Summary

In Ahmanet's tomb/prison, it's not Nick who breaks the chain - it's Jenny, and suddenly the future is not quite what it was.

Notes

"We need to go," Nick said, "the Colonel said we've got a sandstorm incoming."
Jenny was all business. "We have to take the sarcophagus."
Nick looked aghast. "It's huge, Jenny. It'll take too much time!"
"Then you can explain to Greenway why you left without me."
Chapter 1

Dr. Jennifer Halsey had, since she was a child, been a staunch believer of myths. Any kind - gods, monsters, all of it.

The ones that had always captured her attention most, though, were the Egyptian myths. She loved everything about them. The majesty of their gods, the sheer ingenuity and intellect of the people, the advanced science and art they were capable of even so early in the history of humanity. Egypt, as a whole, was what Jenny loved most.

So, when she grew up, having devoured everything even vaguely Egyptian she could get her hands on, Jenny became an archaeologist and Egyptologist, dedicating her life to what she loved most.

She was, upon being awarded her doctorate, almost immediately snatched up by Dr. Henry Jekyll - which brought her to where she was now.

Iraq was, quite honestly, not exactly where Jenny had expected to find an Egyptian tomb. Then again, this was not a regular tomb. Jenny should know, she’d been searching for it since she’d been twenty-two.

A princess, deliberately erased from history, and nobody had any idea why, or even when it had happened. Hell, only very few people were even aware the princess had existed in the first place. Jenny was one of those people.

When Henry had approached her with the barest shreds of evidence of the princess’ existence, Jenny had thrown herself into research. She probably knew more about it than anyone else alive - which, honestly, didn’t say much, because it had taken her years to find enough information to fill maybe twenty pages.

This princess was Jenny’s life’s work, and she’d been ecstatic when a tomb filled with crusaders had been found under London - not so much because of said crusaders, but because the tomb had contained a map. The map had led her to Iraq, and Jenny had never been closer to finding the princess she’d been hunting.

Needless to say, when she woke up in her hotel room in Baghdad after a rather short and disappointing night with Nick Morton to find her map gone, she was livid. She had the map memorized, of course, she wasn’t stupid enough to rely only on a piece of paper, but still - Jenny was very aware of the fact Nick sold antiquities on the black market. This was her life’s work, and she’d die before she’d see it sold off to some ignorant ass who had no idea of the importance of this princess.

The first thing Jenny did after her map was stolen was get in touch with the army commander in charge of the soldiers in this region of Iraq. Henry had arranged her cover with the military of an archaeologist who tagged along to keep antiquities safe so the insurgents couldn’t sell them off for funding, so Colonel Greenway was already familiar with her. She’d met him once or twice before, when doing some exploration in the field to see if she could find any signs of Haram, in case the map wasn’t as accurate as she hoped. He was a reasonable man, a competent leader, and prepared to listen to her as long as she argued her point and didn’t put any of his men in danger.

And when Jenny heard about an airstrike in the exact region the tomb was supposed to be in, she immediately called Colonel Greenway and arranged to be taken along to the site. The strike should’ve scared away the insurgents there, so it should be relatively safe. As safe as an active
Slapping Nick Morton in the face was very, very satisfying. The red mark that bloomed on his cheek, painful and raw, was even better.

Jenny shook her hand to soothe the ache left in her fingers and then completely ignored the thief in favour of the hole that had opened up as a result of the airstrike. It seemed deep, and when Jenny shuffled as close to the edge as she dared, she came face-to-face to a huge, carved out statue of a woman’s face, clearly Egyptian in nature.

The mouth was wide open as if mid-scream, the surrounding rock rough. Either left that way when the tomb was built, or part of the statue had been destroyed due to the bomb that been dropped on top of it. Jenny was willing to bet the latter was the case, and it made her want to turn around and knock Nick on his ass for a second time in as many minutes.

Instead, she turns to Colonel Greenway. ‘’I need you to have your men secure the village. I need time to get down there,’’ she pointed at the exposed cave-in, ‘’and secure what’s inside.’’

The Colonel gave her an incredulous look. ‘’We’re in the middle of hostile territory.’’

‘’Colonel,’’ Jenny struggled to sound calm, ‘’my job is to secure everything that might be of value. We have no idea what’s in there, but it might be a royal tomb. The contents of Tutankhamun’s tomb when it was discovered were estimated at 650 million Pounds sterling. Do you really want that kind of money in the hands of the insurgents?’’

That gave the Colonel pause. He thought for a few seconds, and then nodded sharply. ‘’You have two hours. And those two,’’ he pointed at Nick and Vail, ‘’are going in with you.’’

Jenny opened her mouth to argue, and then thought better of it. She could use Nick and Vail to carry her stuff, if nothing else. ‘’Fine.’’ She turned to the two men, who didn’t look very enthusiastic to go in. ‘’I need my bags.’’

The actual cavern turned out to be much deeper than Jenny had initially expected, a hundred feet at the very least. She counted herself lucky she’d thought ahead and brought an abundance of rope, because she’d expected to have to do some abseiling. The inside was dark, and she could faintly hear something dripping. Water, probably, because the air started to feel moist the deeper they went, and by the time Jenny had both feet on the ground again, she could touch her fingers to the ground and feel a light sheen of liquid on the stone.

Wiping her hands on her pants, Jenny unhooked herself from her climbing harness and took her flashlight and voice recorded from her belt. ‘’This is Dr. Jennifer Halsey,’’ she started after she’d clicked her voice recorder on, narrating the exploration, ‘’I believe I have found the tomb I’ve been looking for. With me are Nick Morton and Chris Vail. We have entered what seems to be an antechamber. There are large stone statues of what appears to be the Egyptian god Set. At the entrance of the antechamber, there is a large statue of a female face, who appears to be screaming.’’ Jenny moved her flashlight, frowning when she was distracted by Nick.

‘’Is that mercury?’’

‘’Yeah, I think it is,’’ Vail replied, staring at something in Nick’s hand.

Curiosity peaked, Jenny moved over, squinting at the pulsing silver drop in the palm of Nick’s glove.
"That’s definitely mercury. The Egyptians believed it weakened evil spirits."

Nick snorted. "Now we know it kills you."

"After it makes you go crazy," Vail added.

Jenny ignored him, aiming her flashlight at the ceiling as she spoke clearly into her voice recorder. "Mercury is dripping down from the ceiling," she glanced at the ground, "into man-made receptacles in the floor. They appear to be draining into a larger reservoir." Following the small receptacles, she came to an entrance into an adjoining cave. "There is writing around this entrance, New Kingdom hieroglyphs if I’m not mistaken. I’m guessing they are around five-thousand years old by their style. They are in remarkably good condition, considering their age." She shone her flashlight into the new cave, and frowned when it didn’t really help her see. "Nick, Vail, set up the big lights!"

The big lights were called that because they give a huge amount of light, and it was exactly what Jenny needed to be able to see the interior of the cave. There was enough light to make the cavern seem like it was naturally lighted, certainly plenty to be able to survey everything and get a good read on whatever was inside. Switching her flashlight off and and clipping it back to her belt, Jenny carefully entered.

There was a small flight of stairs down, deeper into the cavern. What was inside surpassed her wildest expectations. "I can see a large pool of mercury, maybe twenty feet across in all directions. There are six statues around the pool, facing inward. Three chains come down from the ceiling, and they go into the pool of mercury," Jenny narrated into her voice recorder, "I can see the remains of several people, including a high priest, but I see no provisions whatsoever for passage into the afterlife." She glanced around, feeling like something was off, but she couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was that made this place feel so… not right. "From my observations, I think I can confidently state this is not meant to be a tomb. Those chains are not for removing something from the pool of mercury, they are for keeping it down. I think this was meant as a prison."

Trying to ignore Nick and Vail shuffling around in the background, Jenny continued looking around. Not entirely sure why, the glanced up. Chains ran across the ceiling. She followed them with her eyes, tracing them from the pool of mercury to the decorative chain that surrounded the pool and it’s guardian statues. Carefully, she reached out and ran her fingers across the metal. It was dusty, but hardly felt rusted or otherwise tainted.

Remarkably well preserved.

All of it was remarkably well preserved, actually. Far more than she had expected. If she was right and all of this was nearly five millennia old, then it shouldn’t be nearly as well preserved as it seemed to be.

Strange.

Jenny shut down her voice recorder and clipped it to her belt next to her flashlight, wandering back over to where Nick was crouched next to one of the skeletons. He was studying a scarab ring very intently. Ruby and gold. Probably worth a small fortune - exactly what the jerk was after, Jenny thought snidely as she gave him a death glare. Nick gave her an innocent look, holding his hands up in defeat, standing and turning away from the ring.

Jenny’s eye fell on the gun holstered on Nick’s hip. She didn’t know why she did it, but she grabbed it, pulling it from the holster.
Nick gave her a confused-wary-frowning look. “Jenny?”

“Is it loaded?”

Nick blinked at her. “What for?”

She ignored his question and repeated hers. “Is it loaded?”

“Well, yeah,” Nick’s frown intensified.

“Good.” Aiming carefully with both hands, Jenny pulled the trigger. The gunshot echoed around the chamber, followed by the harsh, metallic snap of the chain breaking.

It sounded strangely final.

The pulleys in the ceiling began to groan, five millennia of grit and dust raining down as the ancient mechanisms began to uncoil.

Nick stared at her, and Vail was gaping at her gracelessly. They looked as shocked as Jenny felt. She didn’t even know why she’d shot the chain. She’d just felt that she had to.

The mercury in the pool began to churn as the chains were pulled up. A rounded shape broke the surface, hoisted higher and higher until it dangled over the silvery pool. Mercury dripped off it, a liquid sheen of silver sliding down the stone surface.

Jenny felt her jaw drop as she stared at the newly revealed sarcophagus. It was the same screaming face at the entrance of the antechamber, frightening and with a faint air of malevolence about it. The figure was depicted wearing a stylized nemes, though with strange spikes running across it originating from the face - a clear indication of a royal figure. Stone ropes wrapped around the sarcophagus, overlapping some of the hieroglyphs engraved into the stone.

Jenny felt strangely drawn to it. She squinted a little bit, staring into the empty eyes of the sarcophagus. There was a strange sensation of hot desert wind and scorching sun. For a moment, she was sure she could see red sand - and then, far closer and far more real, the sudden skittering sounds of hundreds of tiny little feet.

She glanced around, a little alarmed, and saw hundreds of spiders beginning to swarm from the walls, crawling out of all kinds of little nooks and crannies. Camel spiders. Some were as big as her hand. Jenny wouldn’t exactly call herself afraid of spiders, but, well, when they were as big as these and with as many… she made an exception for that.

She yelped quietly, stomping her feet to get the spiders off her legs and brushing at her arms and torso got sweep off the ones that had somehow managed to get past her stomping feet and climb up. She could hear Nick cursing and Vail yelping in pain. Vail’s yelp was cut off, and then replaced with the sound of gunfire. Jenny cursed, ducking in an attempt to avoid the ricocheting bullets.

“Vail!” Nick was almost flat on the ground, spiders swarming over his back. “Vail! Stop shooting! Stop it, dammit!”

“IT BIT ME!” Vail lowered his gun, instead nearly jumping in anger and fright. “IT F*CKING BIT ME, Nick!”

“They’re not poisonous! They’re just camel spiders!”

“I don’t care! That thing f*cking bit me on the goddamn neck!”
Jenny glowered at the scratched and dented bullet at her feet. It had missed her by inches. And to think that the spiders had already started leaving when Vail had started waving his gun around like a maniac. Nearly killed her and Nick in the process too. The last of the spiders disappeared back into the nooks and crannies in the walls.

Jenny finally felt safe enough to get up from her crouch, and quickly checked herself over. She was a bit ruffled and dusty, but she didn’t feel any bites or other wounds. Ignoring Nick and Vail arguing, she straightened out her shirt. As she glanced up, she met the eyes of the sarcophagus for a second time.

A hint of desert wind caressed her face.

She blinked, and when she opened her eyes, she was not in the cave; she was in the desert, surrounded by endless dunes of fine red sand, the sun beating down on her shoulders, the hot wind biting at her skin, and yet it all felt strangely safe and comfortable, like being wrapped in a soft blanket in bed, listening to the thunder outside and knowing it couldn’t reach her.

A figure walked barefoot across the scorching sand. A woman. A beautiful woman. She was wearing a thin white dress, the fabric billowing and snapping in the breeze, her hair long and dark and loose, her skin a glowing bronze and dark eyes accented with bright blue and black in the traditional Egyptian way. She had tattoos, running in thin lines down her throat and chest, into the elaborate gold-and-gemstone necklace she wore, as well as coiled at the hairline just in front of her ears. Her fingertips and toes were dipped in blue paint, the same shade as under her eyes, elaborate gold rings twisting around her knuckles.

Jenny tried to swallow when the woman came close enough to touch, and then closer, but found her throat was as dry as the desert surrounding her. The woman cupped Jenny’s face in her hands, coming closer still.

“*You freed me,*” she whispered, and Jenny felt too captivated to startle at the sound of fluently spoken Ancient Egyptian, “*Setepa-i,*” and then a whisper of soft lips against Jenny’s, the tiniest bit of pressure, soft and warm and inviting, and then, suddenly -

“*Jenny!*”

Blinking rapidly, Jenny found herself staring at Nick instead of the… Egyptian princess? She’d sure looked like one - the jewellery had certainly indicated someone of high standing, at least. Weird. Probably just a delusion, though. Jenny shook her head, deciding that she’d probably breathed in too much mercury or something. She didn’t really have any other explanation for what had just happened. It made her feel a little off-kilter.

“Are you okay?” Nick’s voice broke her out of her thoughts.

“I’m fine,” Jenny responded.

“We need to go,” Nick said, “the Colonel said we’ve got a sandstorm incoming.”

Jenny was all business. “We have to take the sarcophagus.”

Nick looked aghast. “It’s huge, Jenny. It’ll take too much time!”

“Then you can explain to Greenway why you left without me.” Jenny wasn’t leaving without her prize. She’d searched for this since she’d been twenty-two, she wasn’t about to let thirteen years of work go down the drain.
“... Fine.” Nick looked less than pleased as he grabbed his walkie talkie and moved a few steps away, starting to talk into it.

The moment he wasn’t demanding her attention anymore, Jenny’s eyes slid back to the sarcophagus. It felt like it was staring back at her.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“Don’t shoot!” Jenny ordered, hating how her voice shook. “This is a pressurised aircraft. You breach it, we die.”
“I won’t shoot if they don’t shoot!”

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one day (though this one's a little shorter than chapter one) - I'm inspired. And having fun. Enjoy, people, because I certainly had a good time writing this.

Getting the sarcophagus out of the tomb was a nerve wracking operation involving a heli and one hand’s worth of chewed-up fingernails - Jenny felt irrationally worried, and she showed it by nervously chewing on her cuticles. It took a few minutes, and by the time the sarcophagus was safely out of the confined space of the cave and dangling under the heli at the end of a very sturdy rope-and-chain, two of Jenny’s fingers were bleeding sluggishly.

She settled in one of the heli’s that wasn’t transporting the sarcophagus, and didn’t take her eyes off the stone relic the entire trip to the cargo plane.

Soldiers were waiting for them to arrive, and five of them concerned themselves with the sarcophagus.

“Be careful!” Jenny fretted worriedly, “That’s five-thousand years old!”

One of the soldiers grunted at her, but that was all the reaction she got. They shoved the sarcophagus into the plane, and Jenny wanted to cry at how carelessly they let the ancient stone scrape across the metal floor. She didn’t even want to think of the damage done to the undoubtedly priceless relic.

When the sarcophagus was properly secured (Jenny personally tightened the straps, she didn’t trust those soldiers not to do further damage with the metal clasps), she slumped down into one of the seats available, simple benches against the walls of the plane.

It was, unfortunately, next to Nick.

The plane trembled when the engines started up, and then when the wind hit and the sandstorm enveloped them. Jenny grabbed onto the edge of her seat and waited for the plane to steady, which it did after a minute or two.

For a few minutes, it was silent. Then Nick opened his mouth.

“You’re welcome, by the way.”

Jenny turned to stare at him. “Excuse me?”
“You know,” he waved his hand in the direction of the sarcophagus, “for saving whatever that is.”

Jenny took a few moments to respond, suddenly angry. “That was safely hidden for five thousand years until you dropped a hellfire missile on it.”

“And you might never have found it otherwise, so, again, you’re welcome.” Nick smirked at her, and Jenny wanted to slap that smirk off his face.

She stood up, clambering on her seat to retrieve her backpack from the overhead storage. Once she had it, she sat back down, backpack in her lap, and glared at Nick angrily. “Do you have any idea how significant this is? The importance? An Egyptian tomb, in Mesopotamia, thousands of miles from Egypt?”

Nick stared at her. It was obvious he did, in fact, not know. He probably had no idea just how important the find he had been planning to steal was.

Jenny gritted her teeth. “This means something, Nick. Something bigger than you. My life’s work.” She sneered at him. “And you were going to steal it. How much do you figure that’s worth on the black market?”

When he didn’t respond to that, Jenny huffed and searched through her backpack for a notebook, a pen and her dictator. She made her way over to the sarcophagus, trailing her fingers across the stone. It felt smooth and oddly warm. Jenny chalked it up to the stone having absorbed warmth from the sun during the trip from the tomb to the cargo plane.

She switched her voice recorder on and bent over the sarcophagus. “This is Dr. Jennifer Halsey, conducting a preliminary analysis of an Egyptian sarcophagus, recovered from the Nineve province in northern Iraq. As I speculated in the tomb itself, the hieroglyphs are New Kingdom.” She glanced at a few rows of them, grateful she’d taken the time to study Ancient Egyptian until she was as close to fluent as one could be in a dead language. “From what I can see, it appears that the wife of King Menephtre died in childbirth. She left behind a single heir to the throne. A girl, called Ahmanet.” The name, even as she spoke it, sent a shudder through her.

For a moment, Jenny could feel the sun burning on her back, the smell of the desert in her nostrils. Faintly, she could hear footsteps crunching in fine sand, and maybe, if she listened very carefully, the sound of quarterstaffs connecting. Her eyes fluttered closed, and she swore she saw red sand.

Jenny shook herself, stepping away from the sarcophagus. She glanced around. Vail was curled up on one of the benches, apparently asleep. Colonel Greenway and Nick also seemed to be dozing, though the two other soldiers present were awake. Jenny yawned, feeling exhaustion creep up on her also - it’d been a long day, and the excitement of her find had worn her out. Some sleep wouldn’t be amiss.

She switched off her recorder and shuffled back to her seat, slumping into it. Tucking her possessions back into her backpack, Jenny stole one last look at the sarcophagus, and then tugged some headphones over her ears. She put on some soothing, rhythmic instrumental piece she didn’t actually know the title or artist of, closed her eyes, and tried to get some sleep.

A few hours later, she was woken up by the sound of shouting. It was loud enough to pierce through the wall of music she’d fallen asleep to, which was still playing.

Jenny took a moment to be impressed by the battery life of her iPod, and then shrugged off her
headphones and looked around to take stock of the situation. She barely got a second to take in the view of Vail, who was looking rather worse for the wear, pale and sweaty and greyish, before Nick pulled her out of her seat roughly, shoving her behind him. Jenny peeked over his shoulder, and gasped when she saw what Vail was doing.

He had a knife in his hand, and said knife was buried in Colonel Greenway’s chest.

Now, Jenny was pretty used to dead people. She’d worked with mummies for years, and Henry was prone to having dissected body parts and stuff lying around, so Jenny knew what death looked like. What she wasn’t used to, however, was people who were still in the process of dying. It was terrifying.

Vail’s knife slid from Greenway’s chest, and Jenny was sure she could hear the wet suction sound of it all the way where she was stuck between the wall and Nick’s back. A moment later, it was buried again, this time a few inches lower. Greenway dropped like a puppet with it’s strings cut, the thump of his body hitting the floor overly loud. A puddle of blood rapidly started to pool on the metal floor.

Slowly, Vail turned into the direction of Jenny and Nick.

One of his eyes was milky and blind, and black veins spiderwebbed from the camel spider bite on his neck. His feet dragged when he started walking in their direction, and Jenny felt her heart pound harshly in her throat with terror.

“Vail, stop it!” Nick tried to talk to him. “Come on, Chris. It’s not funny.”

There was no response. Vail didn’t seem to hear Nick, or the two soldiers. Jenny, squashed between the two soldiers with Nick in front of her, was pretty sure Vail wasn’t reacting because he was dead - no human could ever look like that and have a pulse.

Then Vail raised his knife again, this time aimed squarely at them - as one, the two soldiers on either side of Jenny pulled their guns, aiming steadily.

“Whoa! Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” Nick, in an attempt to prove he was an idiot, decided to jump between the loaded guns and the dead guy with the knife. Jenny stared at him, momentarily overcoming the terror bubbling in her chest to marvel at Nick’s sheer intent to either get shot or shanked.

One of the soldiers took a step forward, but before he could do more than aim properly at Vail, who had started swinging the knife around mindlessly, Nick lunged at him, wrestling the gun from his hands. Why he needed to do that when he had a gun of his own holstered at his hip was a mystery. Jenny backed away despite herself - not because she thought Nick would shoot her, because he might be a thief but he wasn’t a murderer, but because he was aiming at the soldier who was standing maybe half a foot to her left.

“Don’t shoot!” Jenny ordered, hating how her voice shook. “This is a pressurised aircraft. You breach it, we die.”

“I won’t shoot if they don’t shoot!” Nick retorted, briefly glancing behind him. His eyes widened and he jumped to dodge a swipe of Vail’s knife. “What the hell, Chris?!”

Vail seemed to focus on Nick at that, the next swing of his knife a little more intent. Nick stumbled backwards, one arm in front of Jenny to push her back too, until she was pressed against the wall, Nick in front of her and a soldier on either side.

“Back off, Vail!” Nick, looking like the motion hurt, aimed at his friend. His hand shook.
continued to advance, arm outstretched, approaching steadily, the knife bloody. His dead eyes were fixed squarely on Jenny. He took another swing at Nick.

*BANG* - the gun in Nick’s hand went off like a clap of thunder.

Vail staggered, stumbling back at the impact, and then righted himself. Blood seeped from a wound in his left shoulder, which he ignored completely. The wound didn’t seem to hurt him.

Jenny could feel her face twist in horror, the same expression she could see on the faces around her.

Nick pulled the trigger a second time, hitting Vail square in the heart region and knocking him flat on his back. He didn’t move. Blood, darker than it should be, seeped into his shirt, spreading until it met the stain from the first bullet wound, and then spreading further.

Jenny sagged a little in relief, and then jumped again when the gun in Nick’s hand went off for a third time, the bullet punching into Vail’s side. Grimacing awkwardly, Nick handed the gun back to it’s owner. “Sorry.”

“No problem,” the soldier replied numbly.

“Why don’t we go take a seat,” Jenny suggested, a little shakily.

“Yeah,” the soldier on her right agreed. He didn’t seem much better off than her. Jenny could sympathize - the last five minutes had probably been some of the worst of her life. And the strangest. Jenny worked for Prodigium, she’d seen a lot of weird shit in between searching for her lost princess - Ahmanet (just thinking the name sent a faint shiver down her spine) - but zombies (she was pretty sure she could accurately describe what was left of Vail as a zombie) were new, and freaky, even for her. And that was saying something, considering her boss literally had a homicidal evil alter.

She shuffled around Vail’s body in as wide an arch as the plane would allow. She didn’t want to get too close, not if she could help it. The only dead things she could deal with were mummies. Everything else was just too… fresh. With blood and stuff. Mummies were very old, too old to still have messy liquids like blood. A lot cleaner than fresh corpses.

“Are you okay?” Nick looked worried, eyes flashing back to Vail’s body every few seconds.

“Fine,” Jenny responded. She was a little shaken up, but mostly okay. She just wanted to sit down and have a few minutes to herself.

“Alright,” Nick nodded. He didn’t press any further, which Jenny was grateful for. Besides, he was probably pretty torn up about Chris. He’d been Nick’s best friend, after all.

Jenny wandered towards the tail-end of the plane, fully intending to go sit on one of the benches. Instead, she found herself standing next to the sarcophagus. It was strangely soothing to be close to it, and without thinking about it, Jenny sat down on the floor and leaned her back against the smooth, strangely warm stone. She didn’t consider she might accidentally damage her find, her mind occupied with what’d just happened and the faint sense of comfort being close to the sarcophagus gave her. She leaned her head back against the relic, staring at the ceiling of the plane, and tried to not think about the dead body of Chris Vail lying not too far away.

It was a few hours still, maybe two, until they reached England. Jenny couldn’t wait to get off the plane and find a pub - a pint or two, or a glass of wine, sounded really good right about now. Yeah, wine sounded fantastic. If she’d been ten years younger, she’d have contemplated tequila shots, but she was in her thirties, and if she touched tequila, she’d probably really regret it when morning came. She liked wine better anyway.
Jenny closed her eyes, and tried not to think for a while.

Two hours and fifteen minutes later, one of the plane’s engines went up in a ball of flames.
Jenny jerked awake for the second time in as many hours at the sound of an explosion and the sensation of the entire plane jerking and shuddering violently. She scrambled up, trying not to fall over. It took a few seconds to find her footing properly.

Momentarily, she was grateful the sarcophagus was strapped down securely, because Jenny didn’t even want to think of it sliding around, smashing into the walls and getting damaged beyond repair. ‘‘What the hell’s going on?!’’

One of the soldiers, the one that’d gotten his gun stolen by Nick, held on tightly to one of the benches lining the walls. ‘‘The engine blew! A bird flew into it.’’

Jenny felt her eyes widen with fear. ‘‘We’re crashing?!’’

‘‘Don’t worry! We have really good pilots, they’ll figure something out,’’ the soldier tried to assure her. It didn’t work very well. They were thousands of feet in the air, in a broken airplane, her life’s work in danger of being destroyed and lost forever - Jenny couldn’t really think of a situation much worse than that.

The soldier struggled closer, his hand closing around the strap of a backpack. ‘‘Here, wear this. It’s a ‘chute.’’

Jenny shrugged it on quickly, tightening the strap across her sternum and quickly buckling the straps that looped around her thighs. ‘‘I’ve never used one of these before.’’

‘‘Let’s hope you don’t need it,’’ the soldier said, ‘‘but if you do, just pull this string. Wait a couple of seconds until you’re away from the plane, and you should be fine.’’

Nodding in understanding, Jenny glanced at the string. It was bright red, almost neon in colour. Not easy to miss. She could do that.

The plane gave another shudder.

Jenny shuffled closer to the sarcophagus. She didn’t want to leave it behind. If this plane crashed, she was sure the only thing she’d see of her find afterwards were fist-sized chunks and dust - if she was lucky. With how high up in the air they were, the sarcophagus would probably be smashed into gravel when it hit the ground.
“Jenny!” Nick appeared from the small hallway that led to the cockpit, looking panicked. Before he could get another word out, there were screams from behind him, the sound of glass shattering, the cawing noises of... crows? The plane lurched hard enough for Jenny to lose her footing. Through the metal of the plane came another muffled blast.

For a second, Jenny swore time stopped.

The nose of the plane tipped downwards.

Then it dropped like a stone.

Jenny couldn’t quite stop the shriek that escaped her when gravity was suddenly cancelled. She hit the ceiling of the plane with a thud and a groan of pain as her arm smacked into the metal harshly. Jenny tried and failed to find something to hold on to, the soldier who’d been standing next to her not much better off. He’d dropped the second chute, which he had been about to shrug on, somewhere along the way.

The next few minutes were kind of a blur. Jenny spent most of it being tossed around the plane like a ragdoll. Nick had somehow managed to make his way over to her and had grabbed one of her arms, using his free hand to search for something to anchor them to. He was failing miserably, but Jenny was just glad he was even trying.

Nick was an asshole the vast majority of the time, but from what she’d seen so far, when it was needed, he could buckle up, shove back his douchebaggery, and get things done.

Jenny hissed as she smacked into the wall next to one of the small windows. She got a glimpse outside. The wing of the plane on this side was missing. They were still high up, but Jenny could see how fast they were going, and she was sure it wouldn’t be long before this death trap hit the ground and smashed them all into fine paste.

She was jerked away from the window again, thrown straight across the corkscrewing plane until she hit another piece of metal. There was no window, and she was too dizzy and in too much pain to figure out whether it was the ceiling or the floor. Blood drizzled down from her hairline - she must’ve hit her head somewhere along the way, but she couldn’t quite remember when.

The sound of metal screeching and tearing, followed by her ears popping and just about everything that wasn’t nailed down being sucked out of the plane - one of the soldiers included, Jenny noticed faintly - announced that the plane had torn wide open. A gaping hole in the side, nearly half the length of the plane, from floor to ceiling.

Jenny screamed when she was sucked towards it by the howling wind, fingers scrabbling. She reached out to the overhead luggage racks, and missed, and dropped a few feet to the floor. Her hand hit the floor wrong, and she could feel her fingers bend and snap under her weight - she yelped in pain, nearly biting through her tongue at the pain. On instinct, she yanked her hand towards her chest in a protective motion, and lost all purchase she may have had.

She started to slide backwards, towards the gaping hole of open air.

Reaching out with her good hand, Jenny scrabbled for something, anything - and at the last moment, just when it looked like she was going to miss, it was like her hand moved on it’s own, something that wasn’t her nudging it just that extra inch to the right, and she finally found purchase at one of the legs of a bench, nailed to the wall and sturdy enough to hang on to. She did so with all her might, her muscles struggling under the strain.
Nick thumped into the wall besides her. “You wearing a chute?!?” He yelled, barely audible over the roar of the wind.

“Yeah!” Jenny managed to yell back. She noticed the straps of a similar pack as her own across Nick’s shoulders - he, too, had found a parachute.

“Then I’ll see you on the ground!” Nick yelled, and before she could react, he reached over and yanked at the red string on Jenny’s chute.

“’You ass!” Jenny managed to scream at him as the chute unfolded. She was yanked back, her breath punched out of her lungs by the sudden pressure on the sternum strap, and she was too breathless to properly vocalise the sheer terror she felt in that moment. She caught a glimpse of the ground, thousands of feet below, of the plane, on fire and missing a wing and with a huge hole in the side and spiralling down at breakneck speed.

Then the chute fully unfolded and caught air, and the sudden jerk punched out what little air she had left and everything went black.

Her last thought was a mental note to herself to punch Nick once she had both feet on the ground and her nerves back under control. She was gonna lay that bastard out cold for scaring her like this.

She woke up to the stale smell of medicine, illness and bleach, which was all Jenny needed to come to the conclusion she was in a hospital.

Which meant she’d survived.

She opened her eyes, letting out a sigh of relief. For a few moments back there, she’d been convinced she was going to die in that plane, and she was beyond glad she hadn’t.

Jenny glanced around. She had a clip on her finger that led to a machine that measured her heartbeat, and there was a cannula in the back of her hand, but she was otherwise free of any hospital equipment. She didn’t even have any plaster on her hand.

Jenny stared at her right hand in confusion - she’d broken the fingers, she knew she had. She’d felt them break, had heard them snap under her weight and had nearly cried with the pain. There was no way she had imagined that. And yet, here she was, with a whole and unbroken hand.

The rest of her felt remarkably not-injured as well. She reached up and touched her hairline, where she was sure she’d had a cut, and met unmarred skin instead. It was like there’d never been a cut in the first place. Jenny slowly sat up, noting that it didn’t hurt, which was wrong, because she was well-aware of the fact that she’d been tossed around like a rag doll. There should’ve been bruising at the very least, maybe split skin and bone fractures too. But there was nothing at all, not even a scratch or the greenish-yellow of a nearly-healed bruise.

It made absolutely no sense, and Jenny had a hard time wrapping her head around it.

Something very, very strange was going on here, and she wasn’t sure she liked it.

Deciding to put the matter out of her mind for now, Jenny glanced around and quickly found the button that would summon a nurse. She pressed it, and then laid back into her pillow to stare at the ceiling. The room was more silent than she would prefer, the only noise being the soft buzz of the machine next to her bed and the soft murmurs of other people coming from the hallway.
There was a small knock on the door, which then opened to allow a woman in a nurse’s uniform in.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Halsey.”

“Afternoon,” Jenny returned politely, sitting up again.

“It’s good to see you awake, you’ve been out for a few hours.” The nurse said, moving over to the side of the bed. “How are you feeling?”

“Pretty good,” Jenny said.

“Well, that’s expected. You were found passed out, but otherwise unharmed. You might develop a bit of a headache later on, but apart from that, you’re basically free to go.” The nurse smiled at her.

Jenny hummed, and then remembered Nick had also been in the plane crash. “Hey, do you know if a guy called Nick Morton was brought in?”

“Yes, he was released maybe half an hour ago. He’s left a message for you at reception.”

“Alright,” Jenny watched as the nurse completely removed the cannula from her hand, taping a small cotton pad over the tiny puncture to catch any residual bleeding, before removing the clip from Jenny’s finger. She glanced down at the hospital gown she was wearing. “Have you seen my clothes?”

“They were disposed of, I’m afraid. They were pretty torn, and covered in mud. But,” the nurse added, “some new clothes were delivered on the name of one Henry Jekyll, they’re right over there.”

Jenny looked at the chair the nurse was pointing at, and indeed saw a small bundle of fresh clothes.

“I’ll let you dress, and then I’ll bring you the papers you need to sign for your release.”

Nodding, Jenny waited for the nurse to leave the room, and then quickly dressed. She was grateful her boss had been thoughtful enough to provide her with new clothes, even though it had probably been thought of and done by one of his assistants. They were simple clothes, just some jeans, a white blouse and a jacket, but they fit and they came complete with clean underwear, socks and shoes (Jenny tried not to think of her boss knowing her sizes, but working for Prodigium didn’t allow for a lot of privacy), so Jenny was happy with them.

Her personal items, like her wallet, keys and phone, were also present, though the screen of her phone had a spiderweb of cracks running across it. It, unlike her, had not come out unscathed. Somehow, oddly, it made Jenny feel better.

Once she was dressed, she called the nurse back in, and within a couple of moments her discharge papers were signed and she could leave. She only stopped briefly at reception on the way out, where the woman behind the desk handed her a small paper. It was written in Nick’s hand, and contained the name of a pub, as well as a hotel and room number. The pub looked like a good place to start.

Jenny could definitely use a drink, even if she couldn’t find Nick there.

Half an hour later, Jenny had found a table and was nursing a glass of wine. She had a feeling that it would not stop at one glass tonight.

Across from her was Nick, who was accompanied by two pints of beer, and eight shots of tequila.
He was a little worse for the wear, compared to Jenny, a large bruise above one eye, a split lip, and his hand bandaged - not broken, but definitely sprained. He was downing one shot after the other.

Jenny stared at her unbroken-but-should-be-broken fingers and thought. Things were off. She knew something was not quite right.

And it’d all started back in Iraq.

The sandstorm, of course, was not that strange, there were plenty of those in that part of the world, and they could pick up quickly. But those strange visions she’d had when in contact with the sarcophagus, the crows that had crashed the plane, the fact that she’d been injured and had woken up without a scratch mere hours later… Jenny was sure something was going on.

And she was sure it had something to do with Ahmanet.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The rest of the bar scene, as well as most of the church scene.

Chapter Notes

Slightly late with updating, but I’ve been a little busy the last few days. Either way, the new chapter's here. Enjoy.

Nick downed the last of his shots, following it up with a long pull of beer. He gave Jenny an intense, searching look. “So…”

“What?” Jenny took a nervous sip of her wine. The urge to just down the whole glass and go for a second one was strong.

“The coffin.”

“So, sarcophagus,” Jenny corrected automatically, and tried not to think of her life’s work smashed into bits and spread across the English countryside.

“The coffin,” Nick emphasized, “mind explaining what the deal is with that? Cause you know just as well as I do that what happened, with the plane crash and you not being injured, isn’t natural.”

Jenny sighed. “Right. The man I work for, Henry Jekyll, he’s interested in antiquities, like me. He came across a reference to an Egyptian princess. She was deliberately erased from history. So he hired me, to find that princess. And I think we did. And I think we angered the gods in the process.”

She took a deep breath. “I don’t think we were actually supposed to find her. She was too well-hidden. It took me thirteen years to even find any information. And I only started making real progress when that crusader tomb was discovered.”

Nick frowned. “The one on the news?”

“Yeah. We found a map in there, engraved on the wall, that led us to Iraq. And one of the knights was buried with a gem. We think it belongs to a dagger. According to the records we found, written by one of the knights, the dagger is cursed with dark magic. It was given to Ahmanet by Set, the Egyptian god of death and evil. She was meant to use it to bring Set into this world, but she was captured and mummified alive before she could. The dagger was separated from the stone, and both pieces were later stolen and hidden by crusader knights.”

Nick stared. He looked like he believed her, but desperately didn’t want to. “That sandstorm… it picked up literally a few seconds after you pulled that coffin out of the mercury.”

“Yeah.”

“And aren’t crows a sign of death?”
“They are.” Jenny agreed.

Nick thought that over for a moment. “She’s alive, ain’t she?”

“I think so, yes.” She emptied her glass of wine and glanced at the bar, lifting her hand to get the bartender to bring her another. She faltered halfway through the motion.

The corpse of Chris Vail was staring at her.

Then, silently, he gestured her to follow. Jenny glanced at Nick, then back at Vail, and stood up from her seat. “I’ll be back in a few. Bathroom.”

“Alright.” Nick went back to his beer, looking deep in thought. Jenny left him to it, hurrying over to the ladies’ room and closing the door behind her.

Vail was nowhere to be seen.

She checked a couple of the stalls, and when she turned around, she caught sight of him in the mirror. Jenny leaned her hands on the sink, staring at the… ghost? Apparition? of Vail. “You’re dead.” She stated, somewhat redundantly.

“You’re gonna wish you were in not too long,” he responded. He sounded just like he did when he was alive. It didn’t match his appearance. He looked even worse off than in the plane; still greyish and half blind and spiderwebbed with black veins, but now it looked like parts of him were already starting to decompose. Slowly eating away at what was left of Chris Vail, until nothing of him remained.

Jenny’s mind worked fast. “Her name is Ahmanet, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Vail agreed.

“And she’s not as dead as the sarcophagus would have us believe. And I have a feeling the plane crash didn’t even really slow her down, let alone harm her.”

“You’re right.” Vail stared at her intently. “You’re cursed, Jenny. I’m cursed and you’re cursed. And unless you give her what she wants, it’s only gonna get worse for you.”

“And what, exactly, does she want, Chris?” Jenny asked, though deep down she already knew the answer to that question.

“Setepa-i, Jenny. You know what that means.”

Jenny gave a bitter sort of smile. Setepa-i. She knew exactly what that meant. And she had a feeling she also knew why. “I freed her.”

“You’re her new chosen.” Vail looked at her with pity. He, too, knew what that meant. “She wants you. And she’s gonna get you.”

Jenny chewed on her lip, glancing down at the sink and then back up at Vail. “Does she have the dagger already?”

“Not yet. She’s still regenerating. But it won’t be long, Jenny,” Chris warned, “and then she’ll be after you.”

“Well,” Jenny said, and was proud when her voice didn’t tremble or otherwise betray the nervousness and the first hints of fear starting to stir in her chest, “I’d better start figuring out a way
Vail shook his head. "There’s no stopping her, Jenny. Your life is hers now. If I were you, I’d give in to her now, because if you don’t, she’ll make you regret it."

Jenny felt a little bubble of defiance well up. She was a strong, independent woman, and she did not belong to anyone. "I don’t bow, Chris. If she wants me so badly, she can damn well come and get me, because I won’t be going willingly."

Vail looked uncomfortable. "You’re gonna piss her off talking like that."

"She’s gonna be even more pissed when she gets a mercury bullet to the face," Jenny responded sharply. Turning sharply, she didn’t spare Chris another look as she stormed out of the bathroom, pushing through a small group of drunk uni students.

Vail yelled after her. "You can’t run, Jenny! You can’t hide! There’s no escape!"

Jenny ignored him, but as soon as she left the bathroom, the defiance she’d felt deflated, leaving her just tired and afraid. She slumped back into her seat across from Nick, who looked as despondent as she felt. There was a fresh glass of wine on the table, and she took it gratefully, downing half in one gulp.

She felt conflicted.

On one hand, she knew exactly what Ahmanet had been planning to do before she’d been sentenced to that prison; Henry had told her of the bargain she’d struck with Set, the purpose of the dagger and what she’d tried to do to her first chosen. Jenny was her new chosen, and that meant Ahmanet was going to be after her.

On the other hand, the sarcophagus had seeped a faint sense of comfort whenever Jenny had been near it. And now that she knew Ahmanet was, in fact, very much alive, she was willing to bet everything she owned that it had been her who’d moved Jenny’s hand in the plane, and that it had been her who’d healed Jenny’s injuries. That didn’t seem like the actions of someone who wanted to stab her to death. Especially because she’d been wearing a chute and likely would have survived even if she had been sucked out of the plane, so there had really been no reason to help her. And an injured victim was easier to capture than a whole, healthy one.

So it didn’t make sense. There was no reason for Ahmanet to have helped her find a grip and heal her, and yet she had.

Jenny couldn’t figure out the motivation behind it, and she didn’t like it.

"So," Nick slurred a little, obviously less than sober. "What’re you gonna do now, with some undead chick running around?"

Jenny sighed, and finished off her glass of wine. "I’m gonna have another few drinks, and then I’m going to try and figure out how to fix all of this."

"Smart girl," Nick said, waving at the bartender for another round.

"Fuck you, Nick," Jenny responded, and stole his beer.
And hour and a half later, she and Nick stumbled into the streets of Oxford. It was chilly.

Jenny was a little tipsy, but a plate of hot, greasy fish and chips at the pub and the cold air got rid of most of her buzz. She was certainly sober enough to be able to think mostly clearly.

Nick had, somehow, managed to regain a semblance of sobriety, even with several shots of tequila and three pints of beer in him. Jenny didn’t know how he did it, but she was impressed. She was pretty sure she wouldn’t be as solid on her feet if she’d drank that much. It did say something about Nick’s drinking habits, though, which made Jenny grateful she’d restricted her relationship with Nick to a one-night stand and nothing more.

“You know what we should do?” Nick said, sounding remarkably sober.

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“We should go see the crash site.”

“What? No! That’s a terrible idea!” Jenny absolutely did not want to go see the crash site. Partly because she feared Ahmanet was still hanging around there, and also because she didn’t want to see the sarcophagus, her life’s work, smashed into bits and scattered across the ground.

“It’s a great idea,” Nick said. “We can check out the coffin. There was writing on it, right?”

“Hieroglyphs, yes,” Jenny nodded.

“And you can read them.”

“Yes, I can.”

“Then maybe they can tell us how to take down that undead chick.” Nick grinned at her roguishly. “C’mon, smart girl, where’s your sense of adventure?”

“It got knocked out of me in that plane crash,” Jenny muttered softly, and then said more loudly; “fine, but the moment we see anyone at all, we get the hell out of dodge.”

Nick’s grin widened, and Jenny had the feeling she’d just made the worst decision ever. Possibly even worse than freeing Ahmanet in the first place. Jenny watched as Nick hailed a cab, and already wished she’d just gone to find a hotel for the night.

Despite all that, she stepped into the cab anyway.

Nick, who had apparently paid attention to the news, gave an address to the driver. “It’s a small church maybe half a mile from the main crash site,” he explained as she leaned into his seat, “I figured it’d be best if we walk the last bit. The whole place’s still under police custody, so showing up in a cab might be a bit too conspicuous.”

Jenny groaned quietly. “Please tell me we’re not going to break the law.”

“Maybe. Only a little, though.” Nick looked pleased with that. Jenny wanted to hit him.

The drive was maybe half an hour, and Jenny spent it coming up with all the different reasons this was a bad idea. There were many. Most of them boiled down to the undead princess who was after her, and going to the place she had most likely been last sounded like a terrible, terrible idea that
would get Jenny killed sooner rather than later.

She got out of the cab anyway, once they reached their destination.

"The crash site is that way," Nick pointed out the direction, but Jenny wasn’t listening. Her eyes were fixed on the small church. She knew, instinctively and deep in her bones, that what she was looking for was in there.

There was an intense urge, the deep want to go inside and find Ahmanet. She felt drawn towards the church. It was like nothing else Jenny had ever felt before, and it immediately had her on edge.

"Jenny?" Nick was frowning, standing a few feet away.

"She’s not at the crash site." Jenny said, blankly.

"What?" He took a few steps closer. "We were looking for the coffin, right?"

"Yeah," Jenny said, but her body was already moving without her permission. She trundled towards the church, simultaneously wanting to run away and speed up, and heard Nick mutter something about going to find the sarcophagus behind her. She ignored him. The draw in her chest, like a rubber band stretched too far and about to snap back, was too sharp and acute to pay attention to much of anything else at all.

The courtyard was empty, and eerily quiet. Jenny was barely breathing from both fear and anticipation as she scanned her surroundings carefully. She finished her circle and turned back into the direction of the doors, still a hundred feet or so away.

They were open.

Jenny would’ve sworn they were closed just a few seconds ago.

Light poured out, illuminating the silhouette of a woman, standing with her hand outstretched, beckoning.

The want clogging Jenny’s throat was so strong she nearly stumbled forward, her feet trying to move against her will and her common sense rebelling against it. There was a whisper of warm desert wind against her face, and despite herself, Jenny closed her eyes to relish the brief warmth against her skin. It was more soothing than she would ever admit to.

When she opened her eyes, after what felt like barely a second, though it just as easily could have been a minute, she was inside the church.

And she definitely didn’t remember walking in.

The woman, whom Jenny instinctively knew to be Ahmanet, was nowhere to be seen. She took a few slow, hesitant steps deeper into the church, until she was standing with the pews on either side of her. At the front, a few feet from the foremost pews, was an altar, with a reliquary on the left of it, shaped like an angel.

Jenny was getting a really, really bad feeling.

She took a few steps back again, and then turned to leave as quickly as possible. She stepped into the hallway - and was promptly tackled. The body wrapped around her twisted so she landed on top of it when they hit the ground, holding on to her firmly, but without hurting her. Jenny struggled, and managed to nearly free herself when two more sets of hands grabbed an arm each and pulled her up.
As she was put on her feet, she caught a glimpse from the person who’d tackled her.

Jenny screamed.

She couldn’t help it; staring back at her was the withered, emaciated face of a rescue worker, very obviously dead and somehow zombified. His eyes were sunken and blind, lips pulled back from his teeth, his skin leathery and dry and peeling away. Jenny dared to glance down at her arms. Brittle, bony fingers curled around her biceps, cracked nails digging into the fabric of her jacket. Their hold was firm, but not painful.

Instinctively, Jenny tried to struggle free. The zombies were stronger than their brittle appearance suggested, and when another showed up, it was four against one - odds that were not in Jenny’s favour. They began to drag her back into the main room of the church, past the pews, and when they reached the altar, the other two zombies grabbed Jenny’s legs and helped the first two swing her up.

Jenny tried her best to kick them off her, which didn’t work very well. Fighting was not her specialty. She was so absorbed in trying to get their hands off her so she could get the hell out of here that she didn’t notice the fifth body slinking around in the shadows until it straddled her.

Jenny froze the moment she felt thighs settle on either side of her hips, the sudden weight on her upper thighs and pelvis firmly pinning her to the altar. A cool hand, colder than was regular but not freezing cold, gripped her chin, moving her head until Jenny had no other choice than to look Ahmanet in the face.

She was almost whole. A part of her nose and her jaw was still missing, and she looked a bit dusty, but the rest of her was mostly intact. Tattoos ran down her face, lines of scripture on her forehead, cheeks and chin, and running down her shoulders and chest into the tattered remains of the cloth bandages Egyptian mummies were traditionally wrapped in during the mummification process.

Ahmanet was more beautiful than Jenny had expected, even when not fully regenerated and sickly pale (presumably from, you know, spending 5000 years in a sarcophagus, and probably also from striking a deal involving dark magic with Set) and very, very dusty.

Jenny stared at her, wide-eyed and stiff with terror, as Ahmanet seemed to inspect her. She turned Jenny’s face a couple of times, staring into her eyes and even checking her teeth, fingers worming their way into Jenny’s mouth (Jenny tried not to gag at the taste of dust and death on her tongue), before turning her attention a bit lower. She pulled up Jenny’s shirt, dragging her hands over Jenny’s breasts and stomach, lingering over the waistband of her jeans.

Then, apparently satisfied with what she’d seen, Ahmanet abruptly turned her attention to the reliquary just past Jenny’s head. The top half of it was smashed into dust a few seconds later, little bits of grit peppering Jenny’s face and tangling in her hair, and it was all Jenny could do not to cry in fear when she saw Ahmanet take a dagger out of the hollow inside of the ruined statue. She knew, deep in her bones, what that dagger was, and she didn’t want it anywhere near her.

Ahmanet reached out with her free hand, fingers brushing soothingly over Jenny’s cheek, and then over her lower lip. She spoke in Ancient Egyptian, as if she knew Jenny could understand it. ‘‘This will hurt, my chosen, for a little while, but you will thank me after.’’

Jenny felt the first tears pool in her eyes and drip down, running over her temples and into her hair. ‘‘I don’t want to die. I don’t want to become Set.’’

‘‘And you will not be Set.’’ Ahmanet smiled, seemingly in an attempt to reassure her. It failed miserably. ‘‘Set wants a male body. You are not male. The pact was altered.’’
She tried not to look at the dagger, resting so casually in Ahmanet’s hand. “You’re just going to kill me then.”

“No. You will be my queen,” Ahmanet raised the dagger with both hands, and Jenny started squirming, trying to get away and not making any progress at all, “you will bring me ultimate power. And when it is time, you will birth Set into this world and complete the pact.”

The dagger came down with terrifying speed, hardly giving Jenny the time to panic about the whole ‘birthing Set’ part - and faltered just before it could break skin.

Jenny could feel the very tip of it, scratching against her stomach, and tried to suck in her belly as much as possible so it would stop touching her. She chanced a glance at Ahmanet. The princess was staring at the hilt of the dagger - it was missing the gem. Despite herself, Jenny quailed at the rage that overtook Ahmanet’s expression, even as she heaved a sigh of utter, complete relief. That was close. Too close.

“Hey, Jenny, are you in he- what the hell?!”

Jenny snapped her head towards the entrance of the church so fast she nearly gave herself a whiplash.

Nick stood just inside the room, staring at them in complete shock, his cellphone in his hand with the flashlight function on.

Ahmanet was staring at him like he was prey. Jenny could feel her thighs tensing around her hips, was close enough to Ahmanet to sense the instant tension in all her muscles. The princess shifted ever so slightly on top of her, and Jenny knew immediately what she was planning to do next.

“Nick!”

Nick was still staring dumbly. “Yeah?”

“Run!”

Nick ran.

He didn’t get far.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The rest of the church scene, as well as the forest scene.

Chapter Notes

A late update, I know, I’ve been a little busy lately. (Read: I’ve spent a ridiculous amount of time at the cinema.)

Anyway, for this chapter, credit also goes to the wonderful SnowQueen, who also writes for The Mummy, and who allowed me to use the ‘pupula duplex’ concept. I came across it in her fics, Princess Ahmanet and Dear Jenny, and thought it was a good explanation for Ahmanet’s eyes. I asked her if I could use said explanation, and she graciously allowed it, so credit where credit is due. Go check out her works, by the way, they're good. I certainly enjoyed reading them.

Ahmanet moved faster than Jenny had ever seen anyone move, jumping off the altar and crossing the distance towards Nick in barely a second. He was slammed into a pillar, Ahmanet’s hand on his throat, and Jenny took the princess’ distraction as the chance it was. Nick could handle himself, she had to concentrate on getting free.

The zombies’ grips on her had loosened at the arrival of Ahmanet, and Jenny took advantage of it, kicking out violently and managing to shake one of them off.

The zombies, in the end, turned out to be as brittle as they looked. Their grip was strong, but when Jenny kicked at one of them, her foot went straight through the former rescue worker’s ribcage. It didn’t put him down, but it did let Jenny know they weren’t as strong as they seemed, nor as durable as she’d feared.

She wrenched her foot loose, sending the zombie reeling, and managed to free herself from the other three. She rolled off the altar, hitting the ground with a thump, and crawled away as fast as she could to reach the candlestick she’d spotted. She’d seen Nick use one of those on Ahmanet from the corner of her eyes, and though it hadn’t seemed to phase the princess (she’d literally picked Nick up and smashed him into the pews less than a second later, not hurt at all), Jenny liked the idea of having something properly hard and heavy to hit the zombies with.

She managed to grab a candleholder just as a hand closed around her ankle and started to drag her back towards the altar, and Jenny spun onto her back and started beating at the decrepit arm holding on to her. It crumbled at the first hit, allowing Jenny to scramble to her feet and really start swinging.

She’d played softball as a teen, she knew how to get some real power behind this candlestick.

The zombies didn’t stand a chance.
The first one, who’d already lost an arm to Jenny, found himself losing his head, and when that didn’t put him down, his legs as well. With only one arm left to move around with, he was no longer a threat. Jenny took the opportunity to stomp on him anyway, if only out of spite, and moved on to the second zombie. This was the one who she’d put her foot through, an action she repeated with about ten pounds of solid, gold-plated metal.

Jenny was in the process of reducing zombie no. 2 to dust when arms closed around her waist. She shrieked in a mixture of surprise and dismay, wrestling to get loose and very nearly dropping her candlestick in the process. The fourth zombie, having slowly scrambled to his feet, hulked closer and grabbed at her legs, nails digging into Jenny’s jeans.

There was a groan from Nick’s direction, and then a body came hurtling into Jenny’s direction, smashing into the zombie clamped to her legs. Nick’s fall was cushioned by the dead man, who crumbled into bits when Nick fell on top of him, groaning as he let his head thump to the floor softly.

Jenny stared at him, shocked into silence, and then glanced at where Ahmanet was standing. Her eyes, a bright, burning amber in colour, and with two irises and pupils in each eye, were fixed on Jenny. Apparently, screaming had been enough to catch Ahmanet’s attention.

Nick let out another groan, slowly rolling onto his stomach and pushing himself to his knees. In his hand was the Dagger of Set.

He glanced up at Jenny, giving her a roguish grin, and then winked, mouthing something along the lines of ‘trust me’. Jenny did not, in fact, trust Nick, but she figured that, at this point, she had little choice but to go along with whatever hairbrained scheme he’d cooked up.

Best to get free first, though.

She drove her elbow back, feeling it punch into the zombie holding her with a satisfying cracking noise, and struggled out of the arms holding her, whirling around and beating the dead guy into chunks with her candlestick. She was seriously contemplating keeping this thing, for sentimentality’s sake.

Jenny finished bashing down the zombie and turned back to Nick - only to pause halfway through the motion. Ahmanet was looking at her with considerable interest, quite a few feet closer than she’d been a few seconds ago. Close enough for Jenny to reach out and touch, if she’d wanted to.

Which she absolutely didn’t.

That odd pulling under her ribs was heartburn, from that plate of fish and chips, not longing. Obviously.

Nick had dropped onto his hands and knees and was slowly shuffling backwards, behind Ahmanet. He gestured, with one hand, at Jenny, who took it to mean that she was supposed to distract Ahmanet. There wasn’t a lot of distracting to do. Ahmanet was still scrutinizing her, those strange eyes (pupula duplex, it was called, Jenny’s mind dredged up) flicking to Jenny’s face, down to the candlestick, and back up.

Jenny swallowed, suddenly feeling apprehensive, and wondered if she should maybe drop her weapon. She was sure she didn’t want to know how Ahmanet would react if she thought Jenny was going to attack her.

Nick slowly got to his feet behind Ahmanet. In his hand was the Dagger of Set. Jenny realized what he was planning, and felt her eyes widen despite herself.
It was enough to tip Ahmanet off.

Eyes flashing dangerously, she whirled around, hand raised to lash out - just in time for the Dagger of Set to be plunged into her chest. Ahmanet fell with a cry of shock and pain, eyes wide with surprise and the first flickerings of a burning hatred for Nick.

“Sorry, not sorry,” Nick grinned, grabbed Jenny’s hand, and started running. Jenny stumbled after him, dropping her candlestick. She glanced over her shoulder, watching as Ahmanet slowly started to pull the dagger from her chest. Those amber eyes met Jenny’s, and the combination of anger and betrayal in them made Jenny’s lungs ache with unexpected hurt.

Then Nick pulled her around a corner and their eye-contact was broken, and Jenny instead put all her effort into running away as fast as possible.

An ambulance was parked just outside of the church’s courtyard. It’s bright yellow colour was easy to spot, and Jenny, who had been running in the other direction, quickly changed course and sprinted over to the vehicle instead. Wheels were faster than feet, and speed was definitely necessary right now.

Jenny quickly climbed into the driver’s seat, grateful to see the keys had been left in the contact. She tried not to think of the fact that the driver had most likely been one of the zombies she’d bashed into gritty chunks a few minutes earlier.

Nick scrambled into the passenger’s seat just as the engine roared to life, and Jenny didn’t bother waiting until he was sitting properly, instead stepping on the gas. A glance in the rear view mirror was enough for Jenny to push the ambulance as fast as it would go - the glimpse she’d gotten of Ahmanet exiting the church was enough to make her want to leave now.

Nick slumped in his seat, panting, part of his face swelling with bruises. “Do you know where we’re going?”

“There’s a road in this direction, I’m pretty sure,” Jenny responded. She chewed on her lip nervously. “This was a really bad idea.”

“I’m starting to see that,” Nick agreed, a touch shakily.

Jenny jerked at the steering wheel, sending the ambulance bouncing down a less tree-infested piece of ground. Part of her desperately wanted to go back to the church, and she tried to fight it to the best of her ability. “We have to get to London.”

Nick ignored her. “Why’d you go into the church anyway? We were going to the crash site, not to find Ahmanet,” he demanded to know instead.

“I was curious,” Jenny deflected, not interested in letting Nick know she’d almost felt compelled to go find Ahmanet.

“Bullshit,” Nick accused. “You looked like you were concussed, all glassy-eyed and stuff. It was creepy.”

Jenny gave another jerk to the steering wheel and didn’t answer. She didn’t want to, nor did she get the chance - only a few seconds after Nick had finished his sentence, the glass at the passenger’s side of the car was smashed in. Jenny screamed, involuntarily pulling at the steering wheel, and Nick
cursed violently as he struggled with the zombie that’d jumped through the window. It’s hands were stretched towards Jenny, the wild swerving of the ambulance not doing much to deter it or throw it out.

“Get it out!” Jenny yelled at Nick, swerving hard to avoid a tree.

“I’m working on it!” Nick was punching at the zombie’s head and torso, denting the skull and ribs with each blow, trying to shove it back out of the window, with little success. Jenny spotted a tree coming up ahead, and, hoping to God she wasn’t going to kill both her and Nick, adjusted course a little. They missed the tree by inches, but it did hit the zombie, literally tearing it in half. After that, it was easy for Nick to throw it out.

He brushed some glass off his lap and turned back to Jenny. “As I was saying, I don’t think you entered that church out of curiosity, Jenny. You acted like you were possessed. That isn’t normal.”

“Nothing about this situation is normal, Nick!”

“Yes, well, you’re acting strange, eve—” the windshield shattered inwards. Shards of glass peppered Jenny’s cheeks as another zombie crawled in from the roof. Decaying hands went straight for her, grabbing her shoulders and trying to drag her forward. Nick yelled inarticulately, kicking at the zombie with all his might.

“Hey!” Jenny struggled to keep the ambulance straight, “stop kicking at my face!”

“Not aiming at you,” Nick grunted as he continued to kick at Jenny’s face. He was probably gunning for the zombie, but he was doing a really piss-poor job of it. Her face was probably going to bruise as badly as his if he kept missing the zombie. Jenny took one hand of the steering wheel, pushing Nick’s feet away from her face and towards the zombie.

After a few long, terror-filled moments where Jenny truly struggled not to accidentally wrap the ambulance around a tree, Nick managed to kick the zombie away from her. One of it’s hands broke off at the wrist, and Jenny took a few seconds to pry the fingers off her shoulder and toss the hand out of the shattered windscreen.

Nick made double sure the zombie wasn’t somehow clinging to the car, and then resumed accusing Jenny. “That woman’s in your head, Jenny,” he told her, somewhat harshly, keeping an eye on the trees around them.

“She’s not in my head,” Jenny denied. “I’m perfectly fine.”

“No, you’re not!”

Jenny gritted her teeth in annoyance, taking her eyes off the road (not that it could really be called a road, it was more of a bit of forest with less trees than the rest of it) so she could properly glare at Nick. “I’m telling you, Nick, I’m fine!”

“Right,” he scoffed, blatantly unbelieving.

Jenny scowled at him some more, too distracted by her annoyance to really pay attention to where she was driving the ambulance beyond making sure they didn’t crash and die in a fiery explosion. Probably a better way to go than with the Dagger of Set sticking out of her chest, though.

Nick stared back at her stubbornly, and after a few minutes, Jenny rolled her eyes and turned her full attention back to driving - just in time to step on the brakes.
Less than twenty feet away was Ahmanet. Behind her, the church.

For a few seconds, Jenny was too stunned to react, just staring, slack-jawed. Ahmanet was smirking at her, and was a more charming (and attractive) look on her than Jenny would honestly admit to. Especially now, because this was definitely not the time to be distracted by a pretty (if undead and not entirely regenerated) girl.

“You drove us right back to her!” Nick looked ready to hit someone.

“She’s in my head,” Jenny threw his own words back at him as an excuse, putting the ambulance in reverse and stepping back on the gas. The tyres screeched as they shot back, and Jenny didn’t let up until the back of the vehicle crashed into a low stone wall. Jenny hastily put the vehicle back in drive, and wasted no time getting her and Nick the hell away as fast as the ambulance would go.

“You,” Nick said after a few minutes, “are an idiot.”

“Excuse me?!” Jenny said indignantly. “This was your idea!”

“I wanted to see the crash site! You’re the one who had to go into that church!”

“I couldn’t help it!”

“Bullshit!”

“Fuck you, Nick! You don’t know anything.”

“I was there when you dug that chick up!”

Jenny breathed in sharply through her nose. “Nick, between us, who’s the one that dedicated their life to Ahmanet and works for a society dealing in paranormal antiquities?”

Nick didn’t answer, but he really didn’t have to. He just glared at her instead.

“Exactly, so don’t try to pretend you know what’s going on, because you don’t,” Jenny told him harshly, “I, on the other hand, do. So shut up and let me drive!”

Nick shut up. Jenny was grateful he did. He was really getting on her nerves. She already knew it’d been a mistake to enter that church, she didn’t need Nick effing Morton to yell at her for it. And as long as he was quiet, she didn’t care if he was sulking.

Another few minutes passed in silence. Jenny was still glaring out of the shattered windscreen when she began to feel an odd pull on the steering wheel. It started out small, but after a few seconds, the pull was steadily starting to gain in strength, and before long Jenny had to really work to keep the vehicle straight.

“What’s going on?”

Jenny really, really wanted to hit Nick. Or maybe throw him out of the vehicle. Whichever worked better at shutting him up. Instead, she grunted with effort, now literally leaning over the steering wheel and using her whole body and all of her weight to keep it from turning and derailing the ambulance, and managed to grunt to Nick, “something’s wrong.”

Nick grabbed the part of the steering wheel closest to him, feeling the tension in it and starting to help Jenny pull at it in the other direction. “This isn’t normal. Even in vehicles with a broken system, it’s not this bad.”
“It’s her. I can feel it,” Jenny could feel it, a restless sort of energy, making the air buzz around her and her heart race (un)pleasantly in her chest. It was almost hot against her, enough to have Jenny breaking out in a light sweat. She wasn’t sure whether she was frightened or just tense with anticipation. Either way, she didn’t like it.

Despite Jenny and Nick’s combined best efforts, the steering wheel slowly started to turn. Jenny anxiously glanced out of the driver’s seat window, and blanched at the sight of a downward slope less than twenty feet from the ambulance. It was not much of a mental exercise to figure out that that was what Ahmanet was aiming for. Jenny redoubled her efforts to keep the ambulance driving in a straight line.

A few way too long, very anxious moments later, the pressure on the steering wheel began to lessen. Within twenty seconds, Jenny and Nick no longer needed to yank at it to keep the ambulance from derailing.

“I think it’s over,” Nick said, letting go of his part of the wheel and slumping back into his seat.

“I dunno, Nick,” Jenny was still holding on tightly. She didn’t trust the sudden slack - Ahmanet didn’t seem like the type to give up that easily. Especially when the ambulance was still on course and racing along the dirt road at breakneck speed, getting farther and farther away from Ahmanet with every second.

She was right.

It took nearly half a minute, at which time Jenny had cautiously started to relax a tiny bit, when suddenly the wheel jerked so hard her hands bounced off the pleather grip and the ambulance jerked sharply to the right.

Jenny smacked against the door, not wearing her seatbelt, cursing when her head hit the glass sharply - not hard enough to break the glass, but definitely hard enough to blur her vision for a split-second. It was enough to temporarily knock her limp, which was probably what saved her from further injury.

The right front wheel of the ambulance hit the slope, and within seconds, the ambulance was rolling down the hill. Jenny found herself tossed around for a bit, painfully, and was unpleasantly reminded of the plane crash. The driver’s seat door hit the ground, was lifted back off as the vehicle made another bouncing roll, and sprang open.

Jenny could feel it, even clearer and stronger than in the plane, some strange force moving her body without her consent, lifting her through the door opening and letting her drop to the mulch of the forest floor. Jenny shrieked, bouncing a couple of times and then just rolling, until she came to a slow, sliding stop several dozen feet lower, at the foot of the hill.

She groaned, expecting a whole lot of pain, yet not as surprised as she should be when the pain didn’t come.

Jenny didn’t move for a few long, slow seconds, cheek pressed into the mulch and breathing in the earthy smell. The ambulance was only a few feet away, and she could hear Nick moaning inside, apparently in some pain.

Slowly getting to her feet, Jenny took a few moments to look down at herself. Her clothes were covered in dirt and mulch, and there was a tear in the sleeve of her jacket, but there wasn’t a scratch on her. She was willing to bet everything Ahmanet had healed her, again.
It was also obvious she hadn’t done Nick the same courtesy, if his grunts were anything to go by.

Jenny, quite honestly, and though she would never admit it, didn’t blame her.

Nevertheless, Jenny went to check on him. He was her only ally for now, at least until she got to London. When she got to London, she could dump him in a bar, wait for him to get wasted, and then leave, but until then - Jenny wasn’t the best fighter, and Nick knew how to throw a decent punch. Best to keep him around for now.

“You okay?” Jenny crouched at the shattered windshield, ducking down to look into the cab of the ambulance. It had landed on it’s roof, and Nick was slumped on what had been the ceiling, blood leaking from his mouth. It didn’t look serious, though, maybe some loose teeth of a cut on the inside on his cheek. Certainly nothing life threatening.

“I’m fine,” Nick wheezed, “just got the wind knocked out of me.”

“Alright.” Jenny took his word for it, sitting back on her heels. She fished her cell phone from her pocket, but she didn’t have any signal. Exhaling in frustration, she looked around, hoping for some kind of landmark to ascertain their location.

Jenny felt her before she saw her.

She stood up abruptly, automatically turning into the direction she just knew Ahmanet was coming from. Jenny didn’t know how Ahmanet had managed to keep pace with a racing car enough to find them this quickly, and she didn’t want to know either.

It was foggy, which was odd because the air had been clear a few moments earlier, and after a few seconds, Jenny could just make out a shadowy figure, approaching steadily.

“Nick!” Her voice was urgent enough for Nick to pull himself together. He scrambled out of the totaled ambulance and came to stand next to Jenny.

“What?”

“She’s here.”

Nick squinted, scanning their surroundings. “No, she’s not.”

“Yes, she is. Over there.” Jenny pointed straight ahead, at a small path clear of trees and shrubs. Nick squinted a little more, and then spotted her. His whole frame stiffened, a hard, angry look overtaking his face.

“You know, I’m getting really sick of that woman. Stay here.”

Jenny frowned. “What are you going to do?”

Nick didn’t answer. He glanced around for a second, and then took a few steps to pick up a large, thick branch, about the size of a baseball bat. Jenny, instantly knowing what he was planning to do, wondered if she should try to stop him. She glanced past him as he stalked in the direction of Ahmanet, and a set of pupula duplex eyes met her own.

Jenny abruptly shut her mouth, jaw locking without her consent, and when she tried, she found she couldn’t open her mouth, her tongue sticking to the roof of her mouth.

Nick had reached Ahmanet, and Jenny watched mutely as he hefted the tree branch and tried to hit
Ahmanet with it. The princess flicked the branch aside without even trying, breaking it upon contact, the pieces smashed aside. Then, in the same, fluid movement, she gave Nick an uppercut. It looked effortless, like she wasn’t even trying or putting any strength into it, but it sent Nick off his feet and flying for a good twenty feet.

He smashed into the ground only a few feet away from Jenny, and didn’t move.

Jenny’s jaw dislodged, but she was too busy scrambling back to notice.

Ahmanet seemed amused at her pathetic attempts to get away from her, that devilish smirk back on her lips and a definite gleam of humor in those strange amber eyes. She glanced down at Nick as she arrived at his still body, and, apparently on a whim, crouched down and grabbed him by the throat. She lifted him up effortlessly, a strange combination of anger and revulsion on her face, and it looked a lot like she was about to kiss him.

Jenny felt a momentary flare of utterly erratic, illogical jealousy, before she realized that Ahmanet was intending to suck the life out of Nick, not kiss him.

She moved to protest - she disliked Nick, that didn’t mean she wanted him dead - and then Ahmanet glanced up at her and her jaw locked tight again without warning.

Ahmanet’s lips were maybe an inch away from Nick’s when her eyes suddenly went wide, and instead of sucking the life out of Nick, she let out a choked cry of pain and pitched forward.

Sticking from her back, just under her shoulder blade, was the shaft of a small harpoon, attached to a strong wire.

It was quickly joined by a second harpoon.

Ahmanet wasn’t the only one screaming this time - Jenny was too, searing pain blooming under her left shoulder blade and on the right side of her spine.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Jenny wakes up at Prodigium, and finds out that Nick has been lying while she was unconscious. She gets the chance to have an actual conversation with Ahmanet, and in the process, she gets to ask some very urgent questions. She might not like the answers she gets, though.

Chapter Notes

Welp, chapter six is up!

This one has a large amount of interaction between Ahmanet and Jenny, as I thought I should add a little depth to their relationship. It's mostly dialogue, as Ahmanet is a little tied up at the moment, but it does give Jenny a little more insight into the woman who's life is now linked to hers. And for once, their interaction doesn't consist of Jenny running away while Ahmanet tries to hunt her down to murder her. Progress!

Anyways, enjoy!

Jenny woke up in what she recognized as the infirmary at Prodigium.

She’d been in here before, once or twice, though not usually because she’d collapsed after being overwhelmed by the feedback of pain hitting her through her link to Ahmanet.

Jenny hadn’t even known her link to Ahmanet meant she’d feel the princess’ pain like it was her own. She wondered if it worked both ways. It was not something she was itching to go try out, though, so Jenny supposed it was something she wouldn’t find out anytime soon (she hoped).

Slowly, she sat up. There was a faint twinge over her liver, where the third harpoon had hit Ahmanet and had gone right through her, just a second before Jenny had blacked out from the pain, but otherwise, she felt fine. Must be Ahmanet’s healing magic at work, again.

Jenny really should thank her for that - it would be the polite thing to do, even if Jenny just really wanted to forget about this whole mess.

The infirmary was empty apart from her, which Jenny was fine with. Some privacy was nice, because whoever had treated her had left her in simply her underwear, and she only had the covers of the hospital-issue bed to cover her.

She’d apparently been out long enough for her clothes to be washed, because a very familiar pair of jeans and blouse were neatly folded at the foot end of her bed, clean and ready to be worn again. Her jacket was missing, though, probably because the sleeve had been torn, but there was a new one folded under the jeans, identical to her torn jacket.
Sliding out of bed, Jenny took a moment to stretch, and the spot over her liver gave another tiny twinge. It faded quickly, though, so she ignored it and got to dressing herself. The clothes were still a little warm from the dryer, telling Jenny they’d been placed on the foot of her bed only a little while ago. It was nice to have a toasty warm pair of jeans, though, because for some reason, the air at Prodigium was always a little on the chilly side.

Jenny spent quite a lot of time at Prodigium, and Henry had always refused to turn up the heating - something about the slight chill helping people stay awake and alert. Jenny just wished she wouldn’t have to wear a jacket or sweater every time she came into work.

She laced up her shoes, and, upon finding a hair tie in the pocket of her jacket, quickly did up her hair in a simple ponytail so it was out of her face and wouldn’t start annoying her later on.

Jenny took a moment to straighten out the covers of the hospital bed and then made her way out of the infirmary, in search of Henry. He was probably in his office, so that was where she headed first.

Prodigium was quite a large complex, located underneath the Natural History Museum.

Jenny knew that it was this big due to funds provided by both independent investors, as well as some parts of the government that were aware of the existence of the paranormal. Under Henry’s leadership, Prodigium was a benign though conspiratory organization meant to protect humanity from supernatural threats normal people could not (and should not) fight.

Much as Jenny didn’t like to admit it, Ahmanet was at the top of the list of supernatural threats, and with her link to the princess, Jenny probably was as well.

That thought in mind, Jenny was a little confused why she was left to walk around uninhibited. If she was counted as a threat, like she feared, protocol was to lock her up until she was either freed from the evil influencing her, or until it was confirmed she could not be freed and was eliminated as a result. She’d seen it happen before, when she’d been at Prodigium to research Ahmanet and the whispers of myth surrounding her.

She knew that no one who worked from Prodigium would shy away from doing what was necessary.

Which brought her back to the question of why she was allowed to walk around freely. Like so many things in her life lately, this just didn’t make sense.

Jenny made the conscious decision to put it out of her mind for now - she could ask someone later on, if she decided really wanted to know - and continued in search of her boss.

He was, as she expected, to be found in his office. Along with Nick, much to Jenny’s dismay, who appeared to be perfectly fine even after being smacked around by Ahmanet. His face was still slightly swollen and bruised, and he moved a bit gingerly, but he didn’t seem that much worse for the wear.

Jenny knocked on the doorframe as she entered, causing both Henry and Nick to look up. They’d been having a drink, apparently, if the glasses of scotch were anything to go by. Knowing Henry’s taste in alcohol, it was probably ridiculously expensive and sharp enough to give you heartburn after a single sip.

“Jennifer,” Henry put down his glass and stood up, looking pleased, “it’s good to see you up and
about. How do you feel? You were unconscious for quite a while.''

“Fine,” Jenny replied, taking a few cautious steps deeper into the office. “What’s going on here?”

“Mr. Norton, here, was just telling me everything that happened since the tomb was opened,” Henry gestured to Nick, who was looking vaguely guilty.

Jenny’s feeling of unease increased, “Is that so?”

“Yeah,” Nick said, “I figured Mr. Jekyll should probably know what’s been going on, y’know.”

“Right,” Jenny agreed slowly. Something was going on here. She couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was, though, and she did not like it. At all. She should know what was going on, she decided, because she was the one in the middle of it all, and leaving one of the subjects of whatever was going on out of the loop sounded like bad management to her.

“It’s been quite the interesting tale,” Henry said as he pulled up a third chair for Jenny to sit in. She did so, glancing at Nick and then back at Henry when he handed her a drink. It wasn’t the scotch Henry preferred, which always gave Jenny a stomach ache, but a mellower glass of wine. One of the few bottles he kept on hand just for her, because Jenny was one of the few employees Henry actually sat down and had drinks with on occasion.

Jenny sipped it, brightening a little when it proved to be good wine. “What did I miss so far?”

“I was just telling Mr. Jekyll what it’s like to be Ahmanet’s chosen,” Nick said, and Jenny nearly choked on her wine.

“It seems to have quite an impact on Mr. Norton,” Henry agreed as he poured Nick some more scotch and topped up his own glass immediately after.

Jenny stared at Nick incredulously, wondering what the hell he was thinking. What the hell was wrong with him?! He wasn’t Ahmanet’s chosen, he was just some random guy who happened to be there when Jenny had made the simultaneously best and worst decision of her life. Why the fuck was Nick going around telling people he was the princess’ chosen when he damn well knew that he wasn’t?

Jenny, too taken off-guard, and, quite frankly, confused, wondered if she should be angry about this. On one hand, she did not like the fact that Nick was basically making a second attempt at stealing her life’s work. On the other hand, it did explain why she wasn’t chained up in a cell somewhere, and she should probably be glad Nick was taking the fall for her.

“Right,” Jenny slowly agreed with Henry, after a few long seconds. “From what I saw, she has quite a lot of influence on Nick,” she told Henry a little vindictively. This was the perfect way to get back at Nick. “I think she’s in his head.”

Nick gave her an absolutely poisonous look, and Jenny hid her sharp little smile behind her glass of wine. That served him right for the shit he’d given her in the ambulance.

Henry frowned, and Jenny gave him her most angelic smile.

“Mr. Morton did mention something about an unnatural need to find Ahmanet.” Henry mused as he sipped his scotch. He looked very thoughtful, and then shook his head. “Nevertheless, Ahmanet is restrained and no longer dangerous, so I suppose it’s no harm if Mr. Morton wishes to see her, as long as he stays at a safe distance.” The last was added with a very stern look in Nick’s direction.
Nick quailed a little - Henry could be really intimidating when he wanted to be.

“Can I see her?” Jenny asked, trying to ignore the little surge of want when Henry said it was possible to see Ahmanet. “I want to ask her some questions.”

“Do you mind asking her some on our behalf also?” Henry looked interested. “Our only other employee who spoke Ancient Egyptian was in a car accident last week, he’s still in a coma, so we can only communicate with Ahmanet through you.”

“Sure,” Jenny agreed easily. She had no problems with that. It was actually quite a boon for her, to know that she was the only one who spoke Ancient Egyptian around here. It meant she could talk to Ahmanet without people being able to understand what they were saying, and that, in turn, meant Jenny would be just a little safer.

Nick looked uncomfortable. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Morton, Ahmanet can’t harm anyone right now. And besides, she’ll be more interested in you than in Jennifer, since you’re her new chosen.”

“Alright,” Nick said, his expression enough to tell he already dearly regretted his lie.

Jenny, on the other hand, felt almost giddy. She was getting the chance to study her life’s work and ask questions, in a secure setting, without people trying to lock her up for being Ahmanet’s chosen - it was as close to perfect as this scenario could get. She’d be able to ask Ahmanet about the changes that had apparently been made to the pact she’d made with Set, and, more importantly, what the hell she had meant when she’d said Jenny would ‘birth Set into this world’. Jenny just hoped to God that Ahmanet hadn’t meant that literally.

“Can I go see her now?” Jenny asked, putting her half-finished wine aside, “best to get this over with, before I lose my nerve,” she added, and she didn’t even have to act nervous, because she kind of was, and it showed.

“Of course, let me bring you to her,” Henry threw back the last of his scotch and stood up from his chair, “will you be joining us, Mr. Morton?”

“Yes,” Nick hastily drained his glass, almost scrambling to get up, “I think I will.”

“Excellent,” Henry looked cheerful as he led them out of his office. “The containment area is this way,” he added, probably for Nick’s benefit.

Jenny was familiar with the various containment areas spread around Prodigium. She also knew that most of them, if not all, could be considered inhumane by most modern standards. It didn’t make her feel very confident on what conditions Ahmanet was kept in. They were probably something along the lines that would have the UN or NATO yelling about human rights violations.

She was right.

The containment area was a large circular room. Part of it was occupied by Prodigium technicians, most of them occupied with their computers, some observing the figure crouched in the middle of the room with fancy tablets in their hands. Near the technicians, and surrounding the center of the room, stood half a dozen containment officers, all carrying assault rifles. Jenny was willing to bet they were loaded with mercury-laced ammunition.
Ahmanet was held over a large steel grate in the floor, forced to kneel with her arms shackled behind her back in a way that did not look comfortable at all, a thick collar around her neck. Tubes came from the collar, see-through plastic, about half an inch wide, attached to large machines across the room. Also attached to the collar was a chain, which ran back to the cuffs at Ahmanet’s wrists, and then up to a large ring bolted to the steel walkway twenty feet higher, hardly allowing Ahmanet any movement or chance at comfort.

The princess was glaring at whoever was closest when Jenny followed Henry and Nick into the containment room, but the moment Jenny had passed the threshold, Ahmanet’s eyes focused on her instead, glare immediately fading. She shifted slightly in her chains, immediately causing the containment officers to stiffen and slightly raise their rifles, and Jenny knew the horror she felt was clear on her face.

Jesus fuck, she’d known the circumstances would’ve been less than ideal, but this was beyond the pale. Wild animals were treated more humanely than this.

“Henry, is this really necessary?”

Nick gave her the most utterly incredulous look ever, as if he couldn’t believe she was even asking that question.

Jenny scowled at him. She agreed that Ahmanet needed to be contained and, if possible, freed from her pact with Set, but that didn’t mean she had to suffer and basically be tortured in the process of it.

Henry, however, nodded solemnly. “I’m afraid it is, Jennifer. Ahmanet is very dangerous, we can’t afford to take any risks.”

“I know, but…” Jenny gestured helplessly at the room as she struggled for words. “It’s so… It’s just… Isn’t there any way to make this more humane?”

“There isn’t,” Henry said firmly. “I’m sorry Jenny, but this is the only way we can restrain her and ensure no one gets hurt.” He softened a little, suddenly looking more like the man Jenny was used to dealing with. “I understand if you want to leave instead of staying here. We can find a translator somewhere else if necessary.”

Jenny shook her head, taking a moment to settle her emotions and a few deep breaths to dispel the nausea. It was probably Ahmanet influencing her, she told herself, she normally never would’ve reacted this strongly. She gave another, more determined shake of her head. “No, no, that’s fine. I’ll be fine.” She bounced on her toes a couple of times. “How close am I allowed to get?”

Henry considered it for a second. “Best if you stay off the metal grates.”

“Alright,” Jenny padded around Henry and Nick, the latter looking like he dearly wanted to drag her out of the room, and stopped a few inches from where the concrete floor gave way to metal grates. She sat down on the spot, folding her legs under her in a lotus position, and took a moment to smooth the folds out of her pants.

Screwing up her courage, Jenny met Ahmanet’s eyes.

Ahmanet was looking at her with curiosity, though tempered by inhuman patience. She didn’t look especially uncomfortable, pupula duplex eyes trained on Jenny and showing no signs of pain, but Jenny figured Ahmanet wouldn’t be comfortable showing discomfort in a room full of people who kept her prisoner. She sure as hell wouldn’t, if she were in Ahmanet’s position.

Ahmanet was the first to speak, which Jenny was glad for, because she honestly had no idea what to
say. Again, she spoke in Ancient Egyptian.

“My chosen. You are unharmed?”

Jenny, a little startled by the concern displayed by the princess, managed to nod. ‘‘I’m fine. I think I just passed out from the stress or something like that.’’ She glanced down Ahmanet’s torso, and didn’t see any wounds. ‘‘And you? I remember you were shot.’’

‘‘Mere flesh wounds. I have already healed from them.’’ She responded dismissively.

Jenny frowned, cocking her head. ‘‘Then how come they captured you?’’

‘‘I was… taken off-guard by the recent advancements in weaponry,’’ Ahmanet admitted grudgingly, ‘‘I shall not make the same mistake again.’’

That was obvious, because Jenny was pretty sure Ahmanet wasn’t getting out of this one. She wouldn’t have a chance to make that mistake a second time.

Henry cleared his throat, coming to stand next to Jenny. ‘‘Ask her what she’s planning to do to Mr. Morton.’’

Jenny glanced at him, and relayed the question.

In response, Ahmanet cocked her head, frowning a little. ‘‘Why is he asking after the male?’’

Jenny shrugged. ‘‘Nick told them he’s your chosen.’’

Ahmanet hissed angrily. ‘‘That peasant has dishonoured you!’’

‘‘How so? I’m pretty sure he didn’t mean any harm by it.’’

‘‘You are my chosen. That makes you royalty. My Queen-Consort. You are above a peasant like him. He has attempted to usurp your position with his claims.’’ She looked livid at the thought. ‘‘I will kill him for this, my chosen, to restore your honour. I swear it.’’

Jenny blanched. Henry looked desperate to know what they were saying. Jenny glanced up at him again - sitting down as she was, she had to crane her neck to do so. Jenny thought for a moment, and then, before she knew what she was doing, lied through her teeth. She tried to ignore the little burst of surprised satisfaction she knew didn’t come from herself, ‘‘she needs Nick alive for now. I don’t know why.’’

‘‘Ask her why, then,’’ Henry pushed eagerly.

Jenny turned back to Ahmanet.

‘‘You may tell him that the Dagger of Set will only work for me,’’ Ahmanet said before Jenny could translate the question, looking pleased, ‘‘and that it will not work in his favour should he try to complete the pact in my stead.’’

‘‘You understand English?’’ Jenny asked, surprised.

‘‘Your language is simple,’’ Ahmanet smirked, her words heavily accented but definitely in English.

Henry looked delighted as he crouched down. ‘‘You can speak our language? Tell me everything about your pact with Set.’’
Ahmanet very pointedly ignored him. She didn’t take her attention off Jenny, amber eyes gleaming with a glint of devilish amusement. ‘‘This man is very demanding. I will kill him once I escape these bonds.’’ She slipped back into her mother tongue, still ignoring Henry.

Henry was rapidly glancing between Ahmanet and Jenny. ‘‘Why’s she back to speaking Egyptian? Jennifer?’’

Jenny shrugged helplessly. ‘‘I don’t know.’’

Henry glared at the princess. ‘‘Speak English!’’

Ahmanet barely spared him a glance. ‘‘I will speak to you only, my chosen. You alone are worth my time.’’

‘‘She says…’’ Jenny said slowly, not looking away from the princess, ‘‘that she will only talk to me.’’

‘‘Damn it!’’ Henry growled in frustration, abruptly standing and pacing a couple of steps. ‘‘Ask her how the ritual works. How do we bring Set into this world, and how do we kill him?’’

Jenny barely withheld a sigh at the expression on Ahmanet’s face - it was obvious, even without words, that the princess would not be revealing that information. Jenny honestly did not blame her. Henry wasn’t making the best impression, after all.

‘‘The Dagger of Set will only work for me,’’ Ahmanet repeated, looking smug. ‘‘There is nothing this man can do to change that. The ritual will forever be beyond his reach.’’

Stifling another sigh - this was going to end in trouble, Jenny just knew it - she relayed the message to Henry, who looked less than pleased. He glared at Ahmanet, opening his mouth to say something, and then just let out a frustrated grunt and stalked over to Nick to continue interrogating him instead.

It suited Jenny well enough - now she could, at least, ask some questions of her own without people wanting to know what she was saying.

‘‘...At the church,’’ she started hesitantly, ‘‘you said that the pact with Set had been altered. What does that mean?’’

Ahmanet stopped glaring at Nick and Henry to give Jenny her full attention. ‘‘When you freed me from my prison, Set was watching. He does not desire a female body to walk this Earth in, he wishes a male body to mirror his divine form.’’ She explained it patiently, much to Jenny’s surprise, seemingly not minding the question. ‘‘Therefore, he altered the pact I made with him. When I complete the ritual, Set will not inhabit your body. Instead, you will be granted power beyond imagination, and through you, my power shall also increase greatly. You will become a living god, but not Set’s mortal avatar.’’

Jenny was glad to hear it. She didn’t want to be Set’s ‘mortal avatar’ anyway. The thought of being shunted out of her body and have it possessed by a god wasn’t a nice one. She rather liked her body, and she didn’t want to share.

That left her with another question, though. ‘‘You also said that I would birth Set into this world when the time is right,’’ Jenny frowned at the thought. ‘‘Did you mean that literally?’’

‘‘Once the ritual is completed, we will return to Egypt,’’ Ahmanet responded, ‘‘there, we will start our work to prepare this world for Set. When we have done this, Set will temporarily infuse his essence into my body. Then I will bed you, and thus impregnate you with the essence of Set. You will be the mother of a god brought to Earth,’’ the princess finished, anticipation colouring her voice. It
was obvious the thought was a nice one for her.

For Jenny, not so much. If she hadn’t already been sitting, she might’ve fallen down. As it was, she felt a little queasy. “I don’t want children,” she managed to choke out. “I’ve never wanted to be a mother.”

Ahmanet looked at her, her four amber irises gleaming under the harsh lighting of the containment room, and Jenny had the sudden, striking feeling that the princess completely understood that sentiment.

It, deep down, did not really surprise Jenny.

Ahmanet had grown up five-thousand years ago - though Jenny knew she had been trained to be pharaoh from childhood, she was still a woman. And in those times, women were expected to marry and have children as soon as possible. Especially those of high status, to provide heirs. In Ahmanet’s case, she would have been expected to provide an heir to the throne, and after the birth of her baby brother, an heir for whichever noble she’d have ended up married to while her brother took the throne that was supposed to be hers.

She knew exactly what it was like to be confronted with a future she didn’t want.

That didn’t stop her from speaking the words Jenny didn’t want to hear.

“You are my chosen. You must.”

Jenny didn’t respond. She stood up, dusted off her pants, and left the containment room, pausing only to inform Henry and Nick she would be in the library.

The princess made no attempt to stop her or call out to her, but she felt the burn of Ahmanet’s gaze between her shoulder blades even after the door closed behind her.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet breaks free from Prodigium - which brings Jenny back to running for her life. She has a plan, though...

Chapter Notes

Chapter seven done, ahead of schedule. I'd planned on posting it sometime next week, but I happened to be inspired, so I managed to finish it early - which means ya'll (and by 'ya'll' I mean the people who actually read my stuff, even though there's probably not a lot of you) get an update before I'm off to Paris, and don't have to wait until after I'm back.

The library at Prodigium was probably Jenny’s favourite library in the whole world. Not because it was particularly big, because it had nothing on some of the larger public libraries, but rather because of the books that could be found in it.

More specifically, the texts that could be found in the Egyptology section. The texts were either spectacularly informative, or spectacularly rare, or spectacularly old, or written in actual ancient hieroglyphs, or, as was the case in the ones Jenny liked best, all of the above.

It was in these books that Jenny took refuge after her little talk with Ahmanet.

The idea of giving birth to the mortal form of Set - and she’d probably end up being forced to raise him, too, because Jenny honestly doubted he’d just be born and then fully grown five minutes later - was enough to send revolted shivers down her spine.

She needed some serious distraction from that.

Which brought her to seek out one of the oldest tomes present in the Egyptology section. It was positively ancient, almost as old as Ahmanet was, and very well-preserved, though it had to be handled very carefully and with gloves on so the oils in her skin didn’t taint the pages and didn’t do the book irreparable damage. She would even have to wear a surgical mask to stop the moisture in her breath from hitting the book.

There was a special room in the library where books as old as this one were supposed to be read, where the air was kept cool and dry and nearly sterile - again, so the book wasn’t damaged beyond repair.

Jenny had chosen this book for a reason; it was written in hieroglyphs, New Kingdom like on Ahmanet’s sarcophagus. She could read them quite well, but not nearly as easily as English, so it would take a decent amount of concentration. Enough, at least, to make sure she couldn’t think about anything else. Like getting ritually stabbed in the chest and turned into a god by Ahmanet and then being forced to birth another god. And ending up as Ahmanet’s Queen-Consort (did that make...
Ahmanet the King, or would she be the Pharaoh?) in the process.

Yeah.

Not the future Jenny had imagined for herself, that was for sure.

She sighed, grimacing at the rush of moist warmth it caused inside her mask (she hated those things for this exact reason), and tried to concentrate on the yellowed papyrus pages in front of her. The ink used to draw the hieroglyphs was faded in some places and nearly unreadable in others, which made the text a lot harder to read, but unlike it usually did, it did not irritate Jenny. The more effort she had to put into reading it, the better.

Brow furrowed in concentration, Jenny eventually managed to lose herself in the book, something she was more than grateful for.

A while later, it was a sharp knock on the glass of the separate room jolted Jenny from her reading, causing her to frown as she looked up from her book.

Nick was on the other side of the glass, gesturing at her urgently. It seemed to be important.

Sighing, Jenny waved at him in a way that said ‘calm down, I’m on my way’. She carefully closed the book and returned it to the metal box it was kept in for protection, closing it securely. Then she took off the gloves and the mask she was wearing, picking up the box as she left the room.

“What do you want, Nick?” Jenny asked as she carried the box over to the correct shelf and slid it back in it’s place.

“We need to talk,” Nick said, “is that room secure?”

“It’s a glass reading room. What do you think?”

“So that’s a no, then,” Nick muttered, looking around. “Is there anyplace else we can go?”

Jenny sighed in resignation. It didn’t look like Nick would be giving up anytime soon. “I have an office. We can talk there.”

Nick nodded tightly. He looked anxious. Jenny figured he’d finally realized the consequences of naming himself Ahmanet’s chosen, and didn’t like what they were. Sucks for him, she thought a little vindictively as she led him out of the library. If he didn’t want the trouble that came with it, he shouldn’t have lied, simple as that.

Jenny’s office wasn’t particularly big or impressive, as her position in Prodigium wasn’t an especially important one. Her job had been to find Ahmanet, and one didn’t need a huge office with a flatscreen tv and leather couches to find a tomb. That didn’t mean, though, that Jenny’s office was particularly small or underwhelming either. It was, if she had to describe it, a fairly normal office of average size, decorated in fairly neutral colours and with little personal effects in it.

Jenny didn’t care; she didn’t really spend a lot of time in it because most of her research was done in her library or on site. Besides, she didn’t have to share her office with anyone, so she was pretty content with what she had.
Nick slumped in the guest chair in front of Jenny’s desk while Jenny closed the door behind them so they wouldn’t be disturbed.

“What did you want to talk about?”

Nick groaned, slumping further into his seat. He was doing a very good impression of a limp dishtowel. “I made a mistake, Jenny.”

“You’ve made several,” Jenny said, not at all sympathetic. “But which one are you referring to?”

“This is not funny, Jenny!” Nick suddenly looked almost frantic, the first hints of panic beginning to stir on his face. “They’re going to kill me!”

Jenny paused. “Excuse me?”

“The dagger! They want to stab me with it!” Nick dropped his head into his hands, groaning quietly. “Henry said he wants to do the ritual so Set can be destroyed. And to do that, they have to stab me with the dagger. They’re gonna kill me, Jenny.”

Jenny frowned as she leaned against her desk. “It won’t work.”

Nick looked up. “What do you mean?”

“I talked to Ahmanet, remember? She told me the dagger won’t work for anyone but her. She’s the only one who can do the ritual and complete the pact. The only thing that’ll happen if Henry stabs you is that you’ll die, it won’t bring Set into this world. And Henry knows that.”

Nick’s mouth flopped open ungracefully. “Then why is he going to try it anyway?”

“Honestly?” Jenny sighed as she crossed her arms. “Henry is an intelligent man, Nick, and mostly a good one. Not a kind one, but he does try to do what is right. In this case, his idea of right is ridding the world of a threat to humanity, at any cost.”

“How in the world does that translate to murdering me when he knows it won’t give him what he wants?” Nick looked flabbergasted, and maybe a little nauseous as well.

Jenny shrugged. “I’m not Henry so I don’t know what he’s thinking, but my guess is that he doesn’t believe Ahmanet. I think he wants to give it a try, in case Ahmanet lied. He’s trying to eliminate the possibility of missing his chance at destroying a threat to humanity.”

“And sacrificing my life in the process!” Nick added, a touch hysterically.

Jenny nodded, absently wondering why she felt so calm. She was pretty sure she should’ve reacted more intensely to something like this. But she didn’t. She was calm, she didn’t feel much of anything, almost uncaring. She shouldn’t be. She knew that. But she was. And Jenny honestly wasn’t as surprised, or as worried about that, as she should be - her emotions had been screwy since she’d freed Ahmanet.

Nick’s emotions also seemed a little screwy, but not because he was linked to an undead princess who was aiming to take over the world- he was just panicking because Henry was planning to murder him. He had a valid reason for feeling the way he did. God knew Jenny had panicked when Ahmanet had been about to murder her in the church. She’d been absolutely terrified, and part of her still was. Jenny could understand Nick being scared.

There was a whisper at the edge of her consciousness.
Nick was yammering away, apparently not noticing Jenny’s sudden distraction.

Jenny frowned as she tried to place that odd feeling, tried to figure out why she had the feeling things would go to hell again in a few moments.

The air was thick in her lungs, tasting of power.

The penny dropped.

_Ahmanet._

She was working on something, Jenny could feel it, could feel it resonating through that thrice-cursed link, could smell it in the rippling waves of power coming from the direction of the containment area that kept Ahmanet prisoner.

Abruptly, she pushed away from where she’d been leaning against her desk. She grabbed Nick’s jacket at his shoulder and began to drag him out of her office.

“Jenny, what the hell?!” Nick pulled himself free of her grip, looking indignant.

“She’s doing something.” Jenny wrenched her office door open and hurried down the hallway, away from where Ahmanet was being kept. Nick barely kept up with her. “She’s trying to escape.”

Nick opened his mouth to say something - and then abruptly shut it and started to run as well when the sound of gunshots started coming from the containment area.

“Where’s the exit?!’

“This way!” Jenny grabbed the sleeve of his jacket and jerked him around a corner sharply, not slowing down at all. The exit wasn’t too far, as long as they took the stairs instead of allowing the elevators to slow them down.

Jenny took the stairs two steps at a time, Nick on her heels, and burst through the doors that connected Prodigium to the Natural History Museum. It was nearly two in the afternoon, so the museum was crowded, and it was all Jenny could do not to crash into people or push them aside as she scrambled for the exit. She didn’t entirely succeed, but the person she did run over was a teen in apparently good health, and he didn’t seem hurt, so he’d probably be fine.

There was a low, ominous rumble from under the floor.

Jenny sprinted past a display cabinet, eyes locked on to the wide open doors only a hundred or so feet away, so close, it would only take a few seco-

The floor fell away.

Jenny couldn’t help the shriek that escaped her, clawing at the floor with all her might as she was dragged down with the collapsing structure. Bits of marble flooring cut into her hands and through her blouse, little lacerations opening up across her palms and fingers and torso, making it harder to grasp onto anything, the blood turning her hands and everything within reach slippery. A single splinter of marble cut into her face, cutting through the skin and leaving a laceration nearly an inch long, horizontally over her cheekbone, just half an inch shy of her eye.

Nick had, by some miracle, managed to keep on his feet, and he scrambled down after her, reaching out with terror on his face - and managed to grab Jenny’s wrist just in time. His other hand found purchase on part of a display cabinet, partially stuck in the broken-up floor, sturdy enough to hold
their combined weight for now. Grunting with effort, Nick began to pull Jenny up.

Jenny did her best to help him along, struggling to find purchase and crawl her way to more stable grounds. Grit and shards dug into her hands and stomach, her jacket thankfully protecting her arms and the fabric of her pants thick enough to withstand most of the abuse heaped upon it.

Finally, Nick managed to drag her away from the edge, and he wasted no time dragging her up to her feet.

Jenny stumbled for a moment, panting with a combination of breathlessness and fear, and briefly squeezed Nick’s hand in thanks. She grimaced a moment later when the action drove a few of the tiny shards of marble deeper into her palm and fingers.

‘‘That was way too close,’’ Nick looked upset at the thought.

‘‘Yeah,’’ Jenny agreed with him wholeheartedly. That was way too fucking close. ‘‘We should get out of here.’’

‘‘Best idea I’ve heard today.’’

They started running again.

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Ahmanet was pissed - Jenny didn’t need the link between them to know that much. She was also far, far more powerful than Jenny ever could have dreamed her to be.

Wind howled through the streets of London, every gust drenched in wave upon wave of raw power, and just behind the initial hurricane-force gales, was the sand. Clouds of it, whipped into a frenzy, large enough to envelop even the Big Ben, engulfing everything it came across.

Windows shattered, doors were torn off their hinges, roof tiles smashed apart against the pavement - entire cars were blown off their wheels, metal screeching against the asphalt of the streets as they were slowly moved by the sheer force of the wind.

Above it all, through the howling of the wind and the sand in her ears and the noise of people screaming and running in terror, Jenny could hear Ahmanet, her voice echoing with force and determination as she whipped the sandstorm into a mad frenzy and called upon Set to bring her her chosen.

To bring her Jenny.

Jenny tried and failed to suppress the terrified shudder it sent down her spine, and instead concentrated on getting the fuck away. Somewhere out of London. Getting out of the city was probably her best bet right now. If she could find a car that had the keys in it (Jenny did not know how to hotwire a vehicle, and this was not the time to learn), she could be out of London within an hour, and on her way out of the country not long after.

She wasn’t sure where she’d go, but at the moment, anything was better than England.

She ducked around a corner, pressing against the stone of the building, intending to take a few seconds to catch her breath. Nick wasn’t much better off then her, covered almost entirely in sand, hair and clothes all over the place, like he’d been caught in a hurricane - which, honestly, was a pretty accurate description.
“What do we do? We can’t keep running like this,” Nick swallowed thickly, “we’ll tire, and then she’ll catch up to us.”

“We need a car.” Jenny peeked around the corner, squinting to keep the sand out of her eyes. “Do you know how to hotwire one?”

Nick nodded. “Yeah.”

“Good.” Jenny’s mind worked at lightning speed as she thought up a plan. “Here’s what we’re going to do. We are going to find a car and hotwire it. Then we get the hell out of London. We head to the tunnel to France.”

“Yeah, alright,” Nick agreed. “And then?”

“We find the nearest French airport, and we catch a plane to Iraq.”

“Iraq?” Nick frowned, apparently not following Jenny’s train of thought. “Why?”

Jenny finally caught her breath. “Her tomb. They locked her in there, and they managed to keep her contained for 5000 years. There must be more to it than just a sarcophagus and mercury.”

The penny fell, and Nick lit up in understanding. “So you think there might be a way to defeat her in her tomb?”

“I’m not sure,” Jenny had to admit, “but it’s the best chance we have.”

And right now, she was willing to take just about any chance she could get. Desperation and fear for her life made good motivators. Jenny did not want to die. So she was going to do everything she could to prevent it. Simple as that. And she was dragging Nick along for the ride, because he’d been there when she’d gotten herself into his mess, and he’d damn well be there when she got herself out of it as well.

Nick peered around the corner like Jenny had done a few moments earlier. He squinted a little. “I can’t really see a car undamaged enough to drive.”

Jenny shifted uncomfortably. The amounts of sand in the air had slowly started to increase over the course of their conversation, and she didn’t like it. “C’mon, we’ll try a couple of blocks further. I don’t think the sandstorm is quite as severe there as it is here.”

Not yet, at least, she added mentally. With luck, they’d get there before all vehicles were destroyed.

Ducking around the corner, Jenny started to run again, Nick on her heels, Ahmanet’s voice in the air, low and insistent and demanding, haunting Jenny with every step she took.

She just ran faster, intent on escaping the woman nipping at her heels as quickly as possible.

Nearly half an hour later, Jenny and Nick found what they were looking for in an underground parking lot. Many cars had been left behind while their owners fled the suddenly apocalyptic city of London, leaving plenty of vehicles for Jenny and Nick to claim.

“Which one should we take?” Jenny scrutinized the dozens of cars, wondering if she should feel more guilty about planning to commit a felony. Probably.
Nick made his way over to an SUV of some kind. "This one should work. Better than a sedan or something. And it should be able to handle off-road stuff once we get out of the city, in case the roads are blocked."

"Alright." Jenny nodded. That sounded logical. The SUV it was, then.

"Stand back a bit." Nick instructed as he took off his jacket, winding it around his fist until it was completely covered and his arm was padded almost up to the elbow. Jenny took a step back as instructed, grimacing when Nick pulled his arm back and then punched through the driver’s seat window. The glass took a few blows before it shattered, most of the glass falling into the driver’s seat, and some of it landing on the concrete floor.

Nick freed his hand, and, after shaking the glass out of his jacket and making sure no shards were left behind, shrugged it back on, shooting Jenny a roguish grin. He looked right in his element. Of course he did. He was a thief more than a soldier. This was what he did best.

Nick stuck his arm through the broken window and fiddled around with the inside of the door for a moment, and a few seconds later it just popped open without further fuss.

Nick gave a small whoop of victory and quickly used his sleeve to brush the shards of glass out of the driver’s seat. He climbed in, and opened the passenger’s seat door from the inside.

Jenny took the hint, walking around the car and sliding in, making sure she put on her seatbelt - she hadn’t forgotten the way she’d been thrown out of the ambulance. It was something she wasn’t keen to repeat.

Her hands were sticky with blood and dusty with sand, and once her seat belt had clicked like it should, she took a moment to wipe her palms on her thighs. A half-dry mixture of blood and mud smeared over the fabric of her pants, and Jenny hissed at the sharp twinges of pain in her hands - she still had the little bits of marble grit stuck in her hands, and now that they were momentarily out of the sandstorm, she was starting to notice that it really hurt.

And her stomach, too. She glanced down, and found that parts of her blouse were practically ripped to shreds, clinging to her stomach only because of the blood that had soaked the fabric and then dried against her skin, sticking it there. It had bled, but not as much as the cut on her cheekbone; now that Jenny was actually paying attention to her injuries, she could feel the drying blood on her face, trailing down over her cheek, past her jaw and over her throat until it disappeared under the collar of her blouse. If Jenny hadn’t known that head wounds tended to bleed a lot, she’d have been concerned.

Nick paused from where he was rooting through a bundle of brightly coloured wires poking out of a hole he’d torn under the steering wheel. "You okay?"

"Got a little banged up at the museum," Jenny muttered as she started to pick at the bits of marble in her hands. "I’ll be fine."

Nick glanced at her hands, and then at her face, and visibly debated her answer for a moment before nodding his head and going back to fiddling with the wires.

Jenny let him fiddle, instead concentrating on carefully pulling a thin, razor sharp little sliver of marble from her palm without opening up the laceration even more or cutting her fingers as she tried to grasp it. If only she had a pair of tweezers... and maybe of disinfectant wipes. Because this was just asking for infections and all kinds of nastiness.
Jenny was glad when, a few moments later, she’d managed to take out the sliver, because the car gave a small rumble and a cough, and then started up smoothly, startling Jenny enough that her hands jerked.

‘‘We’re up and running!’’ Nick grinned victoriously as he started maneuvering the car out of the parking space. Despite herself, Jenny was a little impressed.

Nick drove out of the parking lot at top speed, crashing straight through the barrier beam and bouncing onto the street like they were in a bumper car. Jenny managed to keep her head from slamming into the passenger’s side window, even as Nick started cursing - his window had been smashed out, and the sandstorm had by now reached this block of the city. He immediately got a face full of sand, and was wiping at his eyes with one hand even as he raced down the street, barely missing the rubble and destroyed cars strewn around.

It was the second-most terrifying ride Jenny had ever been in in her life, the first being the ambulance ride away from the church.

Zombies were creepier than a sandstorm, even though the sandstorm could probably do more damage.

Nick drove beyond recklessly, reaching a speed of nearly fifty miles an hour in the middle of the city, missing obstacles by mere inches, honking the horn loudly whenever one of the running people got too close for comfort. Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to tell him to slow down - she could deal with the terror of sitting in a car with Nick behind the wheel as long as it meant getting farther away from Ahmanet.

After nearly forty-five minutes, the SUV containing Jenny and Nick steadily drove out of London, avoiding the M25 in favour of smaller but less crowded roads to make a quicker getaway.

The engine growled as Nick pushed it to it’s limits, breaking virtually every traffic rule known to man, nearly running over several people in the process, but he didn’t stop. He continued to drive, the speedometer climbing higher and higher, the car silent besides the rumbling of the engine and the whipping of the wind through the broken window.

Behind the SUV, still visible in the rearview mirror, the gales of the sandstorm continued to rip apart London, but neither Jenny nor Nick bothered (or dared) to look back.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Mostly a filler chapter; Jenny and Nick get found by Prodigium, and convince Henry to go to Iraq.

Chapter Notes

A late update, I know, but I've been out of commission for a bit. First, Paris, then I was dealing with sensory overload. And I can assure you, trying to write on a bright laptop screen while dealing with sensory overload is not fun. I've mostly been sleeping, and slowly building up to being able to spend time writing without getting a migraine.

Anyways, while this is mostly a filler (there's not a lot of plot, to be honest, I'm not quite at my best at the moment), we are arriving at the point where canon goes out of the window. I've pretty much cancelled the movie plot.

No Ahmanet in this one, but she'll be making a reappearance sometime soon.

They were picked up by Prodigium troops about twenty miles from Folkestone, just over an hour after leaving London.

Nick was pumping gas into the car, keeping a wary eye on his surroundings, and Jenny was cooped up in the car. She couldn’t exactly go outside looking like someone had tried to murder her (and nearly succeeded), with blood and dirt all over her. Nick was mostly unharmed, and the few cuts he had were on his chest and thus easily hidden under his undamaged button-up shirt.

As a result, it was his job to refuel the car, as well as pick up some snacks at the shop to keep them going.

Nick was just returning from the shop, arms full of prepackaged snacks and bottles of water, when a large black military-style Hummer stopped next to their SUV. Jenny tensed in her seat, hand straying towards the knife Nick had left with her (how he’d even gotten in and out of Prodigium without his weapons being taken from him was a mystery to Jenny, because they were usually quite stringent about security, but at least they had a knife and a gun to defend themselves with).

(She tried not to think of the fact that the gun only had six bullets left, and that they had no extras. And they were regular bullets, not mercury-laced ones.)

Needless to say, Jenny exhaled a big sigh of relief when the doors of the Hummer opened and people wearing Prodigium uniforms stepped out.

One of them moved over to Nick, and the second knocked on the passenger’s side window, gesturing at Jenny to step out of the car. Jenny did, wincing when her flayed hands protested, and was grateful when Nick’s lie proved to still be the believed truth at Prodigium, because the soldier
didn’t do anything to detain Jenny. Instead, the armed woman seemed rather worried about her.

“Are you alright, Dr. Halsey?”


“Alright,” the soldier said, “we have a first aid kit in the car. If you would, Dr. Halsey.”

Jenny nodded, slamming the SUV’s door behind her and obediently making her way over to the black Hummer. The door to the back seat was still open, so Jenny climbed in without having to be told to. It was big enough for two benches of seats, facing each other, with still some leg room in the middle. Jenny chose the middle seat (the far seat was already occupied) facing forwards - if there was something she hated, it was facing backwards in a moving vehicle, be it car or bus or train.

The female soldier - the name tag sewn onto her bulletproof vest claimed she was called Susan Miller - climbed in after her, taking the free seat next to Jenny so she had an armed soldier on either side of her. Nick was stuck in a very similar arrangement, only he looked a lot more uncomfortable with it.

Jenny didn’t mind the armed guard; she rather liked the idea of people with big guns between her and Ahmanet and whatever minions she had. She was willing to bet the bullets in those rifles were laced with mercury, too, which was another layer of protection Jenny especially appreciated.

The Hummer started to move.

Susan dug a first aid kit from under the row of seats, momentarily abandoning her rifle to take out some medical supplies. Mostly antiseptic wipes, analgesic cream and a lot of gauze and medical tape, as well as a pair of tweezers, all neatly packed in sterile packaging. “Would you please take off your jacket, Dr. Halsey?” Susan gave her a reassuring look. “I’m trained in basic field medicine, so I just want to patch you up until we can get you to a proper doctor for further treatment, alright?”

Jenny nodded, shrugging off her jacket and letting it fall to the floor.

Susan snapped on a pair of surgical gloves. “I’m going to take care of your face first,” she said, grabbing what seemed to be a pack of moist wipes.

Jenny gave another nod, making sure to keep her head as still as possible as Susan set to wiping the blood off the skin surrounding the cut on her cheekbone.

Nick was trying to look out of the darkly tinted windows. “Where are we going?”

The soldier on his right, a gruff looking man with the name tag ‘Jack Poulter’ said, “We’re heading for Dr. Jekyll’s current location.”

“Where is that?” Nick frowned at the non-answer.

“Twenty-seven miles north of London.”

“Alright…” Nick said slowly. He still didn’t seem assured. “And how’d you find us?”

Jack gave an annoyed grunt. “You were spotted heading out of the city. We simply followed.”

Jenny blinked in surprise. She hadn’t even noticed they’d been followed. Apparently big black Hummers were easier to overlook than she’d thought they were. Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to be irritated; she didn’t exactly mind some extra protection. Not like Nick seemed to mind, anyway. He was clenching his jaw, eyes moving restlessly, visibly less than pleased to be surrounded by
highly trained Prodigium operative.

She could, Jenny thought as Susan began to bandage the cut on her cheek, somewhat understand Nick’s perspective. These were, after all, the people of the organization that had been planning to stab him to death to perform a ritual that wouldn’t succeed out of the hands of Ahmanet. They’d been planning to kill him for no reason at all beyond redundancy. Jenny could see why he’d be somewhat apprehensive around Prodigium people.

Susan finished taping some gauze to Jenny’s cheek and moved on to focus on the cuts spread across Jenny’s chest and abdomen. “I’m sorry, Dr. Halsey, but I need you to open your blouse so I can properly reach everything.”

Jenny instantly flushed red with embarrassment. She didn’t really want to open her blouse - she wasn’t exactly planning on flashing everyone in the car. Especially when Nick was there, he was definitely the type to start making lewd comments or start giving her lecherous stares.

The soldiers - another woman and two men - were professionals, at least, and could probably be counted on to look away respectfully or at least ignore it.

But Jenny could also understand that Susan would need the fabric of her blouse out of the way, so she could properly reach each laceration to treat them. She couldn’t clean and disinfect anything if there was a layer of fabric covering the torn skin. After a few seconds of deliberation, Jenny bit back a sigh and nodded, moving to open the buttons of her blouse.

Susan stopped her before she could even undo the first. “Your hands are damaged, Dr. Halsey. Let me do it.”

Jenny carefully dropped her hands into her lap - they did hurt a lot, so fiddling around with buttons was probably not the best idea anyway - and tried to ignore the lecherous smirk Nick was wearing. If her hands didn’t hurt as much as they did, Jenny would’ve slapped him. It’d worked when he’d been an ass back in Iraq, so she figured it would work again.

This time, though, she’d have to delegate.

Since Susan was busy unbuttoning her blouse, Jenny turned to Jack Poulter. “Could you please slap Nick for being a pervert?”

Nick’s eyes widened. An amused grin overtook Jack’s face.

“Owch!” Nick yelped and rubbed his upper arm, where Jack had punched him. It wasn’t a soft hit, it was one meant to hurt. Not harm, per se, but it did cause some pain.

“Respect Dr. Halsey’s privacy,” Jack informed Nick in clear terms, and then did just that himself, directing his attention out of the window, away from Jenny. Nick, still rubbing his arm, gave a mulish expression, but obeyed anyway.

Jenny was grateful for it; it was embarrassing enough as it was to have Susan see her half-naked. Susan was a professional, though, and she acted like it, cleaning and treating each laceration quickly and methodically, without lingering at the more inappropriate spots.

Jenny’s torso was soon spotted with patches of gauze and tape rather than dried blood, and about fifteen minutes later, her hands were also cleaned, treated and carefully wrapped. She would need a new blouse, and a shower to rid herself of the sand leftover from the sandstorm, but at least she wasn’t covered in blood anymore.
“Thank you,” Jenny thanked Susan as the woman packed away the medical supplies.

“Not a problem, Dr. Halsey,” Susan responded with a smile. She clicked the first aid box shut and returned it to its spot under the seat.

Jenny drew the remains of her blouse together so it at least covered the cups of her bra, and then clumsily zipped up her jacket to cover her up the rest of the way. Her hands and other injured parts still hurt, but Susan had given her some painkillers that should take care of it soon enough.

Henry’s location turned out to be a tiny airfield that Jenny had never heard of before. It was too tiny for commercial flight. The kind of airport used to fly for leisure or sport.

A private plane was parked on the airstrip, and Jenny and Nick were ushered into it without much fuss.

Henry was already waiting for them, sitting in one of the big leather chairs and typing furiously on a laptop. He looked less than pleased, though the expression slid off his face and was replaced with relief once he spotted Jenny and Nick. “Jennifer, Mr. Morton, good to see you alive and well… at least reasonably so,” he added, lingering on Jenny’s bandaged hands and the gauze peeking over the top of her jacket’s collar. “Are you very hurt?”

“Cuts and bruises, mostly.” Jenny responded as she chose a seat, diagonally across from Henry, next to the window. “Susan already patched me up.”

Henry squinted a little. “Susan Miller?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm. Good soldier. Competent field medic.” He glanced briefly at his laptop. “I gather you were caught in the sandstorm at some point, to gain injuries like those?”

Jenny grimaced. “The floor collapsed on me at the museum. Got stuck in splintered marble.”

“It was pretty awful,” Nick chimed in. “Half the museum nearly collapsed on us.”

“So it did.” Henry agreed. “Luckily, Prodigium only took minor damage.”

“The ceilings literally collapsed,” Jenny said, wondering how that counted as ‘minor damage’. Henry had to operate with a different dictionary than she did, because collapsed ceilings were counted under ‘major catastrophe’ in her book.

“Only in the containment area used for Ahmanet. The rest of the base was left untouched bar the sand that blew through. All it needs is a vacuum cleaner or two.” Henry typed a few more sentences. “The ceiling will take a little longer to repair, but it should be done in a week or two.”

Outside, the plane engines started up with a steadily increasing roar of noise.

Nick cleared his throat. “Changing the subject, where are we going?”

“Prodigium has multiple bases. The London base was merely our main one. Now that it’s temporarily out of commission, we’ll be relocating to France for a few weeks.”

“Actually, Henry,” Jenny spoke up before Nick could get the idea to lie about this too and steal her
thunder again, “Nick and I need to get to Iraq.”

Henry paused, adjusting his glasses on his nose. “Iraq?”

“Well, I figured that the tomb managed to imprison Ahmanet for five millennia.” Jenny explained. “That’s a long time. So I figured, what if there was more than mercury to it? It seems a little farfetched to me that a mercury bath can stop Ahmanet from using her powers, even if it does weaken evil spirits. Maybe, if I investigate the tomb a little closer, I’ll find something that can help us stop her.”

Henry thought it over for a few seconds. “It does have some merit to it.”

“Plus Iraq is thousands of miles away,” Nick added in, “it’ll give us some time to plan before Ahmanet catches up, if nothing else. France is pretty close, if she’s coming for me,” he eyed Jenny shiftily, and Jenny gave him a warning glare, “and she can somehow track me, it wouldn’t take her long to cross the Channel.”

“Indeed,” Henry responded slowly. “Perhaps Iraq is the best place to go for now. It’s worth a shot, at least.” He stood up from his chair, placing his laptop on the small, lacquered table in front of him. “If you’ll excuse me for a moment, I’ll inform the pilot of our change in plans.”

“So…” Nick said when Henry had disappeared into the cockpit. “I guess we’re going to Iraq again.”

“Don’t even start,” Jenny groaned.

“What? I wasn’t going to say anything!”

“I swear to God, if you start about Baghdad hotel rooms, I will hit you. I don’t even care how much it will hurt.”

Nick, despite himself, grinned for the first time in a while. “Trust me, I won’t. You hit pretty hard.”

Jenny found herself grinning back. “I try.”

Nick’s grin faded, and he shot a paranoid look around as he leaned closer to Jenny. Automatically, Jenny leaned in as well, to hear what he had to say.

“Do you, y’know, sense anything?” Nick whispered as quietly as possible. “From her?”

“Um,” Jenny said, “give me a second to concentrate.”

Nick nodded, watching her avidly.

Feeling a little self-conscious, Jenny closed her eyes, mentally trying to find her link to Ahmanet. It was elusive, for several long seconds.

Then there was a tiny spark of awareness.

Jenny opened her eyes. She looked at Nick. She could feel the expression of distress written all across her face.

“What?” Nick asked anxiously.

“The gem. She’s found it.”
“The dagger is complete?!?” Nick hissed out in horror.

Jenny shook her head. “Not yet. But she knows where to find the gem. It won’t be long now.”

“...Fuck.” Nick blew out a long breath, slumping back in his chair. “Where?”

“The crusaders’ tomb at the subway. It was buried with one of them.”

“Fuck.” He repeated.

“Yeah,” Jenny agreed.

“Is there time to go grab it before Ahmanet gets to it?”

“No. She’s, like, minutes away from it.” Jenny ran a hand through her hair, wincing when the pressure caused pain that cut straight through her painkillers. “We wouldn’t even reach London in time, let alone the tomb.”

“Fuck.” Nick repeated himself for the third time.

It was a sentiment Jenny wholly supported. She, too, was less than pleased Ahmanet was gaining ground. With the dagger as good as completed - she pretty much had the gem, considering there was no one to stop her from taking it - all Ahmanet would have to do was hunt Jenny down and murder her. Which meant Jenny had to get the hell to Iraq, to figure out a way to stop her own death from happening.

Yeah.

She’d thought this kind of shit only happened in movies, but apparently not.

God, a movie. If only. If this were a movie, Jenny knew for sure the monster would be defeated in the end. She probably wasn’t that lucky, though.

Henry returned from the cockpit. “The travel plans have been confirmed,” he informed Jenny and Nick as he retook his seat, “we’re going straight to Iraq.”

“Baghdad?” Nick asked.

“Yes. From there, we’ll make our way to the tomb over land.” Henry confirmed. “There will be Jeeps waiting for us. And new clothes,” he added, glancing at Jenny. “Susan told me your blouse was ripped to shreds when you fled the museum.”

“Turns out fabric can’t stand up to razor-sharp marble,” Jenny said. “Who knew, right?”

Henry eyed her in concern. “You’re alright, though.”

“Nothing big or deep enough to require stitches or glue.”

“Good, good. I’ll have a doctor on waiting in Baghdad as well. Just in case.” Henry returned to his laptop, starting to type again.

Jenny was quite happy at the idea of a doctor - she should probably get herself some things like tetanus shots and antibiotics, because that marble floor just couldn’t have been sanitary, with people tracking God knows what into the museum from outside. Jenny didn’t fancy getting all kinds of nasty infections and diseases just because she forgot to get her shots. She wasn’t a fan of needles, but compared to the dagger that might be in her near future, Jenny felt she could handle a few tiny, thin
tubes of steel.

Nick should probably get some shots as well, Jenny figured, and some antibiotics. He’d been injured too, a few cuts on his chest (they’d been treated by Susan as well, once she’d finished patching up Jenny), and it would probably be bad if Nick succumbed to infection or something like that in the middle of the Iraqi desert.

The plane slowly came into motion, starting to roll down the airstrip. It gained speed quickly.

Jenny made sure her seatbelt was on when the plane took off, and kept it on until they were halfway over France - just in case Ahmanet had managed to somehow call up another murder of crows to crash this plane also.

She didn’t, but being strapped to her chair for a while made Jenny feel better anyway.

The flight passed quietly.

Jenny was a little surprised how quietly, actually. There hadn’t so much as been a whisper of trouble. Not even turbulence. Certainly no murders of crows or hurricane-force sandstorms.

It made her feel a lot better about being on a plane, considering the one she’d been in before this one had been smashed into bits on the English countryside. A quiet flight was nice.

The alcohol offered by the flight attendant (it was a private jet, fully staffed, so the alcohol was strong and high-quality) probably helped with how calm Jenny felt about it all, though. She’d succumbed to a couple of glasses of Henry’s ridiculously sharp whiskey, which was exactly what she’d needed. It gave her heartburn, but she could ignore that, and the alcohol did help calm the anxiety.

Nevertheless, Jenny was glad when they arrived in Baghdad and she could get her feet back on solid ground.

The heat practically smacked her in the face when she stepped out of the cool, air-conditioned plane, but Jenny didn’t mind. She liked hot weather.

A small contingent of people and vehicles were waiting for them. A row of big, bulky Jeeps and more Prodigium soldiers (at least twenty of them, fully armed and packed for a field operation - it was kind of impressive to see) were lined up and ready to go. It looked very much like they were about to go into battle.

Jenny hoped to God that Ahmanet couldn’t get to Iraq easily and that it wouldn’t come to a battle.

Henry led them over, and as they came closer, Jenny spotted the sign of the Red Cross on several of the soldiers, signalling their proficiency in medicine. The doctors, as promised, ready to go. Henry obviously wasn’t in the mood to wait around in Baghdad; Jenny had a feeling she’d end up being treated in one of the Jeeps on the way to the tomb.

She was right; one of the doctors met her halfway and led her towards one of the Jeeps, Nick stubbornly on her heels. He refused to get into another Jeep.

“I’ve been with Jenny since the start, I’m going to be there to the end!” He snarled when one of the doctors tried to get him into a second Jeep, wrenching his arm loose and climbing in after Jenny.
without a second thought.

Jenny raised her eyebrow at him, but didn’t say anything. She didn’t have to.

Two doctors climbed in, one for them each, as well as two regular soldiers, as there was space for six people (driver’s and passenger’s seat not included, which were also filled by Prodigium soldiers). Eight people per Jeep in total. Amongst them, a solid twenty soldiers.

Jenny watched as the doctor treating her measured out meds for her tetanus shots as the car started to move, and hoped to God that the soldiers wouldn’t be needed.

The needle stung as it entered her arm. Jenny could almost feel the liquid being pushed into her body. The cuts covering her, all neatly bandaged and, according to the doctor, not to be touched until the dressings had to be changed, itched and burned.

Jenny swore she could smell desert sand. (They had not yet entered the desert, or even left the city of Baghdad.)

A red sun, scorching with heat, burned down on her. (The Jeep was a hardtop model, no sunroof, and the windows were tinted.)

Jenny wrung her hands and barely felt the pain.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Jenny and the boys arrive at the tomb, and waste no time searching for a solution to their problem.

Chapter Notes

Well, there we go, chapter 9 is up.

Still no actual appearance from Ahmanet, but I promise she's back next chapter.

The trip was, over land, a couple of hundred miles. Which meant that, when travelling with a small caravan of cars, it was a long trip. Especially because Henry insisted they avoid most cities and towns unless in need of more gasoline for the Jeeps.

Jenny wasn’t sure why they needed to avoid places with lots of people - she honestly doubted people even knew Ahmanet existed, let alone worked for her - but Henry was in paranoid mode and since he was in charge of the soldiers, he made the decisions. It did mean detours, though, lots of them, driving around each town or city in a wide arch to avoid them, sometimes adding hours, or, in one case, nearly half a day to the trip.

Jenny really didn’t mind so much; after the days of stress and running for her life she’d experienced, it was actually kind of nice to be able to just sit back and watch the landscape rush by the window. The car was air conditioned, some radio channel was playing soft rock at low volume, and there was a case of drinks and snacks tucked under one of the seats - Jenny hadn’t been this relaxed since she’d made the mistake of sleeping with Nick in Baghdad a week ago.

Everything had been kind of stressful after that.

This was nice. Plus, she’d gotten a clean blouse and bra, and that was really appreciated as well.

All detours included, it took a couple of days to reach the tiny town Ahmanet’s tomb had been hidden under.

The crater that had revealed it was still there, and the town was still completely abandoned. It’s inhabitants had obvious decided not to return, which Jenny could somewhat understand. First they’d been overrun by insurgents, then they’d been bombed, and to put the cherry on the sundae, their village had been turned into a smoking crater with an ancient, cursed tomb at the bottom of it. The mercury fumes must’ve permeated the whole village by now, too. It had become unlivable.

When Jenny stepped out of the Jeep, she completely understood the villagers’ decision not to return.
The place was a mess, and if it weren’t for Ahmanet, Jenny would have chosen never to return too.
The soldiers fanned out, rifles at the ready, forming a protective wall around Jenny, Nick and Henry. A few of them split off to search the village at the sound of a barked command.
Jenny doubted they would find anything. She didn’t so much as spot a flying bug. The village was utterly and completely deserted. Nothing but a heap or bricks and dust on top of a cursed tomb filled with poison and death.

‘‘Get the supplies,’’ Henry ordered one of the soldiers, who nodded and obeyed.
Jenny watched as several crates were pulled from the three Jeeps’ trunks. Climbing rope stuck out of the top of one of them, and Jenny was sure she could see climbing harnesses as well. They’d be rappelling down, as she’d expected. It wasn’t as if there were any stairs down into the tomb anyway, unless Henry also had a rope ladder stowed away.

‘‘I’ll have some people set up camp just outside the pit.’’ Henry said as he came to stand next to Jenny. ‘‘I’m planning for us to go into the tomb immediately, if that works for you as well.’’

‘‘Sure,’’ Jenny nodded. The sooner she got this over with, the better. She couldn’t wait to be free of Ahmanet again, to be able to live her life without constantly fearing for her life. She wanted to live without dreading every breath she took, knowing that it might be her last before Ahmanet caught up to her and plunged that dagger into her chest.

Henry gave a nod of his own. ‘‘Go get kitted out, then. I have a climbing harness in your size. Tahn,’’ he gestured at one of the soldiers standing next to the crates, ‘‘will help you gather everything you’ll need.’’

‘‘Alright.’’ Jenny made her way over to the crates and the soldier named Tahn.

‘‘You’ll be wanting your supplies, then?’’ The man asked her.

‘‘Yes, please,’’ Jenny responded.

‘‘Let’s see, then,’’ Tahn pulled one of the crates closer and started pulling stuff out of it. Jenny soon found herself with her hands full of climbing harness, coils of climbing rope, a large flashlight, a helmet with a light on it, an oxygen mask complete with a tank that would last two hours, and lastly, a fully loaded handgun.

‘‘Mercury-laced,’’ Tahn said, handing her an extra clip of bullets. ‘‘It’s not a lot, but should the undead bitch turn up, you’ll have enough to distract her and run for it.’’

Jenny honestly doubted it, because she’d spoken to Ahmanet and she hadn’t been all that impressed by modern weaponry. Add the fact that she had the ability to call up sandstorms, and that they were in the middle of the desert… well, Jenny didn’t think a couple of mercury bullets were going to do anything to stop Ahmanet.

She took the gun anyway, as well as the extra bullets and the thigh holster, because as useless as it was, it did make her feel better to have a weapon on her. She could pretend she stood a chance against Ahmanet with the weight of a firearm against her leg.

Tahn rummaged through the crate some more, finally pulling out a small backpack. ‘‘In case you find something down there that might help us and is small enough for you to carry back up,’’ he said as he handed it to her.
“Thanks, Tahn,” Jenny said, momentarily putting her other stuff on the ground to put the backpack onto her back. Once she’d pulled the straps tight, she stepped into the loops of the climbing harness and began fastening it around her hips and thighs.

Jenny was ready to go a few minutes later, feeling a little silly with the huge helmet on her head. Nick and Henry were in the same boat as her, though, so at least she wasn’t the only one wandering around looking like an idiot. It was enough to make her feel a little better.

“Ready to go?” Nick finished fastening his own climbing harness.

A bit away, three soldiers were hammering metal pins into the ground to help secure the climbing ropes to.

“Yeah,” Jenny said, “I’m ready.”

“Good,” Henry approached, all kitted out himself, wearing practical clothing. It looked odd, seeing him out of a suit. Jenny had never seen him without one before. “If you’re both ready, then, we should get going.”

Jenny nodded, following him over to the edge of the pit. She looked down, seeing the carved, screaming face, and swallowed hard.

Suddenly, she was nervous.

Anxiety cramped her stomach. She felt like she was going to throw up. This tomb was what had gotten her into this mess, it was the reason for her death sentence.

Jenny didn’t want to go in a second time.

Everything in her screamed not to go in a second time. Her bones ached with the knowledge that, if she did, she would not like the results.

She went in.

Her oxygen mask was hot and moist against her face with each exhalation of breath, and she grimaced at the feel of it. It felt gross. Jenny couldn’t wait to get out of here and get it off her face. Her heart pounded against her ribs in anxiety, loud and painful.

She reminded herself that the solution to her problem was probably down there. As much as she wanted to get out of this pit and run like hell, she couldn’t. This was her only chance, and she had to take it. Because if she didn’t… well, the consequences weren’t pretty.

After a few minutes of slow descent, her feet touched the ground. Jenny was glad for it, quickly unhooking herself from the climbing ropes so she could walk around freely. The ground was a little slippery under her feet, mercury staining the rock silver. Jenny was glad for her oxygen mask, uncomfortable as it was. At least she wasn’t breathing in airborne poison. That was something, at least.

Switching on the light on her helmet, Jenny carefully made her way towards the nearest wall. She hadn’t paid a lot of attention to the hieroglyphs last time she’d been here in her haste to find Ahmanet (something she sorely regretted today). Now that she was back a second time, though, Jenny was planning to read them all, and she hoped to God they contained the solution to her problem.

Nick and Henry appeared on either side of them, switching on their flashlights to further illuminate the wall, revealing a large section of glyphs.
“Can you read them?” Henry asked.

Jenny nodded. “They’re New Kingdom. I can read them.”

“Good.” Henry handed her a small headset. “It’s linked to a recording device. Make sure to translate verbally, please.”

“Alright.” Jenny took the headset, briefly taking off her helmet to hook it around her ear. The little microphone pressed against her cheek, barely half an inch from her mouth.

She put her helmet back on as she scanned the glyphs briefly. They started maybe twenty feet to her left and twenty feet up the wall, so Jenny moved backwards and to the side until she was able to get a good look at the whole picture. She was more than a little relieved that they were carved quite clearly, and that they were perfectly readable, even after 5000 years.

Last time she’d noticed how well-preserved everything was, too. Then, she’d been impressed by the fantastic condition everything was in. Now she just felt nauseous.

Slowly, Jenny started to translate the hieroglyphs in front of her, and it was all she could do to stop her voice from shaking at the dread and discomfort aching in her bones.

The glyphs in the antechamber were, all things considered, quite tame.

And not at all what Jenny had been looking for.

The foremost subject was the ‘Evil God’, as Set was apparently referred to in here, and his apprentice Ahmanet, also referred to as the ‘Dark One’. Neither was mentioned often by their actual names, which Jenny supposed was superstition. Something along the lines of names having power and attracting attention by using them.

Jenny hoped to God that that wasn’t true, because none in their party was shy about calling Ahmanet or Set by name, and they definitely would have attracted attention by now.

The glyphs told about the Evil God and his powers, and his desire to walk the Earth in a mortal body without the limits of his divine body - apparently, gods were bound to certain rules, and one of the ways to circumvent those was to take a mortal form. In a mortal body, the Evil God would be free to intervene in the human world as much as he desired, wherein the divine laws would not allow him to do so.

The Dark One was his gateway to mortality, the only person in the world with the power to break through the tenuously thin barrier that separated human from divine.

And to do that, the Dark One needed the Chosen.

When the Dark One used the dagger given to her by the Evil One to kill her Chosen, enough power would be released to tear the barrier and bring the Evil One into the mortal world. (And resurrect the Chosen as a god, the conduit for the power of the barrier, the divide between human and divine, the power over life and death - the third most powerful being on the planet, third only to the Dark One and the Evil One.)

(Jenny tried not to think of that as she translated.)
The stories and warnings carved into the walls of the antechamber sent shivers of dread and revulsion down Jenny’s spine, but it wasn’t what she was looking for. Right now, she couldn’t care less about the legend being spun in front of her, or the archaeological significance of it. She just wanted a way to take down Ahmanet so she could move on with her life. And find something to do that didn’t involve hunting down ancient corpses. Jenny was pretty much over that, she wanted something less… archaeological. Something that didn’t involve accidentally freeing an undead, murderous princess of old and getting chased halfway across the world and back.

Well, she mused as she finished translating the last glyphs in the antechamber, she did know enough about Ancient Egypt to be able to teach a university course on it. She could go back to school, get licensed as a teacher, go teach Egyptology somewhere. Certainly a lot safer (and more comfortable) than plodding around tombs trying not to breathe poison.

“Was that all of it?” Nick looked as uncomfortable as Jenny felt. “I’m running out of oxygen. We should go back up soon.”

“Yeah,” Jenny said, throat sore and dry from talking so much. She checked the dial of her oxygen tank, which was strapped to her wrist, and found that she, too, was low. Only half an hour left. “That was all. Nothing useful, I’m afraid.”

“There’s still the tomb itself,” Henry said, glancing at the entrance to said tomb longingly. “How much oxygen do you two have left?”

“Half an hour,” Jenny said.

“I’ve got just over a quarter hour,” Nick said.

Henry looked less than pleased, but nodded in resignation. “We’ll go back up. We’ll take a break, have something to eat, and then we’ll get back down here for the rest.”

That was a plan Jenny could agree to. She was tired and hungry, and she needed the bathroom, so going back up for a break sounded like a really splendid idea.

She didn’t actually have to climb back out of the pit. The soldiers up top in the village were strong, and they easily pulled her all the way back up. All she really had to do was grab onto the rock at the edge of the pit and pull herself onto steady ground.

The troops had been busy while they’d been down in the pit, Jenny noticed as she took off her helmet. A couple of military-style tents had been erected a safe distance from the tomb, and when Jenny was away from the precipice and took her oxygen mask off her face (fucking finally), she could smell food being cooked.

Her stomach rumbled hungrily. She could definitely go for some of that food. It smelled delicious. Something hearty and savoury, maybe something along the lines of a meaty sauce. Either way, Jenny wanted some of it, because she was hungry and it smelled good and she honestly didn’t care what it was as long as she got it into her stomach asap.

She returned her supplies to Tahn, who was in charge of all that, and wasted no time making her way over to the tent the smell of food came from. It was a large military-style one, and inside there was a makeshift kitchen and a bunch of collapsible tables and chairs. Jenny wondered how the hell those had gotten here, because there was no way all of this would have fit in the Jeeps. She asked
“I had ordered a small truck of supplies as well,” he explained, “but they hadn’t quite finished loading when we arrived in Baghdad, so they followed an hour or so behind us. Everything here was set up while we were in the tomb.”

That made sense. Jenny nodded in understanding. “Must’ve been a big truck.”

“Fairly, yes,” Henry agreed. “Now, how about something to eat?”

“I’m starving,” Jenny agreed. “Have you seen Nick yet?”

“He’s on his way,” Henry led her deeper into the tent, “I’m pretty sure there’s spaghetti and meatballs for dinner today, as well as fresh garlic rolls.”

Jenny was pretty sure she was drooling a little. She loved spaghetti and meatballs. She grabbed a tray from the stack and stepped in line; it was just about dinner time, so the vast majority of the soldiers were also waiting to get some food. Three cooks were manning the makeshift food bar, busily dishing out steaming plates.

When it was Jenny’s turn, she was handed a large plate with a heap of spaghetti, tomato sauce poured over the top and a generous serving of meatballs on it as well.

“Cheese?” One of the cooks asked, and when Jenny nodded, she got a bowl with some grated cheese as well, so she could add it to her own taste. A second, smaller plate was handed over as well, containing two rolls that smelled strongly of garlic and herbs, sliced open and buttered. It all looked delicious.

“Cutlery, condiments and drinks are over there,” the third cook in the row gestured to another table a few feet away. “you’re welcome to come get seconds or thirds whenever.”

Jenny thanked him and went to get herself a fork and knife, as well as one of the bottles of water on offer. As she sat down at a free table, Henry joining her, she noticed Nick entering, looking as hungry as she felt. She waved at him briefly so he knew where to come sit once he had his food, and then hungrily started in on her own plate.

It was delicious. Piping hot, savoury, tomato-y and cheesy, and the meatballs were fantastic. Whoever had cooked this was not messing around. Jenny appreciated it very much.

She was a shit cook herself, so when someone made her something edible, she always appreciated it. The last time she’d tried to cook pasta, the fire department had been called in because her neighbours were convinced Jenny’s home had caught fire.

Nick plonked down in the seat next to her and dumped all of the grated cheese in his bowl over his spaghetti sauce. ”Smells good, doesn’t it?”

Jenny, whose mouth was full with spicy garlic bread, nodded. She swallowed thickly, washing the crumbs down with a little water. “It tastes even better.”

Nick took a bite, and then nodded in agreement, looking at Henry. “You hire good cooks.”

“The only way to sustain a long day of hard work,” Henry said as he curled some pasta around his fork, somehow managing not to splatter sauce everywhere.

Jenny chewed on one of her meatballs. “You want to go back in after dinner, right?”
“Yes,” Henry nodded, “I don’t know how much time we have, because I’m sure The Dark One,” he made sure to use the title Jenny had found in the antechamber, which Jenny appreciated, “is hunting us as we speak. I think we should push as much as possible before she catches up.”

“I agree,” Nick said. “There’s still some daylight left, we can do another hour or two.”

“More, even,” Henry said, “I have some large construction lights and a generator on site. If necessary, we can work until far after sundown.”

Jenny was totally okay with that. She was tired, but she could stand to lose sleep if it meant not getting murdered and godified at the end of the day. She didn’t object to working through the night to find a way to stop Ahmanet. It wasn’t like she had anything better to do. “Let’s finish eating then,” she told Henry and Nick, “and get back to work.”

Half an hour later, Jenny was once again strapped into her climbing harness and halfway down into the pit.

Going in a third time was even worse than the second time.

That didn’t stop her, though. She was determined to put an end to this once and for all. If that meant going into this hellhole that made her bones ache with dread and her head hurt with anxiety not once or twice, but three times (possibly even more often), so be it.

A couple of soldiers rappelled down with them, guiding down crates with supplies while Jenny untied herself from the climbing ropes and clicked on the light on her helmet. She didn’t know how to set up construction lighting, so she’d leave that to the Prodigium troops, and instead do a last sweep of the antechamber to make sure she hadn’t missed any text.

She found some bits and pieces, but they mostly seemed to be warnings. Jenny wished she’d found those the first time she’d been here, and that she’d have been smart enough to pay attention to them. Past her was kind of an idiot, Jenny had to admit.

Present-Jenny wasn’t doing too well on the idiot-meter either.

There was the low buzz of electricity behind her, and with a few flickers, suddenly the antechamber was flooded with light. Jenny blinked for a moment, a little taken off guard, before she managed to blink away the spots in her vision. She switched off the light of her helmet, since it was no longer needed, and squinted in the direction of the lights to find Nick and Henry. They were already moving towards her, carrying a portable construction light each.

“Ready to go into the tomb itself?” Nick asked her.

“Of course,” Jenny said, and absolutely didn’t mean it.

Neither Nick nor Henry seemed to notice, both too intent on getting into the tomb to pay much attention. Jenny was actually kind of glad for it; she was not in the mood for too much attention. She let Nick and Henry go ahead, allowing them to use the lights they were carrying to properly illuminate the tomb. It took a few deep breaths and a quick mental pep talk before Jenny could get her feet moving again, and a few more seconds before she could actually convince herself to step into the tomb.

The first time Jenny had stepped into Ahmanet’s tomb, she had been awed.

Impressed by the theatrical look, impressed by the age, impressed by how well everything had been preserved.
Today, she just felt nauseous.

Revulsion turned her stomach, and she was so faint with terror she felt like she was going to pass out. She pushed through it, somehow managing to keep that fantastic spaghetti in her stomach where it belonged.

Instead, Jenny started to methodically work her way through the tomb. The headset was already on her head and running, tucked under her oxygen mask so the recording would be extra clear. The entire tomb was lit decently thanks to Nick and Henry. She still had a couple of hours of oxygen - plenty of time to make a good start. Plenty of time to be careful with her investigation.

This was the time to be thorough and precise. She couldn’t miss a single thing. Not now, not when lives were at stake.

She started at the entrance of the tomb, scouring every inch of wall for glyphs, and the floor as well. There were warnings, all over the walls, as well as what looked a lot like spells to capture and contain evil. Nothing to help her take down Ahmanet yet. Jenny wondered how she’d missed the glyphs the first time.

Maybe because the lighting hadn’t been as good. Maybe because she’d been too excited at finding her life’s work to pay attention.

Maybe she just hadn’t wanted to know.

By the time oxygen started to run out and they had to get back up to camp, Jenny hadn’t made a lot of headway. All she’d found on the walls was more warnings and spells, as well as a description of the ability of mercury to weaken evil spirits, which they’d already known.

No new information, no clues on how to kill the Dark One.

It was frustrating. Jenny didn’t let it get to her, though. She’d only translated maybe a third of the walls of the tomb, and she hadn’t even started on the stuff inside. There was plenty of possibility left. She had to stay positive.

She was pulled out of the pit by a couple of troops and led towards the mess tent for a quick snack and something to drink.

Then, after taking care of her nightly ablutions, which were once again possible due to the makeshift bathroom set up nearby, Jenny asked one of the soldiers to lead her towards where she was sleeping. It was minimal, a simple cot with a pillow and a blanket and a small collapsible table next to it to function as a nightstand, and she had to share the space with another seven women, but it was a bed to sleep in, and that was all she really cared about at the moment.

Jenny was asleep in a matter of seconds.

She opened her eyes, and saw red sand.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet pays Jenny a visit in her dreams. Jenny, Nick and Henry spend more time in the tomb, chasing a solution. The stress of being hunted finally starts to catch up to Jenny, and she has a bit of a breakdown. Secrets are revealed.

Chapter Notes

Ahmanet is back, baby! I'm very excited about it, and hopefully so are you. She really is a joy to write.

Enjoy!

Apprehension seized her throat like a vice.

Jenny whirled around, trying to ignore the blistering sand under her feet and the scorching sun beating down on her. She knew, deep in her gut, that she was not alone in this dream world. Ahmanet was here. She could feel it.

"Setepa-i…"

The whisper came from behind her. Jenny nearly stumbled in her haste to turn around. Kicked-up sand flooded over her feet, burning at her skin.

Ahmanet stood before her, in her mortal form, whole and healthy and alive. Her skin was a healthy brown again, and her eyes dark but human. She was close enough that Jenny could touch her if she’d wanted to. She looked… not angry per se, but definitely displeased.

Jenny expected her to say something about London, or perhaps about the fact that Jenny was still running from her. Instead, Ahmanet turned her head, surveying the reddish dunes around them.

"It is beautiful, is it not? The desert."

Jenny blinked, taken off guard. "'It's, um, yes. Yes, it is,'” she managed.

"Walk with me," Ahmanet requested lightly.

"Alright," Jenny said. She wasn’t sure what else to say. Ahmanet wasn’t acting like Jenny had expected her to, and it had thrown her off her game.

The princess started towards one of the dunes. Jenny followed.

"This is a real desert, you know. At least, this is what it looked like, when I was a child." Ahmanet’s voice was soft, a little wistful. "'The Nile is only a few miles west of here. I used to go swimming, when my father allowed it, with a couple of the palace children. Guards, too, of course.'"
Jenny tried not to stare. Of all the things she could have imagined, Ahmanet reminiscing over childhood memories was not one of them. It was a very… human thing to do. Despite herself, Jenny felt a little touched Ahmanet was willing to tell her this.

"It doesn’t look like this anymore." Ahmanet said. ‘The Nile is a popular place to build. A good place for farming, when so little soil in the rest of Egypt will support crops.’

"Yeah," Jenny said awkwardly, "there’s a lot of cities at the Nile now."

"I would imagine so." Ahmanet agreed. She stopped walking. They’d made it to the top of the dune by now.

In the distance, miles away still, was a sprawling palace of white stone, gleaming under the burning sun like a jewel.

"My childhood home," Ahmanet provided when she noticed Jenny staring.

"It’s beautiful."

"It is even more beautiful inside." She glanced at Jenny. ‘Once my pact with Set has been completed, I will rebuild it. You will be able to see all of it then.’

Jenny swallowed at the reminder. She didn’t say anything.

"I will build a shipyard, too, at the Nile," Ahmanet continued. ‘When it is done, I shall have a ship built for you. You will be able to take trips down the Nile, if you’d like.’

"That’s, um," Jenny managed, ‘very generous of you.’

Ahmanet turned to look her straight in the eye. ‘You are to be my Queen. A Queen never wants for anything, for her King will give her everything her heart desires.’

Jenny dared to ask, ‘and you will be my King?’

Ahmanet nodded. ‘Yes. I shall be your King.’

Jenny nervously licked her dry lips. ‘And what will Set be?’

‘Set will be your son, and he will be your father. He will be Set, like he has always been.’

That made little sense to Jenny. ‘How can someone be my son and my father at the same time?’

‘Set is a god. Mortal relationships hold little meaning to him. You will birth him, so you are his mother. He will grant you godhood, so he is your father.’ Ahmanet shrugged, a gesture that made her look so very human. ‘And in the end, he shall always be your god.’

‘...Right,’ Jenny said.

Ahmanet said nothing, turning back to look at the desert.

For a few seconds, it was silent between them, the only noise the faint breeze sweeping up little clouds of sand. Jenny gazed at the palace in the distance. It really was beautiful.

Finally, Ahmanet spoke again. ‘Tell me, Jennifer, how are you enjoying my tomb?’

Jenny choked on her saliva. It was a second before she managed to catch her breath, giving Ahmanet
a horrified look. “H-how’d you know that?!”

“You are my chosen,” Ahmanet said, turning to look at Jenny. “Did you think I would not keep my eye on you? That I would not ensure I would not lose you?”

Jenny sputtered something incoherent.

“You are a fool, Jennifer, to think I would just let you run like that without knowing where to find you.” The princess scrutinized her for a moment. “No matter. You’ll not be able to keep running from me for long.”

And there was the threat Jenny had been expecting at the start of the conversation. It didn’t make it any less terrifying - especially now that she knew Ahmanet was very much aware of her location. She stared, terror draining the blood from her face, speechless.

Ahmanet gave a slow, predatory smile. “You can’t run from me, Jennifer,” she repeated. “I’ll find you wherever you try to flee.”

“I’m starting to see that,” Jenny mumbled, more to herself than anything.

Ahmanet’s smile widened. “It would save you a lot of trouble if you just surrendered to me now.”

Jenny felt a tiny flare of rebellion at that. “Didn’t you just say a King gives a Queen everything she wants? What if I want you to leave me alone?”

“You are correct. A King gives a Queen everything her heart desires. But in return, it is a Queen’s duty to obey her King.” Ahmanet gave Jenny a significant look.

“I’ve never been very good at obedience,” Jenny said, conveniently ignoring the fact that she’d pretty much been a model child when she was young, and hadn’t done anything beyond maybe running a red light once in a while during adulthood so far. Except the shit she’d done in the last week or so, of course, but that didn’t count.

“You have been quite rebellious since freeing me.” Ahmanet agreed.

“Right,” Jenny said, “and I’m not planning on changing that.”

Ahmanet gave another of those so-very-human shrugs. “No matter. I will teach you to obey me once I have made you mine.”

Jenny looked back towards the palace in the distance. It was still glittering under the sun, like mother of pearl, or maybe silver-dipped diamonds. It really was gorgeous. Like the palaces of old Jenny had seen illustrations of in her books. The kind of palaces she’d dreamed of as a child. It was the most gorgeous piece of architecture Jenny had ever seen in her life, but right now, it didn’t make her feel anything. She didn’t want it.

“Physically, perhaps,” she finally answered, “but mentally and emotionally… no. I’m not going to be yours. I refuse.”

Finally, the anger Jenny had expected made it’s appearance on Ahmanet’s face. She looked absolutely furious at Jenny’s defiance. Like she’d never been insulted like this before.

“You dare deny me?! You dare deny your King?!”

Somehow, Jenny found it in herself to look Ahmanet straight in the eyes and not flinch. She wanted
to, but she found strength she didn’t knew she had, and glared right back. ‘‘You’re not my King. You’re my death sentence.’’

Ahmanet’s expression darkened. Her eyes blazed amber without warning, all humanity burned away with her fury.

Jenny’s newfound bravery shrivelled up and died.

She shrank back without thinking about it, breaking eye contact and hunching in on herself to make herself look smaller. From the corner of her eyes, she could see Ahmanet relax a little once Jenny made it clear she wasn’t going to challenge her further. The princess just looked at Jenny for a few long, long seconds. Jenny stared at the sand at her feet, pouring all her attention into observing the contrast of the red sand against the paleness of her skin, and made sure not to look up.

‘‘If you were anyone but my Queen and Chosen,’’ Ahmanet eventually said, voice sounding tightly controlled, ‘‘I would kill you for your insolence.’’

Jenny wasn’t quite able to stop herself from flinching.

‘‘I will not intentionally harm you beyond using the dagger to complete part of my pact with Set.’’ Ahmanet continued. ‘‘But I will not allow you to show me such defiance.’’ She was silent for a moment. Jenny dared glance up at her. She looked thoughtful, then nodded to herself like she’d made a decision. ‘‘I should punish you for this. However, I know from personal experience that ascending to divinity is a painful process. Therefore, I shall refrain from punishing you this time, and when I use the dagger on you and you ascend, I shall take that as your punishment instead.’’

Jenny wondered if that really was the mercy Ahmanet framed it as. She wasn’t about to start protesting, though - if it stopped Ahmanet from ‘punishing’ her, Jenny was fine with not saying anything.

Ahmanet sighed. She sounded disappointed. Oddly, it bothered Jenny more than her talk about punishment and ascending to godhood.

‘‘I should let you sleep properly.’’ Ahmanet turned back to the desert. ‘‘I’m sure you’ll need your energy to search for a way to kill me tomorrow.’’

Jenny opened her mouth to say something, and instead woke up in her cot at camp. There was an odd, hollow ache in her chest. She knew, instinctively, that it didn’t come from her. Something about that knowledge made her own chest ache similarly in unbidden sympathy.

Jenny wiped at her face, mildly surprised her hand came away wet with tears she hadn’t known she was crying, turned over, drew the covers up to her ears, and tried to go back to sleep. She failed. (She failed to ignore that ache too.)

(Jenny didn’t get another wink of sleep that night.)

Dawn found Jenny slouched at a table in the mess tent, breakfast in front of her. She’d barely eaten a bite of it. The coffee was given more attention. She was on her second cup, loaded with more sugar than she usually put in her coffee in a whole week.

Most of the soldiers were already up; the only ones asleep were the ones who’d had the night shifts
keeping watch, and were now sleeping because they’d been up all night.

Neither Nick nor Henry had appeared in the mess tent yet.

Jenny was kind of grateful for it; she didn’t feel like talking to anyone right now. And she knew that if Nick saw her looking as exhausted and half-upset as she did now, he’d be asking questions at the same rate a machine gun spat out bullets. He’d been doing that a lot since their unfortunate one-night stand in Baghdad a week ago. Right now, Jenny just did not have the emotional capacity to deal with that too. The night had left her entirely too raw for her liking.

She’d not slept at all after being visited by Ahmanet in a dream. That ache in her chest, like a black hole had opened up and sucked away happiness and replaced it with loneliness and hurt and an old, festering kind of anger, hadn’t faded for hours. To know that those emotions weren’t hers didn’t make it any better. It hadn’t made them feel any less real.

Jenny poked at her breakfast and wondered why it upset her so much to know Ahmanet felt like that. Surely she shouldn’t care if Ahmanet was less than happy? The princess was out to kill her, Jenny shouldn’t give a damn about anything but saving her own skin, and killing Ahmanet in the process of doing so. And yet…

Sighing to herself, Jenny dragged a hand down her face and focussed on the slowly cooling bowl of porridge in front of her. It was already going glue-y and lumpy. There were raisins in it, as well as apple slices, and Jenny had a couple of pieces of buttered toast as well. She didn’t feel hungry at all. She forced herself to dig her spoon into her porridge and eat it anyway, trying to ignore the fact that it was barely lukewarm anymore, because she’d be spending all day in the tomb, and she was going to need her energy for that.

Jenny was halfway through her toast and feeling a little more stable when Nick stumbled into the mess tent, apparently still half-asleep, unshaven and hair sticking everywhere. He made a beeline for the food bar, and got his own porridge, toast and coffee. Blearily, he glanced through the tent for a place to sit, and spotted Jenny. He made his way over and plonked down on one of the free chairs.

“Morning.” He grunted.

“Morning,” Jenny responded tiredly.

“Someone’s in a good mood,” Nick halfheartedly stirred his porridge.

“Fuck you,” Jenny said. “I’m just tired.”

“Yeah, I didn’t really sleep well either.”

Jenny took another bite of toast and said nothing.

Nick sighed. “This whole thing… it’s just, I’m tired of it. Right?’’

“Yeah,’’ Jenny could at least agree to that.

“How come you didn’t sleep well?’’

Jenny slowly chewed on some toast. She probably should tell Nick about Ahmanet appearing in her dreams. She didn’t want to, though. This was something personal, and she didn’t want to spend the rest of the day being interrogated about it. “…Just a nightmare,” she responded after swallowing her toast, “the storm in London really freaked me out.”
“I know, right? Did you see that face the sand made when we left? Freaky.” Nick bought her lie easily, not even suspecting he’d been lied to.

“Yeah,” Jenny agreed hollowly, “freaky.” She ate some more of her toast. Wished for a little more butter to make it less dry. Had a sip of her coffee. Winced at the amount of sugar in it.

Nick was still stirring his porridge. He hadn’t taken a single bite of it yet.

It was silent. Awkwardly so.

Jenny wished that instead of butter, she could maybe have some honey or some brown sugar for on her toast. She nibbled on one of the crusts. Had some more of her coffee. It was almost cold now. There was a layer of undissolved sugar at the bottom of her mug, just barely visible through the flimsy layer of not even lukewarm coffee on top of it. Jenny scraped some out with her spoon and smeared it over her toast and ate it. Better than just butter. Not as good as honey.

She made a mental note to brush her teeth before she went back into the tomb. Or gargle with mouthwash. She was pretty sure she’d seen a bottle of mouthwash somewhere.

She ate her last bite of toast, dripping with coffee-sugar. It made her mouth feel dry and sticky. She piled her dishes back onto her tray. “I’m going to get ready for the day,” she told Nick, getting up.

“See you at the pit.” Nick responded, finally finished with stirring his porridge.

Jenny left him to it, dropping her tray off at the washing-up station and then making her way out of the mess tent. Time to hunt down that bottle of mouthwash.

An hour later, a little more upbeat and with a minty fresh taste in her mouth, Jenny was once again being lowered down past the screaming face carved into the rock wall of the pit. Nick looked a little more awake, and Henry had finally appeared about half an hour ago, having apparently been busy with all kinds of stuff since five in the morning.

Jenny entered the tomb without waiting on the boys, eager to get back to work. She still had a lot of glyphs to translate and other stuff to go through - there was no time to waste.

It took her a few moments to find where she’d left off yesterday, as she hadn’t had anything near to mark it without ruining the glyphs. Jenny’s inner archaeologist had managed to rear it’s head yesterday, and Jenny hadn’t managed to find it in herself to actually mark the wall with the luminous but slightly corrosive liquid Henry had had for that purpose, nor had she allowed him or Nick to do it. They probably thought it was some kind of female hysteria (honestly, men!) or something, but they’d indulged Jenny anyway and hadn’t ruined anything in the tomb, which Jenny’s inner archaeologist was very grateful for.

Once she’d found the glyphs where she’d left off yesterday, Jenny resumed her translation. So far, not a lot of useful things had come up at all, but there was still two-thirds of the walls to go, as well as the glyphs on the various decorations. The statues surrounding the pool of mercury, for instance, had glyphs scribbled all over square bases they stood on, and also over their chests and arms. Apart from the statues, there were also plaques of smooth stone surrounding the pool, also inscribed from top to bottom, and some of the skeletons strewn around were holding smaller tablets of stone.
Hours later, she had still gained no knowledge except for repetitions of what she already knew. Nothing that hadn’t already been repeated at least five times. Nothing groundbreaking. Nothing even especially important. And definitely nothing that would help her survive this whole ordeal.

Jenny was starting to get frustrated, she had to admit it. And anxious.

The knowledge that Ahmanet was actively hunting her and knew exactly where she was didn’t help. The Ahmanet in her dreams had been very clear; she was coming for Jenny, and Jenny didn’t have a lot of time left to find herself a way out of it.

Nick and Henry were pretty much useless while Jenny was translating. They mostly just hung around, listening to Jenny as she narrated the things written on the walls, occasionally offering commentary when they felt like adding something. Both had started to get frustrated early in the day, when it had started to become obvious the walls were mostly covered in spells of imprisonment and prayers to ward off the presence of the Evil God.

This, in turn, frustrated Jenny even more, because it meant both Nick and Henry were constantly breathing down her neck in an effort to make her translate faster.

“Another prayer?” Nick asked in dismay. “Can’t you just, I dunno, skip it? There’s gotta be something more interesting than this.”

“Do you want to translate, then?!” She finally snapped at him, too frustrated to keep it in anymore. “Oh wait, that’s right, you can’t read hieroglyphs! So shut up, Nick, and let me do my job!”

Nick took a step back, eyes wide, raising his hands in surrender. “Sorry, sorry!”

Henry eyed her in concern. “Jennifer, are you feeling alright?”

Jenny managed, somehow, to keep herself from actually snapping at her boss too. It wasn’t easy. Her voice was tight with tension. “No, Henry, I am not feeling alright, okay?”

Henry continued to give her a concerned look. Nick looked torn between wanting to flee from the ‘crazy upset chick’ and awkwardly patting her shoulder.

Jenny took a few deep, calming breaths, stubbornly staring at the hieroglyphs on the wall. She blinked, feeling tears in her eyes, and cursed the fact that the stress was making her emotional.

“Do you,” Nick started hesitantly, licking his lips, “do you want to tell us what’s wrong?”

The noise that escaped Jenny was half-laugh, half-sob. “What’s not wrong anymore, Nick?” She tried to hold back the tears, and failed. “Everything’s gone to hell, and here I am, translating useless prayers that won’t save our lives, helping exactly no one. And you two,” she added, before they could say anything, “are just hovering constantly, and I can barely breathe without you two needing to comment on it, and I’m just so sick of it!”

Nick and Henry looked a little shocked at her outburst, trading a look over Jenny’s head.

“Would you like to take a break for a few hours?” Henry suggested. “I can have the cook make you a cup of tea and some of those cookies you like, I’m quite sure we have all the ingredients needed on site.”

Jenny wiped harshly at her face. “We don’t have time for a break,” she said, and hated how thick and loaded her voice sounded.
“There’s plenty of time,” Nick said soothingly. “Nothing is going to happen.”

Jenny bit her lip, suddenly feeling guilty she hadn’t told Nick about her dream. It didn’t help her effort to stop crying. God, she felt like such a useless dweeb right now. This was not at all what she needed right now, let alone what the rest of the team needed. She was the only translator they had. She needed to get her shit together and do her fucking job.

“We don’t have the time,” she repeated, a little more firmly.

Nick opened his mouth, then abruptly closed it. Realization washed over his face. He paled a little. “We really don’t have the time, do we?”

Jenny shook her head, choking back a terrified sob.

Henry was looking between them, out of the loop and looking a little lost. His eyes were slowly starting to narrow. “Jennifer? Why do you think we don’t have a lot of time?”

Jenny froze.

Nick, on the other hand, completely ignored Henry, too focussed on Jenny to care about what Henry was asking.

“Jenny,” Nick pressed, utterly serious, “how much time do we have?”

“I don’t know.” Jenny shrugged, swallowing thickly. “Not a lot.”

“Give me an estimate.”

Jenny gave another shrug. The tears were starting to slow a little. “Anywhere in between an hour and a couple of days.”

Henry was starting to look suspicious. “How do you know that, Jennifer?”

Jenny gave Henry a nervous look. She hunched in on herself a little, turning her gaze back to the glyphs on the wall as if they contained the secrets to the universe. Or maybe the secrets of not dying via a dagger to the chest.

Nick looked hostile, shifting in a way that put him closer to Jenny, protectively. He reached out a little, grabbing Jenny’s hand and giving it a quick, encouraging squeeze.

Jenny couldn’t quite make herself squeeze back. The jig was up, she knew it, and she was too terrified to really do anything anymore.

“I lied to you.” Nick said, boldly. “When you brought us to Prodigium.”

Henry watched them silently, but Jenny was sure he already knew what Nick was going to say.

“I’m not the Dark One’s chosen.” Nick said. He squeezed Jenny’s hand again.

Jenny glanced up at Henry anxiously. “I am.”

For a moment, Henry said nothing. He looked at Nick. “Is there a reason you decided to lie about this and put everyone in danger?”

“Well, what was I supposed to do?” Nick was a little offended. “This borderline militia randomly shows up and drags me back to some secret base that coincidentally has ways to keep supernatural
people locked up, and then starts interrogating me about the Dark One and her Chosen. I was trying to protect Jenny. And I was right. You were planning to kill me when you thought I was the Chosen! Like hell I was going to let you do that to Jenny!"

"We had no choice! If Ahmanet gets her Chosen, she’ll have access to her full power!" Henry argued. "Set will enter this world and darkness will rule. We had to make an attempt at preventing it!"

"The ritual will only work for Ahmanet." Jenny interjected sharply. "I already told you this. There’s absolutely no reason for you to plan Nick’s death - my death - anyway."

"What if she lied to you? For all we know, she was lying!" Henry continued to argue.

"She wasn’t," Jenny said, "because stabbing me with that dagger isn’t what’s going to bring Set into the mortal world. He won’t take over my body so you can attempt to kill him."

Henry gave her an incredulous look. "Yes, it is. That’s what the ritual is for. You know what the myths say as well as I do." He pointed towards the antechamber. "You translated them yourself just yesterday!"

Jenny stared back stoically, trying to ignore the tears finally drying on her cheeks. "I talked to Ahmanet, remember? The pact was altered when I freed her. Set wants a mortal body, but not a female one. He wants a male."

Both Henry and Nick were instantly on high-alert. Jenny frowned - had she forgotten to tell Nick about that? Thinking back, she probably had forgotten to tell him.

"What changed, Jennifer?" Henry asked demandingly. "Tell me how the pact was changed."

Struck with the sudden sense it was a really bad idea to tell Henry how the pact had changed, Jenny lied through her teeth. "She didn’t tell me. All she said was that killing me with the dagger will give her her full power. When I asked about Set, she just told me that I would find out in time."

Both Nick and Henry watched her closely.

"Are you sure? She didn’t tell you anything of importance?" Nick pressed.

"I’m actively helping her enemies to find a way to destroy her," Jenny said dryly. "Do you really think she’s stupid enough to tell me important information, knowing that I will try to use it against her?"

"No," Henry said, looking thoughtful. "No, she’s smarter than that. She’d keep you in the dark to protect herself rather than risk her secrets being exposed."

Nick shook his head. "Anyway, getting back on topic - Jenny, are you sure you can’t give us a more accurate estimate of how long we have left?"

Henry snapped back to attention. "How do you know that anyway?"

"I’m her Chosen," Jenny said uncomfortably. "We have a link. She can manifest in my dreams. I fell asleep last night and she was just... there."

"Did she do anything to you?" Nick looked enraged at the thought.

Jenny shook her head. "No. We just talked."
Henry took hold of her upper arm, leading her over to one of the large rocks near the doorway to the antechamber and pushing her down to sit on it. "Tell me everything about that dream. All the details."

"We were in a desert," Jenny started, "in Egypt. It had Ahmanet’s childhood home in the distance, this huge white palace. It’s only a few miles from the Nile. Not sure where exactly. We talked. Ahmanet told me about her childhood. Then she said that she knew we’re here, in her tomb, and that she’d be coming for me soon." Jenny swallowed. "That she’d use the dagger on me." She looked up at Henry and Nick. "I didn’t get a timeline, or her current location. I don’t know when she’ll get here. All I know is that it’ll be soon."

Nick looked horrified. Henry looked like he was planning.

Jenny stared ahead and tried to keep the bile from climbing up her throat. Her stomach was churning. Tears burned behind her eyes. It was all she could do not to get overwhelmed again like a few minutes ago.

After a few long seconds, Henry hesitantly cleared his throat. "Are you feeling better, Jennifer?"

Jenny stared at him for a second, and then burst into tears.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Jenny gets some time outside the tomb, and has a heart-to-heart with Henry. The soldiers are informed of her status as the Chosen. Decisions are made. Jenny gets a guard.

Chapter Notes

Update! And a little quicker than usual, too! Yay!

Not a lot happens in this one, to be honest, but, y'know, sometimes chapters like these are necessary. I'm pretty sure Ahmanet makes her return next chapter, though, or maybe the chapter after. Either way, I'm planning a pretty decent confrontation, so...

On another note, school is starting back up in a couple of days, so I shall once again be spending my days studying law. This means I get less time to write (boo!), and thus updates will probably be a little less frequent. It really depends on the amount of homework and stuff, and how many actual lectures I have to attend. I'll try to keep it to one update a week, but it might be once every two weeks or so instead.

Anyways, the new chapter. Enjoy, and, if you have the time, I'm always happy to find out what your thoughts are, so feel free to leave a comment!

Nick awkwardly took a seat next to Jenny, carefully placing a steaming mug of piping hot tea on the table. He pushed it over to her, wincing visibly when Jenny hiccoughed into the handkerchief Henry had given her and wiped at her eyes.

"It’s, um, chamomile," Nick said hesitantly when Jenny failed to reach for the mug. "The, um, the cook had some of it on hand in case of illnesses and stuff."

Henry approached, looking dishevelled, seating himself in the chair on Jenny’s other side rather ungracefully. "Those sugar cookies you like are being made," he said, "the cook had everything he needed to make a couple of batches."

Jenny wiped at her eyes with the hanky, reaching out for the mug of tea. It was still scalding, the water having boiled only minutes earlier, and she sipped at it very carefully to avoid burning her mouth.

The men on either side of her were watching her very carefully. They’d both been rather startled by Jenny’s little breakdown, and Jenny wasn’t sure to be grateful or offended with how gently they were suddenly treating her. It was like they thought she was going to shatter into a thousand little pieces at the first hint of a raised voice or unfriendly look.

Henry cleared his throat. "You know, Jennifer, if I’d known you were Ahmanet’s Chosen, I
would’ve acted differently. You shouldn’t have been afraid to tell me.’’

For a moment, Nick looked outraged. Probably because Henry had been perfectly willing to kill him trying a ritual that wouldn’t work for redundancy. He quickly got his expression under control, though, instead making himself look as sympathetic and supportive as possible.

Jenny tried not to snort into her tea. ‘‘I know how you treat people you deem threats at Prodigium, Henry,’’ she said, hating how her voice trembled thickly. ‘‘I didn’t want you to lock me up like a wild animal.’’

‘‘I never would have done that to you.’’ Henry stated with conviction. ‘‘I’ve known you for thirteen years. You’re like the daughter I never got to have. I’d have moved heaven and earth to find a way to free you without harming you.’’ He looked at her, waiting until Jenny looked back. ‘‘I’ll find a way, Jennifer. I’ll find a way to kill Ahmanet, and to kill Set, without you being hurt in the process.’’

Jenny laughed wetly. ‘‘That’s impossible, Henry. She already has a hold over me. Killing her would hurt me. There’s nothing you can do to change that.’’

‘‘Regardless, I will try.’’

Nick reached over and squeezed the hand that wasn’t holding her tea. ‘‘And I’m gonna be here to protect you from her until we find out how to get rid of her. I promise.’’

Jenny looked up at Nick. ‘‘She said she’s going to kill you, you know.’’

Nick swallowed, but held her gaze determinedly.

‘‘It’s because you lied about being her Chosen,’’ Jenny continued. ‘‘She said it was an insult to me. That you were trying to usurp my position as her Chosen and Queen. And she said that she would kill you for dishonoring me.’’ She looked at Henry. ‘‘And she said that she’s going to kill you too. For being demanding, and for capturing her.’’

Henry gave her a strange smile. It was somewhere between reassuring and threatening. ‘‘I’d like to see her try. She’s not met my… other side yet.’’

Jenny tried not to shudder at the little reference to the alternate personality Henry liked to refer to as Edward Hyde.

She’d seen Henry’s alter several times, and he terrified her every time he managed to overwhelm Henry and claw his way to control. Edward Hyde, strangely enough, seemed to harbour a kind of fondness for Jenny - he had, unlike he had done to other people, not tried to hurt her. Not badly, at least. The most Jenny had suffered was a fairly light bruise when he’d shoved her out of the way to get at someone else. Which was probably just about how far the extent of Hyde’s ‘fondness’ stretched, to be honest. That didn’t mean Jenny wasn’t absolutely frightened of him, though - Eddie Hyde was violent and cruel, the complete opposite of the generally calm and kind Henry Jekyll.

Henry’s smile lost it’s threatening edge. ‘‘Now drink your tea, and then we’ll see about those cookies.’’

Jenny drank her tea.

The cookies, when they arrived about forty-five minutes later, were the brown sugar and lemon biscuits Jenny liked best.

As she bit into the first, she couldn’t help but wonder how the cook had gotten the recipe; only a few
people that Jenny knew of knew how to get these cookies just right.

The satisfied glint in Henry’s eyes probably told her all she needed to know.

How he had gotten the recipe, though...

They didn’t make her go down into the tomb for the rest of the day.

Jenny protested, because time was running out as it was and they really did not have enough of it left for a break, but she gave up fairly quickly. Nick and Henry didn’t seem like they were going to listen to her anyway. And honestly, Jenny didn’t really want to go in again. She would, in fact, give quite a lot to never have to go into that tomb ever again.

It was hard to think of the fact that, a week ago, she’d been so utterly excited at finding this place. It had been her ultimate dream to find Ahmanet’s tomb. She’d searched for it for thirteen years.

The fact that this tomb, her life’s work, would probably lead her to her own grave was a bitter pill to swallow.

Jenny tried not to think of it, and instead occupied herself with the steady stream of chamomile tea and sugar-lemon cookies offered by Nick and Henry.

Besides, there was some entertainment (and distraction) to be had in camp; a couple of the soldiers had brought some simple games with them. And since Jenny had nothing better to do, she found herself playing Go Fish with Nick, Henry and a handful of soldiers. She was losing terribly, but it was entertaining and it took her mind off things, so Jenny didn’t mind losing.

Once Jenny had sufficiently calmed down, a while later, and wasn’t about to start freaking out right in the middle of the tent, Henry leaned in to talk quietly in her ear.

“I’m going to tell my troops you’re the Chosen, Jennifer. It’s to make sure they know protecting you is the priority,” Henry explained to her as he put down his cards, keeping his voice low so only Jenny and Nick could properly hear him, “we can’t let Ahmanet get to you, and they need to know who to protect should it come down to that.”

Jenny nodded silently, deciding that silence was the better part of valour. She was pretty sure that, if she opened her mouth and said anything, her voice would break. Or she would cry again. Or both.

She felt her hand being squeezed, and looked at Nick. It was a habit he’d picked up somewhere in the last few hours. Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to be annoyed by it. It was actually kind of reassuring. Which was odd, because a couple of days ago, Jenny had been dead-set on hating Nick for trying to steal her life’s work.

Henry cleared his throat. “Tahn, would you go gather everyone, please? I have a few announcements to make.”

“Yes, sir,” Tahn said, dropping his hand of cards on the table and standing up. He marched out of the tent without pause. Jenny watched him go with an odd sort of resignation in her stomach. All of the soldiers would know soon enough. She didn’t know what to expect of that, didn’t know how they’d react and treat her once they knew the truth, and Jenny wasn’t sure she really wanted to know either.
Not that she had much choice in the matter.

Henry seemed pretty intent on making sure she was protected, and apparently that meant she needed a lot of soldiers around her. Jenny wasn’t sure how she felt about this either. She wasn’t very keen on being surrounded by soldiers at all times.

Jenny focussed stubbornly on her hand of cards. It was a bad hand. She wouldn’t be yelling ‘go fish!’ anytime soon, that was for sure. Maybe next round - if there was going to be a next round - her hand would be better. It’d be nice to win for a change.

Tahn re-entered the tent, the other sixteen soldiers on site following. Most of them were carrying very big guns. They all looked very serious as well, to match the weapons.

Jenny looked away and continued to focus on her cards. It really was a bad hand.

“Everyone take a seat, please,” Henry said as he did the exact opposite, standing up so he could properly see everyone. “There have been some revelations that are of critical importance to our mission here.”

Almost at once, all the soldiers perked up in interest. They listened intently.

“It seems,” Henry continued, “that in an attempt to protect Jennifer, Mr. Morton lied about being the Chosen, as he feared how we would treat Jennifer. Jennifer is the real Chosen, and Mr. Morton is not.”

A wave of muttering went through the tent. Jenny stared down at the table. She could almost feel the stares of the soldiers burn into her skin. She squeezed Nick’s hand tightly.

“Jennifer came clean to me this morning,” said Henry, “as she gave me some vital information.” He looked at the soldiers gravely, “It seems that Ahmanet is aware of our location. Jennifer informed me that Ahmanet will be arriving here soon, although we do not have an exact time frame. Therefore, I need you all to be at high alert at all times. We could be attacked at any moment.”

Henry paused for a moment to survey his troops. “I don’t need to tell you how vitally important it is that Jennifer is kept safe from Ahmanet. She cannot get her hands on her Chosen under any circumstances.”

One of the soldiers raised her hand. “Sir, if Ahmanet knows we are here, should we not evacuate the Chosen to a safe location?”

Jenny swallowed as she finally looked up from the table, ready to throw in her own bit of advice. “There is no safe location that she wouldn’t find me at. I freed her. And that created a link between us that cannot be broken she dies. She’ll find me no matter where I am.”

“Which means that all we can do is defend Jennifer and find a way to destroy Ahmanet once and for all,” Henry picked up the cue again.

Another soldier raised a hand. “Sir, there are only twenty combat-ready troops on site. Ahmanet is a Class A Supernatural Threat. There are not enough of us to truly stop her. We do not have that kind of force on site.”

“You are, of course, correct,” Henry agreed. “I’m calling in additional troops and firepower to support you and protect Jennifer. Any other questions?”

“Yes,” another soldier said. “The Chosen needs to be guarded 24/7. We need to set up a schedule.”
Jenny stomach churned at the not-question. A twenty-four/seven guard… That sounded absolutely awful. She glanced at Nick, wondering why he hadn’t gotten a full-time team of guards when they’d thought he was the Chosen. Nick caught her looking and leaned in.

“You okay?”

Jenny shook her head. “No.”

“It’s gonna be fine, Jenny. You’ll see.” Nick gave her a roguish grin. “And when all of this is over, the first round of beer is on me.”

“Nick,” Jenny bit her lip anxiously, “I don’t think it’s gonna be okay.”

“It’s gonna be fine,” he repeated, squeezing her hand. “You’ll see, Jenny. Trust me, you’ll see.”

She didn’t believe him for a second. Ahmanet was thousands of years old and more than powerful, she could call up sandstorms with a snap of her fingers and literally raise the dead and turn them into her slaves. She could do magic Jenny couldn’t even dream of. She had a real-life god behind her to back her up.

And Jenny… Jenny had Henry, less than two-dozen soldiers outfitted with mercury bullets that probably wouldn’t even match a mosquito bite to Ahmanet, and backup that was not even in the country right now. That, and Nick Morton, of all people. Nick, who was good in a fistfight or a gunfight, but had never dealt with the supernatural before last week. Nick, who she didn’t even really like as a person.

Jenny was more than a little screwed, and she was finally beginning to realize it.

She looked away from the man next to her, tuning back in to the conversation happening around her. A couple of troops were bent over a piece of paper, and one of them was scribbling down what looked like a rotation schedule.

“We’ve decided on four guards at all times,” Henry caught her up quickly when he noticed she was paying attention again. “Women only at night, so you can do your ablutions and such in peace, and so you don’t have to sleep in the co-ed dorm if you don’t want to.”

Jenny hadn’t even known there was a co-ed dorm until a few seconds ago. She nodded anyway. She was quite happy staying in the womens’ dorm.

She churned the rest of Henry’s statement in her mind a couple of times. “Four guards…” she said slowly, “isn’t that a bit much?”

“It’s a little on the low side, actually,” Henry said matter-of-factly, “but the troops we have here are limited, and we have to work with what we’ve got. I’ll be increasing your guard as soon as backup arrives.”

Jenny tried not to look too horrified at that. She probably failed. Henry was kind enough not to embarrass her by mentioning it, though, which Jenny appreciated. Her day had been bad enough without adding embarrassment to the mix.

She sat, silently, until the troops had finished working out a schedule. Four of them reported once they had, standing in a straight line and actually snapping off a salute. It was the first time anyone had ever saluted to Jenny. She immediately decided she didn’t like it.

“Bree Stenton,” the operative who was apparently in charge of the group said, “along with Zeke
Langston, Peter Stone and Mel Pine. We’ll be guarding you until eight this evening, after which we will be relieved by the next team on rotation.”

“Right,” Jenny said awkwardly. “Jennifer Halsey. Nice to meet you.”

“You as well, Dr. Halsey,” Bree said.

Jenny nibbled on her lower lip. “Is there anything I need to know about all this? Things I need to take into account?”

“Just that you cannot go anywhere with at least one of us with you, Dr. Halsey. This might cause some discomfort, but it’s necessary for your own protection.”

“Additionally, Jennifer, if you sense anything through your link with Ahmanet, you must let someone know immediately.” Henry added seriously. “If you have any more dreams, or even just an odd hunch or a strange feeling, tell someone. No matter how small it is.”

Jenny nodded. “Alright. I can do that,” she said, and tried to ignore the sudden guilt gnawing at her for lying about how the pact had been altered. She should tell them. It was important information. If Henry and Prodigium knew, they’d be able to strike when Set was newly born and thus vulnerable.

(Jenny tried not to think of what had to happen for Set to be born, because the idea of being murdered, ascending to godhood and then being impregnated with the essence of an actual freaking god was like, the stuff of nightmares, right there.)

(She was pretty sure there were horror movies with a story like that.)

(The thought made her a little bit sick - she had become the protagonist in some sort of horror story. Those never ended well. Not for the protagonist, anyway.)

She kept her mouth shut, despite the gnaw of shame in her belly. She didn’t want to see the faces when they realized what was in her future. She didn’t want to see the disgust on Henry’s face when he realized that she was going to be the mother of the apocalypse. Quite literally, at that.

(The gnaw of shame in her belly was joined by bubbling disgust.)

Instead of saying anything, she sipped at her cold tea and tried not to look too guilty.

Henry glanced at his watch. “There’s still a few hours of daylight. If you’ll excuse me, I have some calls to make.”

The troops saluted him as he stood up and left the tent. Jenny continued to sip at her tea. It wasn’t good, cold as it was, with that oily-looking, filmy skin on the top that cold tea always had, but it gave her something to do. Her four guards were staring at her expectantly.

Nick nudged her. “So, you planning on doing anything for the rest of the day?”

Jenny shrugged a little. “I wouldn’t know what. I didn’t expect having time off.”

“Me neither,” Nick agreed. He was silent for a second. “Want to play some more cards? They’re regular ones, so we could do a couple of rounds of poker or something. Use the remaining cookies as currency.”

That sounded like a better plan than spending the rest of the afternoon mindlessly staring at the tent fabric, which had been Jenny’s initial idea, so she easily agreed to play a couple of rounds of poker.
It was something she hadn’t done often. It was surprisingly enjoyable, though. She wasn’t very good at it, but Nick was apparently still being sensitive and gentle, so he let her win most rounds and made sure she ate all the cookies afterwards.

Having guards was… awkward. Very awkward.

Jenny had never physically been followed every second of the day before, and she was quickly coming to the conclusion that she did not appreciate it. And to think it had only been a few hours, too…

After Jenny had finished eating all the cookies she’d won from Nick, she’d decided to get out of the crowd for a while. Get some alone time to think. Which had absolutely failed the moment Jenny had realized that yes, her guards were absolutely going to follow her around constantly.

Jenny took a walk through the village, and tried to go a bit into the desert outside of the village, but was stopped before she could set foot past the last building before the desert started. Anything outside of the village was, apparently, off limits. Jenny was a little annoyed, but not keen enough on a desert walk to really press the issue. Probably not the best idea to wander too far from camp anyway.

“Perhaps it’s best if you stay close to the mess tent, Dr. Halsey,” Zeke suggested. “Would you like to play some more cards to pass the time?”

Jenny was pretty tired of cards, after spending literal hours playing Go Fish and poker. There wasn’t much else to do, though. Jenny hadn’t exactly had the time to pack herself a book or some other thing to distract herself with. Running away from the massive deadly sandstorm had been a little higher on her list of priorities at the time. She’d been too busy trying to get out of London without taking a dagger to the chest as a souvenir to care about anything else.

Giving the desert one last, somewhat longing look - oh, to get away from everyone and have some time to herself would be fantastic - and turned back towards camp.

“Actually,” she responded to Zeke, “I think I would like to take a bit of a nap.’’

“Alright,” Zeke agreed. “If you would, Dr. Halsey?’’

Jenny trudged back into the village, into the direction of her bed, her guards on her heels. Two of them walked just a step behind Jenny, the other two a step in front of her, which had her pretty much surrounded by people with large guns. If Jenny hadn’t known they were there to protect her, she’d have been in a panic by now.

Upon arriving at the dorm/tent Jenny’s bed was located in, Peter and Zeke took up positions on either side of the door/tent flap, as it wasn’t a mixed dorm.

Bree and Mel did go in with Jenny, turning respectfully so Jenny could shuck her jeans and exchange her blouse for an oversized shirt. She released her hair from the ponytail she’d had it in for most of the day, and crawled onto her cot, drawing the covers up to her nose.

It was hot, being Iraq in the afternoon and all, but Jenny didn’t care. She just wanted to hide under her blanket for a while and pretend the world still made sense, and that she had a future ahead of her.

She clenched her eyes shut, trying to ignore the breathing and occasional rustling movements coming
from Bree and Mel. It was awkward, very awkward, to lie there and try to sleep while two people were standing around with the sole purpose of looking after her. Jenny could pretty much feel their gazes sweep around the tent, regularly touching upon Jenny herself to make sure she hadn’t gone up in smoke while they’d been checking their surroundings.

She pulled her blanket up a bit higher, until the only part of her still visible was the crown of her head.

It was sweltering under her blanket. Summer in Iraq in the afternoon was blisteringly hot, and under her covers, it was even hotter. In a matter of seconds, a sheen of sweat was beading on her skin, and every exhale of breath only made it warmer. Jenny didn’t care right now. Right now, she just wanted everyone to leave her alone so she could wallow in peace.

At least Bree and Mel were quiet.

They whispered a little, occasionally, but the blanket muffled the sound enough that Jenny couldn’t understand they were saying and it melded into a kind of wordless susurrus that was actually quite soothing.

It still took Jenny the better part of an hour to fall asleep.

She dreamed of brown skin and dark eyes and that stupid, arrogant, infuriating smirk she shouldn’t like half as much as she did.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Jenny, Henry and Nick go back into the tomb - and this time, they actually find what they're looking for. But for every step forward they take, they're pushed two steps back, and for every bit of good news comes a bit of bad news.

Chapter Notes

Guys, I made my deadline! School is not yet kicking my ass to the point I can't update once a week, even though my writing time has decreased by several hours a day. Let's hope it stays that way! It is a bit of a shorter chapter than usual, though, but sometimes, the chapter stops where it stops, and I can't do a whole lot to change that. Not without ruining the whole thing, anyway.

Either way, enjoy, en let me know what you think!

Also, kudos to Avanwolf for pointing out to me that Ahmanet needs more than a shiny dagger and half a dozen of zombies to take over the world. I've tried to make it a little more plausible this chapter, but I've got more stuff in the works to further take care of the problem.

“Dr. Halsey. Dr. Halsey, wake up, please,”

Jenny woke up to a hand on her shoulder, shaking her, and a voice. She grumbled sleepily, half-heartedly swatting at the hand on her shoulder. “Whattaya want?’’

“Dr. Halsey, I need you to wake up.’’

Reluctantly, Jenny opened her eyes, peeling the blanket away from her face.

Mel was standing over her, looking worried.

Jenny rubbed at her eyes and yawned. “What’s up?’’

“You were talking, Dr. Halsey,’’ Mel said, “in Ancient Egyptian.’’

Jenny was too tired to really react to that. “Was I?’’

“You dream of Ahmanet, Dr. Halsey?” Mel questioned her seriously.

“Um,’’ Jenny blinked and tried to remember what she’d been dreaming of.

Brown skin. Dark eyes. That smirk. Fingers in her hair, sometimes just caressing softly, sometimes sharply pulling her head back, both dominant, neither painful. Lips and teeth against her throat.
“Yeah,” Jenny said, swallowing to soothe her dry throat, “she was there.”

Mel’s look of concern increased. She crouched down so she was at eye level. “What was the dream about? Did you speak to her?”

“No,” Jenny said. She was pretty sure the occasional whisper of ‘my Chosen’ and ‘mine’ from Ahmanet didn’t qualify as an actual conversation. “She was just there.”

“She did not say anything?” Mel asked for emphasis.

“No,” Jenny responded. “Nothing. Can I go back to sleep now?”

Mel nodded. “Of course, Dr. Halsey.”

“Great,” Jenny said, stretching her arms above her head. She was about to hike the blanket back up when suddenly Mel reached out and stopped her.

“Dr. Halsey, have you recently hurt your throat?”

Jenny looked at her oddly. “No. Why?”

“You have a bruise. Just there.” Mel touched her throat. Jenny frowned, reaching up herself to brush at the spot Mel had pointed out. Now that she was paying attention, the skin there did feel a little more tender than the rest.

Jenny’s frown deepened… she was pretty sure that Ahmanet had bitten her there - not hard enough to break skin, but, apparently, enough to leave a mark. But that didn’t explain why it’d shown up on her skin when it’d happened in her dream.

“I…” Jenny closed her mouth, frowning, and then opened it again, “I must’ve bumped into something, or caught skin with a zipper.”

“You’ve not worn anything with a zipper since arriving in Baghdad,” Mel pointed out, “and the recordings of your time in the tomb don’t mention any accidents.”

“Maybe Freddy Krueger stopped by for a visit,” Jenny joked weakly. Mel watched her silently. Jenny fidgeted. A few seconds passed. “Look,” Jenny eventually said exasperatedly, “I don’t know either, okay? I went to sleep, I woke up with a bruise. That’s all I know.”

After a few more seconds, Mel nodded, and Jenny tried not to look too relieved her hundredth lie so far had been bought. It was starting to turn into a really bad habit.

“Whatever you say, Dr. Halsey.”

“I’m going to go back to sleep now,” Jenny said.

“Alright. Bree will go inform Mr. Morton of this, and we’ll make sure to wake you up in time for dinner,” Mel said, standing up.

Jenny muttered a confirmation, turned over, and was back asleep in moments.

Dark eyes and a wicked smirk embraced her.

A larger part of her than she would admit to was quite happy to drown in that embrace, like a dying sailor being returned to the sea. And when her lungs filled up with water, it felt like that larger-than-she-would-admit-to part of her could breathe again.
Dinner, a few hours later, came far too quickly for Jenny’s taste.

She let herself be herded out of bed and towards the mess tent reluctantly, only pausing to dress, still half-asleep.

Nick and Henry were waiting for her at one of the tables. A plate of food, still steaming hot, was waiting for her. Chicken pot pie, this time, with mashed potatoes and peas, in a portion that was about the same size as Jenny’s head. It smelled delicious, but Jenny wasn’t hungry. She tried to eat anyway, if only because Henry and Nick looked on the edge of starting a conversation and they’d be less likely to want her input if she had her mouth full every time they wanted her opinion.

Unfortunately, her luck didn’t last long.

"Bree informed me that you dreamed of her again," Henry said.

Jenny tried to swallow a chunk of mashed potato. "It was nothing. We didn’t speak."

"Alright," Henry said, believing her on her word. "Did you see anything of importance, though?"

"No," Jenny really wished the food had worked better as a repellant, "just her and desert. Same as always."

"Well, make sure to inform me if that changes," Henry said.

Jenny, who had just taken a bite of peas, nodded silently in acknowledgement. She doubted Ahmanet would really tell her anything important, but still. If it made Henry feel better, she would tell him if something especially interesting happened. That is, as long as those interesting things did not involve Ahmanet sucking hickeys into Jenny’s neck, because she was of the opinion Henry did not need to know about that. Not if Jenny wanted him (and Nick, for that matter) to completely freak out.

It wasn’t like they could do much about it anyway. Hell, Jenny herself couldn’t do much to make Ahmanet talk if she didn’t want to. Ahmanet had not exactly encouraged conversation this time, and Jenny had been too distracted by the teeth nibbling at her throat and the hands in her hair to really insist on talking. The ancient princess was remarkably distracting when she wanted to be.

Jenny scooped up some mashed potatoes, eating them thoughtfully. "Are we going back into the tomb tomorrow?"

"I fear that we must," Henry agreed.

"There’s not much time left to find a solution," Nick added. "And you’re the only one here who can read those glyphs."

"Yeah," Jenny said. "How come Prodigium doesn’t have more people who can read Ancient Egyptian anyway? Me and that other guy seems a little..." She shrugged. "I mean, Prodigium is pretty big, and I know you have more translators for other languages."

Henry looked a bit sheepish. "Well, we didn’t actually expect the tomb to be found for another few years at least. We’re still in the process of finding a third and fourth translator who’ll fit into our organization."
“Because of the whole ‘supernatural threats that probably want to wipe out humanity’ thing can be pretty hard to deal with,” Nick nodded in understanding.

Jenny awkwardly speared some chicken with her fork. “Ahmanet doesn’t want to wipe out humanity,” she said, and then realized how much it sounded like a defense. She stuffed the chunk of chicken into her mouth and chewed furiously.

Henry gave her a pitying look. “Jennifer, you know just as well as we do that Ahmanet holds no love for humanity. Given the chance, she will destroy us. Perhaps not by annihilating us, but in the end, she will see civilization as we know it fall.”

“I know,” Jenny mumbled into her chicken.

“She’ll enslave us all!” Nick said, a little more harshly. “The bitch wants to rule. No matter how many she has to kill to get there.”

Jenny hunched in on herself a little more, “I know.” She knew she sounded miserable and small, and she hated it. Jenny was very well aware of what Ahmanet was capable of. She knew, probably better than Henry and Nick, just how far Ahmanet was willing to go.

And she didn’t understand why it made her so miserable.

It should make her angry. Encourage her to fight with all she had. Instead, Jenny just wanted to lay down and ignore everything around her until things had settled down again. She wanted to sleep, and not wake up for a very long time. Perhaps not ever.

Both Henry and Nick were staring at her in a mixture of pity, sympathy and sadness.

Jenny played with her food and didn’t say anything for the rest of dinner.

The next day they went back into the tomb, as Henry had said. Jenny was really, really starting to hate this place. And she was getting really sick of hieroglyphs. It was starting to get repetitive; go down into the tomb, translate, take a break for lunch, translate some more, leave the tomb for dinner, rinse and repeat.

Jenny had written the walls off as a bad job by now, and instead concentrated on the various surfaces around the pool of mercury and the guardian statues. These were more helpful, in a terrifying kind of way.

“I’m pretty sure these describe what Ahmanet can do,” Jenny said as she quickly skimmed a few of the tablets, not really reading but picking out the gist of what it was about, “or at least, the powers Set gave her when she made the pact.”

Henry and Nick perked up, as did the members of Jenny’s guard, who’d followed her into the tomb and were standing at the entrance of the tomb.

“They match Set’s powers?” Henry asked, dread on his face.

Nick looked a little lost. “What are Set’s powers anyway?”

Jenny sighed, crouching to get a better look at the glyphs. “He’s the god of storms, the desert, chaos and war, and later on he also became the god of foreigners and evil.”
“So, basically, if Ahmanet’s powers match his,” Nick said, “the desert is a really, really bad place to be?”

“Yes,” Jenny said slowly, “especially if what I’m reading here is true.”

Henry moved a little closer so he could see the glyphs as well. “What do they say?”

“Well,” Jenny said, “we already knew Ahmanet can call up sandstorms. She’s done it before, in the plane, and then in London. Set gave her control over the sands of the desert. Here, it says that she can do more than just use it to call up sandstorms.”

“Like what?”

Jenny looked up at Henry and Nick. “How about an army of sand soldiers, unable to be killed and reforming every time they are injured or destroyed? Or an army of the reanimated remains of every being that has ever died in the desert? Their bones are part of the desert now, she can control them.”

Nick paled. Henry’s face, already drawn and pale with worry, tightened.

“How many?”

“It doesn’t say.” She squinted at the glyphs. “But considering Ahmanet managed to call up a sandstorm big enough to swallow London, in a place where there is no desert sand to easily access, I’m going to wager ‘a lot’. And she’s used undead soldiers before. Nick and I saw them in the church.”

“Yeah,” Nick said, “but that was only a couple. Like, four or five at most.”

“Yes, well, don’t expect it to stay in the single digits.” Jenny responded, feeling a strange, sick mixture of terror and excitement at the thought. She immediately wanted to hit herself once she recognized the excitement. This wasn’t exciting at all. They were talking about an army of undead corpses and unkillable sand men. Nothing about that should make Jenny want to witness it. And yet, a small part of her, the same part that had happily melted into dream-Ahmanet’s arms, could barely wait.

Jenny hurriedly tried to ignore it, instead focussing all her attention on translating the hieroglyphs before her. “There’s more,” Jenny said, interrupting Henry and Nick. “The tablets aren’t terribly clear, but there’s something about spiders created by dark magic. Ahmanet controls them, and can use them to control people as well. She also has a connection with crows.”

“Anything else?”

Jenny scanned the tablets again and shrugged. “There’s mentions of superhuman strength and the ability to regenerate herself by sucking the lifeforce out of people, but beyond that, not really. It could be, though, that there more, because here,” Jenny pointed at one of the tablets, “the text just stops. My guess, the one engraving it either left or died, because it’s too abrupt to be a natural ending to the text.”

“He probably died,” Nick said, looking around at the earthly remains of people present in the tomb. “I mean, they did. They were probably left behind to make sure the bitch didn’t escape when she was just caught and still alive and at near-full strength.”

Jenny winced. “Don’t remind me. This place is bad enough without knowing how many people died here to keep Ahmanet imprisoned.” And then I came around and released her, she added bitterly in her mind. Not her finest moment, that was for sure, nor was it the best decision Jenny had
ever made in her life.

Henry frowned seriously. "So we have an immortal witch who can call up sandstorms and armies of the undead and sand soldiers, who knows dark magic to control the minds of men, and who can heal any injury she might sustain by stealing the lifeforce out of people." He summarized. "And who may or may not possess additional powers beyond that."

"...That does seem to be the gist of it, yes," Jenny allowed reluctantly.

Nick’s nervous swallow was unnaturally loud in the silence that had fallen over the tomb. One of Jenny’s guards shifted uncomfortably near the entrance, the shuffle of his tactical boots echoing through the chamber.

"Is there anything about weaknesses?" Nick asked after a few seconds.

Jenny stood up and made her way over to one of the engraved guard statues. If there was anything in here about taking Ahmanet down, Jenny was sure the statues made to keep her imprisoned would have that information. Or at least, she hoped that they would.

Henry and Nick followed after her without words, instead hovering anxiously as Jenny started to read the hieroglyphs on the first statue’s chest.

"This one’s about mercury," Jenny said. "Nothing new. Just that mercury weakens evil spirits and can thus be used to imprison them."

"We need something to kill her, not imprison her," Nick said.

Jenny rolled her eyes and moved over to the second statue. "This one has more spells, nothing useful." The third wasn’t very useful either, but the fourth did have something interesting. Jenny squinted as she read the hieroglyphs, an odd mix of excitement and dread flopping in her stomach. "This one says something about a poison. Apparently it was used to capture Ahmanet in the first place so they could imprison her here."

"That’s exactly what we need!" Henry moved over eagerly. "Does it say how it’s made?"

"It says that you need mercury as the base." Jenny read. "And that you then need to distill it with something called the Blood of Osiris."

"The god of death and the underworld, amongst other things," Henry said, realization washing over his face. "It makes perfect sense. If something is capable of killing the undead and destroying Set’s influence, it’s the power of death itself!"

"It’s not lethal, though," Jenny said, "if it was, Ahmanet would’ve died when they used it on her five-thousand years ago."

Henry frowned. "Perhaps a larger dose? If we make enough of it, we could take a dart gun loaded with a poisoned dart and her down with it, and then put her on an i.v. and just let it circulate through her system until she dies."

Jenny winced. That sounded painful, and cruel. "How about something a little more humane?"

Henry opened his mouth, but didn’t get the chance to respond; Nick interrupted him before he could, "I get that this is, like, a big discovery and really good progress considering this whole poison thing will apparently put the bitch down, and planning is a really good idea, but I have a pretty important question."
“Which is?” Henry asked, a tad impatient.

“What the hell is the Blood of Osiris?”

Jenny paused. That was actually a really good question. Nick was right; what the hell even was the Blood of Osiris anyway? Because she sure hadn’t heard of it before. And that was saying something. She’d studied Ahmanet for thirteen years and she had never even found a single mention of the Blood of Osiris - not a single hint or sentence, or even a single word in all of her books and papers. Osiris had been mentioned plenty, as had the word ‘blood’, but never combined into the ‘Blood of Osiris’.

Jenny didn’t have a single clue what it was. Or how one got their hands on some of it. Or, if it had to be made, how one made it.

She glanced at Henry, licked her lips nervously. “Henry, do you know what the Blood of Osiris is?”

He looked just as baffled as Jenny felt. “I… I don’t know.” He responded. “I’ve not come across something called the ‘Blood of Osiris’ before.”

Nick looked incredulous. “Neither of you know what it is?”

Jenny shrugged. Henry shook his head silently.

“So we have a solution, but it won’t work until we figure out the recipe to a poison no one has heard of before. And we have no clue where to find it?” Nick asked for clarification.

Henry gave a slow nod. He looked old, and more tired than Jenny had ever seen him. “Apparently, yes.”

This, Jenny decided, could pose a problem.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Jenny and the gang go to Egypt to find the Blood of Osiris. They pick up some extra soldiers upon arriving in Cairo. An old friend (enemy?) shows up.

Chapter Notes

Well, here's a new chapter, very much ahead of schedule. I'd planned on updating on Sunday, but I happened to stumble upon a few hours of free time, and I made use of them. Therefore, without further ado, 4,000 words and a little bit of plot.

When Jenny, the boys and her guard resurfaced from the tomb, camp looked a lot like a kicked-up anthill. People were running around packing up stuff, the tents were in the process of being torn down, the Jeeps and the single, huge truck were being reloaded - the camp was being disassembled in front of Jenny’s eyes.

“'We’re going to Egypt,’” Henry said, barely pausing to take off his climbing gear before stalking off to shout orders at the nearest cluster of soldiers.

“'Egypt?'” Nick asked incredulously, ”'as in, a country with a humongous desert? Which also happens to be Ahmanet’s home country?''

“No,” Jenny said, instantly understanding Henry’s reasoning, “'it makes sense, Nick.'”

“'How so? We should be going somewhere she’s powerless, like an island. Egypt is like, the worst place for us to go right now.'”

Jenny shook her head. “'Egypt is the best place to go right now.'”

“No, it’s not!” Nick disagreed. “'Why would you even think that!!’”

“'Because,’” Jenny said, “'while the main religion in Egypt nowadays is the Islam, there are still people who follow the old ways. People who worship the old gods.'”

“'Great, so we’re going to a place Set probably has a cult of murderers just waiting to kill us all,’” Nick sniped.

“'And the place where Osiris is still worshipped today,’” Jenny added. “'It might be a long shot, but if anyone knows what the Blood of Osiris is, it would be one of his high priests. And I have a feeling Henry is thinking the same thing.’’

Nick nibbled on his lower lip, frowning in thought. “'Alright, that makes sense. But shouldn’t you go somewhere else? Some place that isn’t Egypt?’”

“I’m the closest thing to a warning system you have. If Ahmanet is close, I'll know.” Jenny said.
“But that won’t be much use if I’m not there to warn everyone.”

“How about you warn us while you’re on an island surrounded by sea and not in a country that is mostly desert,” Nick suggested.

“Do you really think water will stop Ahmanet from getting to me?” Jenny eyed Nick, wondering how the hell he thought that that would work. Just because most of Ahmanet’s power was in the desert, didn’t mean she would be repelled by the sea. And if she played it smart, she wouldn’t even have to cross the ocean, she could just send a couple of minions to go fetch Jenny from whatever island Nick was planning to stash her at for safekeeping.

“It’s worth a try,” Nick said. “I was thinking Hawaii, or maybe Bora Bora. Out of the way of pretty much anything, nothing but ocean for miles and miles. Tropical, hot, great weather all around.” Nick gave her a persuasive look. “You could relax in a beach chair under a parasol and drink those fruity girly cocktails that have little parasols and bits of fruit on skewers stuck in them. Go to the spa. Make necklaces out of seashells or something. Learn to play the ukelele.”

“It’s not gonna happen, Nick.” Jenny responded, amused at the image Nick had sketched but not really tempted. “I’m coming along.” Something deep in her bones told her she needed to go to Egypt. She recognized it as the same feeling that had drawn her into the church, and though she knew who was causing it, she found herself wanting to go regardless. It was insistent in an itchy, pulling kind of way, and Jenny knew that it would get worse the farther she went from Ahmanet. And if she went to Egypt, which was evidently what Ahmanet wanted her to do, it would go away.

Intellectually, it was a really, really bad idea. Possibly even worse than entering the church. It might even be on the same level of bad as freeing Ahmanet had been. It was a decision that would, undoubtedly, see her getting in even more trouble. It might even kill her (even if it wouldn’t last long).

Emotionally… well, Jenny had never claimed to be emotionally sound when it came to Ahmanet. She was unnaturally attached, and she knew it - for all that she said about killing Ahmanet, there was thirteen years of searching and wanting and hoping that told her to do the exact opposite. That, and a supernatural link that made her feel weird things she shouldn’t feel. Jenny didn’t want to admit that the link wasn’t that big an influence in comparison to thirteen years of laser focus. Hell, Jenny had lost several romantic partners because she’d been too busy searching for Ahmanet to remember things like anniversaries or dinners with the parents.

“I’m coming along,” Jenny repeated stubbornly. “You should go pack, Nick. I’m guessing Henry will want to leave as soon as possible.” She didn’t give Nick the chance to respond or wax lyrical about tropical beaches (though tropical beaches were very nice), and instead stalked off towards the tent she’d slept in the past couple of nights to go pack her own stuff.

Jenny didn’t have a lot at the moment, having been chased out of London without anything but the clothes on her back, but Henry had somehow found the time to grab her some essentials.

She snagged a duffel bag from one of the soldiers, and started packing what little possessions she had. She had a sleeping shirt, some clean underwear and socks, a spare outfit, toothbrush and toothpaste, a hairbrush and an extra pair of shoes.

At the moment, she had literally nothing but the bare essentials and a price on her head.

As a result, it took Jenny barely two minutes to throw it all into her duffel. For redundancy, she also grabbed the blanket from her bed; during daytime, the desert was stiflingly hot, but during nighttime, temperatures could drop below freezing.
After making sure she hadn’t forgotten anything, Jenny left the tent and brought her duffel over to the Jeep she’d be travelling in. The soldier in charge of fitting everything in the trunk took her duffel with a nod of thanks and put it with the rest of the luggage to be packed.

With that chore taken care of, Jenny went to see if she could help anyone. There was plenty to do, after all, and only a limited amount of hands and time to get it all done. It barely took a few moments before Jenny found herself helping a trio of soldiers in the kitchen, packing all the equipment and the food supplies into large crates, which were then fetched by some very strong-looking men and women and dragged over to the truck.

Within the space of a few hours, camp was disassembled completely.

It happened at an astonishing pace, and with remarkable efficiency. In the hour Jenny had been helping in the kitchen, most of the tents had been torn down and the Jeeps and truck loaded, and once the mess tent was also torn down, it only took another half hour before everyone was ready to go. It was a little bit staggering to Jenny. She’d gone camping exactly twice in her life, and both times it had taken her the better part of four hours to set up one tent, and about just as long to break it down and pack it correctly - here, an entire military camp for over twenty people had been disassembled in barely even half that time.

Jenny followed her guard over to one of the Jeeps, pausing just before she was about to climb in. Despite her hatred for the place, Jenny couldn’t help but glance back at the tomb. From here, she could barely see the top of the screaming face carved into the rock. The vast majority of Jenny was very, very happy to leave it behind her. But a teeny tiny part already felt nostalgic at leaving behind the place that had, in the end, brought her to the completion of her life’s work. She’d found Ahmanet, and part of her could never regret that.

The vast majority of her regretted entering the tomb - she hated it, was revolted by it, wished to never see it again - but a tiny part of her was glad she had.

Conflicting feelings were a bitch.

Jenny turned away from the tomb and climbed into the Jeep. She took the middle forward-facing seat, a guard on either side of her. Her original team had been relieved for night duty, but had returned this morning before Jenny had gone back into the tomb, so she had Bree on one side, Mel on the other, and Zeke and Peter flanking Nick across from her. He looked mulish, for one reason or another, but Jenny didn’t care enough to ask.

Henry stopped by, standing at the open door. ‘’Alright, folks, ready to go?’’

Jenny nodded, and her guards responded with a series of crisp ‘yes, sir’s.’

‘’Good,’’ Henry said, ‘’this is what’s going to happen. We’re going to go towards the nearest airstrip, which is a couple of hours from here, and a plane will be waiting for us. We’ll fly to Cairo. There will be additional soldiers waiting for us there.’’ He glanced at Jenny. ‘’Your guard will be increased at that point, Jennifer.’’

Jenny barely dared to ask, ‘’how many?’’

‘’Ten in total,’’ Henry said, ‘’possibly twelve.’’

Jenny stared at him in abject horror. Ten guards. Possibly twelve. That sounded absolutely awful. Jenny had four guards right now, and even that was getting on her nerves. She had no idea how she was going to deal with a dozen people following her around all day.
“It’s for you own good, Jennifer,” Henry said upon seeing her expression. “And it’ll only be until we take care of Ahmanet and break the curse she placed on you. After that, you’ll be free to do what you wish again.”

Jenny grumbled inaudibly. She couldn’t wait for the day she could just walk around freely and not worry about anything. Well, except for getting a new job. She was not going anywhere near field work ever again, that was for sure.

“As I was saying,” Henry continued, “once we have touched down in Cairo and met up with the rest of the troops, we will be staying in the city for one night, so everyone can get the opportunity to get some real rest, as well as giving me the opportunity to resupply our mission.”

Nick perked up a little. “Please tell me we’ll be staying in a place with an actual bed in it.”

Jenny, too, perked up at the thought of an actual bed. That sounded very, very good. Her simple cot when camp had still stood had been fairly decent, but it had been far from the most comfortable bed she’d ever slept in. Jenny would murder someone right now for a queen size with a spring-and-foam mattress, thick, fluffy covers and feather pillows, all with fresh, clean sheets and maybe even one of those little mints on the pillow.

“Yes, we have reservations at a hotel,” Henry confirmed. “If I may continue now?”

Nick shut his mouth and nodded.

“Splendid. Now, when we’ve concluded our business in Cairo, we will be taking another flight to the city of Aswan. We’re heading for the island of Philae.”

That was a name Jenny had heard of before. Philae was an island in the Upper Nile, in a part now called Lake Nasser, and from what she’d read, it was one of burying-places of Osiris. Although…

“Wasn’t that place closed down by Emperor Justinian I sometime during the sixth century?”

“Officially, yes,” Henry agreed, “but the religion there was strong. Christianity and the Islam never really gained a foothold on Philae, even when the rest of Egypt converted. My sources say the island still shows signs of activity concerning the native Egyptian religion fairly regularly. If there’s any place to find a high priest of Osiris, that’s the place.”

Jenny nodded in understanding.

Nick looked confused. “Why would that place be so important?”

“It’s believed to be one of the burying-places of Osiris,” Jenny responded. “The most likely place for a cult of worshippers, wouldn’t you think?”

“So, it’s like a church, or a mosque?” Nick asked.

“More like a temple, but yeah,” Jenny agreed. “It’s where people would go to pray and make offerings to Osiris. Lots of pilgrims went there, too.”

“Alright,” Nick agreed dubiously. “I guess that makes sense.” He didn’t sound very convinced, though.

Henry nodded, patting the door of the Jeep impatiently. “I’ll see you at the airstrip. The trip should only take a couple of hours, maybe three at most.” He glanced sharply at Bree and Mel, who were on either side of Jenny. “Keep an extra sharp eye out on the way. I don’t want any surprises involving Jennifer.”
“Yes, sir,” Bree agreed, Mel echoing her.

Henry gave a short nod, and slammed the door of the Jeep closed. The sound of his hand hitting the steel of the outside came through a second later, and the Jeep lurched into motion. Jenny hastily fastened her seatbelt. Nick did the same, and then reached into his pocket and pulled out a deck of cards. “Anyone up for a game of poker?”

“Make it Go Fish, and you’re on,” Peter said, and Nick nodded and began to shuffle the cards.

The airstrip turned out to be a very familiar one; it was the same one the military plane had used to carry Ahmanet’s coffin out of the country. Back, when Jenny could still pretend Ahmanet was dead and that the link between them didn’t exist. Back when her life’s work still filled her with joy and wonder, instead of a sickening mixture of absolute terror and utter fascination.

Jenny hoped to God that this plane wouldn’t crash also. There was no sandstorm on the horizon, though, and Jenny hadn’t spotted any crows so far, so she was cautiously optimistic. Hopefully, the plane crash would remain an outlier, an exception to the rule.

The plane was larger than the one they’d taken out of England; it had to carry a lot more people, and thus it needed to be bigger. Inside, there were twenty seats. Apparently, a couple of the soldiers would function as the pilot and co-pilot, and another two would take position near the door, ready to open it up should a quick exit by chute be needed, so there were just enough seats for everyone else. Though it wasn’t as luxurious as the private jet had been, it was still pretty nice. Large, comfy leather chairs, plenty of legroom - it was as good as any first-class flight.

Jenny had to admit it; when Henry did something, he did it in style.

Not that Jenny minded. She rather enjoyed a bit of luxury every now and then. Jenny chose a window seat, unsurprised when Mel took the seat in the ‘pod’ next to her. Privately, Jenny wished Mel had chosen a different seat. Nice as the woman was, Jenny had been followed around since the moment she’d woken up that morning, and it would be nice to have at least the illusion of privacy for a little while. Not that Jenny was about to say it out loud, of course. It wasn’t Mel’s fault Jenny was annoyed with her, and there was no reason for Jenny to take it out on her.

She turned her attention to the small tv screen built into her space. It was a touch screen, and she wasted no time booting it up and then searching through the system for a movie to watch. It would take about two hours to reach Cairo by flight, so there was plenty to time to watch nearly an entire movie.

Finally selecting some random action comedy, Jenny ignored the pilot’s voice over the intercom, only pausing to buckle her seatbelt before settling in comfortably.

The flight, much to Jenny’s relief, went off without a hitch. There wasn’t even any turbulence. Jenny appreciated it very much, and was very happy to come to the conclusion that plane crashes weren’t about to become a new staple in her life.

She would be quite happy to do without those for the rest of her existence, however long it may be.

(Hopefully long, but not unnaturally so.)

(Especially not unnaturally so.)
They touched down in Cairo two hours and seven minutes after take-off, exactly on schedule, and it was just enough time for Jenny to finish her movie and the drink she’d gotten up to get herself halfway through the flight. She unbuckled her seatbelt once the engines had powered down, and then waited for about half of the soldiers to file out before following.

She’d been informed that she shouldn’t be the first to leave the plane, nor the last, apparently for security purposes. Jenny was pretty sure Ahmanet hadn’t posted a sniper with sedative darts anywhere, if she even knew what snipers and sedative darts were, so she thought it rather unnecessary, but she went along with it anyway. There really was no use in protesting about something as silly and inane as leaving a plane in the middle of a group.

Cars were waiting - a lot more cars than there had been in Baghdad. And a lot more soldiers. Jenny had counted on maybe another twenty extra troops. Forty in total should be more than enough, in Jenny’s opinion.

In front of her, however, did not stand an extra twenty soldiers.

Lined up, in neat lines of ten, wearing Prodigium uniforms and with assault rifles in their hands, were a hundred additional troops.

“What the fuck?” Nick stopped next to Jenny. “Are you seeing what I’m seeing?”

“Yeah,” Jenny agreed, a little bit stunned, “I’m seeing it. That’s a lot of soldiers.”

“Since when does Prodigium have that kind of manpower?”

Jenny shrugged. “It’s a large organization. I just didn’t think Henry would be calling so many of them to Egypt.”

Nick glanced at her. “What did you expect?”

“I dunno. Maybe twenty, or twenty-five. Not this, at least.”

“Yeah, same here,” Nick agreed. “Still, I can’t say I mind. The more people between Ahmanet and you, the better.”

Jenny grimaced. “She won’t hesitate to go straight through them.”

“That’s what they’re here for.” Nick said. “And they’ll give you enough time to escape, at least.”

“I don’t want people to die.”

“Considering who we’re going up against, it’s a given people will die. People have already died. You saw those zombies as clearly as I did.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it,” Jenny said as she watched Henry move over to the fresh troops and start to issue orders.

“No,” Nick said after a second, “no, it doesn’t.” He took a breath and changed the subject. “So, how about that hotel, huh? Looking forward to it?”

Jenny groaned at the thought. “So much. I can’t wait to sleep in a real bed.”

“I can’t wait to take a hot shower,” Nick said in anticipation.

“God, yes, a shower,” Jenny hadn’t even thought of that yet. It sounded so very good, though.
Maybe the hotel would even have a tub. A properly hot, foamy, sudsy, bath sounded even better than a shower.

Henry waved them over from near the troops. Jenny trotted over, Nick and her guard on her heels. As she approached, six of the soldiers stepped forward and saluted her.


“Nice to meet you,” Jenny said, and though believable, her smile was very, very fake.

“You as well, Dr. Halsey,” Elise responded, the others echoing the greeting. She briefly glanced at the members of Jenny’s original guard. “Good to see you guys as well.”

Zeke grinned. “You too. Drinks after this mess is taken care of?”

“As long as you’re buying the first round,” Darren agreed.

“Will do,” Zeke agreed with a laugh.

“Good, good,” Henry said, “now that you’ve been introduced, how about we start making our way to the hotel? They’re expecting us.”

That sounded like a good plan. Jenny followed Henry over to yet another Jeep (how many of those did Prodigium even have?) and settled into it. Nick didn’t follow her in; all available seats were taken by various members of Jenny’s guard. Jenny pretended not to mind, instead looking out of the window the best she could from the middle seat to catch a glimpse of Cairo.

She’d been here, once or twice before, back when her search for Ahmanet had still been mostly unsuccessful. Cairo had lots of manuscripts and engraved tablets in the various museums, libraries and other such places, which Jenny had made extensive use of. She hadn’t done much sightseeing, though, so it was nice to be able to sit and look at the city for a bit. Even if the very burly guy next to her - Matthew - obscured most of the window.

The hotel was nice. Very nice. Five-star hotel nice.

Jenny, however, didn’t really care about the shiny marble flooring or the chandeliers at this moment. She wanted a hot bath, food, and then sleep, in exactly that order. Maybe a couple of glasses of wine as well. With all the shit she’d put up with in the last week, she could really use a drink or two.

Henry checked them in at the reception desk, and soon returned with more keys than Jenny had ever seen in one place. Enough to mean he’d gotten rooms for all of them, hundred-something soldiers included. Jenny was very happy to find out that she had a suite to herself, the only caveat being that some people would be stationed outside her door at all hours. She could agree to that. As long as she could bathe and sleep without someone breathing down her neck, Jenny didn’t really care what her guard did.

She happily accepted her key and made her way to the nearest elevator.

She was situated on the third floor, and it turned out to be quite a nice suite. It had a bathroom with a full tub and separate shower, a queen-sized bed, a flatscreen tv on the wall and a minibar in the tiny kitchenette off the living room area. Jenny approved. Henry really did work in style.

The first thing Jenny did was lock the door behind her, and root through her duffel for the spare
oversized shirt she had. It was still reasonably clean - certainly clean enough to be worn to bed for another night. She took out fresh underwear and socks as well, moving into the bathroom to fill up the tub. The idea of a bath, so hot it was just on the edge of scalding, sounded like heaven. She could definitely use one.

She found one of those small bottles hotel always used, and poured some of the bubble bath into the tub.

Then, while the tap ran with hot water, Jenny perused the room service menu. It took her a few minutes to pick her meal and call room service to halve it delivered an hour from now, and by the time she was done, the tub was plenty full enough. She shucked her clothes, and sank into the almost-but-not-quite-too-hot water with a groan of relief. It was like the heat and bubbles instantly turned her muscles to jelly and drained the tension from her tired mind. It was, possibly, the best bath of Jenny's entire life.

She soaked for the better part of an hour, adding hot water whenever it became too cold for her tastes, and only got out because her food would be arriving soon. Jenny dried herself off with the fluffy white towels provided, quickly sliding on clean underwear and her sleep shirt, wrapping her hair up in a towel in a kind of turban-like style to leach the water out of it.

Her meal arrived a couple of minutes later. The bellhop wheeled the little trolley into her living room and placed the tray on the table for her, removing the cloche from the plate. Jenny’s stomach rumbled at the sight and smell of lamb and potatoes. There was a chocolate and caramel dessert for afters. Jenny managed to find a couple of English Pounds in her pockets and tipped the bellhop with it - she wasn’t sure what the exact conversion rate was from Pound Sterling to Egyptian Pounds, but she did know that the GBP was a lot stronger at the moment, so even if it were only a couple of GBP, it should make a nice tip in EGP.

After the bellhop left, it didn’t take Jenny long to devour the food - it was delicious - until only crumbs were left on her plate. She finished the glass of wine that came with it and went to brush her teeth in the bathroom.

Relaxed from her bath and with plenty of food warm in her belly, she was more than ready to sleep for the next ten hours or so.

“Nice digs you got here, Jenny.”

Jenny’s toothbrush clattered into the sink. Toothpaste foam went after it as Jenny choked on it in shock and fright.

Face dripping, eyes wide, Jenny looked up into the dead, decaying face of Chris Vail.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Jenny and the gang attempt to leave Cairo. Things don't really go as expected.

Chapter Notes

Whew, I made it! One chapter at the end of the week, as promised!

That said, Ahmanet is back! I'm rather chuffed about it. Jenny probably isn't as happy about that as I am, though. And it's a cliffy! I'm getting rather good at cliffies, if I say so myself.

Enjoy!

Vail winced. "Careful there, Jenny. Wouldn't want you to die early, would we?"

Jenny hacked up the last of the foam, spitting it into the sink. "Chris… What are you doing here?"

He ignored her. "It's been a while since the pub, hasn't it? Long time no see."

"... I don’t understand." Chris shrugged as he looked at her. "I figured I’d come see you. Don’t really have anywhere else to go right now."

Jenny frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I can’t move on. I can’t go back to being alive. I’m stuck." There was a raw kind of pain in his expression. "And no one else can see me."

"Chris…" Jenny could hear the pity in her voice.

Vail smiled bitterly. "I tried, you know. Nick can’t see me. Even my wife and my baby girl can’t see me. Random strangers can’t see me. You’re the only person who sees me, and who can talk to me."

He shrugged a little. "Well, apart from Ahmanet, anyway. And I’m not exactly enthusiastic about spending time with that nutcase."

A combination of pity and horror churned in Jenny’s stomach. She could barely imagine what it must be like to go through that… invisible, dead, stuck between this life and the next, and unable to do anything about it. It sounded like a nightmare.

"Yeah," Chris said, reading Jenny’s expression, "imagine living it." He frowned. "Well, not living, exactly. I’m not entirely sure how to describe my existence right now." His eyes, which had glazed over, suddenly sharpened. "You’re lucky, Jenny. When you die, you get to come back to life. You don’t get stuck in between."

Jenny let the worlds swirl around her mind. She swallowed back a combination of bile and tears, her
throat tight and her eyes burning. In the mirror, through the smoky appearance of Chris, she could see her own face. There was a feverish glint to her eyes, and the twist of her mouth couldn’t quite conceal her terror. ”Chris...” she swallowed thickly, ”what’s it like to die?”

Vail softened a little, his shoulders losing some tension. There was a hole on his cheek through which Jenny could see decomposing muscle and teeth. A maggot crawled out and slithered down until it reached his torn shirt, disappearing into one of the bullet wounds on his chest. ”Dying,” he told her, ”is the easiest thing you’ll ever do.”

”And being resurrected?”

”I wouldn’t know. I’m dead. There’s no resurrection for me.”

”When I’m resurrected,” Jenny said, licking her lips nervously, ”I’m supposed to receive power over life and death.”

”I know. Do me a favour?”

”Yes?”

”Leave me dead. When you receive your power, I want you to help me move on. That’s what I want. I don’t want to come back, and risk getting stuck for a second time.”

”Right,” Jenny said, wishing she had the option of just dying and not getting forced back into life, ”okay.” She took a shaky breath. ”Are you going to leave now?”

”No.” Vail shook his head, looking more like the man Jenny had known in life, a little less broken down by grief. ”I think I’ll stick around for a bit. I think you need someone who doesn’t treat you like you’re about to shatter into a thousand little pieces.”

Jenny smiled at him gratefully. ”Thanks, Chris.”

”No problem.” He faded a little in the mirror. ”Go get some sleep. You look exhausted.”

”I am,” Jenny said. ”But things are going to get better now, Chris. We figured out a way to stop her.” She yawned a little, suddenly almost too tired to keep on her feet. ”We just have to go get it. Then all of this will be over.”

”Best get some rest, then,” Vail said, and Jenny was too busy letting out another giant yawn to really register the strange note in his voice.

”Right,” Jenny managed, ”G’night, Chris.”

”It’s the middle of the afternoon,” Vail said.

”Same thing,” Jenny said, and then stumbled off to bed. She faceplanted into the pillows, dragging the covers up over her shoulders. In a matter of seconds, she was out. She was met with dark eyes and brown skin and a sinful smirk.

Jenny woke, many hours later, feeling like she’d barely had a couple of seconds of sleep, despite the rather pleasant dream she’d had. Her eyes felt gritty and her throat dry, her head pounding with a slow, dull headache, exhaustion making her muscles feel like they were filled with lead.
She groaned lowly, pulling the covers up to her ears, not even bothering to open her eyes. Right now, Jenny had absolutely no plans and no desire to get out of bed. Not now, and not anytime soon. She was staying right here, curled up in her little nest of warmth and softness, until she felt well enough, and brave enough, to face the world for another day.

She dozed for a while, feeling the headache slowly ebb away - she still made no attempt to get up. It was nice and cozy in here, and safe. No one could hurt her here. That appealed to her. For a moment, Jenny seriously contemplated just staying in this bed forever.

"Jenny, you awake?" Chris’ voice pierced through the little cocoon of silent safety Jenny had made for herself.

Jenny jumped a little - she’d completely forgotten about Chris. She sat up hastily, peeling the covers away from her face. "Chris, you’re still here!"

Vail’s decaying body was sitting on the edge of her bed. He wasn’t leaving any imprints where he was sitting. His lack of a solid body was a little off-putting. "Of course I am. I said I’d be sticking around for a bit, didn’t I?"

He had, Jenny remembered now. She yawned and rubbed at her eyes. "Did you sleep?"

"I can’t sleep anymore, so no."

"I meditated."

"Oh," Jenny said.

Chris smiled sympathetically. "How did you sleep?"

"Badly," Jenny said. "I feel like I haven’t slept at all."

"You looked like you were sleeping pretty deeply," Vail commented.

Jenny decided to ignore the fact that he had apparently been watching her sleep. "I don’t feel like it."

"Anyway," Chris changed the subject, "I just wanted to let you know that it’s pretty much morning. You slept the rest of yesterday away, as well as the whole night. And someone was knocking on your door a couple of minutes ago."

"Really?" Jenny twisted her body so she could see the clock on her nightstand. It was, like Chris said, already morning. Nearly eight, in fact. A little shocked, Jenny did the math. They’d arrived in Cairo yesterday at around two (they’d gone down into the tomb very early, and things had gone quite quickly from there), and Jenny had been in bed by four in the afternoon. She’d slept for a good sixteen hours. That had to be a record of some sort.

The second part of what Chris had said sank in. "Wait, there was someone knocking on my door?"

"Yeah, a bit ago," Vail agreed.

Frowning, Jenny rolled out of bed, grabbing the complimentary hotel-robe to wrap around her. Egypt was warm, but her bed was warmer, and the hotel was air conditioned - the suite was a little chilly for getting out of bed. Tying the belt around her waist, Jenny padded over to the door.

She couldn’t exactly hear Chris following her, he moved entirely noiselessly because there was no corporeal body to make noise, but there was a sense that wasn’t one of the traditional five ones that made her know he was barely half a foot behind her. It was like an itch in the back of Jenny’s mind,
one that she could easily ignore if she wanted to.

She didn’t want to, though. It was kind of nice to have Vail around, even if he was dead and looked kind of creepy.

It was nice to have someone who could sympathize.

Nick could, to a degree - he’d been in the plane crash with her, seen Ahmanet in the church, had fought the zombies with Jenny. He knew what Ahmanet was capable of. But he didn’t truly realize what would happen to Jenny if - when - Ahmanet got to her. Chris did. Chris had already experienced it. She’d killed him. He knew, more than anyone, more even than Jenny, the lengths Ahmanet would go to.

Rubbing at her eyes with one hand, Jenny unlocked the door and opened it, finding Darren and Joel standing on either side of it, faces towards the corridor to monitor it. Darren turned a little at the sound of the door opening.

“Good morning, Dr. Halsey,” he greeted her.

“Morning, Darren, Joel.” Jenny returned. “Hey, did someone knock a bit ago?”

“Yes. When you didn’t answer we figured you were still asleep, so we decided to try again in about an hour from now,” Joel explained.

“I was half-awake,” Jenny said. “Is there anything I should know?”

“Just that we’re leaving a few hours later than planned. There were some issues getting airspace cleared for takeoff at the airport, and we’re a little behind schedule.” Darren said. “So we’re leaving at noon instead of nine.”

“Okay,” Jenny said. That was good to know. It’d be nice not to have to hurry off towards the airport immediately. She might even get the time for a decent breakfast, and, if she could talk her guard and Henry into it, an hour or two of sightseeing in the city. Cairo was a beautiful city, Jenny didn’t want to miss it - especially since this might be the last time she’d ever see it while alive and human.

“Thanks, guys,” Jenny said to Darren and Joel, who nodded at her and turned back to monitoring the hallway.

Jenny closed the door again and went to root through the small heap of clothes she’d tossed aside the night before, quickly sniffing at the armpits of her blouse - it would do for another day. And she had her wallet, she could always get herself a new blouse before she had to leave Cairo again. If she had to, she could ask Bree or someone else to go out and get her one.

Jenny took the time for a quick but very hot and very appreciated shower before dressing, and was grateful she didn’t have to ask Chris to give her some privacy - the moment she’d gone into the bathroom, he’d turned away respectfully to go look out of the window.

“Breakfast?” He asked when Jenny reappeared, hair still damp but a lot more alert.

“Yes,” Jenny agreed, “I’m starving.”

“I went down to the restaurant while you were showering,” Chris said as he followed her to the door, “and they’ve got a breakfast buffet that looks amazing.”
“Sounds good,’” Jenny said, pausing at the door. She shot Vail an apologetic look. “I can’t really talk to you in public. People’ll notice.”

“That’s okay. Just knowing someone can see me is enough.” Jenny nodded, trying not to let the pity show on her face, and left the hotel room.

She didn’t look at Vail, but that odd sense that made the hair on the back of her neck stand up told her he was close, within arm’s reach. Darren and Joel were also close, having started moving the moment Jenny had left her room, following her like guard dogs.

The breakfast buffet at the in-house restaurant was, as Vail had told her, impressive. Jenny wasted no time grabbing a plate and a tray to put it on, then hesitated and looked at Darren and Joel. She wasn’t sure if they were allowed to eat on duty or not. She decided to ask. “Have you two eaten yet?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Darren said with a smile, “don’t you worry about that. We had breakfast a while ago.”

“But we won’t say no to a coffee,” Joel added.

“Alright,” Jenny said. “I won’t stop you. Go right ahead.”

The two nodded, but stayed close anyway until Jenny had loaded up her plate and arrived at the drinks. They both took a large mug of coffee, and Jenny had a cup of tea instead, adding a little milk and no sugar.

She carried her tray over to an empty table and took a seat. From the corner of her eye, she could see Vail wandering around the restaurant, wistfully looking at the food and the people. She felt another stab of pity. Poor Vail… ending up like this had to be absolute torture.

“Dr. Halsey?” Joel asked when he noticed her staring.

“Just lost in thought for a moment,” Jenny said, turning her attention to her plate. She had scrambled eggs, bacon, a fresh croissant with butter and jam, and a small bowl of fresh fruit. Mostly strawberry, pineapple, kiwi and watermelon. It was a pretty good breakfast, if Jenny had to say so herself. She was a fan of large breakfasts.

She ate leisurely, taking her time to let her tea cool to a drinkable temperature and cutting up her bacon into bite-sized pieces, making sure to give Darren and Joel plenty of time to drink their coffee and, in the case of Joel, sneak in a cheese-and-omelet sandwich as well.

By the time she finished, the rest of her guard had found her as well, and she walked out of the restaurant surrounded by ten people. Her guard was more than willing to take her for a little sightseeing before they had to go - they, too, wanted to see a little of Cairo. The members of her guard weren’t openly wearing rifles today, but Mel had briefly shown her the loaded handguns on her hip and under her arm, concealed under her jacket and the extra clips of mercury bullets tucked into a small case on her belt.

Apparently, every member of her guard had two handguns on them, with four extra clips of bullets each, and little things that looked like remote car keys. They, Mel had told her, were emergency beacons, in case they got into trouble and needed to call for backup. Each of the guards had one, and another had been pressed into Jenny’s hand halfway through the explanation.

She tucked it into her pocket, making sure to keep on the easily-removed cap that stopped the button from being pressed on accident. It would be bad - and utterly mortifying to explain - if the entire cavalry came running over a proverbial butt-dial.
Since there was a lot to see and only little time to see it all in, Jenny and her near-dozen guards ended up loaded into a city tour bus, which was probably the most efficient way to see a big part of the city within a few hours. Not to mention the fact that the bus was air conditioned, if barely, which made it a little cooler than the air outside, and the roof of the bus did stop most of the sun already burning in the sky. Jenny was pretty happy with it. She got to sit calmly in the shade as the bus took her across the city to show her all the pretty sights, and she didn’t have to walk around with a literal wall of people surrounding her.

Jenny arrived back at the hotel at eleven, at Henry’s request. The entire squadron of soldiers were waiting, Henry and Nick standing with them, a long line of black cars behind them.

Looking at them, Jenny was once again reminded of how utterly excessive the amount of Prodigium troops present was. Seriously, over a hundred soldiers was way too much. Another twenty would have done easily.

“Jennifer,” Henry greeted her, “enjoy your trip?”

“It was nice,” Jenny admitted. “Normal.”

Henry squeezed her shoulder. “Things will work out. We’ll take care of it.”

“I know,” Jenny said, and didn’t mention that she had trouble believing it. Because honestly? This didn’t feel like something that could just be solved anymore. She was starting to believe that there was no solution. All they had at this point was a reference to a poison no one had used in 5000 years and a shaky lead to Philae, where there might or might not be a pagan cult who may or may not know the recipe of said poison. No guarantees anywhere.

Jenny hated to admit it, but it was the truth - and she was starting to lose hope.

She got into the car she was pointed at. Nick managed to bully his way in as well, taking the seat of one of the guards that was supposed to join Jenny, leaving her with four guards instead of the five Henry had insisted on. Nick didn’t care, and instead nudged Jenny’s shoulder until she glanced at him, shooting her an encouraging smile.

“Chin up, Jenny. We’re gonna have this fixed in no time at all.”

“Right,” Jenny said, and stared at the ghost of Vail across from her.

He’d taken a seat, melting straight through Elise, who had taken the seat across from Jenny. The woman didn’t seem to notice anything. Vail, apparently, was so utterly incorporeal he didn’t even give off a presence like a mild chill or an off-vibe. Jenny couldn’t imagine what that was like.

Chris caught her eye and smiled. The rotting flesh of his cheeks pulled, and the hole stretched and tore a little more. Black, fetid blood leaked down his chin and dripped onto his filthy, torn shirt. He didn’t seem to notice. “It’s not gonna be long now, Jenny,” Chris said. “You looking forward to it?”

Jenny managed an imperceptible nod, just small enough for Chris to see. She didn’t truly believe in a solution anymore, but it was a nice thought regardless. And who knew - maybe, just maybe, it would work out after all.

Chris leaned forward, clasping his hand across Jenny’s. She tried not to gasp - where Elise seemed utterly oblivious to the fact Vail was sitting in the same spot as her, Jenny could feel him, if barely. It was only just there, an infinitesimal pressure on the back of her hand, a hint of clammy cold, the lack of heartbeat screaming obvious even here, in a sensation so barely there it might as well not exist at
all.

Jenny wished she could squeeze back.

The car began to move, smoothly pulling up. The windows were tinted, but only from the outside - Jenny could see out quite well. It helped that Nick was sitting next to her, and he wasn’t as bulky as, say, Matthew. She could see past him easily.

It was busier on the streets now than it had been when Jenny had left to do sightseeing, cars clotting the roads and people busying the sidewalks. It was a nice sight, normal people going about their day, doing their thing, oblivious to the monsters that went bump in the night.

Jenny felt an odd sort of longing, a yearning, to be one of them. To just be a random face in the crowd. To not have to worry about losing her life and her freedom and her dreams.

She looked away, abruptly, and tried to ignore the sudden grief that made her ribcage feel like it was caving in on her lungs. Tears burned in the corners of her eyes. Her fingers twitched under Vail’s hand. He squeezed a little harder. The pressure, barely-there as it was, grounded her a little.

They were nearly at the airport now. It was just outside the city, to allow the planes enough space, and Jenny suddenly couldn’t wait to get out of Cairo.

Jenny watched the buildings become scarcer and scarcer until there was just road and pavement. Empty.

There was a flicker at the edge of her awareness.

Jenny looked up, instinctively looking out of the window, in the direction she knew the desert to be.

Something was buzzing in the back of her mind. A spark of impatience. A tingle of anticipation. A prickling of subtle, rich, velvet-like power that had goosebumps popping up on her arms.

“Stop the car.”

“What?” Nick looked at her in confusion.

“Stop the car. Now!” Jenny could hear the edge of panic in her voice, started scrabbling at her seatbelt to free herself, tried to lunge for the driver’s seat despite the divide between it and the cabin she was in. Zeke’s arms wound around her waist and pulled her back into her seat. Jenny struggled, her pulse pounding in her ears, sweat beading on her forehead.

“Dr. Halsey, calm down!”

Nick had unbuckled his seatbelt too, twisting to take her face in his hands. “Jenny? Jenny, look at me! What’s wrong?!”

“Turn around! We have to turn around!” Jenny stared at Nick wildly. “She’s here!”

For a moment, the car was silent. Then there was a flurry of noise. As one, her guards began to check their guns, making sure they were loaded and ready for use. Peter pounded on the button to lower the divide, barely waiting for a crack to appear as it began to slide down, “turn the car! Enemies incoming!”

“Enemies incoming!” Patricia echoed, barking into a walkie talkie. “I repeat, we have hostiles incoming! It’s her!”
The car screeched to a halt, and Jenny was nearly thrown out of her seat with the force of it. Zeke’s arms tightened around her waist.

Ripples of awareness flowed and stabbed across Jenny’s mind like waves of needles. “She’s here,” she repeated mindlessly, for the fifth time, “she’s here, she’s here, she’s here, she’s here-he-”

There was a deafening noise.

Metal screeched as it dented and tore.

The car tilted, left the ground, soared for a few feet - and came crashing down with a ground-shaking, bone-rattling crash, rolling and rolling, then skidding, then coming to a shuddering halt. Jenny smashed into the ceiling, then into the window and nearly through it, then crashed back down onto the backseat.

A thin film of power was wrapped around her, sparing her from injury.

The others in the car weren’t so lucky.

Jenny stared at the ceiling blankly, the blood of Bree and Ali and Matthew and Elise soaking into her hair and clothes, their moans of pain and the screaming coming from the walkie talkie like explosions in her ears.

“Jenny? Jenny?” Nick’s voice came faintly from far away, a contrast to the cacophony around her. A hand, slick with blood, patted her cheek.

Needles stung at her mind, paralyzing her with a strange dichotomy of pain and artificial pleasure, the buzz of power like a swarm of angry bees, closer and closer and closer.

Jenny continued to stare at the ceiling blankly. She was only faintly aware of her mouth moving, “she’s here, she’s here, she’s here…”
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet finally catches up to Jenny...

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone, the new chap's up. It's late by a week, I know, but school has been very busy lately and then I got sick on top of that, so I haven't had the chance to write a lot these last couple of weeks. I'm getting better though, my head doesn't hurt as much and I don't get nauseous anymore whenever I move, and I managed to get out the chapter anyway, so... forgive me? Pretty please?

Anyway, Ahmanet is back in this one, for real. And she's determined...

Enjoy, and lemme know what you think! I'm always happy to hear (read) your opinion.

“Jenny!” Hands pulled at her arms, shaking her, and Nick’s face blurred into view - he was bloodied, thin rivulets dripping down his temple and from his ear. “Jenny, come on! You have to get up!”

The needles were still washing over her mind, little waves that came and came and came and didn’t stop, like the surf at the beach during high tide. Jenny felt woozy and slow, and her thoughts came like they were swimming through molasses, and it was hard to think straight.

“Come on, Jenny!”

The urgency in Nick’s voice picked at Jenny’s brain. She groaned incoherently, forcing herself past the paralysis in her brain, sluggishly making her limbs move. Hands slotted themselves under her armpits, and Nick grunted as he bodily dragged her out of the overturned, crushed Jeep and put her on her feet. She swayed dangerously for several moments before finding her balance.

There was a fuzziness to her vision - not because she’d hit her head, because she’d been well-protected by Ahmanet’s power, but more like something (she already knew who) was trying to slow her down, make her weak and helpless so she couldn’t run.

Jenny had gotten good at running over the past week or so.

She forced her feet to move, one in front of the other and repeat, and slowly started to stumble away from the Jeep. Nick’s hand was tight like a vice around her upper arm, dragging her into the direction of the city. The panic on his face was jarring.

Jenny didn’t feel panicked. She didn’t feel afraid. She didn’t feel much of anything at the moment.

The world was numb, and she was numb in it.
Behind her, she could hear people screaming. Gunshots hurt her ears. A very large part of her told her to turn around and make it stop. Another, larger part screamed at her to go find Ahmanet and surrender - fuzzy and slow as her mind was, Jenny could still recognize the external influence woven into the fabric of that thought. The smallest part, which was the one Jenny decided was the smartest, told her to get the hell out of dodge while she still could.

The sand around her and Nick swelled and moved, like a membrane around a creature about to be born, and when it tore, a tall, hulking mass of sand shaped like a humanoid monster hissed a feral challenge.

“Jesus fuck,” Nick breathed, staring up at the thing in horror.

Jenny blinked slowly, swaying on her feet.

The sand monster had the head of a Set animal. It was obvious who Ahmanet was choosing to mold her army after.

Nick jerked at Jenny’s arm, pulling her along as he frantically backed away from the soldier, pulling her back towards the Jeeps and the Prodigium troops. About half of them were still alive, Jenny noticed with some surprise. She’d have thought Ahmanet would have had all of them slaughtered by now.

She moved, and threw herself behind one of the Jeeps, falling heavily against the wheel. The solid metal would, hopefully, provide her with some cover.

“Here,” Nick thumped into the car door next to her and handed her a loaded gun. “Mercury laced. Do you worst.”

Jenny took the gun. She had to concentrate to curl her fingers around the grip. The metal was already warm, and it was heavy and slick with blood in her grasp. She checked the clip. Full, save for maybe two bullets.

She glanced over the hood of the Jeep, hidden behind the wheel and took stock of the situation the best she was able to at the moment. The Prodigium troops were hailing down mercury bullets on the steadily advancing Set soldiers. Jenny watched one of the sand monsters slam its fist into Tahn, and he was lifted clear off the ground and was airborne for a good twenty feet. The noise his body made when it hit the ground was visceral and so very wrong. A human body should never make that kind of noise.

He was still.

Jenny knew, instinctively, that he wouldn’t be getting up anymore.

Beside her, Nick was shooting at the sand soldier that had stopped them from escaping, shattering the head. It dropped like a puppet with its strings cut and slowly crumbled back into the desert, leaving behind only a small heap of grains and lumps. Something about it felt wrong. Like it shouldn’t have been destroyed that easily.

Jenny swallowed thickly, holding the gun with both hands as she carefully took aim at an approaching sand soldier. It took a few seconds before she could make herself point the gun at one of them. At least the sand soldiers were big, hulking figures - they should be fairly easy to hit. Even for a novice shooter like Jenny.

She tried to pull the trigger - and immediately, her fingers seized up and cramped, joints locking and muscles freezing, refusing to obey and shoot the gun.
Jenny hissed at the sudden tension stinging through her hands, nearly dropping the weapon. She recognized this. It had happened before. Ahmanet had silenced her before, stopped her mouth from expelling the words she’d wanted to say, and in the plane, she’d moved Jenny’s hand to grab the bench - and now, she was stopping Jenny from defending herself and her people.

Jenny gritted her teeth, fighting through the slowly thickening fog in her mind and the immobility of her hands, and tried again.

The wave of needles that washed over her brain and down her arms into her hands had Jenny crying out, the gun bouncing off the hood of the car and dropping into the sand as she curled into herself in agony.

Anger that didn’t belong to her rushed across the link, and Jenny knew, without a doubt, that Ahmanet was less than pleased with her. Her fury burned at Jenny’s mind like molten metal, seeping into every crack and crevice until all there was in Jenny’s world was fury and pain. Through it, she was barely able to wonder how this fit into the whole ‘not harming Jenny beyond her murder/ascension’-bit Ahmanet had talked about, because this sure felt a lot like harm.

She writhed on the ground helplessly, unable to do much beyond praying for the pain to go away. It was like nothing she’d ever felt before. Her teeth ground against each other harshly, jaws locked to the point she couldn’t open her mouth to scream, instead producing painful, guttural, raw noises from deep inside her chest that tore at her throat and made her teeth vibrate with the force.

She was pretty sure she felt one of her molars crack.

Then, without warning, the pain ceased.

Relief flooded across Jenny’s mind and body, like a cool shower after spending too long under the burning-hot sun, and it was all Jenny could do to keep breathing properly. It felt like she couldn’t quite suck in enough oxygen, but at the same time, her lungs were too full.

She felt liquid run down her face. Her muscles screamed at her, her hands felt like they were on fire, but she managed to reach up regardless. Her fingers came away wet with tears.

“Jenny?” Nick’s face blurred into view, just like it had done minutes earlier, in the Jeep. He looked ghostly pale - almost as pale as Chris. He was there too, leaning just as close as Nick. Jenny could see into the hole in his cheek. Maggots wormed around in the rotten muscles, their white bodies slick with fetid black blood.

Jenny wanted to puke, and she wasn’t sure whether it was from the sight of the maggots or from the shock of the pain she’d just gone through. Possibly a bit of both.

“What the hell just happened?!” Nick looked like he was resisting the urge to shake her. Jenny was very grateful he didn’t. If he did, she really would puke.

“Hurts,” Jenny managed. Her voice was hoarse and raw, and she winced, because talking hurt.

“Jenny, tell me what happened,” Nick demanded, “because it looked a hell of a lot like you were being tortured.”

Jenny rolled onto her stomach and tried to push herself up to her knees. Nick caught her by her upper arms when she threatened to crumble back down and helped her up the rest of the way so she could lean against the car.

“Ahmanet,” Jenny rasped, wincing and panting at the exertion of just sitting up, “doesn’t like it
when I shoot at her soldiers, apparently.’’

Nick stared at her. Jenny stared back. The gunshots still filling the air sounded less like gunshots and more like popcorn - like Jenny’s ears were filled with cotton.

From the corner of her eye, she could see Chris, approaching rapidly. ‘‘I checked the surroundings,’’ he said, crouching next to Jenny, ‘‘it’s only a quarter mile back to Cairo. With them providing a distraction,’’ he jerked his head at the dwindling Prodigium troops, ‘‘you should be able to make it back and find a place to hide.’’

‘‘Alright,’’ Jenny croaked, not even bothering to look sane anymore by pretending Chris wasn’t there. She started to scrabble to her feet. ‘‘which way?’’

‘‘What?’’ Nick looked at her in confusion. ‘‘Who’re you talking to?’’

Jenny ignored him. She started to clumsily stumble off, blindly following after Chris, though making sure to keep behind cover. It felt like her feet didn’t quite want to do what she asked. Like there was a second delay between her brain and her limbs - a lagging computer.

‘‘Jenny, wait!,’’ Nick effortlessly caught up, once again grabbing her arm. ‘‘Jenny, where are you going?’’

‘‘Cairo,’’ Jenny mumbled, not taking her eyes off Chris’ back.

‘‘Cairo?’’ Nick echoed.

‘‘It’s a big city,’’ Jenny felt a little more coherent, ‘‘I can hide in there, and wait until it’s safe again.’’

‘‘And you have to walk like, half a mile across open desert first!’’ Nick added, grip tightening on Jenny’s arm as he dragged her behind a Jeep to keep her out of sight. ‘‘You’ll be spotted in seconds.’’

Jenny glanced at Chris. ‘‘It’s clear,’’ he assured her, ‘‘I checked. No one between here and Cairo except normal humans. No one who works for her, at least.’’

‘‘It’ll be fine,’’ Jenny told Nick, ‘‘no one will see me.’’

‘‘Yeah, they won’t,’’ Nick agreed, ‘‘because you’re not going.’’

Jenny blinked at him. ‘‘Excuse me?’’

‘‘You’re not going,’’ Nick repeated, ‘‘it’s too dangerous.’’

Jenny stared. They were in the middle of a bloody firefight, there were sand monsters crawling all over the place to kill people (though they did leave Jenny, and the people around her by proxy, alone, though, which Jenny appreciated), and Nick worried about walking back to Cairo?

Jenny trusted Chris - if he said it was going to be fine, she was willing to give it a try. And she didn’t need Nick being paranoid and keeping her from a successful escape. The longer she could extend her lifespan, the better. She needed to get out of here, fast, and she couldn’t afford to lose the time Nick was wasting right now.

‘‘Stay here,’’ Nick said, pushing Jenny against the Jeep until her back hit the metal, ‘‘I’m going to round up a couple of guards to keep you safe.’’

‘‘Right,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘I’ll be right here then,’’ she added, not meaning a single word of it. Her legs
already felt less shaky and her headache, though pretty intense (seriously, fuck Ahmanet for doing that to her) wasn’t so bad that she couldn’t think straight - she was capable of sneaking away. And she had Chris to lead the way.

“Stay,” Nick emphasized, pointing at Jenny as if she was a dog.

Jenny glared at him. “Didn’t your mother teach you it’s rude to point?”

“I’m not kidding, Jenny. Stay here and wait for me to get back with guards.”

Jenny made sure to look appropriately mulish, crossing her arms and sighing like a broody teenager, but it was enough to fool Nick. He gave her one last, stern look, and then quickly made his way over to the nearest cluster of Prodigium troops, shoulders hunched and head down to avoid being hit by either stray bullets or the rock-hard chunks of sand flying around.

Jenny waited for a few seconds, and then very quietly snuck around the side of the Jeep. She could see a gun lying in the sand, only a few steps away. She was tempted to grab it, but a warning tingle at the back of her skull had her thinking better of it. Whatever it was Ahmanet had done to her, Jenny didn’t want to experience it a second time.

“This way,” Chris called over, “no one is looking right now!”

Jenny hurried over, ducking for cover. She was suddenly grateful there was such a ridiculous amount of Jeeps to transport everyone in. With over one-hundred people, there were a hell of a lot of cars to hide behind.

She pressed herself against the metal. It was hot from the sun, and dented from where one of the sand soldiers had smashed into it. That was probably also what had happened to the car Jenny had been in, only hers hadn’t just been dented, it’d literally been smashed off its wheels by the force with which it had been hit. Jenny was lucky Ahmanet had protected her. Many of the people in her Jeep hadn’t had that luxury.

Trying not to think of the glazed, lifeless look in Elise’s eyes, blood pouring from a hole in the side of her head, Jenny hurried past the car at Vail’s direction.

“Quickly now!” Chris hissed, even though no one else could hear him. He was looking around intently, then hastily gestured at Jenny to duck. “Someone’s looking!”

Jenny dropped to her stomach without thinking twice about it. She knew it was probably a bad idea to trust Chris this blindly, but she did - he was her friend, and he’d never done anything to harm her. And besides, his idea of getting back into Cairo and hiding out in the city until it was safe again was a good one. Better than sticking around here and hoping the Prodigium troops weren’t slaughtered by Ahmanet’s soldiers, anyway. Because Jenny sure as hell was not interested in waiting around and hoping her side won.

And yeah, sneaking away was cowardly, and unfair, and she was leaving the people meant to protect her behind to die, but quite frankly, Jenny didn’t care right now. She wanted to live. She was only thirty-five. There was so much left to do. So much she hadn’t seen or experienced. She hadn’t yet taken that holiday to Bora Bora she’d been dreaming of for years. That book she’d been wanting to write about her life’s work - back when her life’s work hadn’t come to life and tried to kill her repeatedly, that is, although if she survived this it might make a good story for a fictional thriller or something - wasn’t even started yet.

She hadn’t even gotten the chance to buy herself that cat she’d always wanted.
Jenny wasn’t going to die here. She refused.

And if she had to be a cowardly stab-in-the-back traitor to get that, so be it. She could feel guilty about it later. Right now, she had to look out for Number One.

She followed the ghost of Chris Vail.

She could see Cairo in the distance, they were only a quarter mile from the city, and she sped up a little at the sight, quickly catching up to Chris. He glanced at her, giving her a reassuring look.

‘‘It won’t be long now,’’ he said, ‘‘it’s not far from here.’’

‘‘Yeah,’’ Jenny said, looking at the city. It really wasn’t far. She could feel a flicker of hope igniting between her ribs, warming her from the inside out. She could do this. She could make it. Only a quarter mile, and then she would be as safe as she could get right now.

She tried not to think of the people she was leaving behind. Henry, barking orders, Nick, probably frantically looking for her by now, her surviving guards, fighting for their lives, protecting someone who wasn’t even there to protect.

Jenny kept walking.

Chris was half a step ahead of her, silent, but alert. Jenny, because she had nothing else to say, kept her mouth shut as well. They passed the last of the caravan of Jeeps. Jenny didn’t dare look back, but she knew Nick and everyone else were at least ten Jeeps behind her.

‘‘Hey! Jenny!’’

Or, at least, they should be at least ten Jeeps behind her. Jenny paused mid-step, head dropping as she groaned. She turned halfway to look behind her. Nick was jogging over, almost a dozen people on his heels.

‘‘Dammit, Jenny, I told you to stay at the car!’’ He grabbed her upper arm, for what felt like the hundredth time. Jenny was really getting sick of that.

‘‘Staying here isn’t going to keep me alive, Nick!’’ Jenny hissed back. ‘‘I need to get out of here, now!’’

‘‘Out there, you’ll be in full view, Dr. Halsey,’’ Zeke said. A thin trail of blood ran down his face from his obviously broken nose. ‘‘it’s best to keep out of sight until the fighting has died down.’’

Jenny wanted to scream with frustration. ‘‘We’re getting slaughtered out there!’’ She pointed towards the fight for emphasis, where over half of the troops had already been killed or fatally injured. ‘‘Staying is not an option, because we will all be killed, and you know what’s going to happen then.’’

‘‘We’re currently winning the battle, Dr. Halsey,’’ Zeke said patiently. ‘‘We’ve taken losses, yes, but most of the sand soldiers are already destroyed. In another ten minutes, everything will be taken care of and we can regroup and make a new plan.’’

Jenny stared at him, wondering if he honestly believed that. This was nowhere near over. She could still feel Ahmanet’s presence, pulsing in the back of her mind, at the base of her skull. She could feel the veil of power licking at her skin. It was everywhere. Seeping into Jenny’s bones, into the sand of the desert, into the motes of dust in the air.
Jenny knew she had a chance at getting back to Cairo if she was very careful and had people providing a distraction - but it was slim even if it was just her and Chris.

“You’re not winning,” Jenny eventually managed, trying to sound calm. “She’s here. She won’t let you win. All we can do now is run, and pray we survive.”

“We’re not going to run!” Mel protested. “Those are our people back there! Our friends! We can’t abandon them to die!”

“Then you’re going to die too!” Jenny shouted, finally losing her temper. “Don’t you get it?! This was all a trap! It was set up! And if we stay, we will all be dead!”

None of the soldiers, or Nick, looked any less determined to stay.

“I’m sorry, Jenny, but this is the best thing to do right now,” Nick said. “You need to come back with us so we can stash you somewhere safe until this is over.”

It was all Jenny could do to keep her jaw from dropping. This was ridiculous.

Didn’t they get it? Didn’t they understand that everyone would die if they stayed? Didn’t they understand the danger of the desert right now?

She took a small step back. Chris, only a few feet away, glanced anxiously at the soldiers, and then gave Jenny a reassuring look.

“I can distract them, if you want,” Chris said, “I should be able to manifest enough to kick up some sand as a smokescreen of sorts. Maybe I can even trip one or two of them.” He frowned. “It’ll only give you a few seconds, though.”

“I’m not going with you,” Jenny said, staring at Chris to let him know she agreed. “The only place I’m going right now is Cairo.”

“Jenny,” Nick said warningly.

“Three seconds,” Chris said, holding up three fingers. He folded one into his palm. “Two… One.” He lunged forward, his form shimmering and becoming more solid, and smashed his shoulder into Nick’s back.

Jenny didn’t wait to observe the shock on everyone’s faces as Nick toppled over with a surprised shout, apparently pushed by nothing. She turned on her heel, and ran as fast as her legs could take her.

The shouts behind her turned from shock-confusion-terror into barked orders, and Jenny tried her best to run harder, because she could hear people starting run behind her. She couldn’t hear footsteps, due to the sand, but their gear made enough noise that she didn’t need footsteps to know.

“C’mon, Jenny, faster!” Chris caught up to her. He looked tired, and his form was more translucent than Jenny had ever seen it - the sun shone through him as if he was made of smoke.

“I’m trying,” Jenny ground out, but her feet were slipping and sinking in the sand and it was hard to make any real speed like this.

“Try harder! They’re catching up.”

“They’re trained soldiers,” Jenny shot back, panting. She didn’t have the training they had. Or the
stamina. Most of Jenny’s work before this week had consisted of translating ancient records and maps to find Ahmanet’s location. Running hadn’t been involved.

“I’ll try to slow them down some more,” Chris decided, and vanished from her side. A moment later, there was another chorus of shocked screams and rough curses.

Jenny dared slow down a little and look over her shoulder - three of the soldiers were sprawled in the sand, Chris’ fading ghost flickering over to a fourth.

There was a swell of power.

An approaching presence.

Pressure, like the air before a thunderstorm.

Something coiled up Jenny’s leg, and before she could even look down, it tightened around her ankle and dragged her to the ground. She shrieked as she fell, landing hard enough on her back for the air to be pushed out of her lungs. Jenny gasped for air, eyes shut against the sand on her face, not quite able to suck in enough oxygen. More sand curled around her other leg, and her arms, pinning her to the ground.

She could hear screams, not of shock or frustration, but of plain terror and agony.

The veil of power swelled.

A flood of pain-pleasure-she’s-here washed over Jenny’s mind.

The sand under her shifted slightly. Footsteps, crunching ever so slightly. Shadow on her face, then a weight settling on her hips. A hand brushed over her face, wiping away the sand on Jenny’s lashes. She dared open her eyes.

 Burning amber stared back.

Jenny swallowed thickly as Ahmanet smiled at her.

“‘My chosen… still, after all the warnings I gave you, you attempted to run.’”

Jenny tried to shrug and half-managed. “I like being alive.”

“You will live again,” Ahmanet said. “Forever. Death is not for you.”

“I’d rather not try it out, thanks,” Jenny said, wondering where the hell this nonchalance suddenly came from. She should be shaking in her boots, but all she could feel right now was a kind of fatalistic indifference. She wasn’t afraid. It was like all the fear she’d been bottling inside her ribcage was suddenly gone, distilled into nothingness.

Ahmanet brushed one hand against Jenny’s cheek. Her skin was cool. Too cool - the kind of cool dead people were. “You do not have a choice. You will be my Queen, and for that, first you must die.”

The screams were slowly dying down. Jenny craned her head, but she couldn’t see. Ahmanet’s hand took hold of her jaw, moving Jenny’s head until Jenny was staring at the princess again.

“You look only at me. They are not worthy of your attention.”

“They’re my friends.”
‘‘Yet you were about to abandon them. Not such good friends after all.’’ Ahmanet sat back a little, reaching behind herself. Her hand came back with the dagger, gleaming under the sun, the ruby in the hilt shining bright.

Jenny’s eyes widened as the fear suddenly crashed back into her, hitting her with the force of an eighteen-wheeler. A sheen of sweat broke out on her forehead as she started to struggle against the sand restraints holding her down.

‘‘This,’’ Ahmanet said as she raised the dagger above her head, ‘‘shall hurt, my Queen. But it shall only hurt for a while.’’

Jenny sobbed in fear. ‘‘Don’t! Oh God please don’t! I don’t want to die!’’

Ahmanet’s eyes softened, but she didn’t falter. ‘‘You must.’’

The dagger came down.

The blade ripped through Jenny’s clothes and touched Jenny’s skin. For a moment, there was the tiniest bit of resistance. Then the blade broke through like Jenny’s skin was made of wet tissue paper, sinking in and scraping across her sternum. Ahmanet put more force behind it. Jenny’s eyes bulged.

For a moment, she couldn’t feel anything. Then, as Ahmanet forced the dagger through her sternum and muscles, splintering and tearing as it sank down into her heart, the pain hit.

Jenny screamed.

‘‘Hush, Jennifer,’’ Ahmanet cupped Jenny’s cheek with one hand, pressing down the dagger with the other, ‘‘it will be over soon. Surrender to it.’’

Jenny sobbed, her scream tapering off as the air in her lungs decreased, then choked on the blood creeping up her throat. She coughed weakly, each convulsion of her lungs sending new waves of pain through her system.

The restraints on her wrists fell away, and she scrabbled helplessly at her chest. Her arms felt heavy.

The agony was like nothing she’d ever felt.

Black spots were starting to grow at the edges of her vision.

Her mouth tasted of copper and salt, and she managed to push a mouthful of blood past her teeth. It ran down her cheeks and down into her hair and ears, burning hot against her skin.

Ahmanet continued to hush her softly, now caressing Jenny’s face with both hands, her expression tender and comforting.

Jenny stared into her eyes, desperately, looking for something, anything at all, to take away the pain.

‘‘Close your eyes, my Queen. It won’t be long now.’’

Jenny didn’t close her eyes. She stared, tears and blood pouring down her face, each desperate gulp of air sending agony through her chest, sobbing as much as she choked.

The black spots were growing.

Faintly, she could hear someone bellowing in rage and horror, but it wasn’t Ahmanet. She was was epitome of remorseful, murmuring sweet nothings to make Jenny’s passing easier, unshed tears in her
own, burning amber eyes.

She could feel herself starting to slump into the sand. Her strength drained out of her with every weak, struggling beat of her heart, with every pulse of blood leaking out of her mouth and chest, with every choked attempt to breathe. She couldn’t feel her legs anymore, or anything from the elbows down.

The black spots grew and grew, eating up all the light until all Jenny saw was blackness, a moonless night in broad daylight, blind and helpless like a newborn kitten.

‘‘That’s it,’’ Ahmanet cooed, her voice faint and far away, ‘‘just a little bit more.’’

Jenny exhaled, a bubbling death rattle that sent more blood dribbling down her chin. Everything was cold and dark and wrong wrong wrong – she didn’t inhale.

In the sands of Egypt, Jennifer Halsey died.
In the sands of Egypt, Jennifer Halsey died.

It felt like fire and burning tears and too little breath in her broken lungs and a dagger thrust into her heart.

Then, death.

There was darkness and despair and a cold, dangerous, almost slimy presence that raised goosebumps on Jenny’s skin, the sharpest of nails trailing across her shirt and a burning pain spreading across her abdomen.

Whispers, in a language more ancient than the Egyptian Jenny had studied, like nails on a chalkboard and breaking glass, guttural and alien in all the worst ways. It hurt Jenny’s ears, and she wanted to clap her hands over them to muffle the noise, but her arms felt too weighted to move, cotton-y in their numbness but heavy like they were filled with concrete.

Something slithered past her, cold and slimy and sending waves of terrified, disgusted shivers down Jenny’s spine. The pain in her abdomen concentrated and seeped into Jenny’s skin, burning and settling into a circle until there were individual spots of white hot agony seeping into her like drops of melted steel. Jenny cried out, trying to curl into a ball in pain and failing, the noise of her screams dissipating into the black nothingness around her the moment it left her lips.

Eventually, after some time, it could be hours or years, Jenny couldn’t tell, the pain started to fade.

The presence, curled around her, slimy cold against Jenny’s skin, tightened for a moment, and then began to slacken. The coils fell off her like smoke, and when they were gone and the thing began to recede, Jenny felt like a pressure she hadn’t realized was there had been lifted from her.

With it, the nothingness began to lessen.

Slowly, very slowly, colour and definition began to seep in. Warmth crept back into her bones and the heaviness in her limbs began to lighten until she felt like she could move again and her ribs were
flexible enough again to allow her lungs to inflate.

In the sands of Egypt, Jennifer Halsey lived.

It felt like fire and burning tears and too little breath in her broken lungs and a dagger thrust into her heart.

It tasted of sand and blood and a future broken to shards and rearranged into a horror story.

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Dying, Jenny concluded as her eyes shot open and she almost choked on the first breath of oxygen flooding back into her ruined lungs, was not as easy as Chris had told her it would be.

Or, at least, staying dead wasn’t as easy.

Her heart struggled in her chest, giving a single, strong beat and barely shivering through the next handful. She coughed helplessly, choking on the chunks of coagulated blood stuck in her throat as they dislodged and came up. She half-rolled onto her stomach, leaning on her elbows to vomit the blood out, hacking and retching as the coagulated chunks splattered onto the already blood-soaked ground, followed by a flood of more sticky red.

It was already cold.

Jenny finished puking it all up and wiped exhaustedly at her mouth, wondering how long it had been. Long enough for the blood to cool in her lungs.

Giving one last heave to ensure everything was out of her throat, Jenny slowly pushed herself to her hands and knees, and then slowly sat up. Her entire body was shaking, and she was so, so cold. She felt as weak as a newborn kitten. Not at all like a newly ascended goddess, which was what she was supposed to be now.

Panting, Jenny looked down at herself. The dagger was still sticking out of her chest, the ruby in the hilt darkened to black and filled with hairline fractures. It didn’t hurt. Jenny coaxed her hands up until she had a grip on the hilt, and slowly pulled the blade out of her chest. It came out with a wet suctioning sound, blood slopping out of the wound. Still there was no pain. Not even numbness. Just nothing. Like the blade had never been in there in the first place.

If it wasn’t for the fact that that dagger had been the instrument of her murder, and that Jenny had just pulled it out of her chest, she wouldn’t even have noticed the wound.

She dropped the dagger into the sand and watched, distantly, as it crumbled into dust, no longer needing to exist now that its purpose had been fulfilled.

For a few, long seconds, Jenny stared at the dusting of black left on the golden desert sands, feeling oddly numb. She absently rubbed at her chest. The wound was much smaller already. She could feel it closing under her fingers, skin knitting together seamlessly, keeping the blood sealed inside her body.

There was an itch on her abdomen. Jenny rubbed at it, remembering the white hot agony that had centered there, slowly frowning when she felt miniscule indentations in her skin under her ruined blouse. She hitched it up a little. Imprinted on her skin were markings, the same kind of glyphs Ahmanet had on her face and the rest of her body, in a spiral shape right on top of where her womb was.
Jenny didn’t have to guess what they were for; she already knew. This was her own pact with Set, a promise she hadn’t made, had never wanted to make, to bear him into this world. Her choice, if she’d ever had one, had been taken from her.

Letting her blouse drop down to cover her skin, Jenny finally lifted her head and looked around.

The sand around her, in a circle of at least twenty feet, was blown aside in a wave pattern, as if Jenny had emanated gusts of power during her death and rebirth, strong enough to actually physically manifest and move the sand.

Outside the circle were corpses.

Jenny recognized Peter and Mel and some of the other Prodigium troops. A couple of them were too mangled to be recognized beyond their uniform. Nick was pinned under a sand soldier turned to solid stone - he was groaning lowly in pain, one of his legs twitching; hurt, unable to move or wriggle loose, but alive.

Henry was there, too, to Jenny’s surprise - last she’d seen of him, he’d been fighting near the rest of the troops (who were silent enough to make Jenny assume they were all killed as well). He was still in the sand, but didn’t look dead. More like he’d been knocked unconscious by the stone statue keeping him pinned down.

“**My Queen.**”

Jenny froze at the familiar voice. Ahmanet. She was still here.

“**You look… divine,**” Ahmanet continued.

Jenny turned her head to look at the princess. Her eyes widened despite herself.

“**You look human,**” Jenny responded after a moment of silent shock. And Ahmanet did. She was no longer dead - or at least didn’t look at it. Her hair was once again thick and shiny, the clammy, corpse-like pallor of her skin back to a warm, healthy brown, free of arcane markings. She looked just like she’d done when she’d been human. Whole, and healthy, and undeniably alive.

“**The power inherent to your ascension flowed through me also,**” Ahmanet explained as she slinked closer, “**as I was the one to perform the ritual. It was enough to restore me to as I once was.**”

“**You’re beautiful,**” Jenny said before she could stop herself.

“**Thank you.**” Ahmanet sounded pleased. “**As are you, my Queen. Red is very much your colour.**”

Jenny looked back down at herself. Her entire front was soaked in drying blood. She stared for a moment, feeling oddly okay with being covered in blood, and then looked back up at Ahmanet, squarely meeting the princess’ eyes for the first time since her resurrection. They had changed back from the burning amber Jenny was used to, to the near-black Ahmanet’s eyes had always been in Jenny’s dreams and visions - even the pupula duplex was gone.

Something deep inside of Jenny seemed to click into place.

The link, which had mostly come from Ahmanet’s side, suddenly flared to life, and Jenny gasped at the intensity of the bond there. It was as if her entire being had woken up and bound her, irrevocably, to the woman before her.

Ahmanet stepped closer, an inherent grace in her movements that hadn’t quite been there when her
heart had been motionless, and held out her hand. "Stand, Jennifer. A Queen should only bow before her King in private."

Without thinking about it, Jenny took Ahmanet’s hand and let herself be pulled to her feet. She swayed slightly, knees shaking like jelly. Her legs felt incredibly weak, like she’d never used them before. Ahmanet’s hand on her elbow, grip tight but somehow gentle, kept her from stumbling and falling back down.

"Careful, Jennifer," Ahmanet said, "it may take a few minutes to regain your balance. Ascension is always a harrowing process."

"You went through this too?"

"Yes. I am as human as you are," Ahmanet agreed.

"Which is to say, not at all," Jenny said, wondering how and why Ahmanet was suddenly acting so familiar and normal. She took a few deep breaths, intimately aware of how her lungs inflated and deflated, exactly like they should. Her heartbeat was slowly getting on track too, almost back to its normal, strong rhythm. "I think I can stand on my own now."

"Of course," Ahmanet said, but didn’t let go of her elbow. "You don’t mind, do you?"

To her own surprise, Jenny didn’t. "No, I don’t mind."

Ahmanet looked pleased. "Good."

Jenny swallowed and stared down at her hands. They were bloody. She faintly remembered scrabbling at her own chest, desperate to get the dagger out of her heart, and failing. "Why do I feel so weak?"

"As I said, ascension is a harrowing process, Jennifer," Ahmanet said. "It takes a lot of energy. And dying leaves you weak for a while. It will be a few days before your strength returns."

Jenny thought of Chris, whose ghost she couldn’t see anymore (he was probably recovering from the effort it’d taken to distract Nick and the others), and asked, "and the powers you talked about?"

"Life and death," Ahmanet breathed, looking faintly hungry, "the power to give and take both at a whim. Those are dangerous things, Jennifer. And powerful. Very powerful. They, like your strength, will take time to come to you."

"How long?" If she was really in this situation, Jenny figured she might as well get the powers she’d been promised. That, at least, could work to her advantage, when nothing else could.

"I do not know." There was an expression of faint annoyance on Ahmanet’s face at that. She obviously didn’t like not knowing that.

Jenny nibbled on her lower lip, wincing when she tasted the blood left on her lips. "How long did it take with you? Before you could control the desert?"

"Set accelerated the process. It took mere minutes before I could move the dunes, only hours before I could sweep up sandstorms."

"Must be nice to be at full strength almost immediately," Jenny mused, very aware of the way her hands were shaking and, despite the fact she figured her legs would support her, the jelly-like consistency of her knees. She felt like she’d just had a week-long flu and hadn’t been eating and
sleeping properly while at it.

“*It was necessary. Back then, people were aware of what Set could do. They knew what his acolytes looked like.*” Ahmanet shrugged, and Jenny still wasn’t used to that, though it did look less alien on a living, breathing version of the princess. “*If he had not accelerated the process, my situation would have been much worse.*”

Jenny wondered what the hell could be worse than getting poisoned and locked in a box in a pool of mercury for 5000 years, but decided it was probably safer not to ask. Instead, her eyes flickered over to Nick and Henry. Nick had stopped groaning, and Jenny figured that that was probably a bad sign.

Ahmanet followed her gaze. “*Those are the two you’re fond of, correct?*”

Jenny nodded. “*Henry is like a father. He’s a good man.*”

“*And the other one? Nick Morton?*”

“A lying bastard whom I can’t help but like.” Jenny responded wryly. She wasn’t sure how else to describe her feelings for Nick. He was fucking annoying - but he’d also been at her side through everything without faltering. It was hard not to like him after all the shit he’d gone through to keep her safe and alive.

“*He is the one who dishonoured you,*” Ahmanet spat hatefully. “*The one who tried to usurp your position as my Chosen.*”

“She was trying to protect me,” Jenny argued.

Ahmanet didn’t look convinced. “*I promised you I would kill him. And the one who imprisoned me and conspired to embalm me with mercury as well.*”

Jenny swallowed, remembering that, yes, Ahmanet had said that. Back, when she’d still been imprisoned at Prodigium. “*I’d rather you didn’t. I like them.*” Jenny glanced at Henry, unconscious in the sand. “*I don’t want to lose either of them.*”

“You already have.” Ahmanet said.

Jenny stared at her. She wasn’t entirely sure what the princess was getting at.

“You’re ascended now, Jennifer. You’re my Queen. No longer human. Do you think they will accept you as you are now?”

“Why wouldn’t they? They’re my friends,” Jenny said, but a flicker of doubt gnawed at her stomach.

She knew how harsh Henry could get when it came to supernatural threats. A couple of hours ago, he was working to free her from her curse - but now that the ritual was completed, Jenny honestly wasn’t sure how he’d react to her. If he’d still see her as a surrogate daughter, or as a threat.

And Nick… Nick hated Ahmanet and everything she stood for. It wasn’t that much of a stretch to think that hatred would extend to Jenny too, now that she was ascended. Now that she was like Ahmanet.

And Jenny had attempted to abandon them before she’d died...

On the other hand, though… Henry and Nick had done nothing but help and support Jenny, even after Henry had found out Jenny was the Chosen instead of Nick. Surely, after all the pain and the
terror and the blood they’d suffered together… after all of that, surely they would still be there for her. They wouldn’t abandon her now…

“They are human,” Ahmanet corrected. “And humans do not mix with the divine.”

“That doesn’t mean they have to die.”

“It does not,” Ahmanet allowed, “but the fact that they dishonoured you, and imprisoned me, amongst other crimes, does.”

Jenny took a step back, Ahmanet’s hand slipping off her elbow. She took another step, putting herself squarely between the princess and her boys. The link flared, and Jenny suddenly felt the intense urge to step aside and let Ahmanet do what she wanted. She managed, somehow, to resist, though it made her knees tremble.

“I won’t let you kill them.”

Ahmanet visibly paused, confused.

The urgency in the back of Jenny’s mind increased. It was strong, way stronger than it had been before Jenny’s ascension had linked her even closer to Ahmanet.

Jenny still didn’t step aside. “They’re my friends. And I want them to live.”

“You would stand against your King for them?”

Jenny cringed, both at the words and at the warning tone in the question. But there was curiosity too. Like Ahmanet couldn’t understand why Jenny would defend Nick and Henry. Then again, she’d been locked in a box for the past five millennia - Jenny was pretty sure it’d been about that long, or even longer, since she’d had friends. Or anyone, really.

“I’m not standing against you. I’m just trying to keep my friends alive.”

“They,” Ahmanet said, words measured but with a dark, dangerous undertone of anger in her voice, “are not your friends. They are the enemy. And when they realize what you are, the power you possess, they will turn on you and find a way to kill you like they are trying to do to me.”

Jenny shook her head, hating the way her voice trembled. “They won’t. I trust them.”

“You’re thinking like a human.” Ahmanet took a slow, measured step forward, eyes fixed on Jenny’s intently. “Step aside, Jennifer.”

Nervousness welling up like bile, Jenny took a shaky step back. Her shoulders were hunched, she felt sick with apprehension, everything in her was screaming to obey - but she managed to stand her ground. “No.”

Ahmanet took another step forward.

Jenny stumbled back.

“You are still weak, Jennifer. You do not have the strength to stop me.”

That was something Jenny hadn’t considered. It was a good point, too. Jenny could barely stand on her own right now. There was absolutely nothing she could do if Ahmanet decided to just walk right past her and kill Henry and Nick anyway.
“I’ll…” Jenny scrambled for something to say, “I’ll just resurrect them when I have my powers!”

“Impossible if you do not have their bodies. And I plan to bury them forever once I have taken their lives.” Ahmanet took a third step. She was almost within arm’s reach again.

“I’ll find their bodies!” Jenny argued weakly.

Ahmanet gave her a smile that bordered on pity. There was some condescension to it too. “You do not control the deserts, Jennifer. You will never find them if I do not wish you to.”

Jenny felt helpless tears begin to burn behind her eyes. She tried, frantically, to find a reason for Ahmanet to not kill the only friends she had left at this point. She was pretty sure all her guards were dead, or so maimed they were about to be dead. They’d not exactly been friends, but Jenny knew that, given more time, they would have been. With them gone, all Jenny had really left were Henry and Nick. She needed them. She couldn’t let Ahmanet kill them.

But she didn’t have the strength to stop her.

Still, she needed to at least try.

“If you kill them,” Jenny said, wishing to whatever god was out there other than Set that this would work because she honestly didn’t know what else to do, “I will never forgive you for it.”

To her complete and utter surprise, Ahmanet paused. Dark eyes met her own, and Ahmanet scrutinized her intensely.

“You care for them enough to defy me?”

“Yes.”

“Enough, even, to deny me your love?”

“Yes,” Jenny repeated, wondering where Ahmanet had gotten the idea that Jenny loved her. Because she didn’t. Obviously. Jenny didn’t care for Ahmanet at all. And the bond hadn’t - wouldn’t - change that.

Ahmanet’s expression was unreadable, dark eyes flickering between Jenny and her boys repeatedly.

Jenny held her breath, feeling her newly restarted heart pound inside her chest painfully. Her lungs burned. She chalked it up to the fact that they’d been dead not too long ago and probably needed some time to work properly again.

Finally, Ahmanet straightened up from the faintly predatory posture she’d adopted. “Very well, Jennifer. If this is what you wish, so be it.”

Jenny actually stumbled in surprise and relief, falling down onto her butt and staring up at Ahmanet in amazement. “Really?”

“I will give them the chance to prove themselves, because it is you who is asking, but do not see this as a mercy.” Ahmanet looked down on her, towering over Jenny like the ruler she had been meant to be millennia ago. “It is not. When they see you, and realize what you have become, they will turn on you. Perhaps immediately. Or perhaps they will wait, and plot, and then betray you when your trust in them is greatest.” The princess looked towards the desert briefly, and then focussed on Jenny again. “Either way, you will be shunned. Feared. Despised. And when you realize that, I will be waiting for you. And then I will kill them. And you will approve, because you will know that I speak
Jenny realized her mouth was hanging open, and quickly closed it. She shook her head slightly. "I won’t let you kill them."

"Yes, you will. Not now, but soon." Ahmanet bent down and cupped Jenny’s bloodied cheek, thumb brushing across Jenny’s cheekbone. "And when you do, I will be there to help you mourn. After all, you are my Queen."

Jenny said nothing. There really wasn’t a lot she could say to that. Ahmanet straightened.

"I must go now, Jennifer. There are still things I must do to claim my birthright.‘’ She smiled a little. "When you come to me, my palace will be recovered from the desert sands. I will fulfill my promise then, and gift it to you as your home."

‘’...Right,’’ Jenny said, still not sure how to react.

She watched silently as Ahmanet gave her one last, faintly longing look before beginning to walk away. As she did, the sands of the desert were swept up in a small cyclone around her, and when they died down, Ahmanet was nowhere to be seen.

From behind Jenny, there was the sound of sand crumbling, and she knew without looking that the sand soldiers keeping Henry and Nick trapped had disintegrated.

Jenny didn’t get up to go check on them. She probably should, but she couldn’t find it in herself. Instead, she took her eyes off the spot Ahmanet had disappeared, and looked at the small scattering of rough black grains that were left over from the dagger.

It took a few seconds, and then it all sank in.

She’d died.

She’d been murdered, and then she’d been resurrected - and she was pretty sure she’d met Set in between.

Her life had been taken and replaced with a mockery. Her future, gone like it had never even mattered.

Utterly overwhelmed with a mixture of horror, grief, fear and a dozen other emotions, Jenny sat in the sand and did the only thing she could think of right now.

She cried.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Jenny faces Henry and Nick, and has a talk with Chris.

Chapter Notes

People, I have managed to get the chapter out on time! Which, honestly, I hadn't expected. This morning I still had almost 2000 words to go, but somehow I've managed. I honestly hadn't paid that much attention to writing this week, due to the Carmilla Movie being released. This resulted in me being too fidgety and excited to write, and then me watching the movie on repeat and thus not writing as well. Nevertheless I have prevailed, and I present to you: Chapter Seventeen.

As always, enjoy, and let me know what you think!

It was the sound of Henry groaning that snapped Jenny from her misery.

Hiccuping slightly, she rubbed at her face, wincing at the feel of her tears moistening the blood smeared across her face, turning it into a thick, grainy paste. The coppery smell of it made her feel a little sick.

Wiping her hands on her ruined blouse the best she could, Jenny slowly got to her feet. She still felt a little wobbly. She wished that the strength she'd been promised would kick in already, if only so she wouldn't be stumbling around like a sailor who'd spent too much time out at sea and wasn't used to dry, solid land anymore. Hell, she'd even be happy if she got to normal, human strength. The idea of stumbling around like she was drunk or concussed didn't appeal to Jenny at all.

Once she felt steady enough to walk, Jenny carefully made her way over to Henry, kneeling at his side. ''Henry?''

He gave another groan, sounding pained as he opened his eyes, and then immediately shut them again against the light of the sun. ''Jennifer?''

''Yes,'' Jenny said, swallowing against the lump in her throat, ''it's me, Henry.''

His eyes snapped open. Squinting against the sunlight, he stared at her, a mixture of relief, joy and resigned horror on his face. ''You're alive.''

''Something like that,'' Jenny agreed.

Henry swallowed. ''The ritual worked.''

''It did.''

''Then you're...'' he trailed off, looking pained.
"Like Ahmanet. Yes."

Jenny felt her eyes water again and wiped at them roughly. "I woke up only ten minutes or so ago."

Henry grunted as he lifted himself onto his elbows, and then laboriously sat up fully. Jenny made sure to stay at a small distance, suddenly hesitant to get too close.

"And Ahmanet?"

"She left."

Jenny hesitated for a moment, and then added, "she wanted to kill you."

"I would imagine so, yes."

"Why didn't she?"

"I stopped her. I didn't want you to die. You're my friend,

she said, looking at Henry pleadingly, acutely aware of the naked, watery hope on her face "right?"

Henry looked her straight in the eye and said, full of conviction, "this doesn't change anything, Jennifer. I told you you're like a daughter to me, and the fact that Ahmanet got to you doesn't change that.

He reached out and squeezed her hand. "And the fact that you stopped her from killing us tells me you're still you."

Jenny's eyes watered. She grasped Henry's hand between her own, squeezing her eyes shut as she tried to stop her shoulders from shaking with the sobs of relief building in her throat. It was like the weight of the world had fallen off her shoulders. Henry, at least, didn't hate her. He didn't look at her as if she were a monster fit only to be killed.

"Hush, Jennifer," Henry scooted over and wrapped an arm around Jenny, apparently not caring about the blood she was covered in, "we're going to fix this. We're going to Philae like planned, and we'll see if the priests of Osiris can do something to undo all this."

Jenny sobbed, burying her face in her hands, "I found script on my abdomen. I think Set was there, when I died. He put it there."

"A pact?"

"...Yes."

"Can you read it?"

"No. It's older than Egyptian. Not from human origins." Jenny wiped at her face, trying to ignore the way blood smeared across her skin. "It's the scriptures Ahmanet had on her skin."

Henry looked up sharply. "Had?"

"My ascension," she said hesitantly, "it involved enough power that Ahmanet, as my murderer, was restored to her former human state. The writing she had on her face disappeared as well."

"She's human? Fully?"

"Unless corpses have a heartbeat too, yes." Jenny had no doubt that Ahmanet had been fully restored to her former glory. The health and vitality had practically radiated off her in waves. There was nothing corpse-like about her anymore.

Henry looked pleased. "That's good. If she's human, she's vulnerable."

Jenny felt her stomach lurch at the implications of that. The idea of Ahmanet vulnerable to attack made her feel nauseous with worry. It made her want to go and make sure the princess was
protected. And that made Jenny want to hit herself, because she wasn’t supposed to give a damn about Ahmanet’s safety. They were talking about the woman who had murdered Jenny, not a cute barista at a coffee shop somewhere.

Jenny kind of wished they were talking about a cute barista at a coffee shop somewhere. Her life would be a lot easier if asking out a cute girl was all she had to worry about.

“Yeah,” Jenny said hollowly to Henry, feeling her stomach churn, “that’s good.”

Henry changed the subject, “have you checked on Mr. Morton yet?”

“No, not yet,” Jenny said. “I haven’t had the chance yet.”

“Understandable, considering what you’ve just gone through,” Henry responded, and Jenny tried not to tear up in combined horror and remembered fear at the mention of her dying and being resurrected. It was an experience she would like to forget as soon as possible.

“We better go check on Mr. Morton, then,” Henry said, “and the others.”

“I don’t think anyone else made it,” Jenny said softly. “I think you and Nick are the only ones Ahmanet left alive.”

Henry’s shoulders drooped. “Are you sure?”

“Pretty sure.”

“Then we lost over one-hundred men and women today. Good men and women.” Henry sighed, running his hands through his hair, “such a waste.”

“I’m sorry, Henry,” Jenny said.

“It’s not your fault,” Henry waved her off.

Jenny disagreed - if it weren’t for her freeing Ahmanet, all of this wouldn’t have happened - but kept her mouth shut. She didn’t think it would help the situation any if she argued, and it would also disrespect the people who’d died here today. Best to just shut up and keep her opinion to herself on this.

Watching Henry slowly get to his feet, Jenny quickly followed. She was grateful to find her legs were a little more steady than they’d been a couple of minutes ago. At least steady enough that she didn’t have to concentrate on staying upright. Henry was wobbly, though, so Jenny made sure to grasp his elbow and keep him from falling over. He’d probably gotten clocked in the head or something, and Jenny knew how disorienting it could be to be knocked unconscious.

“Thank you, Jennifer,” Henry steadied himself.

“No problem,” Jenny responded, letting go of Henry’s elbow. She quickly made her way over to Nick. He was still out, sprawled across the ground. There was a cut on his face, blood splatters across his shirt, and his right arm was bent at an odd angle just above the wrist.

Henry crouched down and pressed two fingers into the side of Nick’s throat. “His heartbeat is strong.”

“Just unconscious, then,” Jenny said, glancing over her shoulder in the direction of Cairo. “We should probably get him out of here. Before the local authorities arrive.”
“Agreed,” Henry nodded.

“I can go check if any of the Jeeps survived,” Jenny suggested.

“Do that. And could you see if you can find a first aid kit? It’s probably best if we at least bandage Mr. Morton’s wrist until we can get access to better medical supplies.”

Jenny nodded in understanding and jogged off towards the Jeeps to go check them. The first couple were total losses, the engines dented and broken by the sand soldiers or the wheels ripped off completely, but the sixth Jeep looked to be in fairly good shape. It was severely dented at the right back seat, but when Jenny popped the hood the engine didn’t seem damaged, so she figured this one might still work.

Not that she honestly knew all that much about cars, but she’d seen a couple of engines before and knew what they were generally supposed to look like. Since nothing seemed overly damaged or broken…

Jenny climbed into the driver’s seat and found the key was still in the contact. Whoever had been behind the wheel had obviously not taken the time to take the key out. Which was totally understandable, and, right now, very much appreciated.

Sending a little prayer to whatever god was listening (not Set, hopefully), Jenny tried to start up the car.

It sputtered for a moment, stopped, and then gave a dull rumble before doing what it was supposed to. Jenny gave a small shout of joy, and then quickly clambered out of the car again and went around it to open the trunk. Every Jeep should have a first aid kit, so this one had to have one too.

It didn’t take her long to find the red case. She quickly carried it back over to Henry and Nick.

“I’ve got the first aid kit, Henry.”

“Good, can you hand me some bandages?”

Jenny zipped the kit open and rummaged through it, taking out a roll of bandages. “I’ve got a pair of scissors here, too, maybe you can use those as makeshift splint or something.”

“Good idea, Jennifer,” Henry agreed, taking the scissors from her. “I’m going to have to set his wrist first.”

Looking at Nick’s wrist, Jenny had to agree with that. It wasn’t quite a compound fracture as the bone hadn’t gone through the skin, but the odd bump was enough to show that the bone definitely wasn’t where it was supposed to be either. It looked painful.

Jenny wondered, morbidly, if she could still feel physical pain. The dagger hadn’t hurt after she’d been revived. She hadn’t even felt the wound anymore. Would she feel a broken bone? Or would she just not notice it until she went to do something and actually saw it was broken?

Would she notice if someone fatally injured her? If there was another dagger thrust into her chest until it speared her heart?

If someone tried to put a bullet in her?

Jenny didn’t know, and that made her nervous.
She watched, nibbling on her lip anxiously, as Henry carefully put Nick’s bones back into place - apparently, that medical doctorate he had really came in handy.

“‘The scissors, please, Jennifer,’” Henry held out his hand.

Jenny quickly gave him the scissors, which Henry put against the back of Nick’s wrist so they extended up the back of his lower arm. They were held in place by the roll of bandages, wound around Nick’s arm from the palm of his hand to his elbow.

“‘We’re going to have to find a hospital to get a proper cast applies,’” Henry said, “‘but this should at least prevent more damage until then.’”

“I found a working car,” Jenny said, “‘so we can get back to Cairo.’”

“‘Then we should leave now,’” Henry stood up, and then lifted Nick into his arms, grunting a little at the weight.

Jenny rushed ahead to open the car door to the backseat, then climbed into the driver’s seat. She figured that, since Henry had a medical doctorate, he should probably keep an eye on Nick while Jenny drove them back to Cairo and the nearest hospital. And a clothes shop. Because Jenny needed new clothes. Again.

The drive to Cairo was mostly silent. Jenny was very much grateful that the local authorities, or anyone else really, had yet to notice the hundred+ corpses and caravan of destroyed cars. She wasn’t sure how anyone could miss it really, because it was quite obvious a sight, but then again, there had been a suspicious lack of people on the way back to the airstrip.

Maybe Henry had rented it out for the day or something. He did like to work without the outside world butting in and starting about cruelty and human rights and such.

Still frowning suspiciously, Jenny pulled up the Jeep at the first hospital she could find and turned to look at Henry. “‘I should probably stay here. Because I’m covered in blood and everything.’”

“‘Good thinking, Jennifer,’” Henry agreed, “‘it would raise too much suspicion to have you walking in. And we also do not know what kind of strange results would come up now that you are... ’”

“A literal goddess?” Jenny suggested dryly.

“‘Quite,’” Henry agreed.

“I’ll park the car a bit out of sight and wait there,’” Jenny said decisively.

Henry nodded and stepped out of the passenger’s seat, opening the back seat to drag Nick out. He was still unconscious, but visibly less deeply than he’d been a few minutes ago. He’d probably be waking up soon, in the next half hour or so.

Jenny waited until Henry had carried Nick into the hospital before she drove a little out of the way, to a half-concealed corner of the parking lot. She left the engine on, fiddling with the radio until she found a station that played what seemed to be Egyptian soft-rock. It wasn’t her preferred kind of music, she liked jazz and things like that better, but it was way better than modern pop, so it would have to do.

Letting her head drop back against the headrest, Jenny let out a long, drawn-out sigh. She was exhausted. Apparently dying did that to people. Maybe she should take a little nap…
“Hey, Jenny,”

Jenny’s eyes shot open and she turned to look at the passenger’s seat. “Chris, you’re back!”

“Yeah, sorry about that. Distracting them took more out of me than I’d expected,” he said. He looked as tired as he sounded, a drawn, haggard look to him that made him look even worse than he already did. His words were a little slurred with exhaustion.

“Are you going to be okay?”

“I should be fine. It just takes a little while to get back up to scratch,” he assured her. His eyes flitted over her face and blouse, taking in the blood and her rumpled appearance. “She got to you, didn’t she?”

Jenny grimaced at the reminder. “Yeah.”

“I’m sorry,” Chris said.

“It’s not your fault,” Jenny responded sadly.

Chris winced, then said, “still, though. I’m sorry you died.”

“And by the way, it wasn’t nearly as easy as you told me it would be,” Jenny added.

“Well, how was I supposed to know that? I was poisoned by a cursed spider, not stabbed. I just fell asleep at some point and woke up like this.”

“I did get stabbed to death. It’s painful. And messy.” Jenny felt her eyes water and blinked furiously to stop the tears. “I could feel my damn heart stopping, Chris. I could feel my lungs, drowning me in my own blood.”

“Jenny…” Chris reached out to grab her hand. His touch was barely there, as faint as his exhausted form was in the sunlight.

Jenny took a few deeps breaths. “It’s fine, Chris.”

“I went through it too, you know,” Chris said, “it’s a completely normal reaction.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it,” Jenny retorted weakly.

Chris nodded, and changed the subject. “So, what are we listening to?”

“Some kind of soft-rock,” Jenny said, “but Egyptian.”

“I think I like it better in English.”

“Same here. Not much else on, though.”

“Shouldn’t Al Jazeera broadcast here too? They have radio broadcasts too.”

Jenny shrugged. “Haven’t come across it yet.”

“Do you mind if I…” Chris gestured at the radio,

“Go ahead.” Jenny didn’t really care what they were listening to, to be honest. It wasn’t like she was actually paying attention to the radio. If Chris preferred Al Jazeera, Jenny wasn’t going to stop
him from listening to it.

They sat in silence for a while while Chris fiddled with the radio. Jenny absentmindedly rubbed at her sternum, where the blade had pierced her. The skin there was perfectly smooth. Jenny couldn’t feel a scar, or even a faint indentation where her skin had split and separated under the tip of the blade. It was like the wound had never existed.

Chris glanced at Jenny’s hand. “Does it hurt?”

“No. It hasn’t since I woke up.”

Chris frowned. “And the wound?”

“Gone. It closed up by itself when I pulled out the dagger,” Jenny said. “There’s not even a mark left behind.”

“Strange,” Chris said, rubbing at the side of his neck, “mine’s still there. Poison and all. And we both died.”

“I woke back up, though,” Jenny responded, “maybe that’s why mine disappeared. The magic that resurrected me might’ve taken care of it.”

Chris nodded thoughtfully. “Sounds reasonable. And maybe regeneration is just a trait inherent to people like you. Didn’t Ahmanet heal herself after Henry captured her near the church?”

Jenny blinked. “You were there?”

“Yeah. But I wasn’t yet capable of remaining visible all that long back then. Talking to you at the bar took most of my energy.” He shrugged. “It took me a while to get back up to scratch.”

“Shouldn’t you still be drained from distracting everyone though?”

“I’m learning to deal with it,” Chris gave another shrug. “Rationing my energy and stuff. It’s not that hard, I just needed to figure it out.”

“Good for you,” Jenny said.

“So…” Chris said, returning to fiddling with the radio faux-nonchalantly, “do you know when your powers will kick in?”

“Honestly? Not a clue. Ahmanet said it might take a while.”

“When you get them, you’ll help me move on, right?”

“I promised, didn’t I?” Jenny retorted. “Of course I will.”

“Good, good,” Chris said, trying to sound nonchalant and failing at it.

“I just have to, you know, get my powers, and then figure out how they work.”

Chris nodded. “I’ll make sure to drop by regularly until then.”

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “You’re not staying?”

“No, I figure that, since I’m going to be moving on soon, I should go and see some things I’ve always wanted to see. Y’know, the Coliseum, Niagara Falls, Machu Picchu. Stuff like that.”
"Sounds good," Jenny said appreciatively.

"That's what I thought," Chris agreed. He glanced at the small clock in the dashboard of the Jeep. "I should probably get going soon. Before Henry gets back and sees you talking to thin air."

"Well, he probably already thinks death screwed with my mind, so…" Jenny shrugged.

Chris chuckled. "He's probably right, though."

"True," Jenny had to agree. Death, she already knew, had not exactly left her as she had been. It felt like a part of her had broken off and crumbled.

Chris sighed and then perked up, patting his hands on his legs. "Well, I gotta go. I've got a date with the Great Pyramid of Giza. See you in a few days alright, Jenny?"

"Alright, see you then," Jenny responded.

Chris smiled at her, and then, in a blink, was gone.

Jenny blinked for a moment, shook her head, and started fiddling with the radio again. Whatever station Chris had chosen was definitely not her style. Once she'd found the soft-rock station again, Jenny leaned over to the passenger's seat to open the glove box, pleased to see a half-empty bottle of water and a pack of paper tissues. She grabbed them both, and spent a few minutes carefully cleaning the blood off her face, neck and hands. Her blouse was a lost cause, but there was enough water to carefully wet the parts of her hair that were clumped with blood and then wipe the blood out with more tissues.

Jenny was attempting to blot the blood out of her blouse, and failing miserably, when she caught a glimpse of Henry in the rearview mirror. He looked a little annoyed.

"Jennifer," he said, opening the passenger's seat door so he could talk to her, "we're going to have to stay for a few more hours."

"What for?"

"Mr. Morton's wrist needs to be put in a cast, but they want to do some x-rays beforehand to ensure no additional damage is done to the bone or the surrounding tissue. He's woken up, though, and there are no signs of a concussion."

"Alright," Jenny said.

"I got you this at the gift shop," Henry said, handing over a shirt. "So you can join Mr. Morton and myself inside."

Jenny unfolded the shirt and found herself looking at a shirt one would normally find at a tourist trap, the exclamation 'I ♥ Cairo' written on it in large letters.

"I'll give you some privacy," Henry said.

Jenny sighed and took off the remains of her ruined blouse. At least the shirt was clean. That alone made it better than her blood-covered blouse. She pulled it over her head quickly and adjusted it so it fit comfortably. It was a size larger than she needed, which Jenny didn’t mind at all - she’d rather have a too large shirt than a too small one.

She double-checked to make sure she hadn’t missed any spots of blood on her face and neck, and
then took the key to the car from the ignition, following Henry inside the hospital.

Nick had, apparently, already been assigned a bed at the Emergency Room. He was sitting upright, Jenny could see, his wrist cradled in his lap with a more functional splint to keep the bone straight and in place until a proper cast could be applied. The cut on his face had already been treated. The bandage on it covered most of his cheek, but couldn’t completely hide the bruising creeping out from under the edges.

Jenny paused at the edge of the curtains that separated Nick’s cubicle from the rest of the ER. He hadn’t noticed her yet.

“Hey, Nick,” she said cautiously, “how are you feeling?”

Nick looked up. “Hey, Jenny.”

Jenny winced at his tone. It was flat and cautious and, dare she say it, distrustful. She shifted her weight from foot to foot anxiously.

“I’m feeling okay,” Nick continued flatly, “just, you know, a headache. And a broken wrist.”

“Sorry about that,” Jenny said.

“You didn’t break it,” Nick said dismissively.

Jenny wrung her hands. This was awkward.

Henry was glancing between them, standing next to Jenny, looking less than pleased at how things were going.

“So…” Nick drew out the word, looking at her almost scathingly. Accusation was written all over his face. “Had a nice talk with Ahmanet while I was lying around groaning in pain?”
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Finally, the gang reaches their destination; Philae!

Chapter Notes

So... the next chapter's up. Chapter 19 next week could be a little late, though - I have a couple of big exams coming up at school, so I don't really have the time to write in between studying, crying and despairing over my future. Also, I am seriously debating selling my soul to the patron god of tax law for a passing grade, so I might be a bit busy coming week.

I'm going to try my best to get chapter 19 out, but I can't promise anything.

As always, enjoy the chapter, and let me know your thoughts!

‘’What?’’ Jenny asked, lowering her hands. She was a little taken off-guard. Nick had been aware enough to have seen her talk to Ahmanet?

‘’You heard me,’’ Nick said scornfully. ‘’You and the undead bitch looked pretty chummy back there.’’

Jenny blinked in shock. She hadn’t really expected Nick to react to her like this, even after Ahmanet’s warnings - it was jarring, and she didn’t like it at all. ‘’We weren’t acting chummy, Nick. I had questions, she answered them. That’s all.’’

‘’Didn’t look like it. You looked pretty comfortable with her wrapped around you.’’

Henry’s eyes narrowed. ‘’Mr. Morton, control yourself. Remember that Jennifer saved your life today. If it weren’t for her, Ahmanet would have killed us both.’’

Nick scoffed. ‘’Yeah, right. They’ve probably teamed up and are keeping us alive for entertainment or something.’’

Jenny clenched her jaw, feeling tears burn behind her eyes. She stubbornly blinked them back. ‘’Is that what you think, Nick? That I’d just turn on you and Henry because I’m ascended?’’

‘’Well, you’re like her now, aren’t you? You’ve become a monster like her. Why wouldn’t you?’’ Nick looked away. ‘’Besides, she’s been in your head since the beginning. She’s had plenty of time to induct you into her little cult of murderers.’’

Fists clenching so hard her knuckles turned white, Jenny turned to look at Henry. She wasn’t going to deal with this. More importantly, she wasn’t going to stand here and let Nick insult her. She had better uses for her time. ‘’I’ll go find a place to get some coffee or something, Henry. Let me know when we’re ready to leave.’’ She glared at Nick, both angry and hurt at how he was acting. ‘’And
don’t bother bringing him. I don’t want to see him for a while.’’

If Nick was going to act like an ass, she wasn’t going to bother. It hurt, because she’d come to rely upon him and consider him a friend, but Jenny had standards. And she’d learned early on to cut toxic people from her life. She was going to leave for a bit, and hope Nick cooled off and came to his senses. But if he didn’t, Jenny was going to have to make a tough decision. Because after all the crap she’d been through, she didn’t need this on top of that.

If Nick was willing to turn his back on her this easily, he obviously wasn’t worth the trouble in the first place.

Which was exactly what Jenny had thought when she’d first met Nick and he’d stolen the map to Ahmanet’s tomb from her. Apparently first impressions rang true.

‘’Have you still got your phone?’’ Henry asked.

Jenny patted at her pocket and found to her surprise that, yes, she did still have her phone. She took it out and checked if it worked, which it did. ‘’Yeah.’’

‘’I’ll call you when we’re done here, then.’’

‘’Alright,’’ Jenny agreed. She shot Nick another glare, briefly touched Henry’s shoulder, and wasted no time getting the hell out of there.

It didn’t take her long to find a coffee place.

It was modern, more Starbucks-like than traditionally Middle Eastern, which was fine with Jenny. She found a couple of crumpled Egyptian Pound notes in her pocket and ordered herself a latte and a small pastry before finding a table.

She slowly sipped her coffee, barely noticing the heat of the drink. It was hot enough that it should have burned her lips and tongue. She didn’t feel anything of the like though. It didn’t even feel like it was too hot.

Jenny stared into her coffee and wondered if she really was a monster now.

She didn’t feel like a monster. She didn’t feel all that different than from when she was human at all. Maybe she would when her powers kicked in. But what she was, her new nature, didn’t automatically make her evil, did it? Her morality was defined by her choices, and her actions, and so far, she hadn’t done anything that could be construed as evil.

Not as far as she was aware, anyway.

She’d argued Ahmanet out of killing Henry and Nick. She’d helped where she could. She hadn’t slapped Nick no matter how much she wanted to. And sure, trying to abandon the troops before she’d been killed was a shitty thing to do, but it wasn’t evil - it was the result of fear and survival instinct, not the result of wanting to hurt or kill people.

No.

She wasn’t evil.

Ascending didn’t automatically equate to being a villain. Jenny was pretty sure of that. Nick was just
spewing hate at her because he couldn’t deal with the fact that she was like Ahmanet now. Jenny knew he hated Ahmanet. And now, because Jenny was like her, that hate had shifted to her as well. It was complete and utter bullshit, Jenny knew that. Nick knew her. He knew she wouldn’t just join Ahmanet. He knew exactly how much effort Jenny had put into trying to find a cure, a way out, a solution. For him to suddenly act like this because she’d died and got resurrected (against her will, she might mention) was totally unfair and more than a little ridiculous.

Sipping her coffee, Jenny tried to calm down a little. Her chest ached with a mixture of hurt, betrayal and anger. It was enough to make her hope Henry wouldn’t call for a good while. That way she’d have some time to calm down a little. At least until she stopped being stuck between wanting to cry and wishing she had her superhuman strength already so she could smack Nick into next century.

“Asshole,” she muttered into her coffee bitterly, low enough that no one could hear her.

She took a rather vicious bite of her pastry. That, at least, tasted good. Honey-sweet and filled with pistachios, rose and cream, it wasn’t quite baklava but something quite similar to it. Jenny liked it a lot. It served to improve her mood, if only by a little. That didn’t stop her from trying to set the table on fire with her gaze alone, though. She didn’t manage, but it made her feel a little better.

Jenny was on her second latte (this one with an extra shot of espresso), almost an hour later, when her phone vibrated in her pocket. She fished it out quickly and looked at caller id, even though there was only one person who’d call her right now.

Henry, as expected.

She accepted the call and brought the phone up to her ear. “Hey, Henry.”

“Jennifer,” Henry’s voice came through, “we’re done at the hospital. Where are you?”

“This small coffee place, just around the corner from the hospital,” Jenny responded, “let me finish my coffee and I’ll be on my way.”

“Don’t hurry, we’ll find you,” Henry said.

“Alright,” Jenny agreed, perfectly content to sit and sip her coffee and wait, “I’ll see you in a few minutes, then.”

“Alright,” Henry agreed as well, wasting no further time and ending the conversation.

Jenny dropped her phone onto the table and went back to sipping her coffee. She wondered if there was time for another of those pistachio-rose-cream pastries. They really were good. There probably wasn’t enough time to have a second, though. A pity. Although… Jenny dug through her pocket for her money, and counted out the Egyptian Pounds she had left. She could probably afford to have one or two of those little pastries packed up to take with her. Yeah, that was a good idea.

She grabbed her take-away cup of coffee and made her way over to the counter to order a couple of pastries to go.

Jenny had just collected her little box of pastry when she saw Henry entering the shop from the
corner of her eye.

"Jennifer, there you are," Henry said, walking over to her.

Jenny raised an eyebrow. "You sound like you've had a hard time finding me."

"There are four different coffee shops within a block of the hospital," Henry said, "and you have to turn a corner to find them. Meaning you could've been in any of them, and I had to go to all of them to check."

Jenny sipped at her coffee. "I did offer to come back to the hospital."

"So you did," Henry agreed. He had the faint air about him of wishing he'd taken Jenny's suggestion and spared himself a treasure hunt.

Jenny weighed the pastry box in her hand, thinking about the third pastry she'd been able to get with her last Egyptian Pounds. "And Nick?"

"Is waiting in the car," Henry provided. "I have convinced him to... delay judgement until the priests of Osiris have had a look at you."

"So he's still going to be an asshole," Jenny translated, "but then behind my back instead of to my face."

Henry gave a small wince, then looked at Jenny seriously. "I have impressed upon Mr. Morton the importance of civility. If he sets a foot out of line, I will personally put him on a plane back to London. With guards to make sure he stays there."

"Alright," Jenny said. That sounded like a plan she could agree to. She just wished it wasn't necessary.

Henry glanced at the coffee and the pastry box in Jenny's hands. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes," Jenny said, "let's go." She couldn't wait to get out of Cairo. She didn't feel quite as fond of the city as she used to, after all that had happened here.

"We're flying commercial, unfortunately," Henry said as he led her out of the coffee shop and towards the beat-up Jeep, opening the door to the backseat for her. "It seems that Ahmanet saw it fit to destroy my jet as well as kill my troops."

Jenny winced at the reminder of the people who'd been killed. Over a hundred people, gone in less than half an hour. Over a hundred bodies to add to Ahmanet's headcount.

Jenny tried not to think of how many people Ahmanet had killed over the course of her life. There must've been casualties in London, victims of the sandstorm or the flying/falling debris, and people had died in the place crash and subsequent cleanup before London. And Jenny knew Ahmanet had murdered her father, his wife, and her newborn brother. Who knew how many she'd killed after she'd done away with her family, before someone had managed to poison her with the Blood of Osiris.

Jenny was pretty sure Ahmanet's headcount ran far into the triple digits, even before she'd killed over a hundred of Prodigium's combat troops.

Jenny climbed into the backseat, ignoring Nick in the passenger's seat. "We're flying straight to Aswan, I assume?" Aswan was close to Philae, and since Philae was an island and had no airport of
it’s own, Jenny was comfortable making the assumption that they’d be making for Aswan instead, and then continue on to Philae from there.

“Yes, we’re sticking to the original plan,” Henry agreed. “Our flight is leaving in a couple of hours. From a different airport, of course.”

“Of course,” echoed Jenny weakly. She wondered if the carnage they’d left behind had already been found or not. If the local authorities were on site, trying to figure out how and why a bunch of people registered as ‘private security officers’ had been slaughtered to the last man. If the victims were already identified, the metaphorical ‘black letters’ sent out to their families to inform them of their loved ones’ deaths.

Henry started the car and began to maneuver them down the street.

Nick turned a little in the passenger’s seat, looking very reluctant. “Jenny,” he said slowly, “I apologize for what I said at the hospital. I was out of line.”

Jenny had the distinct feeling that this was not a voluntary apology. Still, it was better than nothing, and she wasn’t petty enough to draw it out. Besides, she wasn’t here to fight. “I accept your apology,” she told Nick.

Nick nodded stiffly. He visibly debated saying something else, but then seemed to come to a decision, closing his mouth and turning to look out of the windscreen of the car.

Jenny slumped a little with disappointment, a new flare of hurt making her feel kind of awful. Because goddamnit, after everything, she’d expected Nick to know her better. She thought he knew she wouldn’t just suddenly turn evil. And the fact that she was apparently wrong about that, that Nick would so easily condemn her, hurt. It stung.

Stifling a sigh, Jenny turned to look out of the window as well, slowly drinking the rest of her latte. She didn’t have much else to do right now, after all. Or much she could do.

The airport was enough to remind Jenny why she preferred to fly with Prodigium’s (or Henry’s) private jets.

Working as one of Prodigium’s primary archaeologists brought with it the perk of not having to fly commercial, and Jenny had gotten used to that. She hadn’t actually been on a commercial flight in years. She quickly came to the conclusion that she would have preferred not flying commercial for another good, long while.

The waiting was annoying, but not so bad. It was the customs that Jenny quickly came to hate.

Customs were the worst. It took ages, all the scanning for weapons and stuff meant going through detection gates and having people swipe her with metal detectors, and random pat-downs meant the queues were slowed down even more.

By the time Jenny, Henry and Nick were able to board the plane (at least they did get to fly first class), Jenny was grumpy, tired and wishing she could eviscerate someone to alleviate her newfound temper. Which was a rather more vicious thought that she was used to having, but right now she didn’t care. She just wanted to find her seat and watch a movie or listen to some music, or something like that, to distract herself.
A nap sounded really, really good. She was tired, and annoyed, and maybe if she got some sleep, she’d feel more like herself when the plane touched down in Aswan. Yeah, that was a good plan.

Jenny found her seat, sat down, buckled her seatbelt for the ascent, and closed her eyes. She was asleep in a matter of minutes and slept through the entire flight undisturbed. It was only about an hour and a half, but when Jenny was woken up by an apologetic Henry, she felt a little better anyway.

Customs were still hell though.

Philae was close to Aswan. By car, it took about an hour to reach the banks of Lake Nasser, from where they took a boat to reach the island of Philae, and with it, the priests of Osiris.

Jenny had to admit she felt a little nervous.

More than a little nervous, actually. She was terrified.

 Mostly because she had no idea what the priests of Osiris would do once they saw her. She had no doubt they would immediately realize who and what she was. They were the people who’d taken down Ahmanet 5000 years ago, after all. And they probably hadn’t let that knowledge die like they’d let Ahmanet’s presence in history die. Henry was too sure they knew how to make the Blood of Osiris.

Jenny, in turn, was pretty sure that the Blood of Osiris would affect her like it did Ahmanet, considering they were the same now.

Which meant they would be able to hurt Jenny with far too much ease for her to feel comfortable as she came closer to Philae. She wasn’t sure if she was capable of feeling physical pain anymore, but she wasn’t really all that eager to find out either. Hopefully, she wouldn’t have to find out.

She wasn’t really all that eager to get poisoned either, to be honest. Poison sounded like a shitty way to die. And painful. In comparison to poison, Jenny was sure she’d gotten off pretty well with a dagger to the heart. At least a dagger to the heart worked fast.

"It doesn’t look like it’s inhabited," Nick said as he squinted at the temple from the deck of the ferry bringing them there. "It’s mostly just tourists."

"That’s the temple of Isis," Henry explained. "It has become a very popular tourist destination, yes. But the temple of Osiris is located beneath it, not on the surface of the island."

Jenny blinked. She hadn’t known that. Of course, before this week, she hadn’t really concentrated on the priests of Osiris as part of research, so her knowledge of them was spotty at best. The temple being underground made sense, though. "To simulate a closeness to the underworld, I presume?"

Henry nodded. "Yes. It is Osiris’ domain."

"And the priests would want to honour that," Jenny finished.

"And no one knows it’s even there?" Nick asked, sounding a little incredulous. "Wouldn’t people notice a temple, even if it’s underground?"
“It’s presence is well-guarded. A state secret, if the government knows about it at all. Things like these aren’t left out in the open.” Henry said.

Jenny looked back up at the temple of Isis and felt a shiver go down her spine. She felt cold, and tense. Everything in her was screaming to get away, to have the captain of the ferry turn it around and get her out of here. She wasn’t supposed to be here.

The ferry docked.

Jenny hid her clenched fists in her pockets and tried not to look too apprehensive as she reluctantly followed Henry and Nick onto the shore. She stepped onto the ground of the island. A shock went through her, so cold it burned. The marks on the skin of her abdomen gave a throb of pain. She could almost feel the sudden defensive wariness in the air, the sense that she was definitely not welcome.

“Henry,” she said, grateful her voice was at least steady, “we should wait here.”

“Don’t be stupid, Jenny,” Nick snapped, “we’ve got to find those priests to get you exorcised.”

“They already know we’re here,” Jenny said calmly, refusing to react to the hostility Nick aimed at her. She was an adult, and so was Nick - she could at least act like it, even if he apparently couldn’t.

“And how would they know that, Jenny? We haven’t gone to see them yet, have we?” Nick seemed intent on being as much as condescending asshole as was humanly possible.

Jenny rolled her eyes. “It’s not that hard to figure out, Nicholas,” she made sure to put extra emphasis on Nick’s full name. “The whole place is drenched in magic. And it reacted to me the moment I stepped foot on this island.”

“We’ll wait here,” Henry said decisively, shooting Nick a warning look. “Jennifer, tell me more about this magic, please.”

Jenny shrugged. “I’m not an expert or anything, but I can feel it. It’s everywhere. Like we’re in some kind of soap bubble filled with it.”

“And it doesn’t reach beyond the island?”

“I didn’t feel it on the ferry, so probably.”

“Describe the feeling to me, please.”

Jenny frowned. “I’m not sure I’m the best person to ask that, Henry. I have a feeling it doesn’t exactly want me to be here.”

Henry looked interested. “How so?”

“It feels cold. Suspicious. Not necessarily hateful but definitely wary. Like it already knows what I am and isn’t pleased.”

“No surprise there,” Nick muttered under his breath so only Jenny could hear. Jenny shot him a glare, but didn’t bother to dignify him with an answer.

“Interesting,” Henry muttered thoughtfully. “Since when are you able to sense magic?”

Jenny shrugged uncomfortably. “Since I pulled Ahmanet out of the mercury. But I could only sense her until she murdered me. I can sense more since I was resurrected.”
“Very interesting,’” Henry said. “Do you think you could learn how to sense the presence of other supernatural creatures?”

“I don’t know, Henry. I’m not a bloodhound. This is all new to me as well.’’

“My apologies, Jennifer. I didn’t mean to offend you.’’

“It’s fine,’” Jenny muttered. She just didn’t like the way Henry has said ‘other supernatural creatures’, like Jenny was one of them. As if the fact that she was no longer human made her less. Because it didn’t. She was still who she’d always been. Just a little… different.

An awkward silence fell over them.

Jenny stared at the ground, trying to ignore the oppressive feeling in the air around her. It pressed against her, heavy and slick and unpleasant, like she was submerged in a thick, fetid gel.

She shivered despite herself, cold even under the burning Egyptian sun.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The Temple of Osiris, part one.

Chapter Notes

Soooo, I'm back! I've just had the last of my exams (tax law, someone shoot me please) and now that I am no longer tempted to jump out of my window or something like that, I'm uploading the new chapter that I somehow managed to finish in between pretending to study and crying. I'm a bit behind on chapter 20 now, though, but I'm doing my best to get it done in time for the coming weekend. I'm hoping to be back on my regular uploading schedule by then. Fingers crossed.

As always, enjoy! And if you have any thoughts, let me know!

It was a few minutes before Jenny could feel several distinct presences approaching. They felt harried and agitated, like Jenny’s arrival had taken them by surprise and left them scrambling to find her.

“‘They’re almost here. I can feel them,’” Jenny said to Henry.

“‘Splendid.’” Henry looked far, far more excited than Jenny felt. Jenny rather felt like jumping into the Nile and just swimming back to the other side, to be honest. She’d probably be a lot safer surrounded by crocodiles. It’d probably be a more pleasant experience too.

She fidgeted nervously, every shred of her attention utterly focussed on the presences she could feel. They were approaching more rapidly than she’d expected, though also slower at the same time. It felt like they were systematically checking everyone near the docks, as if they couldn’t quite single Jenny out on sight.

It was a bit of a relief, to be honest.

That way, if Jenny needed to flee and hide, at least they wouldn’t be able to pick her out as easily. Provided, of course, a picture or a description of her wouldn’t be circulating immediately after this. Then things would be a little more complicated.

Jenny hoped there would be no cause for her to flee. She’d done enough running away over the past week or so, and she was getting really sick of it.

Where were the days that she could just sit down in the library with some book about Ancient Egypt and spend the entire day reading and making notes?

Compared to her current situation, that sounded a lot like heaven. It was enough to make Jenny wish she’d never found Ahmanet, that her search would have lasted her entire life and she’d have died at
an old age, disappointed that she’d never found what she was looking for but altogether quite content with how her life had gone. Because looking back, Jenny would have happily taken continuous disappointment than actual results.

Well. It was as they said. Hindsight was twenty-twenty.

One of the presences she could sense was getting close. They were only a few meters away now, and moving in the right direction. It would only be seconds now.

Jenny found herself holding her breath as a native Egyptian man turned in her direction, eyes flicking around in search of her, his face as mask of seriousness. His eyes fell on Jenny. There was a spark of familiarity that raced through the fog of magic that blanketed the island, and Jenny could see the realization dawn on the man’s face.

Jenny made sure to look as harmless as possible as the man approached, keeping her hands away from the pockets of her jeans, her palms clearly visible to show she wasn’t holding any weapons. It would be bad if someone shot her for looking too hostile or something like that. Especially because she wanted to know if the priests of Osiris could do anything about her situation.

The man stopped a few feet away, out of arm’s reach. He looked wary, but not necessarily hostile. When he spoke, it was in the Ancient Egyptian Jenny was rapidly getting used to.

“Cursed One, why have you come to the sacred shores of our Lord Osiris’ temple?”

Jenny opened her mouth, and surprised even herself with how archaic her answer sounded - it came automatically. Like she’d already known what she was going to say before she’d had the chance to think on it. “Son of the Dead Lord, I have come upon these sacred shores in search of thy assistance. The Dark One has laid a Curse upon my body. I seek the touch of the Dead Lord to free my soul.”

“What are you saying? Jennifer?” Henry looked a little anxious, glancing between Jenny and the priest.

Both Jenny and the priest ignored him.

“I hear and understand your conditions, Son of the Dead Lord,” Jenny responded, wondering where the hell these new conversational skills came from, “and I shall not engage unless I am forced to defend myself or my companions.”

“We hear and understand your reservations,” the priest returned with a slow nod. “I am called Asim, and I welcome you to our shores, Cursed One.”

“I am called Jennifer Halsey,” Jenny responded, “and these are my companions, Henry Jekyll and Nick Morton. We thank you for your welcome.” She paused, and then looked at Henry and Nick, who had both looked up at their names. “We’re welcome here, provided we behave and don’t show any hostility.”

“So they’ll help us?” Henry asked for clarification.

“I think so. We at least get to access the temple,” Jenny said, “so I think they’ll at least try.”
“Good,” Nick said roughly, “let’s go then. The sooner you get fixed, the better.”

Jenny eyed him for a moment, not quite comfortable with the tone of voice he was using, and then turned back to Asim. “Son of the Dead Lord, if you would lead the way, we will follow you inside.”

Asim nodded. “Please stay close, so you don’t get lost, Cursed One. Not all on this island are as willing to allow you access as the priests of the temple are.”

Jenny took the warning to heart. She’d not expected to be welcomed at all, to be honest, so the idea that people here would wish her harm didn’t come as a surprise. That didn’t mean she wouldn’t be paying attention, though. Just in case.

“C’mon,” she said to Henry and Nick, “Asim is going to show us in.”

“Does Asim speak English?” Nick grumbled as he followed along, hands stuck in his pockets. “Must be nice to be able to understand what everyone is saying, right, Jenny?”

“Oh, shut up, Morton,” Henry said, less than kindly. He was apparently just as fed up with Nick’s behavior as Jenny was. “Jennifer will translate for us.”

“And how can we be sure she won’t lie to us?!” Nick snarled. “Because last time I checked, you didn’t speak Egyptian either, so neither of us can check.”

Jenny gave him a poisonous look over her shoulder from where she was walking just half a step behind Asim. “It’s called integrity, Nick. You might not have heard of it, being a grave robber and a thief and all.”

Nick snarled at her wordlessly, anger all over his face. Jenny ignored it. Nick, despite his obvious anger and distrust, had not yet actually tried to harm her, so Jenny just let him be for now. Besides, assuming she was as… sturdy as Ahmanet, Nick wouldn’t really be able to hurt her anyway. Especially if Jenny couldn’t feel physical pain anymore. Which she still wasn’t eager to try out. Just in case the results didn’t pan out as she suspected.

Asim led them past the temple of Isis, and towards an obelisk. It looked like it was carefully cared for, the stone hardly worn and the edges of the hieroglyphs still sharp and clean. Jenny gave it a quick once-over, spotting the glyphs that spelled out Osiris’ name. If she’d had the time, she would have wanted to linger a little, to properly translate the thing.

“This way,” Asim said, leading them around the obelisk. Behind it, closed off by ropes and signs aimed at tourists that no one was allowed in, was a stone staircase down into the earth.

Something cold and nervous dropped in Jenny’s stomach. She glanced around, at the half-dozen guards that were spread around nonchalantly, the borderline hostile anger of Nick, the faintly worried seriousness of Henry. It didn’t look like she could run for it now. The best she could hope for was getting out alive and unharmed.

Trying to swallow the lump in her throat, Jenny followed Asim down into the darkness, her heart pounding a war tattoo against the inside of her ribs. It made her skin crawl. The last time she’d seen darkness as complete as this, she’d been dead and in the company of Set.

She was very, very relieved when, after a bit, electric lights started to appear on the walls. They were about ten feet apart and lit only a small area, but it was enough that they didn’t have to stumble around in pitch black anymore. Either way, it was appreciated. Especially because the steps of the stairs were a little uneven at some parts, and Jenny didn’t want anyone (except maybe for Nick, he could maybe use a good knock to the head) to take a tumble and get hurt.
The stairs went down a long way. Jenny figured they must’ve gone down a good couple of hundred feet under the surface before the steps began to widen and become less steep. After a couple of dozen feet more, the steps disappeared completely, replaced by smooth, even flooring. The hallway was hewn directly out of the base of the island, and the walls, ceiling and floor hadn’t been covered by anything - all of it was bare, if carefully smoothed out stone. The lights were a little more frequent here, and brighter, leaving the hallway lit brightly enough to be able to see properly.

Jenny could hear Nick grumbling under his breath behind her, and Henry, silent but with echoing footsteps. She wondered how close to the surface his alter was. Jenny knew she’d heard Hyde, back when she’d died, bellowing in rage, but she hadn’t seen any signs of him since. Not that she minded. Hyde was terrifying, even if he seemed fond of her (or, at least, less likely to use her as a human punching bag than with other people).

“Jennifer,” Henry asked after another couple of moments, “would you please ask Asim where exactly he’s taking us?”

“Yeah, sure,” Jenny sped up a little to walk next to Asim, “Excuse me, Asim,” she started, figuring she could be a little less formal now, “my companion would like to know where exactly it is we’re going.”

“We’re going to see the High Priest of Osiris, Abdamelek,” Asim responded easily, “he is the guardian of the knowledge we have of the Evil God, the Dark One and the Cursed Ones. If anyone knows how to help you, it’s him.”

“Alright, thanks,” Jenny said, falling back to relay the information to Henry.

“I hadn’t expected to get such easy access to the High Priest,” Henry said consideringly. “I wonder if that’s a good or a bad thing.”

Jenny was silently wondering the same. The idea of meeting the High Priest of Osiris kind of freaked her out a little. Or more than a little. Anyway. It wasn’t like she had the chance to turn back anymore, with the guards at her back.

The hallway went on for another bit, and then they were stopped by what looked like a pretty tight layer of security. It consisted of a steel door, which Jenny was willing to bet was at least two inches thick, with an armed guard on either side of it. They were carrying modern weapons, but each also had a traditional Khopesh sword at their hips, and though they wore bulletproof vests, their lower halves were clothed in traditional wrap skirts of white linen that reached their knees.

The mix of modern and traditional looked a little odd, but not necessarily bad. And besides, Jenny was more focussed on the automatic weapons than she was on whether what they were wearing was a fashion faux-pas or not.

Asim stepped close to one of the guards and quietly conversed with him for a bit. The guard nodded, then looked at Jenny with more caution. It was obvious what they were talking about. Jenny looked around a little nervously and wondered what she had to do to look as harmless as possible. Because this was definitely the time to look like as little a threat as she was imminently capable of.

Asim exchanged some more words with the guard, and after a few seconds and another nod, the guard gestured to his companion, who pulled a key out of a pocket on his bulletproof vest and unlocked the door.

Beyond the door, the hallway split into three new ones, and Asim led them down the left-most of the three. The walls weren’t bare anymore, here, instead filled with images painted directly onto the
walls, intersected by hieroglyphs. Jenny read a couple of them in passing, and then a couple more, and slowly started to recognize fragments from traditional funerary texts.

She’d studied them extensively while searching for Ahmanet, figuring they might also show up wherever she’d been buried/imprisoned, so it wasn’t hard to recognize the glyphs she was used to reading in the Book of Gates.

Fitting, really. To have funerary texts inscribed into the walls of a temple dedicated to the God of the Underworld.

They went through another three layers of security, each guarded carefully, until they reached a larger space. It was almost a hall, with truly huge pillars in the likeness of Osiris carved into the walls, smooth flagstones on the floor, and fluttery white drapes hung from the ceiling every couple of feet, preventing most of the hall from being seen.

The place was so silent their footsteps echoed even through the fabric coming down from the ceiling. It was a little eerie, to be completely honest.

Jenny tried not to shiver.

Asim turned to look at Jenny. “Wait here, please. I shall go inform the High Priest of your presence.”

“Of course,” Jenny said, “thank you, Asim.”

Asim nodded curtly and swiftly walked off, disappearing between the drapes.

“Where’s he going? Isn’t he supposed to, like, take us to this priest person?” Nick looked around, visibly uncomfortable with their surroundings.

“You don’t just walk in and expect to be seen immediately, Nick,” Jenny said, “we’re talking about the High Priest of Osiris. The most important person in this temple. It’d be like walking into, I don’t know, Buckingham Palace and expecting the Queen to be waiting.”

Nick scowled. “You said we’d be going to see this priest person.”

“That’s what Asim said, yes,” Jenny responded tersely. “But he didn’t say when. And it’s perfectly reasonable to wait for a bit. We’re not in any hurry.”

“You wouldn’t be,” Nick said, “considering this guy is probably going to kill you or something.”

Jenny rolled her eyes, making sure she didn’t show the anxiety in her stomach - she really, really hoped that that wouldn’t be the case, but she couldn’t be certain, “they’re not going to kill me, Nick. I’ve not done anything wrong.”

“You don’t have to. What you are is enough,” Nick said.

“Wow,” Jenny muttered, “xenophobic much? Now that I’m not like you, suddenly I’m evil and have to die?”

“You’re like the undead bitch, and she killed Vail without even so much as a reason,” Nick said, “who’s to say you won’t go evil on us as well?”

Jenny finally turned to look at him. “You do realize that it could’ve been you in my position, right? Considering you looked pretty eager to rob that tomb blind, sarcophagus included, back when we
first found it. If I hadn’t been the one to break that chain, you’d have been standing where I am now. Because you were going to do it. You know that just as well as I do.’’ She took a deep breath, glaring death at the man who was really, really started to get on her last nerve. God (not Set, another god) she wished she had the same strength Ahmanet had, so she could properly knock Nick off his imaginary soapbox. ‘‘So how about instead of condemning me, you thank me for saving your sorry life. Not that you deserve it,’’ she added, taking a vicious kind of pleasure of the mixed outrage and disgust on Nick’s face.

Nick sputtered, face flushed with rage. ‘‘You didn’t save my life! I’d have handled this a lot better than you’re doing!’’

‘‘Sure you would’ve,’’ Jenny said condescendingly, ‘‘just as well as you handled actually being in what would have my place at Prodigium.’’ She paused over-exaggeratedly, ‘‘oh, wait, I remember now. You came crying to me about Henry wanting to stab you with that dagger, because you couldn’t handle it on your own.’’

It was a low blow, Jenny knew that, but she was angry and honestly, fuck common decency. It would be good for Nick to be knocked down a couple of notches. At least until he stopped being an ass.

Nick was almost incoherent with rage, and Jenny eyed him, half-satisfied and half-worried he would actually come at her. Henry seemed to be thinking the same thing, as he subtly shifted until he was half standing between them.

‘‘It would perhaps be a good idea,’’ Henry said calmly, ‘‘if we would all calm down a little. If only so we don’t insult our host with our manners.’’

Jenny took a deep breath, nodding, ‘‘Alright. Fair enough.’’ She’d refrain from taking metaphorical chunks out of Nick for now. She could always do that later. Maybe when there wasn’t a larger-than-she-would-like chance that she’d get killed in a bit.

The next few minutes passed in a stilted, tense silence. Jenny concentrated on one of the Osiris-shaped pillars lining the walls, looking it over appreciatively.

It was a beautiful piece of art. Big, too - the top of Jenny’s head just reached the knees of the statue-pillar. It was fully painted, a creamy white for the clothing and wrappings, the traditional greenish-black skin that was associated with Osiris’ domain of resurrection, and Jenny was sure the belt, necklace, crook and flail and the ornaments on his crown were plated with real gold inlaid with obsidian and blue sapphire.

Jenny imagined it was worth more than a fortune. Especially because there were twelve of the identical statues lining the walls.

Finally, after what had to be a good half-hour, Asim returned.

Jenny perked up a little.

‘‘High Priest Abdamelek will see you, Cursed One,’’ Asim said. ‘‘He is awaiting your presence at the main altar. If you would follow me.’’

‘‘We appreciate it very much,’’ Jenny responded, wondering if she should be grateful or just afraid. She put it out of her mind the best she was able to and translated what Asim had said to Henry and Nick. ‘‘The High Priest is willing to see us. Asim is taking us to him.’’

‘‘That’s good,’’ Nick said, looking a little more cheerful. ‘‘Let’s go, then.’’
Asim led them out of the hall, into a next one, decorated much the same as the first. Jenny knew that this wasn’t unusual, because Egyptian temples usually consisted of several courts and halls one had to walk through before you actually got to the actual holy sanctuary. It was a larger temple than Jenny had expected, though she supposed that, being underground, the people who built it had no need to stick to the boundaries of the island.

If they went deep enough and properly fortified the ceilings, they could dig right until they were underneath the Nile, and probably beyond as well.

Which they’d most likely done, considering the fact that Asim led them through five large halls and a wide, pillar-lined hallway before they reached a truly humongous set of double doors.

They looked to be made of some kind of hardwood, tastefully inlaid with gold, and they were old - Jenny, used to looking at old stuff, was willing to bet these doors were at least seven-hundred years old. If not older. They were in very good condition, probably looked after by the priests of the temple, carefully kept clean and restored when damaged.

Jenny approved.

More guards were stationed at the doors, ten of them, this time fully in traditional get-up. Jenny had no doubt that they didn’t need guns to take someone down. They looked like they knew very well how to use the khopesh swords and oval shields they wielded.

‘’High Priest Abdamelek waits for you inside,’’ Asim said, stopping a few feet away from the doors, ‘’it would do you well to show him the respect his position demands.’’

‘’We will,’’ Jenny responded. She paused, and then added, ‘’is there any way we should address him?’’

‘’High Priest is usual,’’ Asim said, looking almost approving, ‘’but you may also address him as Eldest Son of the Dead Lord, or Favoured Disciple.’’

Jenny nodded and relayed it to Henry and Nick, making double sure they took note of what she was saying. It would probably be bad if they insulted the one person who might be able to help them.

Asim gave a nod of his own and gestured at the guards, who took hold of the large golden rings attached in lieu of door handles and pulled open the doors. They opened slowly due to the sheer size and probably the weight of the things.

Behind the doors was, in comparison to the halls they had walked through, a small room. It was maybe 40 by 40 feet, white linen coming down from the ceiling at the side walls, and against the back wall was a statue of Osiris even bigger than in the first hall. It was inlaid with gold, ivory and precious stones, the green of his skin seeming to exist almost entirely out of carefully polished, shining malachite.

At the mummified feet of the Dead Lord, there was a large altar of white marble. On it, a variety of bowls filled with fresh fruits and flowers, platters holding burning scented candles and small pottery vases that Jenny suspected to hold things like essential oils - all things that, thousands of years ago, would have been considered luxury products fit as offerings to gods. That tradition apparently hadn’t changed.

Before the altar, holding what seemed to be sticks of incense, was a man in traditional dress, the golden jewellery that told his status for everyone to see shining in the candlelight, his head shaved bald. He was reciting prayers.
It wasn’t hard to guess who this was.

The High Priest of Osiris, Abdamelek.

The man who was probably going to determine whether Jenny had to somehow fight her way out of this place or not.

Jenny sent a quick prayer to whichever god might be listening (not Set) and stepped into the sanctuary.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The temple, part 2. Jenny talks to Abdamelek, has a bit of a breakdown, and then has another dream-talk with Ahmanet, who shows a softer side we've not really seen before.

Chapter Notes

Welp, I've made it. I was running a little behind earlier this week, but I've pulled through since I had some free time and managed to finish the chapter. I have a good 4400 words for you guys to read. It's a bit of a doozy for Jenny, emotionally speaking, but I had fun writing it, and that's what counts.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know what you think!

Jenny, Henry and Nick (the latter reluctantly, and after being shushed harshly by Henry) waited patiently for Abdamelek to finish his prayers.

The High Priest seemed very immersed in his rhythmic words, and Jenny wasn’t about to go and interrupt that - if there was something she made a point not to interrupt, it was praying people. No matter what religion they subscribed to. It was just one of those things that no one was supposed to mess with, as far as Jenny was concerned.

They stood silently by the doors, which had been closed behind them by the guards, until Abdamelek finished his rhythmic praying and carefully placed the lit incense sticks in a small, intricately decorated pottery vase on the alter. The smoke of them curled up against the high ceiling and then exited through a series of small round ventilation gaps.

Abdamelek took a deep breath, shoulders rising and falling with it, and then finally turned around. He was maybe middle-aged, both his face and his scalp clean shaven, and some fine wrinkles were starting to line his face at his mouth, eyes and forehead. Nevertheless, he was obviously in shape, his age not slowing him down any.

“Good afternoon,” Abdamelek said in heavily accented but clear English, “long it has been since one of your nature has set foot upon this Earth, Cursed One.”

Jenny tried not to fidget. “Yeah. About five millennia, I’d reckon.”

“Indeed,” the High Priest agreed, “and why, then, have you come here, when you are likely aware of what we did to the last Cursed One the Evil God’s favoured had chosen?”

“Um,” Jenny said.

Henry jumped in. “We were actually hoping there was a way to get Jennifer back to normal. And a way to kill Ahmane-”
Abdamalek hissed, cutting Henry off, “do not speak the name of the Dark One! It is as cursed as the Evil God who created her!”

“- the Dark One,” Henry finished, a little lamely.

“We have heard the Dark One has been freed,” Abdamelek said, “though we have not yet been able to confirm the rumours. We cannot check her tomb, you see. It is forbidden land to the Sons of the Dead Lord. Though we have our sources and do not need to be physically present to know the tomb has been... opened.”

“Yeah, she’s free again.” Jenny swallowed. Her throat felt dry, as did her lips, and she licked them nervously. “Sorry about that.”

The High Priest focussed on her, a bit like a laser. All of a sudden, he was a very intimidating figure. “Yes. You are the Cursed One. You must be the one who freed her. It is the only way you would have contracted the Curse that you bear.”

“It was kind of an accident,” Jenny squeaked, throat suddenly clogged with terror as she scrambled to explain herself. She didn’t want to know what Abdamelek would do to her if he thought she’d freed Ahmanet on purpose. “I didn’t really believe she was supernatural, you see, and I’d been searching for her for thirteen years. It was my job. Since she was erased from history and all. And when I arrived in the tomb, it was like something wanted me to free her. I couldn’t help it. I’d already done it by the time I could think clearly!”

The veil of restrained power lessened a little. Abdamelek rubbed at his chin, frowning and thoughtful. “It was not your intention to release her evil back into this world?”

Jenny shook her head rapidly, “no! I just wanted to find her! I thought she’d be like any other mummy!”

And that was mostly true.

Henry had told her about how Ahmanet was supposed to be alive when he’d asked Jenny to go find her, but Jenny had never quite taken that seriously, no matter how staunchly she’d believed in myths. Because spending 5000 years in a locked sarcophagus, submerged in mercury, with no food or water or light, or anything really, and surviving the experience - that had been a step too far, even for Jenny.

Nothing could have - should have - been able to survive that.

Except for Ahmanet, apparently.

Which was honestly ridiculous. Because seriously, even magic shouldn’t have let Ahmanet survive for that long.

Jenny tried not to wonder if she would survive it, being what she was now.

“I see,” Abdamelek said. He looked at Nick, who had yet to say anything. “And what is your role in this?”

“Well,” Nick said, all defiance apparently drained from him like a plug had been pulled, “I kind of stole Jenny’s map and called in an airstrike that opened the tomb up. So I guess it’s kinda maybe my fault as well. That she’s free now, I mean. Yeah.” Nick gave a small, awkward cough and trailed off, shuffling his feet. He looked like a schoolboy who’d been caught stealing pencils and had been called to the principal for a lecture.
The High Priest frowned, clasping his hands behind his back. "And why would you steal this map? You would have no use for it if you hadn't intended to find the Dark One’s prison. Therefore, you must have had a reason to interfere."

Nick winced, looking even more awkward. "I, um,"

"He deals in... " Henry took over for Nick and searched for the right words. It took several seconds. Finally, he settled on, "...illicitly obtained antiquities. Yes."

"A thief, then."

"Jekyll, Henry Jekyll. I am the owner of an organization called Prodigium," Henry explained, apparently deciding truth was the best way to go at the moment, "we search out supernatural threats to humanity and eliminate them."

"I work for them," Jenny volunteered, though a part of her quailed at her stupidity of catching the High Priest’s attention again, "it was my job to find Ahm- excuse me, the Dark One, so they could permanently dispose of her."

"Yet, things have not gone as planned," Abdamelek said.

"That… does seem to be the case, um, Favoured Disciple," Jenny stuttered. She was feeling an intense desire to turn on her heel and get the fuck out of here with all due haste. She didn’t like how intently the High Priest was focussed on her.

"So you have come here for help?"

"Yes," Henry said, "we were planning to be here earlier, though. We went back to the Dark One’s tomb, you see, to find a way to stop her. And it spoke about the Blood of Osiris. And if someone would know what it is and how to get it, it would be the priests of Osiris.” Even Henry, stoic, authoritative Henry, started to look a little nervous. "Unfortunately, we were… delayed on our way here."

"Oh?" The High Priest made an inquiring noise.

There were a few seconds of silence. Jenny wasn’t about to open her mouth and drop this tidbit of information. Abdamelek waited patiently, though.

"The Dark One caught up to us just outside Cairo,” Nick said after a full ten seconds of silence, when it looked like it was going to stretch longer, "broke my arm, killed all our guards and then murdered Jenny here and turned her into a monster.”

Jenny glowered at him, a little distracted by the attack upon her person. “I’m not a monster, Nick. I’m still me.”

“Except the fact that you’re evil now.” Nick shot back.

“I’m not evil,” Jenny snapped, “you’re just a judgemental ass!”

Henry cleared his throat.

Jenny paled in realization and turned to look at Abdamelek. To her utter relief, he actually seemed rather amused, rather than angry or anything.

After a moment, he turned serious again, though, looking at Jenny piercingly. “You are already
ascended?’"

Jenny nodded uncomfortably. She couldn’t find it in herself to mumble something in the affirmative, but she didn’t really have to anyway.

“I see.” Abdamelek looked less than pleased.

Jenny totally understood the sentiment - she, too, was less then pleased with her current situation.

“I’m assuming the Dark One has gotten her hands on the Dagger of the Evil God, then?”

“Yes, she found it in London,” Henry admitted reluctantly. “Our attempts to keep the blade separated from the stone so it would be useless didn’t pan out as expected.”

Most of their plans didn’t pan out as expected, Jenny mused to herself, now that she thought of it.

Their plan of getting Ahmanet to Prodigium for disposal ended with a plane crash, a chase through the woods with zombies, and also mercury-laced crossbow bolts.

The plan of imprisoning Ahmanet at Prodigium had ended in a collapsed museum and London being swallowed in a sandstorm.

The plan of finding a solution at the tomb - well, actually, that part had gone pretty well, all things considered. No one had died, for one. It was the bit that came afterwards that things had gone south again, ending with over a hundred people dead and Jenny being forcibly god-ified.

It was like they were being followed by an uncommonly long-lasting case of spectacularly bad luck. Or maybe they just made really bad plans. It was honestly about fifty-fifty on that one.

“And when she used the Dagger on you,” Abdamelek asked Jenny, “did she leave it behind?”

“It disintegrated,” Jenny said, remembering the way it had crumbled in her very hands until it was just a heap of black grains, “just turned to dust as soon as I pulled it out of my chest.”

“I see. That complicates things,” Abdamelek muttered, more to himself than anything.

“How so?” Henry asked, before Jenny could.

Abdamelek sighed. “We have known about this Dagger for a long time now. It was actually in our custody for a long time, until a few hundred years ago. When it was stolen by crusaders, we lost sight of it, but we had already learned its purpose.” He started to pace. “The Curse was a two-part one. Half of it was placed on Jennifer, here, when she freed the Dark One. The other half was embedded within the Dagger, to be brought to completion only by the Dark One. When the Dark One used it to kill her Chosen, the two halves of the Curse would have joined together and triggered Jennifer’s ascension,” Abdamelek explained. “If we had the remains of the Dagger, we could have used the dissipating remains of the curse to find a way to counter it.”

“So it can be countered,” Jenny concluded. She tried not to sound too hopeful, but it was hard. She might just have found the solution to all her problems. And that solution was standing right in front of her.

Maybe.

Hopefully.

(Please?)
Perhaps,” Abdamelek said. He stopped pacing and took a few quick steps closer to Jenny. “Tell me everything that happened when you ascended. How much do you remember?”

“Well,” Jenny said, “the Dark One stabbed me with the dagger. It went straight into my heart. I died.” She swallowed harshly at the memory of it, feeling tears burn at the corners of her eyes. “Then there was darkness. Nothingness. And there was something there. Cold. Slimy. Powerful. And it wrapped around me like it owned me.” Jenny could barely find it in herself to even look at Abdamelek anymore, irrational shame making her face burn. “I think it was the Evil God.”

Abdamelek stiffened, his expression changing to one of extreme alarm, and he grabbed Jenny’s upper arms and walked her backwards until her knees hit the edge of a low bench she hadn’t noticed before. He pushed her down onto the bench and crouched in front of her, hands on her knees.

In his alarm he fell back into his native language, which Jenny was strangely grateful for. Death seemed too intimate an experience to describe in a language that could have Nick fucking Morton listening in.

“Are you sure? Are you absolutely sure it was him?”

Jenny nodded miserably. She was utterly, completely sure it had been Set who had been with her in death. That presence had been too unsettling, too possessive to have been anyone else.

It came to her attention that she was crying, but she couldn’t be bothered to reach up and wipe the tears away. She swallowed thickly. “Yes. I could feel it. It felt dangerous and older than anything I’ve ever known. Older than the world.”

“Did he do anything? Say anything?” Abdamelek almost demanded answers, his fingers digging into Jenny’s knees like he wasn’t quite registering how tightly he was squeezing.

“He, um,” Jenny hiccoughed, “he didn’t say anything. But he touched me, curled around my like a snake. And he put something on my abdomen. Writing. It burned when he put it on my skin. I think it’s a pact, but the glyphs are like I’ve only ever seen on the Dark One. I can’t read it.”

Abdamelek’s eyes were fixed on Jenny’s stomach at the height of her navel. “Show me, please. Immediately.”

Nervously, Jenny knotted her fingers into the hem of her ‘I ♥ Cairo’ shirt and drew it up just high enough that the markings were visible. She wasn’t keen on showing the marks, but she didn’t think she had much of a choice.

Jenny kept her eyes only on Abdamelek, but she could hear Henry and Nick making a small fuss near the doors. She didn’t bother paying attention to it. Something far more important was going on here.

Abdamelek’s fingers pressed against the markings on Jenny’s skin. He was frowning heavily. “I know this language. It is older, far older, than traditional Egyptian is. It’s no miracle you couldn’t read it. Very few people can.”

Jenny’s hands trembled. “Can you?”

“I can,” he confirmed. “The knowledge of this language has been passed down from High Priest to High Priest for millennia. Osiris himself came down to Earth to teach it to the first Favoured Disciple of his temple.”

Jenny wrung the hem of her shirt between her hands. ‘Can you tell me what it says?’
“It says,” Abdamelek responded, taking his hand back, “that you have a pact with the Evil God. And until it is fulfilled, you are bound to him like a dog to its master. It is through the Dark One that he will control you until he has gotten what he wants.” The High Priest looked up at Jenny. The pity in his eyes was clear. “And you already know what he wants, don’t you?”

Jenny’s lower lip trembled, and she bit it to make it stop. She couldn’t help the fresh tears that spilled. “Yes. I know.”

Abdamelek looked at her and said nothing. He didn’t have to. Jenny’s lip wobbled harder. She tried so hard to keep herself together, but God, she was at her limit and she didn’t know what to do anymore.

“I’m scared,” she managed, voice cracking halfway through the words. Her knuckles were bloodless with the force she clutched at her own shirt with, and it made her wish, desperately, that she had someone to hold her. The tears of her face were hot. “I swear I never wanted any of this to happen. I didn’t mean to do all this. Honest.”

Abdamelek smiled then, gently, reassuringly, more kindly than Jenny ever could have hoped for. He looked like he’d just made up his mind about her, and had come to a conclusion that was pro-let’s-not-kill-Jenny-today.

“I know you didn’t, Jennifer Halsey,” Abdamelek proclaimed like he truly believed every word he was saying, “You couldn’t have known the consequences of doing the job Henry Jekyll assigned to you.” He reached out and touched her cheek, as if to wipe away any semblance of guilt. “The Dark One is powerful. You, a mere human at the time, could not have resisted if you’d tried. It is not your fault. You are blameless.”

It was all Jenny hadn’t known she needed to hear. The drop that made the bucket spill over.

The sob tore from her throat before she could even attempt to stop it, and Jenny crumbled forward, sliding off the bench to her knees. The High Priest caught her before she could crumple to the floor completely, and he had to keep her up because all the strength had abandoned Jenny’s limbs.

She clutched at him desperately, not even caring that this was a literal stranger who she’d met not even half an hour ago, and cried unashamedly. The sobs that ripped from her throat were deep, racking ones that hurt her as they came out and made her sound like she was dying all over again; keening wails of all the pain and fear and horror she’d kept locked inside, the terror of being murdered and resurrected and branded like an animal made into noise and tears -

And the Eldest Son of the Dead Lord just held her, letting her scream into his shoulder and beat her fists against his chest, doing nothing but cup the back of her head and hum rhythmic prayers for inner peace.

It hurt, the emotions almost tore her apart, but it was probably the most cathartic experience Jenny had ever had in her life. Like the weight she’d carried on her shoulders since the plane crash had lightened by at least half. Not all of the weight was gone, but a decent chunk had crumbled away, and it made Jenny feel like she was Atlas and had just been allowed to put down the sky for a while.

It was exhilarating.

And it was, even more so, utterly exhausting.

By the time she’d quieted down, throat hurting, eyes sore, her fists aching from pummelling at
Abdamelek’s chest and shoulders, she was so wrung out from all the emotions that her eyes slid closed without her permission and her body went slack. For a few moments, she panted helplessly, unable to make herself do anything else. She was exhausted. She tried to open her eyes, and barely managed a blink before they slid shut again.

Maybe she should take a little nap… just a little one. Just ten minutes. Yeah… that sounded good.

Jenny managed a weak, noiseless yawm, and seconds later, she was blissfully asleep. She had never been more grateful to get some rest.

Or, she decided when she opened her eyes and saw desert, maybe not so grateful after all.

Frustration snapped within her like a whip, and all of a sudden, she was seething with the unfairness of it all.

Couldn’t she get one minute, just one fucking minute of peace?! That wasn’t too much to ask for, right?!

But no, even in her sleep she had to be smacked in the face with reality, and her emotions just had to be on a goddamn rollercoaster, and Jenny was getting really fucking sick of everything.

Why couldn’t she just get a few hours to herself?!

She tried to stifle the irrational, burning rage that tried to crawl up her throat. It’d come out of nowhere the moment she’d felt sand underneath her bare feet, and it was all she could do not to yell with how hot and stifled and trapped it made her feel.

‘Jennifer.’

Jenny gritted her teeth at the familiar voice. ‘Ahmanet.’ She tried to keep her tone under control, she really did, but it came out terse and curt anyway.

‘You are very distressed.’ Ahmanet said, footsteps crunching in the sand as she walked slowly into Jenny’s view. ‘I could feel it as if it were mine.’

‘Good for you,’ Jenny gritted out, making sure not to look at the princess. She was sure that, if she did, she would burst. The fact that Ahmanet could sense her emotions only served to rile her up even more. Her emotions were her own. They were private. She didn’t want anyone to mess with them, or even be able to feel them.

She could almost sense Ahmanet frowning. ‘And you are very angry as well.’

Jenny gritted her teeth and said nothing. That hot, irrational rage felt like it was burning her from the inside out, choking her.

Ahmanet took another few steps, not stopping until she was standing squarely in front of Jenny, easily with arm’s reach. The thin strokes of turquoise paint rimming her eyes like eyeliner contrasted against the darkness of her skin, making it stand out and her eyes seem even more intense. She was, as always, gorgeous.

Jenny wanted to hit her.

The urge was so intense she’d already balled her hand into a fist and started to raise her arm before
she managed to stop herself.

‘‘I wish you weren’t so angry,’’ Ahmanet said. ‘‘You would feel much better if you were to accept what happened. Acceptance will release you from a great weight.’’

‘‘Acceptance?!’’ Jenny’s voice was a snarl, nearly a shout. ‘‘You murdered me and you’re telling me to just suck it up and be okay with it?!’’

Ahmanet’s brow furrowed, as if she didn’t understand why Jenny was yelling at her. Or maybe there’d just never been anyone who’d had the guts to yell at her before. Probably the latter. Jenny didn’t care, though. Because she did have the guts. She was angry and upset and she needed someone to take it out on, and who better than the person who was the cause of this entire mess in the first place?

‘‘I died!’’ Jenny snarled at the princess. She felt a vein on her forehead bulge. ‘‘You put a dagger in my heart and killed me, and you’re expecting me to just be totally fine with it?!’’ She could feel her nails dig into the palms of her hands with the force she was clenching her fists. The sharpness of the pain and the warmth spreading across her skin told her she’d cut into her own flesh until bleeding. ‘‘You ruined my life! And now I’m stuck at this goddamn temple, with a bunch of people who may or may not try to kill me for what I’ve become, and Nick wants me dead because you killed Chris, and my life has basically just gone to complete and utter shit! You took everything from me!’’ Jenny choked back a sob, panting and standing stock-still, slowly unclenching her fists, and then added, softer, ‘‘I wish I’d never found you.’’

She looked at Ahmanet, noted that the princess was actually a little shorter than her, saw the mixture of shock and outrage and, to her vague surprise, the pain on Ahmanet’s face, and felt both wretched and revolted. Wretched, because the part of her that cared ached at the sight of Ahmanet in any kind of pain at all. Revolted, mostly at herself, because that part of her that cared shouldn’t exist in the first place, and she hated that it did.

‘‘I wish,’’ Jenny almost whispered, the anger seeping away and just leaving her tired and sad, voice cracking and defeat in every syllable, ‘‘that I’d never learned your name. I wish that I never realized a princess was erased from history. And I wish that I hadn’t been stupid enough to go looking for you.’’

Ahmanet swallowed, throat bobbing. She searched for words. Failed. Tried again. Sadness had overtaken the outrage she’d first displayed when Jenny had started yelling.

‘‘But you did, Jennifer,’’ the princess finally whispered. She sounded softer than Jenny had ever heard her before. ‘‘You did find me. You did learn my name. You did realize I was erased from history. And you did come looking for me. You did all of that, perhaps against your own wishes, but that doesn’t change the fact that you did.’’

She reached out, splayed her hand against Jenny’s cheek, and Jenny felt all the fight she had left drain out of her. Her knees buckled and she sunk bonelessly into the sand. She didn’t have the strength to hold herself up anymore. Blood dripped off her hands in thin rivulets and stained the sand a sticky red.

Ahmanet followed her down into the sand, kneeling in front of Jenny, cradling Jenny’s face between her warm, soft palms. Her thumbs brushed across Jenny’s cheekbones to swipe away the tears.

‘‘You found me,’’ she repeated. ‘‘And when you pulled me out of that mercury, when you freed me from that hell I was imprisoned in,’’ Ahmanet looked pained at the reminder, ‘‘you instantly became the single most important thing in my world. Jennifer, look at me.’’
Jenny looked up from the sand she’d dropped her gaze to. Ahmanet’s expression was softer than Jenny had ever seen it before. More approachable. More… normal. Like she was a regular human, instead of the Dark One from legend.

Instead of the woman who had murdered Jenny without a shred of hesitation.

‘‘I’ve been alone for five millennia, locked into darkness because I chose to take my birthright rather than have it be stolen from me. Because I refused to bow to my father’s wishes like I was supposed to. Five millennia of nothingness, of hunger and thirst and loneliness…’’ Ahmanet swallowed. ‘‘I had almost given up hope. I was on the brink of just surrendering myself to death and be judged for my deeds. And then you came, and you freed me from my personal hell. And I can keep you, because you are female and Set won’t take your body for his own,’’ the princess hesitated for a moment, looking torn.

Jenny watched her avidly, struck silent with fascination.

She’d never been as utterly enraptured as she was right now, her earlier rage entirely forgotten in the face of Ahmanet openly allowing herself to be vulnerable. She was showing weakness, openly and unashamedly, for Jenny. Because of Jenny.

The princess had yet to lie to her, but her honesty had never been this achingly, bruisingly raw.

Ahmanet seemed to steel herself, her thumb slipping down to press softly at Jenny’s lower lip. Jenny let her. She didn’t have the energy, or the will, to stop her.

‘‘I… know that this has all been very overwhelming for you. Especially since your ascension was ultimately a very violent, painful affair. And I apologize for that. But don’t ever think I meant to, as you claim, ruin your life. It’s not ruined, Jennifer. It’s just a new beginning. Like my life began anew when you freed me.’’

Jenny took a deep shuddering breath and looked down. There were little dark spots in the sand from her tears and blood. Her throat felt thick and achy, ‘‘I hate you.’’

‘‘No,’’ Ahmanet denied, hands warm and steady on Jenny’s cheeks, ‘‘you don’t. Not truly.’’

Jenny didn’t.

But God, she wished she did.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

The Temple of Osiris, part 3.

Chapter Notes

Here you go, chapter 21. I'm already busily writing away at the next chapter, and I have Plans for it. In the meantime, this is it. It's a bit of a filler, honestly, but fillers are occasionally needed too. Things are picking up a bit in chapter 22, though.

As always, have fun with it, and let me know what your thoughts are!

“I should let you sleep properly. You look like you need it.”

Jenny startled a bit at the words as the silence was broken. It was the first either of them had said in what had to be half an hour.

Jenny blinked. Her eyes felt puffed and gritty. She’d almost forgotten that this was a dream, and that she wasn’t awake right now. She sure felt like she was awake - she felt far too wrung-out and achy and exhausted to feel like she was sleeping.

Rest sounded very, very good.

True rest. Not too-real dreams masquerading as rest.

“Yes,” Jenny muttered absentmindedly, “I’m tired.”

“I would imagine so,” Ahmanet said, “with all this emotion on top of everything that has happened over the past couple of days.”

Jenny managed to muster the energy for a weak scowl. “No thanks to you.”

Ahmanet sighed. “You’re still upset with me.”

“Yes,” Jenny said, “yes I am.”

“I understand,” Ahmanet responded. “When my father made my brother the crown prince when he was born, thus ruining my life like you claim I have ruined yours, I was very angry as well.” She gave another sigh. “It takes time to fade.”

“I don’t have five millennia to get over it.”

“You will overcome your anger. I have faith in that.” The princess sounded like she truly believed what she was saying. “And when you do, I will be there to help you pick up the pieces.”
Jenny blinked rapidly instead of responding. She felt like she could cry, but she was all out of tears for now. She’d shed enough of them in the last couple of hours, anyway. Certainly plenty enough to justify not being able to cry for a bit.


Jenny knew that she shouldn’t accept anything from Ahmanet. Knew that it was a slippery slope that could lead her into even more trouble. Especially when said offering involved directly manipulating Jenny’s mind and body.

But she was so tired.

More exhausted than she’d ever been in her life. She was absolutely and utterly drained. And the idea of sleeping for a couple of hours, just a bit of oblivion, sounded so damn good Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to say no.

“Alright,” Jenny said softly.

“Close your eyes,” Ahmanet said.

Jenny did. A warm, soft hand pressed gently over her closed eyes, and there was a whisper of something warm and soothing. Faintly, she realized that it was the first time since she’d pulled Ahmanet out of her tomb that she didn’t feel afraid.

A slow, rolling fog over sleepiness washed over Jenny, and then she floated off into sweet, blissful oblivion, and for a blessed while, Jenny’s world was peaceful and calm.

She woke up feeling refreshed.

It was something she hadn’t experienced in a while, even before she’d found Ahmanet. She’d been too hyped up by her search finally getting any results at all to sleep peacefully, even back then. Therefore, it was nice to wake up for once, and feel like she’d really had a good couple of hours of sleep.

Regardless of who was responsible for those couple of hours.

Her hands did ache a little though, right in the palms where, in her dream, she’d dug in her nails until they bled. She curled her fingers in and lightly scraped her nails over her palms, not finding any indentations or cuts. Just soreness, then.

She decided to ignore it and instead tried to snuggle deeper into the thick fabric wrapped around her. Jenny wasn’t eager to get out… the bed she was lying in?

Her eyes snapped open.

Since when was she in a bed?

The last thing she remembered before falling asleep was totally embarrassing herself by blubbery all over the bloody High Priest of Osiris. And also in front of Henry and Nick, but that was a less pressing source of concern.

Stifling a sigh as that warm, woolly feeling of a good nap seeped away, Jenny looked around to
inspect her surroundings. The room, obviously a bedroom, was bare and relatively small. There was a bed (which she was lying in - it was a sober, but warm and surprisingly comfortable), a nightstand, and a chair next to the door. On the chair was a small bundle of folded clothes that, even from a small distance, seemed impeccably clean and pressed.

Reluctantly, Jenny rolled out of bed. She was still in her jeans and shirt, which relieved her. She didn’t need people undressing her when she was asleep to make her even more paranoid.

Jenny rubbed at her eyes and yawned, shivering a little because the air of the room was cold in comparison of the comfy warmth of the covers of the bed. Being several hundred feet underground didn’t help, of course.

The clothes turned out to be simple, but comfortable. There was a new pair of underwear and a comfy sports bra (Jenny guessed whoever had brought the clothes had obtained her sizes through Henry, who, inexplicably, seemed to know them), some socks, a pair of shoes, a pair of loose linen trousers, a similarly linen button-up and a cardigan. It kind of looked like the stuff someone would get at a hospital or something, or what someone who was on a really intense rich-person-zen-kick would wear.

Jenny didn’t mind, though, because the clothes were clean and felt good, and that was all she really asked for.

Although, she could really go for a shower as well.

Being able to clean up properly would be really, really nice right about now. She should ask someone about that. Jenny knew traditional Egyptian temples were whole complexes complete with housing and stuff for people, like priests, who lived at the temple on a permanent basis. They had to have showers as well, and Jenny was really hoping to borrow one for, like, an hour or so. Because a very long, very hot shower sounded like a splendid idea.

Jenny padded over to the doorway, pushing the door open just a little bit. A guard was standing just outside, and she vaguely recognized the man as one of the guards who’d been there when Asim had showed them into the temple.

“Excuse me?”

The man looked up. “Yes, Cursed One?”

Jenny hid a wince at the moniker. “Just call me Jenny, please. Do you know where the Favoured Disciple and my companions are?”

“I do, Curs- Jenny,” the guard corrected himself. “Shall I take you to them?”

“Yes, please,” Jenny responded, opening the door fully and stepping out of the small bedroom.

“Follow me, then, Jenny. And please stay close. There are many here who disagree with our High Priest’s approach to your situation.”

Well, that was a nice statement to wake up to.

Jenny kind of wished her ignorant bliss had lasted a little longer. Apparently though, implied death threats were the flavour of the day. Here’s to hoping Abdamelek had a solution for her, or her stay here might be cut very short indeed. Either because Jenny had to flee, or because she was murdered - permanently, this time.
Her guard led her through several corridors and past several rooms, until they stopped at a seemingly random doorway. The door was closed. The guard knocked on it several times before opening it and stepping aside to let Jenny in.

A little cautiously, she stepped inside, eyes widening when she spotted the wall of positively ancient scrolls and books across the room. She’d never seen so many works that were that old and that well-preserved in one place before. It was an absolute treasure trove.

Jenny was so absorbed with the wall of wonders that it took her several seconds to spot the large table, Henry, Abdamelek and Nick sitting around it and pouring over even more perfectly preserved works.

‘‘Excuse me, Eldest Son,’’ Jenny’s guard cleared his throat, ‘‘the Cursed One,’’ he shot Jenny an apologetic look, ‘‘has awoken and asked me to bring her to you.’’

All three men at the table looked up, even though only one could understand what was being said.

‘‘Jennifer,’’ Henry looked delighted to see her, ‘‘did you sleep well?’’

‘‘It was nice,’’ Jenny said, stepping into the room. She wasn’t sure if she should mention Ahmanet. Probably not. Best not to give the priests of Osiris even more reason to want her dead.

Although Jenny had to admit that Abdamelek had not given the impression of wanting her dead in the least. So far, he had been very kind to her. Certainly far kinder than Jenny had honestly expected him to be.

‘‘It was good to get some rest,’’ she added as she made her way over to the table. ‘‘What are you doing?’’

‘‘We’re trying to figure out a cure that doesn’t need the Dagger,’’ Henry said, gesturing at the books and scrolls scattered over the table.

Jenny perked up a little. ‘‘Any luck so far?’’

‘‘Not nearly enough,’’ Abdamelek said in his heavily accented English. ‘‘It is possible, but my predecessors always assumed that we would have the Dagger should a cure be needed. As it was stolen by crusaders and then destroyed not too long ago…’’

‘‘An alternative needs to be found,’’ Jenny finished. She’d hoped this would be easier, that there would be an easy snap-your-fingers, drink-a-potion-solve-your-problem kind of cure, but she really wasn’t that lucky. ‘‘What can I do to help?’’

‘‘At the moment? Not much,’’ Henry sighed. ‘‘Most of the volumes here are written in the same language that script on your stomach is. It has to be translated to English before we can do any research of our own.’’

‘‘Damn,’’ Jenny cursed quietly but emphatically. ‘‘There’s no Ancient Egyptian either? I could get started on that instead.’’

‘‘There is a little, but not much,’’ Abdamelek said, getting up from his chair and moving over to the wall of books to browse through them. ‘‘Knowledge like this is traditionally reserved for the High Priest, and, as such, tends to be written down in the Old Language to ensure it cannot be stolen. As it is, only I can read it, as I have no successor as of yet.’’ He gathered three books, none of them thicker than maybe half an inch. ‘‘This is all there is in Ancient Egyptian, and it is only the most general of knowledge on the subject.’’
Jenny frowned, a little disappointed. She understood, though. Information like what they were looking for was very, very important, and probably twice as dangerous. It was probably good the majority of it was written in this so-called Old Language. Safety first and all that.

She wished she could do more, though.

Pulling up a chair, Jenny sat down and opened the first of the three books Abdamelek had handed her. There were some notebooks and pens, so Jenny grabbed one of each and proceeded to put to use a skill she had perfected over long, long years of searching for Ahmanet; research.

A couple of hours passed before Nick started to complain about being hungry. His complaints were emphasised by the thunderous growling coming from his stomach region, proving that, yes, he really was very hungry.

For the first time since the hospital, Jenny sympathized with Nick.

She, too, was starting to feel a little peckish. Some food wouldn’t be amiss right about now. A sandwich, maybe, would be very nice. Bread with cheese and marmite and some cress. And maybe a piece of fruit and a cup of tea on the side. That sounded very good indeed.

Nick’s stomach gave another audible growling sound.

Abdamelek actually looked a little embarrassed as he stood up. ‘‘I’ll have the kitchens make us something to eat. Are there any dietary restrictions our cooks need to take into account?’’

Jenny, Henry and Nick all shook their heads.

‘‘Very well,’’ Abdamelek swept over to the door and opened it, then spent a few moments talking to the guards standing just outside. He stepped back in. ‘‘One of the guards will retrieve us when the food is ready.’’

Jenny settled back into her chair, mollified. That was good enough for her. She wasn’t so hungry that she couldn’t wait for a bit.

Nick seemed a little less happy, but at least he didn’t open his mouth, so Jenny decided that that was a win too. Her patience for Nick effing Morton was at an all-time low, as he had spent the last few hours making snide little remarks whenever he could, and him shutting up when Henry or Abdamelek made their displeasure known was probably the only reason Nick still had all of his teeth.

Shaking her head, Jenny turned her attention back to the open book in front of her. She hadn’t quite finished it yet, with all the note-taking she was doing in between, so she still had plenty of things to keep her occupied until they were retrieved for what was either a very late lunch or a very early dinner.

Forty-five minutes later, Jenny found herself in a spacious dining hall.

She’d barely sat down in the chair Abdamelek had pointed out for her when cooks came walking in, carrying dishes of food that smelled so amazing Jenny felt her mouth fill with saliva.

The fare was typically Egyptian, which shared many similarities with Middle-Eastern food, and the spread was rather more extensive than Jenny had expected with such little warning to the cooks beforehand. There was a platter full of the pita-like flatbreads that were a staple in Egypt, cheese, baba ganoush and some other similar dips, stuffed grape leaves, falafel, and molokhia soup with bits of chicken in it - the only non-vegetarian dish offered.
Jenny made sure to wait respectfully until Abdamelek had prayed to Osiris and given permission to start eating - they were in a temple, religion was important around here. And respecting that religion was equally as important.

So Jenny waited until Abdamelek relaxed and gestured towards the food, "please, help yourself."

Nick groaned something that sounded like a mangled attempt at "finally!" and groped for the nearest platter of food, which were the stuffed grape leaves.

Jenny took a bowl and ladled some of the soup into it, and then placed one of the flatbreads on her plate, followed by a few falafels, some cheese, and also some of the stuffed grape leaves. They turned out to be filled with rice, herbs, soft, mild cheese and some toasted nuts, and they were very good.

Jenny ate her fill in relative silence, deciding to concentrate on her food rather than really listen to whatever it was that Abdamelek and Henry were discussing. The food was all delicious, and honestly, Jenny was more interested in filling her stomach at the moment.

She opened up her flatbread and filled it with her falafels, adding chopped tomatoes, some herbs and some of the yogurt-cucumber sauce on top, then bit into it hungrily.

It was the first meal she’d had since those pastries in Cairo, and that had been early in the afternoon yesterday. Now it was already past three in the afternoon, which meant she hadn’t eaten in over twenty-four hours. No wonder she was as hungry as she was.

Wine and water were served with the food, and Jenny poured herself a glass of the latter, deciding that alcohol wasn’t the best idea right now. Even though the idea of getting spectacularly drunk and forgetting about everything for a while sounded like a novel idea. Jenny knew better, though. Getting drunk was not the answer to her problems. Even if it sounded tempting.

She drank water instead, and was pleasantly surprised to find it had been flavoured with honey and crushed leaves of mint. It tasted fresh and clean and mildly sweet, and combined with the food, it was absolutely perfect.

She finished her bowl of soup and her falafel sandwich, and almost full, only took some of the baba ganoush with a bit of bread and a couple of bits of cheese to fill her up the rest of the way. The baba ganoush was wonderfully smoky and sweet from the eggplants, which had probably been roasted or something before being made into the dip, and the cheese was sharp and salty, and they went quite well together.

Once her plate was scraped clean, Jenny finished her water, piling her knife, fork and spoon on top of her plate and pushing them away a little. "That," she sighed, utterly satisfied with the meal, "was delicious. Thank you, Abdamelek."

Abdamelek bowed his head in acknowledgement. "It is my pleasure, Jennifer. What kind of host would I be if I didn’t feed my guests?"

Nick mumbled something through a mouthful of bread and cheese. He had, after tasting one of the stuffed grape leaves and apparently not liking them, stuck to the flatbreads, the cheese and the falafels on offer. And the wine. He was on his third glass already.

Henry was a bit more polite. "It was indeed excellent, Abdamelek. You have very good cooks."

"I shall pass them your compliments," the High Priest responded. "Now, I assume you have all had a hectic couple of days. Perhaps you should get some sleep before we get back to research."

Jenny was okay with that. She’d had some sleep already, of course, but she could go for a couple of hours more. First, though… “Abdamelek, is there maybe a shower I could use? I haven’t had the chance to clean up since the Dark One caught up to us.”

“Of course,” the High Priest responded immediately, “I should have thought of that earlier.” He waved over one of the guards. “Please escort Jennifer to a bathroom. Ensure only those who wish her no ill-will protect her while she is occupied.”

“Yes, High Priest,” the guard responded. He turned to Jenny. “Please follow, Jennifer.”

“Thank you,” Jenny said, getting up out of her chair. She was very much looking forward to that shower. Especially because she was sure she still had blood in her hair somewhere. Wet tissues didn’t really make for a good way to wash hair.

She followed the unnamed guard out of the dining hall, a little spring in her step. They walked silently; Jenny wasn’t sure what to say, and the guard didn’t seem interested in initiating a conversation, so nothing was said until they stopped at a random door.

“In here is a bathroom,” the guard said, “feel free to use whatever you need inside, and take as long as you wish.”

“Alright, thank you,” Jenny said. She wasted no time stepping into the room, closing the door behind her and locking it. She didn’t need anyone bursting in while she was showering.

The bathroom, like the bedroom she’d found herself waking up in hours ago, was furnished sparsely, but it contained everything needed. There was a shower with a glass wall to keep the rest of the room relatively dry, a sink and mirror, a shelf full of towels and washcloths, and another shelf with some bottles of shampoo and body wash.

So, like the guard had told her she could, Jenny happily made use of it. She put her clothes on the counter of the sink, grabbed some washcloths and a bottle of shampoo and body wash each, and ducked into the shower for a well-deserved wash.

Jenny washed her hair twice, to get the smell of blood out completely, and then rubbed up a nice lather of body wash on a washcloth and washed her body twice also. Then, when she was guaranteed squeaky clean, she spent at least ten minutes just luxuriating under the hot water. She didn’t care if it was bad for the environment, she had had way too many way too shitty days in a row, and she needed to relax. And Jenny had yet to discover a better way to relax than a hot shower or bath.

After approximately half an hour, Jenny finally managed to muster up the motivation to shut off the hot water and step out onto the cold tiles outside the shower. She wasted no time wrapping herself in a huge, fluffy towel to ward off the cold, rubbing her arms to keep the chill from seeping into her skin. It made her wish she’d stayed in the shower for another five or ten minutes, just to soak up the heat.

She dried off quickly but thoroughly, wrapping a towel around her hair like a turban to keep it from dripping down her back, and then quickly wormed back into her clothes. Her socks helped against the cold tile of the floor. She absentmindedly rubbed her hair dry with the towel she’d used as a turban. If only she had a blow dryer, but it didn’t seem there was one to be found in this bathroom. No one in the temple needed one, she supposed, since all the residents had their heads shaved bald.

Once her hair was just damp instead of dripping, Jenny dumped the towels she’d used in the hamper and draped the used washcloths over the edge of it to dry. She replaced the bottles of shampoo and
body wash where she’d found them too, leaving the bathroom exactly as she’d found it except for the water left on the floor under the shower head and dripping down the glass divide.

Now that she was clean and relaxed, Jenny realized that she was still kind of tired.

Maybe another nap wouldn’t be amiss. A couple of hours of extra rest. Maybe she’d feel a little more human after that, so to speak. She unlocked the bathroom door and stepped out. Her guard was still dutifully waiting for her.

‘’The High Priest said that I could get some more sleep,’’ Jenny said. ‘’Can you bring me some place where I can do that?’’

The guard (Jenny should really learn his name sometime) nodded. ‘’I can. If you would follow, please.’’

Jenny did. After a few corners and hallways, the place slowly started to look more familiar. Not by much, though. Jenny was, despite herself, still surprised to see she’d ended up back at the bedroom she’d woken up in hours earlier.

This time, the chair didn’t have linen pants, but a pair of simple cotton pyjamas. She thanked her guard, who gave a simple nod in return, and once again locked the door behind her. Then she changed into the pyjamas, appreciating the softness of the cotton, and slipped into the bed, hitting the light switch to plunge the room into darkness.

The moment her body hit the mattress and her head the pillow, it was like her muscles turned into string cheese, and she melted into the bed with a sigh of exhausted relief.

It didn’t take Jenny long to drift off into sleep, and she was vaguely relieved to find she wasn’t standing in the desert this time. Then she truly fell asleep, and she didn’t feel much of anything, as she dreamt of nothing. Her sleep was light, but restful.

A couple of hours later, Jenny’s eyes snapped open in the darkness at the sound of a key sliding into the lock of her bedroom door.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Jenny deals with an intruder in her bedroom, gets an answer to a question she's been asking herself since her ascension (and doesn't like what the answer is), gains the first of her promised powers, and find something she doesn't like in the mirror.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 22 is up, and it's a good one. At least, in my opinion, it's a good one. Things happen.

As always, enjoy, and let me know your thoughts!

Jenny laid stock-still under the covers of her bed, eyes wide open as she listened to the tumblers in the lock sliding and giving way to the key. Her heart was beating so fast she could hear her blood pulsing in her ears, the adrenalin screaming through her blood hyping up every sense she had until she almost swore she could hear the heartbeat of the person trying to come into her room.

Trying, and succeeding, Jenny thought anxiously, clutching her covers between her hands until her knuckles turned white under the strain.

This was bad.

This was very bad. She just knew it.

Had it been Henry, or Nick, or Abdamelek, they would have knocked and waited for her to answer, she knew that.

There was no reason to sneak into her room like a thief in the night unless it was with ill intentions.

This was very, very bad.

The lock clicked.

For a few moments, nothing happened, as if the person behind it was waiting for something.

Jenny took the opportunity to swiftly rearrange her blankets, so she would be able to jump out of bed without getting tangled and tripping. She wished she had a weapon. Any weapon. Even a butter knife would be welcome at this point.

Her door slowly began to swing open, sending a beam of light into her room. Jenny quickly closed her eyes until she was looking out through her lashes and did her best to look like she was peacefully asleep and totally ignorant of what was happening. Her heart pounded violently. She resisted the urge to swallow anxiously.
Peeking out through her lashes, Jenny tried not to tremble visibly as she watched the door open wide enough for a body to slip through. The intruder was wearing the traditional white linen of Ancient Egypt.

The priest turned to close the door behind him until only a tiny bit of light could get in from the hallway through an inch-wide crack, and as he did, Jenny spotted a glint of metal in his hand.

Knife.

The realization burned into Jenny’s consciousness like a hot poker.

The man was holding a knife.

And there was only one reason a priest wielding a knife would be breaking into her bedroom while Jenny was supposed to be asleep.

Jenny’s stomach turned cold.

Trying not to make noise, she frantically tried to figure out what she was supposed to do now. Did she try to run? But that if there were more would-be assassins, waiting outside the door to see if they were needed? Or would she try to fight? Nevermind the fact that Jenny had, before finding Ahmanet, hardly any experience with violence. She wouldn’t know where to start when it came to overpowering an attacker. She could throw a decent punch, though.

Jenny watched the priest slowly stalk closer, evidently trying not to wake her up, and panicked a little bit. More than a little bit. The priest was within arm’s reach now. He stood still for a second, and Jenny could barely see him in the near-complete darkness of the room. The small amount of light from the hallway was enough to make the metal of the knife gleam.

The priest raised his arm, knife clenched in his fist.

It came down with force.

Jenny reacted instinctively. She threw the covers aside, grabbed the first thing within reach, smashed her pillow into the priest’s face. She jumped out of bed and rammed her shoulder into the priest’s midsection before he could recover. The man went stumbling, cursing loudly.

Jenny made for the door. Her socks slipped on the tile of the floor. Jenny was cursing too as she went down, scrambling for the door on her hands and knees.

A hand closed around her ankle, dragging her back into the room. Jenny yelped as her knees gave way and she smacked face-first into the floor. She flipped onto her back and rammed her shoulder into the priest’s nose with a crunch. He fell back, grunting in pain, blood already starting to drip down his face.

‘‘Monster!’’ the man hissed angrily, scrabbling to his knees and grabbing the knife off the floor, ‘‘I’m going to rid this world of your evil!’’

Jenny tried to crabwalk backwards. She was panting with panic, unable to spare the breath, or the thoughts, for a response.

The man lunged at her.

Jenny threw herself to the side, her shoulder knocking into the chair next to the door and sending it clattering on its side. She grabbed one of the chair legs without thinking about it. It was heavy with
one hand. Jenny grunted as she smashed the chair into the man’s side. There was a crack of wood, and the softer crunch of bone. The man let out a yell of pain.

It wasn’t enough to stop him.

He kicked the chair aside, charging forward.

Yelping, Jenny instinctively brought up her hands, eyes clenched shut.

The knife came down.

There was an odd sensation of pressure against Jenny’s right arm, then liquid hitting her face.

Jenny opened her eyes. A half-terrified, half-hysterical sob escaped her. The knife was stuck in her forearm, the blade stabbed all the way through until the tip emerged at the other side. Blood was pouring out of both the entrance and exit wound.

It looked really, really painful.

But it didn’t hurt.

The priest growled like an animal, yanking the knife out of Jenny’s arm. “Die, devil!”

Jenny caught his wrist just before the knife could touch the skin of her throat. The priest gave another growl, putting his entire weight behind the knife. The tip of the blade touched the hollow of Jenny’s throat.

A bolt of panic surged through her as cold realization dropped into her stomach. This bastard was going to murder her. She was going to die. Her throat was going to get slit like she was a pig for slaughter. She was about to die for a second time.

A drop of blood welled under the tip of the blade.

Something inside Jenny cracked and went cold.

In an instant, the panic burbling inside her turned into a quiet, icy kind of calm.

A new, inhuman sense of strength rushed through her, like nothing she’d ever felt before.

Jenny tightened her grip on the priest’s wrist. Bones ground together, bent, and then splintered under her fingers. The priest howled. Jenny didn’t stop. She continued to squeeze, morbidly curious and strangely apathetic at the same time. It didn’t take any effort. It was like she was gripping a piece of foam, it was so easy.

The wrist in her grip compacted and crumpled in her hand. Bones escaped between Jenny’s fingers, piercing muscles and skin. A spray of blood hit her face.

The priest writhed on top of her and made an panicked animal noise of complete and utter agony.

Jenny plucked the knife away from her throat with her free hand, the wooden handle denting under her fingers, tossing it to the side negligently. It sank into the wall with a crunch of steel and stone until only the handle was visible. Jenny watched it for a second, feeling strangely numb about it.

She turned her full attention back to the priest writhing in her grip. Slowly, she peeled her fingers away from the ruined wrist in her hand, watching the mangled mess of splintered bones, crushed muscles, near-liquefied flesh and oozing blood. It didn’t horrify her like she felt it should.
The priest slumped against her, raw noises coming out of his mouth, his face wet with snot and tears and sweat.

Jenny wedged her hands under his shoulders, palms pressed forward, and shoved.

For a split-second, she could feel, could see, her hands sinking into the flesh of his shoulders, his collarbones snapping like twigs.

Then the force of her shove propelled him away from her. The priest went flying like a ragdoll and impacted the wall across the room with a sickening cracking, crunching kind of noise. When he slid down, crumpling onto the bed lifelessly, he left behind a smear of blood, splinters of bone, loose shreds of skin and pinkish-grey bits of brain matter.

He was silent and motionless.

Jenny clenched and unclenched her fists a couple of times and slowly pulled herself to sit with her back against the wall. Her eyes were on the dead man slumped across her bed. She could see where the back of his skull had caved in. Blood was already soaking into the bedlinens.

She should feel bad about it.

She should feel horrible.

She should feel like a monster.

She didn’t.

If anything, she felt more alive than she’d ever felt before.

Taking her eyes off the dead priest, Jenny inspected her wounded arm. The stab wound, a clean through-and-through, was slowly but visibly knitting itself back together. It had already stopped bleeding. She poked at it curiously. It still didn’t hurt. If anything, it felt a little numb. Like someone had injected a weak anaesthetic into the surrounding tissue. Judging by the rate it was healing at, Jenny guessed the wound would only take a few minutes to close up completely, as if it had never been there in the first place.

She went back to clenching her fists. That strange strength was still there, she could feel it all through her body. Like an electric current, softly buzzing away in her bones and muscles. It should have been frightening, but it only really felt reassuring. Comforting. Like safety. Like an instinctive knowledge that there was very little in this world that could overpower her now.

Jenny let her head roll back against the wall, hands still clenching and unclenching every few seconds, and decided to stare at the ceiling for a while.

It was probably the safest thing to do for now.

It took maybe ten minutes before she heard rapid footsteps hurrying down the hallway, accompanied by harried-sounding voices. Someone had discovered what had happened, Jenny guessed, still staring at the ceiling. That, or there were more people arriving to see if she was dead yet, and attempt to finish the job when they found out she wasn’t.

Well, let them come, Jenny thought viciously. She’d smack them down like she’d done to the first priest.

The idea of another fight didn’t make her feel afraid at all.
She didn’t feel much of anything right now. Just an icy, quiet calm, like all of her fear and anger and other emotions had frosted over until only a deadly stillness remained.

“Jennifer?!”

The door, which had remained open a tiny bit, was flung wide open and smashed into the wall, bouncing back violently. Abdamelek stormed into the room, wielding a khopesh blade, Henry and Nick on his heels with a gun each. They faltered upon spotting the mutilated corpse half-hanging off the bed, blood soaking into the mattress and dripping into an expanding puddle on the floor.

Slowly, their gazes drifted to Jenny, who hadn’t stopped staring at the ceiling. It wasn’t all that interesting to look at, but that didn’t stop her.

“Jennifer?!” Henry tucked his gun away and crouched in front of her.

Jenny slowly moved her gaze until she was looking straight at him. “You’re a little late, aren’t you, Henry?”

The look of worry on his face increased. “Jenny,” he said, using the shortened version of her name for what was probably the first time ever, “I can’t understand what you’re saying. You’re speaking Ancient Egyptian.”

Was she? Jenny hadn’t noticed. She made a conscious effort to speak English, and was a little surprised when the words came out with a heavy accent - almost as heavy as Abdamelek’s. “I didn’t realize,” she said. “Sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Henry said, visibly startling at her suddenly gained accent, “Jenny, can you tell me what happened?”

Jenny gave a slow shrug. “He tried to kill me. So I killed him.”

“We’re gonna need a little more detail than that, Jenny,” Nick said, a hint of worry buried underneath his otherwise scathing tone.

“He tried to kill me,” Jenny repeated. “He had a knife. It’s over there now.” She pointed at the wall, where most of the knife had disappeared into the stone. There were a few incredulous looks. “He stabbed me with it, but it didn’t hurt. I didn’t even feel it. And then he tried to stab me in the throat, but I caught his wrist. Then I squeezed, and it broke. Then I shoved him away, and he flew into the wall.” She nibbled on her lower lip a bit. “I think he died on impact. His skull caved in, you see. And he stopped screaming at that point.”

Abdamelek had sheathed his khopesh at his waist and made his way over to the dead priest, quietly inspecting the man’s crushed wrist. There was a quiet kind of horror on his face. “You did this just by squeezing?”

“It was easy,” Jenny said. “Like squeezing in a piece of foam or something.”

Abdamelek looked grave. “How much force did you use?”

“I don’t know. Not a lot. I just kind of squeezed until he started bleeding.”

“Jesus, Jenny,” Nick breathed, both horrified and revolted. Henry didn’t say anything, but seemed to share the sentiment.

Abdamelek inspected the wrist some more. “You completely pulverized it. I can’t see any bone
fragments larger than maybe half an inch. It looks like the skin just burst under the pressure.’’

‘‘The bones broke through first, actually,’’ Jenny said, feeling remarkably good about it all. The memory of flesh compacting and bursting under her fingers didn’t bother her at all. It probably should, though. She wondered what this said about her as a person. Probably nothing good.

‘‘We didn’t need to know that,’’ Nick said. ‘‘We don’t need any more detail.’’

Jenny shrugged, but didn’t say anything else. Though if they’d asked, she could have intimately described what it felt like to splinter bones and feel the blood squeeze though the seams between her fingers as the flesh turned to jelly under the force of her grip.

Yeah, there probably wasn’t anything good to say about her, Jenny was very sure about that.

She really felt remarkably calm. Too calm. She wondered where it came from, because she was pretty sure that, a week and a bit ago, she would have been utterly incapable of feeling this calm in a situation like this one. Hell, she’d have panicked so badly she’d have been completely unable to defend herself.

Henry was still crouched in front of her. ‘‘Where did he stab you?’’

‘‘My arm,’’ Jenny said, holding out her arm so Henry could see. The only sign of the wound left now was the blood crusted on her skin.

‘‘Jenny,’’ Henry said in that special tone reserved for people who might’ve hit their head a touch too hard and lost touch with reality a little bit, ‘‘there’s no wound here.’’

‘‘I know that Henry,’’ Jenny said, a touch irritably, ‘‘it healed up within minutes.’’

‘‘You gained regenerative powers as well?’’ Henry asked interestedly.

‘‘I think so,’’ Jenny said. ‘‘It took only a few minutes to heal. And it didn’t hurt.’’

‘‘At all?’’

‘‘No. It was like a local anaesthetic. Like when you’re at the dentist and they give you one before they start drilling in your teeth.’’ Jenny pulled her arm back and tucked it safely against her stomach. ‘‘All I really felt was some pressure.’’

‘‘Fascinating,’’ Henry muttered, more to himself than anything.

Across the room, Abdamelek sighed, finished with inspecting the corpse. ‘‘This is going to cause some trouble.’’ He ran a hand across his head.

‘‘What are the options?’’ Nick asked.

‘‘We don’t have a whole lot of options,’’ Abdamelek said. ‘‘This is a small temple. There are only a hundred or so priests. Everyone knows everyone. And they’ll know immediately when Akar, here,’’ he gestured at the corpse, ‘‘goes missing.’’

‘‘And Jenny being what she is, it won’t take them long to figure out what happened,’’ Henry finished. ‘‘And I’m guessing they’ll turn on her immediately after.’’

The High Priest nodded. ‘‘I fear so, yes.’’

‘‘Is there anything we can do about it?’’
“I’m afraid self-defense claims won’t be of much help here. Two of our number died tonight.”

Jenny looked up in confusion. “Two?”

Nick grimaced. “This guy, Akar was it? He killed the guard stationed outside of your door to get into the room.”

“Oh,” Jenny said. “I didn’t know.” She hadn’t heard anything coming from outside before the lock had woken her up. Akar must’ve taken care of that guard very quietly indeed. Especially considering the fact that the slight noise of him twisting the key in the lock had been enough to wake Jenny up. He must’ve made any noise at all killing the guard. Possibly, Jenny mused morbidly, by slitting the guard’s throat and then lowering him down to the floor so he wouldn’t fall and make noise, like they did in crappy spy movies.

“We are lucky it was Asim who came across the scene,” Abdamelek said, “and not someone more prone to gossip. No one else knows what happened yet.”

“The clean-up process will change that, though,” Henry said.

“Yes, it will. Which means we’re going to have to deal with the fallout.”

Jenny bit her lip a little nervously. She was pretty sure she wasn’t going to like the fallout. It was starting to sink in that it wasn’t just a regular guy she’d killed - he was a priest of Osiris, and she was currently in the Temple of Osiris, a.k.a. the headquarters of the priests of Osiris. That probably wasn’t a good combination for Jenny.

“I’m going to have to leave, aren’t I?” She asked in resignation. She felt tired at the very thought of it. She’d done nothing but run around in the last week and a half, and what she would really like was a stable place where she could stay for a while without people wanting to lynch her for simply existing.

“I’m afraid so,” Abdamelek agreed. “It’s not safe for you anymore. If you stay, I have no doubt this will happen again.”

Jenny had a feeling he wasn’t saying that he wasn’t quite sure about her staying here anymore. Which was understandable, considering she’d just killed one of his priests. It was kind of obvious he’d be upset about that. It was also kind of obvious he wouldn’t want the murderer around after it either. But she wished he’d just say it to her face instead of talking around it.

“It’s alright,” Jenny said after a few seconds, clambering to her feet, “I’ll go. Just give me some time to get dressed.”

Abdamelek nodded stoically. “You can clean up first. You’re covered in blood. And I’ll have some trusted priests put together some supplies for you.”

Nick’s brows furrowed. “You’re kicking us out?”

“Did you expect us to stay after this, Nicholas?” Henry asked. “It’s best if we leave. For everyone.”

“But what about the cure? Aren’t we supposed to find one?”

“And I will continue to look for one,” Abdamelek said, “but until then, you cannot be here.”

“But -” Nick started to argue.
Jenny sighed. “Just shut it Nick. You heard him. We’re leaving.”

Nick looked like he wasn’t going to shut up.

Jenny glowered at him, annoyance rising steadily, then frowned when Nick suddenly went pale and stumbled back. Alarm was stark and vivid on Abdamelek’s face as his hand went to the grip of his khopesh.

“What?” Jenny asked, confused.

“Jennifer…” Henry was the only one who looked even remotely calm. “Your eyes…”

“What about them?” Nick dug through his pocket with his good hand and pulled out his phone, then held the black screen in front of Jenny’s face. She caught a glimpse of her reflection, and gasped, terror suddenly clogging her throat.

Looking back at her were four pupils.

And her irises were a very familiar, inhuman, burning amber.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The last part of the temple of Osiris. Jenny tries to deal with her new eyes, has to leave the temple because of what happened with Akar, and Nick does something unexpected, and an unwanted guest shows up.

Chapter Notes

So, here's chapter 23 for you guys. Stuff happens. Some of it, I might add, could even be considered unexpected, which I am pretty pleased by.

Also, all of you should go check the comments on chapter 22. There you'll find a user called navieth, who has made some totally awesome fanart for The Mummy, and you should absolutely go check it out, because it's amazing.

As always, enjoy and let me know what you think!

Jenny rubbed harshly at her head, massaging the shampoo into her bloodied hair none too gently, eyes clenched shut.

Pupula duplex.

Burning amber.

She had the same eyes Ahmanet had had before Jenny’s ascension had fully revived her.

It was the first truly visible trait that marked her as different.

As something inhuman.

Her inability to feel pain wasn’t visible. Her regeneration, as long as she didn’t get injured, wasn’t either.

But her eyes… she couldn’t hide her eyes. Not for long, anyway. They were all people needed a glimpse of to know that Jenny was Not Like Them. That she was Something Else. Something that, Jenny was sure, people would instinctively shy away from in fear.

Like Nick had flinched away. And Abdamelek, who had, before anything else, reached for a weapon. Only Henry had treated her like a normal person. Possibly because he knew what it was like to have a side that was wholly unlike what a human was supposed to be.

Jenny scrubbed at her head more furiously. Her scalp stung from the force of her scrubbing and the scalding temperatures of the water. She was sure she’d drawn blood in some places, she could feel the spots where her skin had split under her nails, but as she rubbed the pads of her fingers over them, she could already feel them knit back together and close up. Like the tiny wounds had never
Inhuman, Jenny’s mind whispered at her venomously, and she shut her eyes and stuck her face under the spray of the shower and tried not to think for a while.

The water ran into her mouth, and with every breath through her nose she almost inhaled it too, and the sensation of not getting enough air was so human that Jenny didn’t care about the discomfort and kept her face in the spray so the water could wash away her tears.

By the time she found the courage to leave the shower, her skin was a deep red from the heat and her fingertips were wrinkled.

The world outside of the shower cabin suddenly seemed a whole lot more daunting.

Henry, Nick and Abdamelek were waiting by the time Asim, who had fetched Jenny from the bathroom, led her into the small antechamber. Henry was carrying a backpack, and a second one was at his feet. He handed it to Jenny, and she hoisted it onto her back without a word.

“I’ve put in some money for you,” Abdamelek said, “as well as clean clothes, some food and directions to some places in various cities where you’ll likely be safest. There’s also a phone with a number. It has a solar charger. I will use it to send you updates about the cure.”

Jenny nodded in understanding. She said nothing.

Abdamelek gave a curt nod of his own. “Asim will show you out and bring you to the mainland. He will drop you off at Aswan. From there, you can go wherever you want.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, turning to Asim.

“Follow me,” Asim said, and Jenny was a little relieved that his tone was still the same he’d always used to talk to her. He didn’t seem frightened, or horrified, or disgusted. Or maybe he was just a really good actor, pretending until he was rid of her and her boys.

Asim led them back to the surface of Philae in silence. Jenny couldn’t blame him. There wasn’t much to say, after all, considering the circumstances. Instead, she watched the various statues and murals and rows of hieroglyphs on the walls pass by. Somehow, she couldn’t find it in herself to admire them the way she’d done going in. The whole temple had kind of lost its appeal, to be completely honest.

The part of Jenny that had known it was a bad idea to come here in the first place felt viciously vindicated. It was more than a little annoying.

Jenny was just glad that there didn’t seem to be any priests around save for Asim, the halls and hallways they were led through suspiciously empty of any life save for themselves. She suspected things had been arranged that way. It didn’t seem feasible that in a temple full of priests who specialized in guarding the world from the Dark One and her Chosen, only one of them would try to kill her.

Especially now that she’d killed one of their own.

Jenny clenched her fists, imagining she could still feel the blood slowly becoming sticky and cool on her skin, and tried not to think of the fact that she was a murderer now. It made her chest feel hollow...
and cold, like a pane of glass had cracked inside her ribcage and the shards were still there, stabbing and slicing and ripping her apart with revulsion and guilt and self-hatred until she could almost taste blood on her tongue.

She wanted to cry, but she’d already spilt too much tears over the last few days, and her tear ducts felt dry and depleted, as if she would never shed another tear in her life.

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Upon reaching the surface of Philae, Jenny found herself blasted by sunlight the moment she stepped off the stairs. She grimaced, holding her arm up to block the sun from shining directly into her eyes.

“Here,” Asim produced a pair of sunglasses out of seemingly nowhere. They were wrap-around ones, that would hide Jenny’s eyes even from the sides. Jenny took them gratefully and put them on, blinking a little in relief as the glare of the sun was cut down to manageable levels.

“Thanks.”

“There is a spare pair in your backpack. To keep your eyes hidden,” Asim said as he handed Henry some sunglasses as well. “I recommend you look into some coloured contacts if you have the time. Though I suppose you’d have to find ones that can hide all of your pupils.”

“I’ll think about it,” Jenny said, figuring that it wasn’t the worst idea she’d ever had. Although she wasn’t sure there were natural-looking contacts out there that could hide her pupula duplex eyes from scrutiny.

“Come,” Asim said, “we have a small boat ready to take you to shore, and a car to bring you to Aswan.”

“After you,” Henry said.

Jenny made to follow Asim, then paused and frowned when after a few feet, she noticed that Nick was still standing near the stairs. A new priest Jenny hadn’t seen before stood next to him.

“Nick?” Jenny asked, “are you coming?”

“No,” Nick said, “I’m not coming.”

Henry paused as well. “Nicholas?”

“I’m staying here, Jenny,” Nick said. “I’m going to help Abdamelek find you a cure and make the poison to take the Dark One down once and for all.”

Jenny felt like she’d been punched in the gut, all the air rushing out of her lungs and leaving her breathless. “You’re… not coming?”

The concept was hard to wrap her head around. Nick had been by Jenny’s side since the start. Plane crash and ambulance pursuit and London sandstorm and all. He’d promised to see it through to the end. To stick with Jenny until she was cured or irreversibly dead. And now he was just turning around and abandoning her?

Nick shrugged a little. “I just think I can do more here.”

Jenny was speechless. She literally couldn’t find any words.
“I suppose we cannot force you to come with us,” Henry said, sounding both disappointed and like he’d expected it. “Although I cannot say I am not disappointed in your lack of steadfastness.”

“Steadfastness?” Nick scoffed. “I’ve been in a plane crash, chased by zombies, hit by a sandstorm and nearly killed more times than I can count in the past week and a half! Anyone would’ve just upped and left the moment that coffin came out of the ground! I should’ve upped and left then!” He glared at Henry angrily.

“Then why didn’t you?” Jenny found herself asking, voice hollow.

“Because I care, Jenny,” Nick looked pained, “and I had to watch as that bitch tore you down bit by bit until you became this -” he gestured vaguely at her “- and I can’t stand it, okay?”

Jenny stared, dumbfounded. This was possibly the most honest Nick had ever been with her, and it was jarring. She didn’t like it. She wanted the arrogant, dumb jock back. The cocky bastard who’d held her hand to comfort her and grinned that stupid grin that made her want to grin back and slap him at the same time. This man, this broken down shade of who he used to be - he wasn’t the Nick Jenny knew.

“A week and a half ago, Jenny, you were this brilliant doctor who knew everything about Egypt there is to know. You were smart and driven and not taking any shit from anyone! And now you’ve been turned into a monster. The Dark One ran you into the ground and made you hate yourself. And I couldn’t do anything to stop it from happening,” Nick continued. There were, to Jenny’s shock, tears in his eyes. “And I hate it!”

“Nick…” For the hundredth time, tears burned in Jenny’s eyes.

“No!” Nick shouted, rubbing furiously at his face, “I’m staying here! Okay?! I’m staying here, and I’m getting you a cure. And then I’m gonna kill the undead bitch, and everything will go back to normal! Okay?!’’

Jenny found herself nodding mindlessly. She had no idea how to respond to this, or what she was supposed to say. If there even was anything to say.

“Okay,” Nick said, a little calmer. “So just go. You’ve got a phone. I’ll keep in touch. You just go now and find a safe place to stay for a little while.” He stared at Jenny intently, waiting for her to agree. “Okay?”

“Okay,” Jenny mumbled reflexively.

Nick nodded decisively. “Good.” He stood silently for a moment, opening his mouth to say something and then closing it again, like he wasn’t quite sure what to say or do anymore after his outburst. Then he sharply nodded and turned on his heel, abruptly disappearing back down the stairs towards the temple. Jenny watched him go, stomach cold and heavy, and wondered what the hell had just happened.

“Let’s go, Jennifer,” Henry gently took hold of her hand and tugged her away. Jenny followed mindlessly. “If we reach Aswan at a decent time, we might still be able to find a hotel before nightfall.’’

“Yes,” Jenny droned, wondering whether Nick did or didn’t hate her now, because it was all getting really confusing really fast, “a hotel. Of course.’’

“I was thinking something with a view of the Nile,” Henry chatted in an attempt to distract her, “what do you think?”
Jenny mumbled something in response, and wasn’t even sure what she saying even as she said it. It must’ve made some sense, though, because Henry nodded and agreed with her as if she’d just said something that was both poignant and sensible. Though Jenny wouldn’t have noticed if he was just going along with it - she was too distracted.

Asim accompanied them all the way into Aswan, as Abdamelek had promised, dropping Jenny and Henry off at a decent-looking hotel. He left quickly, though, biding them a simple goodbye before climbing back into the car and driving off.

“I think,” Jenny said, having pulled herself together, “that we should find a different hotel to stay in.”

“You’re thinking it’s possible one of the priests that want you dead will know we’re here and make a second attempt?” Henry pretty much read Jenny’s mind.

“That’s exactly what I’m thinking,” Jenny agreed. “The temple was supposed to be safe, and you know how that worked out. I’m not willing to give them a second opportunity.”

Having to defend herself from the priests of Osiris once was plenty, thank you very much. She still didn’t feel as guilty as she should, but that didn’t mean it was an experience she would like to repeat. Especially because it would probably be hard to hide a body, and Jenny didn’t feel like having to deal with the local authorities arresting her for murder or something. Not that she’d let them, because Jenny was not planning to go to jail, but it would probably not be fun either way. Both for her and for the poor bastard who actually had to go arrest her.

“I agree with you,” Henry said. “We should find someplace safer. There should be plenty of hotels. Philae is a popular tourist destination.”

Jenny nodded, looking up and down the street. “Which way should we try?”

Henry shrugged. “Left?”

“Good enough for me.” Jenny gave a shrug of her own and started walking. Henry followed without protest.

Luckily, Henry was right, and there were more than plenty hotels to choose from. After some deliberation, Jenny and Henry decided to go for one of the bigger ones, for the sake of anonymity. If there were enough guests, they’d be able to blend in. A small hotel meant few guests, and that meant that Jenny and Henry wouldn’t be able to disappear into the crowds as easily as they could in spaces with more people.

Their chosen hotel was in between small and huge, and, more importantly, it was a hotel favoured by westerners. Since Jenny was Caucasian and Henry was too, they could blend in with the Europeans, Americans and Australians as well as the crowds - it was the best way to stay hidden right now.

“We could share a two-bedroom suite,” Henry suggested as they walked into the hotel, “that way I’ll hear if someone comes in too.”

“Alright,” Jenny said. She had no objections to that. And it would be nice to have Henry there if she was attacked again. Especially because his alter was very capable of killing as easily as Jenny had killed Akar.

“I’ll go order the suite for us, then,” Henry said. “If you’ll wait here?”

“Sure.” Jenny sank down on one of the seats available in the lobby, placing her backpack between
her feet as she settled in to wait. Henry handed her his backpack as well and then walked over to the service counter to talk to one of the receptionists.

Jenny glanced around, nervously bringing her hand up to make sure her sunglasses were pressed onto her nose, hiding her eyes. She didn’t want anyone to see them.

“Jennifer,” Henry was back at her side, holding two keys, “are you ready?”

“Yes,” Jenny said. “What room?”

“Number 307. Third floor. This key is yours.” Henry handed one of the keys to her. “I’ve booked the room for two nights to start with. That’ll give us some time to figure out where we go from here.”

Two nights. Two nights should be plenty to figure out a new plan. Jenny could go along with two nights.

She followed Henry into the elevator, and, being closest to the buttons, pressed the one to take them to the third floor.

The suite Henry had arranged was a nice one. Not the best in the hotel, but certainly one of the better ones. It had two separate bedrooms with queen beds, and though the bathroom was shared, it was spacious and could be locked so the other couldn’t accidentally walk in.

All in all, Jenny was more than pleased.

She took the bedroom on the right for herself and dumped her backpack onto the bed, curious to actually find out what it was that Abdamelek had packed for her as supplies.

She dropped down on the bed as well, kicking off her shoes and folding her legs underneath her lotus-style, and zipped the backpack open. Inside was a set of clean clothing, very similar to what she’d already been provided at the temple, and some packages of food, which turned out to be stuff that lasted long. Mostly dried fruits and some bread-cakes and cheese. The phone was there too, complete with charger and sim-card. Lastly, there was an envelope of cash. Jenny counted it out quickly, finding that it was the Egyptian Pound equivalent of about a 1000 Pounds Sterling. A more than generous amount. Far more than Jenny had expected, to be honest.

Jenny stuffed the items back into the backpack, save the food. She didn’t need to hoard food right now, so she supposed she could have a snack of sorts. She tore off a piece of the bread and cheese and nibbled on it thoughtfully. It was the same hard, salty cheese she’d had during lunch/dinner at the temple, though the bread was more compact and seemingly made to have a longer shelf-life. The fruit, it turned out, were dates.

Jenny laid back onto her bed and frowned at the ceiling. It was hard not to think about what she was going to do now. Or, more accurately, her absolute lack of knowing what her next move should be. She wasn’t sure if there was much she could do anymore. Abdamelek and Nick were at the temple, looking for a cure. Jenny didn’t have to run from Ahmanet anymore, because she’d already ascended and thus wouldn’t be hunted anymore. So Jenny really had no purpose at the moment.

Everything since pulling the sarcophagus out of that mercury had revolved around surviving, and she’d failed at that. Spectacularly so. And after that it had been about getting a cure. But she couldn’t help with that anymore.

Jenny was, effectively, useless. And she didn’t like it one bit.
She could hear Henry’s footsteps in the main room of the suite, then a door falling closed and a lock clicking. A few moments later, the shower started up. Jenny ignored it and frowned harder at the ceiling, mind churning.

What was her purpose now?

What was she supposed to do when there was nothing she could think of that she could do?

Was she just supposed to wander around doing nothing until Abdamelek and Nick cooked up something that could make her human again? And, more importantly, was that even possible? Jenny didn’t think ascension came with a retour ticket. And she sure as hell didn’t think Ahmanet - or Set for that matter - would let her go that easily. The dagger that had been thrust into her heart and the glyphs on her abdomen were testament to that.

She caught a glimpse of movement in the corner of her eye.

“How was the Great Pyramid?”

Chris smiled, taking a seat at the foot end of Jenny’s bed. “It was nice,’’ he responded. ‘‘You know, even with all this bullshit going on, I can’t help but be impressed with the Ancient Egyptians. I totally understand why you chose to go into this field of archaeology.’’

“It is pretty cool, isn’t it? The Great Pyramid?” Jenny agreed.

“You’ve seen it?” Chris asked, and then chuckled at himself. “No, never mind. Of course you’ve seen it.”

“Course I have,” Jenny smirked. “I’ve been in and out of Egypt since I was twenty-two.”

“Work?” Chris guessed.

“Yeah,” Jenny said, “I didn’t have a lot of time to go sightseeing, but you can’t go to Egypt almost constantly and not go to see the Great Pyramid at one point.”

“True,” Chris agreed. “At least you got sent to fun places for work, though. When you go travelling in the army, it usually means you’re going to end up getting shot at.” He glanced at her. “Though I suppose you know all about getting hunted.”

“Yeah,” Jenny agreed. She knew everything there was to know about being hunted by people out to kill you. “What else have you been doing, except hanging around the pyramids?”

“Not much, to be honest. There’s not a lot I can do anymore,” Chris shrugged. “I’ve just been hanging around, mostly.” He brightened a little. “I’ve been working on my haunting.”

“Haunting?” Jenny asked, raising an eyebrow. That sounded interesting.

Chris gave another shrug. “You know how I can manifest enough to influence the material world, right?”

Jenny nodded.

“Well,” Vail looked a little embarrassed, “I’ve kind of been going around, finding shitty people. I spent the last day and a half at the house of some guy who is a bit of a bastard. You know, making his tv screen flicker, knocking over lamps, shattering his plates. Stuff like that.”

Jenny snorted. She knew she shouldn’t find it funny, but she did. The idea of Vail wandering around
some guy’s house making a mess was enough to cheer her up considerably.

“I think I’ve got him pretty spooked,” Chris stated with a bit of mischievous pride. “I think I’ll show him glimpses of me in mirrors and other reflective surfaces next. That’ll really put him off his tea.”

Jenny tried not to giggle at the thought and failed. Her sense of humour had gotten a little fucked over the last couple of days, she’d noticed, and this kind of stuff was apparently right up her alley.

Chris grinned at her, obviously pleased. The hole in his cheek oozed, but the sight didn’t bother Jenny at all; she was too busy grinning back.

Chris opened his mouth to say something else, but froze before he could. Jenny froze too in response, staring intently at the ghost of her friend, waiting for him to tell her what was wrong. Chris was so tense he looked like he was made of stone.

The room was silent save for the sound of Henry in the shower coming in through the wall.

A slow, rattling breath came from near the window.

Jenny was honestly more exasperated and annoyed than she was wary when she slowly turned to look at the source of the noise. Then her eyes widened, and she couldn’t have stopped the horrified gasp that tore from her throat if she’d tried.

Staring back at her was the dead, mangled ghost of Akar.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Chris deal with Akar, then talk about Nick amongst other things. While Jenny and Henry are eating lunch, something comes on on the news that shocks them both.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 24 is up and running, my amigos, for those who have not yet given up on my ramblings. I'm honestly a little surprised at myself - its going much better than I had initially expected.

As always, have fun with it, and if you have anything to say, feel free to tell me.

“Well,” Chris eventually broke the silence. “Shit.”

“Seconded,” Jenny faintly agreed after a second or two.

“Who the hell is that?”

“That,” Jenny said, “is Akar.” She watched with a kind of horrified fascination as the dead priest responded to his name, shambling a step closer. “He tried to kill me at the temple of Osiris. I killed him first.”

She felt nauseous at the sight of him, caved skull and mangled wrist and all. Guilt churned in her chest. It was intense enough that Jenny felt like she couldn’t breathe. Bile climbed up her throat, and she swallowed it back desperately.

Chris looked faintly shocked and a whole lot more impressed. “Wow, Jenny. You killed someone?”

Jenny nodded. “Yeah.”

“It looks like you did a number on him,” Chris stood up to walk around Akar, staring at his broken skull in fascination.

“Don’t remind me,” Jenny said. Looking back on it, the sensation of her hands sinking into Akar’s shoulders, his collarbones breaking and splintering, his animal howls of agony, the helpless terrified tears that had dripped down his face… the memories made her swallow back sick, the blood draining from her face.

“Is he aware?” Chris waved his hand in front of Akar’s face. There was a twitch in his face, but beyond that, he didn’t respond. “I think he’s, like, brain dead or something.”

“If he was brain dead, he wouldn’t even be standing, Chris,” Jenny said. “He’d be in a heap on the floor, unable to even breathe on his own.”
“He’s a ghost, though. Technically he doesn’t need to breathe.”

“Does him being a ghost automatically mean he can function with half his brain missing, though? I mean, does he automatically regain the functions he had in life?”

Vail frowned. “I don’t know. He’s the first ghost I’ve met other than myself.”

Jenny gave a frown of her own. “You retained all your injuries, though, but you’re aware and you have all your faculties. Your personality hasn’t changed. You’re still intelligent. You’re basically the same you were in life, except intangible. He,” Jenny gestured at Akar, “evidently, is not.”

“Well, the fact that he attacked you does show a certain lack of sense.” Chris said.

“He was coherent, though. And aware. Can you honestly say that this here is aware and capable of behaving normally?” She gave another gesture in the direction of Akar.

“Fair enough.” Chris reached out and poked Akar. “Hey, d’you understand what we’re saying?”

Akar gave no reaction. His breath rattled disturbingly in his lungs. Blood dripped down the back of his neck, down his back, and soaked into the linen of his traditional skirt. Some drops hit the ground, and they disappeared the moment they touched the carpet on the floor.

“Pretty sure he’s, like, the ghost version of brain dead,” Chris concluded.

Jenny rolled her eyes and pushed Chris out of the way. The fact that she was touching a ghost as if he were tangible failed to register; she’d been through so much insane shit that, quite frankly, tangible ghosts didn’t even faze her anymore. Besides, she’d touched Chris before, there was no reason for it to not work now.

Chris let himself be pushed aside easily, grinning, and Jenny shot him another eye roll before turning her attention to Akar. She waved a hand in front of his face like Chris had done.

Akar didn’t respond verbally, but he did slowly turn his head to look at her, which was more than Chris had managed to get out of him so far. His eyes were empty and clouded, but that didn’t stop him from focussing on Jenny with an almost frightening intensity.

For a moment, nothing happened.

Then there was a spark of… well, not life, because he was dead, but… awareness, maybe.

His mouth opened. ‘‘Cu-‘’ he croaked, voice rough and breaking like he hadn’t used it in years, and he had to stop and start over again, ‘‘Cursed…’’

Jenny sighed. Was there ever going to be a day when she was rid of that nickname? Still, she was mildly impressed Akar had enough brains left to speak. ‘‘That would be me, yes.’’

Akar made a raw rattling sound from deep in his throat. ‘‘You ki…lled me…’’

‘‘Yes,’’ Jenny said awkwardly, trying not to let on how guilty she felt, ‘‘that would be me as well.’’

‘‘I… dead… Evil God…’’ Akar rasped. He grimaced with every word, as if the very act of talking physically pained him.

Jenny frowned at his words. ‘‘You were dead, and Set was there?’’

Akar nodded silently, and there was a quiet kind of horror in his eyes that Jenny knew better than
anyone. Like he’d seen evil in its basest form and evil had looked back and showed him what it truly was. Like his very soul had been devoured by it and spat back out, mangled and injured and not quite what it had been before.

Jenny knew the feeling.

She knew exactly what it was like to meet Set.

His presence, ancient and cold and callous, curling around her like she was a bird with clipped wings kept in a cage, leaving a slimy trail across her skin that made her shudder with revulsion even now. It was almost as if she could still feel the writing on her abdomen being carved into her skin, so cold that it burned. The memory of it made her swallow thickly, a lump gathering in the back of her throat.

She totally understood why Akar was so out of it. Because Jenny had a feeling that Set hadn’t been nearly as careful with Akar as he had been with Jenny - Akar had attacked the woman who was supposed to birth Set’s mortal avatar.

And Jenny had a feeling Set was the possessive sort who didn’t like it when people messed with his toys.

‘Can you tell me what happened?’ Jenny didn’t really want to know, but at the same time, she did. A small, dark part of her, the part that had cracked and broken when Akar had tried to murder her, wanted to gleefully revel in what had happened to him, wanted to know what Set had done so she could enjoy his misery. But the larger part, the part of Jenny that was reasonable and forgiving and human, that part of her was horrified and sympathetic and really wished she hadn’t just asked that question.

Akar’s breath stuttered. Fear and horror and revulsion skittered across his face in rapid twitches. He looked like he was about to start hyperventilating and convulsing.

Obviously, whatever Set had done to him wasn’t nice.

‘Cold…’ Akar croaked after a few moments, terror stark on his face. His speech was improving, though. ‘Freezing… then pain. So much pain… Anger… He was… livid.’

‘He was angry because you tried to kill me, you mean,’ Jenny stated, ‘so he what? He punished you?’

The expression on Akar’s face was all the answer Jenny needed to that question. She felt faintly nauseous. And grateful, that Akar hadn’t gone into actual detail about what had happened to him beyond telling that there had been ‘so much pain’. Jenny didn’t want to find out how much pain ‘so much pain’ was exactly.

Not that she could, as Akar had provided the answer to her question of whether she could still feel physical pain when he’d tried to murder her in her sleep.

She couldn’t. FYI.

Jenny still wasn’t sure whether she was happy about that or not. Probably a little bit of happy and a little bit of not-happy.

Anyway. She was getting off-topic.

Jenny sighed. ‘Alright. Why are you here? And how? I doubt Set would have just let you go with
how you displeased him. So he must’ve had a reason for it.’’ She glared at Akar, watching him
flinch as his cloudy eyes met her yellow, double-pupilled ones. ‘‘And that means you have a reason
for being here.’’

Akar swallowed thickly. A small stream of blood leaked down behind his ear, dripped onto his
shoulder, and separated into two smaller streams that went down his back and chest. Several small
splinters of bone and shreds of skin were carried away by the liquid. ‘‘The Evil God…’’ Akar rasped,
‘‘He said… I have a debt to you… for what I did.’’

Jenny frowned. ‘‘Alright, but that still doesn’t answer my question.’’

Akar lifted his right hand, then, showing her the palm of his hand. Imprinted on his corpse-pale skin
was a circle of symbols in a far too familiar script.

Jenny’s hand flew to her abdomen automatically, splaying her fingers across the area of her skin
where Set had burned their pact onto her very being. ‘‘You made a pact with Set?!’’

Jenny could scarcely believe that a priest of Osiris - Osiris, the sworn enemy of Set and all his
favoured (cursed) subjects - would make a pact with the one they called the Evil God. Why would
Akar make a pact with him? Jenny didn’t get it. It just didn’t make any sense at all.

Although she supposed Akar could’ve been forced into it, like Jenny had been.

‘‘I had to,’’ Akar said, looking like he wished to Osiris he hadn’t been stuck in that situation - a
sentiment Jenny could totally sympathize with. ‘‘My soul… He took it. Payment, he said… for
attacking you… I had to escape...’’

‘‘So you made a pact with him.’’ Jenny sighed with understanding. ‘‘What did you promise him?’’
Akar hesitated, and Jenny let out another sigh. ‘‘You didn’t get to set the terms for the pact, did you?’’

‘‘No.’’ Akar shook his head.

Jenny wished he was a little more forthcoming with the information she wanted. It would’ve been
nice if she didn’t have to keep asking to find out what she wanted to know. Apparently, though,
Akar just wasn’t giving information away that easily. Jenny wanted to hit him with every ounce of
the new strength she had in her. Maybe another good blow to the head would get him to talk. And
she knew that she could definitely touch ghosts...

Just as Jenny was debating the possibility of choking Akar (just a little bit, that small dark part of her
whispered, imagine how satisfying it would feel to grab his throat and squeeze), the former priest
managed to scrape together enough courage to continue. Jenny tried to ignore the small surge of
disappointment (it would’ve felt so good).

‘‘The Evil God said,’’ Akar’s speech really was improving fast, ‘‘that he’d let me go, if... if I’d
serve.’’

Jenny frowned. ‘‘Serve? Who, him?’’

‘‘No,’’ Akar shook his head in the negative. Drops of blood flew from his head at the motion. Jenny
was sure she could see a bit of brain, only barely attached to the rest, wobble like a rather disturbing
kind of jelly behind his ear. ‘‘Not him. You.’’

That threw Jenny for a loop. She blinked furiously at Akar. ‘‘Excuse me?’’
Akar looked less that happy. Or rather, not happy at all. ‘‘I’m meant to serve you,’’ he gritted out, ‘‘until the Evil God deems my debt paid off.’’

‘‘What, with all due respect, the absolute everloving fuck,’’ Jenny stated emphatically, falling back into English without even noticing.

‘‘What is it?’’ Chris asked, and Jenny startled a little, because she’d almost forgotten he was present. ‘‘I still don’t speak Ancient Egyptian, remember?’’

Jenny let out a long, deep breath. ‘‘Long story short, Akar died, met Set, got tortured for a while and was then forced into a pact which means he’s now my servant.’’

Chris stared. ‘‘What the fuck?’’

‘‘Yeah, that’s what I thought too,’’ Jenny agreed. She looked at Akar. ‘‘When will Set consider this debt paid off?’’

That was important information, because Jenny was not keen to have her would-be murderer following her around constantly. She was one conversation in and she already wanted to throttle Akar. Having him around long-term would probably drive her to attempting to commit ghosticide.

If ghosts could even die. Because they were already dead.

If Akar hung around though, Jenny figured she would find out if ghosts could die soon enough.

‘‘I do not know,’’ Akar said.

Well, wasn’t that just great? Fan-fucking-tastic. Stuck with the ghost of a guy who’d tried to murder her at the whim of a God she hated. Jenny was sure the anger and annoyance were plain on her face for all to see - something that was proven when Akar took one look at her face and flinched away like a beaten dog.

Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to feel guilty for it. It wasn’t her job to be nice to someone who had literally put a knife through her arm.

‘‘So what now?’’ Chris asked. ‘‘Is he just going to follow you around?’’

Jenny hoped to God he wouldn’t. She generally didn’t have that much luck though. ‘‘So, how is this going to work?’’

‘‘I’m supposed to… stay near you. And provide assistance… where needed.’’ Akar responded reluctantly.

‘‘Do you have to be in sight, though?’’ Jenny wanted to know. The idea of looking at his caved skull all day didn’t exactly appeal to her. And she didn’t want him around in the first place. So if there was a way to get him away from her, she’d take it.

‘‘The Evil God bound me to you,’’ Akar said, ‘‘I will hear you if you call.’’

‘‘So you don’t have to follow me around constantly?’’ Jenny checked to make sure.

‘‘Correct,’’ the former priest agreed.

‘‘Good,’’ Jenny sighed in relief. ‘‘Then just go away, okay? If I need you, you’ll know.’’

Akar nodded in understanding. He glanced at Chris a little curiously (apparently his awareness had
returned almost fully by now) then turned on his heel and walked straight through the wall.

“Where’d he go?” Chris asked curiously.

“Away,” Jenny said. “And he won’t be back unless I call for him. Hopefully.”

“Sounds good. But he’ll be sticking around?”

“Well, according to him, he’s bound to me now, so unfortunately, yes. He will be sticking around for the near future.”

“Well,” Vail said, “that sucks.” He shrugged it off quickly though. “So… is there anything to do around here?”

Jenny shrugged. “I dunno. Haven’t checked yet.” She dropped down on the bed to stare at the ceiling. “Besides, I kind of have to be careful right now. I don’t know whether there’ll be more priests out to kill me.”

Vail frowned. “So you can’t really go out?”

“Not without being very careful,” Jenny said.

Chris hummed. “No going outside, then, I suppose. You kind of stand out, being blonde-haired and white-skinned and all.”

“Don’t remind me.” Jenny responded. “Although I wouldn’t be surprised if a description or even a picture of me is floating around too.” She glanced at Chris. “I’m pretty sure no one has tried to kill me here yet because Henry and I decided to choose a hotel different from what Asim recommended.”

“Asim?”

“A priest of Osiris. He seems okay, but that doesn’t really mean anything anymore.”

“You can say that again,” Chris agreed. Then he frowned. “Just you and Henry? I thought Nick was with you as well.”

Jenny pulled a face. “He’s decided to stay at the temple. He wants to find a cure for me and a poison to kill Ahmanet.”

Chris sat up to give her an incredulous stare. “He just went and abandoned you? After everything?”

“He’s doing what he thinks is best, I’m sure,” Jenny said, but even she didn’t believe the words that came out of her mouth. “It’s not like I could stop him anyway. He’s a big boy, he can handle himself.”

“That’s bullshit.” Chris said. “He abandoned you, and you know it. Stop making excuses for him.”

Jenny eyed him in confusion. “Weren’t you two best friends?”

“We were,” Chris said, “but that doesn’t mean I don’t know he’s kind of an asshole. And I also know he treated you like shit after Cairo. So don’t pretend like he didn’t take the first chance to get away from you that he got. Because he’s a jerk, and that’s what he does.”

Jenny nibbled on her lower lip and went back to staring at the ceiling. She knew Vail was probably right. Nick had been an utter ass to her since she’d gone through her ascension, and his behaviour
before that, which had been much more pleasant, didn’t cancel that out. It didn’t work like that. Being nice did not give Nick carte blanche to be a bastard later on. And it also didn’t mean Nick could just spout something about ‘helping to find a cure’ as an excuse to walk away and expect Jenny to be okay with it.

She had the right to feel abandoned.

Especially because she knew very well that Nick had no idea about Ancient Egypt beyond how much he could sell treasures for on the black market, and also that he couldn’t read hieroglyphs - which meant he’d be pretty much useless in finding a cure, because all the documents were written either in hieroglyphs or in the Old Script like the one Jenny had on her abdomen.

No.

Chris was right.

Nick had just used it as an excuse to get the hell away from this entire mess.

Jenny really wished she could blame him for it, but then again, if she’d been in his place and he in hers, she’d have booked it ages ago. No way in hell would she have hung around to get hunted down and almost killed God knows how many times.

So no, she didn’t blame Nick for walking away, but that didn’t stop her from feeling like she’d been kicked in the gut anyway.

“Let’s go do something,” Jenny said abruptly.

“Like what?” Chris asked. “It’s like you said, you can’t exactly go outside all willy-nilly right now.”

“What do you suggest, then?” Jenny asked, a little irritated all of a sudden.

Chris shrugged. “I dunno. We could watch tv? You could order room service and eat away your worries for a bit?”

“...Fair enough.” It was as good a plan as any, Jenny supposed. Besides, it had been a while since she’d just sat down and watched mindless sitcoms, and it sounded like a really pleasant, normal thing to do right now. Jenny hadn’t done nearly enough pleasant, normal things lately. Also, she knew that the BBC also broadcast in Egypt (Jenny was pretty sure the BBC was global) so she could see what was on there.

“Let’s go hang in front of the telly, then,” Chris said, getting up. “The living room one. It’s bigger than the one in here.”

“Alright.” Jenny followed him into the living room part of the suite and dropped down on the couch, grabbing the remote off the coffee table. Chris dropped down next to her, slumping into the cushions of the couch and perching his feet on the coffee table. Jenny would’ve told him to put his feet on the floor, but he was a ghost and thus wouldn’t leave behind any dirt that might’ve been on his shoes anyway, so there was no use in it.

Henry was still in the shower - the water had shut off by now but the door was still locked - so Jenny decided to hold off on calling room service until he’d finished and instead spent a couple of minutes zapping between channels. There wasn’t much on.

“Stop at this one for a moment,” Chris requested when Jenny came across what looked like a B-
Since Jenny didn’t really have a preference at the moment, she shrugged and dropped the remote next to her on the couch. The movie would be entertaining, at least, even if the plot was already shaping up to be horribly cliche and predictable.

A couple of minutes into the movie, Henry exited the bathroom, fully clothed but hair still damp, and joined them on the couch. “What are we watching?”

“Some action movie,” Jenny said, abruptly remembering Henry couldn’t see or hear Chris. “I was planning on ordering room service in a bit, by the way.”

“Sounds good,” Henry said. He got up to grab the menu from the small table next to the door and sat down next to Jenny again. “I would like something to eat. What would you like?”

Jenny glanced over the menu, and found that while a large part of it was traditional Middle-Eastern/African food, there was also a sizable menu with more Western dishes. Jenny loved Middle-Eastern and African cuisine, she’d spent enough time in Egypt and its neighbouring countries to learn to adore it and she ate it regularly, but sometimes she just wanted something from closer to home.

“I’ll take the double bacon cheeseburger,” she told Henry, “with French fries and a banana milkshake.”

“Alright,” Henry said, “and dessert?”

Jenny nibbled on her lip as she looked over the dessert menu. “Ice cream. Strawberry flavour.”

Henry gave a nod. “I’ll order.” He made his way over to the table where he’d found the menu and grabbed the landline there, dialling the number for room service before ordering his and Jenny’s chosen meals. He’d gone for something less fast-food-y than Jenny with a relatively healthy chicken stir-fry kind of meal. Although he had ice cream for dessert too, so maybe not that healthy.

“God, I would kill for a cheeseburger,” Chris said from beside Jenny. “I would legitimately murder someone to get to eat that.”

Jenny glanced at Henry to make sure he wasn’t looking and then sent Chris a sympathetic look. She couldn’t imagine being in his position, and quite frankly, she didn’t want to either. She was in a bad place, sure, and her life had kind of gone to shit, but at least she was still, y’know, alive. And capable of eating a delicious cheeseburger with fries.

“I hope there’s junk food in the afterlife,” Chris added a little wistfully. Jenny hoped for him that the afterlife did indeed have junk food. Especially because he’d asked her not to resurrect him, and she was going to respect that wish. So yeah, the afterlife was probably the only place Chris would ever get to eat a burger and fries again.

The food was brought up by a waiter about half an hour later, and Jenny unashamedly drooled over her fantastic-looking double bacon cheeseburger while Henry (on his insistence, he hadn’t accepted the money Jenny tried to give him) paid for the food and tipped the boy who’d brought up the food. She managed to stop herself from pigging out until Henry had joined her at the small dining table, though, even if it was hard.

They’d left the tv on, and the strangely captivating shitty B-action movie was coming to an end while Jenny munched on her fries and tried not to make too big of a mess of herself while biting into her dripping but absolutely divine burger.
Vail hovered behind her, staring over Jenny’s shoulder at the burger in her hands with a wistful kind of longing.

The movie came to an end, and the credits at the end were accompanied with a supposedly-bombastic but really kind of cheesy music. Jenny popped some fries into her mouth and chewed slowly as the credits finished rolling and the next program started. It was the news. Jenny hadn’t seen the news in days. Not since her first foray into the tomb at least.

Jenny’s Arabic was pretty decent, so she had no trouble understanding the news lady. There was some ramble about politics and how some of the more prominent politicians seemed to have changed their entire agenda in a matter of days and how that was working out for them (surprisingly, it actually went over pretty well, but that was probably because of the drivel about bringing Egypt back to ‘its former glory’ and other nationalist messages similar to that).

After that segment there was something about protests happening in Cairo, and Jenny was glad she wasn’t in the city for that. She’d been in Cairo during the revolution of 2011 when Mubarak had been overthrown, and it was a nightmare experience Jenny would be happy not to repeat.

Jenny was halfway through a mouthful of milkshake and fries when a new news segment came up on the tv. The news lady was halfway through her sentence when Jenny looked up from her food and caught sight of the building rising up from the desert on the screen.

She inhaled in shock, then choked when the fries got stuck in her throat.

Henry lurched up from his chair and rounded the table to smack his hand firmly between Jenny’s shoulder blades, not stopping until she’d stopped coughing and got her breath back.

Chris was crouching in front of her, worried. ‘’What’s wrong?’’

‘’Are you alright? What’s wrong?’’ Henry unknowingly echoed Vail’s question.

‘’The news,’’ Jenny said, ‘’did you see that?’’

Both Henry and Chris turned to look at the tv. It was still showing shots of the desert, white stone rising from the reddish sand. From the distance it was filmed at, the people milling around looked tiny, the huge blocks of stones that made up the building making them look even tinier.

‘’What of it?’’ Henry asked.

‘’That,’’ Jenny said, a strange sensation sinking into her stomach, ‘’is Ahmanet’s palace.’’
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The Aswan Hotel, part 2. The reaction to Ahmanet's palace on the news. Jenny has words with Henry. It doesn't work out very well.

Chapter Notes

Welp, this week I have a neat 5100 words for you guys. It was supposed to be around 3800 but then I was busy with the next chapter and I figured that the first 1200-1300 words of that would fit better in this one instead. So yeah. The word count is a bit more than initially expected. Anyway.

As always, have fun with it, and lemme know what you think!

“What? Are you sure?” Henry stared at the tv with something akin to shock on his face.

Jenny nodded. “I’m sure. I saw it in a dream. She showed it to me.”

From a distance, sure, but the sprawling white compound was hard to forget. And it was distinctive. Jenny hadn’t needed to see it more than once to recognize it on tv now.

“...That is not good.” Henry said.

Jenny stared at him. “Sorry?”

“That,” Henry pointed at the tv, “means that she’s confident enough that she’s willing to risk full exposure. She’s intelligent. She would know that reclaiming her palace from the desert would attract attention.”

“And that means she’s ready to deal with that kind of attention,” Jenny finished, realization colouring her tone.

Henry was right. This was bad.

Because if Ahmanet was ready to deal with the attention and exposure that came with the reveal of an ancient palace, she must be powerful enough to be able to deal with whatever consequences that came with it too. It meant that she was as powerful as she’d been 5000 years ago, possibly even more so, and that she had managed to foster enough connections to keep people like the government from trying to eliminate her or experiment on her.

Jenny looked away from the tv and back down at her half-eaten burger.

This was the point where she was supposed to grow frightened and maybe a little nauseous and lose her appetite.
But Jenny wasn’t upset. Or afraid.

Ahmanet had said that she’d wait for Jenny to come to her, and though Ahmanet had hunted her down and killed her, one thing the princess had never done was lie to her. Maybe foolishly, Jenny trusted Ahmanet to keep her word and leave Jenny alone for the time being.

Giving the tv another glance - the shot of the palace had zoomed in on grainy images of the people milling around the place, for as far as they were outside the humongous gates of the equally tall palace walls, anyway - Jenny decided to just ignore it for now and finish her meal instead. She picked her burger back up and took a bite. It was still greasy and delicious, sauce and melted cheese dripping down Jenny’s fingers, and the news on the tv didn’t lessen her enjoyment of the burger at all.

Chris hopped up onto the table, crossing his legs under him. ‘‘You don’t seem upset by the news.’’

Jenny chewed her burger, taking her time to formulate her answer in such a way that it would give Chris an answer without making Henry suspicious.

‘‘You know,’’ Jenny said after a moment, ‘‘I thought I’d be afraid when this came on. I figure I should be afraid. But I’m not.’’ She glanced at Henry, as if talking to him. ‘‘Isn’t that strange?’’

Henry sighed heavily, running a hand through his hair. ‘‘...I think that you’ve been through a lot, Jennifer. And I think that you’ve been getting accustomed to the bond you have with Ahmanet. She’s been in your dreams since the start.’’ He poked at his chicken stir-fry with his fork. ‘‘It’s only normal that you’d get used to her sooner or later.’’

Jenny slurped some of her milkshake. ‘‘Meaning?’’

‘‘Meaning, no I don’t think it’s strange that you’re not afraid of this news. People in traumatic situations learn to cope with the trauma.’’ He gave her a look. ‘‘I’m more worried about what’ll happen to you when all this is over, and when you’re not living on a fight-or-flight response twenty-four seven.’’

‘‘So you’re saying I’m in defense mode on a semi-permanent basis, and that it might impact me when all of this is resolved?’’ Jenny frowned.

‘‘I’m saying that the human mind has a remarkable ability to shield itself from trauma while the trauma is happening to you,’’ Henry said, ‘‘and that I fear what will happen when your brain decides that you’re safe and stops protecting you from all you’ve been through.’’

Jenny popped some fries into her mouth and chewed them thoughtfully. ‘‘And you don’t think that maybe I’m just getting used to this? That I’m just adapting?’’

‘‘It is a possibility.’’ Henry allowed, spearing a piece of chicken with his fork. ‘‘And I suppose we will find out when Ahmanet is taken care of and you are once again human.’’

Jenny nodded, but as she ate the last of her burger and slurped down the dregs of her milkshake, she silently asked herself if she really wanted Ahmanet dead anymore.

The answer to that question was one she already knew, and it probably wasn’t what Henry would want to hear. It wasn’t really what Jenny wanted the answer to be either, but she figured that this wasn’t the best topic to lie to herself about. Trying to deny the connection she had with Ahmanet hadn’t done her any good so far. Besides, she’d tried to hate the princess, and that hadn’t exactly worked either, so...
“You know, he might be right,” Chris said. “The last week and a half or so has been a complete bitch to you. It’s a miracle you’re still sane.”

That was debatable, Jenny thought to herself. She certainly felt like she was slowly starting to go insane. Or at least starting to crack a little. Her screwy emotions and lack of interest in what was, objectively speaking, a bad thing for her (Ahmanet having regained her former power, for example) were a testament to that. Or when she’d killed Akar and it had taken far too long for the guilt to set in - and even then it was a pale shadow of it.

The fact of the matter was that Jenny was changing, and whether it was a good change or a bad one had yet to be seen. Jenny herself was hedging her bets, but with the way things were going, it was probably a good thing to lose most of her ability to feel guilt, amongst other things.

It was a little hard to believe it had scarcely been two weeks - not even that - since this entire mess had thrown her life into turmoil.

She ate the last of her French fries and turned her head to look at the telly again. The news had ended, giving way to what seemed to be a commercial block. Currently it was playing a commercial for a brand of shoes.

Jenny wasn’t sure what she should do now that she’d eaten (she wasn’t interested in taking yet another shower, so her list of activities was rather limited right now), so she watched the commercial and tried to make herself be interested in it. It didn’t work very well, but it was better than sitting around thinking about stuff she didn’t really want to think about right now.

“Jennifer, your ice cream is melting,” Henry pointed out, tone gentle as if he was afraid he’d upset Jenny with their previous conversation.

Jenny blinked, looking down at her ice cream sundae. It was melting, like Henry had said.

“Right,” Jenny said, grabbing her spoon and digging it into the melting mass of strawberry ice cream, whipped cream, fresh strawberries and sauce. It was still delicious though, even if the ice cream was starting to get a little sludgy. Jenny devoured it just slowly enough that she didn’t get brain freeze, but otherwise powered through it with enthusiasm.

Once her bowl was empty and her spoon licked clean, Jenny sat back in her chair, belly full and feeling rather content.

Chris was still sitting on the table, looking at her in a kind of amusement that said more about how bored he was with being dead than it did about Jenny being amusing.

She wondered, idly, almost without even realizing she did it, how Ahmanet was doing. If the palace had been cleaned out yet, 5000 years of sand and decay swept from the marble halls by brooms and buckets of water and soap.

She wondered if Ahmanet lived alone in it now., or that the small figures that had been milling around on tv were residents of the palace - servants, maybe, and priests of Set. Maybe more of Ahmanet’s soldiers to protect the place. Surely those would be needed. Because even if the government apparently wouldn’t try to get into the palace, curious minds and treasure seekers would. Archaeologists would want access too.

Jenny knew for a fact that, if she hadn’t been Ahmanet’s chosen and this was the first she’d ever seen and heard of the princess erased from history, she definitely would’ve loved to have access to the palace. To a piece of living history. She probably would’ve sold her soul for that.
As it was, Jenny already knew about the princess lost to history, had spoken to her and touched her, was bound to her forever, and she probably didn’t have a soul left to sell anyway. It probably already belonged to Set, though it had been taken from her and not willingly given.

Jenny turned her mind back to the palace. From a distance, in the dream Ahmanet had sent her, it had looked wondrous. From close up, it must be even more sublime.

She tried to imagine it.

Winding hallways with white marble flooring, torches or maybe candles to light it up at night, white fluttery drapes in every doorway, the walls absolutely covered in written history. The furniture, Jenny imagined, would be either white marble, or a pale wood, polished and lacquered until soft to the touch, further made comfortable with cushions of silk filled with goose feathers. There’d be large, ornate metal bowls filled with fire in every large hall and room, to keep them warm and lit at night.

Jenny, not even ashamed or frightened at thinking it anymore, wanted it. She wanted to be there and explore every nook and cranny of it and live inside history itself.

And she could.

She knew that.

All she had to do was go there, and she’d be let in.

But she was still stubborn. Her spirit hadn’t broken entirely yet. And she didn’t want to give in this easily.

"We shouldn’t sit around doing nothing," Henry broke Jenny from her thoughts. "It’s still early. We should figure out what to do from here on out."

Jenny focussed on him. "What can we do? The cure is out of our hands. So is the poison. We’re not being hunted anymore. There is little for us to run from or chase anymore."

"I agree with you, Jennifer," Henry said, "but we cannot stagnate either."

Jenny pursed her lips. "Any suggestions? Because I’ve got nothing."

Henry was silent for a few moments, frowning in thought. "I think," he said slowly, "that we should go back to England."

"I’m sorry, what?" Jenny was sure she’d misheard. Going back to England? To Prodigium and a ruined London? Everything she had in her rebelled at the thought. She didn’t want to go. Her instincts, the link, were screaming at her that she had to stay. She couldn’t leave Egypt. Not yet. Not until all of this was over. One way or another.

"We should go back," Henry repeated. "Rebuild Prodigium and London. We can make it safer, so the facility can withstand another attack. And we should recruit more troops and up the manufacture of weapons."

Jenny stared at him. "You sound like you want to go to war."

"We already are at war, Jennifer. And we need to end it, before we no longer can."

"That ship has already sailed, Henry," Jenny said slowly, not entirely sure she wanted to say this, even though she did believe it. This was was already over. It was already lost. "And I don’t think we
can turn the tide anymore.’’

This time, it was Henry’s turn to stare. ‘‘What are you saying, Jennifer?’’

‘‘Just that Ahmanet is very, very powerful, and twice as dangerous,’’ she responded, ‘‘and I don’t think it’s a good idea to throw soldiers at her so she can use them for target practise. It’s a waste of life at best and an invitation for her to do worse than she did at Cairo at worst.’’

‘‘We need to fight her, Jennifer.’’ Henry looked at her as if he didn’t quite believe what she was saying. As if she was a stranger. ‘‘We can’t just give up. She’ll take over the entirety of Egypt, and the rest of the world after that. We need to stop her now that she’s still accumulating her power.’’

Jenny sighed harshly, running her hands through her hair agitatedly. ‘‘And how do you want to do that, Henry? We don’t have the Blood of Osiris. Abdamelek hasn’t even found the recipe yet. Maybe he will never find it. It hasn’t been needed in millennia.’’ Her fists clenched. ‘‘And without the Blood of Osiris, you can’t hurt her. Not when she can just suck the life out of someone to regenerate herself.’’

‘‘We may not be able to hurt her directly,’’ Henry retorted, ‘‘but we can cull her troops. Cut down on her soldiers so she won’t have as big of an army. We can drop a missile on her palace if we really have to. Anything to weaken her.’’

A shiver of horror went down Jenny’s spine at the thought of a bomb levelling the palace. It’s be horrifying. All that history, lost to the warmongering of humans when it’d been safe under the desert for 5000 years. The very thought was revolting.

‘‘That palace,’’ Jenny ground, feeling anger start to bubble in her stomach, ‘‘is the culmination of Ancient History. It is the single best impression we have of how things were in that time. It is, should be, a national treasure. And you just want to drop a missile on it?’’ She was sure the disbelief and outrage was audible in her voice, but she couldn’t help it.

She was an archaeologist. Her job - her entire life - revolved around the preservation of treasures from the past. That palace, more than anything, was a treasure. And it could not, should not, be destroyed because of the person who inhabited it.

‘‘It is the stronghold of a threat to humanity!’’ Henry growled back. He, too, was visibly angry. Thin black lines were starting to appear on his face. A sure sign of his alter ego vying for control. ‘‘And if it has to be destroyed to take down Ahmanet, then so be it.’’

Jenny snarled, an angry scowl growing on her face. ‘‘Really? So anything is worth being sacrificed to kill her?’’ A new, disturbing thought popped up. ‘‘And if levelling the palace doesn’t work, what then? Will you start bombing the rest of the region? Or better yet,’’ Jenny glared at Henry, watching as the veins on his face bulged and darkened and his eyes turned hard and wild, ‘‘will you try to hurt her through me?! Use the link? Harm me to harm her?!’’

‘‘If that stops her, yes!’’ Henry slammed his fists on the table. The wood cracked and splintered under the force. His eyes had gone completely black.

Two weeks ago, Jenny would’ve flinched back and cowered.

Today was not two weeks ago.

Today, Jenny was a living goddess and a murderer.

She bared her teeth in a feral challenge, shooting up from her chair in the same moment that Henry -
Hyde kicked his own chair away. Her hands sank into the wood of the table like it was made of wet clay as she glared furiously at the man across from her.

Chris had scrambled aside, standing a few feet away with an anxious look on his face.

‘‘Do you really want to do this, Henry?’’

Hyde looked at her with blackened eyes and veins across his face, a crueller expression on his features than Henry would ever wear. ‘‘Careful, Jenny-dear,’’ he almost crooned, ‘‘I am not as easy to hurt as that pretty little priest you mangled.’’

‘‘And I am not the fragile little bookworm I used to be,’’ Jenny hissed back. Her fingers curled deeper into the wood, tearing up entire chunks. ‘‘As said pretty little priest found out. And just like him, you’re only human. I am not.’’

For a few moments, they glared at each other, trying to set the other on fire with the force of their gaze alone.

Jenny was faintly aware that she was breathing heavily, pressure building behind her eyes as if a red haze was trying to take over. She really, really wanted to lash out and pummel Henry through the floor.

After a few seconds, though, Henry let out a violent breath through his nose. The blackened veins receded a little, but it still took him visible effort to rein it in. ‘‘I apologize, Jennifer.’’ He said, voice tight and strained. ‘‘I shouldn’t have lost control.’’

Jenny’s heart pounded a war drum tattoo in her chest. ‘‘It’s fine,’’ she heard herself say, ‘‘I wasn’t exactly calm myself.’’

‘‘Yes,’’ Henry said. He slowly moved to pick up his chair and carefully set it back onto its legs.

Jenny turned her attention to her hands, grimacing as she gently pulled her fingers from the mangled and deformed wood of the table. She was going to have to find a way to hide this, or find a way to fix it. Or just get the hell out of dodge in two days before the hotel could find out she’d damaged their table. She stared at her hands for a second or two, comparing her fingers to the deep gouges in the wood, and then glanced at Henry.

‘‘I’m going to take a walk,’’ she said abruptly, whirling around to go grab her sunglasses and the money Abdamelek had given her from her room.

‘‘Are you sure that’s a good idea?’’ Henry’s voice was still more gravelly than it usually was, but he didn’t sound like he was going to snap in half from the tension of keeping himself under control anymore.

Jenny turned to look at him, sunglasses already on her face. ‘‘Are you sure it’s a good idea if both of us are cooped up in here right now?’’

If a minor spat had both of them ready to decapitate the other, then they both needed some time apart to cool down.

Jenny was a little disturbed with how ready she’d been to knock Henry around and then maybe drown him in the Nile afterwards. She needed to get her head on straight, remind herself that she wasn’t a kill-happy monster, and she couldn’t do that while moping around in the same room as the man she’d been eager to smash through all the floors of this hotel less than five minutes ago.
Henry sighed. He looked old, all of a sudden, and tired. “Do you at least have a phone on you?”

“Fair enough.” Jenny popped back into her room to grab the phone that was in her bag as well. “I know your number,” she told Henry. “And I’ll call if something happens.”

“Please do.” Henry said.

Jenny didn’t bother to say goodbye. She shut and locked the suite door behind her. Chris walked straight through it.

“I’m coming with you,” he told her. “Two pairs of hours is better than one.”

“Alright,” Jenny said. She didn’t really care whether Chris was coming along or not; as long as he kept mostly silent and just let her do whatever, he could tag along as much as he wanted.

She ignored the elevator and took the stairs down instead, hurrying through the lobby and stepping into the burning sun. It was bustling, outside, tourists mingling with locals, and since Jenny had nothing better to do, she decided to go loiter around at the local market. Local markets were always good, and there should be plenty of stuff to distract her there. She had hours to waste and a temper to let cool, and she had every intention of doing that in at least a mildly enjoyable way.

Jenny touched her sunglasses nervously to make sure they were firmly on her face, and then, sure her eyes were hidden properly and wouldn’t scare anyone off, she approached the nearest local and asked for directions to the local market.

Hours later, Jenny was still enveloped in the hustle and bustle of the local market. It really was local, only very few tourists standing out between the hundreds and hundreds of citizens of Aswan and its surrounding towns and villages. It was noisy from vendors praising their wares and the animals that were for sale, and the air was thick with the scent of food cooking and spices and people.

Jenny was having a fantastic time. She really was. This was exactly what she needed. Not running anywhere, not worrying about anything, just pretending she was a tourist for only a couple of hours felt like she’d just had a day at the spa. She felt revitalized. Even better, she felt normal.

It was starting to get dark now, but Jenny didn’t really care about that. A market like this was something that kept going 24/7; the regular day vendors would go home soon, and they’d be replaced with hundreds of food stalls and entertainment like street performers.

Henry was probably starting to worry about her, considering the time. Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to care much about that. She didn’t even bother to take out her phone and shoot him a quick message to let him know she was fine. He knew she was capable of taking care of herself. Or should know that, at least.

And besides, even if Henry didn’t know it, both Chris and Akar were around to keep out an eye for trouble. The latter was out of sight and not here on an entirely voluntarily basis, but still. If there was anything Jenny should know about, she would know about it.

Chris had been beside her pretty much the entire time, and he was looking like a (dead) kid at Christmas. He was also looking a little wistful, but after the second concerned look from Jenny he’d told her to shove off and stop pitying him, so she hadn’t mentioned it.

“Try those, please,” Vail pointed at a small stall that sold what seemed to be tiny square syrup-
soaked pastries with pistachios on the top. Nodding, Jenny went to buy one of the little things, handing over a bit of money for it before taking a bite. She chewed slowly, rolling it around her tongue.

“It’s sweet,” she told Chris, long since having stopped caring about talking to what other people thought was thin air, “but less sweet than the other one with pistachios. It’s got orange blossom syrup instead of rose water, and the pistachios are salted instead of candied. Not as crunchy as the other one though. This one is more flaky than crunchy.”

It was a little game they’d been playing since Jenny had arrived at the market. Chris missed being able to eat, he’d told her so, and Jenny thought it would suck big time to never eat again. So she’d been going around buying bites and small drinks of anything Vail pointed out, describing the tastes and textures to him the best she could. It wasn’t at all like actually eating, but this way Chris could pretend, and Jenny didn’t mind wandering across the market eating all kinds of delicious treats. Even if she was starting to get more than a little full.

“That sounds so good,” Chris stared at the pastry in Jenny’s hand hungrily. “I love orange.”

Jenny gobbled down the rest of the pastry, trying not to grimace as it hit her stomach. She didn’t think she could eat much more, if anything at all. She wanted something to drink. Tea, maybe. Something that would soothe her stomach a little. Mint, maybe, or some chamomile.

“Do you see a place that sells tea?” She asked Chris.

Chris peered around, then briefly jogged through a nearby stand to look at what was beyond it. He was back in seconds. “There’s a place just past here. I’m pretty sure they sell coffee as well if you want that instead.”

“Tea is fine,” Jenny said as she began to make her way in the direction Chris had pointed her at. It didn’t take her long to get there and order herself a fresh cup of mint tea, which, around here, didn’t come in a tea bag, but was actual loose leaf tea with fresh mint leaves added in. Jenny popped in some honey as well, just because. It was, of course, delicious, and more importantly, a couple of sips in it started to help her stomach along a little.

“Shouldn’t we go back to the hotel soon?” Chris took a look at the watch on his wrist, which, apparently, even told the time in death. “It’s nearly eight already. And we left at around two.”

Jenny grimaced. “We probably should, but I don’t want to yet.”

“Henry will be pitching a fit by now,” Vail added.

“Let him,” Jenny said. “I don’t care. And I don’t want to see him yet.”

She sipped her tea, looking around. Some street performers were setting up their act a bit away. “Let’s go watch them for a while,” she gestured at the dancers.

Chris frowned, but nodded and followed anyway.

It was nearly ten by the time Jenny slouched her way back to the hotel.

She was still stuffed from all the delicious treats she’d eaten, both savoury and sweet, and the cups of mint tea and honeyed warm milk she’d drank. It was enough to make her feel a little sleepy and
woolly, and she was sure that she’d be asleep the moment she hit her bed.

She shuffled into the elevator and pressed the button for the third floor, letting it carry her up while she fumbled through her pockets for her key. She found her keys wedged under her wallet (how that one had survived until today, Jenny did not know, but she was grateful for it, because going around without her passport was probably not a good idea) and pulled them out just as the elevator dinged and the doors opened.

Jenny stepped out into the hallway and trudged over to the suite, sticking the key into the lock only to find that the door wasn’t locked in the first place. Why was the door unlocked? She’d locked it when she’d left. There was no good reason for it to be unlocked now.

Cautiously, Jenny twisted the knob of the door, opening it slowly, just enough that she could get a peek into the suite. The lights were on, but that didn’t really mean anything.

She wished she had a weapon of some sort, though her super strength should be enough to protect her. She just hoped she wouldn’t need it - because looking back, she didn’t like how aggressive she was getting since her ascension and she didn’t like it. Best to avoid violence completely unless she had absolutely no other choice.

“’I’ll go check,’” Chris said, briefly squeezing her shoulder before walking straight through the door into the suite. Jenny chewed on her lip hard enough to draw blood and then poked at the small wound with her tongue as it closed up, waiting anxiously for Chris to return. It took him only a few seconds.

“’It’s clear. Just Henry. Though he looks anxious.’”

Jenny breathed a sigh of relief, pushing the door open fully and stepping through. “’I’m back,’” she called out, letting Henry know of her presence.

Barely seconds later, Henry was in front of her, wild-eyed with worried. “’Where the hell have you been, Jennifer?!”’

Jenny blinked, a little taken off-guard by the vehemence in the question. “’Out. I told you I was going for a walk, didn’t I?’”

“’You didn’t add that that walk was going to take seven hours!’” Henry almost bellowed. “’Seven hours, Jennifer! I thought you were hurt, or kidnapped, or just plain dead!’”

Put like that, Jenny had to admit he had a point. It was kind of shitty of her not to have at least sent him a message. She had the means to, her phone was right in her pocket within easy reach. Suddenly, her refusal to let Henry know where she was and that she was find sounded a whole lot more childish.

She managed a weak shrug in response. “’It just slipped my mind.’”

Chris threw her an incredulous look - he had warned her about this, and Jenny hadn’t listened - but luckily Henry couldn’t see or hear him, so Jenny didn’t worry about that. She didn’t need Henry to start in on her because of an unfortunate upsurge of pettiness as well.

“’It slipped your mind?’” Henry sounded the words out incredulously. “’You have assassins after you, and it slipped your mind?! What if you’d been attacked?!’”

“’Trust me,’” Jenny said, “’you’d have known.’”
If someone had attacked her, after everything she’d been through and with how her aggression levels had been spiking lately, she’d have lost it, she just knew. She’d have gone off like a bomb. And like a bomb, she’d have destroyed everything in her path.

Henry stared at her as if he was coming to a realization he’d never wanted to have.

“What?” Jenny stared back.

“You’re not the person you used to be, Jennifer.”

“No,” Jenny agreed, “no, I’m not.”

Henry stared at her some more. There was a heavy, sad kind of look on his face. “I don’t think I much like the person you’ve become.”

Hurt lanced through Jenny’s chest. Abruptly, another little part of her broke off and went cold, dropping like ice cubes into her stomach. She managed a shattered, bitter kind of smile.

“You know, Henry,” she said, hearing her voice come out hollow, trembling and weak like it’d been when she’d pulled that dagger out of her heart, “I’m not sure I like it either.”

Henry said nothing in response. He just looked at her, sorrow in his eyes and face, like he had finally realized that, between the two of them, he wasn’t the only monster anymore.

Or the worst one.

Jenny’s bitter, almost mocking smile widened without her permission. She stepped around him, her legs suddenly feeling like they were filled with lead, and walked into her bedroom.

Henry didn’t move, didn’t turn around to look at her, didn’t say anything at all.

Jenny closed the door and locked it, sat down on the edge of her bed, and stared at the wall, feeling like she’d just lost something very, very important.

She didn’t move until dawn broke, hours and hours later. And the tears that brimmed in her heart never found their way outside.

Instead, they festered and froze inside Jenny’s chest, until all she could feel between her ribs was cold.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

The turning point. Jenny makes a couple of decisions, which, considering her state of mind at the moment, probably isn’t something she should do.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 26 is up, and we’re going in the right direction, I think. I have a vague idea what to do for the next couple of chapters, anyway. I think. Maybe. Well, I’ll figure it out.

As always, enjoy, and leave a comment if you want to. Those always brighten up my day :)

“Jenny?” Chris hovered beside her uncertainly.

Jenny didn’t react, didn’t even look away from the spot on the wallpaper that she’d been looking at for what seemed like centuries. Chris stepped in front of her, waiting until Jenny realized that something was now impeding her vision of the wall. It took a few seconds to get through. Slowly, she looked up until she could see his dead, milky eyes.

“What, Chris?”

“It’s morning,” Chris said. “You’ve been staring for hours.”

“Oh,” Jenny said, blinking for probably the first time since she’d sat down. Her eyes burned, she realized dully, stinging from the lack of moisture on their surface. And she was thirsty. She had to go to the bathroom too.

“Do you,” the ghost in front of her started hesitantly, “do you maybe want some breakfast or something? The kitchen is already up and running.”

“No,” Jenny said, feeling her stomach growl at the thought of breakfast, “I’m not hungry.”

“Okay. Some coffee or something, then?”

“No,” Jenny repeated, “thanks.”

They fell silent again. Jenny resumed staring at the wall, this time through Chris’ midriff, as he was still standing in front of her.

A couple of minutes passed in silence.

“Henry hates me, doesn’t he, Chris?” Jenny’s mouth spoke without her brain’s permission. It took a second before she realized she’d said it out loud.
Chris’s face saddened, and he crouched in front of her so he could look into her eyes. “No, Jenny. He doesn’t hate you. He’s just mourning.”

“No, Jenny. He doesn’t hate you. He’s just mourning.” Jenny said bitterly, “because the new me isn’t something he can deal with.”

“He’s mourning,” Chris repeated.

“Mourning…” Jenny mumbled. Because the old Jenny was dead, had died on the outskirts of Cairo with a dagger stabbed through her heart. And the person who had woken up and pulled the blade out of her chest afterwards wasn’t wanted.

Vail reached out and gently touched her shoulder to catch her attention. “What are you thinking?”

Jenny stared at him with a helpless kind of sadness. She wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn’t come. “I think I lost them, Chris. Henry and Nick. I pushed them away. And now they’re gone. And I don’t think they’re coming back.” She swallowed thickly. “Henry told me that he’d go through me if he has to. Use my link to Ahmanet to harm her. I don’t think he cares that it would harm me as well. How can I trust him when he’s admitted he’ll hurt me if he has to?”

“Jenny, he was angry,” Chris said, “he won’t hurt you. He cares for you too much.”

She chewed on her tongue, feeling a lump form in her throat. “No, he will. I’m not the person he cared for anymore. And besides, he’s pragmatic. He’ll do whatever he deems necessary.” And that included turning on Jenny if he couldn’t find another way to kill Ahmanet. “I’ve lost them,” she repeated to Chris. “They’re gone. And I’m alone now.”

It was as if the words had been waiting to spill off her tongue. As if she’d been choking them back since Cairo. Since Ahmanet had predicted that her boys would, sooner or later, abandon her. Or try to hurt her.

And now Jenny realized that she’d been right.

And, more importantly, she realized that a small part of her had always known Ahmanet had been right that day.

Nick hated her. Henry didn’t want her anymore or would try to harm her. She was alone now. Yet another thing lost.

It was far from the first thing she’d lost.

Looking back, Jenny had been losing little parts of herself from the very day she’d pulled that sarcophagus out of the pool of mercury.

At the church.

At Prodigium.

At the destruction of London.

At the tomb.

At Cairo.

At the Temple of Osiris.
Last night.

Each and every time, a little bit gone, broken off and ground into dust until only shards that barely clung together remained.

Now, as the realization that she’d lost not only her life and her future, but also her friend and father figure, the part of Jenny that had been left, a part that had been steadily crumbling along the edges as the past two weeks had passed by, finally cracked.

She could almost hear it, echoing through the room like a tree when most of it had been sawed through and the bit holding it up gave under the strain, or the cracking of an iced-over river where too much weight had been put in one spot.

The pain was worse.

It was a kind of pain that had Jenny keening in grief and relief in equal measures as she curled in on herself, arms around her middle as if that was going to keep her from shattering apart, like that tree or the ice would inevitably shatter apart. She let herself slide off the bed, unable to hold herself up under the weight of it, curling up on the carpet that was on the floor, high, keening whimpers tearing from her throat. She couldn’t muster up the breath or the mind to scream.

There was nothing physical about it. No broken bones, no torn muscles, no dagger in her chest - this was pure, emotional torment. Like nothing she’d experienced before.

But this time, no matter how much it hurt, she didn’t shed a single tear. She didn’t have any of them left to spill. Her grief was tearless, and the agony of coming apart at the seams was a special kind of excruciating that was wholly unlike anything she’d felt before.

Chris ran his hands through her hair to soothe her, but Jenny barely felt it.

At six in the morning in a hotel in Aswan, Egypt, curled up on the carpet like a beaten dog left for dead in the gutter, Jenny Halsey finally broke.

It had been long, long coming.

“What are you going to do now?”

Jenny stared at the ceiling of her room, a couple of hours later, following the blades of the ceiling fan with her eyes, feeling weak and drained and listless. She took a few seconds to find her voice and make it work. “…I don’t know.”

Chris laid next to her, at a small distance, but his arm was thrown to the side, his hand just barely touching the fabric of Jenny’s shirt. His touch was light, so light that she could ignore it, but not light enough that she couldn’t feel it. Comforting her, but not blatantly. He’d stopped trying that after she’d pushed him away for the fourth time.

“You don’t have any plans at all?”

Jenny didn’t answer. She didn’t have an answer. She had no idea where she was going to go from
here. Where could she go? It wasn’t like she had anything left to go back to.

And it sounded so hard to think of something right now. Her mind felt too sluggish. And her body was too heavy to do anything. No, she was perfectly fine where she was, laying on the floor and staring at the ceiling fan. That was fine. That was good. The ceiling fan was soothing to look at with its steady spinning motion. And the carpet was fairly thick, it was comfortable enough to lie on. For now, she was content where she was.

For long minutes, there was only silence.

“Something more concrete, then,” Chris said eventually. “The priests of Osiris. They’re going to keep coming after you. What are you going to do about that?”

Right. The priests. Those were a problem. An acute issue. Something to focus on.

Jenny watched the ceiling fan spin and let her mind churn over the problem. What could she do about them? What were the actual issues there?

Assassins. Those were bad. She had to stop them from coming after her to kill her. So she wouldn’t have to fight them and end up killing more people or be killed herself.

And the cure. That could end up a problem too. She didn’t actually know what it would do to her. Whether it would turn her human again (if that was even possible) or if it would just kill her. It would probably be a bad idea to just let the priests administer something completely untested to her. Especially since they couldn’t be trusted, as Akar had proven.

And the poison. It’d be used on Ahmanet. To kill her. Permanently this time. The idea made Jenny feel... frightened. For the princess’ sake. And angry. Upset. She didn’t actually want Ahmanet dead. Probably hadn’t for quite some time now. She might, possibly, even care for the princess a bit. Maybe.

So.


Those were her problems.

What was her solution?

Something that would make that there would not be any assassins after her anymore. And that would stop the cure and the poison from being made. Preferably all at once so Jenny would only have to come up with one solution.

The ceiling fan gave off a low, humming whirr as it span on the ceiling.

Beside her, Chris was patiently waiting for her to speak. A couple more minutes passed in silence.

Jenny blinked as an idea slowly swam to the forefront of her mind. She patiently waited for it to form and mulled it over some more. It wasn’t coming to her as easily as she felt it should. Like her brains had been dipped in molasses, or maybe treacle, and didn’t work as fast as usual. Still, the idea took shape. Slowly. Fragmented. But surely.

She opened her mouth to say something, then shut it again.

Chris was watching her with interest. “You have an idea?”
Jenny didn’t respond. Thought over her solution a little more. It probably was a bad thing to do. Not plan-wise, because it actually was a pretty solid plan, but morally speaking. She should be helping Abdamelek, not figuring out how to stop him. She was supposed to be stopping Ahmanet.

But she didn’t want to anymore, quite frankly, because the side of not-Ahmanet was the losing side, and Jenny quite strongly did not want to be on the losing side anymore.

And she didn’t have anything keeping her on that side anymore anyway. It was easier to just… not care about them anymore.

And it was even easier to just step across that line between not-Ahmanet and Ahmanet. Because she might possibly care. More than a little. Maybe. And anyway, Jenny was tired of running. She was tired of hiding. She was tired of hurting. She wanted it all to stop. She wanted to rest.

She made her decision.

‘‘Akar!’’

Chris looked at her sharply. ‘‘What do you need him for?’’

Jenny shook her head silently. After a few seconds, there was movement near one of the walls as Akar walked through it. He looked like he wanted to be anywhere else.

‘‘Cursed One… You called?’’

Jenny didn’t look away from the ceiling. ‘‘You said you have to serve me. Does that mean you have to obey me if I give you an order?’’

‘‘...Yes.’’

‘‘And you can’t disobey? No matter what I ask you to do?’’

‘‘...No.’’ Akar sounded as if the word hurt to grit out. ‘‘I am bound to your will.’’

Jenny mulled that over for a moment, the words heavy in her throat. She knew that if she spoke them, everything would change. There’d be no going back. She’d be crossing the line between not-Ahmanet and Ahmanet. She said the words anyway.

‘‘Then my will is that you go to the Temple of Osiris. Find all the information on the cure and the poison. Destroy it. Leave no shred of it intact. Don’t let anyone know you’re there. Don’t interact with anyone. Sabotage any weapons they have. Incapacitate their strongest fighters.’’ Jenny finally looked away from the ceiling fan, instead staring at a horrified-looking Akar. ‘‘And don’t waste time. Do you understand?’’

Akar stared at her, not responding.

‘‘Do you understand?’’ Jenny repeated, more insistently.

‘‘I...’’ the dead priest looked like he was desperately trying to fight it, ‘‘I understand.’’

‘‘Then go. Don’t come back until you’ve done as I told you.’’

Akar turned on his heel and faded back through the wall.

‘‘Translation, please?’’ Chris asked.
“It’ll be taken care of,” Jenny said as she slowly sat up.

Chris sat up too. “How does it feel?”

Jenny paused halfway through climbing to her feet. She thought it over for a moment. How did it feel to have made this decision… Finally, she settled on, “Freeing. Like a weight just fell off my shoulders.”

Like she wasn’t on the losing side anymore.

It felt bloody good.

“Then I’m glad for you,” Chris said.

“Thanks.”

“Also, want to explain the plan to take care of the priests to me?”

Jenny just shrugged, shuffling over to where her bag had been discarded at the foot end of the bed. The clothes were still neatly folded, and the envelope with the money Jenny hadn’t taken was tucked in between the fresh shirt and pants. Jenny counted out the money quickly. She still had the equivalent of almost 900 British Pounds Sterling. More than plenty. Zipping the backpack up, Jenny slung it loosely over one shoulder.

Chris stood up as well. “You’re leaving.” It wasn’t a question.

“I am.” Jenny agreed.

“Where to?”

Jenny gave another shrug. She didn’t know yet. She hadn’t undressed, taken off her shoes or even taken her phone and wallet out of her pocket yesterday evening, so she was ready to go as she was. She could pick up breakfast or something once she was on her way - even though she wasn’t quite sure where she was going.

Chris followed her into the main room of the suite.

Henry was sitting at the dining table, poking at a bowl of cereal, looking generally miserable. He looked up at the sound of Jenny closing her bedroom door behind her.

“I’m leaving,” Jenny said bluntly, speaking before he could.

Henry blinked. “Excuse me?”

“I said I’m leaving. Now.”

“What? Why?” Henry stood up, knocking over his bowl in his haste. Milk spread across the surface of the table and dripped off the edge, soggy bits of cereal plopping to the floor. “You can’t leave! It’s far too dangerous, Jennifer!”

“I can’t stay here either, Henry,” Jenny responded. Just looking at her father-figure hurt. Knowing that she wasn’t wanted, that he’d turn on her soon enough, and having to look him in the face everyday was something Jenny didn’t have the strength for. She wouldn’t be able to deal with that.

“Why not?” Henry took a few steps closer; Jenny stepped back, closer to the door of the suite. “Is this about last night? Jennifer, I didn’t mean to say that, you know I’d never say something like that
to you. You’re like a daughter to me.’’

‘‘Maybe you didn’t mean to say it,’’ Jenny responded, ‘‘but that doesn’t mean you haven’t thought
it. I know you have, Henry. And I don’t blame you.’’ She gave a short, bitter bark of laughter. ‘‘I’m
not who I used to be.’’

‘‘That’s not necessarily a bad thing, Jennifer. People change. That’s how it works.’’

‘‘Except that I haven’t changed like I should, have I? I’m not even human anymore. I’m more
aggressive, I’m angrier, I don’t care about people like I used to. All I want to do when someone
annoys me now is to smash their head through the wall like I did to Akar. I don’t think I’m even
properly alive, even though I’ve a heartbeat. Not like I should be, anyway.’’ She shook her head in a
self-derogatory kind of way. ‘‘You can’t honestly say that I changed in a good way.’’

Henry looked pained. ‘‘That doesn’t make you a monster.’’

‘‘No, no it doesn’t,’’ Jenny agreed. ‘‘Being a monster is a choice. And I’m not choosing to be a
monster, Henry.’’ At least, she thought she wasn’t, even though she’d just sent Akar to hurt a lot of
people. Maybe that did mean she was a monster after all. ‘‘I’m just choosing to… stop running and
hiding all the time. I’m choosing to stop being a coward. And I’m not going to let Ahmanet, or the
priests of Osiris, or anyone, trap me in this hotel when I don’t want to be here anymore.’’

Henry was frowning. ‘‘You’re not trapped here, Jennifer. This is just for a few days, until we can
figure out how to get back to Britain without being hunted down by Ahmanet.’’

Jenny frowned back. ‘‘Henry, I’m not going back to London. I’ve told you that.’’

‘‘Where else could we go? Prodigium needs to be rebuilt. You need to get out of Egypt. Going back
to London is the only logical option at this point.’’

‘‘No, Henry. I’m not going back to London.’’ Jenny had no intention of going back there and
finding herself hiding/trapped at the remains of Prodigium HQ instead of this hotel at all. She was
sick of hiding.

‘‘Then where are you going?’’

Jenny shrugged. ‘‘I don’t know. Somewhere. Anywhere.’’

Henry ran his hands through his hair. ‘‘Jennifer, you’re not making sense. Let’s just sit down, have
some breakfast, and come back to this later.’’

Jenny sighed, a little surprised and also a little annoyed at how intent Henry was on dragging this
out. She’d made her decision. And she didn’t appreciate that he was trying to talk her out of it.
Especially when Jenny was sure he was doing it because he wanted to keep an eye on her - in case
he needed to use her to get to Ahmanet like he’d said he would if he had to. She dug into her pocket
and took out the suite key, taking a few steps forward to gently lay it on the coffee table.

‘‘Goodbye Henry. Maybe I’ll see you around sometime.’’

‘‘What about the cure?’’ Henry’s tone of voice was almost desperate.

Jenny paused with her hand on the knob of the door. Damn. She’d hoped this wouldn’t come up.
She could hear Henry take a few steps closer.

‘‘Shouldn’t you stay close in case Nick and Abdamelek manage to cook up something that works?’’
He asked.

Jenny glanced back over her shoulder. “There won’t be a cure.”

Henry frowned. “Yes, there will be, Jennifer. Nick and Abdamelek are working on it as we speak. You know that. It’s just not ready yet.”

“It’ll never be ready,” Jenny said. She opened the door, half stepping out into the hallway, half looking back. “Trust me, Henry. It’s not going to happen.”

“...How would you know that?”

“I just do.” Jenny stepped fully outside the suite. Henry was standing in the middle of it, near the couch, staring at her in confusion and hurt and shock, and Jenny ached at the sight of him. She almost wanted to go back in and take everything back.

Maybe if sh- no. She couldn’t. The decision was made, she’d already sent someone to take care of the priests of Osiris - it was too late to turn back now. She’d crossed the line. Things had already been put into motion. It was irreversible now. And she couldn’t keep hanging around someone who’d admitted he’d turn on her if he had to.

She was looking after herself, Jenny told herself as she closed the door on Henry’s devastated face. She was making sure she was safe. And if this was the way to do it... well, needs must and all that. And the ache in her ribcage was obviously just heartburn. Yeah. She must’ve eaten something wrong at the market yesterday.

“He doesn’t look like he hates you,” Chris commented as they walked down the hallway to the elevator. “Quite the opposite, in fact.”

“You know I can’t stay, Chris,” Jenny said as she pressed the button to summon the elevator.

“Why not?”

“You were there when we argued yesterday. Remember what he said?”

Chris nodded. “Yes. I remember what he said.”

“Then you know why I have to get out of here. And why I can’t go back to Prodigium in London. If I do, one of the containment units there will probably have my name on it.”

“That sounds... bad?”

“Right, you haven’t seen Prodigium, have you?” She glanced at Chris, who shook his head, signalling that he’d never been there even though he’d already been dead then and could’ve gotten in undetected. “Well, it’s not pleasant if you’re on the wrong side of the equation. Think chains and collars. And not in the fun way.”

Chris grimaced. “Sounds like a fun place.”

“Yeah. As long as you’re not the one getting dragged around in chains and being shot with sedative darts,” Jenny scoffed. She was less than impressed with how Prodigium tended to treat their ‘captives’, and she’d never hesitated to make her opinion known. It hadn’t ever actually helped, but at least Jenny could say that she’d done her best.

The elevator reached ground level. Jenny and Chris got out. It was somewhere between brunch and
lunchtime, so the lobby was bustling with tourists on their way to either eat at the hotel restaurant or somewhere else in the city.

Jenny followed the ones leaving the hotel, remembering to put her sunglasses on before she stepped outside. She was pretty sure no one had seen her eyes so far, but it was best not to risk it.

“So, where do we go from here?”

Jenny frowned. “You know, I’m not sure.”

‘‘Have you got enough to buy yourself a plane ticket?’’

‘‘Domestic? Yeah. Easily.’’ Domestic flights still weren’t cheap, but the equivalent of 900 British Pounds should be more than enough to get her a chair on a plane across the country. Hell, it could probably get her on several flights if she picked the right ones.

‘‘Then how about we go to the airport and just choose where to go from there?’’

Jenny frowned as she thought it over. She nodded. “It’s probably the best plan we have right now. Do you know where the airport is?”

‘‘Just hail a cab,’’ Chris shrugged, “you can afford it. And you don’t have to pay for me, because no one else can see me.”

That was a fair enough suggestion, so Jenny did exactly that.

A while later, Jenny and Chris were scrutinizing the flight announcement board.

“So… which one?” Chris asked.

“Um… Give me a second.” Jenny scoured the list of destinations. There were over a dozen domestic flights alone that were flying today, so there was plenty to choose from. Not Cairo, Jenny was not planning to go back to that place anytime soon. And she wanted to go to a place at the Nile. Constant desert with no water was not appealing.

Then her eye fell on a specific destination, and she instantly knew she’d made her choice.

“Luxor…” Jenny tested it out loud. It felt right. Like that was the place she should go to. Anticipation curled in her stomach.

Yes. Luxor.

She wanted to go to Luxor.

Vail shrugged. “Luxor it is, then, I guess. Let’s go buy your ticket.”

Nodding, Jenny started to make her way over to the ticket counter. She could afford a flight to Luxor, so that was what she would do; she would get a seat on that plane. She had to. There was something about the idea of Luxor that called to her.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Akar returns to report on his mission. Jenny arrives in Luxor - things don't go as she'd expected them to go. Nick calls from the Temple of Osiris with news.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 27, here we are. I'm fairly sure we're actually breaking the 100k words mark with this one (I haven't counted precisely, so let's hope I'm right, right? I won't know for sure until it's posted anyway). Either way, it's officially the longest piece I've ever written, and I am Pleased with myself.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

“Jenny,” Chris nudged Jenny’s side from where he was sat in an empty plane chair.

The flight was fairly unoccupied, only half of the seats being taken, and Jenny had the luck of having been placed in a row of seats that were completely empty save for hers.

She looked up from her magazine and glanced at the ghost next to her. “What?”

Chris pointed in the direction of the cockpit. “Akar's back.”

That caught Jenny’s interest. She looked in the direction Chris was pointing at, and found her ghost servant present like promised. He stood near the front-most seats, apparently waiting for Jenny to notice him, because when she did he immediately came closer. Close enough that Jenny could talk at a soft volume without being stared at like she was crazy.

“I have finished my assignment, Cursed One,” Akar spoke, looking less than happy.

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “All the information on the cure and the poison is destroyed?”

“I burned down the library, tracked down all the notes and burned those too and broke all the hard drives and internal memory drives of the few computers the temple has. I also short-circuited all USB drives present.”

“And the priests?”

Akar gritted his teeth, “I singled out the ones most proficient in combat, like you ordered.”

“And are they a danger anymore?”

“I broke their arms and legs in four spots each. Compound fractures. It’ll take surgery and weeks in plaster to heal, then even longer in physical therapy before they can even start training again.” Akar hesitated, and then added, “All other priests have one broken limb each. And I broke the High
That was more… dedication to the orders than Jenny had honestly expected. She was pleasantly surprised. And more than a little impressed. It’d be months before they’d be able to start hunting her again. Or do much of anything, apparently. Still, she’d given one other order…

“‘The weapons?’”

“The ones utilizing wood in some way, like the spears, I burned. I bent all the rifles and swords so they’re unusable and threw them into the Nile, stuck in boxes that I filled up with rocks for more weight and tied closed with chains.’”

Jenny blinked. “‘You’re strong enough to just bend whole rifles?’”

“It’s part of my,” Akar grimaced as he spoke the next word, “servitude to you. The Evil God made it so that I would have the ability to carry out orders for so long as I only use it to follow orders. Otherwise, I am powerless.’”

Huh. That was considerate of Set. At least the servant he’d given her was somewhat useful. It was sucky enough to be stuck with Akar, it would have been worse if he was useless as well as unwanted.

Another thought crept up on her. “I ordered you to incapacitate the priests. There was a man at the temple too. Nick Morton. What about him?”

Akar shrugged. “I wasn’t sure what to do with him. I just re-broke his arm. A compound fracture like with the warrior priests.’”

“A compound fracture through plaster?” Jenny wondered if that was even possible, with the plaster allowing little to no leeway when it came to bending and stuff, or enough room to shove a whole bone between the skin and the plaster.

“I broke the plaster first. Then his arm.’”

Well, that did make more sense. Jenny wondered if she should feel guilty about all of this. You know, considering a whole lot of people had just been temporarily disabled on her orders. And the fact that the one sure way to kill Ahmanet was most probably destroyed forever. (Unless Abdamelek had memorized it, in which case Jenny would have to take more drastic measures. That was something to consider later, though.)

“Well,’” Jenny said, “‘good job, I guess.’”

Akar’s face was tense and pinched like he was sucking on a lemon. “Do you need me for anything else, Cursed One?”

“Not right now, no.”

“Then may I be permitted to leave?”

“Sure,” Jenny said, then added, “just make sure not to spill anything we don’t want known to people we don’t want to know it, okay?”

“Yes, Cursed One,” Akar agreed. Jenny was sure it was only because of the circle of scripture on the palm of his hand.

“Then get out of here,” she dismissed him.
Akar went.

“‘And?’” Chris asked impatiently.

“A complete success.” Jenny told him triumphantly. She should feel guilty, but she mostly just felt satisfaction at a plan coming together. It was the first time a nefarious plan had actually gone the way she’d expected. Then again, it was her first nefarious plan too, so maybe it was just beginners’ luck. Anyway. “It’ll be a good while before the priests can come after me again.”

Chris blinked. “‘You didn’t have them killed?’”

“Just temporarily disabled. But even then it’ll take a couple of months before they’re back up to scratch.”

“‘Temporarily disabled?’”

“Broken bones. Multiple ones. Compound.”

Vail winched. “‘Ouch.’”

“‘Yup.’”

“‘All of them?’”

“‘Every single one.’”

“‘Ouch,’” Chris repeated. He looked torn between horrified and impressed. Jenny could sympathize.

The flight to Luxor from Aswan was a short one, and within a few hours, Jenny and Chris had touched down in the city and had gone through customs. Since Jenny’s only luggage was a backpack with a spare set of clothes and an envelope of cash, it didn’t take long. There wasn’t much to check, after all. It only took a few minutes.

“Jenny. Look at that.” Chris gestured at the reception area, where people were waiting for arrivals. Most were holding signs with names. One of them was holding a little sign with ‘Dr. Jennifer Halsey’ written on it.

Jenny blinked in surprise, staring at the Egyptian woman, clad in a modern suit and with long dark hair, carrying the sign in utter confusion. She glanced at Chris. “‘Do you have any idea who that is?’”

“I have no clue,” Chris said, also staring at the woman as if he’d just seen proof of alien life. “‘And I don’t know how they knew we’d be here either.’”

“‘Me neither. Hell, I didn’t know we’d be here until like, three hours ago.’”

“‘Same here.’” Chris agreed. “‘So how the hell did she know when to be here?’”

“‘Also, how does she know my name? It’s not like I’ve been going around telling people.’” Jenny stared at the sign the woman was holding up. It felt like it was mocking her.

“‘Maybe Henry warned her?’” Chris suggested, but even he sounded like he didn’t believe it.

“‘How would Henry know? He doesn’t have any way to contact us. And he didn’t follow us to the
airport, we’d have noticed.” At least, Jenny was pretty sure she’d have noticed if Henry was tailing her. Maybe. Subterfuge wasn’t her forte exactly, considering she’d never needed to hide herself before. Okay so maybe it was possible that this was Henry’s doing. Possibly.

Chris frowned thoughtfully. “I guess we can go ask?”

“I guess…” Jenny agreed hesitantly. “I mean, what else can we do?”

“Walk out and not let her know we arrived?”

“Besides that, Chris, thank you.”

“Just a suggestion.”

“Yes, I got that.” Jenny responded a touch sarcastically. “Let’s just go talk to her, alright?”

Chris shrugged. “Hey, you’re the boss. And also the one with the super strength. If shit goes down, I suggest you use it.”

Jenny took a moment to give him an unimpressed stare, and then started towards the woman with the sign that had her name on it, Chris on her heels. The woman noticed them after a second or two, standing up a little straighter as Jenny approached.

“Dr. Jennifer Halsey?”

“That’s me,” Jenny agreed warily, “and who are you?”

“My name is Aliya, Dr. Halsey, and I have here to retrieve you on behalf of High Priest Aaheru.”

Jenny stared. “High Priest of what, exactly?”

“The Cult of Set,” Aliya responded easily. “We operate on behalf of our God in the mortal world. Currently we support the Pharaoh while she is occupied with regaining her birthright in any way we can.”

“…Right.” Jenny said. The Cult of Set. That explained everything. Not. And the Pharaoh - that had to be Ahmanet, then. “I’ve never heard of you before.”

“If you had, we’d be a lot more worried,” Aliya said with a smile. “We pride ourselves on our obscurity.”

Chris frowned, nudging Jenny. “Ask her why.”

Jenny did.

Aliya looked a little upset. “We worship Set. Over the millennia, many have tried to wipe us out for devoting ourselves to him. Hiding ourselves was the only way to survive and for the Cult to keep existing.” She shook her head, then visibly put the subject aside. “Regardless, that’s not what I’m here to discuss. If you’d follow, Dr. Halsey?”

“Where to?” Jenny asked suspiciously.

“The Royal Palace, of course,” Aliya said, “wasn’t that where you were planning to go?”

“…Um,” Jenny said, “I hadn’t actually thought of where I’d be going yet.”
Aliya looked a little taken off-guard. "You didn’t come here to see the Pharaoh?"

Jenny opened her mouth to respond in the negative - and then paused. Hadn’t she, though? If subconsciously, rather than knowingly. Because she had crossed the line between not-Ahmanet and Ahmanet. She’d known that there would be very few options for her after that. And when she’d chosen her flight, hadn’t she felt unnaturally attracted towards Luxor? Which was apparently where the Royal Palace was, too.

So maybe Jenny had come here to see Ahmanet. She just hadn’t realized it until now. The thought didn’t bother her like it probably should.

"Dr. Halsey?" Aliya prompted.

"How far is the palace from here?"

"By car, about three hours, Dr. Halsey. Through the city, and then a bit into the desert."

"Right," Jenny said, not quite believing the words that came out of her mouth, "I suppose we should get going, then, if we want to get there at a reasonable time."

Aliya looked pleased.

"What?!" Chris, on the other hand, stared at Jenny in shock. "What the hell, Jenny! You’re going with her?!"

Jenny glanced at him, shrugging a little. Yes, apparently she was. And the thought wasn’t frightening at all. Something about this woman gave Jenny the impression that she could be trusted - if only to get Jenny to the palace unharmed.

"The car is waiting out front, Dr. Halsey," Aliya said, "if you would follow?"

"Sure, lead the way," Jenny responded, ignoring the incredulous look Chris was throwing her.

"Seriously?!" Vail hissed as Jenny followed Aliya outside. "Jenny, you remember what Ahmanet did to you right? And to me? And to the hundred men and women killed on her command back at Cairo?"

Jenny did remember all of that. Vividly so. But she wanted to see Ahmanet. Had, secretly, always wanted to see her, from the moment she’d pulled the sarcophagus out of the pool of mercury. The things that had happened after had put a bit of a hamper on the excitement, but at the moment, Jenny was totally fine with going to see Ahmanet. It wasn’t like she had any idea what else to do anyway.

Considering her plan before this was to just wander around aimlessly until she found a spot to stay at for a couple of days before repeating the process, well, this was a much more solid and dependable plan. Also, she got to see the inside of that palace, and that was like, the wet dream of Egyptologists everywhere. That definitely did factor in, Jenny had to admit. She’d give her left arm to see that palace in person.

And since she’d jumped the fence, she might as well get the perks as well as the problems, right?

Chris looked mutinous, taking a few seconds of silence, then said quietly, "I don’t want to go to the palace. I’ll come check on you in a few days, alright?"

Jenny nodded - she was sad that Chris wouldn’t come along, but she understood.
“See you soon, Jenny,” Chris briefly squeezed her shoulder, then walked off in a different direction, phasing through several people before disappearing through a wall.

“Your vehicle, Dr. Halsey,” Aliya stopped next to a car. It was a very nice car. A white Cadillac Escalade, brand new and shiny. A slender man in a suit stood next to it. He snapped to attention and opened the door to the backseat at a gesture of Aliya.

“Nice car,” Jenny complimented as she handed her bag off to the chauffeur and climbed into the backseat.

“We provide nothing but the best for the favoured of Set.” Aliya joined her in the backseat. The door closed behind her gently. “Especially when concerning royalty.”

“This is Ahmanet’s car?”

“No,” Aliya said, “it’s yours, Your Highness. My apologies for not referring to you properly outside. It is safer that way.”

Jenny blinked. “What.”

“There are too many enemies to allow your status to be openly known right now, Your Highness,” Aliya explained, “So the Pharaoh has decided we are to refer to you strictly as ‘Dr. Halsey’ in public until it is safer.”

Jenny blinked again. “I’m not royalty.”

“Excuse me for arguing, Your Highness, but you are. You are the Pharaoh’s chosen and the future mother of Set. You are the Queen of Egypt, the literal Mother of God. If anyone is royalty, it’s you.”

Jenny sat back, running a hand through her hair. “I have to admit, this is not what I’d expected when I got on the plane this morning.”

Aliya didn’t have much of a response to that. Which suited Jenny fine, because she needed a moment to come to terms with the fact that the woman across from her believed that she, Jennifer Halsey, London kid, was a goddamned Queen of a whole bloody country.

Because holy hell, this was not expected.

Jenny remembered Ahmanet telling her she’d be a Queen, but she hadn’t really taken it seriously. She was just an archaeologist. That’s all she’d ever wanted to be. Being a Queen… not so much. It sounded like a lot of political boredom, knives aimed at her back, and maybe whole loads of paperwork needed to govern a country (or would that be Ahmanet’s job, as the Pharaoh?) to make it even worse.

Yeah, not exactly Jenny’s dream job.

She’d be far happier in a dusty tomb somewhere, digging through centuries of dirt and debris with a shovel and a brush and cataloguing whatever artefacts she might find. That’s when she’d always been happiest, even if she hadn’t had the chance to do it all that often in the past thirteen years; the vast majority of her research into finding Ahmanet had consisted of libraries and very old books. The actual digs she’d been on had been few and far between, unfortunately.

Jenny had a feeling that being a Queen didn’t really involve examining rocks to see if they were really rocks or rather petrified human bone. Or carefully removing hardened dirt from tiny valuable artefacts so they could be properly cleaned, photographed and catalogued.
Her phone vibrated in her pocket, emitting a shrill noise. Jenny scrambled to grab it, knowing that the only people who had this number were Nick and Abdamelek. And she had a feeling what the conversation would be about…

She answered the phone. “Jenny speaking.”

“Jenny?” Nick’s panicked voice came from the other end. “Jenny, are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Are you? You sound like something’s wrong.” Jenny knew very well that something was wrong with Nick, several things in fact, his brand new compound fracture included, but it was best to pretend like she didn’t know what was going on.

“The temple’s been attacked,” Nick rushed out.

“What?!” Jenny tried to sound as shocked as possible. “Do you have any idea who did it?”

Aliya looked up a little at that, interest playing across her face.

“I have no idea who did it, but they did considerable damage, Jenny. People are hurt. Badly. And worse,” she could hear Nick swallow, “the library’s been burned down.”

Jenny managed a convincing gasp of shock. “All of it?”

“Everything. Even Abdamelek’s private library.” He breathed out heavily. There was a small hitch in his voice, as if he was close to crying. “I’m sorry, Jenny. The recipe for the poison… the cure…”

Jenny could feel herself sitting up in interest, giving the conversation all her attention. “What about them?”

“They’re gone… I’m sorry Jenny, but they were burned. All that’s left is illegible scraps.”

Jenny blinked. Her plan had worked. It had actually worked. Akar had done his job like she’d ordered. She took a moment to silently be impressed by herself.

Nick, apparently, took her silence for shocked devastation. “It’ll be okay, Jenny, I promise. Once Abdamelek is out of the hospital, we’re going to a different temple. It’s supposed to be super secret, but Abdamelek says that there might be a copy of the poison recipe there. And maybe for the cure too. It’s going to be okay.”

“…Are you sure?” Jenny struggled to sound hopeful. There was a bitter taste in her mouth. Her plan had failed after all… She hadn’t even known about that ‘secret temple’! “Nick, since when do you know about any secret temples?”

“Abdamelek told me about it like, an hour ago,” Nick responded happily, and Jenny was so glad he hadn’t yet heard about her fight with Henry and subsequent disappearing act. He’d probably be more suspicious if he knew about that.

“Do you know where it is?”

“At an oasis, I think. The Dakhla Oasis or something, I’m not sure,” Nick said, “why?”

“Well, I thought I could come and help,” Jenny lied through her teeth, “since that’s probably safer for me to be than the main temple was.”

“No! No, just, stay where you are, okay? You’re safe there, right?”
“Pretty safe, I think,” Jenny agreed, looking around the fancy car.

“Then just stay there, and I’ll come and fetch you when we have the cure and the poison, okay, Jenny? And don’t do anything stupid.”

“Alright,” Jenny said. “I won’t do anything dangerous.”

“Promise me,” Nick demanded.

Jenny crossed her fingers very deliberately. “I promise.”

“Good,” Nick said, “good. I’ll call again when I know more. Be safe.”

He hung up before Jenny could respond. She took the phone from her ear and carefully dropped it onto the empty seat beside her, then clenched her fists and proceeded to say some very rude words at considerable volume.

“Your Highness?” Aliya asked hesitantly, once Jenny had stopped cursing.

Jenny’s voice was tight with anger. “Yes, Aliya?”

“Is there anything the Cult of Set can be of assistance with? We are at your disposal for anything you need.”

“Anything?”

“Whatever it is you need, Your Highness,” Aliya agreed.

Jenny took a few seconds, slowly unclenching her fists and staring at the tiny wounds of her palms until they’d healed up. Aliya stared at her hands with a quiet kind of awe, as if she’d known it existed but never expected she’d get to see something like Jenny’s regeneration.

“Apparently, there is a hidden temple at the Dakhla Oasis,” Jenny said quietly, and Aliya snapped to attention, “it is a temple dedicated to Osiris.”

Immediately, Aliya scowled. It was clear she held no love for the Dead Lord and his acolytes. Not that Jenny blamed her. She didn’t exactly like them either.

“At that temple,” she continued, “there is supposed to be a recipe for the Blood of Osiris, as well as for something else.” She stretched out her fingers a few time, voice carefully measured as she sounded out what she wanted to be done. “What I want you to do is send some people over there. Find the temple. Destroy the recipes. Take care of anyone who has read or memorized them. Don’t let anyone know it was the Cult of Set who did it. Or that it was on my orders.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Aliya had already taken her phone out and was furiously typing.

“If Abdamelek and Nick get there first,” Jenny added after a second, “incapacitate them. I don’t care what you do to Abdamelek, but keep Nick alive. Hurt him if you have to, but I want him alive and coherent.” Jenny didn’t have it in her to order Nick’s death. He was an ass, but he was also her friend, and he’d been at her side through a hell of a lot.

“Your will is mine, Your Highness,” Aliya agreed. She continued to type for several seconds more. “I have distributed your orders, Your Highness. A few of our number should be heading towards the Dakhla Oasis very soon.”

“Good. How long still until we reach the palace?”
Aliya checked her watch. ‘‘About two and a half hours, Your Highness.’’

Nodding, Jenny settled into her seat comfortably and turned to look out of the window to watch the splendid city of Luxor pass by.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Jenny arrives at the palace.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 28 is up, people, and I am Excited. Descriptions from the palace are inspired by pictures I found on Google, so I'm not really sure how accurate everything is description-wise, but meh. I like it.

While you're here, go check out the comment section of chapter 27. You'll find a comment by macmacsmack. They've drawn some really cool fanart, and you should check it out.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

The rest of the journey to the palace was mostly spent in silence.

Jenny didn’t mind. She had a good time watching the streets of Luxor pass by her window, and when they left the city and entered the desert, she was just as happy to just look outside. The desert was a pretty place, after all, all red sand and endless blue skies. Certainly better than dreary old England. It just made Jenny glad that she hadn’t decided to go back to London with Henry. She much preferred the dry, desert heat of Egypt over the muggy clamminess of London in winter. Especially with all the smog making the city even worse. The desert was most certainly an improvement over that.

Speaking of the desert, the ride through it was smoother than expected, as if the sand the car drove across had hardened into almost-stone, but every time Jenny glanced out of the back window of the car (for as much as she could see out of it anyway), the sand was as loose as it could get, gently waving up and down from where the wind had blown it into shallow dunes.

Jenny figured it was Ahmanet’s ownership of the desert that made things easier. That she was aware this car was moving in the direction of the palace and that she was willing the sand to be smooth and hard like an asphalt road. Jenny was willing to bet everything that Ahmanet was also very capable of making the sand impossible to move across.

Aliya didn’t seem as surprised (or impressed, because honestly, it was kind of cool) as Jenny was at first, leaving Jenny to guess that maybe she’d seen this before. Had Aliya been at the palace before? Possibly. From what the woman had told Jenny, the Cult of Set was pretty big on supporting Ahmanet because she was one of Set’s ‘favoured’. It wasn’t outside of the realm of imagination to think that some of the cultists would have come to the palace.

Surely a couple of them would be staying there for now, maybe at the temple that should be at the palace as well. A temple needed priests, after all. Maybe this High Priest of Set, Aaheru or
something, was there. Jenny wondered if he was anything like Abdamelek at all. Part of her didn’t think so. Abdamelek had been kind to her, all things considered, and Jenny couldn’t really imagine the High Priest of the god of evil being a nice guy.

Then again, she’d been wrong about people before, so really, how could she know what kind of person he was? She’d find out when she was at the palace, she supposed. If he was even there in the first place.

Withholding a sigh, Jenny shook her head at herself and stared out of the window. She was worrying about things she shouldn’t worry about. Things that she couldn’t change anyway. There was no use in breaking her head about it - it’d only bother her, after all, and wouldn’t do any good otherwise.

About two hours after leaving the city, white stone arose from the desert. Just a peek at first, from behind a dune, and then it rose and swelled like a wave until Jenny was staring at white stone bricks that were probably higher than she was tall, even lying on their sides. The kind of humongous stones pyramids were built of. From close up, a couple of hundred of feet away instead of miles, they were even more awe-inspiring than they’d been from a distance.

Before the stone were statues, a couple of hundred feet apart and only ten feet in front of the wall or so, each statue at least twenty metres high and fully coloured. They were statues of a female Pharaoh, complete with Pschent, the Double Crown of the Pharaoh who ruled over both Upper and Lower Egypt, and wearing an elaborate white dress in traditional style. She had elaborate, richly painted jewellery and was holding a crook and a flail in her hands.

Jenny looked closer, and realized that the statues had a startling semblance to Ahmanet.

Huh.

She looked at them for another moment (they really were marvellously made) and then looked back at the stone they stood in front of. It was a wall, Jenny realized after a second or two. Not a wall of the palace itself, but the kind of wall that edged along the entire compound, enclosing it and keeping it safe. Keeping outsiders out.

It was doing its job pretty well, considering the news crews, police crews and tourists crowded around the equally humongous gates.

Jenny furrowed her brows. “Why does Ahmanet let these people just… try to harass her?”

The princess (Pharaoh?) didn’t seem like the most patient of people, especially when it came to people and situations that annoyed her. Like when she’d buried London under a sandstorm because Henry had imprisoned her. Or when she crashed a plane to get out of her sarcophagus. So it was odd that she’d just put up with the dozens of people milling outside the gates.

“The Pharaoh is not bothered by their presence,” Aliya explained. “As long as they do not try to enter or bother those who do have permission to enter, they are permitted to stay.”

Jenny hummed in understanding. “Any incidents so far?”

“Several, Your Highness. The perpetrators were handed over to the proper authorities,” responded Aliya.

“The proper authorities, as in the Egyptian modern police?” Jenny asked for clarification.
“For now, yes, Your Highness. Until the Pharaoh establishes her rule over Egypt.” Aliya leaned forward as the car got closer to the gates and the people milling about caught notice of the car. She pressed a small button, hidden against the back of the driver’s seat. Abruptly the glass of the windows went dark - they could still see out, but Jenny had a feeling it was suddenly a whole lot harder to look in.

“ Electrochromic glass,” Aliya explained before Jenny could ask. Huh. Jenny hadn’t known it was called that. Handy feature, though. The last thing she needed was to be caught on camera entering Ahmanet’s palace. She’d been through enough shit, she didn’t need that kind of attention to make everything worse.

The car slowed down to a crawl.

Jenny couldn’t help flinching back when the car was swarmed by reporters, some of them pressing their cameras against the windows in an attempt to find out who was inside. It was really, really unsettling. Unsettling enough that Jenny couldn’t help but wonder how celebrities dealt with this kind of thing on a near-constant basis.

The gate slowly started to open once the car came close to it. Guards were standing near the overly huge doors, modern troops on the outside, and once the car drove through and the gate started to close behind them, Jenny could see traditionally clothed and armed guards on the inside of the gate.

She wasn’t looking at the guards, though. She was looking at the courtyard that had now been revealed to her.

It was everything she had imagined and more.

The courtyard was around the size of a soccer field and twice as wide, the walls extending to each side for a couple of hundred meters before turning a corner, and the inside of them was richly decorated. Images of gods and goddesses, rich, golden fields of grain and papyrus and thick bands of perfectly mirrored patterns covered the bright white stone, engraved into the walls and then painted in deep, royal blues and marvellous, rich greens and vibrant, ochre-y reds.

The palace itself was even more fantastic, if that were even possible. Jenny had to crane her neck to see all the way to the top, squinting against the shimmer that came off the stone, as if it had been polished. Most of it had been left unpainted, so the engravings were subtle, but Jenny could make out scenes of war and glory, and of fields of produce and boats sailing the Nile, some of them small peasant boats fishing for sustenance and some of them large and stately and transporting royal figures.

Closer to the ground were pillars, a dozen of them in two lines, lining the path up to the palace doors like trees. They were circular, widening and flattening at the top until they had something of vases, except that they were huge and made of stone and not hollow. These were painted, bands of hieroglyphs circling around them all the way to the top.

It was absolutely beautiful. Possibly the single most marvellous thing Jenny had ever seen in her life. Definitely better than anything she had dared to dream.

“ Your Highness,” Aliya gently broke Jenny out of her gobsmacked staring. The car came to a stop near the ‘hallway’ of pillars.

“ Yes?” Jenny asked absentmindedly.

Aliya smiled. ”Allow me to be the first to welcome you home.”
Jenny blinked and stared at the palace again. Home. Was this home? Possibly. It certainly was a place she would like to stay for a while. If only so she could explore the literal past brought back to life.

The car door was opened for her, and Jenny very quickly got over the fog of awe the palace had inspired her so she could step out without tripping.

"Your Highness," a man wearing a skirt of the finest linen Jenny had seen so far stepped forward and held out his arm to help her out of the car, speaking in Ancient Egyptian. "Please allow me the honour to escort you into the palace."

Jenny nodded, guessing he was a soldier, maybe a military commander of sorts. There was a sword at his hip, and though he wasn’t wearing armour as very few people in Ancient Egypt did, there was a broad collar made of bronze inlaid with gold that covered his shoulders and collarbones, and a pair of intricately layered leather bracers that covered his arms from wrist to elbow.

It wasn’t much for protection, but considering this palace was stuck in a time where only the Pharaoh and the really important nobles wore armor and helmets into battle and the regular soldiers were stuck with skirts and leather shields, it was pretty good. He was probably of higher rank, considering that. A commander, definitely, like Jenny had thought - possibly even a general or something.

Jenny accepted his arm and let him help her out of the car. The sun glared down at her, and she quickly put on her sunglasses to shield her eyes from it. Double pupils apparently meant double the sensitivity to light. Jenny did not appreciate that fact.

People had gathered while the car had driven up to the pillars. Soldiers, not wearing broad collars or bracers, had lined up on the inside of the pillars, from a few feet of the car all the way to the palace doors, creating a sort of honour guard. The general (?) ignored them, so Jenny took her cue from him and didn’t speak to them.

"I, um, had a bag with me," Jenny said, not sure what else to say.

"It shall be brought inside," the general (yeah, she was just going to call him general for now) assured her. "Worry not, Your Highness."

"Alright," Jenny said awkwardly. The general spared her a small, reassuring smile. Jenny managed an even smaller, tremulous one in response. She was starting to get nervous.

"Her Majesty the Pharaoh has been informed of your presence," the general told her as he escorted down the honour line. The soldiers fell in line as soon as Jenny passed them, marching after her and the general like a very large team of guards. "If you would like, Your Highness, I can escort you to a washroom so you may freshen up and change. However, if you would like to see the Pharaoh immediately, I can escort you to the throne room immediately."

"I think I would like to freshen up first, thank you," Jenny said. She could probably use a few extra minutes to pull herself together and squash the nerves.

"Your will is mine," the general agreed immediately.

They arrived at the palace doors, which opened as soon as they got close to them. The people opening them looked like they might be servants of some sort.

"This way, Your Highness," the general led her into the palace. It was even bigger than the Temple of Osiris had been, and with more people. In the time it took the general to bring Jenny to the washroom he’d mentioned (which took the better part of ten minutes, with all the hallways they had
to go through) she saw more people than there probably were (had been?) at the Temple of Osiris.

“**In here, Your Highness,**” the general stopped at a doorway, which had heavy white linen to function as a door, “**I shall stand guard until you are ready. Your handmaidens will be inside to assist you.**”

Jenny blinked. “**Handmaidens?**”

“**Two, Your Highness,**” the general agreed. “**The finest young women the Cult of Set had to offer. They wished to offer more, but the Pharaoh feared it would be too much.**”

“**Huh,**” Jenny said, wondering if she should argue about this. Because she didn’t need any handmaidens at all. She could do perfectly without them. Especially since she wasn’t entirely sure what handmaidens did anyway. After a moment she decided to just roll with it. She could always complain about it later.

The general held the curtain aside for her, and Jenny stepped into the washroom. Her eyes widened, and she had to physically stop her jaw from dropping. It was less of a washroom and more of a luxury spa. It was a huge room, with a bath in the middle that looked more like an Olympic pool. Steam was rising off the water.

Eyes wide, Jenny slowly walked down the steps into the sunken room. There were pillars against the walls, the floor was smoothly tiled and decorated with rich, detailed scenes of the Nile, all fully coloured in deep blues and marvellous greens.

“**Your Highness.**”

Jenny was snapped out of her admiration of the room. She blinked rapidly, turning to find, like the general had said, two women. They were standing next to the pool, making Jenny wonder how she’d missed them. Although, honestly, she’d probably been too occupied with the room itself to pay attention to anything else. Once Jenny was paying attention to them, the two women sank to their knees, bowing their heads. It was, frankly, uncomfortable to see.

“**It is an honour to meet you, Your Highness,**” the woman on the right said, not looking up from the floor, “**I am Zara. This is Sahar. We are at your service.**”

“**Um,**” Jenny said, grateful that the women were at least wearing a proper dress each and thus not half-naked like in those shitty movies, “**thank you.**”

“**Do you wish to bathe, Your Highness?**”

“**Yes, that’d be nice,**” Jenny said. She could go for a bath. And she was sure that she’d be left alone for that, which would be nice too. She would like a few minutes to herself right about now. And a bath would be really relaxing. She could use that too, right now.

Zara and Sahar finally got off their knees, which Jenny was grateful for, and then moved over to her, which she was a little less grateful for.

“**If you would allow us?**” Sahar asked.

Jenny bit the inside of her cheek. “**You do know I can bathe on my own right?**”

Zara and Sahar shared a subtle look.

“**Of course, Your Highness,**” Zara agreed, “**however, forgive me for arguing, but you are a Queen,**
Your Highness. You do not have to bathe on your own.’’

Right, as if taking an effing bath was such a chore. Jenny didn’t need help to soak in hot water for a while and wash her hair. ‘‘I would really prefer to bathe on my own, thank you,’’ she said awkwardly.

Zara and Sahar shared another look, then nodded.

‘‘As you wish, Your Highness,’’ Sahar agreed, ‘‘if you will permit us, we will go fetch the clothes that have been prepared for you, as well as a selection of soaps and oils.’’

That sounded like a better plan. Jenny quickly agreed with it, in case Zara and Sahar were going to argue again - though they’d probably do so very politely. Zara and Sahar bowed (Jenny made a mental note to ask them not to do that again after she’d collected herself a bit, because she had already decided that she didn’t care for being bowed to) and then swiftly left to collect the promised clothing and soap.

She waited for the two to have left the room before she padded over to the edge of the pool, dipping her hand into the water. It was pleasantly warm. Neither hot nor cold. A good temperature, even though Jenny usually preferred her baths and showers on the edge of scalding.

She found a bench a bit away from the pool and sat down to take off her shoes. She’d just tossed them to the side and taken off her sunglasses, which she didn’t really need anymore anyway, considering probably everyone here knew about what she was, when Zara and Sahar returned.

‘‘Your clothes, Your Highness,’’ Zara gently laid a bundle of white silk on the other end of the bench, followed by a wooden box, which she had carried the silk on top of. She also placed down a very thick, fluffy towel.

‘‘And your bathing supplies,’’ Sahar added, placing a tray of fancy glass bottles and soft-looking sponges at the edge of the pool.

‘‘Thanks,’’ Jenny said.

‘‘Would you prefer it if we left for now?’’ Sahar asked.

Jenny, feeling a little guilty at basically kicking them out of the room, nodded. ‘‘I would, yes.’’

‘‘Your wish is our command, Your Highness.’’

Jenny winced. She really needed to make sure they understood that they didn’t have to bow, or agree with everything she said, or act like they were below Jenny. Because that would get really awkward really fast. Jenny already didn’t appreciate it. She didn’t want to imagine a whole lifetime of people bowing and scraping for her.

Another reason not to be a Queen, besides the politics and the paperwork.

Once Zara and Sahar had left, Jenny undressed and slipped into the humongous pool. The water wasn’t scalding as she preferred, but it was a pretty good temperature nonetheless. Certainly pleasant enough to bathe in. And she did adore baths. She submerged herself to her shoulders, relieved to find that, while the middle of the bath was deep enough to swim in, the edges were a little more shallow and even had solid underwater benches to sit on without drowning. She could spend a few minutes there later.

She paddled over to the tray of bathing supplies. There were glass bottles of sweet-smelling
shampoo, conditioner and body wash, as well as shower oil and a couple of very soft sponges. There was even a small but elegant-looking comb. Jenny washed her hair thoroughly, twice with soap and then with conditioner, and while the conditioner was working on her hair, Jenny lathered a sponge with body wash and rubbed herself down until she was squeaky clean. Then she rinsed out her hair, pulling the comb through it to ensure there were no knots or snags left behind. She really needed a haircut sometime soon, Jenny mused as she combed her hair. It was getting too long for comfort. She made a mental note to see about getting a trim sometime in the next few days.

With her hair washed and combed and her body clean, Jenny swam (and wasn’t it a strange but amazing idea to be in a bathtub big enough to swim in?) over to the seats and chose one to sit in for a while. She wasn’t in a hurry. Ahmanet was probably aware of her presence in the palace, and if not busy with Pharaoh stuff probably waiting for her, but Jenny wasn’t about to hurry through her bath. She was damn well going to take all the time she wanted, and Ahmanet could damn well sit on her throne and wait.

Maybe not hours, though. As much as she wanted to soak for hours (she loved baths so much, honestly), that was a bit too long to make Ahmanet wait. So, after about fifteen minutes, when Jenny’s fingers were just starting to show the first signs of pruning, she made herself swim over to the stairs and slowly climbed out of the bath.

The room was cold in comparison, but not as cold as it could have been, considering the massive amount of hot water heating the air. Jenny towelled off, marvelling at how soft the towel was, and once she was dry, went to inspect the clothing Zara had brought her.

The bundle of white silk turned out to be a traditionally styled Egyptian dress, ankle-length, and underneath it Jenny found a light pair of sandals and some underwear, also white and silk. She was sensing a theme, here.

She glanced over at the sad little pile of clothes she’d gotten at the Temple of Osiris, then decided that she wanted to wear the dress more than the rich-person-zen-kick getup.

The underwear was comfortable and fit well, and the dress was so soft and light Jenny had to look down to make sure she was actually wearing it. The sandals were just as comfy, softer than she’d imagined they could be and not pinching at all.

Which brought her to the box, the last thing untouched.

Jenny had no idea what was in it. She was curious to find out, though. And she figured it was for her anyway, since Zara had left it here with her dress, so she was probably allowed to take a peek at it. And if she wasn’t, well, then they shouldn’t have left it here.

Curiously, Jenny opened the lid of the box, took a peek inside it, and promptly dropped the lid. The noise echoed around the room. Jenny didn’t care about the noise it made. She was struck speechless by what she’d found.

Because in the box was jewellery.

Expensive, handmade jewellery.

More importantly, it was solid gold jewellery, inlaid with gems.

Jenny dared another look into the box to make sure her eyes hadn’t deceived her, and then had to sit down on the bench for a moment so she wouldn’t fall over.

Jesus effing Christ. There had to be enough gold and gems in there to finance a small country.
And instead of being kept safe in a vault somewhere, it had been dumped in a wooden box in a fucking washroom. Someone here had not thought that through.

Jenny rubbed at her face, trying not to look at the box. What was she supposed to do with it? She couldn’t go around wearing half a goldmine around her neck, now could she? No, there must’ve made a mistake. Zara must’ve grabbed the wrong box or something. Yes, that had to be it. Someone had just put the wrong box for Zara to grab. Because there was no way that that jewellery was for her to wear. It was way too valuable for that.

Nodding to herself, Jenny carefully put the lid back onto the box, more than a little grateful she was no longer looking at what was probably the equivalent of quite a few million Pounds Sterling. Now, she should probably find the general. And inform Zara and Sahar that she was done here. It’d be rude to just walk out without at least telling them.

If only she knew where the hell Zara and Sahar had gone. That might be handy. Maybe if she just… called for them? Jesus she needed, like, a manual for all this palace stuff.

‘‘Um,’’ Jenny cleared her throat and made her voice project around the room, ‘‘Zara, Sahar?’’

In seconds, they had entered the room. ‘‘You called, Your Highness?’’

Right, that was something she had to address too. Maybe if she just took it straight to Ahmanet? The gold was more important right now anyway. ‘‘I think there’s been a mistake,’’ Jenny said, wincing when she saw the devastation appear on Zara and Sahar’s faces. She gestured at the box. ‘‘I think this should be in a vault somewhere. You should go warn someone about that.’’

Sahar looked a little relieved, a small smile growing on her face. ‘‘No mistake has been made, Your Highness. The jewellery is a gift from the Pharaoh. It belongs to you.’’

Jenny sputtered. ‘‘Excuse me?’’

‘‘The jewellery belongs to you, Your Highness,’’ Sahar repeated.

Jenny stared. The equivalent of millions of Pounds Sterling was sitting in a wooden box in a washroom, and they were telling her that it belonged to her?!

‘‘It’s too much,’’ Jenny managed to protest. ‘‘I can’t accept this.’’

‘‘It is a gift from the Pharaoh,’’ Zara said, and Jenny was starting to get the feeling that this meant she couldn’t just reject it like she’d been planning.

‘‘The Pharaoh,’’ Jenny said slowly, ‘‘would be insulted if I didn’t take it?’’

Zara and Sahar shared a look.

‘‘I believe,’’ Sahar started delicately, ‘‘that the Pharaoh would be pleased if Your Highness wore the jewellery.’’

Aka, yes, Ahmanet would be insulted if Jenny tried to have someone lock the jewellery into a vault for safekeeping. Damn. Jenny weighed her options for a moment, and then decided that she feared an angry Ahmanet more than she did being robbed. She sighed.

‘‘If the Pharaoh wishes it…’’ she turned to the box and opened it again. ‘‘How do I put all of this on?’’
Both of her handmaidens looked relieved at that. Zara stepped forward and delicately removed the first piece of jewellery from the box; a broad collar like the general wore, but instead of bronze, it was gold inlaid with shards of lapis lazuli, emerald and amethyst. Zara tied it around Jenny’s neck carefully, and Jenny tried not to look too horrified at the weight of the gold; it was more than she had expected, and that meant that there was more gold in this than she had thought.

The collar started at her collar bones and draped four inches down her breastbone, covering her shoulders as well; a ring of solid gold and gems tied together at the base of her neck with a counterweight that stopped it from sagging.

Next were bands around her upper arms, inlaid with malachite and turquoise, and a belt-like girdle around her hips, studded with more amethyst and lapis lazuli, as well as flecks of carnelian, garnet and obsidian. Lastly were two golden rings, one for each hand, with brilliant emeralds set into them.

The muddle of colours from the variety of gems should’ve clashed, but somehow they didn’t. Possibly because of the gold they were set in, or because of the intricate decorations woven into the metal that the gems were shaped to fit into.

When all of it was in place and Jenny was clad in more gold that she had ever seen in one place in her entire life, she honestly wasn’t sure whether to feel flattered or sue Ahmanet for the hernia she was probably going to get from carrying all the weight of the gold around. Seriously. Gold was heavy.

At the same time, part of Jenny, which she was ashamed to admit was the part that liked luxury and being spoiled, was very, very flattered. That part of her wanted to throw the very idea of being upset at this out of the nearest window and bask in it instead.

‘Well,’ Jenny said awkwardly once Zara and Sahar had taken a step back, ‘I guess it’s time to go see the Pharaoh now.’

‘Of course, Your Highness,’ Sahar agreed immediately, ‘High Priest Aaheru is waiting for you outside. He will escort you to the throne room. We will follow.’

Jenny nodded, making her way over to the door and stepping back into the hallway. She looked around for this high priest for a moment, but only found the general waiting. He stepped forward, once again offering his arm.

‘Your Highness. The throne room is this way.’

Jenny blinked. The general was the high priest? She looked back at his collar - bronze, but inlaid with gold. High status, that was for sure. Definitely something fitting for a high priest. Not what she’d expected, considering she’d been convinced he was a general and not a priest, but hey, everyone made mistakes every now and then.

‘Thank you,’ she said after a second, taking his arm. ‘High Priest Aaheru, correct?’

‘Yes, Your Highness,’ Aaheru confirmed. ‘Are you ready to go see the Pharaoh?’

Jenny took a deep breath and nodded. ‘Ready as I’ll ever be.’
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet finally meet again.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 29 is up, and Ahmanet is back, baby!

Anyway, starting Monday I have yet another test week at school - in fact, I have a test week every seven weeks. I have to do tax law again, since I failed the first time, and a couple of other subjects. As a result, I'm kind of busy studying and also busy being sick with a cold. I'm working on the next chapter, and I'll try to have it uploaded on schedule, but I'm not making any promises. Typing is hard when you're coughing your lungs out.

As always, enjoy the chapter, and lemme know your thoughts!

It was awkward, walking through the palace, draped in gold, on the arm of the High Priest of the Cult of Set and with two handmaidens half a step behind her. And everyone they passed in the hallway stopped walking and kept their head bowed respectfully until Jenny had passed them.

Certainly not something Jenny was used to. Not something she really wanted to get used to either.

She felt more than a little self-conscious.

She was, maybe, starting to wish she’d just snuck out of the airport before Aliya could’ve spotted her, like Chris had suggested.

Well, no, she wasn’t, she honestly wanted to see Ahmanet and she was more than a little pleased to be inside a 5000-year-old palace in such splendid condition. It was even better preserved than the tomb was been - the paints on the walls looked brand new and the stone had not decayed or crumbled even the littlest bit. Something had kept it frozen in splendour for five millennia, and Jenny desperately wanted to know what. Or who.

She could definitely do without all the staring and bowing, though.

And she could maybe also do with a sketchpad and a pencil so she could draw some of the things she was seeing right now. Not that she especially enjoyed drawing, but it was still a pretty big part of being an archaeologist, even with technological advancements. She’d learned how to draw accurate, scaled representations of artefacts in school. And she would love to have some time to document the things Aaheru guided her past, because they were the most splendid examples of Ancient Egypt Jenny had ever seen and she never, ever wanted to forget them. And she also maybe wanted to write a paper on this place.
‘‘Your Highness,’’ Aaheru slowed to a stop, causing Jenny to do the same. ‘‘We have arrived at the throne room.’’

Jenny blinked up at the humongous doors they were standing in front of. They were about five times as tall as she was, and could probably fit twenty people through them side-by-side. It seemed like everything in this palace was unusually huge. Guards wielding spears stood on either side of them.

Jenny took a couple of deep breaths. ‘‘I’m ready.’’

Aaheru jerked his head at the guards, who stepped forward and pulled open the humongous doors with surprising ease. Jenny swallowed thickly. Nerves balled in her stomach, making her feel faintly queasy. At the same time, she was excited, anticipation making her grip on Aaheru’s arm tighten. She managed to stop herself from hurting him, if barely. There might be some bruises later on, though.

The throne room was probably the grandest room Jenny had seen so far. It was huge, as everything in the palace was, and just as elegant, but in a different way. Most of the palace, as far as Jenny had seen, was filled with richly coloured decorations in the shape of engravings in the walls and various statues - luxurious without being over the top.

The throne room, though, was far more subdued, more stately. Jenny looked around in awe. The walls were still engraved, but they were not images and texts about deities and scenes of Egypt as it used to be - these were engravings of kings and queens and entire peoples at war, of peace treaties being negotiated and conquered peoples bowing before representations of the Pharaoh.

Jenny looked a little closer - the engravings were not coloured here, leaving the walls the plain white of the stone they were made of and so a little harder to read when the brightly lit room didn’t allow for much shadow - and was a little taken off-guard to see that some of the bowing peoples looked more… modern than humanity was 5000 years ago.

She wanted to look a little closer, but right now, the engravings were not the most important. Far more important was the raised dais at the end of the long room.

Ten steps up, there was a throne. White stone, cushioned by rich, amethyst-coloured silk cushions, empty save for a simple wooden box. A foot to the side, another throne, the same white stone and amethyst silk cushions, but slightly bigger. The back higher and the seat wider - made to be more imposing than the smaller throne.

It was occupied.

Ahmanet lounged on marble and silk like a leopard on a tree branch, clad in more silk, white this time, draped in gold, the Double Crown of Egypt on her head, looking for all the world like she’d never been stuck in a sarcophagus for 5000 years at all.

Several traditionally dressed men and women stood at attention at the foot of the dais, their full attention on Ahmanet.

Jenny totally understood their rapture; she was a little bit speechless herself. Because Ahmanet looked all kinds of regal and powerful on that throne, and Jenny knew she was staring but she didn’t care. Because that was a splendid view, to be totally honest, and she wanted to look a little longer.

Aaheru didn’t have to lead Jenny into the throne room. As soon as Jenny’s gaze landed on Ahmanet, the Pharaoh, even across the room, visibly paused. It was only a split-second, but everyone noticed it. Then she looked up, unerringly meeting Jenny’s eyes.
There was a shudder across the link. Something in the back of Jenny’s mind warmed.

Ahmanet gestured sharply at the small group of people at the foot of the dais. They bowed, deeply, then quickly backed away. As they left the room, they passed Jenny, Aaheru, Zara and Sahar, and bowed again before stepping past them out of the doors.

“Aaheru,” Ahmanet’s voice rang through the air, “girls, leave.”

“Your Majesty,” Aaheru bowed, Zara and Sahar echoing his actions, then slowly backed out of the room as well.

The doors closed behind them, leaving Jenny alone with the Pharaoh. A little shiver went down her spine. A mixture of anticipation and nerves, shuddering down her limbs. She was sure it was too small to notice, but nonetheless she could see a predatory grin creep over Ahmanet’s face, as if she knew anyway.

Jenny steeled herself, gathering all the courage she could find, and walked across the room, pausing at the base of the steps leading up to the dais. “Ahmanet.”

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet rose from her throne, descending the steps like a goddess coming down from the stars. She lightly cupped Jenny’s cheek, genuine warmth in her eyes. This time, Jenny couldn’t even try to stop the shudder that raced down her limbs. Ahmanet’s hand was warm, trembling slightly against her skin as if Ahmanet couldn’t really believe Jenny was here, and across the link. The link was brimming with warmth.

“I am so very glad to see you.” She glanced down for a moment, tracing Jenny’s dress with her eyes. “And you look… divine.”

“So do you,” Jenny said, and she meant it. “That crown looks good.”

Ahmanet gave a small, pleased smile. “I am glad. Come, let us sit.”

She took Jenny’s hand and pulled her up the steps, pausing to remove the box from the seat of the smaller throne, placing it on the armrest of her own. Gingerly, Jenny took a seat in the smaller throne. It turned out to be pretty comfy, with the cushioning on the seat.

“Did you like the gifts?”

Jenny touched the golden jewellery on her chest. “This?” She gave a small, nervous chuckle. “It’s way too much. It’s worth way too much. I can’t possibly accept this.”

“Yet, you are wearing it,” Ahmanet observed with a bemused little smile.

“Zara and Sahar said you’d be insulted if I didn’t.”

“I wouldn’t have been,” Ahmanet said. “I merely would have tried harder to find something you would like. Now that you’re wearing it, though, I’ll assume you’ll keep it.”

Jenny blinked. Not what she’d been expecting. Then again, save for hunting her down and murdering her, Ahmanet had always defied Jenny’s expectations. Speaking of surprises, Jenny was pleasantly taken off-guard with how easily Ahmanet talked to her. Like they were equals. That was nice.

She changed the subject. “You were right, you know. About Nick. And Henry.”
Immediately, Ahmanet’s expression softened. At the same time, Jenny was sure she saw a glimpse of satisfaction. ‘‘I am… sorry your… friends did not stand up to your expectations,’’ the Pharaoh said delicately after a second. ‘‘I did hope I was wrong about them. For your sake.’’

‘‘Well, you weren’t,’’ Jenny said bitterly. ‘‘You were completely right. Nick thinks I’m a monster. Henry wants to use me to get to you.’’

‘‘The link,’’ Ahmanet realized immediately, expression darkening to thunder.

Jenny nodded in agreement. ‘‘And he was talking about going back to London to rebuild Prodigium. And maybe drop a bomb on this place.’’

The Pharaoh looked ready to kill. Only for a moment, though. In a blink, she was back to the small smile she’d sported since Jenny had stepped into the room, every trace of anger gone from her face - and from the link. It was a little eerie. Her hand brushed across the box on her armrest. ‘‘I’ll deal with it. In the meantime, I have another gift for you.’’

Jenny raised her eyebrows, deciding to ignore the fact that she’d pretty much sold Henry out to Ahmanet only a few seconds ago. That ‘‘I’ll deal with it’’ had sounded ominous. She focussed on the bit that came after it instead. ‘‘Several kilos of gold and gems isn’t enough?’’

Ahmanet shrugged. ‘‘Mere drops in the Nile compared to the wealth I will drown you in, my Chosen.’’ She took the box from the armrest and stood up, stepping in front of Jenny. ‘‘This, however, is more of a… formality, I’m afraid.’’

Deciding to ignore that first sentence, Jenny focussed on the box. ‘‘A formality?’’

Ahmanet opened it. There inside was lined with fabric. What was more interesting was the actual content of the box. It was a diadem. Solid gold, like the jewellery Jenny was already wearing, very much unlike Ahmanet’s Double Crown. It was a fairly simple design, just a golden band about an inch wide; it was the decoration on it that made it special. Carefully cut and polished flecks of obsidian, turquoise and emerald, carefully laid into an almost hypnotizing pattern all the way around that somehow managed to look elegant and almost minimalist. Despite the fact that the entire thing was made out of solid fucking gold. Of course, it was also absolutely gorgeous.

Jenny managed to drag herself out of her admiration of the item. ‘‘Why obsidian, turquoise and emerald?’’

‘‘Obsidian,’’ Ahmanet said, ‘‘stands for death. Turquoise for life and happiness. Emerald for immortality and fertility.’’

Actually, that kind of made sense. Not that Jenny was all that pleased with the interpretation she got from that. ‘‘Because I’m supposed to be immortal and have powers over life and death. And because I’m supposed to birth Set.’’

‘‘Indeed,’’ Ahmanet agreed. She took the diadem out of the box, tossing the wooden container aside negligently. ‘‘Will you wear it?’’

‘‘Do I have a choice?’’

‘‘It would be… unusual for a Queen to be without her crown,’’ Ahmanet said carefully.

‘‘So that’s a no,’’ Jenny said. ‘‘What if I don’t want to be a Queen? Because I don’t. I just want to be an archaeologist.’’
“You were not meant to be an archaeologist forever,” Ahmanet responded. She lifted the diadem a little, until it was at eye-height for Jenny. “You were born to be a Queen, my love. It became inevitable from the very moment you freed me from my prison.”

Jenny frowned, an odd twinge in her stomach. “So if Nick had freed you, he’d be King?”

“He’d be nothing more than a vessel for Set to conquer and use,” the Pharaoh said, a touch sharply. “His soul would have been burned away during his ascension. And I would not have mourned his death. You are the only one I wish to have to myself.”

That was oddly reassuring to hear, Jenny had to admit. She didn’t like the thought of someone else being Ahmanet’s Chosen. It made her feel a little possessive all of a sudden. Unexpected for sure, but not an entirely unwelcome emotion - not anymore, anyway. “There are still things we have to talk about,” Jenny murmured.

“Indeed,” Ahmanet agreed. “In the meantime, will you wear the diadem?”

Jenny looked at the elaborate, glittering piece of gold in Ahmanet’s hands, considered what it would mean if she allowed it to be placed on her head, and her mouth opened without further hesitation and said, “yes.”

The smile that overtook Ahmanet’s face was beatific. Like pure, rapturous joy had been given a human appearance. Jenny stared, utterly and unashamedly entranced, feeling something inside her warm and settle at the sight of Ahmanet’s happiness. Like a muscle that had been coiled and straining for too long had been relieved of pressure, or maybe a faint headache behind her eyes she hadn’t known was there until it was gone.

In fact, Jenny managed to think as she took in the way the corners of Ahmanet’s eyes crinkled from the full smile on her face, this might be a little bit of what love was like.

And this time, she didn’t even pretend she hadn’t though that.

She didn’t exactly acknowledge it either, but it was progress nonetheless.

Ahmanet lifted the diadem again, very carefully placing it onto Jenny’s head. It was heavy from gold and gems, but somehow, it fit like a glove. The metal was cold against her forehead at first, but it warmed quickly. Jenny tried not to think of the fact that she probably had about a million British Pounds on her head, if not more. It probably wouldn’t do her admittedly already somewhat fragile sanity any good.

“And?” She asked when Ahmanet didn’t speak for a couple of seconds.

“You look… perfect,” the Pharaoh breathed, then gave a mischievous little smile. “Certainly far better than the last time we spoke.”

Jenny grimaced. The last time they’d talked was at the Temple of Osiris, when Jenny had had her little nervous breakdown. And the things she’d said…

“I don’t, you know,” she told Ahmanet.

The Pharaoh looked at her in incomprehension.

“Hate you, I mean,” Jenny clarified. “I know I said that the last time we spoke. But I don’t. I don’t think I ever have.”
“I never believed you did. I’d have felt it, otherwise.”

“The link…” Jenny muttered. That damn link.

“Indeed.” Ahmanet retook her seat on her throne. “There is something else I would like to discuss.”

Jenny blinked and gave her a curious look.

“How do you feel about bodyguards?”

Automatically, Jenny grimaced. “Don’t like them.” After a second, she added, “and you don’t have to worry about that anyway. I have a servant. He’s bound to obey me. If I order him to, he’ll protect me with everything he has.”

Ahmanet’s eyes narrowed. “Who? That Chris boy I killed with my spiders?”

Jenny briefly wondered how Ahmanet knew Chris, but shook her head instead of asking. “No, not him. Akar!”

“An Egyptian name,” Ahmanet murmured, sitting up straight when Akar reluctantly appeared a few steps down on the dais.

He carefully only looked at Jenny. “You called, Cursed One?”

Jenny gestured between the ghost and the Pharaoh. “Ahmanet, this is Akar. I killed him at the Temple of Osiris. Set captured his soul and bound him to me in a pact.”

There was a keen, predatory interest on Ahmanet’s face as she regarded Akar. “Show me the pact.”

“Well, what are you waiting for?” Jenny asked when Akar glanced at her as if he wished she’d disagree and send him away again.

Looking a little despondent, Akar climbed a couple of steps and held out his palm so Ahmanet could look at the writings on his skin. It was silent for a couple of seconds as the Pharaoh scrutinized her symbols. Finally, she sat back in her throne again, a look of satisfaction on her face.

“It’s binding,” she told Jenny, “he can’t even think of going against you. Trying would send him straight back to Set to become his plaything for eternity.” She glanced at Akar briefly. “I assure you, your afterlife will be far more pleasant in my Jennifer’s employ.”

Akar looked down, gritting his teeth.

“Akar,” Jenny caught his attention, “I have been informed I need to have a bodyguard. Congratulations. You’ve been promoted.”

“Yes, Cursed One.”

“And you’d do well to stop calling my Chosen that, ghost.” Ahmanet almost growled out, suddenly looking angry at the perceived insult. “She is a Queen and my Chosen. Treat her with the respect she is due.”

Akar was shooting daggers at the stone under his feet with his eyes. “I apologize, Queen.”

“It’s fine,” Jenny said, thinking of a way that she wouldn’t have to constantly look at his caved skull now that he was apparently going to be around more. “Are you capable of changing your appearance?”
“No, Queen. But I am capable of… inhibiting corporeal objects, if I so choose.”

Jenny chewed on her inner cheek, then turned to Ahmanet. “You don’t happen to have a statue around that I can borrow, do you?”

Ahmanet thought for a moment. “I will have a suitable one made.”

“Alright. Akar, leave until I call for you.”

“Yes, Queen.”

Ahmanet waited until he was gone before she spoke again. “You killed him?”

“He attacked me. It was self-defence.”

“Then it is good you killed him,” Ahmanet said lowly. “I would not have been nearly as kind.”

Jenny tried not to shudder at that. She really didn’t want to know. Sighing a little, she took in the throne room again. It was still beautiful. “So… where do we go from here?”

Ahmanet stood from her throne and offered Jenny her hand. “First, we show you around the palace. Then we dine, and dance. There will be a feast tonight, to celebrate your arrival. And we will not speak of anything of importance until tomorrow at the earliest.”

Jenny took her hand. That was a plan she could agree to. As Ahmanet began to lead her out of the throne room, she remembered what she’d wanted to know when Aaheru had brought her here.

“How come the palace is in such amazing condition? It was buried for thousands of years, but it looks brand new.”

“It is a part of the desert, and like everything in the desert, it obeys my will,” Ahmanet said as they stepped into the hallway. Zara and Sahar were waiting, immediately snapping to attention once Jenny came within view. Aaheuru was nowhere to be seen, but he was the High Priest and probably had better things to do than wait at the door.

“When I regained my full power,” the Pharaoh continued without so much as even blinking at Jenny’s handmaidens, “I ordered the desert to return my homes to me like they were when they were taken from me.”

Jenny blinked. “Homes? As in multiple?”

“This is the main palace. The seat of our power. It is also the biggest. There are two more. A summer palace, at Alexandria, and a secondary summer palace at Dahab. Both are close enough to the coast to be able to see the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea respectively.” She glanced over at Jenny fondly. “When things have settled down, and it is safe enough to leave the palace without fear, I will take you to both. And once I have built you a ship like I promised, we can sail the Nile all the way down to the sea, and visit the Alexandrian palace by ship.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Jenny responded honestly. It did sound very good indeed. She would love to take a trip like that. Especially when it involved sailing down the Nile, because that sounded like something worth experiencing.

“Then I shall have your ship built with all due haste,” Ahmanet said.

Jenny nibbled on her lip in contemplation. “Shouldn’t you focus on making sure the government, or Henry, doesn’t try to put this place back in the ground first?”
“It is already being taken care of, my love. You shouldn’t worry.”

Frowning, Jenny tried to figure out what Ahmanet had done. Something niggled at the back of her mind. She’d noticed something… she knew. Not too long ago, too.

“What’d you do?” She asked Ahmanet.

“Just a little bit of magic, I assure you. All I did was change some minds.”

And then it clicked. ‘’The politicians!” Jenny gasped, stopping in the middle of the hallway. ‘’I saw it on the news a while ago. They changed their entire policy in a matter of days. That was you, wasn’t it?’”

“Indeed,” Ahmanet said, a small, pleased smile on her lips. They were very nice lips, but that was not something Jenny was supposed to be thinking about right now.

They started walking again.

“How? What kind of magic could just make people change everything they stand for in so little time?”

“When I made my pact with Set,” Ahmanet explained as they walked, ‘’he gifted me many powers. My dominion over the desert is but one of them. Do you remember when you freed me, there were spiders in my prison?”

Jenny did. Those spiders had poisoned Chris, killing him. She nodded her head.

“I control many kinds of spiders. One of them a species wholly unnatural to this earth. They were created by Set himself, and their venom makes the minds of the bitten susceptible to the magic of the one who controls the spiders.”

The math wasn’t hard on that one. ‘’You had those spiders bite those politicians. And since you control the spiders, you control the politicians as well. And through them, you can control the government, and thus the whole country.”

“Correct, Jennifer. And they are just the start. I have many more spiders on the move as we speak. Soon, Egypt will be ours, and I will have my birthright.”

Jenny stared at the profile of Ahmanet’s face and wondered if she shouldn’t be more horrified at the thought of using mind control spiders to conquer a country. Then again, it could be done through open war, too, and this was probably a more peaceful way. Still, though… mind control. That was some sci-fi bullshit right there.

“Come, Jennifer,” Ahmanet lightly steered her down the hallway, “I shall show you the royal quarters.”

Jenny followed, excited to see more of the palace, but as they walked down the hallway she couldn’t help but wonder how many spiders ‘many more’ was, exactly, and where those were going. Or to whom.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet spend more time together. They talk about some important subjects. Jenny is shown the temple of the palace, which is dedicated to Set.

Chapter Notes

So, I've made it. One chapter, as ordered, even with my tests going on. I'm kind of proud of myself, to be honest with you.

A quick note: I'm no longer putting Ancient Egyptian in italics. It's too annoying to constantly have to make sure everything is in italics and that I haven't missed anything, especially since I don't have a beta reader to point out mistakes or missed bits. Instead, just assume that when they're talking, it's in Ancient Egyptian. When people start talking in English again, I'll ensure it's known.

As always, enjoy the chapter, and let me know what you think!

The royal quarters, as it turned out, were not so much quarters as a compound within the palace compound. Or maybe, like, an entire floor at an apartment building, since the quarters weren’t actually a separate building from the palace.

They were certainly big enough to be considered a building within a building, though.

There was a living room bigger than Jenny’s entire apartment at London had been - in fact, her apartment could probably fit into it twice-over. Like the throne room, it was more toned down in colour and decorations than the rest of the palace, but no less elegant and exotic for it.

It was exactly like Jenny had imagined it to be, all warm, honey-coloured stone (as opposed to the brighter white that made up the rest of the palace) and pale wooden furniture cushioned in silk and intricately wrought fire-bowls and candle holders providing light and warmth (somehow without smoke, which was something Jenny was itching to investigate), yet somehow it was more. Like a richer, more… more version of her imagination.

The floor of the living room was smoothly tiled, but covered in fine rugs to prevent cold feet, and the light of the fire made the white silk of the cushions of the furniture glow a golden wheat-like colour.

There were some low cabinets, some as places to keep artwork statues and others simply to serve as storage space. Some of them even held vases with species of desert flowers that Jenny knew for a fact didn’t bloom in this season. Incense, a far lighter fragrance than the heavy, foggy scents Jenny was used to, gave the whole room a pleasant smell and made the atmosphere feel even warmer and more welcoming.

There was a private bathroom, too, easily as big as the one Jenny had bathed in earlier this day, only
the pool had two sections instead of one. One section had warm water for long, drawn out baths, and the second, smaller section, was hot on the edge of scalding, which was just how Jenny liked it, and was apparently intended for shorter soaks. Jenny fully intended to defy that direction and soak in the almost-but-not-quite-too-hot water for as long as her body could stand it.

In both pools, the water was lightly scented with oils, and white and blue lotuses floated lazily.

Here, too, light was provided by fire-bowls and candle holders. Jenny was starting to come to the conclusion that this palace really was still like it had been five millennia ago - including no electricity for modern light sources.

Then there was the room Jenny was dreading the most… the bedroom. Jenny wasn’t sure if Ahmanet was expecting them to share a bed or not, although, considering there was only one bedroom in the quarters that she could see (Jenny presumed that other members of the royal family, when there had been one 5000 years ago, had had their own separate quarters) she had a feeling she already knew the answer to that question.

The bed was big, though. Far bigger than two people would need. Certainly big enough for Jenny to be able to sleep without having to cuddle up to Ahmanet. Because while Jenny was fine with seeing her, and talking to her, and holding her hand as they walked around the palace, she was not fine with falling asleep cuddling with Ahmanet. Not yet, anyway. And she certainly was not fine with anything more than that.

“I hope you don’t mind sharing the bedroom,” Ahmanet said, confirming Jenny’s suspicions. “I would like to sleep next to you. However if it makes you uncomfortable, I can sleep elsewhere.”

Jenny shook her head, a little touched at the thoughtfulness of the offer. “I don’t mind. Just… maybe take things really, really slow?”

There was a small, soft but pleased smile on Ahmanet’s face as she looked at Jenny, a kind of softness in her eyes that Jenny never would have expected.

Maybe… maybe Ahmanet really did care. Maybe she really did want Jenny for more than her ability to bear Set’s mortal avatar into this world. Maybe she did want Jenny’s love like she’d implied after Jenny’s ascension.

“I would like that,” the Pharaoh said after a moment. “We will move as slowly as you wish us to.”

Jenny stared at the decadent sheets on the bed. “Doesn’t Set want his mortal avatar to be born as soon as possible?”

“Set,” the brunette said, “will understand that I will not push you to do something you are not comfortable with yet. He will be born into this world. Just not before you are ready to have him. We have eternity. He has too. He can wait. He has done so for five-thousand years already. A little longer will hardly be an issue.”

Jenny tried not to look too relieved. The last thing she wanted was to end up barefoot and pregnant anytime soon. Hell, if she could, she would just never do it. But as the pact on her abdomen left her with no choice, she’d take all the time she could to get there. She was in absolutely no hurry at all.

Still, it seemed odd for Ahmanet to be so casual about it.

“I thought you wanted me to do this,” Jenny said.

They were still standing in the bedroom, as much as it was one, anyway, considering the quarters
Ahmanet looked like she wanted to sigh, gently taking Jenny’s hand and tugging her back into the living room. She took a seat on the elegant sofa, Jenny following her example.

“I do want you to do this,” Ahmanet said bluntly. “because if you do, your pact with Set will be completed, and so will mine. When Set is born into this world, he will have gotten what he wants, and as a reward, we will be spared from whatever his plans are and given power and wealth beyond imagination. But for that to happen, we would have to,” she looked a little awkward at this, “share the bed in a carnal way.” She met Jenny’s eyes squarely, suddenly very serious. “I am willing to go far, Jennifer. I will kill and poison to get what I want. I’ll happily slaughter my way to the throne of Egypt. But I will never, never force anyone into my bed without their consent.”

“I’m not ready,” was the only thing Jenny managed to say to that.

The Pharaoh nodded. “I know that.”

“I don’t know when I’ll be ready, if ever.”

“I’ve waited for you for five-thousand years. I can wait a little longer.” She stated this matter-of-factly, as if it was perfectly normal to say something like that.

Jenny stared at her, a little gobsmacked, once again taken off-guard by how utterly alien yet strangely normal Ahmanet could be at times. She decided to change the subject. “So, about Zara and Sahar…”

“Yes,” Ahmanet said, “your handmaidens. Are they not to your satisfaction? Aaheru assured me they are the finest the Cult of Set has to offer.”

“They’re, they’re fine,” Jenny assured Ahmanet, “very polite. It’s just… do I really need handmaidens?”

Ahmanet blinked. “You are a Queen. Of course you should have handmaidens.” Then her face suddenly darkened. “Do they make you uncomfortable?”

“It’ll, um,” Jenny said, trying to pick her words carefully. “it’ll take some getting used to. You know, constantly having them around. And bowing. And calling me ‘Your Highness’.” She paused to shoot Ahmanet a quick glare for that. “I blame you for that, by the way.”

The Pharaoh blinked again, looking faintly nonplussed, like a cat who couldn’t quite figure out where the feather they’d been about to pounce on had gone. It was unfairly cute. When Jenny was confused, she just tended to look like someone had slapped her in the face.

“The whole Queen thing,” Jenny explained. “You started that, I’m pretty sure. And now I have people grovelling like I’m the best thing since sliced bread.”

The look of confusion increased. Like the cat had figured out the feather had been a fake all along and was trying to think of why they’d be tricked like that. “But you are a Queen, Jennifer. You are my Chosen. That makes you my wife, and thus the Queen of Egypt, since I am Pharaoh by birthright. Of course people would treat you with the respect you are due because of that.”

“Wait a minute,” Jenny sputtered, “I’m your Chosen, but I’m not your wife, Ahmanet. We’re not married.”
“You are my Chosen. A ceremony is not needed,” Ahmanet said, before pausing and giving Jenny a considering look. As if she hadn’t really thought about it before, but rather liked the idea now that she’d had it. “Would you prefer if we did have a ceremony? Because I can have it arranged within the week.”

“That’s not my point,” Jenny protested. “My point is that people are following me around and acting like I’m above them, and I don’t like it.”

“So you do not like your handmaidens;” Ahmanet concluded.

Jenny sighed. Again, not exactly her point. But it would do for now. “I’m sure they’re very nice,” she responded, “I just don’t like being called ‘Your Highness’ and having them bow every time I walk past them.”

“I see…” the Pharaoh frowned a little. “I would release them from your service, but,”

“Let me guess,” Jenny said dryly, “I’m a Queen, and a Queen needs her handmaidens?”

“Exactly,” Ahmanet agreed.

“It’s fine. I’ll get used to it.” Jenny was sure that, given time, she’d indeed get used to having Zara and Sahar around. Besides, they seemed nice, and were probably unlikely to start yelling at her or calling her monster, so they were already better than Nick. And they probably also weren’t about to sacrifice her in a desperate attempt to hurt Ahmanet, so they were also better to have around than Henry had been.

She looked away from Ahmanet and surveyed the room again. It really was a beautiful place. In a way, she liked it better than the rest of the palace. The rest of the palace was all kinds of impressive and stately and elegant in a multitude of ways, but the honeyed stone and warm candle light of these quarters gave a kind of comfort and a sense of warmth that the rest of the palace lacked.

“Is there any other part of the palace that I should see?”

“The temple,” Ahmanet stood up and offered Jenny her hand, which Jenny took. “After that, I shall show you the formal dining hall. We should be there in time for the feast planned to celebrate your arrival.”

Oh, right, the feast. Ahmanet had said there would be one. Jenny didn’t mind so much. There was probably going to be some ceremony involved, or at least a small speech, but there would also be good food, and that made up for a lot. Jenny liked food. Jenny was willing to put up with quite a lot if good food was involved somewhere down the line.

Ahmanet led her out of the Royal Quarters and down the hallway, presumably in the direction of the temple. Jenny followed, quite happy to admire the artwork on the walls on the way there. She’d have to take some time to actually read the hieroglyphs sometime soon. She was sure there were more than enough stories to read around here on the walls alone to keep her occupied for a while.

“Technically, the palace has two temples,” Ahmanet explained as they walked down the hallway. “The main temple is just outside the palace, though within the compound. It’s the public temple, which all palace residents may make use of. The second, which is the one I am going to show you, is a private temple for higher-ranked residents; only we, as well as High Priest Aaheru and his acolytes, may make use of it. Both temples used to be dedicated to Ra, since he was the god my father worshipped most. I had them reshaped in Set’s honour, of course.”

Of course. Because it was only good sense to actually worship the god who’d given Ahmanet her
powers. In fact, it was probably a very bad idea not to. It could be taken as an insult. Jenny was very sure it was an even worse idea to insult Set.

"The palace has only been unearthed for a couple of days," Jenny said, "how can the temples already be re-dedicated? I imagine something like that takes time."

"The renovations are still underway," Ahmanet admitted, "but the Cult of Set has been preparing for my - and Set's - return for millenia. They had everything needed to properly furnish and decorate a temple ready for use. All that had to be arranged was to switch them out with the items used when the temples were in the service of Ra." She briefly paused to gesture at the richly decorated walls of the hallway. "Of course, like most of the palace, the temples are engraved and decorated, so right now, renovations mostly mean erasing the old engravings and creating new ones in Set's honour."

That sounded like a rather fascinating process. Jenny wanted to know how it worked. Luckily, she had someone who was happy to answer questions. "How are you erasing the old engravings?"

Ahmanet explained. "We are using an acid to eat away the edges of the hieroglyphs and images, so as to blur them and make them unrecognizable. The walls will then be panelled with new slabs of stone, which will be engraved with the new hieroglyphs and images. It's actually quite a simple process, although the acid is dangerous due to its corrosive properties."

"Why destroy the old engravings if they're going to be covered up anyway?" That way there would be no use for the apparently dangerous acid, either. It would certainly reduce the risk of serious accidents. And it would save what were probably treasures that should be protected from being destroyed just because the ruling Pharaoh didn't agree with what they said.

"They are dedicated to a god other than Set. That cannot be tolerated. Especially not within the very stronghold of his favoured."

Jenny blinked. "You're planning to enforce a monotheistic religion within Egypt?"

Somehow, that was not something Jenny had expected. Hell, before now, she hadn't even thought about it. But there'd been instances in Ancient Egypt when the country had been monotheistic. Some Pharaohs had enforced something like that before. It wasn't exactly the norm, considering Ancient Egyptian religion was at its very base a polytheistic religion, but it wasn't entirely unusual either.

"Yes," Ahmanet said, "I am planning to enforce a monotheistic policy."

"Hold on," Jenny said, slowing down and thus forcing Ahmanet to walk slower as well, until they were lingering in the hallway. "What about the current religions? Christianity, the Islam, Judaism. They're all present in Egypt. Buddhism and Hinduism are too. Are you going to forbid their religions as well as the worship of Egyptian gods other than Set?"

Ahmanet blinked. "They do not worship Set. Egypt will me monotheistic. There is no place for other gods. Why should I treat them any differently than I would people who insist on worshipping Egyptian gods other than Set?"

Jenny resisted the urge to rub at her forehead. She could feel a small headache growing behind her eyes. "Ahmanet… just how much do you know about current religious tensions?"

"Enough to know they are worshipping the wrong gods. Gods that have no place here and should not be acknowledged."

Translation; she knew absolutely nothing. Jenny wanted to groan. Had Ahmanet not paid any attention to the actual people of the country she hoped to rule? Because if she had, she'd know that
there was enough discussion and distrust between various religions, even without her trying to ban all of them and instating something new.

"The people won’t accept a new god, Ahmanet," Jenny said, hoping she’d get through. The last thing Egypt needed was a religion-based civil war. "They have their religions that they are loyal to, with gods that they love, and you telling them they have to stop and worship someone else will only make them angry."

"Set is a far better god to worship," Ahmanet said. "They will grow used to it."

"They won’t. They’ll just get angry." Jenny had seen it on the news often enough, when state and religion were entwined enough that political leaders started harassing people of other beliefs, and those people fought back. Oppressed people always did, in the end. "You’ll have a revolt on your hands before long."

Ahmanet actually seemed to think that over for a moment, taking Jenny’s words in rather than dismissing them out of hand. She looked less than pleased with what Jenny had told her, though. It was probably not what she’d wanted to hear.

It was silent. Zara and Sahar, who were still following Jenny around, because that was apparently part of their job description, stood around a touch awkwardly, making a concentrated effort to not listen to the conversation.

"We can pick this up some other time," Jenny offered, after a few seconds, when Ahmanet failed to say anything. This may not be the best time to discuss religion.

"Yes, perhaps this is a discussion for another day," Ahmanet agreed after another second. "I should be showing you the temple anyway."

"And I am very eager to see it," Jenny said, hoping to soothe any hackles that may have been raised over the past few minutes. She wasn’t honestly all that interested in a temple dedicated to the god who’d ruined her life, but hey, she wasn’t all that interested in getting into a fight either, and choices had to be made.

Ahmanet took her hand again and slowly began to lead her further down the hallway. Zara and Sahar snapped out of their carefully composed ‘we’re not listening to give you some privacy’ loitering and followed quickly.

"We will continue this discussion soon," Ahmanet said as they walked down the hallway. "But at the moment, you should see the temple first. That is more important."

Jenny hummed, not entirely agreeing, but willing to go along with it - the discussion was a pretty important one, but also not one she wanted to have right now. Especially not on her first day in the palace. It sounded like a bad thing to start off with, because Jenny was very aware that religion and politics were two subject that caused fights like nothing else.

They reached the temple in a few more moments. Some rope was stopping people from entering, as were two guards.

"The workers have just finished with the acid," Ahmanet explained, "It’s safe to go in now, but the acid itself wasn’t removed from the temple until this morning, and we didn’t want to risk injury by leaving the temple accessible."

Well, at least they weren’t being entirely reckless, even if the acid was apparently caustic enough to eat through stone. Jenny was just happy she didn’t have to be in the same room with the stuff. Still,
though…

“‘There aren’t any vapours or anything left behind?’”

“‘The temple was aired out this morning, and incense was lit to get rid of the smell of the acid. It is entirely safe,’” Ahmanet assured her.

Jenny believed her. She couldn’t not believe her, when the link was leaking sincerity into the back of her mind like water from a broken faucet.

“‘Alright,’” Jenny said, and gestured at the rope, “‘can I just go in?’”

Ahmanet sharply jerked her head at one of the guards, who bowed low and unhooked the rope, quickly stepping aside to offer access to the temple.

Feeling very much like something important was happening, Jenny stepped into the temple, Ahmanet’s hand comfortingly laid on the small of her back.

It was still under construction, like Ahmanet had said, the walls scarred and pockmarked from the acid that had been used to destroy the original engravings. The floor was clean, though, and the furniture - an altar, some statues - was all dedicated to Set already. On top of the altar were small jugs of oils and alcohols, and vases of flowers shouldn’t be blooming in this season, and bowls filled with sand holding lit sticks of incense and fresh fruits.

That wasn’t what caught Jenny’s attention, though.

The air did.

It was thick and heavy with something unseen, weighted down with an inhuman awareness of everything inside, a colourless fog of power. It raised the hair on Jenny’s arms and the back of her neck, goosebumps popping up everywhere her dress didn’t cover, her breath catching in the back of her throat.

She raised her hand, almost expecting the air to ripple like water at the movement.

“‘You can feel it, can’t you, Jennifer?’” Ahmanet stood next to her, voice quiet in Jenny’s ear. There was an expression on her face, one Jenny couldn’t quite make sense of, something torn between awe and worship and a hint of terror - and Jenny wasn’t sure whether it was aimed at the presence in the temple, or at her.

“‘Yes,’” Jenny found herself responding, just as quietly. As if speaking too loud would alert this power to their presence. Yet, deep in her bones, she knew that it already knew they were here. “‘Yes. I can feel it.’” She dropped her hand, off-kilter and vulnerable in the strangely cold air of the room. She already didn’t like this place. “‘I know what this is. I’ve felt this before’”

Just once before, but it was not something she could ever forget. She could almost feel him coiling around her again like a giant, cold snake, manipulating her body like he owned her, slimy fingers on her abdomen, burning the pact into her skin. His power, like a pillow over her mouth and nose, smothering her until she struggled to breathe.

Ahmanet’s hand closed around Jenny’s wrist, squeezing gently and snapping her from the memories. It was enough for Jenny to realize that she was shaking, and that her breath was shallow and quick. She could feel a sheen of sweat on her face. For a moment, she was very, very grateful that Zara and Sahar had not entered the temple with her, and were instead waiting out in the hallway.
“Jennifer?”

“I’m fine,” Jenny managed, “I’m fine. Just… it’s more overwhelming than I’d expected.”

That was an understatement if she’d ever heard one. She hadn’t expected to be able to sense Set in the temple at all. Although it made sense now that she was actually experiencing it. Hadn’t she been able to feel the magic drenching the Temple of Osiris, buzzing across her senses? And that was with a god she had no connection to. So it actually made perfect sense for her to be able to feel Set’s presence, when she was so intimately connected to him.

“Set is powerful,” Ahmanet said solemnly. “He grows in power the more people believe in him. And people are starting to believe again. He gets stronger every day. And when you ascended, he gained access to more power through you. It was enough to restore me to life, and for him to tap into the veil between this world and the next.” Ahmanet’s hand loosened around Jenny’s wrist, then slid upwards to her shoulder, then into her neck so Ahmanet’s fingers could tangle into the baby hairs at her nape. “You will be his mother, Jennifer. I will, for all intents and purposes, father him. We will give him a mortal avatar and more power than he could possibly want for, and he will reward us in turn.”

Jenny blinked at Ahmanet, feeling a little hazy from the power seeping into her lungs with every breath. “I don’t understand.”

“We are the ones who will bring him into this world, my love,” Ahmanet explained, a small smile on her face as she lightly tugged at the hair at the nape of Jenny’s neck, making her shudder a little. “It is through us that he will get what he has coveted for so many thousands of years. And Set may be considered evil, but he does not forget those who stood with him. He kept me alive for 5000 years and then guided you into freeing me, giving me the Chosen I have always longed for as a reward for my loyalty and suffering. He gave you the power over life and death in return for accepting his pact. When I father him and you birth him, he will show his appreciation as he always does.”

Jenny stared back at Ahmanet, only a few inches away, and wondered if she really wanted any rewards from Set anyway. After all, she’d had to die and be forced into a pact she didn’t want to get her powers, and those hadn’t even kicked in yet, so a fat load of good those were.

If that was what she had to look forward to, she didn’t want it.

“Are you feeling alright? You still look pale.”

Jenny shrugged a little, still shaking and a little sweaty. This place had hit her like a sledgehammer, and she quite wanted to leave now. “Shouldn’t we be on our way to the dining hall? You said there would be a feast.”

Ahmanet took the hint, untangling her hand from Jenny’s hair a little reluctantly. “Come, my chosen. The cooks have been working to create a spread worthy of you all day.”

Jenny followed mutely, glad to be able to leave the temple, but as she stepped out into the hallway and felt the threads if power release her almost reluctantly, wisping away into the air until she could only barely feel a faint echo, she felt curiously bereft.

She shivered and clutched Ahmanet’s hand a little tighter, walking quickly.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet talk some more.

Chapter Notes

Hello, all. Bit of a hasty chapter this week. I'm kind of busy with school right now so I didn't have as much time to write, so I had to hurry through. It's probably not as good as other chapters, but it'll do. Anyway.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

The dining hall was somewhere in between the throne room and the royal quarters, which meant it wasn’t too terribly far from the temple either.

The kitchens were close to the dining hall, and by the time Jenny approached the hall, her mouth was watering at the scents drifting through the hallways. It also reminded her of the fact that she hadn’t eaten since she’d walked away from Henry, and she was really, really hungry. She could really go for some decent food right about now. And from what she could smell, whatever it was the cooks had been preparing, would be delicious.

Jenny didn’t even blink when the doors were opened as soon as she and Ahmanet approached - she was already starting to get used to that. She was also getting the (somewhat foreboding) feeling that she wasn’t going to get to open another door by herself for possibly a very long time. Apparently there were servants for that. It made her feel a little uncomfortable, to have people bowing and opening doors whenever she got close.

Like having Zara and Sahar around, it was something Jenny was going to have to get used to.

One of the guards/servants at the door stepped inside the dining hall and announced them just as they were about to enter; “Her Majesty, Ahmanet, Pharaoh of Egypt, Favoured of Set, and her Chosen, Jennifer Halsey, Queen of Egypt, Mother of Set!”

Scratch that, if there was something Jenny needed to get used to, it was being called Queen. Because it was just plain strange, to hear herself being referred to like that. Couldn’t she just be, like, the royal archaeologist or something? Because she’d be quite happy if she got to spend her days on digs or pouring over artefacts, especially if said digs and projects were fully funded and she wouldn’t have to worry about financing it all.

That sounded like a nice, quiet kind of job. Much quieter, certainly, than trying to talk Ahmanet out of starting a religious civil war out of pure, bullheaded ignorance - not to mention whatever other hairbrained ideas the Pharaoh might have in that pretty head of hers. It’d be a small miracle if they didn’t end up embroiled in a war sometime soon.
Jenny made a mental note to look into getting some diplomacy books. She would probably need them sooner rather than later.

The dining hall, when they stepped inside, was filled with people. Four long tables, each capable of seating two-hundred people at least, occupied the vast majority of the hall, and each table was occupied. They weren’t full entirely, but there were a good couple of hundred people present regardless. Jenny could make out soldiers, priests, and other residents, and servants standing near the walls or walking around pouring goblets of drink.

All of them snapped to attention when Jenny and Ahmanet entered.

There was a fifth table, on a raised dais about five steps high, with only six chairs. Four of them were already occupied; the outer two chairs on either side, taken by Aaheru and his three acolytes. The middle two chairs were left free, and they were largest at the table, almost throne-like in proportions.

Ahmanet gently led Jenny over to the more feminine of the two and pulled it out for her. Jenny quietly thanked her, getting a brief, gentle squeeze to her upper arm in response. Then Ahmanet took her own seat in the slightly larger throne, gaze lazily roaming across the dining hall for several moments.

Finally, she negligently gestured outwards. ‘‘Be seated.’’

As one, the people present sat down, not a single one hesitating. One or two servants hastily finished filling cups with what looked to be wine, then hurried over to stand near the wall and wait to be needed again.

Jenny glanced at her own cup, some ornate thing made out of delicate glass, and found it already filled generously with wine. From what she could smell (the scent of the wine was rather strong) it wasn’t made of grapes, but rather of pomegranate. Jenny had never had pomegranate wine before, but it smelled good, so she’d be happy to try it.

Ahmanet cleared her throat. Immediately, the entire hall fell silent. Every head turned in the direction of the royal table, more attentive than Jenny had ever seen a crowd be. It was unnerving to have so many stares aimed in her direction.

Ahmanet took her own cup of wine in her hand, then gave a short speech. ‘‘My Queen has arrived at the palace. Set is stirring, growing in power every day. Today, we are one step closer to Egypt. One step closer to our future, when we regain what has been stolen.’’ She lifted her glass, and Jenny quickly mimicked her. ‘‘To Set, and to the Queen!’’

‘‘To Set, and the Queen!’’ The crowd echoed.

Jenny tried to look like she wasn’t embarrassed, hiding her face behind her cup of wine. At least it was good wine. The pomegranate gave it a kind of sweet tartness that she hadn’t tasted before in wine, which she found herself liking.

Another set of doors, which she hadn’t noticed before, opened. A wave of smells came from beyond them, ones so mouth wateringly delicious that they had Jenny’s stomach roaring like a starved beast. Ahmanet glanced over, an amused tilt to her eyebrow.

‘‘Hungry?’’

‘‘Very,’’ Jenny agreed, watching avidly as a small army of cooks marched into the dining hall, carrying large platters and bowls filled with food. A number of them ascended the dais the royal table was located on, carefully placing down a multitude of dishes. Way too much for the six people
occupying the table, but Jenny was hungry enough to be sure she could make a reasonable dent in the amount of food anyway.

“Then eat,” Ahmanet said, nudging a platter with a whole, roasted red snapper stuffed with vegetables closer to Jenny’s plate. It smelled good enough to die for. “There is more than plenty.”

That, there was. Jenny happily followed the Pharaoh’s advice. She used the utensils added to the platter of fish to cut out a decent piece, placing it on her plate. There were stuffed grape leaves, too, like she’d had at the Temple of Osiris, filled with rice and herbs and nuts, as well as a variety of other dishes involving fish, or rice, or chicken, or just vegetables. Also present was a variety of sauces and dips, like baba ganoush, hummus and yogurt sauce with mint. Bread, too - a staple in Egypt, and present at every meal of the day.

All of it cooked to perfection, of course, as Jenny supposed food was meant to be like in a palace.

Add the really rather fantastic wine to that, and the thick, honeyed milk for those who didn’t want alcohol, it was probably the best, most decadent meal Jenny had ever had in her life. Certainly the best example of Middle Eastern cooking she’d ever had, too - traditional, filling, varied, and absolutely delicious.

“Are you liking the food?” Ahmanet asked, as if the way Jenny was cleaning her plate didn’t answer that question. “If you’d like, I could have more… Western dishes prepared.”

Jenny shook her head, hastily swallowing some of her fish. “No, that’s not necessary. This is delicious.”

“Good.” Ahmanet carefully cut off some chicken and placed it onto her plate. “I am glad. I would hate for you to dislike the local kitchen.”

“I actually really like Middle Eastern food,” Jenny volunteered. She hadn’t really shared anything about herself with Ahmanet yet, and she figured she might as well start now. “I’ve spent a lot of time here in Egypt, and surrounding countries, over the past decade or so. That’s when I really got introduced to this sort of food, and I’ve loved it since.”

Ahmanet gave Jenny her full attention. “You have been to Egypt before?”

Jenny nodded. “Many times. For research, mostly.” She glanced at Ahmanet. “To find you. It took me thirteen years to figure out where your tomb was.”

At that, the Pharaoh looked more than a little pleased. “I am… glad you put so much effort into it, Jennifer.”

“A good third of my life,” Jenny responded, looking down at the little chunks of chicken on her plate. “And even then, I almost didn’t succeed.”

“I understand that the priests of Osiris were thorough when they erased me from history,” Ahmanet said.

“They were. I searched for thirteen years and I barely found anything. If Henry hadn’t told me about his suspicions of your existence, I’d never even have known.”

The Pharaoh frowned a little. “It seems that I owe this Henry a debt, then.” She glanced at Jenny. “I am glad he did tell you.”

“You know,” Jenny said, thoughtfully spearing some chicken with her fork and dipping it into the
“yogurt-mint sauce, ‘I think I am too.’”

Ahmanet paused halfway through taking a sip of her wine, lowering the cup from her mouth. She looked at Jenny as if she didn’t quite believe her. “You are?”

Jenny could feel the flush rising in her cheeks; she took a quick sip of wine to hide it. “Yes.”

She was glad that Henry had hired her to go find Ahmanet, actually. The last two and a half weeks or so had been hell, but sitting here, next to the woman she’d accidentally freed, Jenny felt like a restless part of her had finally settled. Like the urge she’d always felt to go explore and find things had finally been soothed in some way.

Or maybe it was the mix of happiness and contentment she could feel spilling across the link, splaying across Jenny’s mind like a warm, fluffy blanket of comfort.

Either way, she was good where she was right now; sitting right here at this table, eating delicious food, talking to a really pretty lady.

Slowly, a small smile grew on Ahmanet’s face. It was more subdued than the wide grin she’d given when Jenny had accepted her crown, but somehow it was just as joyful. “I am very glad to hear that.”

Jenny gave a small smile of her own, then focussed back on her plate of food, feeling a little off-kilter. Much as she felt comfortable at the moment, it was still strange to be sitting here, next to the person who’d murdered her. But she couldn’t find it in herself to actually feel anything less than pretty good at the moment. Definitely the link, Jenny thought to herself as she scraped the last dregs of hummus off her plate with a piece of bread.

Dinner ended up an extended affair that lasted a full two hours; the food came in waves, and when a platter was empty, it was immediately replaced with a full one.

Jenny ate more than she usually did at dinner, but all of it was so delicious! And besides, she had a strong stomach - if it could handle a movie marathon involving more popcorn and candy than was polite and an inhuman pile of chicken nuggets afterwards, then it could handle a multitude of delicious Middle Eastern dishes spread across a couple of hours.

There was dessert, too, and Jenny chose something with a kind of baked custard thing and pistachios and rosewater that was all kinds of creamy and sweet and crunchy from the nuts added into it.

When it ended (finally), Jenny was full and sleepy, and all she really wanted was to crawl into bed, any bed, and get some sweet, sweet sleep.

“Would you like to see more of the castle?” Ahmanet asked once they had both finished eating, paying no attention to the servants coming to clear the dishes from the table.

Jenny shook her head, stifling a yawn. “Actually, can we go back to our quarters? I’m kind of tired.”

“Of course,” the Pharaoh agreed immediately. She pushed away from the table and stood up, somehow managing to make it look elegant, then held out her hand for Jenny.

Jenny took it, standing up as well.
"Your Highness," Aaheru stood up as well, smiling calmly, "Your Majesty. I understand you visited the temple today?"

"That's right," Jenny agreed, wondering why Aaheru had chosen to start a conversation now when she'd spent the past two hours sitting less than a couple of feet away.

"I do hope you find as much solace there as many of our people do," Aaheru continued.

"It, um," Jenny said, "it was a very intense experience." Definitely not something she'd forget anytime soon. If ever.

Aaheru smiled a little. He looked genuinely pleased. "Perhaps you will join us in prayer tomorrow? We have service in the morning and in the afternoon, whichever you prefer."

"I'll make sure to drop by," Jenny said, even though she wasn't sure she wanted to set foot in the temple again this soon. Still, she was here and she was probably going to stay for a while, so she might as well try to fit into life at the palace.

"We look forward to it," Aaheru responded. "Then I shall also introduce you to my acolytes tomorrow."

"I'd like that," she responded. "I'm sure they'll be very interesting to talk to."

"Indeed," Ahmanet chimed in, a hint of impatience on her face, her hand pressing lightly against the small of Jenny's back. "However, if you'll excuse us, Aaheru, Jennifer and I have matters to attend to."

"Of course, Your Majesty," Aaheru stepped aside to give them space. "I shall see you tomorrow, Your Highness."

Ahmanet nodded at him, Jenny following her example quickly. The hand on her lower back exerted a little pressure, and she let herself be maneuvered out of the dining hall without complaint. It wasn't like she could really find her way around the palace without some direction. It was huge. It had more hallways and rooms than an anthill. It would take some time to find her way around.

It took a few minutes to reach the royal quarters, but when they did, the warm, honeyed stone and the smell of light incense was enough to have Jenny's shoulders dropping as tension leached out of her system, leaving her suddenly and acutely exhausted.

"I will have some tea brought up," Ahmanet said. "If you wish to change into something less formal, there is a wardrobe attached to the bedroom. There are clothes in your size."

"Thank you," Jenny murmured, "I will."

The dress she was wearing was supremely comfy, all kinds of light and silky, but she would like to take off her jewellery for a bit. Gold was heavy, and though she had super-strength, it did not mean that lugging around the amount of gold used in her jewellery was fun. And besides, she still wasn't comfortable with how much it was worth. Something worth this much should be secured somewhere in a vault, or at least behind security in a museum - it should not be worn and used like it was nothing.

She made her way into the bedroom, and found a doorway she hadn't noticed before. It was partially hidden by drapings of white silk coming down from the ceilings to decorate the walls. Behind the doorway was a walk-in closet larger than any Jenny had ever seen before.
Lit with candle light (the candles were set in glass bulbs, open at the top, to prevent the garments present from catching on fire), there was plenty of light for Jenny to inspect the clothing. Unsurprisingly, most of it was simple white, but she did spot some trims of red and purple every now and then.

Eventually she settled on a nightshirt of sorts, a soft cotton rather than the silk she was wearing now, and shorter than her current dress. What she was wearing now went down to her ankles, the nightshirt would go down just past her knees. It had something dress-like to it, she supposed, but that was not why Jenny chose it. She chose it because it looked supremely comfortable to sleep in.

There were drawers, somehow hewn into the very walls of the room, and when Jenny opened them, looking for a place to store her jewellery, she found them lined with fabric, and with some other pieces already present. Obviously that was where the ridiculous amount of gold and gems draped across her was supposed to go.

“Your Highness,” Zara’s voice came from the doorway. “Excuse me for interrupting. The Pharaoh sent us to help you.”

Jenny, about to start removing the gold from her person, paused and glanced at Zara and Sahar, hovering just inside the doorway. She stifled a sigh - she couldn’t get rid of them, Ahmanet herself had impressed that upon her, and she couldn’t exactly send them away all the time either, that would be rude. “Right. Come on in, then.”

They entered immediately, pausing once they were within arm’s reach.

“If you would allow us, Your Highness?” Sahar asked.

Jenny nodded. “Go ahead.”

Heads bowed in respect, they began to relieve her of the weight of the jewellery. The broad collar went first, carefully untied from around her neck and splayed out in one of the drawers, which was then securely shut, pushed back into the wall. Then the girdle around her waist, the bands around her upper arms, the rings on her fingers, and, lastly her diadem. Each piece was placed in a drawer and stored away, the diadem handled most carefully of all.

Then hands started tugging at the clasps keeping Jenny’s dress up at her shoulders, and she immediately tensed and took a small step back.

“Thanks for the help, you two,” she said nervously, “but I can take it from here.”

She was very, very thankful when her two handmaidens didn’t protest.

“As you wish, Your Highness,” Zara agreed, head bowed as she began to back out of the room, Sahar doing the exact same thing.

Jenny waited for the silk drapes to have fallen mostly in front of the doorway again before she unclasped her dress and let it drop to the floor, then quickly shrugged on the nightshirt. Like she’d thought, it fell just under her knees. She took off her sandals, too, tucking them into the rack filled with more sandals, and decided to leave her feet bare for now. The stone of the floor was cool, but there were rugs all over the place, so her feet wouldn’t really get cold all that fast.

Running her hands through her hair to loosen it up a little (apparently, like helmet hair, diadem hair was a thing, too), Jenny made her way out of the walk-in closet and back towards the living room.

There was a tray of tea waiting on one of the various small tables present. One teapot, a set of two
cups, a small bowl of honey and a small plate of sliced lemon, as well as a small dish of sweets.

“While I was… detained in London,” Ahmanet said, sitting on the couch, her crown laid on the cushions beside her and her hair left wild and loose around her shoulders, “I heard that British people like their tea with honey and lemon.”

“Some do, yeah,” Jenny agreed as she sat down. “Some prefer milk and sugar.”

Ahmanet paused. “Would you prefer that?”

“No, honey and lemon is fine,” Jenny said. She didn’t move to pour any tea, instead looking at the Pharaoh. “You know, we should probably talk.”

There was a small smile. “Of course. What would you like to discuss?”

“Several things,” Jenny said. “I have some things to share about the priests of Osiris, for instance. But let’s start with your plans for Egypt.”

Ahmanet stiffened at the mention of the priests of Osiris. “What do you know about them?”


“Then we shall speak about that first,” Ahmanet said decisively. “After that, I will tell you about how I plan to take back my birthright.”

Jenny eyed her, and, figuring that Ahmanet wasn’t going to budge on this, nodded her head. “Alright. I’ll tell you everything I know.”

The expression on Ahmanet’s face was somewhat frightening. “Good.”
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet talk some more, have their first night together (Jenny might like Ahmanet a little more than she'd expected), and an ability shows up out of nowhere.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 32 is up, people, and I have survived my tests - it's a miracle. Now let's hope I've not failed any of them (fingers crossed, everyone).

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Jenny busied herself with pouring tea, adding some honey and a slice of lemon to her own, and just honey into Ahmanet's cup when she shook her head at the lemon, trying to figure out where to start.

Finally, as she handed Ahmanet her cup of tea and picked up her own, she decided to just jump right into it. “Okay, long story short, the priests of Osiris are currently trying to find a way to turn me human again, and are also in the process of picking up the recipe for the Blood of Osiris so they can kill you.”

Then she took a sip of her tea, humming at the flavour, and watched as Ahmanet fumbled with her cup for a moment.

“...I see. That is unfortunate.”

Jenny shrugged. “Not really. It’s being taken care of.”

Ahmanet blinked. “I don’t think the priests of Osiris would be stopped as easily as you most likely believe. They’ve survived for 5000 years, and have not lost any of their strength.”

“Well,” Jenny said, “I had Akar burn down the library and all other information at the Temple of Osiris, and also incapacitate all the priests present.” She sipped at her tea again and swallowed, frowning a little. “Then Nick called me and told me about a secret temple at the Dakhla Oasis, so when Aliya told me I could give the Cult of Set orders, I sent a couple of people over to Dakhla. They have orders to take down Abdamelek, capture Nick, and destroy the recipe to the Blood of Osiris and everything associated with it.”

“...Elaborate ‘incapacitate’,” Ahmanet requested, also sipping her tea.

“Multiple compound fractures to each limb. It should be a good while before they’re rehabilitated, let alone capable of doing anything.”

“Hm…”

Jenny frowned a little. “You don’t seem too pleased with that. Isn’t broken bones enough?”
“The priests of Osiris are… stubborn,” Ahmanet said delicately. “They do not give up easily, if at all. Broken bones are a mere delay to them. Once they are healed enough, they will just start up again from where they left off.”

“I didn’t want to order their deaths,” Jenny almost whispered. “I’ve already killed one person. I don’t want to kill any more.”

“Yet you ordered the High Priest to be taken care of,” Ahmanet pointed out.

“I meant, like, hospitalized. Not dead. Though,” she added, staring down at her cup of tea, “I probably should have worded that better when I told Aliya to send some people over.”

“Perhaps,” Ahmanet agreed. “However, I can’t say I am unhappy you worded your request poorly. The High Priest of Osiris is a threat. It will be better for us if he were to die.”

“He was kind to me when I was at the temple,” Jenny mumbled.

“Many people act kind when they want something from you,” Ahmanet responded, though her tone was sympathetic. “I assume he wanted you to aid him in killing me.”

Jenny nodded her head. “He also wanted to find a way to turn me human again.”

“That, I am sorry to say, is impossible. Once you are ascended, there is no going back. You are what you are, Jennifer, and that cannot change anymore.”

“Yeah, I figured.” Jenny had already known that there was no chance for her to undo this. If there had been, the priests of Osiris, keepers of the Blood of Osiris, would have already had it - it was their job to prevent stuff like this from happening, after all. “And I wasn’t going to let them give me anything anyway.”

Ahmanet cocked an eyebrow, sipping her tea.

“Well, it’s not like they had any idea what to give me anyway,” Jenny elaborated. “And I’m not stupid enough to take something completely untested when I have no idea what it’ll do to me.”

“Indeed,” Ahmanet agreed. “But you sent some of the Cult of Osiris to fix that problem. I imagine it will not be long before they report back. The Cult is very efficient.”

Jenny swallowed some tea. “How long do you think it will take?”

“With the resources the Cult of Set commands? I estimate a few days at most. Provided, of course, they are able to follow the High Priest straight to the temple and don’t have to spend time searching for it.”

Jenny frowned. A couple of days. Maybe longer if they had to look for the temple first. She found herself hoping that they wouldn’t be too late. It’d be bad if the priests of Osiris got their hands on the full recipe to the Blood of Osiris. Especially if they managed to send it to others before the Cult of Set got to them. Because if that happened, she and Ahmanet would eventually get into a lot of trouble, which would involve murder attempts through poison.

Yeah, not a nice idea.

Then again, getting a dagger shoved through her chest hadn’t been a nice idea either, and she’d survived that. More or less, anyway.
“They’ll be bringing Nick with them,” Jenny said, deciding to ignore her doubts for now. “I told them I wanted him captured and in good condition.”

At that, Ahmanet’s upper lip curled a little in disgust. “Why do you want him captured? He has no redeeming qualities. He has hurt you. If anything, he should be killed on sight.”

Jenny looked down, hunching her shoulders. “I don’t want him dead. I just want him to stop trying to hurt us. I figured that if I kept him somewhere, he wouldn’t be able to hurt either of us.”

“And what if he evades capture? Or manages to escape?” Ahmanet looked sympathetic, but she also looked like she wasn’t about to give up her opinion on the matter. “This Nick Morton is a threat, Jennifer. He has hurt you already, and will likely hurt you in the future. Or at least make an attempt at it. Like the High Priest of Osiris, it is best if he were to be eliminated.”

“He was my friend.”

It was a weak argument, and Jenny knew it. She was aware of the fact that Nick was not on her side. She knew that he hated what she’d become and that he’d happily try anything to make her human again, probably even if it killed her in the process. He hated her very nature more than he appreciated her life. That made him a threat, just like Ahmanet had just said. It was an unfortunate fact, one that Jenny wasn’t happy with. But there was little she could do to change his mind. Nick was stubborn at best. When he got a thought or idea into his head, it was very hard to stop him, or to change his mind.

“He is a threat.” Ahmanet insisted, though her brow was creased with sympathy. Jenny didn’t respond. She knew Ahmanet was right. That didn’t mean she had to like it, though.

“However,” the Pharaoh continued after several long moments of silence, sounding very reluctant, “the palace does happen to have several very secure cells in an underground level.”

Blinking, Jenny looked up in hope. There was a grimace on Ahmanet’s face, as if every word hurt her, but that didn’t change what she was saying.

“So I won’t have to have him killed?” Jenny asked hopefully.

“Provided he is kept in a cell and I take the key, and if he is guarded day and night by at least six soldiers,” Ahmanet said, grimace deepening, “I will allow it. Just this once. For you.”

Jenny’s hands were trembling so badly she nearly dropped her teacup. Carefully, she placed it on the table, took a few deep breaths to calm herself a little, and then almost shocked the life right back out of Ahmanet when she leaned in and hugged her.

It took a moment for the Pharaoh to react, but then a warm set of arms snaked around Jenny’s waist to pull her a little closer. One hand crept up her back to tangle in the soft baby hairs at the base of Jenny’s skull, like Ahmanet had done before, earlier at the temple. She seemed to like that spot. It was a little possessive, but Jenny found that she didn’t really mind.

“Thank you,” Jenny mumbled, trying not to notice how nice Ahmanet’s hair smelled, and how soft her skin was where Jenny’s nose nudged her jaw.

“You are very welcome, Jennifer.” She responded sincerely. “As long as you are happy.”

Jenny held on for a second longer, then awkwardly extracted herself from the (much nicer that she’d expected) hug. She could feel the blood gathering in her cheeks, turning her entire face hot and red as she looked anywhere but at Ahmanet. Tea. She still had tea. She could occupy herself with that
for at least a couple of minutes. Yes. That sounded like a solid idea.

She fumbled for her teacup and took a hasty sip, trying to ignore the way Ahmanet was studying her.

“'You’re blushing.'” The Pharaoh stated. “'I like it when you blush. It’s pretty.'”

That, unsurprisingly, made Jenny blush harder.

“'Anyway!'” She quickly changed the subject, hoping to god her blush would recede soon. “'There’s not really anything else I can tell you about the priests of Osiris. We didn’t really spend all that much time there. We kind of had to leave after I ended up killing Akar.'”

“Regardless, it is good to know that the priests of the main temple have been temporarily incapacitated and that a team has been sent out to destroy the Blood of Osiris and everything associated with it as well as kill the High Priest.” Ahmanet, much to Jenny’s gratitude, went along with the change in subject. “'It will give us a brief window to take further measures against them.'”

“I probably don’t want to know what those measures are, do I?’”

“If you asked, I would tell you,” Ahmanet said, “'but no, you will most likely not appreciate my plans.'”

Jenny nodded in resignation. That was enough for her to know that it would likely involve violence and blood, and probably give her nightmares to boot if she got any details. “'Then I won’t ask. I don’t want to know.'”

“'In that case, I shan’t speak of it where you can overhear.'”

“'Good,'” Jenny responded. “'But I don’t want to be left out completely. I don’t need details, just let me know if something important happens.'”

“I will. All I ask in return is that, when Morton is captured and you spend time with him like I imagine you will, you inform me of anything I should know.” Ahmanet placed her teacup, now empty, back on the tray. “'I rather doubt he’ll tell me anything of importance.'”

Jenny nodded. “'I can do that.'”

She rather doubted that Nick would tell even her anything of importance, once he realized Jenny had jumped the fence, but he couldn’t keep his mouth shut forever. Besides, he was an emotional man, he’d let something slip in a bout of anger or something. Jenny would keep Ahmanet informed if he did.

She placed her own empty teacup on the tray as well, trying to stifle a yawn.

“'You’re tired,'” Ahmanet stated. “'Perhaps we should continue this conversation in the morning, when you have had some rest.'”

Going to bed did sound very good. And Jenny was indeed tired. She hadn’t slept well the past few nights, or in a while really. “'You’ll tell me about how you’re planning to become the legitimate ruler of Egypt tomorrow?'”

“I already am the legitimate ruler,” Ahmanet stated mildly, “'but yes, I will.'”

“'Okay,'” Jenny said, “'then I’m going to bed now.'”

“I shall join you in a minute,” Ahmanet said. “'There are personal hygiene supplies in the bathroom,
to clean your teeth and brush your hair. You needn’t worry about the washbowls, they will be
cleaned by servants during the night.’’

‘Alright, thank you,’’ Jenny stood up, brushing a stray crease out of the fabric of her nightshirt. She
quickly made her way to the bathroom, scanning the humongous space for the promised items. She
found them on one of the various alter-like storage cabinets against the walls, the tops of them having
washbowls and mirrors.

Jenny padded over to one and took the carafe of water next to the washbowl and poured some in. It
was cold, but it had some flower petals in it that made it smell pleasantly mild and sweet. Jenny spent
a few moments rummaging around the cabinet until she found, to her surprise, a modern (manual)
toothbrush and a modern tube of toothpaste. It wasn’t the flavour she preferred, she liked the milder
mint flavours over the sharper ones, but as it was, she was just glad to actually have a way to keep up
with her personal hygiene habits.

Jenny washed her face first, dabbing her skin dry with a small towel. The coolness of the water was
pleasant against her skin - the palace was far cooler than the desert outside, but the heated water of
the pools made the bathroom balmy and hot like the tropics.

She brushed her teeth thoroughly, and like Ahmanet had told her, didn’t worry about the washbowl,
spitting the foam into the water and rinsing her mouth with some more water straight from the carafe.

Then, finding a hairbrush, she spent several minutes combing out whatever tangles might have taken
up residence since her bath earlier that day. There weren’t many, but the mundane nature of the task
was calming.

Finally she placed the hairbrush on the smooth surface of the vanity and shuffled into the direction of
the bedroom. She really was tired, and that humongous, fluffy bed looked so very inviting. She
didn’t need a written invitation to take advantage of that.

She crawled in, marvelling at the feel of the Egyptian cotton against her skin. It was probably the
highest thread count she’d ever touched in her life, bed sheet-wise - and they were definitely the
softest sheets she’d ever touched in her life too. Her sheets back at her apartment in London were
soft too, worn from washing and laundry detergent, but not nearly as soft as these sheets.

And the mattress! Holy hell, Jenny never wanted to sleep in a different bed again, because this was
probably the single most comfortable bed in the entire world.

Jenny pretty much draped herself against the mountain of pillows at the headboard of the bed, the
silken covers fluttering over her like they were made of clouds. Oh damn. She melted into the
mattress with a deep sigh of utter bliss. Definitely the single most comfortable bed on the planet.
Maybe in the entire universe. Either way, Jenny was claiming it. If she ever had to leave the palace,
for whatever reason, this bed was going with her.

She was very grateful that the bedroom was lit only with candles, leaving it only partially lit - she’d
prefer it darker to sleep, but at least it wasn’t light enough to irritate her.

Jenny was already half asleep when she felt the other side of the bed dip, then, faintly, a hand on her
waist. For a moment, soft lips touched Jenny’s cheek, and then she dropped off into a deep,
dreamless sleep without further ado.

At first it was just a faint, groggy certainty that something was touching her, but as Jenny started to
wake up a little and blinked the grit out of her eyes, she realized that the something touching her was not a thing, but an arm. Slung loosely across Jenny’s belly, like she’d never woken up any other way.

She blinked blearily, smacking her lips and wincing at the dry feeling in her mouth. It was like the desert had gotten bored of lying around outside the palace and had taken up residence in Jenny’s mouth instead. She squirmed a little, wishing she had a glass of water, or maybe a gallon of it.

The arm slung across her belly twitched a little, pulling her closer against the body curled against her side.

Jenny blinked a little, rubbing at her face, and worked up the courage to actually glance at the other person in the bed.

Ahmanet was curled on her side like an overgrown feline, one arm stretched out across Jenny’s stomach, the other tucked tightly against her own belly, her fist lightly curled under her chin. Her hair was spread out around her in a messy tangle, half across her face and half across the pillows. She looked… desperately human. Desperately normal. The most normal Jenny had probably ever seen her. She didn’t look like an undead monster come to murder her, or a timeless Pharaoh out to conquer a country - she just looked like any other Middle-Eastern girl having a lie-in.

Barring, of course, the fact that they were in a palace, because Jenny was pretty sure that wasn’t as normal.

Heart suddenly in her throat and feeling about three sizes too big, Jenny decided that it was prudent she get out of bed now. Maybe she could go take a bath. Or sit in the living room, take a look at the various pieces of art she’d seen. As long as it didn’t involve being in bed with a very human, very pretty Ahmanet, anything was fine.

Carefully, Jenny lifted Ahmanet’s arm from her stomach, squirming until she was at the edge of the bed before she let go, tucking a pillow under Ahmanet’s arm to fill the space she’d just vacated. Then, swiftly, she padded in the direction of the walk-in closet. She’d need some clothes for the day, after all.

Yesterday, she’d looked through the closet only fairly briefly. She’d been too tired to really care about what kind of clothes were there. Today, though, she had a little more time, so she spent several minutes perusing the closet for something to wear. The vast majority consisted of silken dresses and other such delicate outfits. But tucked away in a corner were some more masculine outfits; the kilt-like skirts men usually wore, and shirt-like garments with richly decorated collars that were almost like short tunics, all made of the finest linen Jenny had ever seen.

They looked more convenient than the dresses did, so Jenny decided to go with a skirt and tunic, pausing only to grab some clean underwear as well. She chose the hotter bath to bathe in, but didn’t draw it out too long, no matter how much she wanted to. Using the soaps she found on one of the vanities, she washed her body and hair quickly, rinsed off, and then quickly dried and dressed.

The skirt and tunic combo was just as comfortable as the dress she’d worn yesterday had been. The tunic was basically just a long shirt instead of coming halfway down her thighs like tunics usually did, just long enough to tuck into her skirt, which was kept up and closed by the belt that came with it.

Jenny brushed out her hair, still damp from the bath, and left the bathroom, tiptoeing through the bedroom so she wouldn’t wake up Ahmanet, and into the living room. The jewellery she’d been given could wait until later (or, preferable, until never - she’d feel better if it was just securely stored
somewhere), and besides, Zara and Sahar had not yet arrived to nag her about it. It was probably still too early for them to be on duty or something. Did handmaidens even have, like, a work schedule? Or were they just around when needed and took time off whenever?

Jenny really needed someone to explain all this stuff to her.

She padded over to the one of the low tables with artwork. This one held a vase of flowers, and Jenny was very interested in it, because it was a beautiful piece of work. The kind that museums the world over would kill to have. Hell, the kind that, a couple of weeks ago, Jenny would have killed to have herself. An absolutely gorgeous piece of pottery, for sure.

She hesitated for a moment, before taking the flowers from the vase and laying them on the small table, picking up the vase. There was a little water at the bottom, so she made sure not to tilt the vase too much or turn it upside down as she inspected it. It was beautiful, the craftsmanship splendid and every detail perfectly sharp and finished.

Jenny kind of wanted to hide it somewhere, to guard it like a dragon with a hoard.

Still, it did not belong to her, so she carefully placed it back on the little table and put the flowers back into the water.

She looked at it for another moment, and then went to inspect a statue on another small table.

An hour later, Jenny was almost done with the various art pieces and vases of flowers spread across the living room. Each and every one of them was worth a small fortune, of course, and they were all as gorgeous as the next.

Jenny had to repress the urge to gather them all up and hide them somewhere they couldn’t be damaged. Like a climate-controlled vault or something. With a floor made of foam so that if something made them fall, they wouldn’t break on impact.

She also wanted a sketchpad and a couple of pencils so she could make notes on them and draw them like she’d do with artefacts on a dig.

Finally she came to the last piece, another vase, filled with fragrant, sweet-smelling Egyptian jasmine flowers. They looked like they’d been picked fresh, as if someone had snuck into the royal quarters in the middle of the night to place a new bouquet in the vase. Maybe someone had. For all Jenny knew, that was normal procedure.

Except - Jenny looked a little closer.

One of the flowers was wilting a little, the delicate white petals drooping, one of them a little bruised and torn. Carefully, Jenny plucked the little flower from the bunch, brushing a finger over the mangled little petal. It was just a flower, but a part of her felt bad that it had gotten damaged somehow. She brushed her finger across the petal again, wishing it wouldn’t have been damaged, so it wouldn’t have to be thrown away.

Something inside her welled.

Warm and powerful and deep, like a wave of hot water without the wetness, washing over Jenny like a dam deep inside her had finally breached.

Under her fingertip, the flower petal mended, the tear knitting together, the bruises fading as the petal revitalized - then it spread to the rest of the blossom, gaining vitality and vibrancy.
The breath left Jenny’s lungs with a whoosh, the power inside her ebbing and waning, leaving her
breathless and a little tired, a slight sheen of sweat on her face and neck.

In her hands was a pristine, unblemished jasmine flower.

Lungs aching for lack of air and heart racing triple-time, it took Jenny a few seconds before she was
able to convince herself to look away from the little white flower - and straight up into the wide-eyed
gaze of Ahmanet.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet talk about magic, and go do some stuff.

Chapter Notes

I dunno my dudes, my ladies, my everyone in betweens and beyonds, it's a bit of a filler, I'm afraid. Don't worry though, things will start happening again soon enough. I've got some ideas to create some drama.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

“Jennifer…” the awed whisper broke the heavy silence blanketing the royal quarters. The Pharaoh swept closer, still in her nightshirt, hair dishevelled, obviously only just awake, and fell to her knees beside Jenny. Her hand trembled as she reached out for the jasmine blossom in Jenny’s hands.

“You… I never thought it’d start this soon…” the Pharaoh mumbled, entranced. “I thought it would take longer for your powers to manifest.” She took the flower from Jenny’s limp hands, gently turning it between her fingers, inspecting it. “You healed it. Gave it life.”

Jenny felt a little faint, staring at the flower between Ahmanet’s fingers, her heart somewhere in her throat. “I didn’t do anything.”

“You did. You gave it life. I saw you.”

Jenny nervously licked her lips. Her mouth was dry again. “I didn’t mean to. I didn’t actually do anything. It just happened.”

Ahmanet gave her a slightly sceptical look. “Are you sure you didn’t do anything?”

“No,” Jenny shrugged helplessly, “I just saw the flower, and it was damaged, and I wished it wouldn’t have to be thrown away for not being intact.”

The Pharaoh was watching her intently. “What happened then?”

“I don’t know. Suddenly there was this power inside of me, and then the flower just… healed.” Jenny honestly wasn’t sure how else to describe what had happened.

“How did it feel? Describe it to me.”

“Warm. Like a hot bath, except it didn’t feel wet like water,” she responded, taking a few seconds to think about it. “It felt like liquid warmth. It felt good.”

Ahmanet was nodding, still turning the flower between her fingers. “Can you still feel it?”
Jenny frowned. She could, actually. It was still there, burning steadily. But barely. It wasn’t a flood of heat anymore, it was just barely an ember of faint warmth, lodged somewhere between her ribs. Like a candle flame, rather than a wildfire.

“‘Yes,’” she said, ‘‘yes, I can still feel it. It’s still there. Not as strong, but it’s there.’’

Ahmanet let out a breath. It was a little shaky, Jenny noticed, and almost noiseless. There was an expression on Ahmanet’s face that made her a little nervous; it was a combination of awe, of hunger, of possessiveness and lust.

In an instant, it became clear to Jenny; Ahmanet wanted her, not only because Jenny was her Chosen and Ahmanet had been waiting for her for over 5000 years, but also because she was attracted to power.

And Jenny had just demonstrated the first hints of her ability to create life itself.

It just so happened that the ability to create life was the single greatest power in existence. It had taken nature billions of years to create life, and it only took one natural disaster to wipe it out again. Destruction was easy - creation was far, far more difficult and took far more power.

If Ahmanet really was attracted to power, Jenny was like catnip to her.

No wonder she was breathing a little shallowly, pupils dilated as she stared at Jenny with a kind of possessive want Jenny had never seen directed at her before. It was thrilling, in a way that made goosebumps pop up on her arms, but also a little frightening. She couldn’t deny, though, that it felt kind of good. It was flattering, to be looked at with such want.

Cheeks a little red, Jenny looked back at the jasmine flower. “What do we do with this now?”

“We’ll save it,” Ahmanet decided. “I will have a servant bring it to a craftsman, so it can be preserved for you.”

“Like, having it dried?” Jenny asked, wondering how else flowers could be preserved.

“Not quite. Our magic is not the only magic in this world, Jennifer. Granted, the vast majority has been shunned and forgotten over the centuries, but in some places it is still practised.” Ahmanet smiled a little. “The Cult of Set is one of the organizations who have worked to protect and preserve the magic in the world, to keep it from dying out. They have many skilled craftsmen in their employ.”

Jenny blinked. She’d known, vaguely, that there was more magic in the world than just the stuff that had made her a living goddess, and the stuff that had kept Ahmanet alive for 5000 years.

There had to be, for Prodigium to exist as an organization. Except that Prodigium was dedicated to wiping out magic, seeing it as a threat to regular humans and thus deserving of annihilation.

Jenny had never even considered that there were people who wanted to preserve it, to protect it and keep it alive for future generations, instead of destroying it. She’d never considered there was more to magic than hurt and death.

“Magic can do beautiful things, Jennifer,” Ahmanet said softly, as if reading Jenny’s mind. “It hurts me to know that you have only experienced the ways magic can hurt and harm. But it can do so much more than that. Magic can do this,” she brandished the vibrant little flower, “it can give birth to life itself. It can create things beyond imagination.”
“It’s not inherently evil,” Jenny realized quietly, feeling suddenly and acutely ashamed for ever having associated with Prodigium. And a little stupid, too, for never having dug deeper, for never having developed her own opinions on the subject.

“No,” Ahmanet agreed, “it’s not.”

Jenny found herself frowning. “Henry never told me about all of this.”

“I doubt he wanted you to know.”

“Still. I could have found out on my own.” She frowned a little deeper, wondering why she’d never gotten the idea to do some research of her own into the subject. “I should have found out on my own. Instead I just took Henry’s word on it.”

“You trusted him, Jennifer. You cared for him enough to stand up to me, even after what I had done to you not an hour earlier. He was also a figure of authority, your employer for many years. It is not strange that you took him at his word and conformed to his views.” She paused a moment, then added; “especially since magic is a subject very few people have any sufficient knowledge about nowadays. Information, I imagine, especially unbiased information, is hard to come by.”

That actually did make Jenny feel a little better. Still, she’d have to think on this. She needed to get her head out of her ass and learn about this, make up her own mind. “I want to learn more.”

“I will get you books,” Ahmanet promised. “And teachers, if you wish it.”

“Books will do for now.” Jenny wasn’t going to let someone teach her all willy-nilly until she had a basic understanding of what was going on. She wanted to figure out her feeling about magic first, and figure out what she was willing to learn and what she was not willing to learn.

“Then I shall arrange to have them brought to you. On all kinds of magic. The light and the dark. The trivial and the significant.” Ahmanet looked at Jenny. “I doubt, however, that there will be much to find on the magic that fuels your abilities. Life and death are, at their very nature, magic of the gods. Mortals cannot use it, therefore they do not know much of it.”

“We are not mortal, though.” It was something Jenny was slowly starting to come to terms with. She was ascended. She was not a mortal anymore. She was, likely, going to live a very long time. Far longer than any human would.

“No,” the Pharaoh agreed solemnly, “we are not.”

Jenny frowned a little, eyes drawn back to the little white flower she’d healed. It was a little frightening. The magic of the gods, at her fingertips. She shuddered a little and changed the subject. “What will happen to Henry anyway?”

“He will be captured,” Ahmanet said, “then interrogated, and then he will be executed.”

Jenny winced. “I don’t suppose we can treat him the same as Nick?”

“I’m sorry, Jennifer. I know you care for him, but he is a far greater threat than Morton is. I cannot allow him to live and rally against us.” Ahmanet’s voice was firm, a clear sign she wasn’t going to budge on this.

Jenny just nodded her head - she would try to change Ahmanet’s mind later. She’d ran away from Henry, sure, but that didn’t mean she wanted him dead. He was, deep down, a good man - flawed, sure, sometimes cruel, but all he’d ever wanted was to protect the world from what he considered
The problem was just that Jenny was now on the other side of that attitude, that she was now part of Henry’s description of ‘evil’, and that meant he was a threat to her now rather than the father-figure-slash-employer he used to be.

Maybe… maybe if she learned magic, she could find a way to chain the Mr. Hyde of Henry Jekyll. If she could find a way to lock away Hyde, to render Henry unable of accessing that part of him… maybe she could save him. Maybe then Ahmanet wouldn’t kill him. She made a mental note to look into that, once she had her magic books. If there was a discipline of magic that could do that, she would learn it, and she would use it, and she would try her best to save Henry’s life.

“We should get ready for the day,” Ahmanet said, breaking the silence. “Then I shall tell a servant to inform the cooks to start cooking our breakfast.”

Jenny blinked. “I’m pretty much ready to go.”

“You do not wish to wear your jewellery and crown?”

“They are… very valuable pieces,” Jenny said delicately. “I’m worried they will get damaged, or lost.”

“They are meant to be worn, my love,” Ahmanet said warmly. “If they are damaged, they will be repaired. Do not worry about that.”

“Alright. But I don’t have to wear all of it every day, right?” She really didn’t want to go through the process of putting it on and off every day, nor did she want to spend all day carrying it around like dead weight.

Ahmanet blinked a little. “They do not please you?”

“No, no, they’re gorgeous. Absolutely beautiful. But they’re also kind of heavy,” Jenny responded sheepishly.

“Then I shall have lighter jewellery made for you,” Ahmanet decided, nodding to herself. Jenny stifled a sigh - not her point, exactly, but she’d take it.

“Your handmaidens should be waiting for you outside our quarters.” The Pharaoh pushed herself to her feet, carefully holding the small jasmine flower. “Go call them in. Tell one of them to run to the kitchens to warn the cooks. I will be going to dress.”

“Alright.” Jenny nodded, standing up also. As Ahmanet made her way into the wardrobe, Jenny made her way to the heavy double doors that were the entrance to the royal quarters. She knew that there’d be guards outside, likely a half-dozen of them, all of them some of the most highly trained soldiers present in the palace. Jenny grasped the heavy handles of the even heavier doors and pulled them open with inhuman ease.

Outside the door, the guards instantly snapped to attention. Zara and Sahar, indeed present and patiently waiting, bowed their heads reverently.

“Your Highness!”

“Good morning,” Jenny said. “Guardians, Zara, Sahar. Zara, if you would run down to the kitchens and let the cooks know the Pharaoh and I will be taking breakfast shortly?”
“Of course, Your Highness!” Zara gave a bow, backed away so she wouldn’t have to turn her back on Jenny, then hurried down the corridor.

Jenny turned to her second handmaiden. “Sahar, come in.”

“Your Highness,” Sahar murmured, head bowed as she quickly walked into the quarters. Jenny made sure to nod at the guards, who were a little wide-eyed at not being ignored, and pulled the doors closed again.

“How may I help, Your Majesty?”

“I’ve been informed that I should wear some of the jewellery I was gifted,” Jenny said. At least until she got the lighter, less uncomfortable stuff Ahmanet had promised her. “The diadem at the very least. I need to know what else would be appropriate.”

Sahar nodded in understanding. “Of course, Your Highness. After you.”

Jenny made her way into the walk-in wardrobe. It was empty, Ahmanet apparently already having chosen her outfit for the day. Jenny figured she was washing up in the bathroom. As she watched Sahar open the jewellery drawers, she couldn’t help but wonder why Ahmanet didn’t seem to have any handmaidens. Did Pharaohs not have those? Maybe handmaidens were something for Queens, not for Pharaohs. She made a mental note to ask.

She turned her attention to the jewellery drawers. “What do you suggest, Sahar?”

“The diadem is a must, Your Highness, as you said.” Sarah gently took the item in question; Jenny bowed her head a little so the shorter woman could place it onto her head more easily.

“What else?”

“Your belt will do, Your Highness, so you shan’t need the girdle. However the broad collar is important.”

Jenny stifled a small noise of annoyance - the collar was the heaviest piece of all. She really wasn’t enthusiastic about wearing that all day. Not to sound ungrateful, because the jewellery was gorgeous and she was more than grateful and a little awed that it had been given to her just like that, but still. Nevertheless, she suffered through it and allowed Sahar to put the piece on her, clasping it securely at the back of her neck.

“You should wear at least one band on your arm as well,” Sahar continued, ”and perhaps the rings, Your Highness.”

Jenny nodded, accepting the rings and sliding them onto her fingers, white Sahar carefully fastened one of the armbands around her upper arm. Well, at least her hair was allowed to remain as it was, loosely falling down her shoulders rather than forced into some fancy updo or another. And she did have her more convenient skirt, rather than an ankle-length dress.

“Anything else?” She asked Sahar.

“Perhaps Your Highness would consider a little makeup?” Sahar suggested. “Traditionally, Queens like yourself would wear a small amount around the eyes.”

Jenny blinked, then nodded. “Alright. I can go with that.”

“If you will follow me,” Sahar led Jenny out of the wardrobe and into the bathroom. Jenny paused
for a moment when she spotted Ahmanet in one of the baths, bare shoulders just visible over the edge of the tiling, hair wet and sticking to her neck. Face flushing, Jenny averted her eyes - she’d feel like a pervert for looking, even if Ahmanet was supposed to be her ‘other half’ and probably her future wife.

Sahar pulled a small stool out of nowhere and had Jenny sit on it, at one of the vanities present. Out of the drawers, she retrieved a few little things like brushes, some small boxes of what Jenny supposed were powders like eyeshadows and a few small bottles she didn’t know the contents of, as well as some charcoal pencils probably used for eyeliner.

Jenny was in the middle of obediently looking up so Sahar could line her lower eyelids with coal when, from the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of wet, brown skin wrapped in white towel, and almost choked on her spit. It was with great mental acuity that she managed to keep still and not have her eye poked out by the pencil Sahar was holding.

“'It looks good,'” Ahmanet complimented. “'But perhaps a lighter blue than the one you have here will fit my Jennifer’s eyes better.'”

Jenny tried not to react to the fact that Ahmanet apparently knew the shade of blue her eyes were. Jenny herself was, of course, very much aware of the deep, almost blackish but not quite shade of brown Ahmanet’s eyes were, and that they had little flecks of lighter brown in them, but still - she hadn’t quite expected Ahmanet to know her shade of blue.

“'Yes, Your Majesty,'” Sahar agreed immediately. The pencil disappeared from Jenny’s line of sight, and she figured it was probably the better part of valour to keep looking up, so she just listened to Sahar opening little tins of powder until Ahmanet made an agreeing noise.

“'Yes, that colour.'”

“'As you wish, Your Majesty.'”

Ahmanet gave a brief squeeze to Jenny’s shoulder and was gone again. Jenny resisted the urge to blink, eyes starting to water a little at how long she’d kept them open now. The coal pencil returned to her line of sight.

Some minutes later, Sahar put down the thin brush she’d been using to apply the lighter shade of blue around Jenny’s eyes, allowing Jenny to finally blink. She did so, gratefully, and watched Sahar rummage through another drawer and take out a small hand-held mirror.

“'It’s done, Your Highness. I hope it is to your liking.'”

It was. It was very traditional, thin black lines and vibrant blue - a shade that was almost a tiffany blue that didn’t make her face look too pale, rather than the slightly darker, more aggressive turquoise Jenny knew Ahmanet preferred - in a clean, sharp design. Somehow, Jenny’s eyes looked bluer because of it, and it gave them almost a catlike slant that was, if she said so herself, really quite attractive.

Jenny spent a moment regretting the fact that, despite having lived for everything Egyptian practically her entire life, she’d never had the confidence to try a daring look like this before. She’d always stuck to more neutral looks, just some very simple things to make her look good, but not anything memorable.

“'I like it,'” Jenny told Sahar, “'thank you.'”

Sahar looked quietly pleased. “'It is my pleasure, Your Highness.'” She briefly glanced over Jenny’s
head. “I do believe Her Majesty is almost ready, Your Highness.”

Eyebrows rising, Jenny stood up and glanced over at Ahmanet. She was already dressed, her hair up and ready to be hidden under her crown, putting the finishing touches to her own makeup. Again Jenny wondered why Ahmanet didn’t seem to have handmaidens to help her. That was something to ask her sometime.

First, though, Jenny hoped breakfast was ready. She’d had a huge dinner yesterday, but she could go for some simple food. Maybe, like, some yogurt with fruit, or toast with marmalade. Sahar had already cleared away the makeup supplies, so Jenny made her way over to Ahmanet.

“I’m nearly ready, Jennifer,” Ahmanet said. “Have you sent Zara to the kitchens?”

Jenny nodded. “Yes. The cooks should be busy by now.”

“Good. Let’s go then, shall we?” Ahmanet put her brush down and stood up. Her eyes were painted in much the same style as Jenny’s, if a little more elaborate and with a darker shade of blue. It looked really good on her - the blue really brought out her eyes and skin.

They made their way out of the royal quarters, pausing only so Ahmanet could retrieve and don her red and white crown. Zara was waiting for them in the hallway, falling into step next to Sahar and behind Jenny and Ahmanet.

In a few minutes, they’d made their way to the dining hall, where breakfast would be served.

“Once you are settled in a little,” Ahmanet said as they entered and made their way up the dais, where she pulled Jenny’s chair out for her, “we will be able to summon breakfast to be served at our quarters. For now, however, it is better if the people can see you around the palace. It is good for morale, and also allows them to grow used to you as their Queen.”

“Right,” Jenny said as she sat down, glancing at the handful of people having their own breakfasts at the other tables, “that makes sense.”

Several servants scurried up to the table, carrying platters of food.

“After breakfast, we shall head to the temple,” said the Pharaoh. “We should make it in time for the morning service, and Aaheru did mention wanting to introduce you to his acolytes.”

Jenny tried not to grimace at the thought of the temple as she spooned some yogurt into her bowl. “Alright. What’s a service to Set even like?”

“Worship to Set, or any of the gods really, is of a sacrificial nature,” Ahmanet explained as she picked out a couple of dates from a platter. “Usually, the sacrifices we offer consist of food items, flowers, incense, oils and candles. On special occasions, we tend to sacrifice some larger items, such as precious gems and metals, and occasionally, animals. Mainly sheep, bulls, calves and geese.”

Jenny paused, spoon halfway up to her mouth, nose wrinkling. “How many special occasions would you say there are, yearly?”

“Not too many. The new year, when royal children are born, when members of the royal family die, days like those.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, still not really happy - she wasn’t sure she could stomach watching an animal be killed and sacrificed. Nor did she really want to find out if she could.
‘Of course,’ Ahmanet continued, ‘when we retake Egypt, we will have a large coronation, during which sacrifices will be made in Set’s honour as well.’

She nibbled on her lower lip, ‘will there be any animal sacrifices at the service in a bit?’

Ahmanet shook her head. ‘No. Just the regular, everyday sacrificial items.’

Jenny nodded in understanding, relief making her feel a little dizzy, and turned back to her yogurt. She’d topped it with bits of fig and prickly pear, as well as a little honey. There wasn’t any toast, but instead Jenny had a plate of small two-bite rolls that were more like cake in taste and texture than they were bread.

She devoured her breakfast at a leisurely pace, not in any hurry. Apparently they had plenty of time before the service began, so there was no need to rush.

Once she’d finished her yogurt with fruit and the little rolls, Jenny decided to have a small piece of bread as well, folding it in half with some cheese and a fancier version of cold cut ham in the middle and biting into it with gusto. There was plain water, milk and tea on the side, and she went for the latter.

Little over half an hour later, Jenny found herself approaching the temple for the second time.

Now that she knew Set’s power lingered there, she could feel it from down the hallway, raising goosebumps on her arms and leaving her a little twitchy. Now that she’d felt the warmth and joy of life, Set’s power felt even more like a cloying, syrupy cold than before. Like something that’d drag her down and drown her slowly, taking glee in her struggles and gasps for breath until it snuffed out her life like putting out a candle.

Aaheru and his acolytes were already inside, Jenny could see them through the doorway as she and Ahmanet approached. Ahmanet’s hand was lightly placed on her back, ensuring Jenny kept walking and didn’t turn on her heel and run like she so desperately wanted. Fear clogged the back of her throat, leaving a sour taste in her mouth.

Nevertheless, she pushed through it, and, after a reassuring look from Ahmanet, forced herself to step into the temple for a second time. The power of Set enveloped her like a clingy, oily film of cold stickiness. Despite herself, she shuddered.

‘’Your Highness, Your Majesty,’’ Aaheru greeted, ‘’I am glad you’ve decided to attend a service today.’’

‘’Of course, Aaheru,’’ Ahmanet responded. ‘’I wouldn’t miss it.’’

‘’Yeah, glad to be here,’’ Jenny gritted out, and everything in her being screamed the opposite.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Jenny experiences her first religious service to Set, and tries out her new ability. Things don't go as expected.

Chapter Notes

Welp, chapter 34 is up, and I gotta say, I'm pretty pleased with the cliffy at the end. Like I said, things are going to start happening again this chapter, and the next couple ones.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

Aaheru didn’t seem to notice her reluctance, or he just didn’t care.

Honestly, it could go either way.

He’d been friendly and polite so far, showing no sign of disdain or hostility towards Jenny, but it was hard to forget who he’d dedicated himself - the oppressive, clinging cold in the temple was a good sign of what kind of god exactly Aaheru had chosen to follow. It couldn’t spell much good for his actual character, or his morals.

Then again, Jenny had to silently tell herself, Ahmanet also followed Set, and she was shaping up to be actually quite a lovely person. Bar the whole murder-incident, of course. She’d been nothing but understanding and kind to Jenny since, though, had left her alone until Jenny came to her, and she had clearly been trying her best to make Jenny comfortable from the moment Jenny had actually arrived at the palace.

So, yeah.

Mixed feelings were starting to become the norm.

Jenny was a little wary of Aaheru, but she was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt for now - she’d give him a chance. If he screwed it up, she could always decide he was a bastard then.

‘’Your Highness,’’ Aaheru pulled Jenny from her thoughts, ‘’if you would allow me to introduce you to my acolytes?’’

‘’Of course,’’ Jenny responded, shifting her attention to the trio of of twenty-somethings lingering behind Aaheru. Two men and a young woman; the men were wearing skirts and sandals and nothing to cover their upper bodies, and the woman was wearing an ankle-length dress. All three had some bronze jewellery, showing their status, though it was not as elaborate as Aaheru’s jewellery.

‘’Splendid.’’ Aaheru gestured at the three to step forward a little. ‘’Your Highness, I am pleased to present to you my acolytes, Bau, Chafrica and Tahirah. They have been training to follow in my footsteps for almost a decade, and once I have left this Earth, one of them shall take my position as
High Priest of the Cult of Set. The other two shall become the next highest-ranked priests or priestess in the Cult.''

The three acolytes, as one, bowed and murmured, ‘‘Your Highness.’’

‘‘Nice to meet you,’’ Jenny managed a small smile, too aware of the tendrils of power seeping across her skin to really express true friendliness. Bau, Chafkem and Tahirah didn’t seem offended or even really surprised at the polite but somewhat cool response, though.

‘‘Perhaps,’’ Ahmanet cut into the conversation, ‘‘you could lend me one of your acolytes for a few hours sometime soon, Aaheru. Jennifer, unfortunately, has not grown up with the religion of Set. She will need someone to teach her about what it entails.’’

Jenny blinked, a little surprised because she hadn’t thought about the fact that she needed to learn more about the god she was supposed to give birth to, and also a little offended that it had just been decided for her like that. She was a big girl, she could fill in her own days. Especially when she got settled a little and found something to do other than worrying and trying to figure out where everything was.

She didn’t say anything, though - she did need to learn more about her new situation, and religion was obviously a big part of that.

That, honestly, was kind of new to Jenny.

Had she always somewhat believed that there was something more out there? Yes, yes she had. Had she entertained the possibility of the old gods, the Egyptian gods, existing? Sure, why not? She’d spent the past thirteen years working for an organization dedicated to the supernatural, why wouldn’t gods exist also?

But she’d never actually actively practised religion.

She’d been raised loosely Christian by parents who went to church at Christmas and at New Year’s, and pretty much ignored the bible every other day of the year. Jenny herself had stopped going to church when she’d been fifteen, and she’d never bothered to get herself baptised or otherwise more involved with the religion she’d been raised with.

So yeah, it’d probably be odd to suddenly have to be actively involved with this kind of thing on a daily basis. Especially since this was what the modern world classed as a ‘pagan faith’ - one that involved ritual sacrifice of animals at that.

Jenny wondered how the hell Ahmanet was going to sell that bit to the masses without immediately being branded as an evil animal abuser and ending up with an angry country trying to impeach her. Because as far as Jenny was aware, animal sacrifice, or any animal cruelty really, was no longer widely accepted - or accepted at all, really. Someone who openly practised it, and was planning to enforce a monotheistic policy with a religion that demanded it, would not be accepted easily.

Jenny really needed to look into getting some of those diplomacy books. She was definitely going to need them.

If she’d known that she was going to have to knock the importance of diplomacy into Ahmanet’s head (honestly, she should already know this stuff, she’d been raised to be Pharaoh, for god’s sake), she’d have taken a holiday before showing up at the palace.

Jenny shook her head a little and focussed back on the present. ‘‘So,’’ she turned to Aaheru expectantly. ‘‘How does a service to Set work? Should I do something, or should I just keep out of
your way?’”

“‘You can sit this one out for now,’” Aaheru responded easily, ‘‘until you have a better idea of the rituals and prayers involved.’’

Jenny nodded. ‘‘Sounds good. Where do I go?’’

“‘Over here, Jennifer,’” Ahmanet led her over to a row of small, single-person rugs on the floor a few feet in front of the altar - Jenny hadn’t noticed them before, but they definitely had not been there yesterday. They were fairly thick rugs, at least an inch of cushioning, so when Ahmanet directed Jenny to kneel on one, facing the altar, she figured that at least her knees wouldn’t ache too much once the service was over.

Ahmanet took the rug directly next to Jenny’s, kneeling also. It was a little odd to Jenny, as she’d always seen Ahmanet as this kind of unbreakable person, even when imprisoned at Prodigium, and it was a little strange to see her kneeling so humbly. Although they were in a temple, so it was probably the appropriate thing to do.

Very curious, because she’d read about this kind of thing extensively but had never actually participated in anything like it before, and even then the information she’d read had been very old and probably not entirely accurate, Jenny watched avidly.

Tahirah was at the altar, lighting candles and incense, and Bau and Chafkem mysteriously disappeared for a few moments and then returned carrying bowls of definitely out-of-season yet still somehow blooming flowers and fresh fruits. The latter were probably imported from Luxor, a couple of hours away, unless the palace had a private oasis stashed in the backyard with the fruit trees already grown and producing, despite having been buried for 5000 years.

Which, admittedly, wouldn’t have been the weirdest thing about this place.

Then, when everything was in place, Jenny got a bit of a shock as Aaheru started to chant a prayer - in a language that was not Ancient Egyptian.

The script on Jenny’s abdomen itched.

She recognized this language, instinctively, and it made her skin crawl, because it was the same language that had been inked into her skin by Set when she’d been dead.

Eyes wide, Jenny glanced at Ahmanet - and found her mouthing the words along with Aaheru. Bau, Chafkem and Tahirah were doing the same. Each, apparently, knew the words by heart, as they matched Aaheru word for word and didn’t wait for him to say them before echoing it.

Jenny felt more than a little out of place, unable to understand or even mouth the words to the prayer and more than a little uncomfortable with the way the presence seemed to wax and wane as the prayers progressed, until the air in the entire room seemed to be thrumming with it.

Set’s presence was far stronger than it had been yesterday.

Jenny tried not to shiver, and failed miserably. Set frightened her. Desperately so. The idea of having to birth his mortal avatar at some point made her a little nauseous.

Aaheru’s voice rose in pitch as his chanting became louder. A small rattle from the altar drew Jenny’s attention. She watched, dumbstruck with apprehension and a small part of interest, as one of the candleholders slowly scraped across the top of the altar, as if guided by an invisible hand. It tipped over, the burning part of the candle landing squarely in the shallow bowl of flowers, which
caught fire at a rate they honestly shouldn’t.

The fire, which had a definite unnatural feel to it, consumed the flowers in seconds, ashes carried up with the hot, ascending air even as the oily smoke reached Jenny and the others present. It didn’t smell like smoke at all. It smelled light and fragrant, with only a hint of fire in it.

Jenny tried not to think of the cause of the candle tipping over. She didn’t really succeed.

She was really very grateful when, after another few minutes, Aaheru’s prayers came to a stop, and the oppressive sense in the room receded a little bit. Not much, but at least to the point where Jenny no longer felt like she would choke if she took too deep a breath.

When Aaheru finally fell silent, he bowed deeply, briefly pressing his forehead to the floor. Jenny noticed Ahmanet, Bau, Chaferkem and Tahirah doing the same, so she quickly followed their example. It was deeply uncomfortable to not be able to see the entire room, she realized as her head touched the floor. The idea that Set was here, in spirit if not in body, and that she couldn’t survey the whole room to make sure he couldn’t just pop out of a corner and scare the life out of her, was not a nice one.

No, Dr. Jennifer Halsey did not like this temple at all.

Even the Temple of Osiris had felt safer.

Considering someone had tried to kill her in her sleep there and nearly succeeded in the fact if it hadn’t been for the timely appearance of Jenny’s inhuman strength, that was saying something.

“Are you alright? Set affects you more than I had expected.” Ahmanet asked, once Jenny had returned to sitting on her knees instead of bowing. There was a look of faint worry on her face.

Jenny took a deep breath, realized she was faintly trembling, but nodded. “I’ll be fine.”

“Perhaps you should retire to our quarters,” Ahmanet suggested, “take an hour or so of rest.”

“Yeah,” Jenny said, resisting the urge to rub at her eyes and thus preventing herself from ruining her makeup in the process, “a nap might be nice.”

Or just a few minutes to herself, so she could gather her bearings. Retreating to their quarters for a few moments sounded like a very good idea.

“Shall I escort you there?”

Jenny shook her head. “You’re the Pharaoh, right? You probably have a lot of things to do.”

“Nothing that cannot be postponed until you are feeling well again.”

“No, it’s fine, Zara and Sahar can walk me back to our quarters,” Jenny said. “Though maybe you can have someone put in an order on some diplomacy books while I go lay down for a bit.”

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow. “Diplomacy books?”

Jenny shrugged. “Well, if I’m to be a Queen, I might as well do my bit, right? I’m not really a warrior, but diplomacy I can do.”

At that, Ahmanet looked pleased. “I shall have books brought to you as soon as possible, then. And perhaps a teacher as well. Is there anything else you wish for?”
“Flowers,” Jenny said, “damaged ones. To practise.”

The pleased expression grew more pronounced. “I shall have a bouquet or two delivered to our quarters within the hour. That should give you plenty of material at least for the next few days.”

Depending on how long it took Jenny to access that power again, it might take a little longer than that, Jenny mused to herself as she scrambled off the praying rug and to her feet, briefly brushing the creases out of her skirt. She had a nagging feeling that it might take a little more effort than just picking up a flower and wishing for it to heal - the first time had come almost instinctively, but now that she knew it was there, it left her completely without instruction or really any idea of how to go about this.

Jenny made sure to (insincerely, but hopefully not noticeably so) thank Aaheru, Bau, Chafkem and Tahirah for including her in the ceremony before quickly leaving the temple, trying not to sigh in relief. She could feel Set’s presence radiating out into the hallway, but it was far less clingy and oppressive than inside.

“I do actually have some things to attend to,” Ahmanet murmured, standing beside Jenny. “It shouldn’t take more than a few hours at most.”

“Take your time,” Jenny said, “if it’s important, it shouldn’t be rushed.”

“A piece of advice I shall take into due consideration,” Ahmanet responded with a small, teasing smile. She glanced at Jenny’s handmaidens. “Escort my Jennifer back to the royal quarters. Ensure she’s comfortable before giving her some privacy.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Zara and Sahar responded swiftly.

Ahmanet took Jenny’s hand, placing a brief kiss on the back, and shot her a quick half-smirk. “I shall see you in a few hours, my love. And I shall ensure the items you asked for will be delivered to you.”

Jenny tried - and failed - not to blush like a firetruck. But damn, Ahmanet could be charming when she wanted to be. And damn if that blasted smirk didn’t look good on her.

The fact that Jenny was very much bisexual and had always had a thing for confident women with dark skin and darker eyes didn’t help, of course.

“Your Highness,” Zara gently caught Jenny’s attention once Ahmanet had started making her way down the corridor.

“Right,” Jenny said, turning, “lead the way.”

Zara and Sahar handily delivered Jenny right to the doors of the royal quarters, following her in and, as Ahmanet had ordered, making sure she was comfortable.

Sahar painstakingly removed the makeup she’d worked so hard on from Jenny’s face while Zara disappeared for a while, and by the time Jenny’s jewellery had been returned to its drawers and her sandals had been put away, Zara had returned carrying a tray of tea and snacks.

They even fluffed the pillows of the elegant couch for her so they’d be more comfortable for her to lean against and moved the table closer so she could lay on the couch and get her tea and snacks without having to sit up and lean over.

It was a kind of pampering that, while completely over the top, Jenny could definitely get used to. It
was also the kind of pampering that would see her grow very lazy very quickly indeed. She wondered, idly, as Sahar handed her a cup of tea, if this was how ladies of leisure lived. Like the British nobility, or what remained of it. Did all those fancy dames and duchesses get everything handed on a silver platter like this?

Jenny sipped her tea - black tea, with honey and lemon just how she liked it and just at drinking temperature - and yeah, she could absolutely get used to this.

Zara was fussing with the various treats she’d brought, placing a tiny petit-four like pastry on an equally tiny saucer, offering it to Jenny. She gobbled it up without complaint, humming at the flavours of sweet cake, cream and fresh strawberry. Delicious.

“Is there anything else we can do, Your Highness?” Sahar asked, standing next to the couch with her hands neatly joined in front of her. Zara placed another tiny little cake on the saucer and then arranged the other dishes of treats so Jenny could reach them all easily.

There were more sweets, like rehydrated dried fruit in syrup and small cookies, but also savoury things like olives stuffed with feta cheese and small, salty baby sardines, roasted with herbs and drizzled with olive oil. How the cooks had managed that in the few minutes Zara had been gone to pick them up, Jenny had no idea, and right now, she had no interest in finding out either.

Jenny shook her head. “No, Sahar, I’m perfectly happy right now. I don’t need anything else.”

“Then we will be just outside, Your Highness,” Zara said, “if there is anything you desire, just call for us and we will ensure you receive it.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, with absolutely no intention to do so. She was perfectly content, and she really just wanted to be left alone for a bit. She’d hardly had a moment to herself since arriving yesterday, and Jenny did value her alone time.

Zara and Sahar exited the quarters, carefully pulling the doors closed behind them.

Jenny was left alone in blissful silence. She closed her eyes, letting her head fall against the cushion of the couch, and spent a moment or two just enjoying the peace and quiet. Jenny would be the first to admit that she had never been an especially social person - she much preferred her research and books and digs to people - and the last couple of weeks had been so busy and filled with noisy humans that the silence surrounding her had her sighing in relief from the bottom of her heart.

For a while, she just lazed around on the couch, sipping her tea and snacking on the food Zara had brought her. The cooks here, she was happy to find out, certainly knew their food. Dinner yesterday had not been a fluke. Apparently it was always that good. That pleased Jenny. She liked food.

After maybe half an hour of quiet, which was enough for Jenny to center herself a little and not be a mess of leftover discomfort from the temple, there was a knock on the doors.

“Come in!” Jenny called, not getting up from the couch. She was comfortable, damn it, they could open the doors themselves.

“Your Highness,” a servant entered, carrying a tray of flowers. “I have come to deliver the flowers you requested.”

“Good,” Jenny said, sitting up, “put them on the table, please.”

The servant did so. “Is there anything else, Your Highness?”
“No, that’s all, thank you.”

The servant bowed and quickly left, pulling the doors closed behind him.

Jenny quickly pushed the dishes with snacks aside and took a moment to refill her cup with some more tea, and then turned her attention to the flowers. They were jasmine flowers, and there were plenty of them, two-dozen at the least. Each had been carefully damaged in a variety of ways; some had the stem or the petals just bruised, others had bits torn or completely removed, others had the stem broken and hanging on with barely a thread.

Jenny, rather wisely, decided to start with a flower that was only barely damaged. Two of its petals were a little bruised, and that was about it. She figured it was best to start small and work her way up to the jasmine blossoms that were only barely hanging on.

So, picking up the little blossom she’d selected and rolling the stem between her fingers, Jenny set to figuring out how her power worked.

Now, Jenny had never consciously done magic before.

In fact, apart from her miraculous success at healing the jasmine blossom from this morning, she’d never done any magic at all. Super strength didn’t count as magic, she figured. So this morning had been her first try at actual, honest to Set magic. Which had been completely by accident, and Jenny had no idea how she’d done it or how to replicate it. And she didn’t have any books (yet) on how it worked either.

So she was flying blind, basically.

Well, no time like the present.

Furrowing her eyebrows, Jenny focussed on the jasmine blossom between her fingers. Concentrating, with all her might, on wanting to heal it and have it be intact again.

Nothing happened.

Jenny tried again, stubbornly telling herself that she really wanted this flower and that it would be awful if it had to be thrown away.

Again, nothing.

She tried a third time, and still nothing changed.

Jenny stifled a small growl of annoyance. Wishing for the flower to heal had worked this morning. The power had come effortlessly. Like it had simply been waiting for the chance to show itself.

But then, she’d already figured that it probably wouldn’t be that easy to repeat. There was more to it than simple wishes. Jenny just wasn’t sure what. All she knew was that will and concentration wasn’t enough.

Sitting back on the couch, Jenny lightly tossed the jasmine flower between her hands, frowning as she tried to figure out what she was missing. It had to be something important. Something big. A realization she hadn’t yet grasped. It grated at her, even so shortly after discovering her new power. After all, it was her power. It should obey her. But it didn’t.

Not to sound like the average storybook villain lusting for power, but this power belonged to her,
and if she wanted it to work, it damn well should.

Like her inhuman strength, showing up when she needed it most and then hanging around until she needed it again, without fading in between.

Jenny took a few deep breaths, squashing her rising frustration as she stared at the damaged blossom between her fingers. Why wouldn’t it work, though? Will and concentration should be enough. But they weren’t. So what was she missing?

Maybe she just needed to think on it for a while. Maybe if she looked at the issue from a different angle, she could figure it out. And she might also need those magic books after all, because this whole ‘do magic and make things heal’-shtick was harder than it sounded.

She returned the jasmine flower to the tray.

It was kind of a sad sight, a tray full of purposely damaged flowers - especially because Jenny had asked them to be damaged, only for them to further wither and die because she was incapable of healing them.

Jenny stared at the flowers, letting the emotion fill her up, and, without even thinking about it, reached out and touched a single finger to the nearest blossom.

Warmth welled inside her.

There was a soft glow, barely visible.

The blossom under her fingertip mended - and then it spread, from flower to flower where they touched, each of them knitting back together until the stems were plump and strong and the petals were thick and glossy and probably the brightest, clearest white Jenny had ever seen on any jasmine flower at all.

She tore her finger away from the tray, sliding off the couch until her knees hit the rug, chest heaving for lack of breath, a sheen of sweat slick on her face, the warmth in her chest bubbling and eager for more.

‘Damn…’ A soft, awed whisper came from only a few feet away. ‘Jenny, did you do that?’

Jenny nearly broke her neck she swivelled her head so quickly, staring wide-eyed at Vail’s dead soul, standing in the middle of her living room.

‘Chris… What are you doing here?’

‘I came to check up on you. Make sure the undead bitch hasn’t hurt you.’ Chris took a few steps closer, until he was only an arm’s length away. ‘Are you alright?’

‘I don’t know,’ Jenny said helplessly. The warmth of her power wasn’t leaving. In fact, it was only getting hotter. Like pressure building within a geyser.

Something was wrong, Jenny could feel it in her bones.

She’d pushed too quickly and too hard. She’d used too much at once. Whatever it was, it wasn’t like it was supposed to be.

A small frisson of panic settled in her stomach.

Chris knelt down. ‘You look awful, Jenny. C’mon, let’s get you into bed before you faint.’
He reached out to touch her.

In the split second before his hand touched her bare arm, a bolt of foreboding so severe it set Jenny’s teeth chattering slammed through her.

‘Chris, don’t!’

But it was too late. His fingertips came into contact with the skin of her arm.

For a moment, the power in Jenny’s chest felt calm like an endless lake under a windless sky.

Then, in an instant, she lost control of it, like a hurricane sweeping up the surface the waves rose up, higher and higher until Jenny was gasping for air, unable to breathe past the pressure in her chest.

She could hear Chris crying out, the sound faint past the roaring in her ears, and through the tears gathering in her eyes she could see his face, contorted in pain and horror, gaining colour and definition -

the world went white.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Jenny wakes up, has a chat with Ahmanet about Feelings, and realizes what her magic has done. She learns something new about Zara and Sahar, and then goes to see Chris.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 35 has arrived, everyone, and it's still going strong. I have so many ideas for future chapters.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts.

“Jennifer? Jennifer, my love, can you hear me?”

The voice came faintly, from far away, or maybe from underwater. The words slurred together and barely audible. Jenny, floating in a sea of white and warm, tried to frown to herself in confusion, and found that her face wasn’t quite cooperating like it should.

“Open your eyes, Jennifer. Look at me.”

It was a voice Jenny recognized, after a second or two of confusion. Ahmanet, her sluggish mind provided. Ahmanet was here. That was… good. A large part of her confused, slow mind thought that that was good.

From even farther away, she could hear more voices, so faint they were almost inaudible - they were panicked, even to Jenny’s failing hearing, and belonged to several people.

Her eyes, when she tried to open them as asked, felt like they were crusted shut. She managed to push a weak groan past her throat, trying to bring her hands to her face so she could rub at her eyes. They felt like they were filled with lead.

There was a small gasp beside her, and then hands on her face. A set of thumbs brushed over her lashes. “Come on, Jennifer. Open your eyes.”

God, why was she feeling so weak? She felt like a newborn kitten, barely capable of doing anything but lying there and sleeping. Or maybe like she’d just had the worst case of the flu for over a week and had been surviving on bottled water and cold soup because she hadn’t been able to muster up the energy to cook. (FYI, not pleasant, Jenny could say from experience. A week of sickness, hardly any food and no energy to shower - yikes.)

She blinked hard, managing to get her eyes open, if only for a moment. She caught a flash of Ahmanet’s face, the corners of her mouth and eyes drawn taut in worry, hair dishevelled around her face, then darkness closed in again.
Jenny woke a second time a while later.

This time, she was able to open her eyes fully and keep them that way for more than half a second. Blinking, she glanced around. She was in her bed, the light in the bedroom left low and soothing.

The mattress beside her held a faint dip, signalling the presence of another body, and when Jenny glanced over, she found Ahmanet asleep beside her. The faint creases of worry hadn’t left her face, even in slumber.

It made Jenny feel abruptly guilty - if she hadn’t messed around with magic she couldn’t understand or control, this never would have happened.

Speaking of magic - where was Chris?

Last she’d seen of him, he’d been screaming in pain and fear as her magic did… something to him. She should go check up on him. Or at least make sure she hadn’t accidentally blown up the living room along with him.

With a small groan, Jenny pulled herself in an upright sitting position. Her whole body ached, like a giant bruise that had already gone yellow but was still tender to the touch. It took way too much effort to sit upright and keep herself from sliding back into the sheets. And she was still so tired, as if she hadn’t slept in days.

Seriously, what had happened? Because this just wasn’t cool.

She rubbed her hands over her face, a little harshly, in an attempt to wake up a little more. Little bits of grit were stuck around her eyes. She brushed them away impatiently.

Beside her, Ahmanet murmured in her sleep, a small frown appearing. Jenny automatically reached out to smooth the faint creases out with her fingertips. Ahmanet shouldn’t be frowning even in her sleep, she should be getting some rest.

What Jenny didn’t expect was for the faint touch to be enough to wake Ahmanet up. She stirred underneath Jenny’s fingertips, brows furrowing even more before her eyes slowly opened. Her gaze immediately fixed on Jenny.

“Jennifer, you’re awake,” Ahmanet sat up quickly, reaching out to touch Jenny’s face. Her face bore the marks of recent crying, the puffiness of her eyes and the tracks on her cheeks telling Jenny everything she needed to know. It was very, very obvious that Ahmanet had been very much upset not too long ago. And the way her hand trembled against Jenny’s cheek was proof enough that Jenny had been the one Ahmanet had cried over.

“How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” Jenny said, trying to reassure her, “just really tired.”

Ahmanet stared at her. “Just tired? Are you sure?”

Jenny shrugged. “I’m a little sore, too, but I feel fine otherwise. Why?”

“Jennifer, you’ve been unconscious for hours. It’s nearly morning already, and you passed out yesterday before noon.”
Jenny blinked. “Excuse me?” She’d figured she’d just fainted or something. Certainly not anything that had her unconscious for over an hour, let alone the rest of the day and apparently also most of the night. She must’ve been unconscious for eighteen hours, easily, if it was almost morning now. “I lost control,” Jenny said, dragging a hand over her face. “That’s why I passed out, right?”

“It drained you of your energy, yes,” Ahmanet agreed, voice a mixture of disapproval and barely hidden terror. She blinked rapidly for a moment, eyes suspiciously damp. “Jennifer, if you hadn’t been ascended, you would have been dead.”

Jenny stared at her. “What.”

“It took too much from you. More than a mortal would have been able to give. It’d have left them a dried-out husk. You’re very lucky that you’re a living goddess. It’s the only reason you’re not dead right now.”

Jenny was only vaguely aware of the fact that her mouth had flopped open ungracefully. She’d almost died. She should be dead right now. The very magic that should give only life had very nearly killed her instead. All because she’d been too eager, had pushed for too much too quickly. And her loss of control had almost cost her her life.

Ahmanet’s hand trembled as she brushed it across Jenny’s cheek and then farther to tangle lightly into her hair. The expression on her face was heartrending. “You terrified me, Jennifer. I’ve waited for you for 5000 years. I think that losing you now, after everything, might drive me mad.”

“I’m sorry,” Jenny said, not sure what else to say. The raw emotions being displayed by the brunette took her off guard, yet also touched her deeply. If she hadn’t known before that Ahmanet cared, this was all the proof she needed to be sure. The part of her that hadn’t believed Ahmanet could actually care for her was starting to melt away in the face of it.

“Promise me you won’t try to do magic anymore. Not until you’ve received some training, at least.” The Pharaoh’s voice cracked a little.

Jenny nodded - that was something she could definitely agree to. And after what’d happened, she wasn’t eager to give it another try on her own anyway. “I promise.”

Ahmanet sagged a little, some of the tension seeping out of her shoulders. “Good. Just… good.”

A little hesitantly, Jenny reached out, placing her hand over Ahmanet’s on the mattress, the Pharaoh’s other hand still in her hair. “I’m sorry I scared you.”

Ahmanet clutched her hand so tightly it almost hurt - and Jenny couldn’t feel physical pain, so that was saying something. “We’re connected, Jennifer. I could feel you… I could feel it draining the life from you. For a moment, with how cold you’d become, I thought I’d lost you.”

Damn, now Jenny really felt awful. She hadn’t even thought of the link. She focussed on it for a brief moment - Ahmanet wasn’t consciously transmitting, so Jenny had to reach out a little. Right now, all Jenny could feel coming across the link was worry, and bone-deep relief, that deep well of warmth Jenny was starting to suspect was love, and a few left-over hints of stark terror.

She tried to imagine what it had to be like, to feel the other end of the link weakening and going cold, knowing that something was killing Ahmanet and being able to feel every second of it. She shuddered, suddenly feeling cold herself.

“I’m so sorry,” the words came out in a half-sob. “I should’ve waited until I knew more about this stuff.”
“It's not your fault.” Ahmanet squeezed her hand tighter, for just a moment, then let her grip slacken a little. “You barely know anything about magic. I know far more than you do. I should have stopped you, or at least insisted someone monitor you.”

“You couldn’t have known this would happen,” Jenny said, hating the self-blame she was hearing. Ahmanet couldn’t have known. She’d thought Jenny was just going to practise on flowers - Jenny had expected that too. Neither of them could have predicted Chris getting involved and things going haywire.

“I should have considered the possibility,” Ahmanet responded. She then abruptly changed the subject. “Are you still tired? You look tired.”

“A little,” Jenny said, “but I want to know what happened to Chris. He was here. Did you see him?”

“I doubt there is anyone in the castle who hasn’t seen him by now,” Ahmanet said eventually. Jenny frowned. “He’s a ghost. Only you and I should be able to see him. Or is that an ability other people have too?”

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet said slowly, “he’s not a ghost anymore.”

Jenny blinked. Then frowned. Opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. It took a few moments for the quarter to fall. Realization hit like a brick to the face. “Ar- are you saying, that I -” Jenny gestured helplessly at herself, trying to breathe past the sudden lump in her throat.

“Yes. You restored him to life, Jennifer.” Ahmanet told her seriously. “You resurrected a dead man.”

“Right,” Jenny said, feeling ready to throw up, or pass out. Maybe both. “Resurrection. Are you sure?”

“Very, considering we have him restrained in a cell,” Ahmanet said. “He’s not woken up yet, but he’s definitely alive. There was a strong pulse. And he was breathing.”

“Right,” Jenny repeated weakly.

Resurrection. She’d resurrected someone. She’d given life to the dead. And it’d almost killed her in the process.

She felt a little like her chest was caving in.

“Love?” Ahmanet was watching her carefully. “Are you alright?”

Alright? No, no Jenny was not alright. She’d created life. Flowers were one thing, but returning a ghost to the living world? Nothing about this was alright. Nothing about this was remotely okay. This wasn’t how the world was supposed to work.

She’d seen Chris die, back on the plane, poisoned slowly by a spider bite. She’d seen Nick shooting his undead body, and the way his blood had seeped across the floor in a blackish ooze as he stopped moving. She’d seen his mangled, rotting ghost-ified corpse more than a few times since. Had talked to him and touched him with the full knowledge that he was very much taking a dirt nap.

Chris was dead.
He was supposed to be dead.

He was alive.

Jenny scrabbled for a pillow with her free hand and pressed it against her face. Then she screamed.

“I want to see him.” Jenny stated, hours later, voice hoarse and the pillow she’d used as a muffler discarded somewhere on the floor next to their bed.

Ahmanet, curled warm and safe around Jenny’s back, tightened her arm a little around Jenny’s middle. Her breath brushed the back of Jenny’s neck, followed by soft lips. “Are you sure? You were very upset. I don’t want you to get upset again by seeing him.”

“I’ll be fine,” Jenny said, staring at a specific spot on the wall, “I want - no, I need to see him. I need to be sure.”

She could feel the doubt across the link, but there was also resignation, as if Ahmanet knew Jenny wasn’t going to let this subject drop. There was also fear, still, the backwash of the link leaving it like a sour tang on the back of her tongue, and Jenny wished she could do something to soothe it, to take away that fear.

“Then I will allow it,” Ahmanet said, “on the condition that I come with you.”

Jenny hadn’t been planning on going alone, so she had no problem agreeing to that.

She just wanted to be sure that all of this wasn’t some horrible dream, that she’d really brought Chris back to life and that she hadn’t imagined all of this.

Part of her hoped that she had imagined it.

The power to bring the dead back to life was a power that, in hindsight, was not something Jenny really wanted to have. Healing flowers was fine and all, and healing in general was pretty good actually, but resurrecting the dead? That was something Jenny was sure was going to bring nothing but trouble. Especially since the whole palace apparently knew about it already.

Jenny wondered how long it’d be until people would start asking her to bring back their loved ones. She knew enough about humanity in general to know that she would be getting requests like that. Hell, if she’d known someone who had the power to resurrect the dead, she’d have asked them to bring people back, too. She’d have asked for her grandmother back without hesitation.

But she was the one with that power now, and there were plenty of people who had lost loved ones, and all of them would claim that they’d lost them too soon. They’d jump on the opportunity to get them back.

And if - when - Jenny refused, either because she didn’t know how or because she never wanted to feel the life draining out of her again, they’d react in one of two ways. They’d either be disappointed and hurt, or hurt and angry. And anger was usually quick to escalate.

Either way, with doing what she’d done, Jenny had painted a huge target on her back.

She really shouldn’t have messed with magic when she didn’t understand it. One thing was sure, though - she wasn’t messing with it again until she’d had someone teach her the basics of control.
Anyone who wanted a loved one back would just have to wait until Jenny was good and ready to start practising that kind of magic.

“Do you want to see the boy now, love?” Ahmanet asked. “Or later?”

“Let’s just get it over with,” Jenny said, slowly sitting up. She was still tired, bit she’d spent the last few hours dozing fitfully with Ahmanet curled around her like she was trying to protect Jenny from the entire world, so she was less tired than she had been. And besides, even if she’d been on the verge of falling asleep, she wouldn’t have put this off.

“You should at least dress first,” Ahmanet said. Jenny frowned and looked down at herself, and found that she was wearing a nightshirt rather than her skirt and tunic from earlier.

“Zara and Sahar took care of it,” Ahmanet said. “I have not seen anything inappropriate.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, wondering if it was really any better to know that Zara and Sahar had been the ones to undress her and put her in a nightshirt. Talk about awkward. Jenny was barely comfortable letting Zara and Sahar help out with her jewellery and make-up, let alone with things like dressing her.

A little flushed from embarrassment, Jenny crawled out of bed, the rustle of sheets behind her telling her Ahmanet was doing the same.

“I’ll just go dress, then,” Jenny mumbled, “please don’t let Zara and Sahar in yet.”

Ahmanet blinked a little at the request, but nodded. “If you wish.”

Jenny made her way into the wardrobe, Ahmanet, also in a nightshirt, on her heels. She wasn’t interested in anything fancy, so she went straight for the skirts and tunics, which she was starting to like better than the dresses. What she really wanted, though, was a pair of jeans and a simple shirt. Maybe like a polo, or something, or a v-neck. Or, even better, the old, faded, ridiculously soft from extensive wear flannel pajamas she’d left at her flat in London before she’d gone to Iraq to find Ahmanet’s tomb.

Provided, of course, her flat was still there. Quite a bit of London had been devoured by that sand storm, after all.

Having made her choice, Jenny took her chosen items from the shelves and went into the bedroom to dress. She did so quickly, shucking her nightshirt and tugging on fresh underwear before sliding into her skirt and tunic. The tunic had no decorated collar this time around, but the finery of the weave was enough to make it look expensive and fancy even left bare. And besides, her belt was fancy enough, with the carefully engraved, shiny leather.

Ahmanet came out of the wardrobe only a few moments later, wearing a dress, her crown tucked under her arm and Jenny’s diadem in her other hand.

“The jewellery can be left as is for today,” Ahmanet said as she handed Jenny her diadem, “but the diadem is a necessity.”

“I know,” Jenny said, placing it on her head without too much complaint. Apparently Queens weren’t meant to be seen without proper headgear. Jenny still wasn’t sure on the whole queen-thing, but the diadem was, for a thing made out of solid gold and gems, relatively light. A great deal lighter than the broad collar was, anyway, and also a fair deal more comfortable to wear. She’d take the diadem over the broad collar any day.
Ready (or as ready as she could be, given circumstances), Jenny sat on the edge of the bed, waiting for Ahmanet to finish pinning up her hair so she could put on her crown. She wasn’t going for a fancy do-up, instead just twisting her hair into a simple but surprisingly neat bun on the top of her head before sliding her crown in place. A few small wisps of hair escaped around her ears, but they mostly blended in with the small tattoos curling across Ahmanet’s skin just in front of her ears.

“Where is Chris anyway?” Jenny asked as they walked out of the bedroom, Ahmanet’s hand in hers. She happened to glance at the table and found the tray of healed flowers gone, idly wondering where they’d gone. Maybe she’d ask later. “You said he was in a cell?”

“In the dungeons, yes. Now that he is alive and once more a threat, I had him imprisoned until we know what to do with him.”

Jenny could see the logic in that. She didn’t agree, because Chris was her friend and had done nothing but help her since the day he’d died and she’d hate to see him locked up, but she did see the logic in Ahmanet’s decision to have him contained for now.

“He hasn’t woken up yet, but the doctors suspect he will soon,” Ahmanet added, pushing open the doors that separated the royal quarters from the rest of the palace.

There was a small crowd waiting just outside the doors, taking up most of the space in the hallway, almost fifty people surrounding the space around the doors and making the generous hallway (almost ten feet in width) seem small. Zara and Sahar were at the head of the crowd, joined by Aaheru and his acolytes, Bau, Chaferkem, and Tahirah.

As soon as Jenny came into view, she was all but mobbed by them. Zara and Sahar, to Jenny’s shock, actually fell to their knees at Jenny’s feet, hands grasping at the hem of her skirt, their faces wet with tears.

“Your Highness!”

Jenny stared down at the two women in shock.

This was totally unexpected. She’d figured they’d be somewhat worried, sure, but in tears and clutching at her like she was about to keel over dead? That was completely unexpected. Especially since they’d only known her for about a day and a half. This reaction was extreme.

“We are very glad to see you are well,” Aaheru stated it a bit more delicately, but his voice was warm and his eyes even more so, and Jenny finally got the idea that maybe Aaheru didn’t just tolerate her presence because of her status as Ahmanet’s Chosen and the future mother of Set’s mortal avatar.

Aaheru briefly glanced down at Zara and Sahar. “Please forgive your handmaidens for their behaviour, Your Highness. They are fond of you.”

“They’ve known they were to be yours from the moment I contacted the Cult of Set,” Ahmanet explained quietly, so only Jenny could properly hear. “Just after London. They had been looking out for your presence for days. More so, the Cult raised them to be my Chosen’s handmaidens in the hope I would be freed within their lifetimes. You are their literal reason for living. They were raised to serve you. Considering that, their reaction to your… incident is not as extreme as you perhaps think it is.”

Well, damn. Now Jenny felt bad for trying to keep Zara and Sahar at arm’s length. And also a little horrified at the idea of people literally being raised as servants for someone who might not even have
shown up in their lifetime at all.

Because if Jenny hadn’t freed Ahmanet, she might’ve gone undiscovered for another millennium, and Zara and Sahar would have ended up waiting their entire life and dying without ever fulfilling the purpose they’d been raised to fulfill.

Which brought Jenny to the concept of people being raised to serve other people at all, because that didn’t sound healthy. What if Zara and Sahar had never wanted to be her handmaidens? If they’d ever wanted to be, like, Jenny didn’t know, a lawyer or something, or a zookeeper, or literally anything else than a handmaiden.

Jenny wondered if she told Aaheru that she didn’t appreciate them indoctrinating little girls and forcing them into a future they might not have wanted, they would stop.

Somehow, she doubted it.

“’It’s fine,’” she told Aaheru after a second of silence. She glanced down at the two women at her feet. “’Are you alright?’”

Sahar gave a small nod, briefly taking her hands from the hem of Jenny’s skirt to wipe at her damp face. “’Yes, Your Highness. I apologize.’”

“’No problem,’” Jenny said, wondering what she was apologizing for. “’Zara?’”

“I shall be fine, Your Highness,” Zara responded instantly.

“’If you are done, then,’” Ahmanet said, a little more impatient than Jenny, “’we were on our way to do something.’”

Zara and Sahar hastily scrambled to their feet, trying to look as composed as they could.

“’Our deepest apologies, Your Majesty.’”

Ahmanet waved them off almost negligently, turning her attention to Jenny instead. “’Are you ready to go?’”

“’Yes,’” Jenny said, feeling not nearly as confident as she sounded.

“’The cells are this way,’” Ahmanet began to lead Jenny down the hallway.

Zara and Sahar were immediately on Jenny’s heels, close enough that she could almost feel their breath on the back of her neck. Aaheru followed as well, but his acolytes remained where they were - they probably had things to do, anyway.

The crowd parted for them as they walked, but nearly everyone present took the opportunity to reach out and briefly make contact with Jenny, their hands brushing past her bare arms and shoulders to get any skin contact they could. It was odd, and more than a little invasive, but Jenny had a clear view of their faces, the raw expressions she’d never have expected from people she didn’t know and who only knew her as a random woman who’d showed up at the castle and had become their Queen immediately after, so she didn’t recoil and allowed them to reach out for her instead, even if it was a little uncomfortable.

The cells, as it turned out, were in a very stereotypical dungeon.
Jenny hadn’t even known the palace had dungeons.

She probably should have expected it, though.

They were farther underground than Jenny had initially expected when they’d arrived at the top of the stairs; they went down a good eighty feet. Every twenty feet there was a door made of steel bars, with a lock on it, for security purposes. Not to mention the guards at the top of the stairs, at each door, and at the bottom of the stairs. Which were also the only entrance into the dungeons, and also the only exit.

It was remarkably well-defended, which was probably for the best, considering the cells were there to host criminals and other dangerous people.

Which apparently included Chris Vail.

The cells themselves were nothing to write home about. Pretty much all of them, save the one that would presumably hold Chris, were empty. In total, there had to be about thirty cells, which was more than Jenny had expected. She couldn’t really imagine all of them filled with people who’d committed crimes or had been deemed a threat.

The cells were small, about six and a half feet by nine feet, with no privacy at all since the front was metal bars from floor to ceiling, door included, with no solid metal beyond that. Certainly not anything that obstructed a clear view of the cell and everything in it.

Against the back wall was a cot, solid stone and too heavy to be moved with anything less than inhuman strength or heavy lifting equipment, with a thin blanket folded at the foot end and a small pillow. No mattress, but there was some hay or straw of some sorts, or maybe dried papyrus, to lie on. There was also a chamberpot in each cell, and Jenny shuddered a little at the thought of having to use that in a cell where everyone could see. Not a nice thought.

She was suddenly more than a little glad that she was considered a Queen, here, and not a criminal or something like that.

Ahmanet gestured one of the wardens over. ‘‘The prisoner?’’

‘‘The last cell on the left, Your Majesty,’’ the warden responded promptly. ‘‘Has he woken up yet?’’

‘‘No, Your Majesty,’’ said the warden, ‘‘but the doctor said he should wake up soon, and one of the guards went to check on him not too long ago and mentioned he was starting to move a little.’’

Ahmanet nodded. ‘‘We would like to see him.’’

‘‘Of course, Your Majesty, Your Highness, High Priest. If you would follow.’’ The warden led them to the back of the sizeable space, where indeed the last cell of the left was occupied. A torch was lit just outside the bars, outside of arm’s reach from inside, casting enough light into the space hewn out of the stone the palace was built on to be able to see inside.

The back of the cell, nine feet into the stone, was a little dark, but not too dark that observers couldn’t see the person sprawled across the cot.

Jenny’s breath caught in her throat, and she had to lock her knees so they wouldn’t buckle and leave her wobbling.

Ahmanet had told the truth.
Because there, hale and healthy and alive, chest rising and falling steadily with every breath, the hole
in his cheek and the darkened veins spiderwebbing across his skin and the spider bite on his neck
gone as if they’d never existed, was Chris Vail.

And he was without a doubt alive.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Chris wakes up. Ahmanet shows her claws and proves that, while she is a soft gay around Jenny, she can be ruthless. Jenny is more than a little horrified at her methods, and despairs at Ahmanet's stubbornness. She makes a promise she's not sure she can keep.

Chapter Notes

People, things are happening. I've got the next few chapters already done and lined up to be uploaded over the next couple of Saturdays, and I can tell you, things are going to happen. I think I'm gonna surprise you guys a little.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

Ahmanet's hand was steady on the small of Jenny’s back, pressing very gently, and it was probably the only thing that was keeping Jenny on her feet right now. She stared at Chris, her eyes wide, the blood drained from her face, breathing shallow as she tried to comprehend the enormity of what she was seeing.

She’d done that.

She’d taken his ghost (on accident, she might add) and she’d given him life.

Jenny had created that body out of nothing (where else could it have come from? It wasn’t like his original body had been lying around the palace.) and put Vail’s soul into it, and then she’d made it work like it was supposed to. Heartbeat and breath and everything.

How had she done that?

How was she capable of something like that? How was anything in the world, outside of nature itself, capable of that?

That kind of power shouldn’t be in her hands. It shouldn’t be in anyone’s hands. It was a power that should never have been given to Jenny. Not even Set could do this, Jenny was pretty sure, otherwise he’d have created a mortal body aeons ago and he would never have needed Jenny and Ahmanet to do it for him.

But somehow, by some cosmic mistake, Jenny had been given the power to create life itself.

Suddenly, it didn’t feel so much as an exciting little knack to play around with. It felt like she’d just been handed a hell of a lot responsibility, and she had no idea what to do with it.

Jenny had a hard time looking away from Chris’ unconscious form.
(She’d created that form. How had she created that form?)

“Are you alright?” Aaheru inquired gently.

“...I’m not sure,” Jenny managed, still staring at Chris. When she finally managed to tear her eyes away, several long moments later, she found that all four of her companions were observing her. Ahmanet’s main emotion was worry, Jenny could feel it across the link they shared, the hand on Jenny’s back gently pressing to let Jenny know she was there and that she could lean on Ahmanet if she had to.

Aaheru seemed more interested in Jenny’s reaction to Chris, but he, too, had a glint of concern somewhere in his demeanour.

Zara and Sahar, on the other hand, looked at Jenny with an almost identical look of awe on their faces that made Jenny wholly uncomfortable. As if, like Jenny herself, they’d only just realized what Jenny had really done, and how enormously big it was.

It was silent again.

Jenny returned her gaze to the prone figure in the cell.

His hand twitched. Then a small groan came from his direction.

Jenny tried not to gasp, taking a small step closer to the bars, watching avidly as Chris started to come to.

“He’s waking up,” Aaheru said. “Zara, go inform the wardens.”

“Yes, High Priest,” Zara hurried off.

Jenny shrugged Ahmanet’s hand off her back, instead grasping it in her own hand and squeezing as tightly as she dared. She didn’t want to accidentally break Ahmanet’s hand or otherwise hurt her, but right now, Jenny needed something to hold on to. She was glad when Ahmanet squeezed back just as tightly, supporting her without saying anything and apparently not in pain either.

Which was good, because Jenny still didn’t really know the extent of her strength, and it was good to have an idea of how hard she could squeeze without harming Ahmanet.

There was another small groan from Chris, then a half-slurred, barely coherent, “whu?”

He started to move slowly, each movement sluggish and stilted, as if his new body took effort to control. Considering it was brand new and had never performed any movement save for breathing and such before, it was a good possibility that there would be an acclimation period.

Managing to move his arms, Chris grasped for his head and accidentally slapped himself in the face, groaning again as he finally managed to get his hands where he wanted them, which was shielding his face from the light. It looked like every twitch of his muscles pained him, like an extreme version of muscle aches maybe.

It made Jenny glad her own body had been waiting for her when she’d been dead, and that she’d had no problems with reinhabiting it - she wouldn’t have dealt well with having to acclimate to a whole new body on top of being murdered and resurrected as a living deity.

Hands covering his face, chest heaving with the apparent exertion of moving and being alive again, Chris failed to notice his silent audience standing only nine feet away.
Rapid footsteps came into the direction of the cell. Jenny briefly took her eyes away from Chris and found that Zara had returned with a warden.

It was enough to alert Chris to the fact that he was not alone.

His hands fell away from his face, eyes flashing around to quickly take in his surroundings. He spotted the bars that betrayed the space as a prison cell almost immediately, sitting up so rapidly his new body couldn’t compensate the shift in gravity. Had had to reach out and steady himself against the wall to keep himself sitting upright.

As soon as his hand touched the wall, Chris froze.

Slowly, his gaze moved from the bars to his hand. His fingers twitched against the roughly hewn stone. An expression of disbelief and denial grew on his face, and he stared at his hand pressed against the stone as if it came from another planet.

Jenny observed him curiously. It was as if Chris hadn’t really realized he had a corporeal body until he’d felt the stone against his hand. As if he was only just coming to the conclusion that he was, in fact, very much alive.

Finally, when after several seconds he was still staring at his hand, obviously shell-shocked, Jenny decided to intervene.

She cleared her throat loudly. "Chris?"

His eyes shot away from his hand, settling on Jenny. For a moment, he seemed uncomprehending. Then, suddenly, he tried to lunge towards the bars. His body gave out on him before he’d taken his first step, his knees unable to carry his weight and sending him sprawling across the cell’s floor in a weak tangle of limbs. He stared up at her almost desperately.

"Jenny?" His voice was hoarse and broke halfway through, sounding like it was the first time it had ever been used. Which was probably the case.

Jenny crouched down so she was at eye-level with him, even though he was several feet away. "Yes, Chris, it’s me. How are you feeling?"

He swallowed thickly. His hands twitched against the floor. Everything about him screamed cornered, terrified animal. "I’m... alive?"

"You are," Jenny agreed. "Do you remember what happened?"

"I..." he stuttered, "I came to visit you. You were doing something with a bunch of flowers..."

Jenny nodded in encouragement when he fell silent. It took a few moments before he could find his words again. "You resurrected me."

"Yes." There wasn’t any other answer Jenny could give.

"I... How?"

Jenny sighed a little. "I lost control. When you touched me, the magic did what it was meant to do. It created you a new body and put your soul into it."

Chris gave another thick swallow. "I’m alive again."

"Yes," Jenny repeated. "You’re alive."
Tears welled in his eyes. Slumped on the floor, with the expression on his face showing everyone how horrified he was at that, cheek pressed against the cold stone, he was a pitiful sight. "You promised me…" he whispered, "you promised you wouldn’t resurrect me."

"I never meant to resurrect you," Jenny said. "I lost control. It was an accident."

"You promised…" Chris whispered weakly, as if he hadn’t heard her.

Guilt welled in Jenny’s chest. "I’m sorry."

"You should be grateful, boy," Ahmanet’s voice was sharp and authoritative, her hand landing on Jenny’s shoulder, fingers brushing her neck. "You received a second chance at life. That is more than most will ever get."

Chris stared at her as if he was only now realizing there were more people than Jenny present. Slowly, his face twisted in anger. "You!!"

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow, less than impressed. "You seem surprised to see me for someone who knows very well that this is my palace."

The hate that flitted across Chris’ face was enough to make Jenny take a small step back. She’d known he didn’t like Ahmanet, but she had not expected such open loathing.

"You murdered me!"

Ahmanet’s upper lip curled a little in disgust. "And if you’re not careful, it’s something I’ll happily do again."

Jenny stood up and turned to stare at Ahmanet. She really hoped the Pharaoh didn’t mean that, because Jenny really didn’t want Chris to die again. He was her friend. And he hadn’t abandoned her like Nick had, or saw her as a potential weapon to use against Ahmanet like Henry did.

Ahmanet didn’t meet Jenny’s eyes, though she did briefly squeeze Jenny’s shoulder. Jenny wasn’t sure what she meant to say with that, but she dearly hoped that it meant Ahmanet didn’t really mean to kill Chris. That she was just trying to scare him.

But much to Jenny’s horror, Chris responded, ‘I never wanted to be resurrected anyway.’

‘Chris!’

He slowly began to move again, pushing himself to his hands and knees before using the cot to pull himself to his feet and carefully sit down on the edge of it. The slump in his shoulders spoke of profound exhaustion. ‘I’m sorry, Jenny, but it’s true. That’s why I made you promise you wouldn’t do this to me.’ He glared at Ahmanet. ‘I don’t want to live in a world where the likes of her are in power.’

Jenny gave another glance over to Ahmanet, expecting to see that anger that she’d seen flashes of since she’d accidently freed her.

The Pharaoh, Jenny had a feeling, was capable of tremendous rage. The kind of rage that had seen her making a pact with Set after her throne had been taken from her, and the kind of rage that had seen her murdering her father, step-mother and newborn brother to take revenge for all that she’d lost. She’d never let it run free in front of Jenny, but Jenny knew that it was there.

But Jenny wasn’t seeing any of that rage now. There was no anger.
Instead, there was a cold, inhuman look of calculation, as if Ahmanet was trying to put together the best ways to make Chris suffer for being insolent.

It also seemed she was getting some ideas she liked.

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet turned to Jenny. “Perhaps we should retire back to our quarters. You still look tired.”

Jenny was tired. But she wasn’t sure she trusted Ahmanet around Chris without Jenny there to make sure no one (most likely Chris) got hurt.

“I will join you, of course,” Ahmanet added at Jenny’s hesitant expression.

“And Chris?” She couldn’t help but ask.

The first hints of a devilish smile appeared. “He can just sit there, and live.”

And just like that, as the horror spread over Chris’ face, Jenny realized how Ahmanet was planning to torment Chris.

She was, ironically, not going to do anything to him. She was just going to leave him to rot in his cell indefinitely, not hurting him, not doing anything to him, except keeping him alive for as long as possible. Which was exactly what Chris feared, Jenny could see it in him.

He didn’t want to live in a place where Ahmanet, the woman who had killed him and condemned him to haunt the in-between until Jenny had accidentally brought him back to life. The idea of being stuck in the same place as his murderess and knowing she was taking over, until the day he died, which presumably was going to be delayed as much as possible, terrified Chris.

It was like taking someone with arachnophobia and locking them in a room full of spiders.

Something diabolical. Surprising in its simplicity. Totally unexpected by pretty everyone present except for Ahmanet, who had come up with it in the first place.

Yet also incredibly cruel.

Predatory grin showing all her teeth in a mockery of a smile, Ahmanet laid her hand on Jenny’s lower back and started to gently push her in the direction of the stairs, away from Chris in his cell.

“No, wait!”

Jenny looked back to see Chris leap off his cot, stumble over his own feet, and hit the bars of the cell with a painful grunt, face-first. The first drops of blood from his nose hit the floor only seconds later.

“Wait!”

Ahmanet didn’t wait. And with her hand on Jenny’s back, gently pushing Jenny along, and the look in Ahmanet’s eyes, Jenny couldn’t find the courage to turn back either. Guilt churned in her stomach, but she kept walking.

They briefly paused at the foot of the stairs.

“He’s getting regular prisoner rations, correct?” Ahmanet asked the head warden.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” the man responded immediately.
“Cut them in half. And take a cup out of his water rations,” ordered the Pharaoh.

“Of course, Your Majesty.”

Jenny bit her tongue so hard it bled to keep herself from blurting out a protest. Half-rations and less water? She was really going to have to talk to Ahmanet about this. Maybe she could convince her to lay off a little bit. Chris hadn’t committed any crimes. Technically he shouldn’t even be in that cell. Cutting the amount of sustenance he’d get was beyond the pale.

But Jenny wasn’t about to argue with Ahmanet in front of Aaheru, Zara, Sahar and all the other people present in the dungeons - the wardens and guards and such. They didn’t need to see that, and besides, she wasn’t sure how Ahmanet would take it if Jenny questioned her decisions in public.

“Ensure the prisoner doesn’t try to harm himself,” Ahmanet continued to give the head warden orders, “and have a doctor ready in case he tries to commit suicide.”

“I will tell a guard to check up on the prisoner hourly,” the head warden promised.

“Have a servant inform me if anything of note happens.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Ahmanet gave a sharp nod and with a slight press against Jenny back, led her up the stairs and out of the dungeons. Jenny tried to ignore the sound of Chris’ yelling slowly becoming softer until she couldn’t hear it anymore.

The walk back to the royal quarters was mostly silent. Ahmanet seemed sunken in her own thoughts, and Jenny wasn’t sure what to say, so she just said nothing. Aaheru veered off halfway through the walk, into the hallway that led to the temple. Zara and Sahar seemed to only speak when spoken to or when they felt Jenny needed to know something important, and thus said nothing as well.

“Sahar, get us some tea,” Ahmanet said as they entered the living room.

Bowing her head in acceptance, Sahar veered off before she could enter to make a detour to the kitchens.

Jenny idly wondered if there was maybe a smaller kitchen closer to the royal quarters - that would explain how quickly Zara had returned yesterday with tea and snacks. It would also make the errands less time-consuming for Zara and Sahar.

“Perhaps you should lay down for a while,” Ahmanet said. “I can stay with you, if you’d like.”

Jenny rubbed a little at her forehead. She was tired, yes. But she didn’t feel comfortable taking a nap when she knew Chris was down in the dungeons, left to rot and half-starve.

“Did you really have to cut Chris’ rations?” Jenny asked as she kicked off her sandals and sat down on the couch.

“It shall teach him some humility,” Ahmanet said, sitting down next to Jenny. She grasped Jenny’s hand lightly, turning it over so it was palm up, and traced her fingers across the lines in Jenny’s palm. “You do not like the way he is treated.”

“No,” Jenny agreed, “I don’t like it. At all. And I don’t understand it either.”

“What is it you do not understand?”
“Well, he hasn’t done anything wrong, has he?” Jenny said. “So I don’t understand why he’s locked up, or why his rations are being halved.”

“He is a threat,” Ahmanet told Jenny seriously. “And you cannot trust him to walk around freely. Especially now that he has a solid form again.”

Jenny frowned. “That doesn’t explain the food. And besides, he’s my friend, and unlike Nick and Henry, Chris hasn’t tried to hurt me. In fact, he’s done nothing but help me. Why shouldn’t I trust him?”

Ahmanet looked at her as if she was missing something very important. “Jennifer, trust me. Chris cannot be allowed to walk free. It is too dangerous. He will remain in his cell.”

Jenny frowned, starting to get a little indignant. “For how long?”

There was a brief lull as Sahar reappeared with a tray of tea, which she placed on the table quickly. She poured two cups, with honey and lemon for Jenny and a little milk for Ahmanet. Then, looking a little ashamed at interrupting the conversation, she went to stand near the doors, next to Zara, to wait until she was needed again.

Jenny, too focussed on Ahmanet, didn’t really acknowledge her, instead waiting for Ahmanet to answer her (quite important, if she said so herself) question.

The Pharaoh’s eyes were hard and cold. “Until the day he dies, or until you gain your power over death and send his soul on to the afterlife.”

Jenny reared back in horror, pulling her hand from Ahmanet’s. “He’s getting life in prison for nothing?!”

That… was something Jenny should have expected, to be honest.

Sometimes it was easy to forget Ahmanet had been raised 5000 years ago, when the Pharaoh of Egypt could do shit like that just because they felt like it. There had been no democracy back then. The one wearing the crown made the rules. And if the Pharaoh figured someone was dangerous, or an annoyance, or simply didn’t agree with how things were going, they got tossed into prison and often didn’t get out again. That, or they were made slaves and deported to work in a stone quarry somewhere, where a conveniently fatal accident could take care of the problem.

It really shouldn’t surprise Jenny as much as it did to realize that Ahmanet was still thinking that way. She’d only been in the modern world for less than three weeks total. Of course she was going to follow the patterns of what she knew from her childhood. Why shouldn’t she? It had worked 5000 years ago, so why wouldn’t it work for her now?

Jenny eyed Ahmanet a little warily. “You are aware that this is a violation of human rights, right? There are, like, global rules for this kind of thing.”

Ahmanet blinked, and then shrugged. “I care not for global law. This is my country. I make the laws. Others have no say in this.”

Oh, damn. Jenny really should’ve taken that holiday before showing up at the castle. First diplomacy and religion, and now this? It was enough to make Jenny wonder if she was getting paid for any of this, because it was sure starting to sound like a job.

“It’s not something you can just dismiss, Ahmanet,” she said, trying to sound patient. “The UN is very powerful. They created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights decades ago, and it’s
globally enforced. One of the rules is that you can’t throw someone in prison without a fair trial and sentencing.''

‘I care not,’’ Ahmanet repeated. ‘‘I am the Pharaoh of Egypt, and I have not agreed to adhere to this declaration. Therefore, it does not hold any power in any of the territories I rule. I have every right to keep someone prisoner if I wish to.’’

She really, really didn’t. Jenny wasn’t sure how to explain to Ahmanet that she really didn’t have the right to decide whether someone was going to spend the rest of their life behind bars or not.

Diplomacy books.

She really needed diplomacy books sometime soon.

‘‘Additionally,’’ Ahmanet continued, to Jenny’s despair, ‘‘I also have the right to decide whether prisoners receive full rations or not, and I have decided that Chris Vail will not receive full rations.’’

Jenny tried not to sigh. She really did. ‘‘Why not?’’

‘‘I did not like his tone.’’

‘‘That’s it? You’re starving him out literally because he was rude?’’

‘‘We are royalty, Jennifer. Yet he referred to you by name and did not hesitate to broadcast his hatred for myself,’’ Ahmanet looked disgruntled at the very reminder. ‘‘In my father’s time, he would have been executed for the slight. For your sake, I will allow him to live, but he will not go unpunished.’’

Jenny absolutely needed diplomacy books. And maybe also a ‘Human Rights for Dummies’ book, if those existed. Maybe a PowerPoint presentation, or high school educational documentary. Literally anything to make Ahmanet understand that being rude was not a good reason to starve people.

‘‘I think I’ll go lay down for a bit, like you said,’’ Jenny said, feeling a tension headache rise behind her eyes. Which was totally unfair, by the way. Someone could stick a knife through her arm and she wouldn’t even feel it, yet she still got headaches? Total rip off.

‘‘Do you not feel well?’’ Ahmanet was instantly concerned.

‘‘Headache,’’ Jenny mumbled.

Ahmanet gestured Zara and Sahar over from where they had been standing near the door. ‘‘Get some painkillers,’’ she ordered them shortly, ‘‘and go fetch my Jennifer a nightshirt.’’

They hurried off.

Ahmanet focussed back on Jenny. ‘‘Does it hurt very much?’’

‘‘It’s not that bad, really. Just annoying.’’

The Pharaoh didn’t look convinced. ‘‘I will lay down with you for a while. You can sleep until dinner, if you wish, or even later. The cooks can make you something to eat whenever you wish for it.’’

‘‘Right,’’ Jenny said, wondering if there were cooks who had night shifts, or if asking for food in the middle of the night meant calling some poor soul out of his bed. She decided that she wasn’t interested in the answer right now, instead standing up from the couch, intent of getting to the bedroom to take a nap in that truly fantastic bed.
Sahar was waiting, standing next to the bed with a silken bundle of cloth folded in her hands. She moved over to Jenny almost immediately, placing the nightshirt on the edge of the bed, then pausing just within arm’s length of Jenny. “If I may, Your Highness?”

Jenny, remembering that Sahar had literally been raised to help her and too tired and half-upset to really protest, just nodded. “Go ahead.”

“I shall give you some privacy,” Ahmanet slipped out of the bedroom respectfully.

It was a little awkward, Jenny had to admit, having Sahar literally help her undress and put on the nightshirt. Definitely not something Jenny was used to. Still, Sahar worked quickly and efficiently and didn’t linger or look inappropriately, so it could have been much worse.

Once she was in her nightshirt, Jenny briefly went into the bathroom to brush her teeth (she believed in good dental hygiene, and also she wasn’t sure if being a Queen came with dental insurance, although she had a feeling it did). Ahmanet entered the bathroom just as Jenny left, briefly brushing her hand past Jenny’s side.

Sahar had the covers of the bed turned down already, ready for Jenny to slide in. Jenny did so gratefully - she really was quite tired still. Apparently having the life sucked out of you was kind of a harrowing experience. Almost as shitty as getting murdered. Except with less blood, and also with less knives.

Zara had returned too, standing next to the bed with a glass of water and two small pills in her hands. “Your painkillers, Your Highness,” she said, offering Jenny the pills.

“Thanks,” Jenny swallowed them quickly, drinking some of the water to wash them down. She handed the half-empty glass back, briefly rubbing at her forehead. Hopefully those pills would kick in soon so she’d be rid of that ache.

Sahar briefly fluffed Jenny’s pillow to make sure it was as comfortable as it could be, and then waiting patiently until Jenny had made herself comfortable before just about draping the sheets over her. Jenny almost felt like a child, being tucked in like this. She half-expected Sahar to pull a storybook out of thin air, and was inordinately relieved when it didn’t happen.

“If there is anything you require of us, Your Highness,” Zara said, “do not hesitate to call for us. We are at your disposal.”

“Sure,” Jenny said, with no intention to do so.

Sahar and Zara both gave a small bow, leaving the bedroom with their dresses swirling around their ankles.

Jenny let her head drop against the pillow and sighed, closing her eyes. Her head really did hurt. And she was tired. Maybe some rest wasn’t that bad an idea after all.

Maybe half a minute after Zara and Sahar had left, there was the soft padding of bare feet on the stone of the floor. The mattress on the other side of the bed dipped, and then Ahmanet quietly sidled over and draped her arm across Jenny’s waist. “Have you gotten the painkillers?”

“Yes,” Jenny responded, trying not to yawn sleepily. She didn’t know what it was, but something about this bed had her ready to fall asleep in a matter of minutes.

“Good.” Ahmanet shuffled a little to make herself more comfortable. “I would like to ask
something of you.’’

Jenny hummed, eyes already closed. ‘Which is?’

‘I wish for you to stay away from Chris unless I am with you.’’

Jenny opened her eyes, shuffling until she was on her other side so she could see Ahmanet and frowning in confusion. ‘Why?’

‘I do not wish for you to be influenced by him,’ the Pharaoh responded.

‘Why do you think he’ll try to influence me?’ And what did she even mean with ‘influencing’? It was a given that Chris would try to talk to her. He’d probably try to get Jenny to convince Ahmanet to let him go too. That was something Jenny was already expecting him to do. She was also expecting to go talk to Ahmanet after he asked, which probably wouldn’t work but would at least assuage her own feeling of guilt.

‘He is stuck in that cell, and he knows it. He will say anything to get out of it.’’

‘So you don’t want me to see him? At all?’

‘No, my love, you may still see him. Just only when I am with you.’’

Jenny gave another frown. ‘And you don’t think he’ll try to influence me anyway, regardless of your presence?’

‘I have no doubt that he will try,’ Ahmanet said, ‘but if I am there, I can ensure he will be punished immediately. I am sure he is intelligent enough to learn the lesson sooner rather than later.’’

Jenny faltered a little. The reminder of Ahmanet’s ruthlessness, both a little earlier in the dungeons and again now, was unsettling. It was very easy to get used to Ahmanet being kind and understanding and patient - easy enough that Jenny had trouble seeing her as the same person who had murdered her.

She blamed it on the link, which leaked comfort and trust and safety whenever she brushed her attention past it, making it very hard to see Ahmanet as an actual threat.

Except that she was. Maybe not to Jenny, but to other people, Ahmanet was downright ruthless, hurting and terrorizing them without so much as a flicker of guilt or hesitation. Ahmanet was an apex predator, and everyone save Jenny was prey.

‘Jennifer,’ Ahmanet snapped Jenny from her thoughts. ‘Promise me you will not see Chris without my permission and presence.’’

‘I promise’’ Jenny said, but there was an uncomfortable curl of curiosity in her stomach that had her doubting her own word.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

Jenny attends her first audience as the Queen. Things do not go as expected. Ahmanet shows a bit of unexpected boldness.

Chapter Notes

Welp, here we go with chapter 37. Thank God I already had it done, because last week was busy and what little free time I had was spent writing a new one-shot. If you're interested, you'll find it with the rest of my works. It's called 'Take care not to fall, darling (it's a long way down)', and it's for the new Netflix film 'Annihilation'.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

When Jenny woke up again, the other side of the bed was empty. Blinking blearily, she reached over and felt the mattress - it was already cold, meaning Ahmanet must’ve left some time ago.

Jenny wormed around under the sheets into a more comfortable position. She wasn’t all that tired anymore, but the bed was warm and soft and her eyes were still drooping a little, and really, she didn’t have the motivation to get up yet.

She dozed for an indeterminate amount of time.

Eventually, boredom set in, and Jenny didn’t want to just laze around and do nothing anymore. She wasn’t sure how long she’d been asleep, but she couldn’t sleep her life away. And besides, she already felt a lot better than she had before her nap. She was taking way too many naps, lately, though.

It felt like she was spending most of her time asleep nowadays. She’d only been here for a few days so far, and a pretty large amount of time had been spent laying down after being introduced to Set at the temple (not a nice experience) or being unconscious after almost killing herself messing around with magic (also not a nice experience).

Jenny rubbed at her face and sat up in bed, the sheets pooling at her waist. The air in the bedroom was cool, but not cool enough to make Jenny’s shiver or break out in goosebumps. It had to be really hot outside, considering this was Egypt, which was enough to have Jenny very grateful for the thick walls of stone keeping the heat out of the palace. She didn’t want to spend all day sweating like a pig because of how hot it was here.

She stretched a little and tossed the sheets off her legs, swinging them over the edge of the bed so she could sit a little more comfortably. She glanced at the empty side of the bed. Where was Ahmanet anyway? Maybe she had Pharaoh things to do or something?

Hesitantly, Jenny called for her handmaidens, wondering if they were lingering somewhere close.
“Zara, Sahar?”

They were, in fact, close. Only moments after Jenny had called for them, they entered the bedroom, perfectly put together and ready. It made Jenny wonder if they even slept at all, or if there was some kind of magic that made them not need sleep and left them ready 24/7. Hopefully not. That sounded like a shitty way to live.

“Your Highness?” Zara asked.

“Do you know where Ahmanet has gone?” Jenny asked.

“Her Majesty is in the throne room, Your Highness,” Zara responded, “for the weekly audience.”

Jenny blinked. Ahmanet had weekly audiences? Huh. She hadn’t known that. As far as Jenny knew, audiences weren’t a strictly usual thing in Ancient Egyptian society, where the Pharaohs had been so far removed from normal life that they had likely barely interacted with their subjects at all. It was a good way for Ahmanet to stay in touch with her subjects, though. Jenny approved. Although she hadn’t known that Ahmanet already had enough subjects for weekly audiences to be a thing.

“Her Majesty suggested you might join her once you woke up, Your Highness,” Sahar added.

That actually sounded really interesting. It would at least give Jenny a better idea of what she was working with; she had, as of yet, little to no knowledge of the actual scale of Ahmanet’s current rule. She didn’t know how many people knew who Ahmanet was and whether they accepted her as their ruler. All Jenny knew so far was that the palace was filled with a couple of hundred servants, and that the Cult of Set was also present.

Jenny nodded. “Sure, why not?”

“I shall go retrieve some clothing,” Zara said, “what would you prefer to wear today, Your Highness?”

“A skirt and tunic,” Jenny said. That was what she had found most comfortable so far, considering the lack of jeans and blouses, so that was what she would stick to. Jeans and blouses probably weren’t the most ‘queenly’ clothes out there anyway.

As Zara disappeared to go get the requested clothes, Jenny stood up and made her way into the bathroom. She could go for a quick wash. Sahar was close on her heels, reminding Jenny of the fact that, yes, her handmaidens were supposed to help her bathe also. Which was something that would be even more awkward than letting them help her dress. But Jenny remembered what Ahmanet had told her, about how Zara and Sahar had literally been raised with the knowledge that this was included in their tasks, and Jenny also knew that she had probably insulted them by not allowing them to help before.

It’d be just like going to a nude beach, Jenny told herself as Sahar started tugging at the laces that kept her nightshirt closed. She’d been to a nude beach once or twice before, and awkward as it had been, she’d survived the experience. She’d survive this as well. Although it might take a while before Jenny would be able to look at Sahar without blushing again.

Once she was naked, Jenny slid into the almost-too-hot water as quickly as possible, blushing like a firetruck and folding her arms across her breasts. She was jealous of how effortlessly unfazed Sahar looked.

Zara entered just as Sahar had started washing Jenny’s hair (which she had tried to do herself, but had been very politely but firmly rebuffed from, so she’d resigned herself to just washing her front
instead), carrying the requested bundle of clothes with Jenny’s diadem and a small assortment of other jewellery on top. At least the broad collar was missing, Jenny thought in relief, but then, it wasn’t really needed today - from what she could see from a small distance and with the jewellery on top of it, the tunic Zara had chosen had a richly decorated collar, embroidered with golden thread all the way around the neck and down the front.

Zara placed the stack of clothing and adornments onto a small bench and then joined Sahar, kneeling on the edge of the bath. She took up a sponge and worked up a bit of a lather with some body wash, then started to scrub at Jenny’s shoulders. Beyond a soft request for Jenny to lean forward a bit so Zara could have better access to her back, little was said. It was surprisingly relaxing. And also Sahar was very good at turning the simple act of washing hair into something closely resembling a scalp massage. Jenny had never had a scalp massage before, but if this was it, she would have to get one more often, because it was wonderful.

Once her hair was deemed sufficiently clean, Sahar rinsed out the shampoo, while Zara finished washing Jenny’s back and scooped water over her shoulders to rinse away the soap. Since the rest of her was clean as well, Jenny figured that that was the end of her bath for now.

A few moments later, Jenny was wrapped in a large towel, shivering a little at the difference in temperature between the water of the bath and the air. Not that the air in the bathroom was cold, but, well, compared to the water it kind of was.

It took a minute of two for Jenny to get dry and dress, and she found that she really did like the tunic Zara had picked out for her. The embroidery created a scene of papyrus and lotus plants around her neck and down her front, rich golds sparsely threaded through with deep greens to emphasize the plants, and just the barest hints of blues to suggest water. Jenny brushed her fingers across the embroidery, wondering how long it had taken to make this, because it was more than obvious that this was genuine handwork. No machines had been used in the creation of these embroidered plants and flowers.

Sahar was once again the one to do Jenny’s make-up, dutifully sticking to the shade of blue Ahmanet had picked for Jenny, and it only took her a few minutes, leaving Jenny more than a little impressed at how easily she got it done. And neatly, too. Somehow she managed to get the eyeliner sharper than Jenny had ever managed on her own.

“Breakfast is waiting in the living room, Your Highness,” Zara said as Jenny stood up.

Jenny blinked. “Breakfast?”

“You slept straight through the night, Your Highness.”

Had she? Jenny hadn’t even noticed. That meant she’d been asleep almost all of yesterday, and the whole night. No wonder she felt more rested. And also no wonder Ahmanet had left to attend her duties; Jenny couldn’t exactly expect her to be around 24/7. She was the Pharaoh, and apparently had enough people to justify audiences, so she probably had fairly little time to spare.

“Breakfast sounds good,” Jenny said. She wasn’t very hungry, but something small would do. She wondered if this place had cheese sarnies. Or maybe bacon sarnies. Jenny could really go for a good bacon sarnie with lots of ketchup.

Unsurprisingly, though, breakfast did not consist of bacon sarnies with lots of ketchup. Instead, it was ful medames, a traditional Egyptian breakfast staple. Spiced and seasoned fava beans in tahini sauce, cucumber and tomato salad, hard boiled egg and freshly baked flatbread. Which, honestly,
was probably even better than bacon sarnies. Jenny had spent a lot of time in Egypt and the Middle East over the past thirteen years, and Ful Medames was one of the dishes she had come to love.

A small table and chair had been added to the living room for the express purpose of having breakfast. Jenny was a little grateful she didn’t have to make her way all the way to the dining hall, and then back into the opposite direction to get to the throne room.

She ate fairly quickly, savouring the taste of the ful medames - it was delicious, and the fresh mint tea that had been delivered to go with it was delicious too, if a bit too hot still to normally drink at first. Then, when she’d eaten enough for her stomach to start sending her ‘that’s enough, thanks much’ signals, Jenny put down her spoon, quickly draining the rest of her tea.

“I think I’m ready to join Ahmanet now,” she told Zara and Sahar.

“Of course, Your Highness,” Zara responded.

This time, Jenny didn’t enter the throne room through the main entrance. Instead, Zara and Sahar led her through the small back entrance hidden behind the dais that held the thrones, which had her slipping into the room almost unnoticed.

The keyword being 'almost'.

It was, apparently, necessary for Jenny to be announced before entering the throne room. It was also all kinds of embarrassing, to have all the faces in the room turn to stare at her as soon as her name was announced and she appeared within their view. Jenny figured it was going to take longer than a couple of days to get used to this.

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet stood up from her throne and walked over to take Jenny’s hand, escorting Jenny to her own throne as if she couldn’t walk a couple of feet on her own. “I am glad you’re feeling well enough to join me today.”

“I’m feeling much better, yes,” Jenny agreed as she took her seat on her throne, the light cushioning making the solid stone comfortable enough to sit on for long periods.

As Ahmanet retook her own seat, Jenny glanced over at the people at the base of the dais. There were two parties; one consisted of a middle-aged man and presumably his daughter, while the other party consisted of a young man and presumably his older brother.

“Your Majesty, Your Highness,” the middle-aged man began once Ahmanet had gestured at him to speak, “I am Rehu, son of Rebu. My daughter, Anai, asks your blessing for her marriage to her suitor, Hespu, son of Hetmas. They wish to be married under the old rites.”

Jenny blinked. So marriages were under Ahmanet’s purview as well? Or, at least, they were under Ahmanet’s purview until the amount of subjects she had grew too large for her to approve or deny every marriage taking place. Again, not something Jenny had expected. There were a lot of thing she didn’t expect nowadays.

Ahmanet allowed a little pleased expression to slide across her face. “It is good to see the old traditions are still respected today.” She glanced at the girl presented to her. “Anai, daughter of Rehu, you wish to bind yourself to Hespu, son of Hetmas?”

The girl looked like she was going to faint at being addressed by the Pharaoh. She managed to pull
herself together enough to speak, though. ‘‘Yes, Your Majesty. I wish to marry my intended as per
the old rites.’’

Ahmanet glanced at Jenny. It took Jenny a moment to realize that the Pharaoh was asking for her
opinion on the matter.

‘‘You love him?’’ Jenny directed her question towards Anai.

‘‘I do, Your Highness,’’ the girl responded, a little flustered but apparently truthful, if her smitten
glance at Hespu was anything to go by. The young man smiled back at the girl, puffing out his chest
a little, showing off for his intended.

Jenny glanced at Hespu. ‘‘And you love her?’’

‘‘With all my heart, Your Highness,’’ he confirmed.

‘‘Then I give you my blessing,’’ Ahmanet decided, apparently satisfied with Jenny’s contribution.
‘‘But be aware that I expect both of you to treat each other with respect. I will not have rumours of
neglect or abuse.’’

‘‘Thank you, Your Majesty, Your Highness,’’ Hespu bowed deeply. His older brother, as well as
Anai and Rehu followed without hesitation. All four looked very pleased. Considering they’d just
gotten the Pharaoh’s blessing to marry, Jenny figured they had the right to be.

Their piece said and having gotten what they’d wanted, the four gave another bow and shuffled out
of the throne room to make place for the next person who had something to ask.

It was a servant, this time, asking whether he would be allowed to go to Luxor to find his wife a
present for their fifteenth wedding anniversary - another request that was quickly granted. Jenny
hadn’t known people had to ask permission to leave the palace. She wondered if, if she asked, she
would be allowed to leave - or if she’d be detained here if she tried, no longer allowed to leave now
that she’d finally arrived. With the way Ahmanet had been acting around her, Jenny seriously
doubted the Pharaoh would let go of her easily, if at all. Neither, for that matter, would Set. And
since his cult was here to obey whatever orders he managed to convey from beyond the veil…

Watching the grateful servant leave the throne room with a skip in his step, Jenny couldn’t find it in
herself to feel like she was locked up. Not like she’d felt it when she’d been in that hotel with Henry
a couple of days ago (and boy, didn’t that feel like it had already been a lifetime), wondering what to
do next, or when surrounded by guards, wondering when Ahmanet was going to catch up and kill
her.

The palace, for all of its unfamiliarity and customs Jenny had yet to catch on to or get used to, felt
remarkably… safe. Like nothing inside the palace walls could hurt her. Except, of course, Set in the
temple, and Jenny’s own stupidity regarding magic she didn’t understand.

There was a kind of atmosphere around here that Jenny liked.

The servant exited the throne room, and a someone new entered. Beyond the doors, Jenny caught a
glimpse of a small line of people, patiently waiting for their turn.

The woman, maybe in her early forties, stopped a few feet before the dais and bowed, waiting
silently.

Ahmanet gave a small gesture with her hand. ‘‘Speak.’’
"Your Majesty, Your Highness," the woman said, looking up a little, "I have a request. My son fell ill a year ago. Many doctors have tried to do something for him, but they have all said that his disease is incurable. There are tumors in his brain."

Jenny’s eyes narrowed - she had a bad feeling about what direction this was going in. Then the woman glanced at Jenny, and she knew. She knew exactly what the woman was going to request from her.

The woman wrung her hands anxiously. "I… I have heard Your Highness has the power of healing. Powerful enough to restore the dead to life. I request - no, I beg you, please, cure my son."

Fuck.

Jenny had known this would happen. She’d fucking known it, the moment she realized what she had done to Chris, she had known this would start happening. Fucking fuck, she should have expected this the moment the woman had walked in.

Next to Jenny, Ahmanet had frozen on her throne. Eyes narrowed to slits, focussed on the woman with a kind of laser intensity Jenny had seen only once or twice before. "Are you aware of the toll it took for my Jennifer to restore a life?" The Pharaoh’s voice was carefully measured, as if she was going to base her reaction on the poor woman’s answer.

The woman ducked her head a little, hands wringing even harder. "Yes, Your Majesty. I heard Her Highness fell ill and was unconscious for several hours."

Jenny winced as the link suddenly flared to life, the sudden fury pouring across it being all Jenny needed to know Ahmanet had lost all composure and thus also her capability to regulate the link. Jenny could taste the bitterness of Ahmanet’s anger on her tongue, it was so strong. Almost strong enough to make her angry by association.

"She fell ill? That is what you heard?"

The woman’s eyes grew wide at the barely restrained fury in Ahmanet’s voice, realizing just what she’d accidentally unleashed. Her hands started to tremble, but somehow, she managed to muster up enough courage to answer, if barely. Her voice was as shaky as her hands. "Y-yes, Your Majesty."

"So you are not aware that it very nearly drained my Jennifer from her very life force? That if it had lasted but a moment later, your Queen would have died?!" Ahmanet stood up abruptly, her expression twisting into a mask of fury so great Jenny huddled a little farther into her throne without even meaning to. "And you dare stand there and ask my Chosen to risk her life again?! The mother of your god?! To save a peasant she hasn’t even met?!"

The woman had collapsed to her knees, tears streaming down her face, a mix of horror and terror on her face. "Please, Your Majesty! My son!"

That was exactly the wrong thing to say. Ahmanet’s face was a mask of wrath, a kind of expression Jenny had never known any human to be capable of. The exact kind of rage she’d thought about before, the kind of rage that had seen her murdering her entire family, unleashed by the poorly timed request of a desperate woman.

"Your son," Ahmanet’s voice was trembling with barely restrained violence, "shall be overjoyed if he does not end up outliving his mother despite his disease. I daresay he will not care about being cured if it means not burying his mother."

Jenny blanched at the blatant threat. The woman cowered deeper into the floor. Her sobs echoed
around the throne room, but none of the guards or the servants lining the walls made any move to help her.

‘‘Please! Your Majesty, I beg you! Please!’’

Fists clenching, Ahmanet took several deep, visible breaths before very slowly sitting back down. Every muscle in her body was tensed until shaking. ‘‘Guards! Remove this wretch from my sight immediately!’’

Two guards stepped forward.

‘‘No!’’ The woman wailed as she was grasped by the upper arms and dragged to her feet. ‘‘No, please! Please, Pharaoh! Save my son!’’

‘‘Throw her into a cell.’’ Ahmanet ordered shortly.

The guards bowed. ‘‘Your Majesty. Your Highness.’’

‘‘My son!’’ The woman wailed as she was forcibly dragged out of the throne room, writhing in the guards’ grips. ‘‘my son!’’

‘‘Everyone out!’’ Ahmanet scowled, looking at the guards near the doors. ‘‘I will let you know when I am ready to receive the next one.’’

The room emptied in seconds.

‘‘Jennifer. Are you alright?’’

Jenny was snapped out of her horrified stare at where the doors had closed behind the screaming woman as she was dragged to the dungeons. She managed to make herself move and looked at Ahmanet. ‘‘I don’t know.’’

That furious, bubbling mass of molten rage coming across the link began to wane a little, and the first frissons of worry and regret started to seep through.

‘‘I am sorry you had to see that,’’ Ahmanet sighed, reaching over to take Jenny’s hand. Jenny let her, not sure what else to do. ‘‘I had hoped your first audience would pass a little more peacefully.’’

Jenny blinked and glanced back at the doors. ‘‘That woman… what will happen to her?’’

‘‘She will be spending a few days in a cell, until I figure out what to do with her,’’ Ahmanet responded, teeth gritting a little at the reminder. ‘‘I daresay the guards will not be pleased with her. They are all very loyal.’’

Jenny swallowed. ‘‘You’re not going to hurt her, right?’’

‘‘Perhaps.’’

Not the answer Jenny had been going for.

‘‘She sounded like she really didn’t know what condition I was in after resurrecting Chris,’’ she tried.

‘‘Yet she knew you had fallen ill. That should have been enough to curb her tongue. Still she asked, and that means she is perfectly willing to risk your health to save her son,’’ A new pulse of anger spilled across the link; Ahmanet’s face twisted accordingly. ‘‘I should have her executed for this.’’
“I’m sure she didn’t mean it like that,” Jenny said, “she’s just worried.” She searched for an argument that would work, mind working at lightning speed. “Imagine… imagine it was our child. Wouldn’t you do anything to save them?”

Ahmanet paused. There was a slightly stronger twinge of regret, and also some longing. Finally, she sighed. “Yes. I suppose I would.”

“Then how can you blame this woman for doing the same?”

“‘You are the Queen. Your life is infinitely more important than the life of a mere peasant.’”

“And would you still think that if our child was on their deathbed and you were in the position of that woman?”

Ahmanet slumped a little in her throne. “No.”

“That’s what I thought,” Jenny agreed. “So I don’t think you should punish that woman for doing something when you would have done the same thing.”

“You are too kind, Jennifer. Anyone else would have done the opposite.”

Jenny shrugged a little. She wasn’t so sure about that, but she wasn’t exactly going to disagree too much about it. “Not kindness so much as common sense, I think.”

There was a tiny smile on Ahmanet’s lips as she stood up from her throne, kneeling in front of Jenny’s instead. “You sell yourself short, my love.”

“‘You think?’” Jenny said, more sarcastic than anything. There was something in Ahmanet’s demeanour, in her eyes, that had Jenny scrambling to shield herself, as if she was suddenly so very vulnerable. From what, she didn’t know exactly.

“I don’t think, I know.” Ahmanet said. There was a kind of anticipation mixed with anxiety seeping from her side of the link. As if she was nervous about something. She reached up to cup Jenny’s jaw with one hand. “You are far more than you believe you are.”

Jenny blinked. Had Ahmanet always looked so determined? Also, why was she moving forward - Soft, warm lips touched hers.

Oh. Oh.

Jennifer Halsey melted.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet take a walk through the gardens and talk about Ahmanet's plans for taking over Egypt, magic, and ascension.

Chapter Notes

So... The first kiss happened! Finally! Kind of glad to have that out of the way - it took way too long to figure out when and how I was going to have that happen. Anyhow, now things can move on a little. Probably. Hopefully. As for this chapter, I've done my best to explain a little on the subject of magic and ascension, but it's still kind of a woolly subject, so I hope my explanations make sense (up to a point, anyway).

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

Jenny was still blushing by the time she and Ahmanet had separated and the next person had been called in for their audience. Her lips tingled a little, in a good way, and there was a warm, mushy, marshmallow-y kind of warmth in her ribcage that she hadn’t expected.

Kissing Ahmanet was nothing like Jenny had thought it would be.

There’d been some possessiveness, sure, in the way Ahmanet set the pace and cupped her jaw to keep her in place, but mostly it had just been soft and tender. Just gentle pressure, hushed breaths and maybe a soft nip of teeth here or there.

It was like Jenny was in her early twenties again and had met a cute barista on her uni campus, like soft kisses stolen before going to class, text messages when no one was looking, holding hands on the way to the cinema. It was, she mused absently as she watched a young woman make her case, a hell of a lot like being in love. Something akin to butterflies fluttered in her stomach.

From the glances Ahmanet was shooting her, Jenny knew she was getting the feedback of it over the link. It had been blown wide open by Ahmanet’s fury earlier, and since Jenny was inexperienced at manipulating the link beyond being able to feel what Ahmanet felt, and Ahmanet hadn’t closed it, it was still transmitting freely. Thus, Ahmanet got to feel the warm, mushy butterflies fluttering around Jenny’s stomach, and Jenny was receiving the same warmth in return. Well, that, and an insufferable (yet somehow kind of cute) smugness. Ahmanet, apparently, was very pleased with the way Jenny had responded to the kiss. She was being seriously smug.

It was another hour or so before the audiences finally slowed down to a trickle, less and less people entering the throne room, until finally a door guard stepped into the throne room to announce there were no more people waiting for a turn.

‘’My duties for the day are done,’’ Ahmanet commented as she offered Jenny her hand to help her out of her throne. ‘’Would you care to take a walk around the gardens?’’
“Sure,” Jenny said as she walked down the steps of the dais, barely blinking when Zara and Sahar appeared at her other side to follow. “What are your duties anyway?”

Ahmanet hummed a little, tucking Jenny’s hand in the crook of her elbow. “Most of it pertains to ensuring the palace and the country run properly. A lot of paperwork and staff meetings are involved. Currently, since we are busy taking back what is ours, strategy meetings and such have been added to the workload.”

Jenny frowned. “Do you think it will be a war?”

“Eventually?” Ahmanet glanced sideways at Jenny. “Yes. I do think there will be a war. From what I have learned, the people in power today are just as attached to their station as people were in my time. They will not let go of their power easily.”

That… was unfortunately very true. It was a universal thing within governments. No matter what country or what part of the world, the people in power, once they had it, never really wanted to let it go again.

“I am already amassing an army,” Ahmanet continued. “My sand constructs, the remains of people who died in the desert, the Cult of Set, others who still obey the call of the old ways… they will all hear my call and fight.”

“People will not do much against modern weaponry, Ahmanet,” Jenny pointed out. “The palace is an easy target. They’ll drop a bomb on it, no questions asked, the moment they find out what you’re doing.”

And Jenny knew they would. This was the Middle East. For all its beauty and splendour, the Middle East was also a place where bombings were nothing out of the ordinary. The Egyptian government may not have nuclear weapons, but they did have chemical and biological weapons, and really, those were just as bad. Not that they’d even need them. A couple of, like, tomahawk missiles, and back into the desert the palace went.

Ahmanet, however, looked unconcerned. “You forget about my spiders, Jennifer. It is not just politicians I have infected with my spiders.”

“Military officers?”

“Just a few soldiers at first. There are plenty around the palace, after all. Then, when they were infected, they returned to their base. I ordered the spiders in them to spawn offspring, and then used those to infect more soldiers, until I got to the commanding officers.” Ahmanet smirked a little, looking viciously satisfied. “I rather doubt it will take long before the higher ranked generals are infected, and after them, I will come to control the rest of the military.”

Jenny blinked. She wasn’t all that knowledgeable on the Egyptian military power structure, but she was sure it wasn’t that easy. “Does the military control all the long-distance weapons, then? Or does the minister of defense have access to them too? Because if he does, controlling the military won’t work, he’ll just push the big red button himself.”

The Pharaoh looked unconcerned. “I will just have him killed before he can. My Infected,” the capital ‘I’ was almost audible, “will take control of the military soon enough, and with it, control over long-range weaponry.”

Jenny had a feeling that it wasn’t quite going to be that easy. And besides, that plan didn’t take any of the surrounding countries, or the rest of the whole entire world, into account. Jenny had a feeling
the surrounding countries wouldn’t be all that pleased when Egypt was suddenly taken over by a 5000 year old, historically lost princess with supernatural powers. In fact, it kind of sounded like the plot of some shitty action horror movie that tried to be scarier than it really was, and didn’t really succeed.

Having the entire Egyptian army under her thumb might be a boon, though. It’d be hard for the current government to fight the take-over if they didn’t have any troops to fight with. Jenny wasn’t sure how big the Egyptian army was, but it was likely fairly big. Add the other soldiers Ahmanet had mentioned - the sand constructs especially, considering how much sand there was around here - and they might actually be looking at a substantial army under Ahmanet’s command. And with that kind of manpower, it could be enough to at least have the surrounding countries hesitate in attacking openly. They might just want to avoid open war.

It was something to hope for, at least, Jenny thought as Ahmanet led her outside into the gardens. The full heat of Egyptian weather all but smacked her in the face, and the glare of the sun had Jenny squinting a little. She wished she knew where her sunglasses were. They’d come in handy right about now, even if she no longer had to hide her eyes - although, hadn’t Ahmanet mentioned her eyes were blue again? And when she’d checked her make-up the first time Sahar had done it for her, hadn’t her eyes indeed been normal?

Suddenly, Jenny wished she had a mirror. Just to check. Just to be sure. Because she really, really wanted to know for sure those creepy amber pupula duplex had disappeared. She hadn’t liked them, and she much rather had her regular, blue, human eyes.

There was another way to be sure, though.

``Ahmanet?''

``Yes, Jennifer?''

``What colour are my eyes?''

Ahmanet glanced at her, a little perplexed. ``They are blue. Why?''

Jenny tried not to sigh in relief. The keyword being tried. ``When I first gained my strength, my eyes changed. Pupula duplex with amber irises, like you used to have.''

``Ah,'' Ahmanet let out a little noise of comprehension, ``it’s a side effect of the ascension, I am afraid, though only temporary. Mine were like that until I regained life. Yours briefly changed when you found the first of your abilities, and I noticed they changed briefly again when you resurrected Chris Vail. When you gain your power over death, they will likely do the same.''

``So I won’t be stuck with them forever?'' Jenny asked, just to be sure.

``No.''' Ahmanet confirmed.

``Thank God,'' Jenny sighed. ``I can’t say I liked them.''

``They are unsettling,'' Ahmanet agreed. ``And blue suits you better regardless.''

``I like your eyes better this way too,'' Jenny offered. Ahmanet’s were a really pretty, dark brown that suited her much better than the burning amber she’s sported before.

``Thank you,'' Ahmanet said, a small smile on her face. ``Now, would you like to see the flower gardens first, or the lotus pond?''
“The lotus pond,” Jenny responded immediately.

“Very well,” Ahmanet began to lead her down a little stone path. Jenny looked around curiously as they walked. The gardens were mostly empty of other people, save for a few gardeners. Most of the plants were true desert plants - cacti, succulents, hardy flowers - but there were juvenile trees as well in the shape of palms of various species and delicate flowering shrubs that definitely should not be able to survive the dry heat of Egypt. Maybe there was an underground irrigation system, or the gardeners were just really good.

“Where does the water for the pond come from?” Jenny asked as Ahmanet led her through the gardens until she could see a glint of water. It expanded into a sizeable pond, maybe twenty meters across, filled with blooming, deep blue lotuses.

“It’s from the Nile,” Ahmanet explained. “I ordered the desert to allow for an underground channel to bring the water in. There’s just enough sand for it to go through that when it arrives, it’s filtered as clean as it can get.” She gestured at the pond with the arm that didn’t have Jenny’s hand tucked into the crook of the elbow. “It’s probably clean enough to drink.”

“Won’t an underground channel be noticed at some point?”

“Perhaps. But it’s not like the whole shore of the Nile can be walled off. If the current channel is closed up for some reason, I’ll just create a new one.”

Jenny nodded, gazing across the pond. “It’s beautiful. I like the lotuses.”

“I am planning to have a small seating arrangement built here,” Ahmanet commented. “It would be a good place for us to have private time away from the bustle of the palace.”

“That sounds nice,” Jenny said. She could definitely see herself spending time here, either together with Ahmanet, or when Ahmanet was busy doing Pharaoh stuff. A comfortable chair or hammock, some tea or cold lemonade, a book to read. That sounded nice indeed. “Are there any fish in there?”

Ahmanet shook her head. “There are not. Would you like there to be?”

“Yes,” Jenny said after thinking on it for a second. “I’d like some fish.” They’d give the pond some life, and if she was bored, she could come out to feed them.

“Then you shall have them,” Ahmanet responded simply. “Is there any specific type of fish you prefer?”

Jenny shrugged. “As long as they’re not too big, it’s fine.” She paused, and then added, “and no carnivores, please.”

Ahmanet nodded. “I will have a servant go to Luxor to select some fish for you.”

“Thank you,” Jenny said, squeezing Ahmanet’s arm lightly. The Pharaoh smiled at her warmly, the corners of her eyes crinkling. She leaned in, pausing with their faces only a few inches apart until Jenny nodded her consent, and then softly pressed their lips together for the second time today.

It was as amazing as the first kiss. Ahmanet insisted on setting the pace, her hand curling into Jenny’s hair at the back of her neck - she really, really liked that spot, apparently, with the way her hand always ended up there - but she did not press for more. Instead, her lips just moved gently against Jenny’s, something Jenny was happy to reciprocate. The little frisson of warmth in her chest was not quite like lust, but it was very close to it and did make Jenny feel warm and happy, and as she looped her arms around Ahmanet’s neck, silently despairing the fact that the Pharaoh’s crown didn’t allow
access to her hair, Jenny figured that the lust would come sooner or later. She liked the gentle warmth of infatuation better anyway.

After a while, they separated, and the smile on Ahmanet’s face was really quite lovely. “You are very welcome, my love.” Her smile dimmed a little as she looked at Jenny a little more critically. “How are you feeling?”

Jenny blinked, still somewhat dazed. “Pretty well, actually. I’m not sore or tired anymore.”

“Good. That means your life force is replenishing properly,” Ahmanet commented. “I was worried since resurrecting Chris Vail put so much strain on you.”

“Well, I feel pretty good,” Jenny responded. “I might go to bed early tonight, but beyond that, I’m fine.” She paused, and then asked, “do you think healing and stuff like that will always drain me like that?”

Ahmanet shook her head. “No. It currently drains your life force because you have not yet learned to control it. Once you have some control, you can direct the drain to take from the ambient magic present in the world, instead of directly from you. Or you can use ambient power to replenish your own reserves.”

Jenny perked up a little. “Ambient magic?”

“An almost unfathomable well of power belonging to nothing but the world itself,” Ahmanet explained. “It’s called ambient magic because it is stored in the immediate environment of the world.”

That… didn’t quite make sense. “The immediate environment of the world?” That was something Jenny had never heard of before. Did that even exist?

“It is the same place the Veil between the human world and the place Set and the other gods exist in,” Ahmanet responded. “Geographically speaking, it does not exist. It is a… curtain, perhaps, between worlds, which does not exist in the material world. It is nowhere and everywhere at once, thus making it the immediate environment of the entire world, as it is the place that… surrounds, is perhaps the best word, the world.”

Jenny tried to wrap her head around that. She didn’t really succeed. “But what is it?”

“It is, quite simply, a well of pure energy. A kind that humanity has yet to learn how to detect, let alone tap into.”

“Huh.” Jenny felt her mind boggle a little. A type of energy the world didn’t even know about, and here she was, learning something scientists would probably give a limb to know. “And we can?”

“With practise, yes.” Ahmanet nodded. “We can. But is it hard. It takes months of meditation to even learn how to sense it reliably. Although,” she added, “you have touched the veil before, if not knowingly. When you crossed it, it provided the power that fueled your ascension. I think it will be slightly easier for you to reconnect to it than it would be for someone who has no experience with it.”

Jenny frowned. “I crossed it?”

“Indeed. So have I.”

“When?”
Ahmanet’s hand briefly drifted to Jenny’s stomach, touching the fabric covering her skin, right over the script inked into her abdomen. “When I… murdered you,” she seemed reluctant to actually speak the word, “and you died, Set stopped your soul from moving on to the afterlife. But to keep a soul from following the natural progression, it must be taken from its course and brought somewhere it cannot continue. In the case of Chris Vail, or Akar, their souls were returned to Earth. They are - or in Chris’ case, were - stuck here until someone with your future power over death will help them move on. In your case, your soul was captured by Set and drawn through the Veil into the realm of the gods so he could create your pact and trigger your ascension. Similarly, during my ascension, Set briefly took my soul across as well for similar purposes.”

“Huh,” Jenny said again, for lack of other words. “So you died as well?”

Ahmanet nodded. “Yes. Power of the likes we possess comes at a cost. Mortals are not meant to possess it. To be able to wield it without literally disintegrating from the force of it, we have to be pushed beyond humanity.”

“Beyond my strength and inability to feel pain, I don’t feel inhuman, though.”

“Physically, you are not inhuman, for the most part. I meant we had to be pushed beyond the spiritual bounds of humanity. Magic is rooted in the soul and life force, not in the flesh.” Ahmanet continued to patiently explain, apparently not minding the questions. Jenny could, from the corner of her eyes, see Zara and Sahar listen closely as well. She was willing to bet they had never heard of any of this before either.

“So my body is mostly human,” Jenny summarized, “but my soul isn’t.”

“Correct.” Ahmanet agreed.

“Huh.” Jenny had been saying that a lot over the past few minutes, but she had a reason for it. Because the majority of what she was being told was mind-boggling, and Jenny had some trouble taking it all in. Until a few minutes ago, she’d had no idea that there even was something called ambient magic, and she’d definitely hadn’t known that the world had an immediate environment.

Did it surround just the Earth, or actually the entire universe with everything in it? Was it tangible? If someone managed to look past the edge of the universe, would they be able to see the Veil? But no, Ahmanet had said it didn’t exist in the material world. And she’d said it was everywhere and nowhere at once. Jenny honestly didn’t know enough to have an answer, or even enough to understand more than the bare basics she’d just been told about.

She glanced at Ahmanet. “When I was searching for you, I found out that you were… incapacitated by the priests of Osiris only days after your ascension. How do you know all this?”

Ahmanet grimaced. “I spent 5000 years with nothing but my own thoughts for company, my love. The mercury dampened my powers, enough to keep me trapped and to wither my body, but my mind was always active. Always searching for a way out, a visitor to my tomb to nudge into freeing me.” She threw Jenny a soft, fond look. “But that still left me with an eternity alone. Mercury is good at dampening powers, but even the amount used to imprison me was not enough to fully Deaden them. I spent a large amount of time trying to reach through the mercury and tap into ambient magic to help free me. Obviously, I did not succeed, as you had to free me instead, but I did glean a lot of insight into the nature of magic, and the nature of ascension.”

Jenny was both impressed and kind of horrified. She’d thought - or maybe hoped, although she’d known in her gut already that it had been in vain - that Ahmanet had slept through the millennia. To hear that she’d been aware all that time, stuck alone in the darkness, unable to move or speak to
anyone—Jenny shuddered at the thought of it. Being stuck like that sounded horrific. She’d honestly rather be dead.

“If you wish,” Ahmanet continued after a second, apparently oblivious to Jenny’s thought process, “I could teach you to sense the Veil. It is the first step to tapping into it. Perhaps magic that does not take from your life force directly will feel… safer to you, after what happened.”

“I would really appreciate that,” Jenny responded. “Will I be able to tap into that to heal as well? Because I would like to learn how to heal people.”

The Pharaoh frowned a little. “Is this because of that woman this morning?”

Maybe a little, Jenny had to admit— the woman’s grief left an impression to be sure. But, beyond that, Jenny liked the idea of healing. She liked the idea of being able to help people rather than hurt them. She still felt somewhat guilty for killing Akar, and having Akar harm the priests of Osiris and Nick. And even if she didn’t feel as guilty as she should, Jenny knew she’d be much happier if she healed rather than harmed.

“Partly,” she admitted to Ahmanet, “but mostly I want to be able to help if someone I care for gets hurt. Plus,” she added, when Ahmanet looked doubtful, “it might help if the Queen of Egypt is capable or returning people to life.”

That caught Ahmanet’s attention. “I was under the impression you didn’t want to be Queen.”

“I don’t,” Jenny said, “I’m still an archaeologist at heart. But I don’t want to leave either, and besides, it’s not like I actually have to do much in the way of ruling. I’ll leave that to you.” Jenny had absolutely no interest in ruling a country. She’d be perfectly happy if she got her hands on, like, a laptop with a word processor, a sketch pad and some pencils, and could spend her time documenting the palace and the old ways of life that still permeated it. She could write whole books on this place and be perfectly happy doing so.

Ahmanet didn’t look entirely happy with that answer, but nodded regardless, then changed the subject. “The diplomacy books you requested were brought in this morning. I’ve also set aside an office for you, next to mine, and I have found you a tutor.”

“Sounds good,” Jenny responded.

“If you wish, you can start lessons tomorrow.” Ahmanet continued. “I was in the process of finding you a suitable tutor for your lessons in magic, but I do not know of anyone who can tap into the Veil like we can. So I have decided I will teach you myself, if that is alright with you.”

That had Jenny perking up a little. That sounded like a very good idea indeed. So far, she’d been more than a little impressed with Ahmanet’s knowledge on the matter, and with how she explained things so a total newbie like Jenny could actually understand it. “I would like that very much, Ahmanet.”

At that, the Pharaoh’s shoulders dropped a little in relief. She moved a little closer to press a quick kiss to Jenny’s cheek. “I am glad. Perhaps after dinner, one hour daily?”

Jenny nodded, happily agreeing to that. “Sounds like a deal to me.”

Ahmanet briefly glanced up at the sun. “It is nearing lunchtime. Are you hungry?”

“A little,” Jenny responded. She wasn’t overly hungry, but she did feel like having some fruit. “What kinds of fruit does the palace have?”
Ahmanet paused and glanced over at Zara and Sahar questioningly.

"The kitchens were restocked the day before yesterday, Your Majesty," Sahar responded, "The servants should have brought a variety of fruits. I believe dates, figs, pineapples, various types of melon, prickly pear and pomegranate, amongst others, were included."

Jenny felt her mouth water a little at the mention of pineapple and pomegranate. She loved those fruits. They were some of her favourites.

"Go to find a servant. Tell them to run to the kitchens and have the cooks prepare a variety of fruits for lunch."

Sahar gave a quick bow and ran off to find a servant.

Ahmanet offered Jenny her arm again. "Care to join me for lunch?"

"Of course," Jenny responded, tucking her hand back into the crook of Ahmanet’s elbow.

"After lunch there is a service in the temple," Ahmanet said as they walked, "but considering your reaction to Set’s presence, you are excused if you do not wish to attend."

Jenny, who had started getting nervous at the mention of the temple, tried not to sigh too obviously in relief. "If Aaheru doesn’t mind…"

"I assure you he does not."

"Then I think I will skip today," Jenny said. She didn’t want to end up offending Set, though, because that sounded like a radically bad idea. "But perhaps you can make a small sacrifice in my name?"

"I will," Ahmanet responded.

"Maybe a couple of the flowers I healed," she suggested as the Pharaoh led her back into the castle and out of the burning sun.

The Pharaoh shook her head. "The flowers have already been selected for something else, I am afraid. I shall light some incense and offer some fruit for you."

"What are my jasmine blossoms being used for, then?" Jenny asked curiously.

"That, my Chosen, is a surprise. You will see soon."

Jenny tried not to gape unattractively as Ahmanet winked - actually fucking winked - at her, a small amused grin on her face. That woman had already been the death of her, Jenny thought as she walked through the hallways on the arm of her murderer, and it wouldn’t surprise her if Ahmanet ended up being the death of her again. In a metaphorical manner. Obviously.
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Jenny goes to visit Chris (against Ahmanet's wishes) and demands to know what Ahmanet is determined to keep secret from her. She does not like what she learns. At all.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! So here’s the next chapter; a couple of hours later than usual, I will admit, but my immune system has decided to commit mutiny and abandon me, so I’m sick. Again. Good thing I'm a couple of chapters ahead, or there probably wouldn't be one today at all!

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

At lunch, Jenny very much enjoyed a plate of fresh diced pineapple, watermelon, grapes and pomegranate seeds with mint leaves shredded into it, all tossed into a rather wonderful fruit salad that really did hit the spot. Jenny hadn’t even known how much she’d been craving a good piece of fruit until the first bite of pineapple had entered her mouth.

Ahmanet had a spicy kind of soup with bits of chicken in it that smelled delicious, but didn’t satisfy Jenny the way the fruit had. She finished the small bowl she’d served herself anyway, because it would be a pity to have to throw it away, but stuck to just fruit after that. Especially the pineapple. Jenny loved pineapple.

Then, once lunch was over, Ahmanet pressed a kiss to the corner of Jenny’s mouth (making Jenny blush wildly) and excused herself to attend the service at the temple (Jenny wasn’t even sure how many services she went to on a daily basis, but it was probably more than one), leaving Jenny with Zara and Sahar for company.

‘‘Do you know where the office Ahmanet spoke of is?’’

‘‘Yes, Your Highness,’’ Zara responded. ‘‘We received directions this morning, from the servant in charge of cleaning and tidying it.’’

‘‘I would like to see it,’’ Jenny said.

‘‘Of course.’’

Zara and Sahar led Jenny to her new office without much fuss. It was fairly close to her and Ahmanet’s quarters, and, as Ahmanet had told her, right next to the Pharaoh’s office. It was much, much bigger than Jenny’s old office at Prodigium. Probably as big as the living room back at the quarters, which made it not just big, but outrageously big. Likely the biggest office Jenny had ever seen in her life.
The walls were the same honeyed colour as at the royal quarters, and the floor had several thick rugs. One of them was under the desk, which was huge and made of pale wood, with designs carved into the legs and the top smooth but inlaid with patterns. It had an equally huge but comfy-looking chair for Jenny to sit in, also wood but cushioned generously. A couple of smaller chairs were set in front of the desk.

In the middle of the room, closer to the doors, was a seating arrangement of couches and chairs, with side tables between the seats and an intricately made firebowl which already had a gentle flame crackling in it, somehow without producing smoke. Apart from the furnishing and the rugs on the floor, as well as a series of shelves on the walls for storage purposes and a low cabinet that had several bottles with drinks and crystal glasses, the office was left mostly bare, ready to be personalized.

"Is it to your liking, Your Highness?" Sahar asked.

Jenny nodded, gazing at the patterns woven into the rugs. "Yes. I like it very much."

"I'm sure Her Majesty will be pleased," Zara demurred.

Jenny gave an absent nod as she walked over to the desk to inspect it closer. There was a pile of books carefully stacked on one corner, each boasting contents about diplomacy, mediation and negotiation. Some about politics, too. Also on the desk were some basic office supplies, though they were fancier versions from what Jenny was used to. The paper, of which there was more in one of the drawers when Jenny checked, was thick and creamy in colour and soft to the touch. The kind that was sold at ridiculous prices for a piece of paper. A set of fountain pens was present, too, that looked so expensive Jenny was almost afraid to touch them. There were equally pricy pencils complete with sharpeners and erasers, and, in case Jenny didn’t want to use a fountain pen, a honest-to-Set dip pen with what was probably the most luxurious inkwell in existence.

Honestly, the sight of the paper and pens made Jenny itch with the desire to sit down and start writing about everything she’d seen so far. To document the archaeological marvel she was currently standing in as if she hadn’t dreamed of this since she was a child.

"Your Highness, would you like something to drink?"

"Just some water," Jenny said absently as she sat down in her chair. It was as comfortable as it looked. She ran her hands over the polished surface of the desk. It was perfectly smooth. But under the varnish was an intricate, extensive pattern of lotuses and water lilies, carved deeply into the pale wood and then filled up with something even paler and whiter. Almost like a very pale marble, or maybe something along the lines of bone. Either way, it was beautiful. That, and people around here really appreciated flowers.

Zara carefully placed a glass of water on the desk, using a coaster she’d apparently found in the drinks cabinet to stop rings from forming on the lacquered wood. Then, after making sure Jenny didn’t need anything else, she joined Sahar near the door, where, to Jenny’s faint surprise, a set of two chairs had been placed apparently specifically for their use.

Jenny took a sip of her water, noted that it had some lemon in it, and then gathered herself a small stack of paper and one of the fountain pens. Then, feeling more like an archaeologist than she had in a while, she set to carefully documenting her impressions and observations of the palace so far, describing it in as much detail as she could remember off the top of her head and making a mental note to explore more thoroughly soon.

For a while, the only sounds in the study were the soft noises of pen scratching against paper and
people breathing. As Jenny wrote, she found her mind wandering to the dungeons, where she knew Chris and the woman from this morning were both held. It also reminded her that Ahmanet had asked her not to see Chris unless she was with Jenny. Something about that had Jenny a little suspicious. There was no real reason for Ahmanet to forbid Jenny from seeing him alone. Not unless something was being hidden from Jenny. Something Ahmanet obviously did not want Jenny to know, and which Chris did know and would be able to tell her about.

Maybe she was just being paranoid, but Jenny was sure there was more to it than Ahmanet fearing Chris would be able to talk Jenny into releasing him. It wasn’t like Jenny had the keys to the cell anyway, and though she could probably rip the bars straight out of the floor, it would make too big a mess and instantly alert everyone to what she was doing to boot.

No, there was something else, and Jenny was, for some reason, being kept in the dark about it.

Jenny didn’t like being kept in the dark.

She was curious by nature. Especially when something involved her. Then she was really curious. And usually quick to find out what was going on, and why she wasn’t allowed to know about it. Which meant she was going to have to visit Chris, without Ahmanet there to stop him from saying what she didn’t want Jenny to know.

The only problem, Jenny thought as she thoughtfully tapped the nib of her fountain pen against her sheet of paper, leaving little blotches of ink behind, was that she had a set of shadows in the shape of Zara and Sahar, who followed her everywhere she went. And Jenny had a feeling that, if asked, they would tell Ahmanet everything she wanted to know about Jenny’s activities.

That was inconvenient.

Going into the dungeons to talk to Chris would be going directly against Ahmanet’s wishes, and that was something Jenny wasn’t exactly eager for the Pharaoh to find out about. At least not until Jenny had gotten some answers.

Then again, Zara and Sahar were Jenny’s handmaidens, weren’t they? Presumably, that meant they’d listen if Jenny told them to do something, or, as was the case, not to do something. Well, it was worth a try.

“Zara, Sahar,” Jenny capped her pen and laid it aside, looking up from her ink-splotched paper.

The two young women were in front of her desk in seconds. “Your Highness?”

“You are supposed to obey my orders, correct?”

Sahar nodded. “Yes, Your Highness. Your word is our law.”

Jenny tried not to grimace at that - the fact that she was taking advantage of the fact they’d been raised to serve her left a bad taste in her mouth. She was a terrible person. Nevertheless, she ploughed on. “Does that include keeping my secrets?”

Zara looked faintly horrified at the very implication of spilling Jenny’s secrets. “Of course, Your Highness. We would never betray you.”

Jenny took her on her word; she was counting that Zara and Sahar’s upbringing would ensure their compliance, even if taking advantage of that made her feel a little sick. “Good. Here’s the situation. Ahmanet has asked me not to speak to Chris without her presence. And the reason she gave me isn’t good enough. It’s a weak argument at best. This makes me think Chris knows something that
Ahmanet does not want me to know...’’ Jenny trailed off, making it obvious where she was going with this as she eyed her handmaidens critically, searching for hints of unease.

Sahar looked a little anxious. ‘’She’s the Pharaoh, Your Highness...’’

’’That does not give her the right to keep secrets from me,’’ Jenny retorted. It probably did, though, but Jenny decided to ignore that. She was pretty sure Chris didn’t know any vital state secrets or anything, and since whatever it is Ahmanet was hiding probably involved Jenny, she figured she had the right to know. It was her life, after all. Forasmuch as it wasn’t bound to Set, anyway. But that was another detail Jenny was happily going to ignore for now.

Instead, she pinned Zara and Sahar with a cold look. ‘’Can I trust you not to spill to Ahmanet if she asks?’’

For a moment, she thought they were going to refuse, if the fidgeting and anxiousness was anything to go by, but then Zara’s shoulder slumped and Sahar bowed her head.

’’Yes, Your Highness.’’

’’We will not say anything, even if Her Majesty asks.’’

’’Good,’’ Jenny breathed a small sigh of relief. At least she didn’t have to worry about Zara and Sahar reporting to Ahmanet behind her back.

’’Her Majesty will want to know why we cannot tell her, though, Your Highness,’’ Zara said. Then she quickly added, ’’If she asks, of course.’’

Jenny frowned. That was true. Ahmanet was not the most trusting of persons. She’d be suspicious if Zara and Sahar just told her Jenny had ordered them to keep silent. She needed an excuse for them to give Ahmanet. ’’Hmmmmm...’’

’’Perhaps,’’ Sahar ventured hesitantly, ’’we could just tell Her Majesty that you spent your afternoon here in the office, writing and reading your books.’’

’’The guards at the dungeons would report our presence, though,’’ Zara responded.

’’They won’t if you order them not to, Your Highness,’’ Sahar said to Jenny, glancing at Zara.

Jenny’s frown eased a little. ’’And you’re sure they won’t report that either?’’

’’Not unless Her Majesty asks them directly if you visited, or if anything was out of the ordinary,’’ Sahar admitted.

Zara nodded in agreement. ’’You are the Queen, Your Highness, but Her Majesty is the Pharaoh. Her word, unfortunately, weighs more heavily than yours. Not to mention the palace guards are part of the royal army, of which the Pharaoh is the highest commander.’’

’’They will obey you,’’ Sahar added, ’’but only for as long as it does not conflict with the orders the Pharaoh gave them.’’

Well, that was inconvenient. Not unexpected, but still. There wasn’t much Jenny could do to change that, though. She’d just have to hope that Ahmanet hadn’t told the guards to inform her if Jenny went to speak with Chris without her presence. It was a risk she had little choice in taking, unless she decided to let sleeping dogs lie - and Jenny was way too stubborn for that. She wanted something, and by Set, she was going to get it.
And besides, it was about time she stopped acting like a doormat anyway. She’d let Ahmanet take charge since she’d arrived, and so far, a lot of decisions that Jenny didn’t agree with had been made. Notably Chris’ life sentence on reduced rations. That was something Jenny was absolutely not okay with. Plus that poor woman who’d been imprisoned for asking Jenny to save her son’s life. And also Ahmanet’s refusal to acknowledge the fact that the modern world worked differently from the world she’d grown up in.

Jenny liked Ahmanet, she really did, but she was not okay with sitting around while the Pharaoh provoked the world into nuking Egypt off the map. It wouldn’t do much to be Pharaoh, or Queen for that matter, if there was nothing to rule over.

Going to talk with Chris was, in comparison, a small rebellion, but Jenny had to start somewhere. And it did count as going against Ahmanet’s direct wishes. Jenny just needed to build up a little momentum, strengthen her spine a little, build up the nerve to actually go against the woman who had murdered her.

She didn’t really think Ahmanet would hurt her if she did - beyond the whole murder-incident, Ahmanet had repeatedly insisted Jenny was beyond important to her. She’d been nothing but gentle and considerate and protective. But a small, traitorous part, though it grew smaller every day and every time Ahmanet kissed her or said something sweet, could not forget the sight of burning amber pupula duplex hunting her down and a long, cruel dagger coming down and plunging into her heart without mercy. It was, considering her experiences, not an unfounded fear - it was, in fact, a very realistic fear, considering it had actually happened to her.

Jenny was not afraid to admit that she feared Ahmanet’s anger more than just about anything. Yet here she was, planning to purposely piss her off by disobeying her request. Somehow she had a feeling this wasn’t going to end up going well.

“Right,” Jenny said after a minute of thinking. “We’ll just have to take the risk.” She took in her handmaidens’ anxious faces. “And if necessary, I’ll take the fall,” she assured them, “I won’t let Ahmanet, or anyone else, take the consequences out on you two, okay?”

That seemed to be enough to take some of their anxiety away. Although there was a hint of guilt in their demeanours now, as if they felt bad at the very idea of letting Jenny take the fall for them. Jenny figured they were probably more scared of Ahmanet’s displeasure than they were of hers, though, so they’d obey her and let Jenny talk to Ahmanet should it get to that point. Which, honestly, it probably would.

Well, then.

There was no reason to put this off. Time to get to it. Jenny gathered her courage and stood up from her way too comfortable desk chair. “Let’s go.”

“Now, Your Highness?”

“Yes,” Jenny responded. “Now.”

She had to do it now, before she lost whatever courage she’d managed to muster. She was already shaking in her sandals as it was, sweat gathering in her palms. If she waited, she’d chicken out.

Zara and Sahar exchanged anxious looks, but followed Jenny out of the study anyway. Jenny felt nerves gathering in her stomach as she stalked down the hallways in the direction of the dungeons, leaving a cold, tight ball of tension in her stomach. By the time she reached the stairs into the dungeons, a minute or two of walking later, her hands were shaking so hard she had to clench them
into fists so no one would see.

At the top of the stairs was a door with two guards. Jenny drew herself up to her full height, tried to look as Queenly as possible, and hoped to Set that Ahmanet hadn’t ordered the guards to keep Jenny out of the dungeons. ‘‘Guards. I’d like to visit the dungeons.’’

‘‘Of course, Your Highness.’’ One of the men pulled a key out of a pocket and spent a moment unlocking the door. Then he pulled it open and stepped aside, wordlessly giving Jenny access. Jenny fought to stop her knees from buckling in relief, somehow managing to give the guards a nod of thanks as she walked past them. The other guards at the other doors on the stairs gave them no trouble either, and it was all Jenny could do to stay upright in relief when her feet hit the floor of the dungeons.

Honestly, that had gone much more smoothly than she had imagined.

The head warden, apparently on duty, quickly made his way over. ‘‘Your Highness, how may I help you?’’

‘‘I’m here to speak to a prisoner,’’ Jenny said, inwardly wincing at having to call Chris a prisoner when he really shouldn’t be one.

‘‘There are only two prisoners at this time, Your Highness,’’ the head warden said.

‘‘I already know where to find the one I wish to speak with,’’ Jenny responded. ‘‘I will call for you if I have need of you.’’

‘‘As you wish, Your Highness.’’ The head warden bowed his head in acquiescence.

‘‘Thank you,’’ Jenny said, stalking past him. ‘‘Zara, Sahar, I’d like to speak to him alone. Remain here, please.’’

The two stopped following her immediately at the order, returning to the stairs to stand against the wall besides them.

Jenny nervously made her way to the cells all the way at the far end of the dungeon. Chris was lying on his cot again, staring at the ceiling, looking exhausted. A plate of uneaten food sat on the floor near the bars. It hadn’t been touched. Half-rations, Jenny noted, really were half-rations. The amount of bread, cheese and the little bit of meat on the plate, as well as the cup of water, would have sustained a person, but wouldn’t have filled them up. They wouldn’t quite have starved, but they’d have started to feel the gnaw of hunger very soon indeed. It was a kind of torture all by itself.

Jenny cleared her throat to catch Chris’ attention. ‘‘Chris.’’

He looked up at the sound of her voice, eyes widening as he spotted her on the other side of the bars. ‘‘Jenny!’’

‘‘How are you?’’

Chris got up and hurried over to the bars, reaching through them to grasp Jenny’s hand. ‘‘I’m so glad to see you.’’

Jenny smiled sadly. ‘‘Are you feeling any better?’’

‘‘Honestly?’’ He sighed tiredly. ‘‘Not really. Are you getting me out of here?’’
“I’m working on it,” Jenny said. “Technically I’m not even supposed to be here, talking to you.”

Chris frowned. “What?”

“Ahmanet doesn’t want me talking to you on my own.” Jenny rolled her eyes. “Obviously, I disagree.”

“Damn. Is she trying to isolate me, or something? Hoping I’d break more easily if I were alone?”

“Apparently she’s afraid you’ll talk me into letting you out of your cell,” Jenny responded.

“Will you?”

“I haven’t the key. And ripping the bars out of the floor or bending them would make so much noise the guards would instantly know what I was doing.”

Chris brightened a little. “So if you could, you would?”

Jenny shrugged. “It’s not as if you actually belong behind bars, Chris. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Thanks, Jenny. I appreciate that.” Chris managed a wan smile. “Nice crown, by the way.”

“Thanks,” she responded dryly.

“Why are you here anyway, if you’re not allowed to be? Don’t get in trouble over me, Jenny,” Chris warned, “you know as well as I do what Ahmanet is capable of.”

“I’m not planning for her to find out,” Jenny said. “And if she does, she won’t hurt me.”

“How do you know for sure?”

“Trust me,” Jenny said, almost one-hundred percent sure she was right, “she won’t.”

“Alright…” he obviously didn’t believe her if his expression was anything to go by. Still, he humoured her. “Anyway… you were going to tell me why you came, right?”

“Alright,” Jenny sighed, “so here’s the thing. Ahmanet is hiding something from. And I think that you somehow know what she’s hiding from me. That’s why she doesn’t want me to see you on my own, so she can control what you tell me.” She pinned Chris with a hard look, noticing the way he had frozen, a clear ‘oh shit’-expression on his face. “Tell me what you two are hiding.”

“Jenny, are you su-” he started.

“Chris. Tell me.”

“You really don’t want to know. Trust me.”

Jenny gritted her teeth and insisted, “Tell. Me.”

Chris stared at her, face pale, but his eyes were glittering feverishly. “Are you sure? Because you’re not gonna like it.”

Apprehension boiled in Jenny’s stomach, causing some tension in her shoulders. Still, she determinedly ploughed on. She didn’t care what it was, she wanted to know. She had the right to know. “Tell me.”
The sigh Chris let out was a deep, exhausted one. “I guess you deserve to know. Do you remember the first time I spoke to you after my death? After the plane crash?”

Jenny nodded. It was hard to forget seeing Chris that first time, in the pub, waving at her so they could talk in the bathroom where no one could hear. “Yeah. What about it?”

He ran a hand through his hair agitatedly. “You… you weren’t the first person I talked to after I died.”

“I know that. You came to warn me that Ahmanet was coming for me. I never doubted you’d spoken to her to know that.” Jenny responded. It was rather obvious Chris had had contact with Ahmanet at that point, if not voluntarily.

“Yeah…” Chris said, “what you probably don’t know, though, is that she made me an offer.”

The first hints of suspicion were starting to brew in Jenny’s brain. “An offer?”

“She… she said that… she said that if I spied on you, told her where you were going and what you were doing…” he messed up his hair even more, unshed tears in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Jenny. She promised me she’d help me move on to the afterlife if I helped her. So I agreed.”

Something cold was growing in Jenny’s stomach. “In London?”

“I did go to Prodigium,” Chris admitted. “I know I told you I’d never been there. I lied. While you were still unconscious from the forest. I loosened her restraints and sabotaged the pumps they were going to use to introduce mercury into her system. Then I told her where the armories were so she could destroy them. And I gave her directions to your apartment, in case you ran there to hide from her.”

Jenny swallowed thickly. There was a lump in her throat the size of a golf ball. That cold spot in her stomach felt like someone had switched out her stomach acid with dry ice. “At the tomb?”

“I told her you were there,” Chris nodded defeatedly, “as well as everything you were doing. All the information you uncovered. The number of Prodigium troops you had with you. When you left, I informed her where you were going.”

“And in Cairo?” Jenny was starting to feel numb, like she was going into shock. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Her head was pounding. Or maybe it was the roar of her own heartbeat in her ears. Her hands were shaking again, but not from nervousness.

“…I lied when I told you it was safe to run. I knew Ahmanet and her troops were there. I was the one who told her you’d be there that day. I even helped her plan the ambush.”

Jenny’s voice was barely more than a hoarse whisper. “Chris…”

“You died, Jenny, because of me. Because I told her where to find you, who was guarding you, what the best ways were to ambush you and get you alone. And then I manipulated you, used your trust in me to get you to abandon Nick and the others. I handed you to her on a silver platter.” His voice broke and he rested his head against the bars. Tears dripped down his face. “All because she made me a promise she never meant to keep.” He gave her an anguished, pleading stare. “I’m sorry, Jenny… I’m so sorry…”

The floor fell away from under her. Numbly, Jenny sank to her knees, her legs unable to support her anymore as she stared at the man she’d called her friend. The last of the people she used to know who she’d thought she could trust. Who she had trusted to never betray her. But he had. He had.
He’d betrayed her, like Nick had betrayed her, like Henry had betrayed her - like everyone she gave a damn about had betrayed her.

It wasn’t until a sob tore from her throat that Jenny realized she was crying. Sobbing, really, in a way that made her nose leak and her makeup run.

“I’m sorry,” Chris whispered, having sunk to his knees also. “Please, Jenny, I’m sorry…”

Jenny didn’t react. She barely even heard him. She was too occupied with the realization that her last friend had never really been her friend at all, too busy trying to fight through the tearing pain it caused in her chest to pay attention to what Chris was doing. Because it hurt. It hurt like hell to be betrayed like that. As bad as it had hurt when Nick had turned against her, and when Henry had turned against her. Like something was trying to rip her heart out of her chest, straight through her ribs.

“Hey!” Chris yelled loudly enough to get through to Jenny, but he wasn’t talking to her. “Guards? Guards! Some help over here?”

There was a sudden rush of hasty footsteps. Then a familiar voice - Sahar, Jenny realized faintly.

“Your Highness!” She thumped to her knees beside Jenny, hands fluttering around Jenny’s shoulders as if she wasn’t sure it was alright to touch, a frantic expression on her face. “Your Highness? Please, what is wrong?”

Zara glared poisonously at Chris. “What did you tell her?”

Jenny stared blankly at him as his face contorted in regret, his eyes and cheeks still raw and wet with tears.

“The truth,” he said hollowly. “The truth that Ahmanet did not want her to know.”

Ahmanet.

Jenny blinked slowly as that bit filtered through her muddy thoughts. Ahmanet had known about this. Had, in fact, not just known, but had been the one to suggest it in the first place. Chris had done all this because Ahmanet had dangled a fake promise over his head to make him do her bidding. This was Chris’ fault - but more than that, it was Ahmanet’s fault. She was the one who had turned Jenny’s friend against her. And then she’d tried to make sure Jenny would never find out about it.

Fury began to rise in her throat like bile.

Somehow, Jenny managed to find her voice. “Zara, Sahar, we’re going back to the royal quarters. Send a servant to fetch the Pharaoh.”

“Your Highness?” Zara asked hesitantly.

Jenny scowled as she labored to her feet. “Ahmanet and I have to have a talk. In private.”
Zara and Sahar were silent as ghosts the entire way back to the royal quarters. The few people lingering in the hallways, servants and other residents, scurried away the moment they caught sight of Jenny stalking down the hallway, her dishevelled appearance only making her furious scowl look more frightening. She knew that she was scaring Zara and Sahar, it seeped off them like an invisible fog of quiet fright, but she couldn’t find it in herself to care right now. She was too angry.

“Don’t come in until I call for you,” Jenny ground through clenched teeth as they arrived at her quarters. Then, glaring at the guards, she added, “don’t let anyone but Ahmanet in until I say you can.”

She barely heard her handmaidens and the somewhat pale guards hastily agree (as if they had a choice right now) as she stalked into the living room, slamming the door behind her hard enough to make the hinges rattle and a bit of dust come down from the ceiling, the wood of the doors denting and cracking under her fingertips. She may have lost control over her strength a little there. She did not care enough to check the damage.

Too riled up to sit and wait for Ahmanet to arrive, Jenny started to pace the living room. Fifteen steps, turn, fifteen steps, turn, repeat. Ten, twenty, thirty times, fists clenched at her sides, teeth grinding as she glared at the floor. It was all she could do not to smash a chair against the wall - or just punch the walls themselves. With how she felt right now, she was sure she’d smash out entire chunks of stone and leave craters where her fists would impact the stone.

Restraining herself took more effort than she would have liked, but the result was intact furniture and undamaged walls, so that was at least something.

Finally, the doors swung open again.

Jenny whirled around. Ahmanet stepped inside, the doors closing softly behind her, looking caught somewhere between worry and confusion. Jenny felt the fury, which had had yet to abate, rise again at the sight of her, clogging her throat with the force of it.

“Jenn-”
“Sit.” Jenny interrupted sharply, pointing at the couch. It was a small miracle she wasn’t screaming yet.

Ahmanet blinked. “What is wrong, my love?”

Jenny gritted her teeth, struggling to stop herself from marching over and making Ahmanet sit. “I swear to God if you do not sit down right now, I will walk out of here and not come back.”

She meant it, too. She’d walk right of this damn palace and all the way back to Luxor, if she had to.

Ahmanet sat. Her eyes were wide and she stared at Jenny as if she’d been podpeople. Probably because she’d never expected Jenny to talk to her like that.

Jenny stared (glared, really, her gaze almost burning holes into her target) back, breathing heavily through her nose as she tried to get her temper under control. “When,” she finally managed, after almost an entire minute of strained silence, “exactly were you going to tell me that you coerced Chris into leading me to my death?”

Ahmanet froze. It was one of the first shows of discomfort and apprehension Jenny had ever seen on her. It did not garner any sympathy.

“Well?!” Jenny snapped aggressively when Ahmanet failed to respond. She wanted answers, dammit! And damn if she was going to get them!

Ahmanet’s shoulders fell a little, some resignation seeping into her expression. “You were not supposed to find out about that, my love.”

Jenny felt a snarl grow on her face. Her chest felt like it was filled with magma, unbearably, searing hot, burning her from the inside out. Scorching at the inside of her ribs. Inexplicably, the idea of Ahmanet lying to her almost hurt more than Chris’ betrayal. She was supposed to be Ahmanet’s chosen, had been told by Ahmanet herself that she was one of the most important things in Ahmanet’s life - but she was not important enough to be told the truth? That stung. It really did. Especially when Jenny herself had told her the truth about Nick, and about Henry, knowing full well what Ahmanet’s reaction to them would be. She’d sold out someone she’d considered her friend and someone she’d thought of as a sort of father figure, and yet Ahmanet had lied to her about something of equal importance.

To say Jenny was furious was an understatement.

Glaring, she let her side of the link fall open, shoving her emotions across it. She felt viciously vindicated when Ahmanet flinched at the sudden burst of hurt-anger-betrayal-why? that travelled across the link. It took her a minute or two to gather herself enough to be able to talk without screaming. Ahmanet, much to Jenny’s relief, wisely kept her mouth shut.

Finally she managed to find her voice again. “You were just going to hide the fact that Chris betrayed me forever? That you coerced my friend - the one person I thought had not abandoned me,” Jenny’s voice cracked a little, and she could feel tears burning in her eyes at the thought of her last friend having abandoned her too, “into turning against me?”

The Pharaoh had never looked smaller, hunched into herself on the couch, flinching at every burst of feedback spilling across the link from her end. She said nothing.

Instantly enraged again at the lack of answers, Jenny clenched her fists hard enough that her nails sliced deeply into the flesh of her palms. If she’s still been able to feel pain, it would have hurt.

“Answer me!”
Finally, Ahmanet shook her head, regaining some of her poise as she looked Jenny straight in the eye. “I would have eventually.”

There was a lump in Jenny’s throat, making it feel like she was choking on something, not quite enough air entering her lungs. “When?! After Chris dies of old age?!”

“...I did not plan for you to find out in some time,” Ahmanet admitted after a couple of seconds of silence.

“So, what? You were just going to lie to me for an indefinite amount of time?!” Yes, Ahmanet lying to her definitely hurt more than Chris’ betrayal. And damn if she didn’t hate that right now.

Ahmanet opened her mouth to say something that would probably only make Jenny angrier, then frowned and took in Jenny’s expression before visibly changing her mind. “I apologize, Jennifer. I only wished to spare you the upset. I never meant to make you angry.”

“Angry?!” Jenny scoffed, “Oh, I’m not angry, Ahmanet. I am fucking furious!”

“I apologize,” Ahmanet repeated.

“You damn well should, yes,” Jenny agreed through gritted teeth. The apologies did not make her feel better at all. She was too furious, a hot bubble of lava roiling in her ribcage, and right now, she knew that if Ahmanet was going to start spouting excuses and apologies everywhere, she was going to burst. Just looking at Ahmanet made her want to throw up. The memory of what she’d coerced Chris into doing, lying to him about peaceful passing to the afterlife to convince him to spy on Jenny and lead her to her death… She needed some time away from the Pharaoh. Because right now, Jenny really just wanted to hit Ahmanet. To cause her a fraction of the hurt and betrayal that flared in Jenny’s heart every time she thought back to Chris’ admission, the tears that seeped down his cheeks as he admitted his betrayal, the way his gaze had silently begged her for forgiveness. It was something Jenny didn’t think she could ever forgive. But Jenny was at her core not a violent person. The fact that she was on the brink of slapping the Pharaoh was enough for her to know she needed a break before she did something she would end up regretting.

Jenny took a deep breath, trying to ignore the roar of her racing heartbeat in her ears and pushing back tears of helpless anger. “I am going to go take a walk now,” she told Ahmanet, a touch of frost in her voice. “When I come back, I expect you to not be in this room. Because right now, I don’t want to see you.”

The expression of mixed shock, hurt and terror on Ahmanet’s face was hard to look at. She stood up from the couch swiftly, taking a few steps closer to Jenny before freezing in place when Jenny took a swift step back. “Please, my love…”

“Do not,” Jenny gritted out, “call me that right now.” The last thing she needed right now was to be reminded of the fact that, while Ahmanet apparently cared for her, she didn’t care enough to tell the damn truth. She wasn’t going to allow anyone to kick her while she was down.

Ahmanet flinched. “Jennifer, I never meant to hurt you like this. Please believe that.”

“I am going to take a walk now,” Jenny repeated, ignoring the request. She wasn’t sure she could believe anything that came out of Ahmanet’s mouth right now. Not meaning to hurt Jenny had not stopped her from shoving a dagger into her chest, or from hunting her down like a dog before that. Why would it matter now?

There were actual tears in Ahmanet’s eyes at the cold response. Her posture screamed defeat and
hurt, and it seeped across the link like ice cold water down Jenny’s spine. Jenny had a hard time caring about it.

“Will you at least allow me to sleep at your side tonight?”

“Probably not,” Jenny responded honestly.

“Of course,” the Pharaoh almost whispered. “If that is your wish.” She swallowed thickly. “I shan’t disturb you anymore today.”

“See that you don’t.” That said, Jenny stalked out of the room, not sparing the defeated woman another look as she slammed the door behind her. “Zara, Sahar. With me.”

They fell in line without a word. Deciding she wanted privacy, Jenny made her way to her study. Zara and Sahar were blessedly quiet even after arrival, the only noise they made the quiet glug of water being poured into a glass and the glass being put on Jenny’s desk. Then, deciding not to risk Jenny’s wrath, they took their seats near the door, still silent as the grave.

For a long time, Jenny just sat in her chair, elbows on her desk and resting her chin on her balled hands, trying to come to terms with what she’d just found out. There was a moment she felt a little faint, hands shaking as the adrenalin rush of standing up to Ahmanet seeped out of her system, leaving her exhausted and drained and feeling empty.

After that, the tears came.

Slow and quiet at first, just noiselessly dripping down Jenny’s cheeks before plopping onto the desk. Then, quicker and noisier until she was just sobbing helplessly into her hands, almost hyperventilating with the emotions tearing her apart from the inside out. It felt like she was falling apart all over again, like she’d done at the Temple of Osiris. Instead of Abdamelek, though, it was Zara and Sahar who stepped in to stop Jenny from breaking into a thousand little pieces. Their hesitance seemed to evaporate in the face of Jenny’s turmoil, and instead of cowering near the wall, they rushed forward to help.

It was probably only Sahar’s hands on her shoulders that stopped Jenny from sliding right off her chair and ending up on the floor. She had a habit of doing that, she thought faintly, falling off furniture when she was really upset.

She cried for an indeterminate amount of time, pouring out all her pain and anger and hurt, during which Zara and Sahar were never more than a foot away. Then, when Jenny finally managed to pull herself together enough to quiet her sobs to small, hiccupped snifflies, Zara had a glass of water ready for her, and Sahar had pulled a damp cloth out of seemingly nowhere and used it to gently clean the tears and ruined make-up from Jenny’s face. They said nothing, but just their presence was enough to keep Jenny from breaking apart again.

She sipped some water from the glass of water Zara handed her, wincing when swallowing it agitated her sore throat.

“I will have a servant bring some tea with honey,” Zara said softly upon spotting the wince. That sounded nice. Something warm and soothing would surely do wonders on her throat. And tea was always good for calming down. Jenny quickly nodded in agreement. Sahar discarded the now make-up stained cloth to the rubbish bin standing next to Jenny’s desk.

“Perhaps something to eat, too, Your Highness?”

Now that Sahar mentioned it, Jenny could go for something to eat too. “Something small,” she
responded, wincing again at the crack in her voice. She sounded raw and tired. She felt raw and
tired. But also lighter, as if the inside of her skin had been scrubbed clean.

"Of course," Zara responded, halfway to the door to fetch a servant. "Would you prefer something
hot?"

Jenny shook her head. "Cold is fine."

Zara nodded in understanding, slipping out of the door to speak with the servant stationed outside of
Jenny’s study for just these kinds of things.

"Have some more water," Sahar suggested as Zara slipped back into the room after speaking to the
servant. Jenny accepted the glass of water and took a few more sips. Much as it hurt to swallow, it
felt really good hitting her stomach. Hydrating was good, right now. She’d lost a lot of water in the
tears she’d spilled. If she didn’t drink plenty now, she’d have one hell of a headache later on from
dehydration.

It was silent for a while as Jenny sipped her water. Zara and Sahar were silent pillars of support
beside her, only moving to refill her glass, and when there was a knock on the door to receive a tray
with a plate of food and a cup of tea from a servant.

"It is jasmine tea, Your Highness, with honey," Sahar said as she placed the tray on the desk and
prepared the tea, adding a small dollop of honey from a small bowl of the stuff and stirring so it
would dissolve into the tea, "it should soothe your throat."

Jenny happily traded her glass of water in for the tea, sipping it carefully. It was hot, but not to the
point it would burn her mouth. As she sipped, she inspected the plate of food that had been brought
up. The traditional Egyptian flatbread, Aish Baladi, was present as it was at every meal. Also there
were some olives, some Domiati cheese, some quarters of fig and some more honey in another small
bowl to tie it all together.

Jenny was not in the mood to eat anything complicated. Taking the small knife from the cutlery
present, she used some of the bread, cheese and figs to throw together a quick sweet-savoury
sandwich. She chowed down on it in silence, chewing and swallowing mechanically, washing it
down with sips of tea. A bacon sarnie, she observed silently, would’ve been nicer right now, but this
was quite nice too. A bit fancy for a post-breakdown sandwich, though. This was a kind of sandwich
that, back in London, would’ve cost a small fortune at a fancy deli or something. They’d have
probably thrown something like fig molasses or fig balsamic on it as well, and called it ‘exotic’.

She finished her sandwich fairly quickly, finishing her tea with it, and let out a tired sigh, slumping a
little in her desk chair, reach up to take off her diadem and lay it on her desk. She was grateful it was
such a comfortable chair, or the position she was in wouldn’t have been comfy for long at all.

"Is there anything we can do?" Zara asked quietly.

Jenny gave another sigh, shaking her head. "No. I just need some quiet right now."

"Of course. Would you like us to leave?"

At the moment, Jenny honestly did not care either way, as long as her study ended up silent. She
made a half-dismissive gesture in lieu of a response. Zara and Sahar took it to mean that they could
retake their chairs near the door and sit in silence, which was just fine with Jenny.

She spent a moment just staring at her desk, not sure what to do with herself right now, before
deciding that, fuck it, she might as well start on those diplomacy books. She was probably going to
need some diplomacy skills sometime soon. Jenny was pretty sure she’d insulted Ahmanet more than a little in the past hour and a half. Not to mention royally pissed her off. And as good as it felt to let Ahmanet know she couldn’t walk all over Jenny and keep secrets from her, Jenny was also very much aware of the power the Pharaoh wielded. She was pretty sure Ahmanet wouldn’t harm her, but some diplomacy might come in handy regardless.

And if she didn’t end up using diplomacy on Ahmanet, she’d probably need it to talk all the many, many countries Ahmanet would probably end up insulting our outright threatening, into not declaring war on Egypt. Jenny would like to live in a country that didn’t have a smoking nuclear wasteland in its near future. Or a giant smoking crater where her home should be, probably also in the near future, if Henry got his way and decided to drop a bomb on the palace.

Although… could a bomb even kill her?

Jenny wasn’t actually entirely know what ascension meant for her life span and general mortality. She wasn’t invulnerable, far from it, but did that mean she’d die from the same damage as a regular human, or could she live through things that would kill a normal person? If someone stabbed her through the heart a second time, would she die? And even if she did die, would Set let her remain dead before she gave him his mortal avatar?

Damn.

Those were important questions, and the answers even more so. And she could hardly go find Ahmanet and ask her. Jenny had told her to not come near her for the rest of the day and stay away for the night as well. She needed to set boundaries, and it wouldn’t help her case if she went running to Ahmanet now that she was trying to show the woman that she couldn’t walk roughshod over Jenny. Instead, she took a sheet of paper and her fountain pen and spent a few moments writing down her questions so she wouldn’t forget them. Once things had calmed down a little, Jenny could get some answers to those questions.

Hopefully before Henry dropped a hellfire missile in the backyard and Jenny got to find out whether she could still die firsthand. That would probably suck. And also really ruin her day.

She finished penning down the questions and capped her fountain pen, laying it and the sheet of paper she’d been writing on aside. Then she turned her attention to the stack of books that had been left on her desk. There had to be a dozen of them at least, and Jenny, after a second of wondering where to start, just grabbed the first off the top. Appropriately, it was called ‘War and Diplomacy: Theory and Practise’. Whoever had gotten these books apparently knew which direction things were currently going in.

“Zara, another cup of tea, please,” Jenny said calmly as she opened her book.

“Of course, Your Highness,” Zara came forward to take the tray off her desk and then quickly hurried out of the study to go fetch Jenny some more tea. In the meantime Jenny sipped from her half-empty glass of water, glad for the cold to soothe her throat. And maybe some more fluids would also make the mild ache pounding in her temples go away.

By the time Zara returned carrying a tea service, Jenny was already a couple of pages deep into her book. It was dry subject matter, but it was better than spending her time regurgitating her argument with Ahmanet in her head, so Jenny didn’t mind if it was a little boring.
It was late in the afternoon by the time Jenny decided it was time to return to her quarters for dinner. Sahar had slipped away briefly an hour or two earlier to pass Jenny’s food preferences for the night to the kitchens so they knew in advance what to cook, and also to pick up something cold to drink. Jenny had to order her to get something for herself and Zara also to make sure they didn’t starve or dehydrate through the afternoon. Apparently they weren’t supposed to eat or drink in Jenny’s presence unless she permitted it, something about impoliteness - and also something they’d forgotten to mention. Jenny made sure to tell them they had blanket permission to eat whenever they were hungry and drink whenever they were thirsty, whether she was present or not. She wasn’t about to deny her handmaidens the basic necessities to live, fuck whoever had taught them they shouldn’t eat in front of Jenny unless expressly invited to.

Jenny had, through Sahar, asked the cooks to make her some Western-style comfort food (God knew she could use some, given the day she’d had), so when she entered the living room, which was void of any Pharaoh’s as Jenny had demanded, she found a dining table set up for her with no less than two of her favourite comfort dishes.

First was a large pizza, pepperoni and extra cheese just as she preferred it, and the second was pasta. Chicken fettuccine Alfredo, to be specific. Both were still steaming hot. Jenny had asked for only one of the two, but she wasn’t going to complain about getting both. There was a third plate, but that one was still covered by a cloche, and Zara informed her that that was dessert.

Jenny sat down in her chair eagerly, frowning a little when Zara and Sahar didn’t join her. There was a reason she’d asked for three places to be set rather than one like at breakfast earlier in the day.

“Sit down, you two. You’re having dinner with me.”

Since Jenny had already given them blanket permission, they barely protested, and even then it was more for show - it took them only seconds to take their seats. They did wait, though, for Jenny to have put a slice of pizza and some pasta on her plate before they reached out to fill their own plates.

They ate mostly in silence, and Jenny very much enjoyed her pizza and pasta. As much as she adored Egyptian and Middle-Eastern cuisine, sometimes some good old Western junk food couldn’t go amiss. Granted, this was very fancy, healthy, grease-free Western junk food that didn’t come in cardboard boxes, but still. The sentiment remained. And the fact that dessert turned out to be a truly decadent chocolate cake (how they’d done that in three hours Jenny did not know - maybe they’d already been planning it for tonight’s menu?) that was so rich she could barely finish half a slice made it even better.

Jenny went to bed fairly early. She had a quick wash in the bathroom, once again aided by Zara and Sahar, and dutifully brushed her teeth and hair, before slipping into a nightshirt and sliding into bed. Ahmanet, as promised, had stayed away. Jenny wasn’t sure where the Pharaoh was sleeping tonight, but it sure as hell wasn’t in the royal quarters.

Zara and Sahar quietly left as soon as Jenny was situated in bed, leaving only a small light on so the room wasn’t entirely pitch black. They’d be back in the morning, Jenny knew, probably before she was even awake, but as she laid alone in silence and darkness in a bed far too large for one person, she kind of wished they’d stayed.

She was too stubborn to call for them, though, and she sure as hell wasn’t going to cave and have a servant find Ahmanet for her so she had someone to cuddle with.

Feeling very lonely and sorry for herself, it took Jenny hours to fall asleep.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet make up. Kinda. Also, Jenny has demands, and Set help Ahmanet if she doesn't agree to them.

Chapter Notes

Alright, here's chapter 41. I'm currently a few chapters ahead, so no worries about the next couple of Saturdays. I'm also busy trying to map out the rest of the plot, but we'll get back to that later.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts.

She didn’t sleep well at all. Not only did it take ages to actually fall asleep, but when she finally got there, she couldn’t stay asleep for very long at all. When she did wake up, barely half an hour later, it didn’t take her long to realize that the emotions keeping her awake were not her own.

It was fairly obvious, since Jenny was mostly just tired, annoyed and a little lonely; the emotions she was sensing, though, were far more intense. A bottomless well of sadness spilled across the link, along with a small truckload of rejection, followed closely by fear and grief. A lovely cocktail that had Jenny choking back tears at the strength of it. It was hard not to cry when she felt like someone was ripping her heart from her chest, or like she’d just been rejected by the love of her life.

Which, essentially, was what Jenny had done early that afternoon.

And it was obvious Ahmanet was far from over it, or even calming down. From across the link, the Pharaoh felt like she was under the impression Jenny was about to walk out of the palace and leave forever. The feeling of rejection that came with that impression was immense.

Damn. That had not been Jenny’s intention. She’d wanted to let Ahmanet know she was not okay with how things were going, sure, and she’d genuinely been (and still was) furious about what she’d learned, but… Jenny had not been aiming to hurt Ahmanet like this. Okay, so maybe a tiny part of her had. Some bit of her, something small and guilty that she kept tucked away where it couldn’t see the light of day, was glad that Ahmanet got a taste of the terror and pain Jenny had gone through when Ahmanet had hunted her down and murdered her. But the rest of her, the vast majority that genuinely liked Ahmanet and felt safe in her presence, felt so very guilty for it.

Jenny was not ready to let Ahmanet back into her bed. But she could try to make her feel a little less awful. She concentrated on the link. Manipulating it had come almost instinctively when she’d been so angry, but it was harder now that she was actively thinking on how to use it. It took far more effort, for one. Frowning in concentration, tears drawn out by Ahmanet’s emotions drying on her face, Jenny shoved a dose of assurance in Ahmanet’s direction.

It was not an invitation for Ahmanet to join her in the royal quarters. It was a wordless promise that
Jenny wouldn’t run away, and she was willing to sit down and talk this out so they could move on from it.

The wave of relief that crashed over Jenny in return had her in tears for a second time in half an hour, and for the fourth time the last twenty-four hours. She really had been crying way too much lately. Four times in twenty-four hours was excessive. It was something Jenny did not appreciate. It was, unfortunately, also something that was rather hard to stop, since she had pretty good reasons to cry.

Her tears tapered off fairly quickly this time, since the emotions weren’t strictly hers; she felt them in full force, but they faded faster than when they’d been her own. They were enough to leave her exhausted, however, especially with the day she’d had. And now that Ahmanet had, from what she could feel, settled down enough that Jenny didn’t have to lie awake from the backlash of terror and grief that had been coming at her, she had a much easier time falling - and staying - asleep.

Jenny woke up the next morning, feeling far from rested. She was sure she had bags under her eyes by now, with all the stress she’d gone through over the past few weeks, but that didn’t really make for a huge problem. She could ask Zara and Sahar, whoever would do her make-up this morning, if there was any concealer in her shade between the eyeshadow and eyeliner, to hide whatever bags she had developed.

However, bags under her eyes were not Jenny’s most pressing issue. The most pressing issue right now was the mix of restlessness, anticipation and apprehension flooding across the link. It seemed Ahmanet did not have the link quite under control yet, her emotions too turbulent to remain leashed to one person. Which was what had woken Jenny up in the first place, because it was hard to sleep when it felt the bottom of her stomach was going to drop out of her body at any moment.

The bedroom had no windows, but Jenny was willing to bet it was barely sunrise, if not earlier. Ahmanet had taken her words seriously; she’d left the quarters yesterday and stayed away for the night, but the moment it could arguably called morning, she was, from what Jenny could feel, chomping at the bit to be let in again - and she was waiting. The impatience coming across the link said it all. Apparently Jenny’s temper had left Ahmanet cowed enough that she wasn’t willing to enter without permission and be yelled at again.

For a moment, Jenny wondered if she could go back to sleep and catch a few more hours, but just the thought had her feeling somewhat guilty. That, and the impatience battering away at her mind wouldn’t let her anyway.

She sighed, tossing the covers aside and sitting up. Might as well get out of bed, then, if she wasn’t going to get any more sleep. She rubbed tiredly at her face and called for her handmaidens. To her surprise, they were already awake and entered the bedroom within seconds - it had to be very early, so Jenny was a little taken off-guard that they looked as ready for the day as they always did.

“Would you prefer the same style clothing as yesterday, Your Highness?”

Jenny nodded. “Yes.”

Zara slipped out of the bedroom to go fetch Jenny some clothes.

“No bath this morning,” Jenny said to Sahar, “I’ll bathe tonight.”

“Of course,” Sahar responded. “I have already informed a servant to bring up breakfast.”
enny nodded. “What’s on the menu today?”

“I believe the cooks were planning a sweet stewed rice with coconut and dates, Your Highness. Bread as well, or a savoury breakfast broth if you’d prefer that. Both are being brought up for your choice.”

Jenny actually quite liked the sound of sweet stewed rice with fruit. That sounded delicious. Like the rice pudding with raisins and brown sugar her grandmother used to make her when she was little. Jenny had a sweet spot for that kind of rice dishes.

ara returned with a small stack of clothing. “Your clothes, Your Highness.”

“Right,” Jenny said, standing up and starting to tug at the laces of her nightshirt.

Since Jenny had decided to skip a bath this morning, it didn’t take long for her to get dressed, have her make-up done, and be ready for the day.

“Breakfast has not yet arrived,” Zara said apologetically. “It will be here soon, though, Your Highness.”

“That’s fine,” Jenny responded as she walked into the living room. She could wait for breakfast a little, though she did really want that rice pudding Sahar had mentioned. She frowned a little as she felt the impatience buzzing at the edge of her mind give a little spike. “Ahmanet is just outside, I think,” Jenny said. “Please go let her in.”

Zara nodded in understanding, quickly making her way over to the doors, pulling them open. She gave a respectful bow. “Your Majesty.”

“I wish to see my Chosen,” Ahmanet said, and Jenny could literally feel how much it grated at the Pharaoh to ask permission to be able to see her.

“Her Highness has instructed me to let you in, Your Majesty,” Zara said, stepping aside. There was a pulse of relief from the other side of the link. As Ahmanet stepped in, a servant did as well, carrying a tray of breakfast. He hurried to place it on the small dining table and then hurried to leave again, only pausing to bow to Jenny and Ahmanet in acknowledgement.

“Zara, Sahar, some privacy, please,” Jenny requested. “I would like to speak to the Pharaoh alone.”

“Of course.” Zara and Sahar quickly exited the royal quarters.

Jenny finally looked at Ahmanet - she looked exhausted. Like she’d slept even worse than Jenny had. Dark circles under her eyes, skin paler than usual (and not in a healthy way), a small tilt in her lips that betrayed the fact that she was still on the edge of crying. Even when she’d been in the process of restoring herself, Ahmanet had not looked so broken down. It made Jenny feel abruptly guilty, knowing that she had caused this.

“Join me for breakfast,” Jenny suggested after a moment of silence, gesturing at the tray of food that had been brought in. It couldn’t be a coincidence that there was enough food for two and also two sets of bowls and cutlery.

Ahmanet relaxed a little at that. “I would like that very much, Jennifer.”

It was silent for a bit as they sat down. Jenny filled her bowl with the rice pudding - it seemed to be made with a mixture of regular milk and coconut cream, and it had dates cooked into it like sultanas.
There were some nuts and some brown sugar to go on top. Jenny was three bites into her rice pudding when Ahmanet spoke.

‘Are you still upset with me?’

She swallowed hastily. ‘Yes, yes I am. Did you expect me not to be?’ The fact that Jenny was no longer yelling and seething with rage did not mean she was no longer upset about what she’d found out. It was kind of hard to get over that in one day. Hurt and anger like that took time to fade.

Ahmanet hunched a little over her bowl of broth, tearing a piece of bread apart between her fingers. ‘What can I do to make you happy with me again?’

That was something Jenny had a ready answer to. ‘First of all, you’re going to let Chris out of the dungeons. I don’t care if you put a whole platoon of guards around him to make sure he doesn’t run, but you’re not keeping him in prison for the rest of his life. And you’re going to give him all the food he wants.’ Ahmanet opened her mouth to protest, but Jenny bulldozed right over whatever it was she was going to say. She was not in the mood to hear it right now, and besides, she knew she was right in this instance. ‘Secondly, you’re going to let that poor woman go home, and you’re going to send your best doctor with her to see if her son can be saved. And thirdly, you’re going to send a servant into Luxor and have him fetch you information on the modern world. Modern warfare in particular. You’re going to sit down, study it, and then you can come and tell me why I’m right when I say it’s a very, very bad idea to disregard modern weapons, and also why it’s a smart idea to stick to conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.’ She made sure to glare at Ahmanet to let her know she was absolutely serious. ‘And those are not suggestions.’

Ahmanet stared at her, seemingly stunned into silence. Jenny scooped up another spoonful of the rice pudding and stuck it into her mouth - it really was very good. The brown sugar reminded her of the rice pudding her grandmother always made - it made the one she was having right now taste almost nostalgic. Even if her grandmother’s rice pudding had never had coconut, dates and nuts in it.

Finally, Ahmanet managed to find her voice. ‘I am… uncomfortable with the idea of letting Chris Vail walk around unimpeded.’

Jenny shrugged. ‘Then stick him in some quarters and put a guard in front of the door. I just want him out of the dungeons and treated somewhat humanely.’

She was somewhat pissed at Chris too - she’d get him out of the dungeons, but he’d have to wait for her forgiveness if he wanted to walk around freely again. He could’ve bloody well told her about Ahmanet’s offer (lie) earlier on. Her knowing about Chris’ ties to Ahmanet wouldn’t have stopped the Pharaoh from getting to her anyway, it just would’ve taken a little longer if Chris hadn’t been able to use her trust in him to lead her to her death. Ahmanet still would’ve gotten what she wanted, and Jenny wouldn’t have had to find out that Chris had betrayed her after the fact and that Ahmanet had lied to her about it. And it’d have spared them all some pain in the process, too.

Then again, Chris was the guy who used to run around and help Nick steal and sell priceless antiquities on the black market, so Jenny supposed she should have expected a certain lack of morality from him. And selfishness, too.

That didn’t stop Jenny from hurting, though, or from being angry. But anger didn’t justify starving someone and locking them up for life. In the modern world it didn’t, at least. And if Ahmanet wanted to live in the modern world, she was going to have to compromise at some point. Best she do it now, before she pissed off the wrong country and got Egypt nuked off the face of the Earth.

‘You will not change your mind on this?’ Ahmanet looked like she really hoped Jenny was going
“No,” she responded calmly, “I won’t.”

Ahmanet sighed, stirring her broth. “I refuse to put him in noble quarters. He will have to stay in a room meant for servants.”

“That’s fine,” Jenny said, feeling triumph surge at the idea of getting her way on this. A servant’s room should be far, far better than the cell he was in right now, anyway. And he’d be out of the dungeons. Which was exactly what Jenny was going for.

“He will have a dozen permanent guards,” Ahmanet continued. “And he will never be allowed to be alone. He will not be allowed to possess anything that can be used as a weapon. He will not be allowed contact with anyone outside of the palace, or anyone who isn’t one of his guards, you, or me.”

Those were conditions Jenny could work with. “Alright. And you’ll give him full rations again, too.”

“If I must,” Ahmanet sighed, almost petulantly.

“You must,” Jenny agreed. She was definitely not going to budge on this. Or any of her other demands, to be honest. Chris was getting out of the dungeons. That poor woman was going home. And Ahmanet was going to learn about the modern world even if Jenny had to tie her down and read the fucking books to her out loud.

Ahmanet gave another sigh. “It will be as you wish, my love.”

“And you’re going to let that woman go too. And learn about modern times.”

“Only because it is you who is asking.”

Jenny wasn’t asking, she was demanding, but she’d take it. Ahmanet was complying, and that was all she really cared about right now.

They finished breakfast in silence. It was a little uncomfortable. Jenny tried not to think of the fact that eating breakfast with Ahmanet after a fight was more uncomfortable than waking up with a knife in her chest and having a conversation with her murderer directly after. Her emotions really were fucked up nowadays. She was pretty sure this wasn’t how most people would react to something like this. Then again, presumably, most people wouldn’t go running towards their murderer like she had. Or survive being murdered in the first place.

Damn.

Her life really had taken a strange turn.

Jenny felt almost nostalgic at the memories of sitting in a dusty library somewhere, searching for clues. Life had been a lot easier back then. Also a lot less dangerous. Although it had also been less interesting.

Jenny finished her tea, wiping her mouth with a napkin. She eyed Ahmanet, who had barely touched her broth, and decided to throw her a bone. “Do you have a lot to do today?”

“There are several meetings with my generals and the Cult of Set that I have to attend,” Ahmanet responded after a second, “and the men you sent out to capture Nick Morton and retrieve the Blood
of Osiris are expected back sometime today or early tomorrow."

"Oh?" Jenny raised her eyebrows. She hadn’t heard about that yet. "Any word on whether they succeeded or not?"

"Not yet. I am afraid. I am sure we will receive word soon, though," Ahmanet looked a little happier at being talked to normally instead of being yelled at, dipping her spoon into her bowl of broth.

"And Henry?" Jenny asked. "You had some people keeping an eye on him, too, right?"

"Yes. He has not tried to leave Egypt yet. I have, however, received intelligence that he has been spotted speaking to people wearing the sign of his organization."

Jenny grimaced. "He’s planning something."

"Assuredly," Ahmanet agreed. "However, bringing him in might prove… difficult."

"Due to his alter ego," Jenny nodded in understanding. She supposed that normal people would have trouble dealing with Hyde. "Last time, though, you managed to knock him unconscious even when he had let loose."

"It was my sand creatures who did that. They do not feel pain, and cannot be killed. Therefore, they were able to subdue him."

"Then send a couple of those after Henry to bring him in," Jenny suggested. She didn’t want Henry to die or be locked up forever, but she was realistic, and she knew that Henry posed a threat not only to Ahmanet, but also to Jenny herself. With the way things had been when she’d left, there was a good chance Henry now saw her as an enemy. And she’d never known him to show mercy on those he considered enemies. Much as she hated to admit it, like Nick, Henry had become dangerous to her.

Ahmanet eyed her for a moment. "You would not object against his imprisonment?"

"I wouldn’t like it," Jenny responded honestly, "but I can also see that Henry is a genuine threat. I’m not stupid enough to ignore that."

"He will not be allowed to walk free ever again," Ahmanet warned. "And there is a good chance I will order him executed once my people have extracted information from him."

"I’d really rather you didn’t."

The Pharaoh looked at her for a moment, measuring her words again Jenny’s expression. "We will speak of this later."

Jenny nodded. She was okay with that. And she didn’t want to get into another fight so soon after the first one anyway. Besides, Henry wasn’t even captured yet, so there was really no reason to argue about this yet. She’d argue for his life when he was actually in the palace, so he could advocate for himself as well.

Jenny decided to change the subject. "When are your meetings?"

"I have one directly after breakfast. It should last until around lunchtime. A second meeting will be held after lunch, though it will not take as long."
Jenny nodded. ‘‘I think that, tonight, we have to sit down and have a talk. Because I didn’t like fighting with you.’’

She was big on communication when it came to relationships. She hadn’t always been, but when one of her relationships had fallen apart because Jenny hadn’t paid enough attention to her partner in between looking for Ahmanet, she had come to the realization that if she wanted a relationship to work, she had to put effort into it. And to her own (faint) surprise, she did want this thing with Ahmanet to go somewhere other than fights and birthing Set and then falling apart. And that meant Jenny had to put effort into building and maintaining it. Communication was definitely an important aspect of that.

‘‘I did not like it either,’’ Ahmanet said. ‘‘And I would like to ensure it does not happen again.’’

Jenny smiled a little. ‘‘All couples fight. Occasional disagreements are good. But not when they escalate like this.’’

There was something akin to hope dawning in Ahmanet’s eyes. ‘‘And you consider us a couple?’’

‘‘Do you know of any other King and Queen who aren’t a couple?’’ It was kind of a non-answer, but it was enough to get the point across. Because Jenny would really like to consider them a couple. She wasn’t, however, ready to say it out loud yet.

‘‘Indeed,’’ Ahmanet murmured, but the feelings that came across the link said it all. There was a kind of giddiness, a kind of joy, that Jenny was very glad to feel coming from Ahmanet. Certainly a nice change from the depressed fear that had been emanating from her since yesterday afternoon. It made her want to kiss Ahmanet. So that’s what she did. There was absolutely no resistance or complaint from the Pharaoh. Quite the opposite, in fact. She reciprocated enthusiastically.

And if Ahmanet clutched Jenny a little too close, held her a little too tightly, kissed her with something that tasted a little too much like desperate relief on her lips, well, Jenny didn’t mention it.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Jenny spends the day mostly just relaxing, and gets a gift from Ahmanet. A guest is brought into the palace, if not entirely voluntarily.

Chapter Notes

Here we are with chapter 42. I've been working hard this week figuring out the rest of the plot, and I'm fairly sure I know where I'm going from here on out. For the first time since starting this story, I actually have a plan. Yay me!

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

After breakfast, once Ahmanet was off to her meeting (she’d almost looked sulky at having to leave, which had Jenny trying to reconcile the expression with the fact that this was the woman who was planning a violent take-over of the country), Jenny came to a conclusion; the palace was really fucking boring.

She’d never not be amazed by the intricacies and the archaeological value of it, but still. There was no tv for her to watch and laze about. If there was a library (there probably was one), it likely didn’t boast modern sci-fi novels. And there was no internet either (and if there was, she didn’t have a laptop or anything to access it), so Jenny couldn’t slouch on the sofa and watch Netflix. Or fuck about on the internet in general.

When was the last time she’d updated her Facebook status anyway? Also, what would she even change it to? She didn’t think there was a ‘recently ascended living goddess/Queen of Egypt to-be and also Chosen of an equally ascended, ancient undead Pharaoh with supernatural powers’- option. So, yeah. There wasn’t much for Jenny to do. She could go read her diplomacy books, but yesterday afternoon had shown her that those books were supremely dry. Not exactly material that made her want to read them all day long. Not exactly material that made her want to read them all day long. She could also go on a walk, explore the palace a bit more, but Jenny was feeling lazy today, and she didn’t feel like walking around aimlessly.

Maybe she could have someone drop a chair outside at the lotus pond. She wouldn’t mind reading a diplomacy book, outside in the shade of a palm tree, as long as someone brought her drinks regularly. Maybe, like, a cocktail sometime after lunch. Jenny could really go for like, a White Russian, or a Caipirinha. Definitely after lunch, though. Jenny made it a point not to drink before noon. And she’d have to have a fairly heavy lunch, since Jenny, being someone who didn’t actually drink that much usually, was a bit of a lightweight.

So. Diplomacy books. Outside, nice and hot, but in the shade so she didn’t burn under the sun. Drinks. That sounded like a splendid idea indeed. At least she now had something to do.

She glanced up at Zara and Sahar, who had slipped back into the room after Ahmanet had left. ‘’Can you have someone bring out a chair and table to the lotus pond? I’d like to do some reading
“Outside.”

“Of course,” Zara responded immediately. “A selection of books can also be brought out.”

“Just the diplomacy books will do.” Jenny responded. She needed to get through them anyway, since she really wasn’t the fighting kind of person. Not if she could help it, anyway. She’d much rather prefer to talk her way to a solution.

“Of course,” Zara repeated. “If you will excuse me.” She disappeared from the living room.

Jenny turned to Sahar. “Care to accompany me to the lotus pond?”

“It would be my pleasure, Your Highness.” To Jenny’s surprise, Sahar actually offered Jenny her arm like Ahmanet had done when she’d shown Jenny the lotus pond. Jenny blinked, then smiled and tuck her hand into the crook of Sahar’s elbow. It was a nice gesture, if nothing else, and it’d be rude to decline. Jenny had been the one to ask Sahar to accompany her there, anyway. Although she did have to admit the gallant gesture looked better on Ahmanet, but that might just be Jenny being biased.

Outside it was warm and sunny, as was usual for this part of the world. Jenny quite enjoyed the short walk through the garden to get to the lotus pond, and by the time she and Sahar arrived, everything had already been set up. There was a comfortable-looking sun lounger set up for her, of modern make but not looking out of place due to the design and materials used. It had cushioning to make it more comfortable, with a slightly thicker pillow at the top, so she could even take a nap if she wanted to without getting a crick in her neck. Next to the sun lounger was a small, round table. On it was a small pile of her diplomacy books, ready to be read, with the one she’d started in already on top. Also on the table was a tall glass of iced water, the glass sweating under the heat, and a glass bowl with diced fruit and mint leaves.

Zara was waiting next to a set of smaller, regular chairs, set a bit to the side of the lounge chair meant for Jenny. They, too, had a small table available, also with large glasses of iced water. Presumably, that was where Zara and Sahar would sit, which made Jenny want to frown a little - surely, her handmaidens had better things to do than sit around and do nothing until Jenny wanted to go do something else? At least they had something to drink - it was still morning, but already getting hot outside, and they shouldn’t go without water for too long.

“You didn’t bring anything for you and Sahar to do?” She asked Zara as she made her way over to the sun lounger.

“No, Your Highness.”

“Then go fetch something, or borrow one of my books. You’ll be very bored otherwise,” Jenny said as she sat down, swinging her legs onto the sun lounger and crossing them comfortably at the ankle. Her small table with books, drinks and snacks was within an easy arm’s reach. She took the book she’d already started on, ‘War and Diplomacy: Theory and Practise’, and opened it at the bookmark.

She was half a page in by the time Sahar timidly moved to select a book from Jenny’s pile, apparently not entirely sure it was allowed despite Jenny having told her it was. Zara followed Sahar’s example, choosing a book before retreating to her chair and settling in to read for a while.

The subject matter of ‘War and Diplomacy: Theory and Practise’ was still dry and boring, and if Jenny hadn’t acutely been in need of some diplomacy skills she wouldn’t have chosen to read it, but when reading it outside, with a mild breeze in the air and shade to keep her out of the sun, with servants carrying over drinks every half hour and keeping her bowl of fruit topped up, it wasn’t so...
bad, honestly. Hell of a lot better than uni, anyway, even if the subject was not as fun. Jenny did not miss lectures, at all. Or the essays. God, the essays. She had written so many essays in uni, it just wasn’t even funny.

There was no way in hell Jenny was going to make herself write essays on diplomacy. Not going to happen. Ever. She hadn’t written anything worth publishing in years, honestly, not since the paper she’d written for her obligatory PhD research, and that she’d finally gotten the degree for. Although, if she wasn’t distracted by, you know, open war, she could definitely write a book on this place. That was one thing she wouldn’t mind writing.

A couple of hours passed in near-complete silence. Jenny made good headway into her book, distracted only by the occasional comings and goings of servants to ensure she, Zara and Sahar were not left with empty glasses. Her sun lounger turned out to be supremely comfortable also over longer periods of time, which was good too. She wasn’t truly disturbed until around noon, which was when a servant quietly informed her that lunch was about to be served, and that the Pharaoh had finished her meeting and would be in the dining hall if she would like to attend as well.

Jenny thought it over for a moment before deciding that it was probably for the best if she showed up. Not just to let Ahmanet know they were okay, more or less, but also so everyone in the palace knew that things were alright again. Jenny usually wouldn’t have given a damn if people had opinions on her relationships, but, well, she wasn’t a random woman in London anymore. She was in a high position, much as it felt uncomfortable, Jenny knew that her doings had an impact on people now. There were plenty of people who’d seen her stalking through the hallways yesterday, seething with rage and demanding to speak with the Pharaoh in private. No doubt they’d come to conclusions about that, had made assumptions, and Jenny figured it be better for her and Ahmanet both if the occupants of the palace knew there was nothing wrong. On the surface, at least.

Jenny was pretty sure neither she nor Ahmanet (mostly Ahmanet) could afford to lose the faith of the people who expected them to somehow take over Egypt and return it to 5000 year old customs.

(When she thought of that, Jenny still felt a little off-kilter, wondering how her life had come to this, and why she was going along with this shit.) (Probably because Ahmanet was the only option she had left.) (Also because Jenny, much as she didn’t want to admit it, was getting much more attached to Ahmanet than was probably healthy. And the butterflies in her stomach from those kisses…) (Those kisses felt a little bit like falling in love.)

Jenny closed her book after marking the page and told the servant that she’d be on her way to the dining hall in a minute, and to please inform Ahmanet of that. She wasn’t exactly hungry because she’d been supplied with fruit all morning, but oh well. It wasn’t like she actually had to eat much, or at all.

Sahar once again offered her arm - maybe she was copying Ahmanet? - and escorted Jenny back into the palace. Zara hung back a little, looking mildly disapprovingly at Sahar, which Jenny didn’t really get since she was pretty sure there was nothing Sahar was doing that could be disapproved of, but since Zara said nothing about it, Jenny didn’t either.

Ahmanet was already present in the dining hall when Jenny arrived, though she couldn’t have been there for long as her plate was still empty and the platters of food in front of her were as of yet untouched. Jenny took her seat quietly, waving Zara and Sahar off to another table so they could grab some lunch too.

“You decided to come,” Ahmanet said. “I was not sure if you would accept the invitation.”

“I’m not that angry,” Jenny responded simply. “And I figured it’d be good if we were seen
together, considering half the palace saw me seething yesterday.’’

‘‘Indeed,’’ Ahmanet nodded in understanding. The link was muted again, but Jenny was sure she could, very faintly, feel a little surge of disappointment, as if Ahmanet had expected (or perhaps hoped) Jenny to say that she’d accepted the invitation because she couldn’t stand to be apart from Ahmanet for more than a few hours. Jenny liked Ahmanet, she really did, and she was starting to realize that she could fall for her, hard, if given time, but she wasn’t so far gone that a few hours apart had her longing for her presence. She had a feeling, though, that Ahmanet did feel that way.

A little awkwardly, Jenny asked, ‘‘how did your meeting this morning go?’’

‘‘Quite well,’’ Ahmanet responded, ‘‘I spoke to my generals about the state of affairs within the Egyptian military. The number of Infected is increasing rapidly, but not as quickly as I would have liked.’’

‘‘How so?’’ Jenny inspected the platters of food and settled on a fairly simple lunch; some bread, some soft, salty white cheese, some grapes. A cup of tea on the side - fresh mint. They really had good tea here.

‘‘I had hoped to have over half the military under my control by now,’’ Ahmanet said, ‘‘but the spiders are not spreading as quickly. They can only spawn so many offspring while remaining in control of their Infected. Beyond that, they are instructed to remain unseen until the entire military is under control, which also affects their speed. It is a variable I failed to take into account.’’

Jenny frowned a little. ‘‘Haven’t you used these spiders before?’’

At that, Ahmanet looked a little disgruntled. ‘‘I am quite new to using them. Last time, I did not have the opportunity before the priests of Osiris left me to rot in my prison. Therefore, I was unable to accurately predict their speed when I sent them to infect the military.’’

‘‘Oh,’’ Jenny said, not sure how else to react. Abdamelek had been kind to her, but the more she heard about the priests of Osiris, the less she liked them. Not only had Akar tried to kill her - and she really needed to look into getting him a statue or something to possess, so he could function as a bodyguard like promised - but they’d also condemned Ahmanet to 5000 years of suffering. And Jenny had a feeling that, when they’d done it, they’d been very much aware of the fact that Ahmanet would suffer. Because even if Set hadn’t kept her alive, she would have been left to slowly die of dehydration and starvation, alone in the dark, suffering until she breathed her last.

So yeah. Abdamelek had been kind to Jenny. She’d give him that, at least. The rest of the priests, though, as far as Jenny was concerned, could go die in a ditch somewhere. The world would probably be a better place without them in it.

Although they’d probably say the same about Ahmanet.

She busied herself spreading some of the soft, salty white cheese over her piece of bread. ‘‘What’s your meeting after lunch about?’’

‘‘The general running of the palace,’’ Ahmanet said. ‘‘And then I shall also send out a servant to Luxor as you… requested of me this morning.’’

It had not been a request, but that was fine - as long as Ahmanet did what Jenny expected of her in this instance, she didn’t care if the Pharaoh preferred to call it a request rather than a demand.

‘‘Can you ask them to bring back a laptop too?’’ Jenny asked. ‘‘Does the palace even have internet?’’
Ahmanet frowned a little. “I am unfamiliar with this ‘internet’.”

“So that’s a no,” Jenny concluded. “Internet is a modern thing. It’s hard to explain, but imagine being able to talk to someone face-to-face from halfway across the world, and listen to music without having musicians in the room, and being able to look up information on basically anything in few seconds without having to search through a library.”

“That sounds very useful. Perhaps I will see about getting this internet.”

“I’d be okay with that.” Jenny really missed her Netflix account. And just a laptop with a word processor would be nice, too. Way easier (and faster) than writing a book with just pen and paper. And if she had internet, also way easier for additional research.

“What have you done this morning?”

Conversation was still a little bit awkward, as it turned out. Ahmanet was almost hesitant in asking the question, as if she wasn’t sure Jenny would answer.

“I went to the lotus pond with Zara and Sahar,” Jenny responded easily. “A servant brought out a nice chair for me to sit in, so I spent most of my time reading.”

“Which book?”

“One of the diplomacy books you got me.”

“Did I already mention I have found you a teacher for that as well?”

“You did, I’m pretty sure,” Jenny nodded. She was fairly sure Ahmanet had mentioned something about a tutor.

“Regardless, I will introduce you to him soon. I believe he is settling into his quarters still, but he should be ready to start your lessons very soon.”

“That’d be nice.” Jenny had absolutely no experience with diplomacy, so it’d probably be good if she had someone to instruct her, before she ended up being the one to start a war rather than Ahmanet. That’d be embarrassing, for the diplomatic one to be worse at peace than the warmongering one. It’d just be typical for Jenny’s life, though.

“Will you be out at the lotus pond again after lunch?”

Jenny nodded. “I was planning on it, yes.”

“Do you… mind if I joined you after my meeting?”

“I would like that,” Jenny said, making sure to smile at Ahmanet. Ahmanet smiled back, something akin to relief coming across the link.

“Then I shall come seek you out once my meeting is over. Perhaps we could have tea?”

“Tea sounds good,” Jenny nodded. She liked the little pleased smile that played across Ahmanet’s lips. Their row earlier had seemingly severely dented the Pharaoh’s confidence, and it was good to see her regain some of it. Although it did really hammer home to Jenny that Ahmanet probably wasn’t very experienced when it came to relationships. From what Jenny had managed to scrounge up in information, before she’d gone into the tomb and freed Ahmanet, she’d been unmarried and hadn’t had a significant other either before she’d been imprisoned. There was a very good chance
that this thing she and Jenny had was Ahmanet’s first serious relationship.

Jenny chewed her bread, harshly reminded of how young Ahmanet had really been when the priests of Osiris had condemned her to die alone. Sometimes it was easy to forget. She didn’t know Ahmanet’s exact age - it hadn’t been mentioned in any of the documents Jenny had managed to dig up, and she hadn’t asked yet - but all things considered, the Pharaoh couldn’t be far over twenty. She was maybe twenty-three, if Jenny guessed generously. If she hadn’t known Ahmanet was over 5000 years old, she, at thirty-five, would’ve felt like she was robbing the cradle. She still felt a little like that, to be honest.

For all that they hadn’t worked out, Jenny did have experience with dating and relationships. She’d had her fair share of them, both with women and with men. It was a little strange, and somewhat awkward, to apparently be eternally bound to a woman who was, for all intents and purposes, in modern terms, a baby gay - one who hadn’t yet experienced a serious relationship at that. This might just turn into a bit of a disaster after all. There was a reason Jenny preferred to date people who had some experience with the whole romance thing. Less chance of people getting hurt if both parties knew what the hell they were getting into.

Jenny finished her bread quietly, then popped the last of her grapes into her mouth.

The afternoon passed fairly quickly. Jenny continued in her book where she’d left off before lunch, and before she knew it, faint footsteps approached the spot where she was reading and Ahmanet rounded around the corner. There was a box in her hands - the same kind of box that Jenny’s crown had come in.

“Hey,” Jenny said, smiling at her. “How’d your meeting go?”

“Quite well. I have sent a servant into Luxor.” Ahmanet responded. She glanced at Jenny’s sun lounger. There was plenty of space at the end, as Jenny was sitting with her legs curled sideways. “May I sit?”

“Of course,” Jenny said, closing her book and laying it aside.

“I brought you something,” Ahmanet said. “I commissioned it before our… disagreement.” Her tone of voice gave Jenny the impression she really meant to say that it wasn’t meant to be a bribe, but she didn’t outright say it. “The craftsman finished it just an hour or so ago.”

Jenny blinked. “What is it?”

Ahmanet handed over the box. “It’s made of the jasmine flowers you healed.”

So that was why Ahmanet had refused to offer them to Set. She’d handed them off to a craftsman for something to be made out of them. Huh. Jenny had thought Ahmanet just had them tucked away somewhere for safekeeping or something. “You mean like you told me earlier? That they could be preserved in some way?”

“Quite,” Ahmanet responded. “Go on, open it.”

“Alright.” The box was bound with a ribbon, so Jenny undid that first, laying it aside. It was a fairly plain box, but the wood had a interesting grain pattern and was carefully sanded and lacquered, making it quite pretty regardless.
Inside the box, however, was something that was not only as far as plain as you could possibly get, but made Jenny’s breath catch in her throat from the sheer beauty of it.

Her jasmine flowers, all 25 of them, as if poured into crystal or diamond, each petal vibrant and bright under the thin layer of glittering transparent stone, wrought into a sparkling, iridescent crown. They were held together by the thinnest, most fragile-looking threads of gold Jenny had ever seen, winding and curling gently in between and around the flowers like the thinnest vines. There were no jasmine leaves to match the flowers, but the crown didn’t need any; just the diamond-coated flowers and the slim golden vines weaving together made it enchanting in a way Jenny had never seen before.

And she hadn’t even known jewellery this delicate and beautiful could even be made. And so quickly, too! Jenny had been under the impression her current jewellery was the most beautiful she’d ever see. She’d been wrong. Because this crown was the single most gorgeous things Jenny had ever seen in her life.

It was the complete opposite of the crown she was wearing right now, that one was heavy and colourful and loudly present - this flower crown, however, looked delicate enough to shatter at a touch, the only colours white and gold, understated in a way that the eye couldn’t miss.

“It’s beautiful,” Jenny said, voice shaky, and it was one of the biggest understatements she’d ever uttered.

Ahmanet looked quietly pleased with herself. “You like it?”

“I love it,” Jenny responded. She felt faintly guilty that she hadn’t really reciprocated in the whole gift-giving thing so far. Maybe she should look into giving Ahmanet something in return, even if she had no idea what Ahmanet would like as a gift. What did you give a Pharaoh who had grown up drowning in wealth? Somehow, Jenny had the idea that a homemade chocolate cake or a nice bottle of wine didn’t quite measure up. This was going to require some thought, for sure.

She reached up to take her golden crown from her head, laying it in her lap before very carefully lifting the jasmine crown from it’s box. It was surprisingly light in her hands. Like the crystal or diamond the flowers had been dipped in was almost weightless. The sunlight made the whole thing shine and sparkle, and as the light was refracted by the diamond, it created dozens of little rainbows.

Jenny carefully placed it on her head, marvelling at how well it fit and how light it was.

“It looks beautiful,” Ahmanet offered. Jenny reached over to squeeze her hand. She wasn’t really into public displays of affection, otherwise Ahmanet would be too occupied to talk right now.

“Thank you. Remind me to kiss you senseless when we’re not in public.”

The force of Ahmanet’s blush made her entire face darken a shade, but the way her pupils dilated and her mouth opened a little was enough to come to the conclusion she wasn’t blushing out of embarrassment. “I am sure I will remember to do that,” she managed after a moment, voice a little huskier than normal.

The moment was broken by hasty footsteps, a servant all but running over. “Your Majesty, Your Highness!”

Jenny blinked, a little annoyed, and Ahmanet drew herself up into a more regal position. “Is there a reason you’re interrupting us?”

“Your Majesty,” the servant said, “the team Her Highness sent out to capture Nick Morton and kill
High Priest Abdamelek of Osiris has returned."

Jenny sat up straight in interest. ‘‘And?’’

‘‘They have not managed to capture Nick Morton, Your Highness,’’ the servant said regretfully, ‘‘however, they have brought back High Priest Abdamelek of Osiris for interrogation.’’

‘‘Nick got away?!’’ Jenny stood up swiftly.

‘‘I do not know the particulars, Your Highness,’’ the servant all but grovelled, ‘‘but the team you sent out is ready to give you and Her Majesty their report.’’

‘‘Where are they?’’ Demanded Ahmanet.

‘‘The dungeons, Your Majesty.’’

Ahmanet gave a sharp nod. ‘‘Dismissed.’’

The servant bowed deeply, and was gone in seconds.

Ahmanet turned to Jenny and offered her arm. ‘‘Would you care to join me in the dungeons, my love?’’

‘‘I’d love to very much,’’ Jenny responded, taking her arm.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet go see Abdamelek in the dungeons. Afterwards, Ahmanet gives a harsh order.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone, it's me. As always on Saturdays. I've got chapter 43 all ready for you, and we have a character returning to the screen! It's Abdamelek! Yay! Well, yay for us, anyway. For him, not so much.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

They hurried to the dungeons. They didn’t run, but they did move faster than Jenny usually did. She nibbled at her lower lip, feeling nerves and annoyance churn in her stomach. Nick had escaped. He’d escaped, even after she’d impressed upon Aliya that she wanted Nick brought to the palace, alive and relatively unharmed, by whoever it was she sent on this job. Having gotten those instructions, how the hell could they have let him escape?

Jenny was not pleased, to say the least. She was also a little nervous about coming face-to-face with Abdamelek again. Last time she saw him, she’d just murdered one of his priests. And then sent the ghost of said priest to break his shoulder, amongst other injuries. How Abdamelek had ever even gotten to Dakhla with those kinds of injuries and in so little time was honestly kind of a mystery to Jenny. Shouldn’t he still be pretty much useless right now? Jenny had never suffered a broken shoulder before, but she imagined it was a very painful and debilitating injury. One that would, in Jenny’s mind, leave a person fairly incapacitated for at least a while. Shoulders were pretty important, after all. Although Jenny wasn’t a doctor, so really, what did she even know about broken shoulders? Not much.

There were more guards in the dungeons than there had been yesterday. And people wearing tactical outfits, four of them, standing guard just outside of a cell. It wasn’t hard to guess who they were guarding. Jenny glanced over at the other cells; she couldn’t see the woman who’d begged for her son’s life anywhere.

“I have released her as you asked,” Ahmanet informed Jenny quietly upon spotting her looking. “She left just before lunchtime.”

“And Chris?”

“He shall be moved tonight. Quarters are in the process of being prepared to hold him.”

Jenny nodded, a little relieved that she wouldn’t have to start a row over this. “Thank you.”

“You are welcome,” Ahmanet responded. For as much as she apparently hadn’t wanted to comply
with Jenny’s demands, she had gotten stuff done quickly, and Jenny appreciated that.

They arrived at the cell guarded by the Cult soldiers, who straightened up and snapped off crisp, perfect salutes. “Your Majesty, Your Highness.”

“Gentlemen.” Ahmanet responded. “The prisoner?”

Two of the men stepped aside so Jenny and Ahmanet could see into the cell.

Abdamelek didn’t look nearly as healthy as the last time Jenny had seen him. He was slumped on the small cot in the back of the cell, the wall pretty much the only thing that held him up. His shoulder was definitely broken, his skin bruised from his elbow to his neck and his arm hanging limply by his side - if he’d had a sling, it wasn’t here now. His hands were cuffed in front of his belly, attached to a chain that went around his waist, and several fingers looked broken. There were bruises on his face, one of his eyes swollen shut, his right knee was swollen and mangled, and his ankles were shackled together. The cuffs were visibly too tight, leaving his feet faintly swollen and with an unnatural colour - the cuffs had probably been on there for a while, considering the look of his feet.

Jenny tried not to wince at the sight, feeling a little nauseous. It was obvious the Cult soldiers hadn’t been kind on him. She wondered if he would still be able to walk, if the ankle cuffs were released, or if cut off circulation had already done permanent damage.

Ahmanet observed him a lot more clinically, then glanced at the soldiers. “Report.”

“Your Majesty,” one said, “we arrived at the Dakhla Oasis three days ago. After some investigation we found out the priest and Morton had not yet arrived. We waited for their arrival and then followed them to the hidden temple, where we waited for them to find the book containing the recipe for the Blood of Osiris. We confronted them and managed to capture the priest. Morton managed to evade us and escaped custody. We searched the temple for more copies of the Blood, but found none, and then destroyed it. All priests of Osiris present were eliminated. We attempted to pursue Morton but he covered his tracks well and we lost him. Then we returned here with the priest.”

“And the book?” Ahmanet asked sharply. Another of the soldiers dug into a small bag and pulled out an old, weathered volume. Ahmanet thumbed through it quickly, then paused at the page of the Blood of Osiris. Part of it was torn away, the bottom third of the page gone. “Where is the rest of this page?”

“We believe Morton tore it out, Your Majesty.”

Ahmanet very calmly closed the book, letting it drop to the floor. “So you're telling me that you were sent on a mission by my Chosen, your very Queen, which instantly makes it the single most important thing in your lives, and not only did you fail, but you also let the target escape with a lethal weapon?!” By the last part, her voice had risen to a shout.

The four soldiers looked like they were sincerely regretting ever being born. Jenny could sympathize. She wouldn’t want to be in their position right now either.

The one who’d spoken most so far managed to say, “Yes, Your Majesty,” but he didn’t sound nearly as crisp and put-together as a minute earlier. In fact, he rather sounded like he needed a new pair of tactical pants.

“Give me one reason,” Ahmanet seethed, “to not have you all decapitated right now!”

Wow, that escalated quickly. Time for Jenny to work her magic.
“Perhaps,” she suggested, making sure to give the soldiers an icy look so Ahmanet would know Jenny wasn’t mad with her, because right now they couldn’t start arguing about death sentences, “these gentlemen would like to correct their… mistake?” She put just enough scorn in the word ‘mistake’ to make it sound like she meant to say ‘incompetence’ instead.

The four straightened up, something akin to hope dawning in their expressions.

“Jennifer?” Ahmanet queried. Her end of the link was muted, meaning Jenny couldn’t quite make out whether Ahmanet was displeased with her interference or not.

Jenny eyed the soldiers. “You have a week. Bring me Nick Morton. Bring me the rest of the page. Bring me everyone Nick Morton has been working with, and anyone who has helped him. Bring me the knowledge that the page has not been copied or otherwise saved, hidden or passed to other people in any way, shape or form.” She glanced at Ahmanet, and then added, “and if you fail me again, I’m sure the Pharaoh will be happy to show you the consequences.”

It left a bad taste in her mouth, especially that last part and the somewhat cruel expression it sparked on Ahmanet’s face, but it’d get the message to sink in, at least. Jenny wanted Nick contained in the palace, where he couldn’t hurt anyone, and she wanted the Blood of Osiris destroyed once and for all so it’d no longer be a danger. She also wanted these soldiers to live to see another day. This was probably the safest alternative, or at least the only one she could think of right now.

“You heard your Queen,” Ahmanet said coldly. “Get it done.”

The four men snapped off another round of salutes. “Yes, Your Majesty, Your Highness!”

Ahmanet waved them off, and after they’d marched off, she gestured over a warden.

“Your Majesty?”

“Make sure this man,” she motioned at the unconscious form of Abdamelek, “doesn’t die. Get a doctor to treat his most acute injuries. Do not unshackle him. If he gets close to the bars, or behaves suspiciously, break something that isn’t vital.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” the warden said.

Jenny reached out and squeezed Ahmanet’s hand. She wanted to scream about torture and human rights. Ahmanet squeezed back, and a small push of assurance came across the link. Jenny settled down a little, sending back some determination to let Ahmanet know that they would be having a talk about this later.

“You will not speak to him,” Ahmanet continued. “You will not respond to him if he says anything. If he says anything that seems important, you will relay it to a messenger, who will take it straight to me. He will be given standard rations for now.”

The warden once again hastily agreed.

“Inform me when he wakes up.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Ahmanet tugged Jenny away. They paused briefly at Chris’ cell, which was across from Abdamelek’s cell. Chris looked horrified at the condition of the priest. Jenny very much shared the sentiment.
“My Jennifer has convinced me you should not be left in a cell for the rest of your life,” Ahmanet said coldly. “You will be moved to a set of quarters tonight. I do not think I have to tell you that cooperating is in your best interests.”

Chris stared at Ahmanet for a moment, then switched his gaze to Jenny. “Thanks, Jenny. I knew you’d come through.”

Jenny gave a small-half shrug, but there was something cold and bitter in her chest as she responded. “Well, you didn’t actually commit a crime, I guess…”

And as she spoke the words, she kind of wished he had committed a crime by betraying her. But he’d done it after his death, and as far as the world was concerned, he and Ahmanet didn’t exist, so technically, he couldn’t be charged with anything. Dead men couldn’t commit crimes, after all. And Ahmanet hadn’t done anything that warranted a conviction either. Not until she’d actually went and murdered Jenny, anyway.

Knowing that she’d been led to her death and no one would even go punished for it, that no one would even be charged, left a kind of bitter taste in Jenny’s mouth. In any other case, she knew, people would’ve gone to prison over this kind of thing.

His face fell a little. “I’m sorry for what I did, Jenny. I really am.”

Ahmanet’s jaw was clenched, eyes dark as she stared at Chris menacingly. “Be grateful that my Jennifer convinced me, mongrel. I’d have left you to die in here.”

Jenny winced a little. Both at the cold remark, but also at the hate on Chris’ face as he glared back at Ahmanet. She was starting to get the feeling that having Chris in the palace, be it in a cell or under guards in quarters, was going to end in trouble. And also possibly in bloodshed. Because if Chris acted on the hate visible on his face, there would be blood. And depending on whether he succeeded on getting to Ahmanet, it was either hers, or his. Probably his. Because he was just a solitary human, and Ahmanet was ascended with supernatural powers and a whole army at her back.

Jenny really, really wished Chris had the good sense to avoid Ahmanet as much as he was capable of while they were all stuck in the palace together. She’d nearly killed herself bringing him back to life. Would have died if not for the fact that she was ascended. Jenny would be very much insulted and also more than a little pissed if Chris just wasted that second chance, the one she’d almost died for to give him, if accidentally and not entirely voluntarily, like that.

“Did I hear that right, Jenny?” Chris finally stopped glaring at Ahmanet. “About Nick? He escaped?”

“Apparently the people I sent after him aren’t as skilled as I was told,” Jenny said, a touch sourly. “So yes, he got away.”

Chris looked a little relieved. Jenny belatedly remembered that Chris had been Nick’s best friend before he’d died, and that they’d known each other since forever. Of course he’d be relieved to know Nick was still running around free. A part of Jenny couldn’t help but think that, if Nick had been the Chosen, Chris would not have sold him out like he’d done to Jenny.

“He’ll be captured soon enough,” Ahmanet commented. “The team will make sure of that, if they know what’s good for them.”

Chris ignored her, keeping his eyes on Jenny. “What are you going to do with Nick?”

“Nothing bad,” Jenny said. She really wasn’t planning to harm Nick. She just wanted him out of the
way, somewhere he couldn’t hurt her or Ahmanet.

“I trust you, Jenny,” Chris responded, “but I don’t trust you,” he added, giving Ahmanet another glare. Ahmanet glared back immediately.

Jenny tried not to sigh. This was going to be a disaster. She just knew it. “Back off, Chris,” she sighed. “I told you I’ll make sure Nick is okay.”

Not comfortable, maybe, and not free, but he’d be taken care of, and unable to harm either Jenny or Ahmanet. Jenny would put him in some quarters somewhere, slap a lock on the door and a couple of guards at all the exits, and leave him there until she’d figured out a better place to stash him. Or a way to convince him to stop hunting her and Ahmanet. That would be nice too. Jenny had enough on her mind with Henry running around, keeping Ahmanet from getting Egypt nuked off the map, and Set lurking somewhere in the background.

God, what even was her life? Where were the days when all she had to worry about was translating a piece of text and not missing the subway home? Although the food at the palace was definitely an improvement over London take-out after stumbling into her apartment at eleven p.m. because she once again forgot to keep time and got lost in translating a manuscript. So yeah. Pros and cons.

Chris huffed a little, but nevertheless pushed away from the bars of his cell and went to sulk on his cot instead. “I’m getting moved soon, then?”

“Tonight,” Jenny affirmed. ”And for the love of God, don’t do anything stupid, okay? You didn’t get a second life just so you can throw it away.”

Chris rolled his eyes. Jenny glared at him until he gave a very put-upon sigh and nodded his head. “I won’t do anything stupid, I promise, Jenny.”

“Good,” Jenny nodded, and hoped to hell he’d stick to his word. Although the floors were stone, so it probably wouldn’t be too hard to wash away the blood if Chris did try to fight the wardens. Easier to get the stains off than if it were carpet, anyway.

Ahmanet tugged lightly at Jenny’s hand, a clear sign she was no longer interested in being near Chris and wanted to leave now. Before they could leave, though, there was a small groan from the cell opposite Chris’. It looked like the warden wouldn’t have to send anyone over to announce Abdamelek had woken up, Jenny thought to herself as she swiftly crossed the few feet over to the priest’s cell. She hadn’t expected him to wake for a while, to be honest. With the condition he was in, Jenny would’ve guessed he would at least be out for a couple of hours still.

Abdamelek woke with a start. The movement was enough to have him sliding off the cot. His yell of pain as his broken shoulder hit the ground, followed by the rest of his injured body, made Jenny wince. He tried to push himself up, but with his hands shackled to his waist, one arm useless, and his feet also shackled, he was stuck on the floor. Painful tears tracked down his bruised face as he panted into the dusty stone of the floor. Spots of blood dripped from his nose.

“The Favoured Disciple of the Dead Lord,” Ahmanet drawled, a look of cruel amusement on her face as she stared at the man prone on the floor, “I never thought I’d actually see you in my dungeons. You’re less… formidable than I had expected.”

Abdamelek stiffened at the sound of Ahmanet’s voice, struggling to tilt his head enough to look up at the Pharaoh. His voice rasped, “...you are the Dark One.”

“Quite,” Ahmanet responded. “And you are the current head of the organization that imprisoned
me and left me to suffer for the past five millennia.’’

‘‘We did what had to be done,’’ Abdamelek said, but his voice was weak with pain, and, presumably, exhaustion, so it didn’t come out as strong as he likely wanted it to.

‘‘Funny,’’ Ahmanet said, but she wasn’t laughing at all. ‘‘I, too, am doing what has to be done. Starting with you.’’

Tears of pain were leaking down Abadamelek’s face. ‘‘You will destroy Egypt.’’

‘‘I will free it from the yoke of modern governing,’’ Ahmanet responded passionately, ‘‘and remake it in my image. Like it should have been millennia ago.’’

‘‘You will never succeed. The priests of Osiris will stop you, as we did before.’’

‘‘Except the priests are now without their leader. And we both know that no new High Priest may be chosen unless the previous one has been confirmed dead. You are not dead.’’ Ahmanet showed her teeth in a predatory snarl. ‘‘And you will not be for a very long time.’’

Abdamelek shook on the floor, but whether it was fear or just cold and pain, Jenny wasn’t sure. ‘‘Traditions can change,’’ the priest responded after a second.

‘‘But I doubt they have,’’ Ahmanet retorted. ‘‘I’d been imprisoned for millennia. I doubt you had expected me to be freed at all. You and your little organization got complacent. You didn’t change any of your traditions. And as long as you’re in my custody, you can’t. You need a full council for that, all priests present in one place, and you’ll need to perform the rituals. Which, again, you can’t do from a cell.’’

Jenny blinked. Huh. High Priests were only elected after the last one died? She hadn’t known that. Like she didn’t know so many things. When was someone just going to tell her stuff like this instead of leaving her to flounder along?

‘‘We will find a way,’’ Abdamelek rasped. ‘‘We did not think we would manage to capture you so many years ago, but we managed that too.’’

Ahmanet’s eyes and the link both flashed with anger, but somehow she managed to keep her face smooth. ‘‘We will see.’’

Her tone very much said that, no, they wouldn’t see, because she wasn’t going to give the priests of Osiris another opportunity to get at her. Jenny had a feeling she’d rather wipe out all the priests than give them another chance at imprisoning her in, well, living hell. Jenny didn’t find that thought as revolting as she probably should. It was hard to sympathize with people who wanted both of them dead and didn’t care how much they suffered beforehand.

‘‘Quite.’’ Abdamelek rasped back. Then he gave a weak, painful smirk. ‘‘I image it will be hard without the Cursed One at your side, however.’’

Wait, he hadn’t seen Jenny yet? She blinked. She was literally standing right next to Ahmanet. There was less than a foot between them. It was kind of hard to miss her. How the hell - oh, wait, right. His eye was swollen shut. He probably couldn’t see much through it. And with the way he was pressed against the floor, it was a small miracle he could twist his head enough to even see Ahmanet.

Ahmanet’s returning smirk was not only less painful, but also infinitely smug. Jenny could feel the cruel delight and glee pouring across the link, powerful enough to make Jenny have to suppress a small smirk of her own from the feedback alone.
"Oh, Abdamelek," the glee in Ahmanet’s voice was unmistakable, "you mean my beloved Jennifer?"

"She came to me to find a way to kill you," Abdamelek tried to taunt.

"She did. And then she came to her senses."

The priest froze on the floor. "What?"

"Jennifer, my sweet," Ahmanet gently tugged Jenny into Abdamelek’s currently limited line of sight. "Won’t you say hello to Abdamelek?"

Jenny stared down on the priest prone against the floor, not sure what to say. Last time she’d seen him, he’d kicked her out of the temple and left her to fend for herself. To be fair, she had killed one of his priests maybe an hour earlier. Still, she couldn’t quite say she was all that fond of him anymore. For lack of words, she just said; "Abdamelek. Last time I saw you, you were in much better condition," which probably came out making her sound more evil than anything. She tried not to cringe. That was the kind of line a stereotypical villain would feed to a hero after they’d, like, detonated a bomb in the hero’s kitchen and came to gloat.

Abdamelek stared up at her in horror. "Jennifer… what have you done?"

Jenny shrugged a little. She really wasn’t quite sure how to explain herself. "I guess I just went where my gut told me to go."

"To me," Ahmanet added, rather unnecessarily, possessively (and somewhat smugly) wrapping her arm around Jenny’s waist. "Doesn’t she look lovely with a crown on her head? Like she was born for it."

Abdamelek was almost speechless. His good eye was watery and bloodshot, while his other eye, bruised purple and swollen shut, was almost continuously leaking tears. They were tinted a little pinkish, which meant his eyes, or the surrounding skin, was likely bleeding. "What have you done?" He repeated weakly.

Jenny gave another shrug. She may not be sure about how to explain herself, but she did know one thing; she didn’t have to explain herself. Abdamelek wasn’t her father. He wasn’t her friend. He didn’t have any authority over her. She owed him nothing. She did say, awkwardly, ‘sorry about your shoulder.’ because she did owe him an apology for that.

He didn’t quite seem to realize it was a specific apology, and not the general ‘I’m sorry’ that was usual in cases of injury for, well, pretty much anyone.

"Come, my love. We will have tea and perhaps see about some entertainment."

"Don’t bother trying to escape or kill yourself. My guards will stop you before you can succeed."

"My people will come for me."

"Perhaps. But they won’t get far. I’ll see to that." That said, Ahmanet placed her hand on the small of Jenny’s back. Jenny let herself be led away, barely even feeling guilty about leaving Abdamelek behind on the floor. She mouthed a quick ‘behave’ at a somewhat sickly looking Chris, and then didn’t look back as she walked towards the stairs. A couple of guards marched past to stand guard outside of Abdamelek’s cell and keep an eye on him.

"Our quarters?" Ahmanet suggested. "Or would you prefer somewhere more public?"
“Anywhere is fine,’” Jenny responded. She wasn’t picky at the moment.

Ahmanet thought for a moment, and then led Jenny to a room she hadn’t seen before. It had a balcony that gave a view over the courtyard and the walls, one she wasn’t aware existed, since it hadn’t been visible from the ground when she’d arrived at the palace. People were milling around the courtyard, servants and regular inhabitants of the palace, as well as some soldiers. They were marching drills, all clad impeccably in traditional skirts and bulletproof vests, carrying rifles against their shoulders and khopesh swords at their hips.

A servant brought in tea and some snacks. Dates, filled with cheese. While Jenny was staring at the marching soldiers, strangely captured by the clean synchronicity of their movements (and the fact that, apparently, having several hundred soldiers marching around was normal here), Ahmanet called in a second servant, to fetch a small team of Cult operatives.

“Send out teams,’” she ordered, placing a hand over Jenny’s to signal her to keep quiet for now. “Burn down the temples of Osiris. All of them. Destroy the altars and religious texts specifically. Leave no priests alive. For every head you bring me, I will give you one troy ounce of gold. Spread the word.”

The Cult soldiers saluted. “Your will shall be done, Your Majesty.”

“Yes,” Ahmanet said mildly. “It will.”
Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

Hello everyone! It's Saturday (at least, it is where I live) and that means a new chapter! Chapter 44, to be exact. Whew, this fic is turning out way longer than I had thought it'd be when I started it. Fun, though. I hope you're all still enjoying this, because I am, and we've still got a bit to go.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

Chapter Notes

Jenny makes a decision she wouldn't have made a couple of weeks ago. In the middle of the night, she and Ahmanet are pulled out of bed by guards - and are told the palace is under attack!

“You really can’t do stuff like that,” Jenny complained to Ahmanet after the soldiers had left, not for the first time, “no, really. You can’t.”

Ahmanet ate a date, looking remarkably unconcerned considering the fact that it was this sort of shit that had them arguing earlier. “Jennifer, I understand your concerns. But can you honestly tell me that modern governments do not prosecute people?”

“Well,” Jenny said uncomfortably, “no, I can’t. Because they do. But it’s really frowned upon. Other countries will call you a dictator and use it as an excuse to invade. There’ll be foreign armies setting up peace missions to stop you from persecuting groups of people before you know it.”

“They will have to acknowledge me as the rightful ruler before they can declare me a dictator,” Ahmanet pointed out. “And if they do, they will first have to convince me to sign those treaties you were talking about. If they set up these ‘peace missions’ before I have done that, I will consider them an invading force and react accordingly.”

“That’s even worse,” Jenny said. “That’s how wars start.”

“We can weather a war,” Ahmanet responded, sipping her tea unconcernedly. “Do not worry so much, Jennifer. I will not let anyone destroy our home.”

“How can you say that? Modern warfare is a lot more advanced than it was five millennia ago, Ahmanet.” Jenny was a little frustrated. She’d been trying to drive this exact point home for a while now, and it just didn’t seem to stick. Ahmanet was more than intelligent enough to understand it, so why wasn’t she taking modern warfare into account?

“I am aware of that. But you need to be aware of the fact that Egypt is my territory. The desert is mine. I control it. My sand creatures are unkillable. If soldiers try to march on me, I will drown them in sand and turn their corpses back on their comrades. If they try to drive warmachines to me, I’ll...
drown those too. I will have crows patrol the skies, and if they try to use planes against me, I will have crows dive into their engines or send a sandstorm to take them down.” Ahmanet squeezed Jenny’s hand in an attempt to reassure her. “No one will take over Egypt without my say so, my love. Trust me on that.”

“That doesn’t help against long-distance weapons like missiles, though,” Jenny pointed out. Great as all of that sounded, and though it did reassure her to some point that they wouldn’t be drowning in enemy soldiers unless Ahmanet allowed it, it didn’t help much if someone decided to make use of a convenient missile base three countries over.

“I’m working on it,” was all Ahmanet responded to that.

“That’s great,” Jenny said blandly. “I still don’t agree with your decision to declare open season on the priests of Osiris.”

Ahmanet sighed a little. “It is something that must be done, my love.”

“Why?”

“Because they will not rest until we are dead, or they are. There is no alternative. Their hatred for us and our god is too strong. If left alive, they will hound our steps until the end of time, always making attempts to kill us. They will not change their minds. They will not stop.” Ahmanet paused, making sure Jenny was looking at her and listening. “If we do not kill them, they will eventually kill us. Do you understand?”

Well. That changed things. Jenny didn’t want to be hunted for the rest of her probably very long life. And also, it was nice to get a decent explanation for once.

“You’re absolutely sure they won’t let up?” Jenny wanted there to be no doubt about this. It was too important not to be absolutely sure about.

“Yes, Jennifer. I am absolutely sure.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, feeling sick at herself even as she spoke the words. “Then I won’t try to stop you.”

Self-preservation, it turned out, was a powerful motivator. And also really good for eroding morals. Jenny did not want to die. She did not want to spend the rest of her life being hunted. That was something she’d experienced once already and it was something she did not care to repeat, ever. And she’d already (involuntarily) sold her soul to Set anyway, so she was probably going to hell no matter what she did. If she could extend her life by letting other people die… well, she’d already sold out her friends and killed a man, so how much worse could she get, really? It wasn’t like she was the one putting bullets in their heads, or stabbing them, or whatever. She was just… not doing anything to stop it. And besides, Jenny was of the opinion that this counted as self-preservation, rather than outright evil. Maybe. From her point of view, anyway.

Ahmanet looked surprised, eyes a little wide. “You agree with me on this?”

“No,” Jenny said, because she didn’t, “I don’t. But I don’t want to die either, or spend the rest of my life being hunted. So while I hate what has to be done, I’m choosing my life over theirs.”

“You make the right choice, my Chosen. You are infinitely more important than some priests of a god destined to be forgotten.”

Jenny rather doubted that - but she liked being alive more than she cared for a bunch of people she’d
never even met and who were actively conspiring to kill her. Equality of life, it turned out, didn’t matter so much in the face of her own life being lost. It was hopelessly selfish, but then, she’d already died once and didn’t care to repeat that anytime soon. She had things to do in the world of the living. Priorities, and all that. And also the road to hell, but fuck it, she was already going there anyway. Might as well do something to actually earn her spot beyond the fiery gates, right?

“Just… I don’t want to see the heads, okay?” The thought of soldiers bringing literal severed heads to Ahmanet and receive gold in return made Jenny want to retch. She almost hoped that it was a metaphor, but probably not. Jenny wasn’t that lucky.

“Of course, my love. I would never expose you to that if not absolutely necessary.”

“Good, because I don’t think I have the stomach for it.”

“You do not have to,” Ahmanet said. “I will handle that kind of issues.”

And Jenny was very, very grateful for that. Let Ahmanet be the one to go around ordering deaths and collecting severed heads. Jenny didn’t want anything to do with that. She didn’t even want to see it. Just knowing about it had her a little nauseous. Good enough reason for her to stay far away from all that.

“And Abdamelek?”

“I will handle him, too,” Ahmanet assured Jenny. “You needn’t worry about that.”

Jenny nibbled on her lip. “He’s not going to make it out of that cell alive, is he?”

Ahmanet shook her head. “No, he is not. I am sorry if that bothers you, Jennifer, but that is something I will not change my mind on.”

“I’d kind of already figured that,” Jenny said. She didn’t honestly expect Abdamelek to survive his imprisonment. He was the High Priest of Osiris. No matter what Jenny said, Ahmanet would not let him go. If he’d been anyone else, she might have, but being who he was… Abdamelek was, for all intents and purposes, already dead.

Jenny sipped her tea and looked back over to the soldiers marching below in the palace courtyard. They were now doing sword drills, their grunts of exertion reaching all the way up to the hidden balcony Jenny and Ahmanet were sitting on.

“Impressive, no?” Ahmanet followed Jenny’s gaze to the soldiers. “There are many, many more. Thousands, already.”

“How are there so many? You’ve been away for 5000 years.”

“I have been… indisposed for many, many years, yes,” Ahmanet agreed. “But not dead. The people were forced to hide, but that did not dampen their faith. For 5000 years, they waited. They know that the glory of Egypt would return one day.”

“Thousands, though?” Jenny could understand that some people had, through the millennia, continued to believe. That was something fairly regular; it’d been done before, with Christianity, the Islam, the Jewish faith, and other religions. Tradition could last a very, very long time. It could weather through the centuries with little to no change. But this wasn’t just religion, wasn’t just the stalwart faith in Set and an ascended Pharaoh; this was about a way of life that, apparently, had barely changed in over five millennia. That was special. And Jenny could see a couple of people sticking to it. But thousands of them - that was far more people than she had expected.
“Jennifer,” Ahmanet smiled at her as if she knew what Jenny was thinking, “the Cult of Set alone counts over seven-thousand people.”

Jenny blinked. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Our people are not nearly as few as you think, my love.”

Apparently, they weren’t. Jenny was starting to see that. Still, though. She’d thought the Cult of Set was way smaller. A couple of hundred people, maybe. Not over seven-thousand. Those were a lot of people. Like, really, a lot. Not compared to most religions, but still, it was not an insignificant number of people.

“How many are there? In total?”

“I do not have the precise numbers,” Ahmanet responded. “But if I had to guess, I would say around one hundred and fifty thousand. In total, not just in soldiers.”

“Huh,” Jenny said, a little stunned. That was enough people for a small city. It was tiny, compared to the population of Egypt as a whole, but still. Again more than Jenny had expected.

“I was quite pleased to hear so many still heed my call,” Ahmanet said.

“Quite,” Jenny responded, not sure how else to react.

Ahmanet placed her empty cup on the table. “It is nearly dinnertime. Are you hungry?”

“I could eat.”

“Then would you do me the honour of accompanying me to the dining hall?”

Jenny let Ahmanet help her out of her chair. “I’d love to.”

Jenny’s hand tucked into the crook of Ahmanet’s elbow as was becoming habit, they left the marching soldiers in the courtyard behind to finish their drills.

After a rather splendid dinner and an quiet evening reading (Jenny was right when she guessed the library didn’t have modern science-fiction, but it did have ancient stories she’d never even known existed, even as an Egyptologist), Jenny had Zara and Sahar assist her with a simple bath. She made sure to pack her new flower crown away for the night extra carefully, placing it in one of the jewellery drawers on the thickest, softest bit of velvet and silk she could find and making double sure the drawer was deep enough that the crown wouldn’t touch the bottom of the shelf above the drawer. That flower crown had instantly become her most precious possession, and Jenny did not want it to be damaged in any way, not if she could prevent it.

When she was finally about to climb into bed, she was a little surprised to see Ahmanet hesitating at the doorway of the bedroom.

“Will you permit me to sleep next to you tonight?” She paused for a second, and then added, “I can go sleep elsewhere if you prefer that.”

Jenny was a little surprised. She’d figured it was implied that Ahmanet was no longer in the doghouse, now that they’d made up. “Yes,” she responded, “of course you can sleep in here again.”
Ahmanet sagged a little in relief and wasted no time climbing into bed next to Jenny. “I am glad. I did not like sleeping elsewhere last night.”

Jenny softened a little. “I didn’t like it either.”

“You didn’t?”

“No. It was lonely. I much prefer having you here.” Jenny blushed wildly as she said it, but she meant every word. After only a couple of days, she had already grown used to having a Pharaoh next to her when she slept. It’d been miserable alone. And she’d never really liked sleeping alone, to be completely honest. That was why she’d been kind of a serial dater before this whole mess; she liked having someone to cuddle up to at night. Now that she was apparently monogamous for the long term, Ahmanet was her new cuddle buddy.

Ahmanet looked pleased at her answer, which was also reflected through the link; a soft, deep kind of warmth washed across it, the kind that made Jenny’s stomach feel a little mushy - in the good way.

“C’mere,” Jenny said, laying down and pulling Ahmanet a little closer. “I want to cuddle.”

Ahmanet had absolutely no complaints about that. Today, Jenny was asleep in a matter of minutes. The gentle warmth and contentment coming across the link only helped soothing her to sleep.

It was the sound of bells that woke Jenny up. Not windchimes or small silver ones, but big ones that made loud, abrupt noises and startled her awake in seconds.

Beside her, Ahmanet sat up, already wide awake, scrambling to get out of bed.

“What’s going on?” Jenny asked, heart pounding from the fright of being woken up so abruptly.

“Those are the warning bells!” Ahmanet scrambled for a robe, shrugging it on and tying the belt around her waist.

“Warning bells?!” Jenny quickly followed her example, hurrying after the Pharaoh, out of the bedroom. That didn’t sound good at all.

The double doors of their quarters burst open. A small crowd of guards poured in, fully armed, bulletproof vests covering their torsos. Zara and Sahar were only seconds behind, also armed. They swarmed to surround Jenny and Ahmanet in a protective circle. Zara and Sahar made sure to be next to Jenny, looking worried and alert and ready to throw themselves between Jenny and a bullet if they had to.

Jenny blinked as Sahar took the heavy-looking garment she had in her hands and wasted no time strapping it to Jenny’s torso, a little more roughly in her haste than Jenny was used to. It took a few seconds before she realized that the thick piece was a bulletproof vest. She’d never worn one before. She didn’t like the implications of having to wear one now. Ahmanet, too, got a vest, though she had the sense to grab it out of Zara’s hands and put it on herself.

“Your Majesty,” one of the guards reported, “intruders in the palace!”

Jenny froze. People had attacked the palace?!
“Where are they?! Ahmanet demanded. “And what is being done to stop them?!”

“So far we have counted over a dozen intruders. Teams are on their trail, Your Majesty, but they have silenced weapons. We’ve already suffered some losses.” The guard responded immediately as the protective circle began to herd Jenny and Ahmanet towards the doors. “You and the Queen need to get to a safe room immediately!”

Ahmanet looked furious as they passed through the doors, a kind of rage lapping at the end of the link like Jenny had felt only once or twice before. The kind of burning hot rage that would lay everything into ashes if allowed to run unchecked.

“Where are we going?” Jenny asked as she watched guards check around the corner before gesturing it was safe to move.

“There is a safe room near the dungeons,” Sahar explained, voice tight with tension. “The safest place in the entire palace. It is meant for situations like these.”

Situations like these. Jenny felt her hands start to shake as the reality of the situation sank in. People had invaded the palace. They were armed. Guards had already been killed. It was obvious the intruders were here for a reason, whatever it may be. And they had turned the palace into a warzone to get at whatever it was they wanted.

Jenny’s heart pounded double-time in her chest. Her hands were already starting to get slick with sweat. She took some mild comfort from the fact that she at least had some protection against bullets.

Echoing down the corridor were faint shouts. The guards tried to hurry them along a little faster. Jenny tried to feel comforted with the way Zara and Sahar flanked her, armed and ready, but it didn’t help much. Jenny wasn’t sure how much swords could do against guns. Not much, probably. At least her handmaidens had bulletproof vests of their own strapped over their nightgowns.

More shouts came down the corridor, louder than the first ones.

“They’re coming this way!” The lead guard hissed, “spread out! Protect the Pharaoh and Queen at all costs!”

Sahar, more forcefully than she’d ever dared to, bodily pushed Jenny into an alcove in the wall, half hidden behind a decorative statue. Sahar pressed next to her, between Jenny and the corridor, shaking with either fear or determination, sword already unsheathed and at the ready.

Ahmanet disappeared from her sight, accompanied by several guards, and Jenny guessed she’d been guided into a more defensible position as well. She didn’t like the thought of not being able to see Ahmanet right now. At least she had the link to let her know what Ahmanet was feeling. She’d know the moment Ahmanet was in true danger.

Zara joined Jenny and Sahar in the alcove. She whispered, very quietly, “please remain quiet, Your Highness. The lighting is bad at the moment, if you do not move and do not make any noise, we might escape detection.”

Hearing footsteps come down the corridor, Jenny made it her new mission in life to be as quiet as humanly possible. She could feel nervous sweat trail down the back of her neck. She’d been in a lot of shitty situations before. She’d been hunted down and murdered in the middle of a battlefield in the desert. And yet, somehow, being pressed into a tiny corner with her handmaidens standing guard, hoping that the gun-wielding intruders wouldn’t spot them, was one of the most terrifying things she’d ever done.
Maybe it was the idea of having to stand here and just wait and hope for the best, unable to control even a single thing about this situation, that had her hands shaking and her stomach roiling with nausea.

Not for the first time, she longed for her little apartment in London.

Sahar gave a nearly inaudible hiss and shuffled back a little more, pressing Jenny further into the alcove until she was trapped against the wall. Her heart was pounding in her throat so hard it almost hurt. Jenny held her breath as she spotted a shadow moving closer to her hiding spot, and then heavy boots stepping into view, only a few feet away from the statue they were hidden behind. The intruder was wearing camo print in shades of navy and black that, outside in the middle of the night, would have made them nigh invisible. They were carrying an assault rifle.

Several others joined the first, standing just out of Jenny’s line of sight, their voices the only indication they were even there.

“Seems to be clear,” one of them commented quietly.

“Can’t assume that. Johnson, check with thermal imaging.”

Jenny sucked in a lungful of breath through her teeth. Thermal imaging. Shit. She doubted being hidden behind a statue mean they wouldn’t be able to get a glimpse of red or yellow from Zara or Sahar, who were closest to the corridor. Or the other guards spread around, hidden. Or, God forbid, Ahmanet.

There were a few seconds of silence. Jenny imagined this Johnson character messing with a thermal imaging camera, searching for them. She spent a second cursing the fact that thermal imaging came in handheld cameras as well nowadays. Made it way too easy to carry around and search people out with to shoot them.

A flicker of silver near the one man in Jenny’s line of sight.

There was a shout of surprise, then a scream of pain and an arch of blood spurting through the hallway and splattering against the floor and wall.

Gunshots. More screams and blood. More flashes of silver - khopesh swords, wielded by guards with bulletproof vests. A head rolled past the alcove they were hidden in.

Jenny gagged, desperately clamping a hand over her mouth and swallowing to keep the bile down. Zara and Sahar crowded in front of her, and if Jenny had been capable of feeling physical pain, she’d have been very uncomfortable by now.

Someone in navy camo stumbled in front of the statue. The man’s eyes widened when he spotted Zara and Sahar, and Jenny behind them. He opened his mouth to yell. Sahar’s khopesh flickered out. A second mouth opened across his throat. Blood sprayed across the three of them. Most of it hit Jenny’s handmaidens, but not all; warm, sticky red splattered over her face and bulletproof vest. The metallic-y smell and the stickiness of it instantly made her want to hurl.

The cries and sounds of fighting came to a stop.

For a second, there was nothing.

Then, to Jenny’s utter relief, a guard stepped into sight. “Your Highness, it is safe for now. You can come out now.”
Sahar and Zara went first, taking a second to look around before gesturing at Jenny that it was indeed safe in the corridor again. Jenny gingerly stepped out of the alcove, and winced at what she found in the corridor. Corpses, an even dozen, were spread across the floor. Eight of them were palace guards, their vests battered, holes in either their heads, throats or just under the edge of the vest in their lower abdomen. They’d either been killed immediately or bled out very quickly. The other four bodies belonged to intruders, slash marks on their necks, faces and arms. One of them had lost an arm completely from the elbow down.

Fury licked at the edge of Jenny’s mind like fire. Ahmanet appeared at her side only a second later, eyes fixed on the blood on Jenny’s face.

“It’s not mine,” Jenny said to reassure her.

Ahmanet glanced over at the dead man near the statue.

Jenny explained, “Sahar killed him before he even got a proper look at me.”

“Good,” Ahmanet said lowly.

“Are you okay?” Jenny asked.

“I am unhurt,” Ahmanet responded. She looked calm, but the rage coming from her end of the link did not abate at all. It was a roiling storm, a current deep underwater that would pull down a ship without showing even a ripple at the surface.

“Your Majesty, Your Highness,” one of the surviving guards, a woman with a bullet graze of her shoulder, swiftly approached, “we should keep moving. The palace has not yet been secured. It is not safe yet.”

Ahmanet nodded sharply.

They moved slowly. New guards caught up with them at some point, bolstering their numbers by five, and though it slowed them down even more, Jenny was glad to have them around. She did feel safer with a living wall between her and danger. Much as she was aware of the fact she was ascended, she didn’t feel all that immortal right now.

As they rounded corners, they stumbled across more corpses. Guards, mostly, and servants, but also intruders, throats slashed, blood pooling around the bodies.

Then, as they were nearing the dungeons and the safe room located near them, voices again from around the corner of the T-cross corner. Harsh, barked orders. A male voice grunting in pain.

Jenny once again found herself pressed against a wall with Zara and Sahar protectively standing in front of her. Ahmanet was pressed next to her, looking like she dearly wanted a khopesh of her own so she could start hacking in on the intruders. Jenny kind of shared the sentiment.

Around the corner, people came into view. First, a servant, limping slowly with his hands shackled behind his back, a gun against the back of his head. It was obvious he was not helping them willingly.

Behind him, a dozen infiltrators. And between the infiltrators, a man Jenny had not expected to see again anytime soon.

She couldn’t have stopped the shocked gasp that escaped her even if she’d had the mental fortitude right now to try;
“Henry!”
Jenny slapped her hand over her mouth the moment the small noise made it past her lips. In front of her, Zara and Sahar froze in horror, and beside her Ahmanet grasped her hand and squeezed, nonverbally telling her to shut up and be quiet as a mouse.

What the hell was Henry doing here?! Hadn’t he told her he was going back to London?! Luxor was a long way away from Britain, that was for sure! And why the hell was he invading the palace with armed men anyway? He had no reason for being here. As far as Jenny knew Henry didn’t possess the Blood of Osiris, and he had no idea about Chris being alive again. And Abdamelek had been brought in only hours earlier - Henry couldn’t be here for him, unless he’d been following the Cult from the moment they’d taken Abdamelek captive. And since no one was supposed to know Jenny was here… well, really, Henry should’ve been on his way back to Britain by now. Not skulking around the palace and shooting people.

Henry’s people didn’t seem to have heard Jenny’s exclamation. For a second, Jenny thought they were going to go unnoticed - and then she noticed Zara stiffen a little, eyes fixing on one of the soldiers. Another thermal imaging camera. Damn it. Jenny sagged a little against the wall in resignation.

There was a small poke of curiosity against the edge of her mind, to which Jenny silently gestured at the camera as explanation. She could see Ahmanet’s eyes narrow. The Pharaoh reached out and tapped a guard on the shoulder, pointing out the camera. In a second or two, all present guards had caught on.

Hands clenched around the hilts of khopesh swords. Bulletproof vests were tightened.

Henry and his posse of soldiers slowly walked past, not having noticed Jenny and her entourage hidden just around the corner.

That did not mean there was not going to be a confrontation.

Like shadows, the first of the guards slipped into the corridor, soundlessly catching up the last of the pack of intruders. They’d only have one shot before they were noticed, and they took shameless
advantage of it. Jenny winced when, as one, the guards lifted their swords and reached out. The (presumably) Prodigium troops let out loud, wet gurgles as their throats were slit mercilessly, arches of blood flying from their necks as their bodies dropped to the floor with heavy thumps.

Four dead in seconds. It whittled the group of intruders down to eight, plus Henry.

Henry whirled around, black lines already creeping across his face, eyes instantly settling on the advancing palace guards. "Open fire!" He barked at his soldiers.

They did so. In an instant, the four palace guards were dead also, blood and brain matter spraying from their heads as the bullets smashed through their skulls.

Next to Jenny, a guard with a bow aimed and let his arrow fly. It pierced the throat of a Prodigium soldier. He dropped his assault rifle as he fell, spasming against the stone floor as his blood pumped out of the hole in his throat.

Things kind of descended into chaos from there.

"Your Highness, we need to leave now," Sahar said urgently.

Jenny nodded blindly. Yes. Getting out of here sounded like a splendid idea. She glanced over at Ahmanet.

"Go," the Pharaoh ordered, "I will follow soon."

Wait, what? Ahmanet wasn’t coming? Jenny reached out and grabbed her wrist, stopping Ahmanet from going in the direction of the fight. "You’re not coming?"

"I need to ensure the palace is secured first," Ahmanet said hurriedly, "go now, Jennifer, before you are noticed!"

"Screw the palace," Jenny snarled. "They’ll kill you if they see you!"

"I am not afraid of bullets, Jennifer."

"Well, I am," Jenny retorted. "And I don’t want you to die."

"I won’t." Ahmanet said confidently, gently prying Jenny’s fingers off her wrist and giving them a small, reassuring squeeze. "But you really need to leave now, my love."

"We will sneak past the fighting and escort Her Highness to the safe room, Your Majesty," Zara said.

"Very well. Go."

Sahar grabbed Jenny’s elbow and began pulling her over to the fight in the corridor. The palace guards were losing, but they were taking the Prodigium troops down with them. Jenny wondered where the soldiers she’d seen practising drills before dinner were. They’d carried rifles as well as swords. They were far more equipped to fight Prodigium than the palace guards were, who didn’t have rifles.

Jenny’s heart was in her throat as they sidled past the fight and away from it, almost plastered against the wall to avoid being hit by either swords or bullets. A palace guard went down with a scream as his arm was practically torn off by a hail of bullets. The retaliation came in the shape of khopesh to the back of the Prodigium soldier’s head, cleaving into his skull with sickening ease. Another soldier
was pushed back by a guard. He had trouble raising his rifle, trying to fend off the guard in close combat. When he stumbled too close to Jenny, Zara struck out with her khopesh, making her first kill of the night.

They were almost away from the fight now. A few more feet and they’d be able to hurry down the corridor and around the next corner. Just a few more feet to g-

“Jennifer?”

Jenny froze against the wall. Damn. So close! Damn, damn, damn and damn again! She fought to keep her voice steady as she turned her head to look at her stunned-looking former father figure. “Yes, Henry?”

Zara and Sahar shifted on either side of her, shuffling a little closer, bodies tense. It was obvious they recognized the name, although Jenny had no idea who’d told them about Henry. She was fairly sure she hadn’t mentioned him, anyway.

“What are you doing here?” The shock was enough to make the blackened veins on his skin recede a little.

Jenny scrambled for an answer, and then decided she didn’t owe him one. They weren’t even allies anymore, so really, there was little for them to talk about. “I could ask you the same question.”

“We heard rumours you were in the palace,” Henry said, “so I came to fetch you.”

Jenny tried to wrap her head around that for a moment. Henry had come to rescue her? As if she was being kept prisoner? And how did he even know she was here anyway? There weren’t supposed to be any rumours. It’d never been explicitly said, but Jenny knew her presence was supposed to have been a secret from the outside world for a while yet. At least until it was safer beyond the palace walls.

“Henry,” Jenny said slowly, “I don’t need to be saved.”

She glanced over at the fight, where the last of the guards were struggling to stay alive against the onslaught of the surviving Prodigium troops. Ahmanet was nowhere to be seen. Jenny could sense her presence, though. She was very close. And she felt displeased.

“Your Highness,” Zara murmured, “we should go.”

“Right,” Jenny said.

Henry’s attention focussed on Zara. His eyes bled dark, and the blackened veins on his skin darkened in colour again. “I see.”

“See what?” What the hell was Henry talking about? Jenny did not appreciate the way he was looking at Zara at all. Henry didn’t answer. Veins stretching across his skin, he reached out to grab Zara by the throat. Jenny was instantly enraged. The look in his eye was enough for her to know that he wasn’t planning to do anything good. She caught his wrist before he could touch Zara.

“Don’t,” she said coldly, squeezing a little to make her point clear before throwing Henry’s wrist away from her, “touch her.”

“She’s keeping you prisoner,” Henry’s voice was already deeper and rougher. Hyde was very close to the surface.
Jenny felt her own strength surge in response, making her muscles tremble with anticipation. “She’s my handmaiden. Don’t touch her.”

Henry stared at her, calculating, weighing her resolve.

Jenny stared back, eyes narrowing. Silently warning Henry to back off, not to push her on this. Because she was fond of Zara (and of Sahar as well), and she wasn’t going to tolerate Henry just waltzing into the palace, killing guards and servants, and then threatening her handmaiden. Jenny was not pleased. And she was not afraid to kick Henry’s ass if she had to.

Behind them, the fight slowly ground to a halt. Jenny took a second to look over. The last of the guards had been killed. Three Prodigium soldiers were left, though they hadn’t come out unscathed. Long cuts bled slowly on their arms and legs, and one had half his nose cut off. Still, they pulled themselves together, grasping their rifles tightly, slowly moving to surround Jenny, Zara and Sahar.

Jenny tensed, readying herself for a fight. She was positive she could take them. But she wasn’t sure if she could protect Zara and Sahar at the same time. It was a risk she was going to have to take, it seemed.

“Drop your weapons,” one of the soldiers ordered Zara and Sahar.

“Don’t drop them,” Jenny ordered quickly. “I forbid it.”

Zara and Sahar’s expressions hardened as they shifted into more defensive positions, raising their swords slightly. Jenny clenched her fists, ready to throw a punch. A weapon would have been preferable, but she didn’t have one right now. Her bare hands would have to suffice.

There was a tiny movement on one of the soldier’s shoulders. A very small spider crawled up on his shoulder and towards his ear. In the back of her mind, Ahmanet’s anger burned fiercely.

“Jenny,” Henry warned, “don’t make me give the order.”

Jenny glared at him. “Touch either of them, and I’ll break your back.”

The soldier’s eyes began to glaze over. The spider was nowhere to be seen. He gave a small jerk, blinking rapidly, fingers twitching against his rifle.

“Last chance, Jennifer. Tell them to drop their weapons. No one needs to get hurt right now.”

She drew herself up to her full height and looked Henry straight in the eye, already knowing what would happen next. “No.”

Henry’s face darkened. He let out a small growl of frustration and angrily reached out to grab her upper arm. Jenny grabbed his hand before it could touch her arm, and, still staring Henry in the eye, broke his thumb. Henry gave a roar of pain.

At the same moment, the Infected soldier opened fire on the Prodigium soldier standing next to him.

Jenny kicked Henry away from Zara and Sahar.

“Stay,” she ground out to her handmaidens, stalking over to where Henry was peeling himself out of the wall. His eyes had bled black entirely. Hyde was in control. He brushed some rock dust of his shoulder, a sick grin growing on his face.

“Now, now, Jennifer. This isn’t how civilized people treat each other, is it?”
Jenny caught his punch, her free hand snapping forward to crush his nose. ‘‘Yet here you are, doing the exact same thing.’’

‘‘I never claimed to be the civilized half of this mind,’’ Hyde said, something between a sneer and a laugh on his face. His broken nose didn’t seem to bother him.

‘‘I’ll agree with you on that,’’ Jenny said, knowing it’d piss him off even more.

The responding fist to her stomach pressed the air out of her lungs and sent her flying across the hallway. She was caught just before she could slam into the wall. Ahmanet’s protective rage flowed across her mind like lava as she helped Jenny to her feet. Her expression was a twisted, hateful mockery of the unending rage Jenny had seen before. That anger, in comparison, was like a spark to a wildfire. She could feel it seeping into her mind, starting an ember of anger in her stomach, the first pinpricks of violence starting to batter at her self-control.

‘‘You dare,’’ Ahmanet seethed, ‘‘lay a hand on my Chosen?’’

‘‘It’s nothing compared what I’ll do to you, little Pharaoh,’’ Hyde threatened, a sick kind of grin on his face. He enjoyed the thought of hurting Ahmanet. Jenny could see it on his face. Those little pinpricks of wanting to hurt someone flared, the ember in her stomach catching fire. Suddenly, she could understand that rage coming across the link. The idea of someone hurting her girl and enjoying it - well, Jenny was suddenly starting to understand how someone could take satisfaction in a kill.

She’d wanted to save Henry. Ensure he was alive and comfortable, but restrained and unable to hurt her and Ahmanet. Looking into Hyde’s black eyes now, all Jenny wanted was to punch that grin off his face and feel his heartbeat stutter to a stop under her fingers.

She caught her breath, sending Henry a murderous glare. The link flared to life, stronger than it ever had before. No verbal communication was needed between her and Ahmanet. Their shared emotions said all that needed to be said.

As one, they started to move.

They were more in sync than they’d ever been. It felt like Ahmanet’s mind had melded to Jenny’s, no distinction left between the two of them. She couldn’t tell where her own mind ended and Ahmanet’s began. And right now, she didn’t want to either. She felt powerful. She felt in control. She felt like she could take on the world and win with her eyes closed and a hand tied behind her back. Her power had never felt more like it belonged to her. Like she’d been born with it.

She couldn’t have wiped the smug smirk off her face if she’d tried.

‘‘Do your worst, mortal,’’ Ahmanat taunted, also smirking.

Hyde charged with a roar of rage. Ahmanet dodged with a move Jenny had learned during her brief love affair with capoeira in her early twenties, plucked directly from Jenny’s mind. She deflected Hyde’s fist away from her, kicking him the chest, towards Jenny.

Jenny smashed her fist into his face a second time, again crunching his nose beneath her knuckles. A small spray of blood splattered over her arm as Hyde stumbled back with a bellow of pain. His eyes sparked with psychopathic fury. A fist came at Jenny’s face with speed. She bent back, feeling the rush of air over her face as it just missed her cheek. Her hand shot out and grasped Hyde’s elbow. With sickening ease she threw him away from her. He was lifted off the floor entirely with the force of it.

Ahmanet’s elbow smashed into his spine. Hyde crashed into the floor with another bellow of agony.
He recovered quickly. Kicking out at Ahmanet, his foot catching her ankle and sending her stumbling.

Jenny surged forward, planting her foot against Hyde’s chest. The sound of cracking ribs filled the hallway as he slid across the floor.

It was an utterly unfair fight.

Hyde, despite his enhanced strength, was human. He was bound by human limitations. Jenny and Ahmanet were not. They’d already surpassed human limitations. They outclassed Hyde so far it wasn’t even funny. And they didn’t finish it quickly either.

Jenny and Ahmanet double-teamed Hyde mercilessly, tossing him back and forth between the two of them, taking every chance to get a hit in.

Faintly, somewhere in the back of her mind, as she broke two of Hyde’s fingers and tossed him back to Ahmanet, Jenny knew she should be horrified with what she was doing. But she wasn’t. All she could feel at this moment was the sensation of Ahmanet’s mind entwined with hers, that inhuman rage, the need to make Hyde hurt for threatening what was hers. The fact that she considered not only Ahmanet, but also Zara and Sahar hers was something she didn’t have the presence of mind to think about right now.

Hyde struggled to his hands and knees, and then to his feet. Blood was dripping from his face, his hands were mangled, one of his ears was cleanly ripped off. Every pant sounded more like a feral growl. Somehow, he managed to muster the breath to pant out, “I’m going to kill you both. Painfully.”

“We’d like to see you try,” Ahmanet responded, barely even fazed.

“Bring it,” Jenny taunted.

Hyde charged.

By now he should have known that didn’t work.

Jenny ducked and, using a rugby move she’d seen on tv, planted her shoulder in his midsection and lifted him off the ground. Ahmanet was suddenly behind her. She plucked Hyde out of the air and threw him against the wall.

Hyde groaned as he slid down to the floor. There was a strange wheezing sound coming from his chest. Blood dribbled down his face. Still, there was defiance in him. He struggled to his feet again and threw himself at Ahmanet, who was closest to him. She lashed out without hesitation. Ahmanet twisted his wrist until it snapped under the strain. Hyde grunted at the pain, then again when the Pharaoh planted her foot in the soft part of his belly and pushed him towards Jenny.

“You bi- ARGH!” Hyde screamed - full out screamed - in pain as Jenny smashed her fist into the back of his elbow. The sound of splintering bone and tendons snapping filled the hallway. His elbow bent sharply under the force of Jenny’s fist until the bone pressed against the inside of the skin, just shy of breaking through.

Hyde moaned pitifully as Jenny let him fall to the floor, the blackened veins on his skin receding a little at the shock.

Still the rage burned. It was like nothing Jenny had ever felt before. The wrath of the gods, burning within her mind and body, consuming all it touched.
“Not so tough now, are you?” Jenny couldn’t help but sneer down at him. Ahmanet’s glee was thick and cloying in their shared consciousness. She was enjoying it. And since there was no distinction between them, Jenny was too. It filled her up, sweet like cyanide, until she could do nothing but surrender to it and let the hate spill from her tongue.

Hyde tried to crawl away, all bravado gone.

Jenny snarled. She brought her foot down on his calf. His screams of pain as his tibia and fibula shattered under Jenny’s foot were ear-shattering. The bones tore through the skin and muscle. Blood started to pool underneath his mangled leg.

Ahmanet chuckled, taking a swift step forward and smashing her foot into Hyde’s good arm. His shoulder shattered on impact, tearing another scream from his throat.

The fight had left him now. He was slumped on the floor, crying with pain, limp. Defeated.

Jenny looked down on him. She couldn’t find it in herself to pity him. There was no space for mercy in her now.

Ahmanet sauntered over. “And, my beloved? Are you having fun?”

“Yes,” Jenny breathed, and she couldn’t even feel bad about it. The power coursing through her veins, the closeness and intimacy of their shared mind, the rush of it all - she liked it very much. But she’d have liked it just as much if they hadn’t been torturing Hyde - he was a footnote at best. It was the link that made it feel so damn good. So good Jenny didn’t even care about the cruelty, the hatred, the inhuman nature of what they were doing.

“You should finish him. There are plenty more in the palace to play with.”

Right. The other Prodigium troops that were surely roaming the palace, killing their people. Jenny bared her teeth angrily. She didn’t like people invading the palace and killing her people. She’d make them pay for it. But first...

She took two quick steps, then crouched down next to Hyde’s head. His blackened eyes were wet with pain and the blood that dripped down his forehead. She brushed her hand through his hair almost gently. Her fingers skimmed past the hole in the side of his head where his ear had been. Then she grasped the side of his skull, placing her other hand on his jaw, nails digging into his skin and drawing fresh blood.

Hyde’s eyes met hers.

For a moment, there was the same inhuman anger as Jenny was feeling, that same hatred - and then his expression cleared, the black draining out of his eyes until they were once again blue. The blackened veins on his skin receded. With it, that rage and hatred went as well. Henry’s bloodied, busted face stared up at her. The man she’d once considered her father looked at her, and all she could see was fear and defeat and a deep, sad kind of empathy.

Jenny snapped his neck like a toothpick.
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of the invasion, pt. 1. Also, the palace gets some visitors.

Chapter Notes

Sooo... I killed off Henry. Painfully. Can't say I regret it, though. Sometimes, you just gotta kill off a character, and it was just about Henry's time to go. Life goes on, and so does the story. So here goes with chapter 46, everyone!

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

Minds melded into a singular entity, they ghosted through the palace.

It was like nothing Jenny had ever experienced before. With her attention no longer on Henry, she could properly feel every moment of being so intimately connected to Ahmanet. Two people melted together into one mind with two bodies. Jenny knew Ahmanet, her every thought, her every emotion, her every move before she even made it. She was as aware of her Chosen - yes, they decided as one, Ahmanet was Jenny’s Chosen as much as Jenny was hers - as she was of herself. And as one person, they hunted.

The Prodigium invaders didn’t stand a chance.

The morning of Jenny’s sixth day in the palace dawned red.

A while later, while servants were cleaning up the palace and getting rid of the bodies, Jenny washed off the blood in the baths. Ahmanet was beside her, rinsing bits of flesh out of her hair, looking and feeling very much like a large, satisfied feline.

Zara and Sahar did the same for Jenny, carefully shampooing and conditioning her hair, combing out the tangles, making sure every strand was clean and fragrant. It was nice. They’d been frightened by what they’d witnessed, Jenny knew. And both had killed. The fact that they were coherent and able to function right now was impressive. She’d have to give them both some time off, really, so they could properly process everything.

Hell, Jenny herself needed some time to process everything. Because a lot had happened in the last couple of hours. Henry was dead. Jenny had killed him with her bare hands, And she had enjoyed it. She’d tortured him, breaking bones and making him hurt, and then she’d looked into his eyes and snapped his neck, and she had liked every second of it. And Ahmanet had done nothing to stop her - had, in fact, joined in and encouraged her. And they’d killed more people after that. Prodigium soldiers. Near a dozen between the two of them. That brought Jenny’s kill count up to seven in total -
Akar, Henry and five Prodigium men and women.

Worst of all, though - worst of all was that Jenny didn’t feel bad at all. There was no guilt. There was no self-loathing or horror or disgust. No urge to throw up like when she’d seen decapitated heads roll down the corridor and Sahar had slashed that man’s throat in front of her. She should be trying to hack up her stomach by now. Instead, she was relaxing in a hot bath, getting a scalp massage from Zara and a shoulder massage from Sahar, Ahmanet sitting next to her and looking as content as Jenny felt.

It was silent.

Zara rinsed out her hair and ran the comb through it again to make sure no tangles were left.

“Zara, Sahar,” Jenny said quietly, “go clean up and get some rest. You’ve earned it.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Zara responded, putting the comb aside.

“If you or Her Majesty need us, we are but a call away,” Sahar added.

“We’ll keep it in mind,” Ahmanet said mildly. Her tone was light, but it was an obvious dismissal.

Zara and Sahar bowed their heads and left quickly.

Jenny closed her eyes, letting her head rest against the edge of the bath. She was submerged up to her chin, and the hot water felt absolutely fantastic.

“Are you alright?”

Jenny opened her eyes to glance at Ahmanet. She knew the Pharaoh already knew exactly how she was feeling. The link had gone mostly dormant again, but that didn’t change the fact that their merging had strengthened it significantly. Like the barrier had been taken away. Jenny didn’t have to consciously reach out to read Ahmanet’s emotions anymore, and they didn’t just seep through in times of high emotion; they were just there, constantly, against the edge of her mind.

“I feel… pretty good, actually.” Jenny responded anyway. “I shouldn’t, but I do.”

“It’s normal. We are beyond humanity. We are ascended. Living goddesses. It’s much like a human who kills cattle. They are not bothered because they know they are superior to the creatures they kill.”

“Are you saying we’re better than regular humans?”

“We are,” Ahmanet stated, full of conviction. “It’s the truth. We are faster. Stronger. Smarter. Our senses are better. We are as good as immortal. We can do things humans cannot even dream of.” Ahmanet smiled a little. “We are as far away from humans as the gods, like Set, are from us.”

“I don’t think humans are cattle,” Jenny said.

“They are not, in the strictest sense of the word,” Ahmanet agreed. “We do not eat them, for instance. But that does not change that we are superior. Predators in a world of prey. You cannot blame a cat for hunting a mouse. Just like you cannot blame yourself, or me, for killing humans.”

Jenny frowned a little. “Then what has changed? Because I felt guilty when I killed Akar. I was disgusted when Sahar killed a man in front of me. But now, I just don’t care. It doesn’t bother me anymore.”
“Natural progression. You were truly immersed in your own power for the first time, I think. I remember how you felt. You felt more powerful than you ever had before, didn’t you? And it felt good. You liked it.”

“I did,” Jenny said, and then, after a second of thought said, “I still do.”

“I know. And you won’t stop liking it. I still do, and it’s been five millennia since I first felt it.”

Jenny stared at the ceiling, thinking. More to herself than anything, she said, “I think… that was me accepting my nature, wasn’t it?”

That, this night, had been Jenny knowing what she was capable of, and accepting it rather than rejecting it like she had done until yesterday. That had been her feeling her power, and reveling in it rather than being afraid of it. There was no fear in her now. It was like all that anxiety, that disgust for what she had become, had seeped out of her. For the first time since getting a dagger to the heart, Jenny felt… good. Content with who she was becoming. Like a weight had fallen off her shoulders.

It was kind of ironic, and also somewhat horrifying, that it had been the act of brutally murdering half a dozen people for Jenny to come to terms with her own murder. That it had taken the deaths of six people at her own hand to make her realize that there was no going back now. She was never going to be human again. She was never going to go back to being a simple archaeologist. Jenny was ascended. She was a living goddess in all ways that mattered. She was probably going to live for millennia. She had become something more than human. And all she could do at this point was accept it and accept herself as she was now.

“I still think you should respect basic human rights and stuff like that,” Jenny told Ahmanet. “No torturing or starving or imprisoning them without a fair trial.”

“Of course,” Ahmanet said mildly.

“The fact that I’m okay with killing now doesn’t make me entirely morally corrupt.”

“I never said it did, my love.”

“And I’m not going to randomly start killing people.”

“You do not have to if you do not with to, my love.”

“Okay,” Jenny said, almost to herself, nodding. “Okay.”

Ahmanet repeated her first question. “Are you alright?”

Jenny gave another, firmer nod. “I’m alright.”

“Good. Because if you will allow me, I would very much like to kiss you now.”

Jenny was quite happy to comply.

A servant was waiting in the living room when Jenny and Ahmanet emerged a while later, both clean and dressed as if nothing had happened. Except it had happened, and the trouble wasn’t quite over yet.

“Sire,” the servant nervously addressed Ahmanet. “there are people at the gates.”
Ahmanet frowned. "There have been people at the gates since the day I unearthed my palace from the desert."

"Yes, Your Majesty, but these people are not simply journalists and the curious. They bear the sign of the false government."

The frown on the Pharaoh’s face deepened a little. "I see. Have they stated their intentions?"

"They wish to parlay, Sire."

Jenny couldn’t quite tell whether that was good or bad. On one hand, no bombs were getting dropped yet, so that was good. On the other hand, if Ahmanet let them in and things went south, there was a good chance at war. But then again, they were already planning to go to war anyway. And they did have most the of modern Egyptian military under control. Also, Egypt was mostly desert, so that was an almost inexhaustible source of soldiers right there.

"Have the hallways been cleaned up yet?" Ahmanet asked.

"Mostly, Your Majesty. If we use the route from the front doors directly to the throne room, they shan’t see anything out of the ordinary."

Ahmanet finished thinking it over. "Prepare a guard, then show them in. Bring them directly to the throne room. No detours. And make sure they don’t leave anything behind that might enable them to spy within the palace."

The servant bowed. "Yes, Sire."

Ahmanet turned to Jenny. "I do hope you will join me."

"Of course," Jenny said. Like she was going to miss this. This was history in the making. No way she was going to go read a book at the lotus pond instead of being there. "Just let me put on something a little more formal."

"Good idea, my love."

Jenny quickly made her way back into the closet. She was going to need something a little more… queenly, if she was going to meet people in an official function. Her plain white skirt and tunic, nice as they were, weren’t going to cut it. She was going to need something a little more decorative. And her jewellery. She was going to need that too. Though she was definitely going to wear her flower crown over her golden diadem, because she liked her flower crown a hell of a lot more.

It took her only a couple of minutes to dress. She stuck to her preferred skirt and tunic combo, but in fancier material, and with some decoration. Her tunic was fine silk, plain collared since she was wearing her broad collar today. Her skirt, though, had a fine leather belt and Ahmanet pulled an honest-to-God leopard skin from somewhere, which she wrapped around Jenny’s hips as well. Sort of like a wrap-around skirt, except that she was already wearing a skirt underneath, and it didn’t cover the entire thing.

"This wasn’t poached, right?" Jenny asked as she slid her arm cuffs into place on her upper arms.

Ahmanet shook her head. "No. My family always had the tradition to keep two breeding pairs of leopards. When they died, the skins were harvested from them. Before that, they were treated well."

Jenny nodded. She was okay with that. Leopards probably shouldn’t be kept as pets, but at least they hadn’t been poached from the wild. The species had it hard enough as it was. And places like zoos
kept exotic animals too - as long as they were cared for properly and weren’t mistreated, Jenny was totally fine with Ahmanet keeping leopards, if she wanted to pick that tradition up again.

Plus, and this might sound vain, she did have to admit that the leopard skin added to her outfit. The fur had a really nice shade of golden yellow that matched quite well with all her jewellery, and the black of the spots made a nice contrast with the white of her skirt and tunic.

Jenny quickly donned the rest of her jewellery, heavy broad collar included, and then carefully retrieved her flower crown and placed it on her head.

“Do we need makeup?” She asked Ahmanet.

“Yes,” Ahmanet said. “That would be advisable.”

Jenny nodded. She was fairly confident she could pull off the makeup on her own. Though she might struggle a little with the eyeliner. She’d figure it out, though. She’d let Zara and Sahar rest for another while, instead of calling them in here to help her. They’d had one hell of a night too. They could probably use the rest.

Jenny probably could too, but it looked like she wouldn’t get to rest for another while at least. Not until this whole meeting thing was over anyway. Why were government representatives even here? And why now? Surely if they’d had a vested interest in the palace (which, honestly, they probably had, if only for the cultural significance) they’d have tried to get in sooner, right? Something about their presence now smelled a little fishy.

Jenny finished her makeup and took a quick look in the mirror. It looked good. Not quite as sharp as when Zara or Sahar did it for her, but not shabby either. It’d do.

Ahmanet, makeup and crown already in place, wearing a dress of gauzy fabric and golden jewellery, was already waiting. “Are you ready?”

“As ready as can be.” Jenny responded, accepting the arm held out for her.

A line of guards were waiting just outside the royal quarters. Traditional dress and weapons, but wearing bulletproof vests.

“Sire,” the leader said, “the guests are in the throne room. We are here to escort you and Her Highness there for further safety reasons.”

Ahmanet nodded. “When we reach the throne room, you will function as the Queensguard.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” the head guard said.

Jenny frowned. “Queensguard?”

“For your protection,” the Pharaoh responded as she started to lead Jenny down the corridor, “I know you do not need it, but I would feel better if you had some people between you and possible hostiles.”

Jenny was okay with that. The fact that she was capable of killing without flinching or feeling bad about it didn’t mean she was going to go around and do so. Or invite people to have a shot at her so she’d have to defend herself. It’d be nice if there were a couple of people between her and their guests. Especially since she wasn’t sure what their guests wanted, and what their intentions were towards her and Ahmanet. Best to be careful for now.
Upon arriving at the throne room, they were announced by the herald; “All rise for Her Royal Majesty, the Pharaoh Ahmanet of Egypt, First of her Name, and her beloved wife, the Queen Jennifer of Egypt!”

Jenny eyed their guests curiously as Ahmanet escorted her to her throne, gallantly waiting for her to have taken a seat before she took her own throne. The guards filed into a single line, standing in front of the thrones on the bottom step, backs towards Jenny and Ahmanet. Their bodies were tensed, ready to jump into action.

There were half a dozen people standing about twenty feet away from the foot of the dais. All were men, mostly middle-aged, clad impeccably in suits, the Egyptian flag on little silver pins on their lapels. They were looking somewhere between curious, impatient and displeased as they stared up at Ahmanet and Jenny.

The disinterest was as clear in Ahmanet’s voice as it was coming across the link. “Why are you here? I have not invited you into my palace, and I rather doubt you are here to return to me my birthright.”

Jenny saw several of the men bristle at Ahmanet’s tone and words. It was very obvious she didn’t think much of them and wanted them out of her palace asap. Not that Jenny didn’t share the sentiment, of course. She, too, wanted these men the hell out of here. Mostly so she could take a nap.

“I am Ahmed Qadir.” One of the men introduced himself, stepping forward. “We are here on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage of Egypt.”

Ahmanet gave a small, bored-sounding hum. “And what of it?”

“This palace has been declared a site of national cultural interest,” Ahmed said. “Therefore, we must ask you to vacate the premises so it may be secured by our archaeologists.”

Jenny resisted the urge to sigh as annoyance started to radiate from Ahmanet. This was going to go badly. She just knew it.

“I see,” Ahmanet said.

Ahmed nodded. “We believe a day is plenty of time for you to gather the necessities and leave. Of course, you may not take any artefacts with you, or otherwise deface the property. Clothing and such are of course excluded from this. Though,” he added quickly, “we also insist the jewellery you are wearing is handed over as well. It is also a point of interest to us.”

“Well, in that case,” Ahmanet responded somewhat acidly, “I refuse.”

Ahmed spluttered. “Excuse me?”

“I refuse,” Ahmanet reiterated. “This palace and everything in it is my property. I refuse to hand it over to a fake government that thinks it has a right to my possessions.”

“We are direct representatives of the Egyptian government!”

“Which I do not acknowledge as having any authority at all,” the Pharaoh responded calmly, though she was seething just under the surface. “I am the rightful ruler of Egypt. It is my birthright. So is this palace. I shall not be giving away either.”

One of the other men puffed up with anger, a little like a bullfrog. “That is nonsense! Egypt has a president, and it is not you!”
"President," Ahmanet scoffed. "I do not aim to be president. I am the Pharaoh! And I shall be Pharaoh until the pyramids crumble to dust and the desert has been blown away by the wind!"

"There has not been a Pharaoh in centuries, and I daresay there shan’t be another ever again." Ahmed stated harshly. "And if you do not vacate the premises of the government’s property, we shall be forced to have you removed!"

Ahmanet’s anger was sharp and cold, accented by a tinge of bloodlust. She leaned forward in her throne, showing all her teeth in a mockery of a smile. "I would like to see you try."

Watching the men grow red with anger, Jenny decided it was time to step in before this descended into violence. "Guards!"

In an instant, a dozen men and women stepped away from where they’d been lining the walls. The Queensguard standing a couple of feet below did not move.

"Your Highness?"

"Escort these men from the premises," Jenny said, somehow managing to come across as bored and a little disdainful. She was sure she came across as a total bitch, but she didn’t rightly care about that. "Make sure the door doesn’t hit them on the way out."

Ahmed shrugged off the hand that landed on his shoulder. "And who are you to make demands?! You are not a citizen of this county!"

"Gosh," Jenny said dryly. Obviously she hadn’t been born here. Her skin was way too pale for that. Anyone could figure that out. "What gave me away?"

"She," Ahmanet’s voice was like a whip, harsh and cracking through the air, "is my Chosen. The Queen of Egypt. How dare you speak to her in such a tone?!"

"Women are not permitted to marry one another," one of the men commented. "It is illegal."

"Your puny laws are irrelevant. Guards, get them out of my sight." Ahmanet sat back in her throne, watching as the guards roughly grabbed the representatives by their upper arms and began to drag them away.

Ahmed tried to wrestle away again, and failed. "We will use force to secure this palace if we have to!"

"Like I said," Ahmanet smiled, slow and predatory, sprawled on her throne like a gigantic feline, a panther ready to pounce. "I would like to see you try."

They were dragged out of the throne room. If they’d been the sort of people who let others see them make a scene (more than they already had, anyway), they’d have gone kicking and screaming. As it was, they went glaring and muttering threats. The latter, especially, had the guards handling them more roughly than strictly necessary.

"Arrogant," Ahmanet muttered when the doors slammed closed behind the representatives. "If they represent the current government, we shan’t have much trouble overthrowing it."

"Don’t underestimate them," Jenny warned. "A wounded dog still has teeth. And it will bite if threatened."

Ahmanet gave a slow nod in acknowledgement at that. "Quite so, my love. But you should not
worry. I have things under control.’’

Jenny didn’t doubt that. She didn’t think Ahmanet would half-ass a coup. But that didn’t stop her from worrying.

‘‘And I am in the process of gathering information on modern warfare,’’ Ahmanet added. ‘‘I have several books. Servants are in the process of reading them, after which they will give me an overview of what I need to know.’’

‘‘Not reading the books yourself?’’ Jenny raised an eyebrow.

‘‘I do not have the time to read all day, my love. And this way, I still receive the information you insisted I know about.’’

‘‘Fine with me,’’ Jenny said. She didn’t care how Ahmanet got the information, as long as she got it. And remembered it. And if she didn’t, Jenny was going to drag her over the coals until she did, because this shit was important. She changed the subject a little. ‘‘How far are you with infecting the army?’’

‘‘Quite far,’’ the Pharaoh said. ‘‘I have spiders producing offspring almost exclusively now rather than controlling people and producing at the same time, which has sped up the process admirably.’’

Jenny nodded. ‘‘And the politicians?’’

‘‘Still advocating for our cause. But it will take time for opinions to change.’’

Jenny doubted they had that time. She knew, deep in her bones, that war was coming. Soon. And by then, a few politicians spouting about the ‘good old times’ weren’t going to make a difference. At that point, it would be armies that made the difference. Good thing their army was made out of sand. There was plenty of that around here. And also dead people, of which the availability would skyrocket as soon as the war started.

‘‘When we take over,’’ Ahmanet said, a pensive look on her face, ‘‘I rather think I am going to execute those men.’’

Jenny raised an eyebrow.

‘‘I did not like the way they acted. Or their tone.’’

A day ago, Jenny would have protested against this. A day ago, Jenny had also still been rejecting her own nature. Today, the only objection she had was the reaction of other countries and human rights organizations. And the fact that she didn’t want to think of herself as entirely morally corrupt. That too.

‘‘Especially that one who insulted you.’’

‘‘He was kind of right, though. Legally, I am not a citizen of Egypt. In fact,’’ Jenny said thoughtfully, ‘‘I’ve probably overstayed on my visa by now.’’

Actually, Jenny wasn’t sure she even had a visa at the moment. She’d left in kind of a hurry after opening the tomb, and she’d returned in an even greater hurry. And there sure hadn’t been any stops at the border to enter through the proper means. So yeah. She was probably here illegally at this point.

‘‘You are the Queen. You have more right to be here than he has.’’
“Perhaps,” Jenny said absently.

“Assuredly,” Ahmanet corrected.

Jenny just hummed in response.
Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet go met with the families of the victims of the invasion, and then have a heartfelt talk.

Chapter Notes

Welp, here we go, chapter 47 is ready for action. To be fair, it's been ready for a while, but I gotta stick to my schedule, right? Anyway, here goes!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After the government representatives had been thrown out, Jenny and Ahmanet did the logical thing and went to have lunch. Or, maybe, not the most logical thing, but certainly something that was necessary too. They’d missed breakfast, and Jenny was getting kind of hungry at this point. She’d burned through a lot of energy last night, after all. As it turned out, killing people was hungry work.

It seemed like the cooks had not been disturbed by Prodigium last night, and the kitchens didn’t appear to have been touched either. Neither had the pantries. Jenny was a little taken off-guard when the food was up to the same standard it always was, as if the cooks had just shrugged off the attack like it never happened and went to do what they always did. She would have expected something simpler than usual, like maybe sandwiches or even things like a hasty porridge.

It was the exact opposite.

It was lunch as Jenny was starting to see was usual, but more substantial than normal, more like an evening meal than anything else. Of course, despite the night the palace had had, it all managed to look like haute cuisine too.

“Food is a good way to calm people down,” Ahmanet said as they took their seats in the dining hall. “In the case of people who suffered losses tonight, meals will be delivered to their respective quarters, so they don’t have to be in public yet if they don’t want to be. They will be simpler meals than this, hearty and meant for comfort.”

Jenny nodded as she surveyed her food options. She went for the sabanekh (a spinach stew), rice, and some of the kofta. She knew that comfort food was good for just that; comforting people. As she placed some food on her plate, she asked, “How many did we lose?”

“In total? Thirty-eight of our people were killed last night. Nineteen guards, seven soldiers, and an even dozen servants.”

Jenny clenched her hand around her fork in anger, gritting her teeth. God, she hated this, hated what had happened. “That’s too many.”
“It is.” Ahmanet agreed solemnly.

“How many Prodigium?” Jenny really, really hoped they’d killed more Prodigium than they’d lost people last night. It’d make her feel better, at least, even if it didn’t change how many had died.

“The count was at thirty. Henry as well. So thirty-one in total.”

Damn. They’d lost thirty-eight people, and had killed only thirty-one in response. Jenny stared down at her kofta, no longer all that hungry. Slow anger burned in her stomach like acid. It was a kind of anger that was new to her, a kind she hadn’t really experienced since she’d merged with Ahmanet completely. She was usually quick to anger and quicker to lash out, and then lost that anger almost immediately after. She didn’t really do the slow, hot, long-lasting rage that was so normal for Ahmanet. At least, she hadn’t until today. That sudden, strong craving for revenge hadn’t been there either.

Apparently she’d changed more than she’d thought. She couldn’t find it in herself to regret that. The anger, like the power, felt good - like it belonged to her. Like it would obey her every whim and make her stronger than she had ever been before. She looked down on her plate, stewing in the anger, letting it seep into all the raw, jagged cracks in her mind. “Do we have any Cult soldiers to spare?”

Ahmanet paused in cutting her pigeon. “Yes. Why?”

“Send them to London. Tell them to burn Prodigium to the fucking ground.”

Ahmanet blinked at her. “I thought you did not approve of killing.”

“I’m making an exception,” Jenny said, letting her fork fall from her hand. It was deformed where her fingers had pressed into the metal.

“I see. I will send some people over.”

“Tell them I’m not interested in survivors.”

“I’m sure they shan’t have a problem with that.” Ahmanet responded mildly.

“Good.” Jenny stabbed her knife into a piece of kofta, ignoring the sound of her plate shattering as the tip of her knife broke through the china. She was just not in the mood for this anymore.

After lunch came another thing that needed to happen, something Jenny dreaded more than she’d dreaded seeing those government representatives earlier that morning; they had to go see the people who had lost loved ones last night. Because apparently if there were deaths in the palace, it was Ahmanet’s duty to ensure her subjects were doing okay. Which meant Jenny had to come along too, because she was the Queen, and that meant that the people were her responsibility too.

Considering the way these people had died, she could totally understand that she and Ahmanet would need to pay the people left behind a visit - if only to make sure the people knew they appreciated the sacrifices that had been made.

Jenny was not looking forward to it, though. Partly because she just wasn’t all that good with consoling heartbroken people. She never quite knew what to say to make them feel better. But mostly because she was the reason the palace had been invaded in the first place; Henry had been
here for her, not for anyone else. It wasn’t going to be fun to see those people, mourning their loved ones and knowing it was partly her fault.

Still, this wasn’t something she could ignore. She could not, in good conscious, beg off and let these people go unacknowledged. Not after what they’d sacrificed to defend the palace and everyone in it. Which meant she had to go and visit every family who’d lost someone; with thirty-eight casualties, of which four had been orphans and several had been related, that left Jenny and Ahmanet with twenty-seven families to visit.

They started with the parents of a servant. A serving girl, Jenny let herself be told by Ahmanet, of about nineteen years old, who’d tried to lead the palace guards to the invaders and had gotten a bullet to the back of her head for the effort. Put down like a common criminal. She’d been spared no mercy. No regard for the fact that she was a teenage girl who was just trying to protect her home.

According to her barely-coherent mother, the girl had wanted to be a chef one day. She’d been trying to work her way up from a serving girl to a small job in the kitchen, and then hopefully later to a position as apprentice to one of the palace chefs. She’d been practising her knife skills for months, and had already attracted the interest from one of the kitchen workers.

She’d had a boyfriend too, a young man a couple of months older than her, and they had planned to go on a holiday to Greece coming summer. Rumour had it that the young man had asked the girl’s father for his blessing; he’d wanted to propose.

Yet, in one night, all of that had been taken from her.

It was enough to make Jenny seethe with anger and wish she’d taken more time to make the Prodigium she had killed hurt before she’d ended them.

After that came the widowed wife of a guard, who’d gone out to search for her husband once the fighting had died down. She’d found him, with bullets in his vest and throat, and one of his eyes as well as the back of his head missing entirely. He, too, had been trying to protect his home, and his fellow guards.

They’d been planning to start trying for a child, since they’d been married for almost five years and decided they were ready. He’d been halfway through building a crib by hand, a project he’d apparently spent weeks on to get it just right, when the palace had been attacked. The palace soldiers, the ones with rifles, had come too late to stop him from being riddled with bullets and left behind like a broken toy. He was lucky enough to have been dead before he even hit the floor; Jenny had heard some guards hadn’t been that lucky. They’d been shot and left to bleed out slowly.

Third came a family of four; father, mother, two little girls. Until a couple of hours ago, they’d had a son too. Jenny was startled to realize that he’d been one of the guards that had retrieved her and Ahmanet from the royal quarters and tried to evacuate them to the safe room. One of the ones that’d snuck out behind the Prodigium and slit their throats to even the odds. The ones that had gotten pumped full of lead only seconds later, enough of it to tear through their vests and rip open their torsos despite the protection.

That were three families down, and Jenny was already shaken and wishing she’d treated the Prodigium like she’d treated Henry.

Only twenty-four visits left to go.

The next couple of hours were not fun.
It was late past dinnertime when Jenny and Ahmanet left the last family to their mourning. They’d lost both their sons in one night, and they had no other children. It’d be hell for them for a long time, coming to terms with that kind of loss. Jenny didn’t even want to think of how they were going to manage on the birthdays, or during holidays like Ramadan and New Year’s. Poorly, probably. If they even celebrated at all this year.

“’You know,’” Jenny said as she entered the royal quarters and dropped down on the couch, quickly kicking off her sandals, “’I wish I knew how to bring people back. Purposely. And without nearly dying in the process.’”

“’You will learn,’” Ahmanet responded gently. “’And they will not hold it against you that you cannot do it now. They know what it did to you last time. They won’t ask that of you. Not even to bring their own children back to them.’”

“’That doesn’t change the fact that I wish I could do it,’” Jenny said. It was bitter, knowing that she should be able to bring the people they’d lost tonight back, yet being incapable of doing so.

“I will teach you. But it will take time.”

“’We have plenty of that.’”

“’Quite,’” Ahmanet agreed. There was curiosity coming from her, but also some hesitance. It took a second for her to ask the question. “’Have you ever lost someone like that?’”

“’Don’t you already know? You’ve been in my mind.’”

Ahmanet shook her head. “’I respect your privacy. I didn’t look into your past. Not without your permission.’”

Jenny smiled a little, pleased. Then her expression fell a little. “’I lost my grandmother, back when I was nineteen. I loved her very much.’”

“’Your father and mother are still alive?’”

“’Yeah. But I haven’t seen them in years.’”

Ahmanet gave Jenny her full attention. “’How so?’”

“’We were never close. My father knocked up my mother at a party when they were barely eighteen. Neither really wanted a kid, but my mother didn’t want to have an abortion, so they had me anyway.’” Jenny gave a small shrug. “’They weren’t married, and my father didn’t stick around once he found out about the pregnancy. My mother wasn’t ready for children. She never intended to have me, even if she didn’t have an abortion. My grandmother stopped her from giving me up for adoption and took me in. She raised me.’”

Ahmanet reached out to squeeze Jenny’s hand. “’I am sorry your parents were so cruel to you.’”

“’I’m not,’” Jenny responded matter-of-factly. At the confusion she could see and feel, she explained. “’If my father had raised me, I have no doubt I’d have ended up with Child Protective Services sooner or later. If my mother had raised me, I’d not have had a childhood as good as I had. My grandmother was a spectacular woman, and she raised me with all the love I could have possibly wanted. I adored her. She gave me a good childhood. A happy one.’”
“She sounds wonderful.” Ahmanet sounded a little wistful. In some of the documents Jenny had read, the death of Ahmanet’s father’s mother had been mentioned, with a date from before Ahmanet had even been born. She’d never had a grandmother.

“She was.” Jenny agreed. “And I was heartbroken when she died.”

“Perhaps, once you have your power under control, you can resurrect her,” Ahmanet suggested.

Jenny instantly shook her head in the negative. “No. She wouldn’t have wanted that. She had a happy life, a full one, and she wouldn’t want me to bring her back. She’s in a good place right now.” There wasn’t a single part of Jenny that did not absolutely believe the fact that her grandmother had gone to the good place. A woman like her couldn’t have ended up anywhere else. She wouldn’t want Jenny to drag her back into the world of the living. She glanced at Ahmanet. “Do you miss them? Your family?”

For a second, Ahmanet’s emotions shuttered. Her face went disturbingly blank. Then the life quickly drained back into her, and in seconds, she looked as comfortable and at ease as she always did.

“...My father.” Ahmanet said after a moment. “Before my brother was born, we were close. He taught me everything I needed to know to take the throne. I was taught from his knee from the day I was old enough to understand what I was being trained for. We spent a lot of time together.”

This time, it was Jenny’s turn to reach out and sympathetically squeeze at the hand nearest to her. She didn’t say anything.

“I never wanted him to die. But he had to go. When my brother was born, he became the heir to the throne. And Father always taught me that those who would try to take the throne from me were the enemy, and they had to die.” There was an old, bitter hurt in the Pharaoh, the kind that dulled with age but never quite went away. A kind of pain that would never stop festering in the back of the mind. “And my father... he turned his back on me. From one day to the other. I was the most precious thing in his life, and suddenly, I was not.”

“So you killed him,” Jenny was very careful to make sure Ahmanet knew it wasn’t an accusation. It was just a statement. A fact delivered for clarification.

“He became one of the people who wanted to take the throne from me.”

“And so did you brother.”

Nevermind the fact that Ahmanet’s a brother had been a newborn infant. The moment he’d drawn his first breath in a male body, he had become someone who would take the throne from Ahmanet. For all everyone knew, he could have declined, could have let Ahmanet have it - but it was much, much more likely he would have just taken it and become Pharaoh, while Ahmanet would have been sidelined. Sold off to some nobleman like cattle and expected to provide heirs while her brother sat on the throne that should have been hers all along.

Ahmanet’s response did not surprise Jenny at all. “Yes.” But this time, that raw, bitter hurt was missing. Ahmanet felt guilty about her father’s death, that was obvious. But she didn’t seem to care about her brother at all.

Jenny ventured cautiously. “Do you miss him?”

Ahmanet hesitated a second, and then; “no. I don’t.” She looked at Jenny as if begging her to understand. “I never knew him. He was just days old when I killed him. He couldn’t do anything other than sleep and cry. He was barely even a person. There was no one for me to know, and no
one for me to miss."

"Alright." Jenny said simply. She wasn’t going to argue about this. She disagreed with Ahmanet’s assessment, but it wasn’t up to her to judge. And besides, it was over and done with and had been for for five thousand years. "Your step-mother?"

The Pharaoh’s jaw clenched a little. "I’m glad she’s dead. Slitting her throat was a deed I enjoyed revisiting during my imprisonment."

Jenny blinked. "Why do you hate her so much?"

"Besides the fact that she bore my father a son?" Ahmanet asked matter-of-factly. "She dared to try and replace my mother after her death. My father forgot all about the woman he married first. The country praised my step-mother’s name as the one to bear the next Pharaoh. And then she did," Ahmanet’s voice went harsh and bitter with disgust, the same cold, bitter hate coming across the link. "And because of her, I was shoved aside by my father, left to watch as she was praised and my brother took my place as the next sovereign."

'So you killed her too,'" Jenny concluded.

"I did. And I enjoyed every second of it." She glanced at Jenny. "Does that bother you?"

"Yesterday, it would have," Jenny responded honestly. "But today… I don’t care if you enjoyed it. Because I enjoyed killing last night. So I can kind of see where you’re coming from."

The relief came thick and fast. "I am glad. I do not wish for you to be afraid of me."

"I’m not," Jenny said, and that was the absolute truth. She’d been in Ahmanet’s head. She knew, as much as she knew her own heartbeat, that there was absolutely nothing for her to be afraid of anymore. Because Ahmanet wasn’t going to hurt her ever again. No matter what Jenny did, she knew that Ahmanet would never hurt her for it. Try to stop her, perhaps, if she decided to leave the palace and not come back, but not harm her.

And Jenny, well, she’d stopped wanting to hurt Ahmanet a while ago. In fact, she didn’t think she’d ever truly wanted to hurt Ahmanet. Most of the time she’d been running, terrified out of her mind, trying to find a way not to get murdered. The simplest solution had been to take her future murderer out of the equation. But it had been about staying alive, not about hurting Ahmanet. That had never been her primary goal.

Until, well, last night really, Jenny’s life since opening the tomb had revolved entirely around surviving. Until she’d been in Ahmanet’s mind, had seen everything she’d been, was and hoped to be, there had still been that nagging kernel of fear. That was gone now. It was like Jenny had realized she could rest, finally, for the first time in far too long, without fearing for her life. Well, not directly, anyway, because there were still threats out there. The thing was just that she no longer felt like a threat was sitting next to her on the couch. It was a nice feeling. Kind of like that little part of her that had been waiting to get hurt had finally uncurled and relaxed.

"I never wished for you to be afraid of me." Ahmanet repeated. The look on her face was almost painful. "Please believe that. I never wanted to hurt you like I did. I had no choice."

"I believe you," Jenny said, because she did know. Much as that whole being-in-each-other’s-minds-business was an absolute invasion of privacy, it did help solve a lot of issues. Somehow, though, it hadn’t felt as an invasion at the time. It’d been comforting. Like the raw edges of her mind had finally found a place that fit. And it’d been the closest Jenny had ever felt to anyone.
“And I am sorry I did hurt you, even if I had no choice.” Ahmanet added after a second of silence. Her voice was thick with remorse. “I have not shown that enough, I think.”

Jenny sighed a little. “It’s alright, Ahmanet. I understand why you did it now. It hurt, and it was terrifying, but it’s alright.”

“You said that you never hated me.”

“I didn’t. Not truly. I was angry, and terrified out of my mind, and I was running on survival instinct. You were the most obvious target for that.”

“Because I was going to hurt you.”

“Yes.” A simple statement. Because it was the truth. Ahmanet had been gearing to hurt her, so all the fear and anger she’d felt had automatically been focussed on Ahmanet.

Ahmanet’s gaze fixed on Jenny’s chest, right where her heart beat steadily. “And it was painful, was it not?”

Again, Jenny responded with a simple statement of fact. ”Very.”

“I remember how scared you were. How you begged me to let you live.”

Jenny remembered that too. Remembered the way her eyes burned with tears, and her voice cracked, and her palms were slick with sweat, and the weight of Ahmanet on top of her, and the glint of sunlight on the dagger as it came down. The way it slid into her skin, tore through muscles and punched into her heart. The way she had felt her heartbeat slow down in her chest, the blood creeping up her throat and pouring into her lungs, the way she’d gasped for air as she drowned on dry land. And the darkness that had crept in on the edge of her vision, Ahmanet’s face the last thing she’d seen before her heart had given out and she’d died.

Jenny remembered all of that. But the terror didn’t come. Not anymore. For the first time since opening the tomb, Jenny wasn’t afraid anymore.

“I wish it hadn’t been like that,” Ahmanet almost stumbled over her words, as if she wasn’t sure she was supposed to say that. ”I wish… I wish our lives didn’t revolve around death.”

“They don’t. We’re alive. Both of us. And we’re not going to die anytime soon.” Jenny reached out again to give a reassuring touch. ”Death is behind us. And we have centuries of life ahead.”

“You are very optimistic.”

Jenny shrugged. Not necessarily optimistic. Just confident in their combined power. ”I’m just tired of feeling like someone is going to come and kill us both.”

“There are still people in the world who will try.”

“There will always be people like that,” Jenny didn’t delude herself about that. Once all of this came out, once the truth was revealed to the world… there’d be plenty of people gunning for them. ”But we’ll deal with that when the time comes.”

“Quite,” Ahmanet agreed.

For a while, they sat in silence.

“It’s late,” Jenny finally said. “We should go get some sleep.”
“I would like to kiss you first.”

Jenny was totally okay with that. She kind of wanted to kiss Ahmanet too. Kind of had, to be honest, since their minds had disconnected after merging and she’d found herself alone in her head again. Because she’d liked feeling that connected to Ahmanet. And if they couldn’t merge (Jenny didn’t know how, and she had a feeling Ahmanet wasn’t sure either), physical contact was the next best thing.

They kissed for a while, absorbed in each other completely, and before long Jenny found herself squirming with a tell-tale ache in a very familiar place. From the backlash from the link, she knew Ahmanet was in much the same state.

“How about,” she murmured quietly against Ahmanet’s lips, “we take this somewhere a little more comfortable?”

Ahmanet looked at her, lips swollen and slightly parted, pupils blown until there was barely any of her irises left, and asked, “are you sure?”

There were hundreds of things Jenny could say at this moment, a thousand fears and doubts and worries about the future, but there was a warm feeling in her stomach and an ache that needed to be satisfied, and Ahmanet was as willing as she was, so all she said was, “I am.”

Chapter End Notes

So... I realize I don't usually do end notes, but in this case, I figured I might as well, and for this reason: yes, this is where the chapter ends. No smut for all you sinners. Not that I mind writing it, but I'm not going to publish straight up sin for one simple reason: my mother reads this. So yeah. Not gonna happen. Sorry! If you want things to get a little more steamy, you're going to have to imagine it, I'm afraid.
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

The morning after. Jenny has an important talk with Zara and Sahar. Then she gets her first glimpse at the palace traditions involving the dead.

Chapter Notes

Sooo... they banged. Yeah. Off-screen, sure, but they did. Finally. And it only took 47 chapters to get there! (This is probably the slowest slow burn I’ve ever written in my whole life.) But anyway, it happened, and now we move on to the next chapter; number 48 out of (as of yet) 67 chapters. I’m hoping it’ll stay at 67, but then again, I started out at 62, so yeah. I guess we’ll see.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Jenny slept late. Or rather, she went to sleep late, and then slept a normal amount of time before waking up again. Long story short, it was mid-morning by the time she found the energy to keep her eyes open. She wasn’t sure of the exact time, but she had a feeling it was more brunchtime than breakfast time by now.

Yawning ungracefully, she squirmed around until she could see Ahmanet’s side of the bed. To her surprise, the Pharaoh was actually present, instead of out in the palace taking care of her duties. Already fully dressed and reading a book, sure, but she hadn’t left. She hadn’t noticed Jenny was awake yet. Jenny took a moment to take in the view. Ahmanet looked perfectly put together - except for the small but dark bruise in the hollow of her throat, just peeking out of her broad collar. Jenny had very fond memories of sucking that hickey into Ahmanet’s skin.

“Hey,” Jenny said, smiling sleepily.

Ahmanet looked up from her book, a smile stealing across her face. “Good morning, my love. Did you sleep well?”

Jenny nodded. “You?”

“I always sleep well when I have you next to me,” Ahmanet responded, and it was one of the soppiest things Jenny had ever been told by anyone. Not to say that she didn’t love it, because honestly, she did. It was flattering. And the soppy smile on Ahmanet’s face was absolutely adorable. “You do not regret taking this step with me?” The smile was replaced with worry.

“Absolutely not,” Jenny assured her, shooting her another smile. “I had a good time last night. I don’t regret it. I hope you don’t either.”

Ahmanet closed her book and laid it aside, giving Jenny her full attention. “I could never regret spending this time with you. And I do not regret advancing our relationship. I enjoyed myself very
much."

"I’m glad," Jenny said, though she’d already had a feeling Ahmanet had had a good time too. Jenny had made it a point to be a generous lover; she was pretty sure she’d managed to coax at least four orgasms out of Ahmanet, if not more. The favour had been returned twice, which was a small miracle, as Jenny was usually an one-orgasm kind of girl. Considering Ahmanet’s inexperience, Jenny was very much impressed with that. She assumed it was because they were both ascended; as it turned out, super strength had more uses than just smashing people into walls and killing them with a flick of the wrist.

And also, the feedback from the link really helped with figuring out what Ahmanet liked best in bed, and what gave her the most pleasure. Without it, it would certainly have taken Jenny longer to figure out that little spot on the side of Ahmanet’s hip that made her squirm and moan when Jenny bit at it.

Jenny stretched a little, giving a small, happy groan as her joints popped. The sheets fell away from her shoulders. Ahmanet’s gaze quickly turned hungry.

"Perhaps," she said slowly, "I could postpone my duties for another hour."

Jenny caught on immediately, and was unable to suppress the filthy grin that stole over her face. "That’s the best idea I’ve heard all week." She reached out for Ahmanet. "Come back to bed, love."

Ahmanet came back to bed. Her duties were indeed postponed for another while.

Jenny was half-dozing by the time Ahmanet was forced to leave to go do Pharaoh stuff, though it was several lingering kisses before she managed to drag herself out of bed and away from Jenny. Jenny could feel the regret over the link as Ahmanet put her crown on her head and made her way out of the bedroom; a sentiment Jenny shared. She’d have preferred it if Ahmanet had stayed, too.

She wasn’t alone for long, though. Zara and Sahar slipped silently into the room only minutes after Ahmanet had left, leaving Jenny to bask in the afterglow in bed. "Good morning," she greeted her handmaidens sleepily, not bothering to care about the fact she was naked as the day she’d been born under the sheets. It wasn’t like Zara and Sahar hadn’t seen it before.

"Good morning, Your Highness," Sahar responded immediately. "Have you slept well?"

"Quite," Jenny agreed. She’d slept very well. Ahmanet had too, she’d fallen asleep before Jenny last night and her content had come thick and strong across the link, and again this morning, before she’d had to get up and attend to her duties. But Ahmanet’s side of the link was warm and content still, so Jenny saw no reason to worry. She’d know if something was the matter.

"Would you like a bath this morning?"

Jenny nodded. "A bath sounds nice."

"I shall go gather some clothing," Zara said, leaving the bedroom, while Sahar patiently waited for Jenny to stand from the bed and make her way into the bathroom.

She did so, still naked, and wasted no time sliding into the steaming water of the hotter bath. She didn’t even try to hold back the sigh of contentment. The water was just on the edge of scalding, just how she liked it, and the slight burn on her skin felt so good.
Sahar arrived at Jenny’s shoulder with a tray of supplies and a cup to scoop water out of the bath. She used it to wet Jenny’s hair and then started to work some scented shampoo into it. “Her Majesty asked us to inform you that a team of soldiers will be dispatched to London within the hour. They should arrive there sometime this afternoon,” she said as she washed Jenny’s hair, “she did not wish to awaken you when she left, so she told us to tell you.”

Jenny hummed. She wouldn’t have minded if Ahmanet had woken her up all the way, since she hadn’t really been asleep in the first place, but it was considerate of her all the same. “Good. I assume they’ve been given the orders I asked for?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“Good,” Jenny said again, sinking a little deeper into the water. It was good to know Ahmanet would indeed send some people to bring down the remains of Prodigium. Big as the organization was, over a hundred had died outside of Cairo, and another thirty had been killed yesterday night. Not to mention the fact that their leader was most definitely dead. Jenny had snapped his neck herself.

That didn’t mean it would be easy to take care of the rest of Prodigium, but it wasn’t impossible. As long as the team was trained well enough and had enough people, Jenny was sure they would manage somehow. It’d be good to have Prodigium out of the way, too. The organization had become a threat Jenny couldn’t, in good conscious, allow to continue to exist. Not that anyone would miss it, really. Or even notice if it was gone. It was so secret the public didn’t even know of its existence. And the museum it was located under had already been destroyed in the sandstorm anyway, and probably quarantined as a result, so no one would look up strangely if the rest of the building proved to be structurally unsound and collapsed on itself.

No one, except perhaps Prodigium, would suspect foul play, and no Prodigium would survive to know for sure anyway.

Sahar began to rinse the shampoo out of Jenny’s hair, using her hand to keep the soap from running into Jenny’s eyes. Zara slipped into the water next to Jenny, also naked as the day she was born, and used a lathered washcloth to clean Jenny’s body. It was still odd and somewhat embarrassing, but Jenny figured she should get used to it. This was her new normal. Best not to make a scene about it.

“Are you two alright?” Jenny asked, breaking the companionable silence.

Zara frowned a little. “Your Highness?”

“Yesterday night,” Jenny explained. “I know you two didn’t have it easy either.”

That was an understatement, considering both her handmaidens had killed someone last night to protect Jenny and had been ready to die for her without hesitation.

“Are you alright?”

Sahar’s hands faltered in Jenny’s hair. Zara almost dropped the washcloth.

“I’m fine, Your Highness,” Zara said, but the inflection in her voice said she was really not.

“You’re lying,” Jenny said.

“I’m,” Zara visibly swallowed, shoulders dropping, “I’m… You’re right. I apologize.”

“Don’t apologize. It’s totally fine not to be okay after everything that happened,” Jenny said gently.
She reached up to touch Sahar’s hands in her hair, letting her know that it was meant for her too. ‘‘You both went through something traumatic. It’s normal not to be okay.’’

Sahar’s hands trembled against Jenny’s head.

Jenny gently untangled her fingers from her hair. ‘‘Get in here. I think you both need to relax for a little.’’

It was a testament to how shaken they were that neither protested about the impropriety of it. Zara laid the washcloth aside, even as Sahar shucked her dress and slid into the water on Jenny’s other side. Her face was drawn and paler than usual. Zara didn’t look much better. Jenny made sure to keep her mouth shut. If her handmaidens wanted to talk, they would start the conversation themselves. Jenny wasn’t going to push them. It was silent for a long time.

Sahar’s voice was quiet and shaky when she finally spoke. ‘‘I… It was the first time I ever killed someone.’’

‘‘Me too,’’ Zara affirmed just as quietly. ‘‘And I’d never seen anyone die before. There was so much blood…’’

Still Jenny remained silent. She’d let them get this out of their systems before she said anything. Because sometimes, a silent listener and shoulder to cry on was better than someone who spouted empty apologies and regrets.

For another few moments, it was silent.

Slowly, silent tears started to drip down Zara’s face. She tried valiantly to stifle the sobs. Sahar wasn’t much better off.

‘‘It hurts…’’ Zara whispered.

Jenny tried not to wince. She felt bad for them. She really did. When she’d made her first kill, Akar at the temple, her emotions had already been tainted by her ascension and her link with Ahmanet. She’d felt guilty, but not nearly as badly as she should have. Not nearly as guilty as Zara and Sahar obviously felt. Jenny couldn’t imagine killing someone and actually feeling like she was supposed to afterwards. She’d gotten to the point where it didn’t bother her anymore. In that aspect, Zara and Sahar were far more human than Jenny was. Although considering the circumstances, Jenny figured they’d have been better off a little less human.

‘‘Does it get better?’’ Zara asked through a stifled sob.

Jenny frowned. She wasn’t sure, since she’d never gone through this kind of emotion in the aftermath of a kill. She decided that a guess was as good as anything. And a little while lie might be the best thing at this point. She said, ‘‘yes. It’s like a wound. And wounds need to bleed before they get better. Eventually, it’ll stop hurting and scar over and become a part of you.’’

Sahar wiped at her face roughly. ‘‘But it won’t go away.’’

‘‘This kind of thing never does,’’ Jenny said honestly, because she did know that for sure. She still carried Akar’s death with her. And since yesterday night, she also carried the deaths of Henry and a couple of Prodigium soldiers. That wouldn’t ever change, no matter what happened or how old and inhuman she would become.

Sahar frowned, jaw clenching and teeth gritting, fists clenching under the water. Finally, she said, though her voice broke, ‘‘I don’t regret it.’’
Jenny looked up in surprise. From the corner of her eye, she could see Zara do the same.

“What?” Zara mumbled.

“I don’t regret it,” Sahar repeated. Her voice trembled, but this time didn’t break. She looked at Jenny as if asking for forgiveness and understanding. “You are our Queen. We’re meant to serve and protect you. At any cost.” She took a deep breath, not looking away. “It hurts. But I don’t regret protecting you.”

Jenny reached out to touch her hand. “I’m glad you did protect me. Thank you.” She turned to Zara, who looked torn between horror and agreement. “And you too. Thank you for standing between me and them.”

For a moment, Zara just looked at her. Then she burst into great, heaving sobs. Sahar was quick to follow. Jenny cringed - the last thing she’d wanted was to upset them even more. Except that she inadvertently done just that. Damn. She just was no good with upset people. Stifling a sigh, she gathered both her handmaidens into her arms for a hug. Best to let them cry themselves out for a bit. God knows a good crying jag helped every now and then. And they were already in the bath anyway, it’d be easy to clean up afterwards. A washcloth to wipe their faces, and they’d be as good as done.

Jenny remained silent as her handmaidens cried into her shoulders, just offering a steady presence and quiet reassurance. Inside, she was seething. Seriously, damn Prodigium. Thirty-eight dead and her handmaidens traumatized for life, all in one night. Jenny really wished she’d taken her time with the soldiers she’d killed. Or that she’d let Ahmanet take her time with them, at least. Save for the Henry Incident, she wasn’t sure she had it in her to personally torture someone.

It took several minutes before Sahar’s cries started to slow, dying down into hiccupping sobs, then sniffles, and finally a few last, silent tears. Zara was silent, but the continued wetness against Jenny’s shoulder that wasn’t a part of the bath was enough to tell her Zara had not yet cried herself out.

Sahar scooped a few handfuls of water out of the bath, splashing them against her face, and then spent a second rubbing at her eyes. They were puffy and red, and her face was a little paler than usual. Yet, her expression seemed lighter. Her shoulders were less tense. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly, “it was inappropriate for me to behave like this.”

Jenny shook her head. “It’s fine. No impropriety here. Everyone needs to cry every now and then.”

“You’re the Queen,” Sahar protested weakly.

“I’m also a person who doesn’t believe in letting the people I care for suffer in silence.”

Sahar gave her a poleaxed expression. “You care for us?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Of course Jenny cared for Zara and Sahar. They were rather hard to dislike. And they were good people, if a little too subservient for Jenny’s taste. But that wasn’t their fault, they’d been raised to be subservient to Jenny. Given time, Jenny was pretty sure she could help them kick that habit.

Sahar’s eyes were looking very watery again. Jenny didn’t even bother with sighing as tears once again spilled and Sahar buried her face back into Jenny’s shoulder, her own shoulders shaking as she tried to suppress the sobs that wanted to break free. Zara’s tears, which had never stopped but had started to slow down, had also picked up again.

Jenny let her head droop down to the edge of the bath and stared at the ceiling. It was, to her
By the time Jenny managed to get out of the bath without emotionally scarring her handmaidens, her fingers and toes were all pruned up and her skin red from the heat of the water. She dried off quickly, and was quickly helped into her now regular skirt and tunic combo by her now somewhat calm again handmaidens. She forewent most jewellery, but did accept a couple of rings, a thin necklace she hadn’t seen before, and her flower crown.

Jenny really loved her flower crown. It was her favourite piece. Considering how utterly gorgeous it was, and the fact that it was literally made from the first things Jenny had ever managed to heal with her power over life, she doubted it would ever not be her favourite.

She really needed to see about finding out what kind of gift Ahmanet would like.

Not that it would ever measure up against her crown, but she could try. She just had a hard time thinking of something. Ahmanet already had wealth and palaces and probably everything else. Jenny really had no idea what she’d be happy to receive. Except, maybe… If Jenny hadn’t already been sitting as still as possible so Sahar could do her make-up, she would have frozen on the spot. Suddenly, she knew exactly what she should get Ahmanet. Now, she just needed a way to get it.

"Zara?"

"Yes, Your Highness?"

"Does the palace employ jewellers?"

"We have several, Your Highness."

Jenny would have nodded if Sahar hadn’t been busy around her eyes with a brush. She didn’t want to poke her eyes out, after all. "Are any of them skilled in the making of rings?"

"Rings?"

"Yes," Jenny said.

Zara was silent for a moment. "They are all splendid at jewellery, Your Highness. The palace employs none but the best."

"Alright. And which one is the best at rings, specifically?"

"I believe that would be Jamila Kader."

Sahar had finished with Jenny’s eyes, so she felt safe enough to nod now. "I’d like to meet her, if possible. I wish to make a commission."

"Of course. I shall contact her today."

"There’s no hurry," Jenny said, "but I would like to meet her within this week, if possible."

"You are the Queen," Sahar chimed in, "she will make time." She swept a thick, soft brush across Jenny’s cheeks a couple of times, then placed it aside and looked critically at Jenny’s face. "You are..."
done, Your Highness.’’

‘‘Thank you, Sahar,’’ Jenny said, inspecting her makeup in the mirror and very pleased with what she saw. Sahar was definitely better at this than she was.

‘‘You are welcome, my Queen.’’

‘‘Do you know where Ahmanet has gone?’’

Zara nodded. ‘‘Her Majesty has gone to visit the dead. They are in the process of being prepared for their funerals, and she is there to bless their journeys to the afterlife.’’

Jenny frowned. Being the Pharaoh would give Ahmanet some power over that, according ancient Egyptian tradition. It made sense she’d be there. Jenny wasn’t sure whether her presence there would be appreciated, but honestly, she wanted to be there. These people had died in defense of the palace, but also in defense of Jenny.

‘‘Take me there,’’ she told Zara and Sahar.

‘‘Yes, My Queen.’’

They led Jenny to a part of the palace she had never seen before. It was a good reminder of how big the place was. Jenny had seen part of it, but far from all of it. She would have to properly explore one day, once her life was less stressful and she wasn’t constantly looking over her shoulder, waiting for the next attempt on her life.

They went down a series of stairs, even deeper than the dungeons had been, until they reached a cavernous room, big enough to fit a cathedral inside. How the hell that fit under the palace without destabilizing part of it was something Jenny didn’t know, and really wanted to find out at some point. It’s walls were richly decorated as most part of the palace were, but the designs were far more solemn; Jenny recognized them as traditional funerary texts. Prayers for the dead to reach the afterlife safely and spend the rest of eternity in peace and happiness with their loved ones. Prayers to the gods to lead them there. Imagery of burial goods and sacrifices and laments for the souls of the dead.

In the cavernous space, rows of long stone tables. Thirty-eight of them were occupied by bodies, surrounded by embalmers doing their work in preserving the bodies for centuries to come. Even from a small distance, Jenny could see they were in the process of removing the organs from the bodies, which they placed into canopic jars.

Zara looked a little sick.

‘‘Zara, you and Sahar can stay here until I return. You do not have to join me for this.’’

‘‘Yes, Your Highness,’’ they both seemed quite happy to remain near the stairs. Jenny left them there, making her way over to where Ahmanet was, observing the embalmers’ grisly work. Jenny very much understood why Zara had looked a little queasy; she didn’t feel too good herself, now that she got a close-up view of someone’s liver being lifted out of their body and placed in the proper jar.

She stubbornly swallowed back the bile that rose in her throat; she owed it to these people to be here, they’d died in part because of her, and she was at least do them the courtesy of witnessing their funeral proceedings. Ahmanet glanced over at her, silent, but the link conveyed her appreciation. Jenny reached out to grasp her hand, squeezing lightly.

Together, the Pharaoh and Queen of Egypt watched as their subjects, killed in the line of defense, were slowly prepared for their journey to the afterlife.
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

Jenny once again has a shitty experience at the temple of Set. She does not appreciate it.

Chapter Notes

Well, I did say this was going to happen since like, the first few chapters of the story. Not exactly in this way, but things don't always work out as expected, so here we are. Anyway. The next plot point is here.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

It was at least four hours before Jenny left the embalming room; she and Ahmanet had taken the time to see each of the dead personally, during which Ahmanet had taken the time to give each body a small prayer to help them let go of their Earthly life. Jenny hadn’t seen any ghosts, which surprised her a little, considering both Akar and Chris had hung around when they’d died. She decided to ask.

“Ahmanet?”

“Yes, my love?”

“Why aren’t there any ghosts? Can people choose whether they become one or not when they die?”

Ahmanet frowned, thinking it over for a moment. “Usually, persons become ghosts when they feel they have something to do still, or if they are forced. In the case of Chris, he became a ghost because he wished to see me fall, I think. Also, my magic was influencing him when he died, and that may have been part of the reason as well. Akar, on the other hand, became a ghost because Set forced him to. He clearly has no wish to still exist in this world, but he cannot move on for as long as he is bound to you.”

“Alright,” Jenny said, “and the people who died in the attack?”

“They died, I think, knowing they did all they could. There is no reason for them to linger except for their family, but their family will join them in the afterlife once they die. Because of that, there is no reason for them to become ghosts.”

That kind of made sense, so Jenny nodded in understanding.

“It is nearly time for the pre-dinner service at the temple,” Ahmanet stated after a minute of silence. “Will you join me, or would you prefer not to?”

Jenny frowned a little, taking a second to think it over. On one hand, she really didn’t want to go. Ascended or not, Set frightened her to the core. Just his presence in the temple, that cold, claying awareness that raised goosebumps on her arms and made her heart race in fear, was enough to put her off religion for the rest of her life. Jenny would be quite happy if she never had to have anything
to do with Set ever again. But she probably wouldn’t be that lucky.

Hell, probably? There was no ‘probably’ about it. She knew for sure that she wasn’t that lucky. Her existence was tied to Set as much as it was tied to Ahmanet. Ahmanet’s existence was tied to him too. Together, they existed because Set willed it so. Without him, Ahmanet would have died 5000 years ago, and Jenny probably would’ve ended up at some university as a teacher of Egyptology. There was no changing that Set was the factor that had brought them together. And no denying that it came at a price either.

Jenny could avoid it for now, but that, too, she couldn’t keep up forever. Because in the end, it was her who would be paying that price.

“I think,” Jenny said slowly, after several seconds of silence, “I will join you today.”

There was a little surge of surprise. “Are you sure?”

“As sure as I’ll ever be,” Jenny said. She might as well get this over with, right? She was going to be stuck with Set for a very long time indeed. Likely forever. At some point, she was going to have to get over that fear of him. It wasn’t something she could just put off and forget about. And she knew herself. If she started procrastinating now, she would never get around to actually doing it. No, she’d best start now. And probably the best way to begin was by actually stepping foot into the temple and attending services. She didn’t have to participate, it wasn’t like she knew any of the prayers or even understood the language they were spoken in, but she could be there and get used to Set’s presence.

Ahmanet smiled a little. “I’m sure your presence will be appreciated. Aaheru mentioned the other day he was hoping you would consent to spending some time with his disciples so you may learn the customs of our religion.”

Jenny nodded, forcing herself not to grimace. She wasn’t looking forward to learning more about Set, or about how his religion worked, exactly. She knew some things already, being an Egyptologist and all, but she was sure there was plenty more she didn’t know, and it seemed she would have to learn it. Well, if she was going to get used to Set, she might as well do this too. “Who of the three would it be?”

“I believe Chafkem is currently Aaheru’s most advanced disciple,” Ahmanet responded, “so it is likely it will be him who instructs you.”

Chafkem… Jenny squinted, trying to remember which of Aaheru’s two male disciples (his third disciple was a girl named Tahirah) had been called Chafkem. She knew the other young man was called Bau, but she’d only briefly met them, and couldn’t quite remember who was who. Finally, she just nodded. “Alright. I can do that.”

“Splendid. If you do not mind, I shall arrange lessons with Chafkem. Perhaps once the immediate threats to our lives have been taken care of and things have calmed down a little.”

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “When would that be?”

“Once we are no longer being threatened by the false government.”

“Do you think they’ll try to force us out of the palace?”

“I have no doubt they will attempt to do so,” Ahmanet responded. “In fact, I am quite sure they have already tried.”
Jenny frowned. "They have? When?"

"If I am correct, which I likely am," Ahmanet was frowning too, "then the attack from Henry was not just a Prodigium effort. The palace is monitored. It has been since I unearthed it from the desert. Press and soldiers are an almost constant presence at the walls. It would have been very hard for Henry to sneak past them with all his soldiers. But if he collaborated with the false government…"

"…they’d have given him easy access to the palace without being seen," Jenny realized, "and if he’d succeeded in killing us, the government would have been able to take control of the palace without any further issues."

"Quite. Don’t you think it interesting how quickly those lap dogs showed up after the attack? As if they had expected we would hand over the palace without struggle? Or perhaps even entirely undefended and ready for the taking?"

Jenny’s mind worked at lightning speed. "They expected us to be wiped out. Or at least so taken off guard that they could have weaselled the palace out from right under our noses."

"That is my theory, yes," Ahmanet agreed.

Well, damn. Now that she thought back, those representatives had shown up awfully quickly after the invasion, hadn’t they? Jenny just hadn’t made the link before. She hadn’t even thought of the possibility that Henry had teamed up with the government. Usually, Henry was the kind of man who kind of ignored the fact governments existed.

"And you think there will be another attempt soon?" Even as she said it, Jenny already knew the answer. Of course there’d be another attempt. This palace was of priceless historical and monetary value. Even a single statue or finely made vase would bring in millions on the black market. Let alone the jewellery Jenny was wearing right this moment, as if it wasn’t utterly priceless. As if museums wouldn’t fight each other for the opportunity to have it.

"Yes." Ahmanet answered anyway. "And I think they will not wait long."

"How are we going to stop them?"

"I have already increased the amount of guards keeping an eye on the palace walls. Every morning, afternoon and evening, the base of the walls will be checked to ensure no one is trying to get in by digging under them. More men are stationed on the rooftops and balconies to stop people who try to climb over the walls or otherwise bypass them. They are armed with modern rifles and have orders to shoot at anything they deem a threat. Non-lethal," she added, glancing at Jenny, "so we can capture and interrogate them for information."

Jenny nodded. Those sounded like decent measures to take. "And if they launch a full-scale attack?"

"I doubt that they will," Ahmanet said. "They will not want to damage the palace."

"Too late for that," Jenny said, thinking back to the holes the bullets had punched into the walls and floor during Henry’s invasion.

"If it will reassure you, the storerooms are quite full at the moment. We will be able to weather a small siege if we have no other choice."

That did reassure Jenny, actually. She didn’t think the government would actually try to besiege the palace, they weren’t that stupid, but it was nice to know anyway. She changed the subject. "When is
the service to Set? Now?"

"In perhaps half an hour," Ahmanet responded easily.

Jenny wondered how she was able to tell the time so accurately. She didn’t have a watch, and there were no clocks on the wall either. Nor could she use the sun for an approximation, since they were deep inside the palace.

They made their way in the direction of the royal temple. Jenny wasn’t looking forward to attending the service, but she’d have to at some point, so she might as well start now. And if wasn’t as if her experiences with Set could get any worse, could they? Still, that didn’t stop Jenny’s palms from sweating and her heartbeat from increasing in pace as they approached the temple. Jenny steeled herself and kept walking. She wasn’t going to back down on this. Her stubbornness was kind of legendary.

Aaheru was waiting just outside the temple, his apprentices standing next to him. He looked a little surprised to see Jenny. "My Queen, you have decided to join us today?"

"Yes," Jenny said. "I’ve avoided this for long enough now, I think."

Aaheru nodded, "well, we are very glad to have you here again, Your Highness."

"We would appreciate it, Aaheru, if you would indeed lend one of your disciples to Jennifer," Ahmanet added, "to teach her the customs of our faith."

"Of course," he replied. "Perhaps Chafkem? He is the most advanced of my apprentices."

At Aaheru’s gesture, one of the two young men stepped forward a little, which nicely reminded Jenny who exactly was who. That meant the other young man was Bau. She committed their faces to memory, so she wouldn’t forget who they were again. Tahirah, being the only girl of the three, was kind of obvious, and very easy to recognize because of it.

"That will be fine," Ahmanet said, "right, Jennifer?"

Jenny nodded. "I’m sure we’ll get along."

"Splendid," Aaheru said. "It is time for the service to start. After you, Sire, Your Highness."

Jenny took a deep breath, and stepped over the threshold of the temple. As soon as she did, Set’s presence washed over her, raising goosebumps on her skin. It was as cold, as cloying and dangerous as she remembered it being. A kind of feeling that made her want to hide under something solid and cower until it went away. She tried her best to hold her head high and her hands from shaking, but she wasn’t sure she managed entirely. Nevertheless, Jenny was glad when she got to kneel on the little rug there for that purpose, because she wasn’t sure her legs would support her for the entire duration of the service.

Like last time, Aaheru led the service. He spoke in that eerie, ancient language that made Jenny wholly uncomfortable.

Except, this time things went a little differently than last time. Last time, a candle had pushed itself over into a bowl of offerings, and that had been it.

Now, Set’s presence swelled, becoming more and more tangible until Jenny could feel it seeping into her lungs with every breath - and then it got even heavier, until she could scarcely breathe at all. Then, the light from the candles and torches started to dim, the flames shrinking until they were
barely more than glowing red points against the wicks and dotted across the fuel. Still the presence got thicker. The flowers and fruits on offering started to decay rapidly, the sickly sweet smell of rot filling the temple.

Aaheru had fallen quiet, staring at something behind Jenny with wide, frightened eyes. His apprentices were in much the same position. They seemed to have stopped breathing entirely, frozen in place with their eyes fixed behind Jenny.

There was a gust of wind. A wave of cold. The smell of more rot. A deep, rattling breath.

Jenny stared at the floor, eyes wide with terror, trying to keep her breathing even. For once, the link to Ahmanet did nothing to reassure her; Ahmanet was feeling just as terrified as Jenny was. Although she did have a side of awe and amazement Jenny was not feeling at all. Jenny was just terrified to the core, and not happy. At all.

Behind her, the slow, dragging footsteps of something Not Human, shambling closer and closer until Jenny could feel the cold, ragged gusts of breath across her neck. Every muscle she had locked up in terror. She stared at the floor as hard as she could, not even daring to move or look up. Beside her, Ahmanet had gone entirely quiet, staring up with wide eyes.

Then, barely there, a touch across the back of Jenny’s neck. A long, thin nail, like a claw, or maybe a needle. Cold. Wispy. Like the being touching her was not entirely present in the world. It trailed down the notches of the vertebra in her neck for a second, then up, into Jenny’s hair, pulling her head back. Jenny wasn’t quite quick enough in closing her eyes so she wouldn’t have to see who was touching her. It wasn’t like she didn’t already know who it was. That still didn’t prepare her for the way he looked.

Set looked down at her, a hulking, shambling figure, misshapen and scorched as if burnt, all needle-fingers and too-long arms and skin like burned-out wood. A spiked, thorny crown sat upon his too-big head, empty sockets staring back at Jenny’s wide eyes, a mouth with teeth to fuel many a nightmare set into an emaciated face. Black smoke poured off his form as if he was made of dry ice. His touch was cold enough for it too.

He spoke, in that ancient language that sounded even worse spilling from his needle-toothed mouth than it did from Aaheru’s tongue. Jenny was more than glad she didn’t understand a word he said.

A hand clamped around her throat. Not squeezing, per se, but it was a firm, possessive grip that didn’t allow for much movement. A warning, for her to keep still and not move a muscle. She wasn’t planning on moving. Right now, Jenny was sure the terror was seeping off of her like a thick fog. She was too frightened to even think of resisting.

Set’s other hand moved lower, bypassing the upper half of her torso until it found her abdomen, where the pact was carved into her skin. He tore carelessly through her tunic, and the moment he touched the runes on Jenny’s skin, a cold so intense it burned rushed over her. For the first time since ascending, Jenny felt physical pain. She managed to muffle the cry that wanted to tear past her lips to a whimper, but the tears broke free despite her best efforts.

The combination of terror, horror, worry and awe coming from Ahmanet didn’t help.

The burning on her abdomen increased until a steady stream of tears was ruining Jenny’s makeup. She was sure she could feel nails cutting into her skin like it was tissue paper. It was only the hand on her throat and the terror turning her muscles into jelly that stopped her from trying to wrestle loose and run like the dogs of hell were on her heels.
More of that ancient language was spat into the world, the hissing breaths punctuating the harsh words. Nails dug into her abdomen. She could feel blood trickling down her skin to soak into the waistband of her skirt. It felt like ice was growing within her flesh. Something was slithering under her skin, seeping into the runes and the bleeding wounds, searching and prodding until it found something deeper inside Jenny. It seeped in like poison, burning cold and invasive, gathering in a small point where it turned even colder, until it felt like her whole abdomen was slowly freezing solid.

Then, just as the cry of pain and horror Jenny had been trying to suppress broke free, the nails buried in her flesh dissipated in a swirl of black smoke. At the same time, that awful, horrible face hovering above her own gave a terrible, terrible smile.

And then in an instant, Set was gone. As if he’d never even appeared in the first place.

Jenny fell forward, faint and boneless, her crown clattering across the floor as she tried to curl in on herself, arms folded protectively over her stomach.

‘Jennifer!’ Ahmanet scrambled over, all pretense of dignity abandoned as she gathered Jenny in her arms, her worry unrestrainedly battering away at Jenny’s mind.

Jenny shuddered against her helplessly, limp with terror and crying unashamedly. Her abdomen was still so cold, like ice. She could feel blood slowly leaking past her fingers, a burning pain that she shouldn’t be able to feel deep in her skin.

‘Jennifer, please,’ Ahmanet pleaded, hands fluttering across Jenny’s face and torso as if she was afraid to touch, ‘talk to me!’

‘She’s bleeding, let me see her abdomen’ Aaheru’s voice came, ‘Bau, get a doctor here! Now!’

Hasty footsteps exited the room.

Jenny flinched when hands curled around her wrists and tried to pull her arms aside to expose her wounds. She let out a sob, curling into herself even tighter, refusing to let them. She was terrified and in pain and she just wanted to be left alone right now. Unfortunately, that wasn’t likely to happen right now.

Ahmanet’s voice was low and on the edge of panic in her ear. ‘Please, my love. Let us see so we can help you.’

‘Hurts,’ Jenny all but whimpered, not letting go of her abdomen.

‘I know, my love, I can feel it in you. Let us help.’ Ahmanet’s fingers circled Jenny’s wrists, gently coaxing her arms away from her torso.

This time, Jenny let her, letting out a new sob when she spotted the injuries to her abdomen. Five of them. No gashes, or cuts, but ragged, round holes, just outside the circle of glyphs branded into her skin - Set’s nails hadn’t just drawn blood, they’d dug past her skin, into her flesh. Bruises were already blooming around the edges of the torn skin. Even at a glimpse, it was obvious the holes were deep. Jenny gagged at the sight. She was sure she could see the pinkish glisten of organs under all the blood and flesh.

Ahmanet let out a horrified noise, even as Aaheru paled at the sight. But, even as they all stared at the wounds, the bleeding started to lessen slowly. Jenny gritted her teeth as she felt the wounds tug, sending little bolts of pain through her. Apparently her specific brand of regeneration hurt now. She didn’t like being able to feel pain again at all. Tears leaked down her cheeks, and she couldn’t find it...
in herself to stop them, or even wipe them away.

Zara and Sahar entered, looking pale and shocked. Ahmanet stared at Aaheru, something akin to helplessness in her expression.

"Why would He do that? Jennifer is meant to birth him. Why would He hurt her?"

"I..." Aaheru looked just as stunned. "I do not know, Sire."

Jenny gritted her teeth and tried not to sound too terrified, but her voice broke anyway, "he put something in me."

"What?" Ahmanet looked like her entire world had just been turned on its head.

"I could feel it," Jenny whimpered, wishing Ahmanet wasn’t still holding on to her wrists so she could curl her hands back around her abdomen. "He put something inside of me!"

Ahmanet paled.

Aaheru stared down at the bloody holes in Jenny’s abdomen. Something seemed to click in his mind, if the look on his face was anything to go by. "Sire," he said slowly, "may I ask a very personal question?"

"Now is not the time, Aaheru," Ahmanet said tightly.

"I believe it is, Your Majesty."

Ahmanet gave a jerky, impatient nod, drawing Jenny a little closer into her arms. Jenny hissed as the small movement agitated the wounds in her abdomen. A new trickle of blood leaked out of one of them. Jenny stifled another sob. She wished her regeneration worked faster.

Aaheru ventured cautiously. "Forgive me for asking, please, but have you and Her Highness been... intimate, at all, Sire?"

"Excuse me?!" The outrage was clear in Ahmanet’s voice and demeanour; a reaction Jenny wholly supported. What kind of question was that?! Especially in a situation like this! Seriously, if Aaheru did this for kicks, Jenny was going to bash his head into chunks.

Aaheru paled, hunching into himself a little. "I am sorry, Sire, but I had to ask. Because if you and the Queen have been intimate, I think I know why Lord Set did this."

Ahmanet didn’t relax. She did answer, though. "If you truly must know, Aaheru," she all but sneered his name, "we did take that step."

"The High Priest’s gaze was fixed firmly on the floor, right next to Jenny’s stomach. "I think, Your Majesty, that I know what Lord Set was doing, then."

Jenny curled her hands over the bloody holes in her abdomen, wincing when the wounds tugged. They were slowly starting to heal. The bleeding had almost stopped already. She could feel the flesh beginning to knit back together. It was a dull burning sensation, like that feeling just after you burned your hand on a hot frying pan, when the initial sharp pain had settled into a steady, deep throb of hurt.

"Well?!" Ahmanet ground out impatiently.

"It is my belief that Lord Set appeared to us today to finish the ritual of impregnation, Sire. If you
have been intimate, the magic of her pact would have caused Queen Jennifer to conceive, upon which Lord Set introduced his essence to the embryo to make it his mortal avatar.”

It was silent.

Jenny stared at Aaheru, and then down at her abdomen. Faintly, she managed to croak out, “pregnant?”

“I believe so, yes, My Queen,” Aaheru agreed.

“I thought Set’s power would be imbued in me during the initial coupling,” Ahmanet said slowly.

“There was no reason for Jennifer to be hurt like this.”

“All the texts implied that it would, Your Majesty. I do not know why Lord Set chose to do things this way.”

“Well, fuck,” Jenny said, feeling a little faint. She stared at her abdomen, watching as the holes left by Set slowly but surely started to grow smaller. As the new skin grew into place where the injuries were, she could see the inky black lines of new glyphs forming slowly. Another pact she hadn’t had a choice in. If she could have rejected it, she would have. But she, once again, hadn’t been given that opportunity. And now she was apparently pregnant with the mortal avatar of a god she feared and hated in equal measures.

Jenny looked down at her now almost-healed abdomen, her belly still flat rather than swollen and rounded with child, and wondered how she was ever going to love this baby.
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet deal with the aftermath of Set's actions. They discuss how a supernatural pregnancy works. They also have an important talk on Feelings that really should've been done earlier.

Chapter Notes

Alright, people, here is chapter 50. We're almost there, now. Based on the current planning, we still have about 16 chapters to go (yes, I cut one out, I do not regret it).

Also, I have this to say: you guys! Thank you so much for all the support you've given me! Turning on my laptop and finding comments in my inbox is the highlight of my week. It's amazing, truly. So thank you, for reading my stuff, and for liking it enough to let me know. I really do appreciate it. Hugs and kisses to all of you!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

By the time Jenny got back to the royal quarters, she was still feeling a little shaky. The wounds on her abdomen had closed up by now, but she was still dressed in her blood-stained clothes and her tunic was still ripped to shreds.

She was grateful that her crown, at least, had survived the ordeal. It wasn’t even scratched. It was nice to know something had gotten through the past hour without ending up a little damaged.

"I want a bath," Jenny protested tiredly as Ahmanet, who had insisted on supporting her all the way from the temple to their quarters, carefully lowered her down onto the couch. She was covered in blood, too; her hands and her lap especially, where Jenny had bled all over her.

"Let the doctor look at you first, my love," Ahmanet responded. "We will have a bath once I'm sure you are alright."

Jenny had a feeling she wouldn’t be alright for some time. Mentally speaking, anyway. Because she had not envisioned herself getting knocked up anytime soon, especially when said getting knocked up involved a god literally sticking half his hand into her abdomen and putting a piece of himself in the newly conceived embryo. Damnit, she didn’t even want children. She’d never wanted to be a mother. Except that she was going to be one anyway. She just hoped that child-Set would grow quickly, so she wouldn’t end up having to raise him, too. That sounded like a nightmare if she’d ever heard one.

There was a knock on the doors. Whoever it was didn’t wait for permission to enter. ‘‘Your Majesty, Highness,’’ the man bowed, ‘‘I am Doctor Abidaoud. Please call me Ismail. The Queen was in need of my service?’’
“I need you to check her abdomen,” Ahmanet wasn’t bothering with niceties. “Her regeneration should have healed it, but I want to make sure it did so properly.”

Ismail nodded. “Of course. If I may.”

Ahmanet stepped aside a little to give him access. Jenny waved Zara and Sahar aside as well. They’d been hovering since the moment they’d entered the temple and found Jenny bleeding all over Ahmanet’s lap and the floor.

Ismail worked quickly and efficiently, snapping on a pair of thin latex gloves. He spent a few moments carefully poking and prodding at Jenny’s skin, watching carefully for signs of injury and pain. Since Jenny wasn’t actually in pain anymore (which she was very grateful for), there wasn’t much for the doctor to be worried about. Nevertheless, he took a stethoscope from his bag and listened carefully to Jenny’s heart and lungs as well, and then insisted on taking her temperature too.

“Everything seems to be in order, Sire, my Queen.” He reported. “But if you wish, I could have a blood test done to be completely sure.”

“Do it,” Ahmanet ordered.

Ismail nodded and rummaged through his bag, taking out a tourniquet, a syringe and a couple of blood tubes. “If you would allow me, my Queen?”

Jenny didn’t even bother to protest. She stuck out her arm, balled her hand up into a fist when asked to, and watched as Ismail swabbed the crook of her elbow and collected two small tubes of her blood. He worked very competently; he hit the vein on the first try, and had the tubes filled up and the needle out of Jenny’s arm in less than twenty seconds. The tiny puncture from the needle healed up in barely two seconds. He packed away the tubes into his bag quickly, after wrapping them in small plastic bags.

“Was there anything else, Sire? My Queen?”

“Prenatal vitamins,” Jenny sighed. If she was going to give birth to Set, she might as well do it properly. The more careful she was, the less chance there was she would have to go through this again. Besides, she may not want children, but that didn’t mean she was going to risk complications either.

Ismail paused. “My Queen?”

“I’m pregnant,” Jenny said, trying to ignore the bitter aftertaste those words left on her tongue, “I’ll need prenatal vitamins and anything else you can recommend to make sure there won’t be any complications.”

“Of course,” Ismail said, “may I ask how far along you are?”

“About a day,” Jenny said dryly.

Ismail blinked. Then he collected himself, and said, “we have a small supply of modern medicines in the palace. I will have a servant check for prenatal medication. If it is not there, I will write a recipe and have a servant go to Luxor to pick it up for you, my Queen.”

Ahmanet gave a sharp nod. “Is there anything else we need?”

“Her Highness’ dietary requirements will adjust slightly due to the pregnancy,” Ismail explained dutifully. Glancing at Jenny, he explained further, “you should eat at least three portions of protein a
day. Lean beef, chicken, nuts, salmon. Stuff like that. A heightened amount of calcium a day as well; milk, for instance, or yogurt, eggs, cheese. Folic acid is also important, from things like nuts, liver, and dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach. Also, iron, again from things like spinach, citrus fruits, and eggs.’’ Ismail paused for a moment, and then added; ‘’you should drink at least eight glasses of water a day, and reduce your caffeine intake. No more than one small cup of coffee per day, for instance.’’

Well, Jenny didn’t really like coffee anyway. She could go without. Tea was more her speed. And she’d be fine anyway, as long as no one made her eat liver. She was okay with spinach and all the other things, but not with liver. Offal was not something she was fond of.

Ahmanet was taking it all in very seriously. ‘’Are there any foods we should avoid?’’

‘’Well, caffeine, as well as alcohol. Raw meats and seafood. Anything undercooked, really, Your Majesty.’’

Ahmanet nodded, turning to Zara. ‘’Send a servant to the kitchens. Tell them to inform the cooks about my Jennifer’s dietary needs. I expect them to fulfill them perfectly.’’

‘’No liver,’’ Jenny added quickly. ‘’I hate liver.’’

Zara nodded in understanding. She seemed reluctant to leave, but went anyway, though a little more slowly than usual.

‘’I shall inform a gynecologist that you are expecting,’’ Ismail volunteered. ‘’You will need to start visiting from the fourth week, to ensure the pregnancy is developing as it should.’’

‘’Bring one into the palace,’’ Ahmanet ordered. ‘’They can stay here until the child is born.’’

‘’Equipment would be required, Your Majesty. It runs on electricity. The palace does not currently possess that.’’

‘’Then I guess it will in four weeks,’’ Ahmanet said faux-mildly. ‘’And I rather expect we’ll have a fully equipped gynecologist on staff as well.’’

Ismail gave a slow nod. ‘’It shall be done, Sire.’’

‘’Yes, it will,’’ Ahmanet agreed. ‘’Thank you for your assistance. You are dismissed.’’

Ismail hastily packed up his bag and left, just in time for Zara to slip back into the room.

‘’The kitchens have been notified, Sire,’’ she reported quietly. ‘’I also told the servant I sent to the kitchens to have the cooks send up a snack, my Queen, in case you are hungry.’’

Jenny wasn’t really hungry - her stomach was rolling at the thought of eating right now, to be honest - but she nodded anyway. She glanced up at Ahmanet. ‘’Can I have that bath now?’’

Ahmanet, apparently reassured that Jenny wasn’t going to keel over dead right this minute, gave a nod, extending her hand to Jenny. ‘’Yes. I believe I need one as well.’’

‘’Yeah,’’ Jenny said awkwardly, ‘’I think we’re going to have to throw out these clothes. Unless you have a way to get this much blood out of white fabric.’’

‘’I will have them thrown out,’’ Ahmanet responded as they made their way past the bedroom and into the bathroom.
The baths were steaming hot as always, and Jenny honestly wanted to just be in one already. She was taking a lot of baths since getting to the palace, and it was one aspect of her new life that she honestly loved. Seriously, she did not miss the crappy shower in her London; it ran cold half the time and the pipes made a hell of a lot of noise when used. But since she’d always spent so much time at the office and out of the country, she hadn’t minded so much. Now that she was in one spot full-time, it was nice to have the opportunity to have a hot bath whenever she wanted to.

Jenny stripped quickly, unbothered by the presence of Ahmanet and her handmaidens - it was nothing they hadn’t seen before, after all - and wasted no time sliding into the water. The blood came off easily, but the new glyphs on Jenny’s skin were there to stay, five new, inky-black sets of lines on her abdomen, just within the original circle of glyphs. She had no idea what they meant, and she wasn’t interested or intending to find out.

Then, as a still very clingy Zara and Sahar set to gently washing Jenny’s hair (somehow, she had managed to get blood into it, and she wasn’t sure when that had happened), Jenny turned to Ahmanet. “Please tell me the pregnancy, at least, will be normal.”

Ahmanet paused. Jenny felt her stomach drop a little. “You have got to be kidding me.”

“I only know the basics, to be entirely honest with you, my love,” Ahmanet admitted after a second. Jenny resisted the urge to sigh. The basics was better than nothing. At least she wouldn’t be going into this completely blind. “Tell me, please.”

“I can tell you for certain that it will take far less time than human pregnancies,” Ahmanet said. “Gods mature far faster than humans do, and even though this child is not technically a god, he has been imbued with the essence of one.”

“How long?” Jenny asked. She liked the idea of not being pregnant for the full nine months. The earlier this sprog was out of her, the better.

Ahmanet gave a very un-Pharaoh-like shrug. “I cannot say for certain. Perhaps less than half the usual length?”

“So about four and a half months?” Jenny could work with that.

“I think closer to three and a half.”

Three and a half. If Jenny was right (which she wasn’t sure she was, considering the fact that this would be her first child and she’d never bothered to look into this sort of thing all that closely), a normal pregnancy started showing at around twelve to thirteen weeks. Probably. Which meant that, if her time was more than halved, she’d start to show in maybe four weeks. If she was lucky and it wasn’t sooner. She couldn’t really imagine herself with a baby bump.

A thought crept up on her. “Does that also count for morning sickness?”

Ahmanet winced a little. “I am afraid that you will likely start experiencing that very soon, my love.”

That was another thing Jenny was not looking forward to. If there was something Jenny hated, it was throwing up. It always left her nauseous and sweaty and shaky, and it made her throat hurt afterwards. Just seeing other people throw up usually had her ready to join them. “I’m expecting you to hold back my hair when I’m busy trying to puke up my innards,” Jenny said, a touch tartly.
“Of course,” Ahmanet responded immediately. “I would never let you go through things like that alone.”

“I’m also expecting you to help me out when I start getting cravings,” Jenny added, wondering if she was maybe being too demanding. There wasn’t any frustration or annoyance from Ahmanet’s side of the link, though. Just deep, gentle warmth, and maybe the tiniest hint of amusement at Jenny’s attitude.

“Naturally, I will.” Jenny almost nodded, but Zara and Sahar were massaging conditioner into her hair and she didn’t want to stop that - it was more of a scalp massage than anything, and it felt really good. “Are there any other things I should take into account? Things that aren’t usual for a regular pregnancy?”

“The child will develop faster, so I assume your appetite will increase accordingly to meet the energy demand,” Ahmanet responded after a second of thought, “and since he was imbued with magic today, I imagine that will cause your own abilities to be more volatile.” She paused a moment, and then added, “I realize I promised you I would teach you magic, but perhaps we should delay that until after the birth.”

“Probably smart,” Jenny agreed, not sure whether to be disappointed or not. On one hand, she did want to learn magic. More specifically, she wanted to learn how to draw on ambient magic and use it to heal people and restore life. That sounded like something she would like to do, if she couldn’t continue to be an archaeologist. On the other hand… well, her experiences with magic so far weren’t exactly the best, now were they? In fact, even the magic that was supposed to be good, the healing, had hurt her. Nearly killed her. Jenny could honestly say that it scared her. And as much as she wanted to know how to heal people, she was not looking forward to the actual learning process. It was probably best, like Ahmanet said, to save the actual magic until Set wasn’t fucking it up for her. And until she had a bit of a grasp on the theory.

She decided to move away from the magic a little.

“What about the child? I understand the pregnancy will be different, but how will it affect the child?” Jenny couldn’t quite find it in herself to call the child her son. She’d never wanted children, had never seen herself as the motherly kind, and where she’d seen other women of her age with kids already or in the process of having them, she had never had that desire. She just lacked that instinct to reproduce. But that didn’t change her situation, pregnant with a child she’d never wanted, unable to make the choice not to have it. And she couldn’t bring herself to actually feel anything resembling care or affection for the baby growing in her belly. Or any guilt for not caring for it, for that matter.

Ahmanet hummed a little as she began to massage shampoo into her own hair, declining Zara’s soft offer to help. “I expect the development to be accelerated, like with the pregnancy. And since it is Set’s mortal avatar, it is technically an ancient god in a child’s body.”

That was… kind of a relief, actually, Jenny thought to herself; Set, but in a tiny human body. Not a truly helpless infant who would rely on her for an emotional connection she wasn’t sure she could provide. She could work with that. At least she wouldn’t have to guide him through years of growing up; mentally speaking, he’d be an adult from the moment he was born. He just wouldn’t have the body to match. Not until he’d physically grown, anyway.

“So he will not be emotionally dependent on us?” Jenny asked, just to be sure.

Ahmanet looked at her then, and the surge of understanding that came from her side of the link had the weight falling off Jenny’s shoulders. She understood. Of course she understood. Ahmanet, as far as Jenny knew, hadn’t wanted children either.
“No, my love. He will hardly need us for that.”

Jenny nodded a little, tilting her head back so Zara and Sahar could finally begin to rinse the conditioner from her hair. She was relieved. Very much so. And also, strangely, kind of peckish. She might want a snack after all. Hadn’t Zara told the kitchens to send something up? Maybe something with feta cheese…

After another while of soaking, and once Jenny’s fingers and toes had started pruning, she finally got out of the bath. It was about time to get out, she figured; as much as she would like to, she couldn’t laze around in the bath all day. Not that she had much to do, but she should at least be dry and dressed. Maybe she should go read another of her books, or something. Although she had a feeling diplomacy was something they’d already passed by, with the representatives who had shown up at the palace and the attack and all that.

Especially if the government insisted on trying to obtain the palace. Ahmanet would die before she gave up the palace, Jenny was very much aware of that. She’d declare war on Egypt before letting anyone run her out of her home. Jenny… well, Jenny didn’t want to give up the palace either. She liked it here. She didn’t want random people to have it instead. Especially when she knew they’d turn it into a tourist cash cow. That sort of thing always turned Jenny’s stomach.

She didn’t mind tourists at archaeological sites, per se, but she did mind when they stomped around and disrespected the history they were standing in.

She dressed quickly, then spent a few moments eating a little of the snack Zara had told the kitchens to make (very simple, just some mango with a little salt on top, although the mango had been sliced very artistically into little pieces of edible art).

‘’Where has Aaheru gone?’’ She asked, finally noticing the High Priest wasn’t around anymore. Thinking back, he’d disappeared halfway through the trip back to the royal quarters. Same for Tahirah, Chafkem and Bau.

‘’I believe he has gone to pray,’’ Ahmanet responded. ‘’He told me he hopes to find out why Set decided to take this course of action.’’

Jenny shuddered a little. She didn’t want to know, really, why he’d done what he’d done. She’d personally be glad to never be around Set again. A vain hope, she knew, but at this point, hope was all she had, and she was damn well going to cling to it like it held the answer to all of her problems.

‘’I assume his apprentices joined him?’’ She asked, a little proud that she managed to keep her voice from shaking.

‘’Yes,’’ Ahmanet agreed. Then she changed the subject. ‘’Would you like to lay down for a little? You still look pale.’’

Jenny shook her head. ‘’I’m not tired.’’

Ahmanet didn’t believe her for a second. ‘’I can feel your exhaustion, Jennifer.’’

Okay, so Jenny was a little tired. It’d been a harrowing couple of days. But she was also pretty sure she was going to have nightmares about Set’s terrible smile if she went to sleep now, and that was the last thing she needed at this point. She was sure she’d feel his hand piercing her flesh all over again. And that was not an experience she was keen to relive.

‘’I’m fine,’’ Jenny said. ‘’I can sleep later.’’
For a moment, Ahmanet just looked at her, gaze steady, considering. Then she nodded. ‘’A walk, then, perhaps? I do believe there should be some fish in the lotus pond by now.’’

‘’I’d like that,’’ Jenny responded. Maybe a walk would do her some good. She could definitely go for some fresh air, anyway, after all that had happened under the palace roof.

Ahmanet offered her arm. ‘’I do believe I can spare some time, if you do not mind me joining.’’

‘’I’d like that, too.’’

They made their way to the pond at a leisurely pace. Jenny was glad to get some fresh air in her lungs, and to see the sun. It was only when she found herself staring at vibrant foliage that she realized how stifling the palace had felt since the attack - and everything that had happened after. She was still in the same location, yet it felt like getting away for a bit. Like a mini-vacation. Jenny could use a vacation.

Prodigium still owed her like, several months of vacation time, but Jenny no longer worked for Prodigium, and it probably no longer existed at this point either, if the team that had been sent to London did their job properly. So she probably wasn’t getting those vacation days. Although, Ahmanet had promised her they’d sail down the Nile and visit the summer palace at Alexandria at some point, hadn’t she? That sounded like a vacation. A good vacation, too.

But it wouldn’t be happening until all of this was over and Ahmanet was officially the Pharaoh, and Set had been born. Jenny wasn’t sure how long that would take. Three and a half months at minimum, because that was about when Set was due, and some time after, until he was grown. Hopefully Ahmanet would be Pharaoh before then. And with a bit of luck, Egypt wouldn’t be at war. Though that was a hope Jenny already knew was probably in vain. War was coming. Whether she liked it or not. And how long it was going to last depended on who was going to be involved, besides Ahmanet and the current Egyptian government. Jenny didn’t think they were lucky enough to have a war be confined to just Egypt. Doubtlessly there were other parties that would get involved at some point. Probably some surrounding countries. Probably the UN. Maybe America, too, considering how they liked to interfere in these regions.

Jenny felt her heart sink a little. She definitely wasn’t going to get that vacation anytime soon. In fact, it looked very much like the immediate future was just going to remain very stressful.

They arrived at the lotus pond. The water was clear enough that Jenny could see the bottom of the pond, and in the water, like promised, fish.

‘’I am unsure of which species they are,’’ Ahmanet said, sounding apologetic.

‘’That’s fine,’’ Jenny said. ‘’They’re pretty.’’

They were; little, agile flashes of silver just under the surface of the water, darting in and out of sight, hiding under the leaves of the lotuses. There were dozens of them, enough to make the sizeable pond feel a little less empty. A little more alive. Jenny took an instant liking to them. She could definitely see herself come out at the end of her afternoons, a few minutes of rest while watching and feeding the little fish in the pond. It sounded like a pleasant pastime.

‘’I’m glad you like them.’’

‘’I do,’’ Jenny agreed. ‘’Thank you.’’

‘’You are most welcome, my love.’’ Ahmanet’s presence was warm and steady at the edge of Jenny’s mind.
Jenny took a deep breath, staring at the silvery flashes of fish in the pond. “I don’t want this child.”

Ahmanet paused, looking at Jenny. “Jennifer?”

“I don’t want this child,” Jenny repeated. “I’ve never wanted children.”

“This is Set’s mortal avatar,” Ahmanet said, “you have a pact with him to bear the child.”

“I know. But I didn’t choose to make that pact. And if I could have, I would have refused.” She remembered, with a shudder, the sensation of being murdered, of death, of Set there with her, carving the pact in her skin without her consent, forcing her into a future she had never wanted for herself. If she’d been given the choice back then… well, she wouldn’t be standing here at the lotus pond today, that was for sure.

“If this pact had not been made, Jennifer, Set would have killed you. He does not desire a female body. He would have killed you, and made me pick another Chosen, a male, to be his avatar.” There was a sharp, wrenching kind of feeling from Ahmanet’s side of the link. Something akin to doubt and heartbreak and horror, all mixed together into a dizzying swell of emotion. “He would have made me choose between you, and my birthright. Because if I had refused to find a new Chosen, he would have killed me too, right there alongside you in the desert.”

Jenny swallowed thickly, still not looking away from the pond. Ahmanet’s hand touched hers, fingers threading together. Jenny didn’t look at her, purposely turned her attention away from the ever-present link, afraid of what she would find. But she had nothing to fear.

Softly, soft enough that it was barely audible, Ahmanet whispered, “I would have chosen you.”

Jenny’s head snapped up, and she stared with Ahmanet with wide eyes. “What?”

“I would have chosen you,” Ahmanet repeated.

“Why?” She asked incredulously. Jenny didn’t understand. Ahmanet had made a pact with Set for the throne. She’d murdered her father and brother for the throne. She’d been imprisoned and withered away for 5000 years for the throne. And here she was, telling Jenny that she’d have thrown all of that away for a woman who had, at the time, been working on a way to kill her. For a woman who had hated her - or at least tried her very best to hate her, because she really had not succeeded at that, no matter how much she might’ve wanted to at the time - from the start.

“Do not mistake me, Jennifer. I want Egypt. It is mine. It has always been mine. But…” Ahmanet’s face was as soft as Jenny had ever seen it, her hand lightly squeezing hers, “when I was imprisoned in that tomb, weak and left for dead, I was, more than anything, so very alone. The most alone I have ever been. And when all I had was hunger and darkness, what I longed for was companionship. Not a throne.” She smiled a little. “And then you came and freed me, and for the first time in millennia, I was not alone. That mattered - still matters - more to me than an empire does.”

Jenny stared at her, struck speechless. That… was not what she had expected. “But,” she managed, “even after the way I reacted?”

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet said, “there is not a single thing in the world that you can do that would change the way I feel for you. I told you before; when you freed me, you became my world. I want my birthright, but if I had to choose… Egypt comes second to you.”

“I…” Jenny honestly did not know what to say to this. She wasn’t sure if there was anything she could say. It wasn’t every day an ancient Pharaoh told her she’d give up an empire for her. But the sincerity was clear. Jenny could literally feel that Ahmanet meant every word of it. And damn if it
didn’t feel like a punch to the throat.

“I need to have this child, Jennifer,” Ahmanet said after a second. “Because it would kill me to see you die.”

There was nothing Jenny could do to that but nod. “I will. I don’t like it, but I will.”

Something solidified inside her as she saw and felt the relief coming from Ahmanet. An emotion she’d been trying to deny as she had tried to deny her nature. But this conversation was exactly what she’d been waiting for, to help her along, give her that final push she needed. She made sure to look Ahmanet straight in the eye, shoving as much assurance and determination across the bond as she could. “You’re going to get Egypt, Ahmanet. And you’ve already got me. You’re going to get everything you’ve ever dreamed of. We’re going to make sure of it.”

“Do I?” Ahmanet asked. “Have you?”

Jenny took a small breath. This, she knew, the answer she gave to this, was so important. A defining moment, even. She could not afford to fuck this one up. So she decided to tell the absolute truth. Even if that truth was one she’d come to only seconds ago (although she’d known it, deep down, for far longer).

“When I freed you,” she said slowly, “I was ecstatic. I’d been looking for you for over a decade. You were my life’s work, my greatest achievement. And then I realized what, exactly, it was I brought back into the world. And I was terrified. But even back then, there was something that drew me to you, just like it had for the past thirteen years. I ran from you, because I was afraid and I didn’t want to die. I tried to hate you, but even back then, I couldn’t. I can’t hate you, Ahmanet,” she made very sure to keep eye contact, to make sure Ahmanet knew she meant every word she was saying, “because I love you too much for it. And I think I started loving you thirteen years ago, when I first heard your name.”

And she did. God help her, but she did. She’d tried to deny it, but it was the truth. And now that she was no longer trying to ignore it, she doubted there was a time she hadn’t, deep down, loved the Pharaoh she’d searched for for over a third of her life.

“Jennifer…” There were tears in Ahmanet’s eyes. “My love…”

“I love you,” Jenny repeated, feeling her heart swell as she said the words, “and you’re going to get everything you’ve ever wanted. Throne included.”

“I love you, too,” Ahmanet responded, the warm, mushy feeling coming across the link telling Jenny everything she needed to know. “When we have Egypt, I’m going to make your dreams come true, too. Anything you want.”

“Build me that ship and take me to Alexandria like you promised,” Jenny said, “and then I’ll be perfectly happy. I don’t need anything other than a holiday with you.”

“I’ll take you around the entire world,” Ahmanet said. “Anywhere you want to go.”

Jenny tried to keep the soppy smile off her face, and probably didn’t succeed. “Let’s start with Alexandria, shall we?”

“And after, we can go to Dahab,” Ahmanet responded. “There is another palace there. I think you will like that as well.”

Jenny blinked. Ahmanet had said something about two summer palaces, she was pretty sure. It
seemed a little excessive, but hey, more archaeology for Jenny to do, so she wasn’t going to complain. And a vacation with the woman she loved (it made her stomach do a little flip, a good one, to think it so freely)... well, that wasn’t something Jenny was going to say no to.

“’We should go back inside,’” Jenny said. “’I think I’d like that nap now.’”

Ahmanet nodded. “’I will lie with you for a while.’”

Jenny raised an eyebrow as they began to slowly meander back to the palace. “’Don’t you have stuff to do? Meetings and such?’”

“’They can wait,’” Ahmanet responded. “’Being with you cannot.’”

And that, it seemed, was that.

And if they took a while to get to the actual napping due to other activities to be done in beds, well, Jenny was not complaining, and neither was Ahmanet. Quite the opposite, in fact.
Chapter 51

Chapter Summary

Ahmed Qadir returns with new demands. Neither Jenny nor Ahmanet are pleased. It does not go very well.

Chapter Notes

So, I present to you, chapter 51! I think we're well on our way here, considering that, in the current planning, there are only 15 or so chapters to go. (That might change, depending on how much I mess with the plot, but if it happens, I'll let you know.) Either way, I'm very busy writing in between studying for exams and spending time with friends.

And also, I received quite a lot of support last chapter, which I am very grateful and flattered for, so thank you for that. You really brightened my week.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Waking up was not as pleasant as going to sleep was. Mostly because it once again consisted of a servant (very apologetically and with many apologies) barging (well, not so much barging as hesitantly edging) into the bedroom and announcing that, once again, there were unexpected visitors. Of the government variety.

Jenny was very, very tempted to just turn over and go back to sleep. Because damn, those types did not hesitate when it came to trying to get the palace turned over to them, and Jenny was just not in the mood to deal with that.

Nevertheless, she forced herself to sit up, clutching the sheets against her chest so she didn’t flash the poor servant. Best to go see what was up, even if she didn’t want to. Ahmanet would probably murder those people if she was left to meet them by herself. She didn’t have a lot of patience for what she called the ‘fake government’. Not that Jenny blamed her. She found herself lacking patience lately, too. And the fact that the Egyptian government came knocking on the gates to commandeer the palace - as much as Jenny did understand it from an archaeological point of view - was getting on her nerves. This was her home now, after all. And she wasn’t going to sit around while people tried to take it from her.

Once the servant had once again dashed off, Jenny let the sheets fall away from her torso, swinging her legs over the side of the bed. “Zara, please bring me some clothes.”

“Yes, my Queen.”

“You do not have to come if you do not want to,” Ahmanet said.

Jenny shook her head. “This is my home too, isn’t it?”
"Of course it is, my love."

"Then I’m going to be there to make sure no one can take it from me." Jenny declared stubbornly. And also to make sure Ahmanet didn’t massacre anyone, but that didn’t have to be mentioned out loud. Besides, if these new government people pissed them off enough… well, Jenny had already proven that killing didn’t bother her like it used to. Or at least having the guards rough them up a little before tossing them back into the desert.

Zara returned with some clothes, and when Sahar suggested a bath, Jenny shook her head, but did accept a bowl of warm water and a cloth to wipe off before dressing herself. She decided to forego most of her jewellery, but she was happy to wear her flower crown, as well as a couple of rings and a necklace rather than the broad collar. Zara quickly did her makeup for her, and before long, Jenny and Ahmanet were making their way to the throne room, Zara, Sahar and a couple of guards on their heels.

They were met at the back doors of the throne room by more guards.

"What are we looking at?" Jenny asked, wanted to know what she was walking into.

"It is the same man as last time, my Queen. Ahmed Qadir, as well as several of his colleagues, two archaeologists, and six guards."

"Armed?" Ahmanet asked sharply.

"They were disarmed at the gates, Sire," the guard who’d taken the lead replied. "The soldiers on duty made sure to search all that passed through the gates for not only weapons, but also recording devices, cameras, and other such technologies."

"Good," Ahmanet said. "They are waiting in the throne room?"

"Yes, Sire. They were escorted straight here and were not permitted access to any other parts of the palace." The guard replied promptly. "A Queensguard has been organized, there are twenty regular guards, and an additional ten soldiers are on standby."

Ahmanet gave a nod of satisfaction. It seemed those measures were good enough. "Go announce us."

One of the guards rushed off to tell the herald to announce their presence.

"Well," Jenny said, "this is probably going to be unpleasant. Ahmed Qadir is that guy from last time, right? Who thought it was a good idea to try to threaten us into releasing the palace?"

"Yes, that was him." Ahmanet felt less than pleased at the reminder.

Jenny sympathized, she really did. She, too, felt a certain dislike for Ahmed Qadir. Although ‘dislike’ was probably kind of an understatement. Jenny felt more of a deep antipathy for him. How could she not? He was trying to take her home from her, and anyone who tried to do that instantly made Jenny’s shit list. And now that she was ascended and her morals were mostly fucked, people who made Jenny’s shit list were in a hell of a lot more danger than they used to be.

Near the doors, the herald carefully cleared his throat. "If you are ready, Sire, my Queen?"

Ahmanet flicked her hand at him somewhat dismissively, "yes, go announce us."

The herald did. It was starting to get less awkward to enter the throne room accompanied by the
announcement of “All rise for Her Royal Majesty, the Pharaoh Ahmanet of Egypt, First of her Name, and her beloved wife, the Queen Jennifer of Egypt!”, but only a little. She’d probably grow used to it given more time. And if there was something Jenny had plenty of, it was time. Centuries of it, if all went well.

Ahmed Qadir looked much the same as last time; impeccably dressed in a bespoke suit, the Egyptian flag on his lapel, misplaced confidence in his stance.

“So, you’re back,” Ahmanet said once she was seated on her throne. She was sneering, upper lip curled up in disdain. Jenny didn’t need to link to figure out what she was feeling. It was all but rolling off of her in waves.

Ahmed drew himself up to his full height. “You did not meet the time limit we set for the release of the palace into our custody.”

“That’s funny,” Jenny broke in, “because I don’t remember agreeing to hand it over at all.”

“Quite,” Ahmanet agreed. “Though I do remember informing you that there will be no releasing of the palace at all. It is my property. And that is how it will remain.”

“Now listen here,” Ahmed said indignantly, “I am the direct representative of the Egyptian government! And on behalf of the government, I demand you relinquish control of the palace to me right now!”

“Your demands are meaningless to me. And so is your so-called ‘government’.” Ahmanet spat back. “Leave. Before I decide to have you thrown out. Again.”

“How dare you!” Ahmed seethed.

It was, unfortunately for him, exactly the wrong thing to say. Except this time, it wasn’t Ahmanet who was on the edge of losing her temper. (Okay, so she was, but this time, Jenny was faster about it.)

“How dare we?” Jenny struggled to keep her voice even. “How dare we?! No. How dare you! This is our home. You do not get to walk in here, look down on us and demand things, and then expect to be obeyed without question!”

Ahmed glared at Jenny hatefully. She glared back just as hard, almost wishing he’d give her a reason to rip his head off his shoulders. Because damn it, she’d do it too, no hesitation or questions asked. Jenny really did not like this man.

“I suggest,” Ahmanet’s voice was sharp, “you stop glaring at your Queen this instant - unless you wish your head to be mounted on a spike.”

“She is a foreigner, not a queen!” Ahmed was starting to take on a startling resemblance to a bullfrog. “If anything, she should be deported! And you can be sure I’ll be suggesting just that when I next see my colleagues!” For the second time in as many minutes, Ahmed said the wrong thing.

“Deported?” If Ahmanet’s voice had been sharp before, it now had about the same kindness and warmth as a sharpened khopesh to the throat.

And the Pharaoh wasn’t the only one who reacted at that declaration; the Queensguard, a row of ten traditionally-dressed soldiers standing in a line just in front of the dais, between Jenny and the guests, grew, as one person, rigid and tense. From where she was sitting in her throne, Jenny could see hands stray towards the khopesh swords sheathed on their hips. At the same time, the twenty guards
lining the walls started muttering amongst themselves, hands tightening around sword hilts and assault rifles, some of them even taking a few steps forward as if to take Ahmed down where he stood.

Jenny had to admit it; she was more than a little touched at the show of support. She hadn’t known the people here actually liked her that much. Especially considering she really hadn’t had all that much to do with them since moving into the palace.

“Yes! I’ll have her deported!” Ahmed apparently sensed he’d hit a sensitive snare. “Unless you relinquish the palace and everything in it to the government right now. Then I might be able to pull some strings and let your…” his face twisted in a sneer, “…dalliance remain in the country for a while longer.”

It had never actually occurred to Jenny that people could fuck up a single conversation to this degree. Ahmanet’s face actually paled a few shades with rage. It was strong enough that Jenny’s hands trembled against the armrests of her throne, and it wasn’t even her emotion.

Although she did feel very much insulted at being called a mere ‘dalliance’ when both she and Ahmanet knew very well that this was it; there would be no other relationships for either of them ever again. They had a bond literally stronger than death. A link that bound them together for the rest of time, whether they liked it or not (Jenny did like it, and she was no longer afraid to admit it). The mere insinuation that either of them would just walk away and find someone else… Ahmanet wasn’t the only one angry right now.

She’d best interfere before there were any casualties, though. “Guards,” Jenny called for the soldiers lining the walls. “Escort these people from the premises. They are no longer wanted nor needed here.” After half a seconds’ pause, she added, “Don’t bother being careful.”

The sudden grins on the guards’ faces worried her, but only a little. And only because she hoped they wouldn’t get overzealous (and thus careless) and get themselves into trouble.

“You wish to let them go?” Ahmanet’s voice, trembling a little with anger, was quiet enough that no one else could hear.

“I wish to go back to bed and sleep for a couple more hours,” Jenny murmured back, “and in the meantime, I don’t care to have these people in our home.”

Ahmanet wasn’t pleased, everything about her screamed it, but nevertheless she nodded her head and sat back in her throne, waving at the guards to get it done. Not that they needed it; they’d already started to surround Ahmed and his companions, swords and guns at the ready in case they were needed. As the palace guards approached, the six guards Ahmed had brought did their best to surround him, his colleagues and the two archaeologists in a protective circle. Unarmed as they were, though, they were at a distinct disadvantage.

“Wait! Wait,” one of the archaeologists - a man Jenny didn’t recognize, and she was usually pretty up-to-date on the important people in her field - yelped when one the guards started to come too close. “We don’t have to do this, we can just talk this out, can’t we?”

Ahmed hissed at the man to shut up. The archaeologist shook his head, ignoring Ahmed in favour of Jenny and Ahmanet. “Um, your…” he hesitated, “majesty? Is ‘majesty’ alright?”

Jenny raised an eyebrow, staring at the archaeologist. Ahmanet pursed her lips.

He quailed a little. Still, to his credit, he did push on. “Could I, perhaps, be allowed to see some
more of the palace? It’s an archaeological marvel. I would really love to study it.’’

Ahmanet’s response came quickly and bluntly. ‘‘No.’’

The archaeologist faltered. ‘‘I’m sorry?’’

‘‘You may not study the palace,’’ Ahmanet repeated.

‘‘But…’’ he spluttered, ‘‘this place is the single best source we have on how life was thousands of years ago, our best glimpse into the past!’’

‘‘Nevertheless, I will not allow you to study my palace.’’ Ahmanet wasn’t changing her mind. Not that Jenny blamed her. Neither of them liked the idea of strangers skulking about the palace, apparently. And Jenny also had to admit that she didn’t really like the idea of other archaeologists studying this place and writing papers on it when, as far as Jenny was concerned, that was her job. This was her palace. Her home. Therefore, her subject for research and study. Call her possessive, but Jenny didn’t fancy having any other archaeologists around to take that away from her.

‘‘Why not?’’ The archaeologist was close to whining.

Jenny gritted her teeth a little. ‘‘If anyone is going to study this palace,’’ she said, ‘‘it will be me. Your help is neither wanted nor needed.’’

Now the archaeologist - what was his name, anyway? - was starting to get a little annoyed. ‘‘And who are you anyway?’’

‘‘Jennifer Halsey,’’ Jenny responded, ‘‘doctor of archaeology and Egyptology. Graduate of Oxford University’s School of Archaeology. Coincidentally, also the person partially responsible for the unearthing of this palace.’’

Which was true, in a roundabout sort of way. Ahmanet had been the one to actually pull it out of the desert, but if Jenny hadn’t freed her in the first place, she wouldn’t have been able to do it. Therefore, Jenny was, through that, responsible for the palace returning from the depths of the desert. Which made it her discovery, technically, if not officially.

The gaping faces the archaeologist, Ahmed and the others made were hilarious. They looked like they’d just been bashed across the head with a brick; like they couldn’t quite believe what they’d heard, a combination of shock and confusion plastered across their features.

‘‘As you can see,’’ Ahmanet said smugly, ‘‘we need no additional archaeologists. We already have the best on site.’’ Her face turned hard. ‘‘Guard, get them out of here.’’

The guards, who had paused during the conversation, jumped back in action. A couple stepped forward to yank Ahmed’s guards out of the way, sets of handcuffs at the ready to incapacitate them without actually knocking them out.

As soon as the first hand landed on a shoulder, things went wrong.

The government guard aggressively shrugged off the palace guard’s hand, and then floored the poor man with a violent punch to the temple. Immediately after, the government guard was felled, the sword cleaving straight through his chest, leaving him to drop to the floor like a puppet with its strings cut. He groaned weakly, blood bubbling on his lips and spreading around him in a sticky pool, and was dead in seconds.

Well, shit. Jenny groaned audibly. This was exactly what she’d been trying to prevent. The only way
this would end now was in extreme violence, and probably more casualties.

For a moment, the entire throne room was silent.

Then, in a flurry of motion, guards of both sides threw themselves at each other, and things descended into chaos.

The Queensguard retreated up the dais, crowding around the thrones, forming a living shield between Jenny and Ahmanet and the fight at the foot of the dais. The first gunshots echoed around the room. One of the guards in front of Jenny jerked, let out a cry of pain, fell to his knees and rolled down the steps, came to a stop face-down, and didn’t move. Another guard took his place in front of Jenny, shielding her with his body.

Jenny peeked around his elbow, glancing down at the fight. Some of the palace guards were down; all of the government ones were pretty much dead already. The smell of blood was thick in the air.

“Stop!” Jenny called out when the palace guards started to advance on Ahmed and his colleagues, who were cowering somewhere near the wall.

“My Queen?” One of the guards asked for clarification.

“Leave Ahmed alive,” Jenny ordered. “We need him to go tell the government that they can, excuse my language, fuck right off.”

“And the others, my Queen?” Jenny paused to glance at Ahmanet. She’d leave that decision up to the Pharaoh. Jenny had no interest in Ahmed’s colleagues, or the archaeologists they’d brought with them.

Ahmanet wasted no time making the decision. “Kill them.”

They barely had the time to scream - didn’t even manage to get out a desperate “please!” - before they were riddled with bullets. Ahmed cowered between them, blood splattered across his face and his neat bespoke suit, hair in disarray, in tears with terror. Gone was the borderline arrogant man who’d tried to threaten them into relinquishing the palace. In his stead, there was a terrified wreck, so afraid of getting killed that he’d wet himself.

Jenny felt her lip curl in disdain. Even she hadn’t lost control like that, and she’d actually experienced being murdered. She heard the words come out of her mouth before she could really think them through, but she didn’t stop talking. “Break his legs, then throw him out. And the bodies, too. I don’t want them in the palace with our own dead.”

“Decapitate them first,” Ahmanet added.

Ahmed screamed as two guards advanced on him, scrabbling backwards against the wall uselessly.

“No! Please! I can help you! Make you a deal!”

They ignored him. Two guards grabbed him by the upper arms, dragging him away from the wall, up to his feet, keeping him there. Two more knelt down and grabbed Ahmed by the ankles, stopping him from moving too much. He was legitimately crying now. Jenny couldn’t find it in herself to feel bad for him.

From the link, she could feel that Ahmanet was enjoying this, was enjoying his fear. Not that Jenny was surprised. It hadn’t taken her long to figure out Ahmanet had a bit of a sadistic streak going on.

Ahmed cried when two more guards came closer, sadistic expressions on their faces. Without
hesitation, one of the palace guards lifted his foot and kicked hard against Ahmed’s knee - hard enough that the sounds of crunching bones and muscles filled the throne room as his knee bent the wrong way. His scream was loud enough to make Jenny wince. He didn’t get the time to recover. The four guards holding his arms and legs held him up, even as his ruined knee buckled under him, and then a second kick came, in the exact same spot, bending his knee wrongly the second time. Blood spread across the fabric of his pants, viscous and wet even against the dark fabric.

Ahmed let out a raw animal sound of pain, voice cracking and breaking, eyes rolling back into his head as he passed out from the agony.

The guards staggered a little under the sudden dead weight. Nevertheless, they managed to keep him upright, and moments later his other knee was broken also. Even unconscious, Ahmed jerked and whimpered at every blow.

Once both knees were mangled, blood dripping down his legs and pooling around his feet, the guards let go. Ahmed dropped to the floor and didn’t move, unconscious. They ignored him, moving over to the killed enemies, drawing khopesh swords and setting to decapitating the corpses as ordered.

“Set will have their souls,” Ahmanet commented as she watched one of the palace guards hack in on someone’s neck. “They will regret ever coming here.”

“I have a feeling they already do,” Jenny said dryly.

“Then they will regret it more.”

“To be fair,” Jenny said, “anyone who meets Set and isn’t on his good side would regret it very soon indeed.”

“Quite,” Ahmanet agreed.

“Speaking of Set,” Jenny suddenly said, “is he still beyond the Veil, or is he already part of the child?”

Ahmanet shook her head. “He will possess the child once it is born. Right now, all of him that is inside the child is part of his magic, to ensure the child will survive being possessed and adapt to his presence to thrive with it.”

“Oh,” Jenny responded, inordinately relieved to know she at least wasn’t carrying Set around in her belly. That was a nightmare just waiting to happen. Not something she wanted to experience anytime soon, that was for sure. The idea of carrying around a piece of his magic was bad enough already.

The guards began to gather the bodies, handing the heads to servants carrying woven baskets, then slinging the decapitated corpses over their own shoulders to carry them. Ahmed was simply dragged across the floor by his arms, feet sliding limply across the stone and leaving behind ragged smears of red.

“Sire,” one of the guards paused in front of the dais. “Should a message be relayed to the crowd outside the gates?”

Ahmanet rubbed at her chin a little. “What kind of crowd is it?”

“Some military, Sire, but mostly civilians and press.”

“Tell them that the palace is personal property. Anyone who tries to take it from us ends up like
them,’” she jerked her head at the corpses being carried out of the throne room, dripping rapidly cooling blood from the stumps of their necks.

“Yes, Sire.”

“Make sure to also tell them,” Ahmanet continued, “that we won’t take it kindly if they attempt to keep our people from reaching the palace should they wish to seek sanctuary here. Or servants that have to go into Luxor for errands.”

The guard nodded and repeated, “yes, Sire.”

Ahmanet dismissed him with a flick of her fingers. The guard went.

Ahmanet relaxed back into her throne, and Jenny did the same as the Queensguard finally gave her some room to breathe again, taking up their usual places at the foot of the dais. They’d been reduced to nine, now, the tenth member dead on the floor. Jenny stared at the corpse for a second, then at the second corpse, a palace guard who’d died at the hands of the government guards.

They were the only casualties the palace had taken today, although there were some injuries amongst the other palace guards. Minor ones, though, considering they’d all walked out under their own power, still strong enough to carry a body over their shoulder.

“So,” Jenny said slowly. “I suppose we’ll have to visit some more families.”

“Yes,” Ahmanet agreed sadly. “That does seem to be the case.”

Jenny sighed, already not looking forward to it.
Chapter 52

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet sit down and have a real talk about what modern warfare really means. Jenny is less than impressed with Ahmanet's generals.

Chapter Notes

Here we go with chapter 52, people! It's not particularly spectacular, but it should do. I'm trying to build up to something. Not sure if I'm succeeding, but that's something we'll find out soon enough, right?

Also, with this chapter we are officially breaking the 200,000 word barrier! Yay!

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Servants came into the throne room with stretchers, and they loaded the two dead onto them and covered their bodies with white fabric. It quickly stained red in some places.

As Jenny and Ahmanet left the throne room alongside the bodies, a crew of cleaners rushed in, mops and buckets at the ready to take care of the puddles of blood left behind. Jenny wondered if they’d already finished mopping up the blood from the invasion; she hadn’t seen any splatters lying around, but she hadn’t been at all the spots where there’d been fighting, so who knew. Either way, they now had more work to do.

They personally delivered the bodies back to their families.

Jenny felt her stomach churn as she watched a father throw himself over the dead body of his son, wails of grief coming from his mouth as he clutched the dead guard to his chest. Not sure what to do, she just gave him a sympathetic look, watching as one of the servants - a friend, it seemed - moved forward after a small nod of permission from Ahmanet, and set to comforting the man. Ahmanet took a moment to say a few words of comfort, and Jenny made sure to squeeze the father’s shoulder warmly before they went to deliver the second body to their loved ones.

It wasn’t any more fun the second time around.

‘‘There are going to be consequences,’’ Ahmanet said as they sat down for dinner. ‘‘The fake government will respond to what happened today.’’

‘‘They will,’’ Jenny agreed. She had no doubt that the Egyptian government would not take kindly to getting their delegation back dead, with the only survivor having two broken knees and a small truckload of new traumas. What mattered was how they were going to respond to it. Ahmanet waited for the servants to place the food on the table, and then took a few moments to serve herself some fish and rice. Jenny did the same, except she chose soup.
“It is very likely this will elicit a war,” the Pharaoh said finally. “A line was crossed today. They will respond with violence. And there is only one way we can react to that, if we wish to keep our lives.”

Jenny sighed, staring down at her soup. There was no doubt Ahmanet was right. The government had tried to do this without violence, but they were so far beyond a peaceful solution that it wasn’t even funny now. “Yes. They’ll try to go the same route Henry took, if they can. And they’ll make very sure they won’t be taken out as easily.”

“I’m increasing guard patrols at the walls,” Ahmanet said. “As well as armed guards throughout the palace.”

“That might not be enough.” Not this time around. If Henry had worked with the government like Ahmanet suspected, Jenny knew that they already knew that Henry’s troops hadn’t managed to secure the palace. They’d send more people. Better prepared people. More heavily armed people. Maybe even people in possession of things like tear gas. That’d go through the palace’s defenses like nothing else. Guards weren’t able to fight against that. Not without gas masks, anyway. And that would still leave the other inhabitants of the palace in danger. No, just increasing the guards would definitely not be enough.

“I fear you might be right,” Ahmanet agreed. “Do you have any suggestions?”

“Beyond extra guards and patrols? Find a way to make the palace safe from things like gas, and explosives. One or two good grenades or something like that and they’ll blast straight through the palace walls. And things like gas… that can flatten whole cities no problem, nevermind a confined space where the wind can’t blow it away.”

Ahmanet frowned thoughtfully as she speared a piece of fish with her fork and popped it into her mouth, chewing thoughtfully. “I will speak to Aaheru. I believe the Cult of Set has several skilled magic users amongst their ranks. Perhaps they will be able to figure out a viable way to defend the palace.”

“Magic can do that?”

“If properly handed by a skilled user? Yes. But it is far from easy. And very draining. Depending of the strength and skill of the magician, it may take up to a week to get decent defences up, maybe longer.”

Jenny frowned as she stirred her soup. “We might not have a week.”

“We will be ready, Jennifer. And we will retaliate. Speaking of retaliation…” Well, that sounded like escalation waiting to happen.

Jenny asked warily, “what about it?”

Ahmanet took a breath, putting down her fork. She looked at Jenny seriously. “This will be war, Jennifer. And I do not plan to let them strike first. I do not want to have to suffer more casualties when we can prevent it.”

“And how are you planning to do that?”

“When we are done eating,” Ahmanet said, “I would like for you to sit down with me, and tell me what I need to know about how modern armies operate.”

Jenny swallowed thickly. “Didn’t you have servants gathering information for you on that?”
“I do. But they have not yet finished going through the material. As of now, I only know the bare basics. I would like you to tell me more.”

“Right,” Jenny said. “After dinner, then.”

She went back to her soup. It didn’t taste quite as delicious as it had a minute ago. She ate it anyway, because she knew the cooks had worked hard on this, and she didn’t want to leave a full bowl on the table when, in all reality, this was really good soup and she’d happily have finished it otherwise. Now, though still as good, she just couldn’t enjoy it. The idea of open war left a kind of bitter taste on her tongue. It couldn’t be avoided, she knew that, and she’d stand by Ahmanet no matter what because damn it Jenny loved her and after everything Ahmanet had been through she deserved to have the throne - but that didn’t mean she had to like the idea of open war and all it entailed.

They finished dinner in silence. Forty-five minutes later (dinner had involved a dessert that Jenny had loved, even with the bad taste in her mouth) they were back at the royal quarters.

“Some privacy please, Zara, Sahar.” Jenny told her handmaidens. “We’ll call you if we need anything.”

“Of course,” Sahar said as she and Zara paused at the doors, holding the doors open for Jenny and Ahmanet and then closing the doors behind them, leaving Jenny and Ahmanet alone in their quarters.

“So,” Jenny said. “Modern warfare.”

“Yes,” Ahmanet agreed as she took a seat on the couch. Jenny sat down too, frowning. Modern warfare was a huge topic. She wasn’t entirely sure where to start.

“How about,” she said after a second, “you start by telling me what you actually know about modern warfare.” Then all Jenny had to do was fill in the gaps, and give additional explanations where needed. It would certainly make things easier for her. After another half a second, she added, “then after we’ve talked about this, maybe you can tell me some more about using magic to defend the palace.”

Ahmanet nodded. “I’m aware that warfare has changed very much since I last had anything to do with an army. I know that armies not use long-distance weapons such as firearms, which are very deadly and very hard to dodge. I also know that it is now possible to attack from several countries away with missiles, which produce very large explosions. You also mentioned nuclear bombs, which I assume are even larger bombs than missiles.”

Jenny stifled a sigh. As it turned out, Ahmanet really did know nothing other than the absolute basics. “Well, you’re not wrong…”

“But I do not know nearly enough.”

“No, you don’t,” Jenny agreed. Ahmanet did not know nearly enough to realize what she was getting into. Hell, Jenny had lived in the modern world all her life and probably didn’t know enough to realize what she was getting into. She was an archaeologist, not a soldier. And just because she’d spent time with the American army in Iraq to secure artefacts so they couldn’t be used by the insurgents to fund their operations didn’t mean she knew about war.

Well, she’d tell Ahmanet what she could, and what she didn’t know, they could look up. Like those servants should be doing right now. Jenny really hoped they’d be done reading those books fairly soon, so they’d have more information to go on.

“Right, then,” Jenny said, “let’s start with guns. They’re probably the most widely used weapon
right now, and they’re dangerous. They come in a range of types. The smaller ones are handguns, also known as pistols, which have ammunition magazines from anywhere between nine and fifteen bullets,” at least, Jenny was pretty sure that was how many bullets there were in a handgun. Could be more. Could be less. Either way, she was fairly sure it was anywhere between five and twenty, depending on the type of handgun. “They are, like all guns are, deadly. If you’re hit centre mass there’s a good chance the surrounding organs will get damaged as well, even if they’re not directly hit by the bullet.”

Ahmanet nodded. “These are used by soldiers as well?”

“Every soldier has one. Depending on the country, civilians do as well,” Jenny agreed. “Then we have bigger guns, like assault rifles. Like the ones Henry’s people used, and the ones our palace soldiers have as well. They’re military staples. I think you’re familiar enough with those now to know to duck and cover when you see one in enemy hands.”

Another nod. “Quite.”

“We’re probably also going to have to look out for sniper rifles. Those are very powerful rifles that can kill someone from up to a mile away. You’ll be dead before you even realize you’re being shot at at all.”

At that, Ahmanet looked a little worried. “Is there any way to stop those?”

Jenny shrugged. “Besides staying inside and away from doors and windows? I guess keeping an eye out for snipers. Beyond that, I don’t know, honestly. But,” she added, “there’s nothing around for miles except desert. Luxor is, like, forty miles from here. And they’d have to shoot from a high place, because of the palace walls. So I guess a sniper wouldn’t be all that hard to notice, if you have some people looking out for one.”

“I will tell the guards to keep an eye out,” Ahmanet said. That was probably a good idea. Jenny knew enough of modern warfare to know that the military preferred to just shoot someone from a distance than get into an actual fight. They liked to prevent casualties on their own side, and maximize casualties on the enemy’s side. Not that she blamed them. Jenny would like as little casualties as possible on her side too. Preferably none at all, but that hope had already flown - currently, the death count on her side hovered around forty.

“Good idea,” Jenny verbally agreed. “Anyway, I think we’re going to have to look out for explosives as well. Depending on how much trouble we cause for various governments, maybe even things like missiles.”

Jenny then proceeded to explain to Ahmanet, exactly, how missiles were Very Bad and would probably get the entire palace bombed right back into the desert, no questions asked. She also made sure to mention more portable bombs, such as grenades, as well as combat vehicles capable of shooting exploding shells, such as tanks. Then, very carefully, Jenny introduced Ahmanet to the concept of nuclear weapons, and the destruction they could cause, making sure to also mention what had happened to Japan at the end of World War 2.

She was gratified to actually feel the first hints of hesitation coming from Ahmanet at the end of explaining just how many people had died in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It wasn’t nearly as much apprehension as there probably should be, but at least it was a start. And since she was on a bit of a roll, Jenny decided to dig up her memories of what she’d learned in high school (since even semi-modern warfare hadn’t exactly been a part of her studies into Egyptian-based archaeology, let alone the very recent) and told Ahmanet exactly how competent humanity had become at killing things.
She mentioned World War One, World War Two, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Gulf War, and the destruction that had been wrought in them, all the lives that had been lost and the damage that had been done and the devastation the countries involved had suffered through. She threw in the conflicts with organizations as well, mentioning Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other insurgent groups, and the war on terror that it had sparked across the planet.

"You have to realize, Ahmanet," Jenny said seriously, "that nowadays, a war isn’t won with spears and bows and swords. Today, people press on a button, and halfway across the planet, a village turns to rubble. And that’s not just one military, Ahmanet. They all have the ability to do that. And they all have allies. If you attack one of them, you attack all of them."

"I see," Ahmanet said. "And the fact that I control most of the Egyptian military is not enough of a deterrent for other countries?"

"No," Jenny said. "It’s not. And while Egypt has allies like every other country, those allies will not jump in to help insurgents. That’s what they’ll label us as. What we are planning is a coup. We’ll be terrorists as far as the world is concerned."

Ahmanet scowled a little. "We are the rightful rulers of Egypt. Hardly insurgents."

"To the outside world, we’re not."

"They don’t care that you have a claim to the throne. In this country, there has not been a throne for a while now. They have a government, and that government will label you as an insurgent."

"And that was how simple it was. There were no claims for birthright, no millennia old bloodlines who had been Pharaohs for just as long. Today, there was a government, mostly democratically chosen, and that government wasn’t going to let a random woman stroll up and put them out of a job. Not without putting up a good fight, anyway."

"Which countries can we expect to end up in conflict with?"

"Probably some surrounding countries, like Libya, and definitely the UN as well, though that’s not a country. Maybe, like, some Arabian countries." Jenny shrugged helplessly. "I’m an archaeologist, not an expert on war and politics. I don’t know, really."

"Of course," Ahmanet said immediately, "I suspect my generals will know, though."

"If you have generals, why haven’t they told you what you can expect from modern warfare?"

"I assume they did not want to cause offence by implying I am ignorant of the modern world."

"And you didn’t think to correct them?" Jenny asked dryly.

"I suppose it slipped my mind." Ahmanet actually looked a little sheepish at that.

Jenny let out a deep sigh, resisting the urge to rest her face in her hands. "Please just ask your generals about this, then. I’m sure they know far more than I do."

"I shall," Ahmanet responded. "But I do not think they will be able to change my mind. You have impressed upon me how dangerous a war is, Jennifer, but I intend to push through regardless. Though I shall adjust my strategies accordingly."

Jenny was not surprised. She knew how set Ahmanet was on getting her birthright. She wasn’t just going to walk away from this. "I know, Ahmanet. And I’ll support you. But I do want you to know
that I do not like the idea of war, and that I do not intend to be on the front lines if at all possible.’’

‘‘My love, if you thought I would let you be on the front lines of a war, you do not know me at all.’’

Ahmanet responded to that, firmly. ‘‘It is bad enough that you were put in the lines of fire this morning, and during the invasion.’’

Jenny cocked her head. ‘‘I thought you liked it when you and I killed Henry and those Prodigium soldiers.’’

Ahmanet took her hand. ‘‘I did, my love. I will not lie and tell you that I did not cherish every second of being so intimately connected to you. But I worry. And it would be unbearable to see you fighting a war when you could be safe behind the palace walls.’’

‘‘Well,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘you don’t have to worry about that. Because I don’t plan to run out there and throw tanks around. I’ll leave that to Wonder Woman.’’

‘‘Wonder Woman?’’ Ahmanet frowned in confusion.

‘‘Fictional character,’’ Jenny explained.

‘‘I see,’’ Ahmanet said, but Jenny could tell she didn’t quite understand after all.

‘‘How about,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘you tell me in a little more detail how you intend to protect the palace.’’

‘‘I shall,’’ agreed Ahmanet. ‘‘I plan to ask Aaheru to help, and some of his Adepts.’’

‘‘Adepts?’’

‘‘Those who are adept at the use of magic.’’

That made sense, so Jenny nodded in understanding, encouraging Ahmanet to keep going.

‘‘They will pray to Set,’’ Ahmanet continued, ‘‘and ask him for his help in raising defences, to keep his subjects safe from harm. Most likely, several animals will be sacrificed. Specifically those that are associated with him. Male pigs, hippopotami, turtles.’’

Jenny frowned a little at the thought of animal sacrifices. That still didn’t sit well with her. But if she had to choose between a few animals and defences for the palace… well, self-preservation was a powerful motivator, and Jenny had an aversion to being bombed.

‘‘If Set accepts the offerings, he will carve protective glyphs into the palace walls, in the same script he used for our pacts,’’ Ahmanet explained, ‘‘and then Aaheru’s Adepts will perform further sacrifices that are needed to give the glyphs their power.’’

Jenny frowned. ‘‘Why more sacrifices? Can’t Set just power the defences?’’

‘‘If he already had a mortal avatar, yes. But he is still beyond the Veil. His power on Earth is limited for now. He can only reach into this world if he already has an anchor here, if he is summoned by a ritual, or if he is given sacrifices to temporarily boost his power in this world.’’

‘‘So when he appeared in the temple…’’

‘‘You and I currently function as his anchors, my Chosen,’’ Ahmanet responded. ‘‘But every time he appears before us, it saps from our strength. He will not risk it. Not now that you carry his mortal avatar and I am preparing for war. We will use sacrifices to increase his power and allow him access into this world.’’
Jenny nodded. That was a strategy she could totally agree to. As long as Set wasn’t anywhere near
her, she was totally fine with it. If she ever saw Set again, it would be too soon. Best to avoid him for
as long as humanly possible. Or inhumanly possible. Whichever meant he was not near her for the
longest amount of time. “Do I have to be there for the sacrifices?”

“No, my love. If they bother you you don't have to attend.”

Jenny nodded. “Good. Because I don’t think I can watch that without throwing up.”

Killing humans who were trying to kill her was one thing. That could, to a point, be justified to her
increasingly deteriorated morals. Killing animals who didn’t even know why they were dying was
something else entirely.

After a moment of silence, Ahmanet said, “I should go talk to my generals soon. We need a strategy
if we are going to wage war on the fake government.”

“Good idea,” Jenny said. “But maybe save it for tomorrow? It’s been a long day already.”

Ahmanet paused for a moment, and then nodded, face softening. “Of course. You must be tired,
after today.”

“A little,” Jenny admitted. It’d been a long day for her, and a pretty shitty one as well. She just
wanted to skip dinner and get some sleep.

“Then come to bed, love. We can still afford to take a few hours to ourselves.”

That was something Jenny wasn’t about to say no to. She took Ahmanet’s hand and let herself be
tugged out of their living room and to bed, only making a brief stop to clean their faces of makeup.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so... confession time. I know I haven't mentioned any generals before this. This is
because I totally forgot a Pharaoh should have generals to help them wage war. Hence
why this chapter is suddenly talking about generals when I'm fairly sure I've barely
mentioned them before, or not at all. Just pretend as if they’ve been at the palace the
whole time, okay?
Chapter 53

Chapter Summary

Jenny meets with Jamila Kader and goes to see Chris. Ahmanet has a new crown.

Chapter Notes

Hello, all. I have chapter 53 up and running for you. As you've maybe seen, the chapter goal is back up to 67, because apparently I am incapable of making up my mind and keep messing around with the plot. It's a bad habit I've yet to kick, I'm afraid. Regardless, we power on. And don't worry, I'm still writing every week, even though I'm currently struggling a little with chapter 56. We'll get there.

Also, I'm pretty sure this fic is around a year old right now! Last year July is when I started this fic (at least, I'm pretty sure it was July), and I'm still here! Par-tay!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Jenny woke up to an empty bed. A part of her had already expected it; even in sleep, somehow, she had known when Ahmanet had slipped from between the sheets and left their quarters to go attend to her duties. The link was strong, and the more time they spent together, the easier it became to sense it. Like a part of her mind was slowly unfurling, adapting, melding to the other mind bordering her own. It was surprisingly comforting, to not be alone in her own head all the time.

It was also not a surprise that Ahmanet could sense when she started to really wake up, and the pulse of warmth that flowed across the link made Jenny hide a small smile into the pillow. She basked in it for a moment, sending back her own warmth, letting it wash across the link.

She stretched a little, opening her eyes, and found her handmaidens already present, waiting patiently near one of the walls. As soon as they noticed she was awake, they jumped into motion, Zara slipping out to, presumably, fetch Jenny clothes, while Sahar folded back the sheets and helped Jenny sit up.

"A bath, my Queen?"

"A quick one," Jenny agreed. "I assume Ahmanet has gone to attend her duties?"

"Her Majesty has been in a meeting with her generals since dawn, my Queen," Sahar confirmed. "They are not expected to leave the war room until late this afternoon at the earliest."

Jenny nodded as she made her way into the bathroom, shedding her nightshirt and sliding into the water of the hotter bath. Ahmanet had, it seemed, kept her promise to go talk strategy with her generals. Hopefully they would further inform the Pharaoh on what it meant to declare war nowadays. Which they should’ve done earlier, regardless of how much respect they had for Ahmanet and how afraid they were of pissing her off.
Jenny made it a short bath, as planned, letting Sahar wash her hair and body and then only taking a few minutes to soak before getting out of the water again. She dressed equally quickly, donning the clothes and jewellery Zara had selected for her, and, on a whim, decided to braid her hair today instead of keeping it down.

Soon enough, she was making her way to the dining hall for breakfast. The halls were still fairly empty, which led Jenny to believe it was relatively early still. Late, compared to the hour Ahmanet had apparently gotten up at, but then again, compared to dawn just about anything was late. Jenny, who liked her sleep, did not envy Ahmanet at all.

Plates of food hit the table as soon as Jenny stepped through the doors of the dining hall, piping hot and freshly prepared. As if the cooks had known down to the second when Jenny would arrive. It was a kind of service she was definitely starting to really appreciate.

There were the usual Egyptian staples, but also a couple Western dishes that Jenny had grown up on at her grandmother’s knee. She selected some Egyptian style breakfast, ful medames and bread, and, because she couldn’t resist the temptation, some good old English bacon and toast with marmalade. Maybe she could ask the kitchens to make her a nice full English at some point. She did love her greasy, artery-clogging national dishes every once in a while. And baked beans! God, she missed baked beans. Nevertheless, ful medames was nothing to sneeze at either, and some days, she did indeed prefer the Egyptian-style fava beans to the baked beans she’d grown up on.

She gestured at Zara and Sahar to get some breakfast too, and then dug in herself, taking her sweet time. If she had anything at all to do today, it could wait until she’d eaten. She wasn’t the one who had a war strategy to think up, after all. That was a matter Jenny would happily leave to Ahmanet. As long as the palace wasn’t bombed, Jenny wasn’t getting involved if she could help it. No more than she already was, anyway.

She finished her breakfast, gulping down the last of her tea and wiping her mouth with a napkin.

“My Queen,” Zara said as Jenny prepared to leave the dining hall, “if you are willing, Jamila Kader is free to meet with you today.”

Jenny perked up a little. Jamila Kader was the jeweller who specialized in rings. “When?”

“Well whenever you wish to see her, my Queen.”

Well, that was nice to know. Jenny wished she knew exactly what time it was. Was it too early to go see her right now? Fuck it, this was important to Jenny, if she ended up dragging Jamila Kader out of bed, so be it. “Is she awake yet?”

“arunbe, my Queen, as it is a weekday. I will send a servant ahead to make sure, with your permission?”

Jenny nodded. “Go for it.”

Sahar motioned over a servant. “Go see if Jamila Kader is awake. The Queen wishes to see her.”

The servant nodded, bowed quickly to Jenny, and rushed off at a quick run.

“So,” Jenny said as she strolled after the servant at a far more sedate pace, “this Jamila Kader, she lives in the palace?”

“Yes, Your Highness. She relocated here when the palace was unearthed from the desert.”
“Just like that?” If she was that good a jeweller, wouldn’t she have had a business of her own? Or at least a full-time job at a jeweller? And she’d given that up, just like that, to go live here (that, at least, was a sentiment Jenny could understand), for… well, what, exactly?

“She comes from a very long bloodline, my Queen,” Zara explained. “Her ancestors were already the jewellers of Pharaoh’s. Moreso, her family has always been believers of the old ways, and they have been associated with the Cult of Set for centuries. When the call came, she was one of many who responded, and her entire family with her.’’

Sahar added in, “the jewellery Her Majesty gifted you was made by her, my Queen.’’

“Really?” Jenny looked down at the ring on her finger with new eyes. All of the jewellery she’d been gifted was beyond gorgeous, and beautifully made. If this was what Jamila Kader could do with gold and gems, she had definitely asked to see the right person. And she had somehow managed to hold onto her wallet all this time, which meant she had access to her bank card and thus her bank account, which meant she’d be able to afford a good piece of jewellery.

Prodigium had paid her well, and she’d worked for them for thirteen years; combine that with the fact that she hadn’t taken any extravagant vacations (she’d regularly spent time in Egypt and the Middle East, after all, which was holiday enough even when it was work) and hadn’t bought herself any fancy cars of apartments (she usually took public transport or rented a car, and she hadn’t spent more than a few hours a week in her apartment in years so she hadn’t needed anything bigger than a one-person studio), and Jenny had a nice little nest egg tucked away. And that wasn’t counting the holiday and Christmas bonuses, which she hadn’t spent much of, if any at all.

Long story short, while Jenny was not considered ‘wealthy’ she could definitely afford to pay Jamila Kader to make a piece of jewellery without going totally broke. As long as it wasn’t one of those broad collars, anyway. She was pretty sure those cost a whole lot more than her entire savings. Probably more than her whole family had made in their entire lives too.

“I am positive you will be very pleased with her craftsmanship, my Queen’’ Sahar continued. “She has gained a very good reputation over the years.’’

“Not to mention the fact that her skill has contributed greatly to the Cult of Set. She always donates a portion of her profits to the Cult, and she also helped to produce the Pharaoh’s crown.’’ Zara added.

“I assume you mean the uraeus?” Jenny asked, referring to the intricate golden cobra, as well as the equally intricate golden vulture, the representations of Wadjet and Nekhbet to symbolize Lower and Upper Egypt, on Ahmanet’s double crown. She’d noticed them, of course. Exquisite craftsmanship, on an equally gorgeously made crown.

Zara nodded. “Yes, my Queen. Jamila made them.’’

So Jenny had definitely made the right choice when she’d asked Zara and Sahar to contact Jamila Kader and make an appointment. Though apparently it wasn’t so much an appointment as it was a message that Jenny wanted to see her. Which, miraculously, meant that the jeweller had a sudden surplus of free time during which Jenny could see her. And Jenny had a feeling it wasn’t because Jamila didn’t have any work to do, but more because of the crown on Jenny’s head, that she had free time all of a sudden.

Nevertheless, Jenny was not complaining. If Jamila was as good as Jenny had a feeling she was, it probably would’ve been harder to get an appointment if she were just a random British woman.

The servant who had been sent ahead came hurrying back down the corridor in the direction of
Jenny and her handmaidens.

‘‘And?’’ Zara asked, a touch impatiently.

‘‘Miss Kader is eagerly awaiting her Highness’ presence,’’ the servant reported.

Zara gave a nod of understanding. ‘‘Dismissed.’’

The servant gave a quick bow and was off.

A little more upbeat, Jenny continued down the corridor. Some days, it was good to have a crown on her head. It got her little perks like these, for instance.

In another couple of minutes, Jenny found herself stepping into Jamila Kader’s workspace. It was fairly large, well-lighted and ventilated, with a large work desk, tools and a gold furnace, as well as molds, a variety of sanding belts, gem cutters, and raw material. Jamila herself was hunched over her desk, sketching on a pad of paper.

Sahar lightly cleared her throat.

‘‘Oh!’’ Jamila looked up from her sketchpad, quickly standing up and making her way over, ‘‘my Queen! I am honored to meet you.’’ She bowed.

‘‘It’s good to meet you too,’’ Jenny agreed.

‘‘How may I help you?’’ Jamila asked.

‘‘I wish to have a piece of jewellery made,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘and I was told you’re the best.’’

Jamila looked flattered. ‘‘I can make whatever you with me to make, my Queen.’’

Jenny waved off Zara and Sahar, then followed Jamila to her work desk, taking one of the chairs available.

‘‘What kind of jewellery are you looking for?’’ Jamila asked respectfully.

‘‘I want you to make me a ring,’’ she said. ‘‘For Ahmanet. And I want it to be a surprise.’’

Jamila looked surprised for a second, and then pleased. ‘‘What kind of ring are you looking for, my Queen?’’

Jenny thought it over a for a second. An engagement ring was ridiculously premature, and just a regular ring didn’t quite convey the message Jenny wanted to convey. She needed something more important than just a regular ring, but something not quite ‘‘engagement’’. ‘‘I want,’’ Jenny said slowly, ‘‘you to make me a promise ring.’’

At that, Jamila smiled, slow and wide. ‘‘Of course. I can do that. Did you already have a design in mind?’’

Jenny had not thought that far yet. But she did have some ideas off of the top of her head. At least, she knew what she liked, and she had a feeling Ahmanet would love the ring regardless of what it looked like. And she’d certainly try her best to describe a beautiful ring.

‘‘I want it to be gold,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘but not purely yellow gold. It needs to be kind of subtle.’’

‘‘We have white gold,’’ Jamila suggested. ‘‘Or rose gold.’’
Jenny frowned a little. “Can you, like, do a marbled effect from yellow and rose?” Because she liked the thought of rose gold, but yellow gold was so very Egyptian that she didn’t want to exclude it entirely. It was a very important piece of the culture, after all.

“I can definitely braid or twist them together,” Jamila said, “and a marbled effect should be possible as well. I can prepare all three for you so you can pick the one you like best.”

Jenny nodded. “That sounds good.”

Jamila made a few quick notes on a fresh sheet of paper. “Would you like it engraved, or otherwise decorated?”

“Yes,” Jenny said, “I want it engraved. Vines, with budding flowers, and if possible, I want the buds inlaid with flecks of ruby. And on the inside, a prayer for protection.”

Jamila nodded, scribbling it down on her paper. “I will be able to do that, my Queen. Again, I can prepare a variety of designs, so you may pick the one you like most. Of course, if none of them are to your liking, I will begin again to make a new selection.”

Jenny doubted that that would be necessary, since she hadn’t seen anything Jamila had made that she didn’t like so far, but she nodded anyway. She could probably (maybe) afford to get a ring like this, and the other ones she didn’t pick could always be melted down and reused.

“You can send me the bill whenever.”

Jamila looked up from her paper, horrified. “My Queen! I would never ask you to pay for my services!”

Jenny blinked. “Well, you need to be compensated for your work, don’t you?”

“Forgive me, Highness, but you are the Queen. I could not charge you for my work. You shall have the ring, at no cost.”

That seemed… wrong. Just because Jenny had a crown on her head didn’t mean she’d just be getting everything for free, did it? Because she was fairly sure that even in ancient times, the royal family had paid for plenty of stuff. So she didn’t quite understand why she was now being told that she couldn’t pay a fair price for a piece of jewellery, that, quite frankly, probably cost enough that Jamila would be missing out on a lot of profit. Not to mention the cost of the materials Jenny had requested. Gold wasn’t cheap, and neither were rubies. Jenny could not, in good conscience, accept all of that for free.

“I insist,” Jenny told Jamila.

Jamila looked highly uncomfortable. “Your Highness…”

“How about,” Jenny said, when it became apparent Jamila wasn’t going to name a price, “you just send me a bill when I’ve picked out the ring I like best.”

At that, a skitter of relief crossed Jamila’s face, which left Jenny with the distinct feeling that that bill might end up ‘lost’ or ‘forgotten about’. “As you wish, my Queen.” Jamila responded.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Jenny said, standing up, “and don’t hurry. It’s not a rush order.”

“I assure you I shall do everything I can to make this ring perfect,” Jamila promised as she walked Jenny to the door.
“And send me the bill after,” Jenny reminded her.

“Of course,” Jamila opened the door for her, bowing as Jenny stepped out. Zara and Sahar perked up upon spotting her, hurrying over from where they’d been leaning against the wall.

“Your Highness, I hope your meeting went well?”

“Quite well,” Jenny responded, noting the way Jamila sagged in relief. At the same time, Zara and Sahar relaxed a little, and it was only then that Jenny realized how tense they’d been around Jamila. And now that she’d told them she’d gotten along fine, her handmaidens were suddenly okay with it. Her word, as it seemed, meant a lot around here.

Jenny took a moment to greet Jamila goodbye, getting another bow in return, and began to make her way down the corridor. “Ahmanet is meant to be in her meeting until this afternoon, correct?”

“Yes, my Queen.”

Jenny hummed in acknowledgement. It was barely an hour past breakfast. That meant she had pretty much her entire day open, with nothing of particular importance to keep her occupied. She didn’t really feel like reading a book… not for the first time, she wished the palace had internet. Or cable tv. Or both.

“Say, Zara,” Jenny said, suddenly thinking of something, “where is Chris being kept anyway, now that he’s out of the dungeons?”

Zara hesitated for half a second before answering. “I believe he has been put in the servant’s quarters in a currently unused wing of the palace, my Queen.”

“But you know the Pharaoh does not wish you to visit him on your own, your Highness,” Sahar added quickly, gently reminding Jenny of the promise she’d made to Ahmanet.

Jenny had, in fact, promised to not see Chris without Ahmanet accompanying her. She had also broken that promise already. And the thing that Ahmanet had been trying to hide from her - that Chris had betrayed her, had sold her out and led her to her death without hesitation - was already out in the open. There was really no reason that Jenny couldn’t go see Chris on her own now. There wasn’t anything he could do to make her release him anyway.

“I wish to see him anyway,” Jenny declared.

“Your Highness…” Sahar sounded worried. “The Pharaoh will not like this.”

“I’m aware,” Jenny responded, but she was no longer afraid of Ahmanet’s reactions. She knew that, though Ahmanet might be displeased, she wouldn’t do anything to Jenny. Maybe she’d let Jenny know she was upset, but no more than that. And Jenny could deal with an upset Ahmanet.

“But, my Queen,” Zara protested softly.

“Look,” Jenny said, “I’m going. If you want to, you can send a servant over to Ahmanet and inform her of what I’m doing, but that’s not going to stop me.”

Neither of her handmaidens looked very much reassured at that. Jenny felt for them, it couldn’t be easy to go straight against the orders of the Pharaoh, but Jenny knew what she wanted, and right now, she wanted to go see Chris and find out how he was doing. Last time she’d seen him, he hadn’t exactly looked all that happy, to say the least. Hopefully he was doing better now that he was out of the dungeons and back on full rations.
Zara and Sahar relented, but they did indeed do as Jenny had suggested, and snagged a servant as he was walking down the corridor, telling him to go inform Ahmanet of what Jenny was doing. Jenny wasn’t too fond of the fact that she had to let Ahmanet know of what she did in her own time, but it was better than getting into a fight again, so she let it go.

As Zara had said, Chris was stashed in an unused wing of the palace. Jenny had a feeling it’d fill up sooner or later, when more people arrived to take up their places under Ahmanet’s rule - more Cult members, perhaps, or believers who were not immediately associated with the Cult but still followed Ahmanet. Maybe new converts. Either way, the wing would not stay empty for long, Jenny was sure. As of now, though, the only occupants of the wing were Chris, and his small platoon of guards. Therefore, it was also easy to figure out which quarters Chris was living in; namely, the ones with guards in front of the door.

They straightened up as Jenny approached, the somewhat laid back atmosphere immediately sharpening into utmost attention.

“‘My Queen,’” one of the guards said, “‘how may we help you today?’”

Jenny nodded at the door. “I wish to see Chris.”

“‘The Pharaoh -’” the guard started.

Jenny cut him off. “‘Has already been informed of my presence here.’”

The guard exchanged a quick look with his colleague, before nodding. “‘My apologies, Highness. I did not mean to cause offence.’”

“‘I’m not offended,’” Jenny responded.

The other guard hastily opened the door. “‘Your Highness.’”

“‘Thank you.’” Jenny stepped into the quarters, Zara and Sahar on her heels, and took them in for a moment. They were small, compared to the royal quarters, but much, much bigger than the little cell Chris had been in earlier. There was a combined living/dining space, and a second space that functioned, presumably, as a bedroom. Kitchens and baths seemed to be communal in this wing, though that could differ in the quarters meant for families. These quarters seemed to be meant specifically for single persons.

Chris, looking less pale than he did the last time Jenny had seen him, was sitting at the dining table, a cup of water in front of him, as well as a book. Paperback, not hardcover. Apparently the guards didn’t trust him with a book that had hard, sharp corners. Just like the cup he had to drink from was styrofoam instead of hard plastic or glass.

Jenny’s stomach hurt a little, looking at him. Betrayal was a wound that took time to heal, and not nearly enough time had passed yet. Nevertheless, she was here now, and she did want to know how he was doing.

“‘Chris.’” Jenny made her presence known.

He looked up from his book, and lit up a little upon seeing her. “‘Jenny!’”

“I thought I’d come see how you’re doing,’” Jenny said as she took a seat. “‘How are you?’”

“I’m…” Chris frowned, closing his book. “‘Well, it’s more comfortable here than in the dungeons, that’s for sure.’” Jenny raised an eyebrow. He sighed. “‘Look, Jenny, I don’t know what you want
me to say. I don’t want to be here. I don’t even want to be alive right now. And I’m not going to lie to you, if I could get out of here, I would.”

“I know.” Jenny sighed too. “I wish there was something I could do.”

“Don’t get in trouble,” Chris responded. “You’re in enough shit as it is.”

“It’s not so bad,” Jenny said. “I’ve got it pretty good around here.”

Chris looked like he didn’t believe it for a second. Jenny wasn’t sure how she was supposed to convince him when he hated Ahmanet and everything she stood for so intensely. He probably wouldn’t believe her if she told him that she liked it here, and that she wouldn’t change finding Ahmanet even if she could. He probably wouldn’t take that well.

“So, the guards seemed a little nervous a while ago,” Chris started, rather obviously fishing for information. “And I think I heard gunshots the other day.”

Jenny grimaced. “Yeah. Prodigium tried to invade.”

Chris perked up. “What happened?”

“They failed.” She responded simply.

“How come?”

“The guards stopped part of them. Then Ahmanet and I got involved.”

Chris’ eyes widened. “You fought against Prodigium.”

Jenny nodded. “They tried to invade my home, Chris. They nearly shot Zara and Sahar.”

“So what?! They’re with Ahmanet, Jenny! Who cares if they’re killed?”

Against wall next to the door, Zara and Sahar stiffened.

“I care,” Jenny said, a little more coldly than a few seconds ago. “And they’re innocent. I wasn’t about to let Henry kill them just because.”

“Henry was there too? Where is he?”

“Dead,” Jenny said, not feeling an ounce of regret even as she remembered the way Henry’s neck had crunched as she’d twisted it until it broke. The way his blood had felt on her hands, the ease with which she and Ahmanet had broken him.

“What?!?” Chris gasped, pale as death. He’d probably been hoping Henry would come break him out, or something.

“He was killed,” Jenny repeated. “Broken neck.”


Oh. Well. Damn indeed. That was a question Jenny really didn’t want to answer. Because she already knew for a fact that Chris would react badly to the knowledge that Jenny had been the one to grasp Henry’s head between her hands and twist until his vertebrae broke under the strain. And he’d react even worse if he knew she’d enjoyed it. So she lied. Obviously.
“I don’t know,” Jenny told Chris, “I wasn’t there.”

Chris sagged a little. “Right.” Then he turned sympathetic eyes on her. “I’m sorry, Jenny. I know you were close to him.”

Jenny grimaced. “Not so close anymore. We had a falling out just before I came here.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that he considered himself your father,” Chris pointed out. “I think he loved you, Jenny. And he’d have wanted you to be safe.”

“I am safe,” Jenny said. Except for maybe Chris, she knew that everyone in this palace, any one of them, would throw themselves between Jenny and a bullet without hesitation. Even Ahmanet would. And Jenny, in turn, would do her best to protect all of them as well.

“No, Jenny, you’re not.” Chris argued. “You won’t be safe until she’s dead and all of this is over.” He didn’t have to say Ahmanet’s name to make it clear who he was talking about.

Jenny shook her head. “Just… don’t. Okay, Chris? Just don’t.”

“What? It’s the truth.”

“No, it’s not. I’m probably safer than I’ve been in a very long time. So do me a favour, Chris, and just stop.” She came off a little more irritated than planned, but it did shut Chris up, so Jenny didn’t really care. She took a deep breath, standing up. “I’ll let you get back to your book.”

“Yeah,” Chris said, a little meekly.

“I’ll visit again soon.”

“Yeah,” Chris repeated.

“I’ll see you later, then,” Jenny was already on her way to the door. She no longer had interest in talking to Chris today. It was good to see he was doing a little better, but Jenny didn’t feel like sitting around and listening to him spout hate all over the place. She didn’t have the patience for that right now.

Leaving Chris sitting at the kitchen table, she stepped back out into the hall - and almost walked right into Ahmanet. She opened her mouth to say something, noting that Ahmanet, while not angry, did not feel entirely happy either - and paused as she realized something.

Ahmanet’s crown had changed. The red and white Double Crown had been replaced.

Dread sank in Jenny’s stomach as she looked at the Khepresh - the blue crown of war.
'I see we're going to war.’’ Jenny spoke before Ahmanet could.

‘‘Yes.’’ Ahmanet responded. ‘‘It appears the generals, and their predecessors, have been working with the assumption that I would be freed for years.’’

‘‘Which means?’’ Jenny asked as they started to walk down the hallway.

‘‘It means that we have strategies as good as ready to go, and that the rifles currently in the possession of the palace troops are far from the only weapons we have.’’

Jenny frowned a little. ‘‘How come you didn’t know this earlier? Shouldn’t they have told you?’’ She left the real question - if information like this was held back, could these generals be trusted? - unsaid, but she knew Ahmanet would understand what she was getting at. They’d already neglected to tell Ahmanet about the modern world until Jenny had pushed her to ask them. Now they’d apparently also neglected to mention they were ready for war, and had been for some time. That sounded like information the Pharaoh was supposed to know, being, you know, the commander in chief of the army.

‘‘You shouldn’t worry, my love. My generals did not mean to deceive me. They were under the impression I would take longer to declare war, and so were planning to inform us of everything they had done to prepare our people once we had both settled in a little more.’’

Jenny frowned. Why would she need to be informed? It wasn’t like she was planning to go wage was. She was planning to stay safe and sound in the palace. The less she had to do with the war, the better, in her opinion. Which left the question… ‘‘what has my presence here got to do with that?’’
Ahmanet glanced at her. "You are the Queen, my love. Should I need to go to the front, you are in charge of the palace. That means you are in charge of the troops here as well."

"I’m sorry, what?"

"If I am not present, you are in charge of defending the palace," Ahmanet repeated.

Jenny stopped walking. "I’m not a general, Ahmanet. I know nothing of warfare. I should not be left with that kind of responsibility."

"Which is why I would like you to start joining me in strategy meetings," Ahmanet said calmly. "The people will look to you, too, my love, to lead them to victory."

"I’m really not cut out for that," Jenny said honestly. She didn’t want to be cut out for it either. Though far from a pacifist, she could not see herself at the head of a war. She’d gladly leave that to Ahmanet and the generals - you know, the people who actually knew what they were doing when it came to war.

"My love, I do not expect you will be expected to lead the war. But, just in case, you should know at least a little about strategy and defence."

Jenny nibbled on her lip. "Isn’t there anything less… violent I can do? Like diplomacy?"

"I very much doubt you will be able to convince the fake government to step down, my love," Ahmanet responded.

"No," Jenny said, suddenly having an idea, "but maybe I can convince other people to support us rather than fight against us."

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow. "How?"

"The media." Jenny said, a little stunned at her own ignorance. How hadn’t she thought of this before? They could use the media. It was 2018, of course they could use the media. Jenny was almost ashamed of herself for forgetting about the media. She thought as fast as she could, thinking of publications and networks that would at least listen to her point of view rather than instantly condemn her and Ahmanet. Al Jazeera, maybe. Western publications, too. The BBC. CNN. Hell, she could even throw her social media accounts into the fray, too. Facebook, Twitter, the whole nine yards. If they managed to get America and other Western countries on their side, their position would be a whole lot stronger. Jenny didn’t hold out a whole lot of hope for nearer countries, as they tended to be more… extreme when it came to well, bisexual people like Jenny and lesbians like Ahmanet. At least, the governments were. That didn’t necessarily the entire populace thought the same way. And social media was everywhere.

"I have an idea," Jenny told Ahmanet, "and I think I do need to talk to your generals as soon as I can."

Ahmanet blinked, apparently not following Jenny’s train of thought. Nevertheless, she took Jenny’s word for it, which Jenny appreciated. "They are still in the war room, I believe. Come, I’ll walk with you."

Jenny followed eagerly, mind still racing. If this worked, if they could garner enough public favour, this war might be over a whole lot quicker. Or at least, they’d get help from places like America and Europe. It’d certainly lower the chances of getting hit with a nuke. And, well, Jenny didn’t like to think it, but if it were American and European soldiers in the line of fire, it would spare them casualties on their side. They’d already lost too many, as far as she was concerned.
The war room was a large space, the walls tiled with mosaics of ancient battles, the Pharaoh tall and proud in a horse-drawn chariot, wearing golden armour and the blue crown of war. In the middle of the room was a very large table, with maps and papers on it. A gaggle of generals in traditional dress was crowded around it, speaking in hushed voices. They fell silent when Ahmanet and Jenny stepped inside.

“Your Majesty,” one of the generals said, standing up a little straighter. “Your Highness. How may we help you?”

“My Jennifer has an idea that might help us with the war effort,” Ahmanet said mildly, taking a seat at the head of the table. “Perhaps we ought to listen to what she has to say.”

Instantly, the generals sat down, looking at Jenny attentively. It was enough to make Jenny feel like she was back in uni and about to give a presentation. Not the most pleasant feeling in the world. Also, now it wasn’t just about passing grades, but about lives. No pressure, then. Ahmanet gently pushed a little confidence across the link. Jenny subconsciously stood a little straighter.

“I think,” she said, very glad when her voice came out strong and sure, “that we should involve the media.”

“Your Highness?” The same general from a minute earlier asked.

Jenny explained. “Right now, we’re hot news. Everyone is watching the palace that just appeared out of nowhere. And they know nothing about us. If we bring someone in here, do an interview or two, get us out there, we won’t just be a faceless entity. People can’t relate to a faceless entity. They don’t care about a faceless entity.” Jenny surveyed the generals, trying to gage their reactions. “If we can make ourselves relatable, people will care if the government attacks us. They’ll react. And if we pull this off, they’ll react in our favour. And we need that right now. We need to have the public on our side, or we’re going to end up being painted as the villains here. If that happens, we’re going to have a hell of a hard time ruling this country.”

For a moment, the room was silent. Jenny tried not to look too nervous, an effort that was supported by the pleased approval that came from Ahmanet.

“The idea has merit,” one of the generals said after a second.

“And if successful, it shall certainly spare soldiers’ lives.” Another agreed. “The more of our people we can keep alive, the better.”

That was a sentiment Jenny totally agreed with. They’d already lost almost forty people. If it was up to her, they would not lose any more. And if Jenny had to make a spectacle of herself on global tv, she’d happily do so.

Ahmanet eyed her generals. “Well?”

“We can have a servant contact a news station,” one of them said tentatively. “With proper guarding, we could allow one interviewer, one cameraman and a sound technician into the palace for an interview.”

“With the Queensguard there, an interview could be conducted with you, my Queen, if you will allow it.” Another general added, looking at Jenny.

Jenny did not hesitate to nod. “If Ahmanet agrees, do it.”

As one, the generals looked at Ahmanet.
“I agree with my Chosen. Make it happen.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Do you or her Highness have any preferences in news stations?”

Jenny thought for a second. “Al-Jazeera.” She said. Best to start with Middle-Eastern news first. And Al-Jazeera was well-known enough on a global scale to be able to reach most, if not all, of the planet. That was plenty of coverage to start with for now. It’d probably spread from there anyway, considering the subject. Jenny had no doubt that half the world, the archaeological and historical world, anyway, was salivating to get a look inside the palace, even if it was through a camera. They’d watch for that, if nothing else. And it was big news even beyond the scientific world. Other news stations would want in too. If given enough time, this could actually work.

“A servant will be sent immediately,” one general said, “to inform Al-Jazeera that they will be allowed a one-time opportunity to enter the palace if they are interested, and to speak with the Queen as well.”

“Very well,” Ahmanet responded. “See that it is done.” She glanced at Jenny. “If the interviewer is good enough, I might join you during the interview.”

That was something she hadn’t expected. It was also something she could immediately appreciate. Not only would it catch even more attention - no doubt the media would jump on getting a glimpse at the woman who called herself the rightful ruler of Egypt - it also meant Jenny didn’t have to do the whole media circus on her own. She was glad for it, too. Jenny had some publicity in her time, she’d written one or two well-received papers, but nothing that had ever warranted attention from the media.

This would all be new to her as much as it would be to Ahmanet. It was nice she didn’t have to do it alone. What was even nicer, though, was that Ahmanet was taking an active interest in Jenny’s plan, even though it was harebrained and barely thought out beyond ‘get an interviewer in here and talk’. If this initial dip into the waters of the media worked, Jenny might have to hire herself a social media manager or something, to ensure the palace kept up a decent image. They were probably going to need a clean image.

Although Jenny had a feeling said clean image was already tarnished - they had, after all, tossed Ahmed the government representative out of the palace with ruined knees and the corpses of his colleagues with him. That probably wasn’t very conductive to a nice, friendly image that would make people not want to declare war and bomb them right back into the desert. Because that would be bad, and also put a spin into Jenny’s plans to get this war over with and then go on vacation.

Ahmanet still owed her a romantic cruise down the Nile.

“Did you have any other ideas, my Queen?” One of the generals asked respectfully.

Jenny shook her head. “No. I’m not planning to be actively involved in the war unless I have no other choice. I will leave that to you and to the Pharaoh.”

“Of course, my Queen.” He said. “However, I feel obligated to mention that, in case the Pharaoh is called to do battle at the front, you will be in charge of defending the palace in her absence.”

“Ahmanet mentioned that, yes,” Jenny responded, “and if there is no other choice, I will, and I’ll probably end up relying on your advice for most of it. But beyond that, I’ll stick to what I said; I want to have as little to do with this as possible. I don’t think I’m cut out for war.”

The gaggle of generals took that in for a moment. Jenny was fairly sure she could see approval on
some faces, thought whether it was because it meant the generals would effectively be in charge or because they thought it was good for an amateur to accept advice from professionals, she didn’t know. Likely a little of both. Jenny knew people in high positions tended to like being in charge. She also knew that most people approved if someone took advice on a subject they didn’t know anything about from someone who did know about it. So either way, Jenny figured she’d gained some allies here.

There was a knock on the door.

“Enter!” Ahmanet called.

A servant stepped in. “The London Team has returned, your Majesty. They are ready to give their report if you have the time. The first bounty hunters have also arrived.”

Ahmanet perked up a little. “Send them all in.”

The servant bowed, then opened the door a little wider and stepped aside. Slowly, the team Ahmanet had sent to London filed in. They were a team of twelve, clad in black combat gear, some of them looking a little worse for the wear, faint bruises on their faces - one even had his arm in a sling. Three bounty hunters stepped in as well, bags of tough leather slung across their backs - filled, by the way they bulged. The bounty hunters took spots near the walls, apparently willing to let the London team report first.

Once the members of the London team had all filed into the room, they stood in two neat rows of six, and then the commander took an additional step forward.


Ahmanet waved her hand at them in a sort of ‘go on’ gesture.

“The mission was successful, Sire,” reported the woman, “we arrived in London and made our way straight to the Prodigium base. It was still in use by the organization, though they were already busy moving. The building was, as expected, unstable and scheduled for demolition. We managed to place discrete explosives at key points throughout the museum and the rest of the base beyond the museum that hid it. After detonating them, the base collapsed, taking most of the surrounding streets and buildings with it. We confirmed over seventy deaths of Prodigium soldiers, technicians and other staff.”

“Did any escape?” Ahmanet asked.

“Some survived the collapse of the building, Sire. Seventeen in total. My team and I followed them to a Prodigium safe house just outside London.” The commander responded promptly. “The survivors were summarily eliminated.”

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “I would assume they’d be on their guard after their headquarters collapsed. How did you get close enough?”

“We pumped nitrogen gas into the safe house, my Queen. It is odourless and presents an asphyxiation hazard because it tends to displace oxygen. When the targets were sufficiently unconscious from breathing in the nitrogen, we placed explosives under the head of each target, doused the floors in gasoline, barred the doors and windows, and set the place on fire.” The commander looked a little proud of her achievements. “We then waited for the explosives to detonate, and continued to wait until the building burned out. When the police carried out the bodies,
we made sure to count them. All targets perished in the attack.’’

‘‘What was the precise headcount?’’ Ahmanet asked.

‘‘I total we eliminated ninety-two enemies, Sire.’’

‘‘A good number,’’ Ahmanet complimented.

Ninety-two was a large number. Combined with the soldiers who had died outside of Cairo, who had numbered around one-hundred and thirty, that brought Prodigium’s losses up to around two-hundred and twenty. Jenny was willing to bet that that was a good chunk of Prodigium’s military force. In fact, she was willing to bet it was almost all of them. For all their well-trained soldiers, Prodigium operated mainly on researchers and technicians. The combat forces were only used on high-risk missions, Jenny knew from what Henry had told her over the years, and even then rarely in squads of more than a dozen. They didn’t have thousands of soldiers because they had never needed thousands of soldiers. Not until today, anyway, and it was a little too late to start recruiting now.

‘‘Thank you, Sire,’’ the commander looked even more pleased. Her team, still standing at attention behind her, straightened up even more, if that were possible.

‘‘Have you found any evidence of other Prodigium safe houses?’’

‘‘We have not, Sire. However, considering the nature of the organization, it is very much possible that there are other safe houses or bases.’’

Ahmanet glanced at Jenny. ‘‘Do you know of any, my love?’’

Jenny frowned, thinking hard. ‘‘There was an airport not to far out of London. Henry used it to get us out of the country after you swallowed London in that sandstorm. Maybe you can find something there? And Henry also mentioned a base in France, but I do not know which region.’’

The commander perked up a little. ‘‘Forgive me for asking, my Queen, but do you remember the name of the airport?’’

‘‘Um…’’ Jenny squinted a little. ‘‘I don’t remember the name. But I’m fairly sure that one of the Prodigium soldiers who brought me and Nick there said it was within thirty or so miles north of London. It’s very small, not nearly big enough for commercial flight.’’

‘‘With permission, Sire, my Queen, we will go investigate the airfield.’’ The commander said. ‘‘After which, we will try to find out where in France the other base is.’’

‘‘Do so,’’ Ahmanet said. ‘‘Leave your wounded behind. Other soldiers will take their place while they recover from their injuries.’’

‘‘Yes, Sire.’’

‘‘You’ve done a good job.’’ Ahmanet complimented. ‘‘Dismissed. Get some rest. I expect you to fly out the day after tomorrow.’’

The commander gave a short bow, and at her command, the team saluted crisply and filed back out of the war room. Once they were gone, the attention turned to the three bounty hunters lingering near the wall. Ahmanet gestured at them to step forward and report as well.

‘‘Sire, my Queen, generals,’’ the first started. ‘‘I have come to claim the bounty of one troy ounce of gold per head of a priest of Osiris. I have one head today.’’
Ahmanet gestured at one of her generals. “Check the head.”

The general did so. Jenny was very grateful he did not take the head out of the bag. After a few seconds, he nodded and closed the bag.

“It is the head of a priest of Osiris, Sire. He has the right tattoo, and it is already years old. It cannot have been set in the days since his death.”

Ahmanet nodded in understanding. “Very well.” She turned to the bounty hunter. “You may go see the treasurer. Show him the head as well. He shall give you your bounty.”

The bounty hunter bowed, expressed his thanks, and left. The interaction was repeated two more times, and when all hunters had left, Ahmanet and Jenny were about four ounces of gold poorer. Considering the palace, though, and the jewellery Ahmanet had showered Jenny in, she had a feeling that they would hardly miss four troy ounces of gold. If they even noticed they were missing in the first place.
Chapter 55

Chapter Summary

A tiny time skip of a few days. Al-Jazeera's interviewer arrives to set Jenny's plan of involving the media in action.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 55 is up, my lovelies, and there are a couple of new characters. I don't expect them to have a huge role, but for now, they're here. I hope you're all still enjoying this, because I very much am. Although I have to admit - I am looking forward to finishing this so I can sit back, look at it, and feel proud of what I've done with it. (Don't tell anyone, but I've gotten a bit attached to some of the characters.)

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

A few days passed quietly. Jenny, to her chagrin, did end up attending meetings in the war room, finding herself looking at blueprints of the palace to find out how it was most easily defended and learning how to best station the troops. It was not something Jenny had ever wished she would learn, but here she was, learning it anyway. Then again, it did mean she spent most of the day around Ahmanet in her element, so really, it wasn’t so bad. And it was hypothetical, anyway. Not like Jenny was playing around with actual lives.

Nevertheless, every day when Jenny left the war room to go have dinner and spend the evening in privacy with Ahmanet, she was glad to be away from the mock battlefields.

Also, the generals had been very swift about arranging an interview. Apparently they had several people on staff who were meant to deal with outside relations, and the media slotted into that part of their job description quite nicely. Al-Jazeera was contacted in short order and within hours, an agreement had been hashed out and a date had been set. As expected, Al-Jazeera was very much interested in getting an exclusive look at the palace and the people who owned it. The fact that they’d be getting an exclusive probably helped with that.

Four days later, Jenny woke up bright and early, nerves fluttering in her stomach. Today was the day of the interview, and she was not looking forward to it. She’d never really been filmed before, not like this, and she wasn’t sure if she’d like it. Probably not. Jenny had never really been fond of cameras if they were aimed at her.

Still, she got up as soon as Zara had gently woken her, and wasted no time readying herself for the day to come. She took a quick bath, then dressed in more formal clothes than she’d worn the past few days. A fine linen skirt, lined with silk, accented in gold thread. Her sleeveless tunic matched, with small patterns stitched into the fabric at her collar and the holes her arms went through. The
stitching around her collar was obscured by her broad collar, shined and polished to a high sheen only yesterday, like all her jewellery had been. She wore the rest of it as well, the rings and bracelets and arm bands, the bejewelled belt, and, of course, her flower crown. Before she put the last one on, Sahar carefully twisted and braided her hair into an elaborate updo that involved braids from her temples and then twisted together at the back of her head until all her hair was up and pinned. It left her hair fancy but in a way that meant her crown fit as perfectly as it always did. Then her makeup was done, with more care than probably ever, until it looked as perfect as could be. By the time she was ready, Jenny felt more like a dress up doll than anything.

Ahmanet prepared just as carefully, dressing in a beautiful gauzy dress with golden stitching that accented her jewellery as well as her skin tone beautifully. Her makeup done impeccably, the blue crown on her head, Jenny wanted to kiss her. She did so, and laughed and ducked away when Ahmanet swatted her away and went to redo her lipstick.

Jenny also felt quite tempted to just drag Ahmanet back to bed and blow off the interview, but she had a feeling that wouldn’t be as well-received, so she refrained. Even if she really wanted to, because Ahmanet looked absolutely amazing (although she always looked amazing, so maybe not that much of a change from usual).

Once Ahmanet had redone her lipstick (she gave Jenny a very pointed look that had Jenny rethinking her plans to kiss it off for a second time), they were finally ready for the day. The interview was scheduled just after lunch, which meant they still had a couple of hours beforehand, and apart from breakfast and lunch, Jenny was planning to spend those hours relaxing as much as possible. If the palace had electricity and internet, she would’ve polished up her social media for a bit, but the palace had neither (yet), so she couldn’t. Well, if things went well, they’d have electricity in a couple of weeks anyway, when the gynaecologist moved in. Until then, Jenny would just have to go without.

“What’s the plan until the interview?” Jenny asked as she sat down at the table in the dining hall.

Ahmanet waited for a servant to fill her cup with tea before answering. “Not much, my love. I do not have any meetings scheduled, and I believe you do not either.”

That was correct. Jenny was very grateful that she didn’t have to spend the morning in the war room pouring over mock battles and pretending she knew what she was doing. Because she still didn’t, really. After four days of mock-up battles for the model palace, all Jenny had really learned consisted of ‘don’t let them get past the walls, and shoot those who try to’. She’d also learned that ‘send people to make sure the walls are secure’ did not count as proper orders when instructing soldiers in a battle. Apparently Jenny was supposed to give orders like ‘team so-and-so, secure the eastern corner of the outer wall’ if she wanted to send people to the wall to shoot off people who tried to get past said wall.

It was all a lot more complicated than Jenny thought it really ought to be. Not that she was going to say so to the generals. They knew far more of this kind of thing than she did. Best to just respect their experience and learn as much as she could in case she did end up needing it.

“Maybe you can show me a little more of the palace,” Jenny suggested. “I haven’t seen all of it yet.”

“If you wish, my love,” Ahmanet agreed easily. “I believe you have yet to see the west wing of the palace, correct?”

Jenny nodded. “What’s in there?”

“Mostly suites for visitors of high status,” Ahmanet responded, “but when this palace was built, it
was considered very important to impress such visitors. Therefore, you will find that the wing boasts quite elaborate murals and artworks, as well as water features.’’

That actually sounded really nice. Jenny would definitely like to see that. ‘‘Are any of the suites occupied?’’

‘‘Not at the moment. The high-ranking inhabitants of the palace have their suites in a wing specifically for those who live here permanently. The west wing is meant exclusively for guests.’’

‘‘How many suites are there?’’ Jenny asked, already fascinated without even having seen the place.

Ahmanet, luckily, was happy to answer. ‘‘A dozen, and each suite is big enough to host a family. And beyond the suites, there are several halls for entertainment like parties, a small library, a bathhouse for those who prefer to make bathing a social thing, separate kitchens, a small indoor garden, and two spaces which one would now call art galleries.’’

Not just really nice then; it sounded outright over-the-top luxurious. Jenny couldn’t wait to go see it. It sounded like something she’d have killed to see on a dig. Hell, even in a modern building, she’d be glad to go see something like that. One couldn’t be an archaeologist without developing a healthy love for architecture, whether ancient or modern.

Excited, Jenny ate her breakfast quickly, only slowing down to drink her tea after, which was still hot. Though she couldn’t feel physical pain, she could feel that the liquid was hot, so she drank it slowly, even if only out of habit. Despite the tea slowing her down, though, she was done fairly quickly, and Ahmanet, who ate at a slightly more sedate pace, was done only a few minutes later.

The west wing was a little away from the center of the palace, and in the complete opposite direction of the quarters where Chris was detained. It was, like Ahmanet had said, opulent. Somewhat ostentatious in the same way the royal quarters were elegantly understated. These spaces were obviously meant to impress and even intimidate, rather than meant to create an intimate, relaxing environment. As utterly gorgeous and luxurious the wing was, Jenny could not imagine curling up with a book here like she could in the royal quarters.

Although she did immediately adore the indoor garden. The walls and even the ceiling was tiled in scenes of the sun and sky, and the floor consisted of soft mulch cut through by stone pathways. It was warm and humid, several square pieces of glass in the ceiling providing sunlight to the plants, and said plants seemed to be coming straight out of a tropical rainforest. There were even a couple of small trees, almost big enough to reach the ceiling, leaving the beams of sunlight to dapple through the leaves.

‘‘This,’’ Jenny told Ahmanet, ‘‘is gorgeous.’’

Ahmanet smiled a little. ‘‘You like this?’’

‘‘I love it.’’

‘‘I will make you another. A bigger one. A private garden only you may see.’’

‘‘That’s really not necessary,’’ Jenny responded, though she was flattered. ‘‘I can always come here if I want to sit in a tropical garden for a bit.’’

Ahmanet shook her head. ‘‘No, love. This one is available to all guests who might stay in this wing. There is a chance they would interrupt you when you wish some privacy.’’ She raised her hand to stop Jenny from protesting. ‘‘I will have one built just for you. You hardly have any true private space, Jennifer. I wish to provide that.’’
Well, put like that… Jenny did like the idea of having a space that was just for her. She’d probably appreciate such a place sooner rather than later. Especially if this war was going through. But a garden like this probably took a while to build… Well, if necessary, she could just commandeer an empty storage room somewhere until then.

“Well,” Jenny said, “then at least wait until we are no longer at war. I’d rather the attention is on that so we don’t lose.”

“My love,” Ahmanet said, putting her arms around Jenny’s waist, “I have no intention of losing this war.”

“No one ever has,” Jenny said. Because there were plenty of wars in human history, and no one who participated in one ever went in with the intention to lose. That did not change, however, that, inevitably, someone had to. Only one side could win. And Jenny was pretty sure that Ahmanet was not going to agree to a treaty or something - and the government probably wouldn’t either. It was win and live, or lose and probably end up dead. Or, considering who they were, lose and end up locked into a lab for experimentation.

Ahmanet arms tightened a little around Jenny’s waist. “I will burn this country to ashes before I lose this war. If I cannot have Egypt, no one will.”

Famous last words, Jenny couldn’t help but think. She knew Ahmanet could feel her doubt, but nevertheless she nodded and mumbled an agreement.

“We should go see if everything is ready,” Jenny said after a bit of silence.

Ahmanet nodded. “If you wish.”

Jenny wished.

Lunch came and went quickly. Too quickly, for Jenny’s taste. Her stomach was all up in knots from nerves, and she’d not eaten much at all from the duck the cooks had prepared for lunch. Which was a pity, because it had looked and smelled amazing, and the little she’d eaten had tasted amazing as well. If Jenny hadn’t been too nervous to eat, she’d have been all over it in three seconds flat.

Once Ahmanet, who looked and felt a little more calm than Jenny did, was done eating, they made their way to the throne room. The interview was supposed to take place there, and Jenny knew the interviewer would be escorted there by armed guards via the most direct route. Jenny also knew that no cameras were allowed to be filming during the walk, to prevent the entire world from knowing the route to the throne room.

A little table had been added in the space between Jenny and Ahmanet’s thrones. It already had a carafe filled with water and two glasses on it, neatly arranged on a tray. There was also a small, square china plate with raised edges as well, with a little lid on top. When Jenny lifted the little lid in curiosity, she found herself looking at small squares of honeycomb, apparently meant to snack on. A small plate, without lid, held little pieces of bread, each just big enough to fit one of the squares of honeycomb.

In front of the dais, a few feet from the first step, was another small table, also with water and honeycomb for a snack. There was a chair, too, for the interviewer to sit if they wanted to, and three more for the cameramen and sound technician. It was a somewhat inhospitable set up, considering Jenny and Ahmanet would be sitting in their thrones, which were a good five feet higher than the
The Queensguard had filed in alongside Jenny and Ahmanet, and had already taken up their position just in front of the dais, standing in a straight, rigid line.

It wasn’t long after Jenny had sat down in her throne that the herald cleared his throat and announced the presence of guests. “Presenting Muhammad Mahdi from Al-Jazeera, accompanied by Abdul Nassar, Amir Nassar and Faisal Rasheed!”

Four men made their way into the throne room somewhat hesitantly. Like the palace was enough to intimidate them a little. Which, fair enough, was understandable, because the palace was all kinds of grand and ancient and not something you saw everyday. Not unless you were Jenny or Ahmanet or one of the other inhabitants, anyway.

Muhammad Mahdi was an average-looking man in a semi-formal suit, carrying a messenger bag that had probably been checked by guards on at least three separate occasions. Abdul and Amir Nassar were pushing a small trolley ahead of them, likely also checked multiple times, and Faisal Rasheed, too, had brought along some stuff. All three looked a little intimidated by the armed guards also, which was understandable, too, considering said guards wore khopesh swords and assault rifles and looked ready to murder them at the slightest misstep.

Jenny did not blame the guards, considering what had happened in this very room only days ago. It’d taken hours to scrub the blood off the stone. As it was, though, the stone was once again spotless, and the blood had not stained at all.

The guards guided Muhammad and his companions over to the table and chairs that had been prepared for them, and then retreated to stand near the walls.

“Your Majesty,” Muhammad said, apparently having been briefed on how to behave, “Your Highness. I am Muhammad Mahdi, senior reporter for Al-Jazeera. It is an honour to be allowed to speak to you.”

Ahmanet’s tone was, thankfully, calm and, though not particularly warm, not hostile or sharp either. “My beloved was quite convincing when she suggested to allow someone access to the palace.”

“Regardless,” Muhammad said, “I am grateful. The palace is quite something to see.”

“Indeed,” Ahmanet agreed mildly.

When an awkward silence threatened to manifest, Jenny decided to step in. “Is there anything you need to prepare, or can we just get started immediately?”

“It would be very much appreciated if you would give Abdul, Amir and Faisal a few minutes to set up,” Muhammad responded. “It won’t take too long.”

Ahmanet waved her hand in a ‘get on with it, then’ kind of motion. Abdul, Amir and Faisal hurried into action. Abdul and Amir’s trolley contained, as it turned out, two cameras with tripods, as well as extra batteries since the palace did not have electricity yet. They set the cameras up quickly, aiming one at Muhammad’s seat and the other up at Jenny and Ahmanet. Faisal pulled out a couple of small microphones, the ones that clipped to clothing for easy access, as well as a large, fluffy one that he put on a large pole, which he set in a stand to hover somewhere between Muhammad’s seats and the thrones.

Faisal then, somewhat hesitantly, approached the Queensguard. “Her Majesty and her Highness need to wear these microphones,” he told a random guard. “They’ll clip onto clothing easily.”
The guard grabbed the mics out of Faisal’s hand silently, turning and climbing up the steps. He paused in front of Ahmanet’s throne first. “Sire.”

Ahmanet took one of the microphones and clipped it just under her broad collar. Jenny followed her example when the guard offered her her own little microphone. It did not have a button, but Faisal was already halfway through setting up his laptop, and with a few strokes on the keyboard, a little red light flared on Jenny and Ahmanet’s mics to show they were on.

With Faisal operating the sound and Abdul and Amir operating a camera each, soon enough, everything was ready to go.

Muhammad looked into the camera aimed at him and began. “Today we are talking to two rather remarkable women. First we have Ahmanet, no known last name, who is the owner of this magnificent palace and has declared herself Pharaoh. Secondly, we are talking to Dr. Jennifer Halsey, an expert in archaeology and Egyptology, who, according to our information, was partially responsible for unearthing this palace from the desert and also carries the title of Queen.” He turned to Jenny and Ahmanet. “Your Majesty, Your Highness. Thank you for speaking with me today. Could you maybe tell me a little more about the palace we are currently sitting in?”

Ahmanet, hiding her irritation at the whole ‘declared herself Pharaoh’ bit, managed to sound calm as she answered. “It is about five millennia old, and has been in my family for as long. I recently decided to make use of it, and have thus reclaimed it from the desert.”

“How come no one knew this palace existed?”

“It was buried five millennia ago. All traces of its existence were wiped from the history books,” Jenny took this one. “Only very few people knew where to find it. The rest didn’t even know there was a palace to look for in the first place.”

“And those in the know did not dig it up earlier because?”

“It is my property. Only I had the right to reclaim it,” Ahmanet said. “Anyone who would have tried would have been punished upon my return.”

Muhammad sat up a little more straightly in his chair. “And do you have the authority to punish?”

“I am the Pharaoh,” Ahmanet said arrogantly. “My word is law.”

“You are aware that Egypt has a government that does not involve a monarchy?”

“I reject the authority of the fake government. Their laws are irrelevant. They have no say over me or my subjects.”

“Your Highness, do you agree with the Pharaoh’s assessment?” Muhammad asked Jenny.

“Quite,” Jenny responded. She’d gotten used to the fact that Egypt was Ahmanet’s birthright, and right now, she wasn’t all that fond of the government either.

“But you seem more… modern-oriented. Is the idea of a Pharaoh not outdated?”

There was a flare of outrage from Ahmanet, and Jenny hoped to god that she wouldn’t flip her shit and call for Muhammad’s head. She sent a quick wave of soothing warmth over.

“England still has a Queen, doesn’t it?” Jenny responded rhetorically. “I do not see why Egypt cannot accept a Pharaoh. They had them for millennia, after all.”
“Not to mention that you seem to be getting a pretty good deal here,” Muhammad said. “From a doctor in archaeology to Queen of an entire country.”

Jenny shrugged a little. “I’d be just as happy as an archaeologist, honestly. Fact of the matter is that I’m here for the woman I love. If she wants me to be Queen, I will be.”

Ahmanet sat up a little straighter, a rush of mixed adoration and pride welling from her side of the link. She said, before Muhammad could ask, “my beloved was stubborn, but I managed to persuade her.”

“Right,” said Muhammad. “How did you two meet?”

“Jennifer freed me,” Ahmanet responded.

Jenny hastily explained. “I was doing research into Ahmanet’s family, which brought me to the Middle-East. I happened to come across Ahmanet when I was investigating a lead and things kind of went from there.”

“I had to chase her to London and back to convince her to give me a chance,” Ahmanet volunteered, which surprised Jenny a little. She’d expected Ahmanet to be more tight-lipped. And also more brutally honest about the whole inhuman thing, since Ahmanet had never shown any signs of wanting to keep it a secret before. Not that Jenny minded she was talking around it, because that was definitely information to keep hidden for now.

“That sounds romantic,” Muhammad said.

Jenny flashed back to the dagger in her chest, and couldn’t quite manage to agree. “It was an... experience for sure,” she said instead.

“How long did it take for the Pharaoh to convince you to give her a chance?”

“Two weeks,” Jenny guessed, “three until I decided to come here.”

Muhammad looked at Ahmanet. “You must have been very happy.”

“To see my Jennifer walking into the throne room was one of the happiest moments in my life.” Ahmanet responded, and Jenny didn’t even need the link to know she meant every single word of that.

“And have there been any… intentions of making the relationship permanent?”

“We don’t need to be married to know that we’re it for each other, you know,” Jenny said dryly.

“There will never be another person,” Ahmanet agreed. “For either of us.”

Muhammad looked a little surprised. “So you intend to remain together?”

“Till death do us part,” Jenny agreed. “And probably not even then, depending on what happens after death.”

“Congratulations,” said Muhammad. “Now, to change the subject a little, I would like to talk about the government. We know they have tried to seize the palace, and you seem to have responded to this quite… harshly.”

“You mean Ahmed Qadir?” Jenny didn’t even really have to ask. It was quite obvious what Muhammad was after.
Yes,” Muhammad confirmed. “A few days ago, the delegation sent here was decimated, and Ahmed Qadir was the only survivor. Can you tell me why you decided on those actions?”

“They attempted to take my rightful property from me,” Ahmanet responded, voice going slightly cold. “Then they threatened my Jennifer. Those are crimes I will not condone.”

“And because of that, they had to die?” Muhammad pressed.

“Those mongrels believed they had authority over me, and they gravely insulted their Queen,” Ahmanet repeated. “Both are crimes worthy of instant death.”

“Also,” Jenny added, “when we ordered the guards to remove them from the palace, one of the guards Ahmed brought with him attacked one of our guards. They responded with lethal force. It devolved into a small battle from there, which was what actually killed most of their party. We only ordered a few of them killed, not all of them.” After a second of thought, she added, “besides, we let Ahmed live.”

“So you’re saying they were killed in self-defence?”

“Most of them were,” Jenny agreed.

“And the others were ordered killed?”

“Yes.”

Muhammad leaned forward a little. “What gives you the authority to do that?”

Ahmanet bristled. “I am the Pharaoh. The rightful ruler of Egypt. My word is law. If I give an order, there is not a single person alive on this Earth who has the right to deny me.”

“Yet the government -”

“- is utterly irrelevant,” Ahmanet interrupted. “They have no power here, and never will have any power here. Any delegation that steps through my gates is at my mercy, and will leave alive only if I allow them to.”

“You cannot expect your actions to come without consequences.” Muhammad said.

“I don’t. But I will not bow to a fake government who do not have the right to rule this country. That is a privilege only I have.” Ahmanet drew herself up in her throne, spine straight, expression cold and harsh. “If I have to fight for it, I will.”

“Dr. Halsey, do you support this statement?”

Jenny gave a curt nod. “I support whatever actions Ahmanet decides to take.”

“Even if it leads to an attempt at a coup?”

“Without a doubt.” Well, not entirely without doubt, because Jenny was not fond of the idea of war, but she’d made a promise to stand with Ahmanet, and she would.

Muhammad looked a little shaken. “Right. How about we return to this subject later? I would like to ask you if you have any plans for the future beyond what we just discussed.”

Jenny shared a look with Ahmanet. “Well… Ahmanet did promise to build me a ship and sail down the Nile, so…”
“And I will, my love,” Ahmanet smiled a little, “after we have Egypt and the baby is born.”

Muhammad broke in hastily, “you’re expecting?”

“I am,” Jenny confirmed, not sure whether to be upset or not that news was out. She supposed it had to come out sometime, but she’d rather have waited until after they had Egypt. Until it was a little less dangerous for news like this to be known. Because Jenny was willing to bet that, once the government and the remaining priests of Osiris found out, they’d be gunning for Jenny as the more vulnerable between her and Ahmanet.

“Congratulations,” Muhammad said, “how far along are you?”

“Not long.” Though, considering the supernatural nature of her pregnancy, a few days probably translated to a few weeks. Jenny was honestly a little surprised she hadn’t suffered morning sickness yet. It’d probably come soon, though. From what she knew of pregnancy, morning sickness was kind of an obligatory piece of awfulness that came with a baby.

“Are you hoping for a boy or a girl?”

“A boy,” Jenny answered without hesitation. She did not want to consider what would happen if she gave birth to a girl. Set would not be happy, that was for sure, and if there was something Jenny did not want to experience, it was an angry Set.

“He’ll be the heir to the throne,” Ahmanet added.

Muhammad sat back in his chair in mixed awe and dread. “A royal dynasty.”

“Like it was supposed to have been for the past five millennia,” Ahmanet agreed.

Muhammad opened his mouth to say something - and closed it again when the doors to the throne room were thrown open.

A servant ran in, panting. “Sire! Government troops at the gates!”
Chapter 56

Chapter Summary

There are government troops at the gates. Ahmanet reacts. Jenny finds herself in the safe room, and then does something she doesn't entirely think through.

Chapter Notes

Hey, all! Here is chapter 56 for ya! It's a bit of a filler I'll admit, but there's a decent step up to the next chapter that I think should work just fine.

Speaking about the next chapter, I have a bit of an announcement: I'm taking a little break. It's the summer hols around here, so I have some things planned for the next couple of weeks that involve me not being at home to write. I'm also running into a bit of a writer's block, so I figure a small break might do me some good. A bit of time might get me some of my mojo back. The next chapter will be up in about two to three weeks, I think.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Ahmanet stood up abruptly. ‘‘Explain!’’

‘‘They're demanding to speak to you, Sire,’’ the servant panted, ‘‘they say that if you do not agree to release the palace, they will take it by force. They have at least a hundred men, Sire, and explosives.’’

‘‘Get my generals in here!’’ Ahmanet ordered immediately. ‘‘I want this entire palace on immediate lockdown! Have all troops ready for combat within the next five minutes! Guards!’’ She turned sharply, ‘‘Queensguard, protect the Queen with your lives! Move!’’

They moved. In seconds, Jenny was surrounded by no less than twenty armed men and women, a living wall between her and the troops at the gates. Muhammad and his men scrambled to keep up as they left the throne room. The warning bells began to toll.

Ahmanet stalked through the hallways quickly. People poured out or rooms and quarters, some guards, other servants or inhabitants, all armed with either weapons or whatever they could find to swing around and hit people with.

‘‘Get Jennifer to the safe room!’’ Ahmanet snapped as she tore the microphone away from her collar. ‘‘Kill any hostile who tries to get in! Troops, with me!’’

‘‘Ahmanet,’’ Jenny started to protest.

‘‘No, love. I want you safe and out of the way,’’ Ahmanet’s voice was calmer when she spoke to Jenny, but no less firm. ‘‘You did not want to be on the front lines, remember?’’
Jenny did remember. She also, quite acutely, decided that she did not want Ahmanet to be on the front lines either. Except she was sure Ahmanet would not agree to hang back and let others do the fighting. “Fine,” Jenny relented, “but be careful, okay? Don’t do anything stupid.”

“The deserts would be blown away by the wind before I leave you, my love,” Ahmanet responded, and though it sounded sappy, the sincerity Jenny could feel pouring across the link made it sweet and intimate.

“Well,” Jenny said, “be careful anyway. I’ll hunt you down if you die.”

“I’m counting on it,” Ahmanet pressed a quick kiss to Jenny’s lips, and was off, hurrying down the corridor with soldiers and armed servants on her heels.

“My Queen, we must move,” a guard coaxed Jenny down the corridor, in the opposite direction from Ahmanet. Jenny followed, Zara and Sahar at her elbows, noting that Muhammad and his men were following just as quickly.

“Dr. Halsey, can you explain what’s happening?” Muhammad, even now, was obviously not done with his interview.

“Didn’t you hear?” Jenny asked, a touch harshly. She was worried, and it spilled into her voice despite her best efforts. “Government troops at the gates.”

“Do you think it is a reaction to what happened to Ahmed Qadir and the people he was with?”

Jenny turned a corner. “I have no doubt that it has to do with that.”

“Do you think there will be a confrontation?”

Sahar glared. “Can you not see we are having a crisis right now?”

Muhammad switched his attention to her. “And you are?”

“I am her Highness’ handmaiden,” Sahar responded coldly, “and you are currently bothering her when it is obvious her attention should be elsewhere.”

That did not deter Muhammad. “Have you been Dr. Halsey’s handmaiden for long?”

“I have been her Highness,” Sahar emphasized the words, “handmaiden since she arrived at the palace.”

“And when was that exactly?” Sahar gave him a look of disdain and didn’t answer. Muhammad turned to ask Jenny instead, but was cut off when the guards slowed down and stopped at a door. It was inconspicuous, looking very much like every other door in the corridor, and fairly close to the dungeons.

Jenny found herself ushered in without much ceremony. Inside, it was less inconspicuous. There was only a small space, with a far heavier door into another room. It took three guards to push it open. The second room was big enough for maybe forty people, and it had smaller doorways to what seemed to be storage space. It was a fairly plain space, and once Jenny was led inside (Muhammad and his companions managed to slip in as well), the three guards pushed the door closed again, and then took two thick wooden beams strengthened with metal and arranged them horizontally across the door, resting on tough metal hooks anchored in the wall.

“My Queen,” Zara coaxed Jenny over to a comfortable chair, “please sit. I will make you some
‘That sounds good,’ Jenny said. ‘How long can we stay in here?’

‘With current numbers, we have enough resources and water to sustain everyone for two days, my Queen,’ one of the guards supplied. ‘With an excess of another day. If the siege draws out for longer than twenty-four hours, some of us will leave to ensure you will be able to remain safe for longer without lacking anything.’

Jenny nodded. ‘And do you think it will take that long?’

‘I have every faith that her Majesty will not allow it, my Queen,’ the guard said, and he was probably right. Ahmanet was far more likely to just wipe out the government troops to get them away from the palace.

‘And until then, we will be safe here,’ Zara added, bringing over a cup of freshly brewed tea. It was piping hot, but Jenny took a sip anyway, and was met with the mild flavour of jasmine. Exactly what she needed right now.

‘Thank you, Zara.’

Muhammad watched with fascination. ‘Dr. Halsey, what are your thoughts on the situation?’

Jenny paused halfway through a sip of tea. Really? They were in the middle of what was likely to turn into either a siege or a battle, and he was still asking questions? No wonder Al-Jazeera had sent him; he just did not know when to stop asking questions. She could see Zara open her mouth to probably blast Muhammad, and quickly held up her hand. The plan was to make friends with the media, not alienate them. Much as Muhammad annoyed Jenny right now, she’d humour him and answer a couple more questions.

‘I have no doubt Ahmanet will resolve the situation,’ she told Muhammad. Whether she’d do it peacefully or violently, that remained to be seen.

‘Do you think it will end in conflict?’

‘There is a distinct possibility.’

‘Does that bother you?’ Jenny shrugged.

‘Not really. It won’t be Ahmanet who’ll die.’ And it was hard to feel sympathy for people who were trying to rob her home from her.

Muhammad looked a little taken aback. ‘You’re not upset about the fact that people will likely die if negotiations go poorly?’

‘There won’t be negotiations,’ Jenny said. ‘Ahmanet will never hand over the palace. Not to anyone. And quite frankly, neither will I.’

‘Why are you not willing to agree with the demands of the government?’

Jenny gave him a look. ‘Really?’

At that, Muhammad looked a little sheepish. ‘Yes, I suppose that question has been answered enough.’

‘Quite,’ Jenny agreed a little dryly. She wasn’t sure how much more clear she could make it that
this palace would go back into the desert before she or Ahmanet allowed the government to have it. She
took another mouthful of tea; the jasmine really was a nice flavour. Although Jenny would not have said no to something a little stronger right now. Except that she was pregnant and wasn’t supposed to have alcohol. Damn. She really was not a fan of this whole ‘mother of god’ thing. Jenny honestly did not understand why women voluntarily put themselves through this kind of thing. She sure as hell was not going to do this a second time, though. Hell no. Once was more than plenty for her.

“How about we change the subject a little,” Muhammad said. “Will you tell me a little about your life before all this?”

Jenny shrugged. “Sure. What do you want to know?”

“You are a doctor of archaeology and Egyptology, correct? You graduated from Oxford in England.”

“That’s correct,” Jenny agreed.

“So how exactly did you end up here?”

“Well, once I had my degree I got a job with Henry Jekyll. He’s a doctor too, though not in archaeology. He was looking for an Egyptian princess who’d been wiped from the history books, and he asked me to find her for him.”

“And did you?” Muhammad asked.

“Yes, I did. It took me thirteen years, but I did it.”

Muhammad looked impressed. “Thirteen years?”

“Yes.”

“Why so long?”

“Well,” Jenny said, “like I said, she’d been wiped from the history books. There was barely any mention of her in texts, let alone any real documentation. I had to start from scratch and go on whatever I managed to dig up in archives and pick out from legends. Even now, I have barely twenty or thirty pages of information of her, and it took me all this time to compile even that.”

Muhammad blinked. “If it took thirteen years, why didn’t you give up? Because to me it sounds like Dr. Jekyll handed you a lot of work with no guarantees you’d find anything.”

“It was a mystery. I like mysteries. And I suppose that, once I started finding the first scraps of information, I wanted to see it through to the end.”

“No matter how long it took?”

“If I hadn’t found her,” Jenny said honestly, “I’d still have been searching for her even twenty years from now.” She shrugged a little. “The princess was my life’s work.”

“Was?” Muhammad asked, sharp enough to pick up on that little bit.

“Was.” Jenny agreed.

“What happened?”
“Well, I found her. In Iraq, actually, which was a bit of a surprise. Got her out of her tomb. The army provided a plane to bring her back to London. Just outside of London, a crow flew into the engines and the plane crashed. I managed to get out with a chute, but the sarcophagus was smashed to bits across the English countryside.” Best not to tell him that the princess was called Ahmanet and that she was currently alive and well and probably in the middle of slaughtering government soldiers at the palace gates.

“This was before the freak sandstorm that destroyed London?"

“A couple of days before that, yes."

“I’m sorry,” Muhammad said. “It must have been hard to see your life’s work destroyed like that.”

Jenny nodded. She’d been very upset when she’d thought Ahmanet was gone, all the way back at the beginning, when she didn’t know any better. It was still a pity the sarcophagus was gone, because it had been a beautiful piece despite what it had been used for, but Jenny’s life work was far from gone.

“And how does Ahmanet fit into this?” Muhammad paused when about half the guards in the room suddenly glared at him and quickly corrected himself, “the Pharaoh fit into this?”

“Like I said, I was doing research into her family. She wanted the tomb to be found too. Things kind of went from there,” Jenny said. Granted, Ahmanet had been half-dead back then and trying to murder Jenny, but it wasn’t an outright lie. She had met Ahmanet face-to-face for the first time just after the plane crashed. And Ahmanet had been, and still was, glad that Jenny had found her and freed her.

“Why was the Pharaoh after the tomb?”

“Family business,” Jenny said vaguely.

“Are you suggesting the Pharaoh is related to the princess you were looking for?” Muhammad pressed.

“You’ll have to ask Ahmanet that question, once she’s available again” Jenny said, not really expecting Ahmanet to answer it. She hadn’t expressed any particular fondness for Muhammad, or even really shown any signs of feeling more than neutral about him, so she probably wouldn’t be open to answering all that many questions. It was a small miracle Ahmanet had been as open as she had been in the throne room. That had probably been for Jenny’s sake; Jenny really wanted this to work, and Ahmanet was a good sport.

Muhammad took the subtle rebuke for what it was and changed the subject. “What is it like to be the Queen within this palace?”

Jenny sipped from her tea. “It took some getting used to, that’s for sure.”

“How so?”

“Well, take Zara and Sahar, for one,” Jenny said, nodding at her handmaidens, “I can assure you I didn’t have any handmaidens growing up. It was a bit of a shock.”

“I can imagine,” Muhammad agreed. “Have you-” he paused when the sound of bells came through the thick door of the safe room. The guards, who’d dispersed through the space, snapped to attention, hands drifting to swords and rifles. Zara and Sahar crowded around Jenny, half between her and the door.
“What’s going on?” Muhammad asked.

“Those,” Zara said tensely, “are the warning bells.”

Muhammad exchanged a few glances with his team. “What does that mean?”

“It means,” Jenny responded, feeling the first twinges of active aggression pouring across the link, “that negotiations failed.”

Muhammad stared. “What?”

Jenny stared back. “We’re at war. Right now, beyond the gates, Ahmanet is waging war against the government who thought they could take the palace from us.”

Muhammad sat down heavily, luckily not missing the chair behind him. “Oh my God.”

Jenny ignored him for a bit. “Zara, there were about a hundred government soldiers, correct?”

“I believe that was what that servant said, my Queen,” Zara agreed. Jenny nodded. She knew the palace had more soldiers than that. She’d seen them run drills in the courtyard herself. And they had modern weapons and protections like assault rifles and bullet proof vests. Not to mention the home advantage, and huge walls to hide behind as they picked off the government soldiers. And there was Ahmanet, who could literally call up an army of sand soldiers, and turn any dead people into zombies. That was a fairly invincible force right there. Even when you didn’t include the literal control over the desert, and thus the ability to turn the very ground against the enemy troops. Jenny imagined it was quite hard to fight when you couldn’t trust the very ground you stood on.

“Alright,” Jenny said, “can you please bring me another cup of tea?”

And just like that, the tension in the room dissipated. The fact that Jenny was visibly not worried, and that was apparently enough to reassure her handmaidens and the guards.

Muhammad wasn’t as convinced. “Aren’t you worried?”

“Honestly?” Jenny said, “not really. We have plenty of soldiers here, all highly trained, and we have the home advantage. Not to mention Ahmanet is there. She won’t allow a defeat.”

“You cannot predict the outcome of this,” Muhammad said.

Jenny looked at him. “I can, actually. We’ll win. And by the time Ahmanet is through, I rather doubt there will be any government troops left alive. She’ll slaughter all of them.”

“That sounds horrible.” Muhammad looked a little pale.

Jenny just shrugged. Two weeks ago, she would have agreed with them. But two weeks ago, she’d only just been ascended and had barely arrived at the palace. Two weeks was enough time for a lot of sweeping changes. Let alone the almost month it had been since Jenny had pulled Ahmanet out of her tomb. In a month, a lot of things could change. Not just morals; also mortality, and the very fabric of life as Jenny had known it before, and knew it now.

There was another twinge across the link. Anger, hatred, aggression, the desire to kill, flowed across Jenny’s mind like water. Ahmanet was deliberately suppressing the link, Jenny could feel it, but it wasn’t enough to stop that boundless, earth-scorching rage from reaching Jenny. But it was muted enough that Jenny could ignore it for the most part. Muted enough that she could clench her jaw a little and let her hands curl into fists, but otherwise not react to it. But if that was that strong muted,
Ahmanet had to be really pissed. Presumably, that meant some of their soldiers had already gotten killed. There was satisfaction, too, though, which led Jenny to believe Ahmanet was killing quite a few government soldiers in revenge.

She wondered if Ahmanet was using any sand soldiers, or zombies, or if she was planning to keep those a secret until she was going to strike back at the government. Use them as secret weapons when she really wanted to strike a heavy blow. Probably. Ahmanet didn’t know much about modern warfare, but she did have a head for strategy.

Zara returned with Jenny’s cup of tea. It had some mint leaves in it this time, which was nice. Zara also brought a small dish, which had a small snack on it. Jenny wasn’t really hungry, a large part of her worried for Ahmanet despite knowing that it was very, very hard to kill the Pharaoh indeed. Still, as long as her morale was up, the same went for the guards, so Jenny pretended she was fine, snacking on the pastry and drinking her tea.

Muhammad was talking to his men. Abdul and Amir were fussing over the camera. Faisal, laptop on his lap, was frowning and typing. Jenny took a moment to be glad Ahmanet had gotten rid of her mic. She had a feeling she didn’t want Al-Jazeera to have sound footage of the battle happening outside. It was bad enough that there were probably news crews there filming the whole thing.

“Everything alright?” Jenny inquired, sipping her tea.

“The camera’s running out of battery, I’m afraid,” Muhammad said, “and in here, we can’t use the solar chargers we brought along.”

“I don’t think we have any new batteries here,” Jenny said, “and we certainly don’t have a power point.”

“The palace has no electricity at all?”

“None,” Jenny agreed. “You’re a couple of weeks early for that.”

“Right,” Muhammad said. “Is there any way we can get outside and charge the cameras?”

One of the guards broke in, shaking his head. “Absolutely not. Not until we receive word the battle is over and the palace is safe again.”

“This door does not open until we are sure it is safe to open it,” another guard added.

Jenny looked at Muhammad, “well, there you have it.”

Muhammad sighed. “Well, I suppose we already caught a lot of footage today. It could be worse.”

“And also you don’t risk getting shot by someone,” Jenny added.

“That too,” Muhammad agreed, and went to whisper with Abdul, Amir and Faisal some more.

Jenny was about to take a sip of her tea when, suddenly, the link burst wide open. She fumbled with her cup, almost dropping it, breath catching in her chest with the overwhelming surge of disbelief and rage that slammed into her. At the same time, a sear of pain burned across the skin of her upper arm. Jenny looked down, a little stunned that she was actually feeling physical pain right now. How was she feeling pain? She wasn’t supposed to feel pain.

A thin trickle of red seeped from under the golden band around her upper and slowly oozed down to her elbow.
Jenny blinked, following its path for a moment and then turning her attention to the bracelet around her upper arm. She set down her teacup and wedged the bracelet down her arm, letting it dangle around her wrist. There, where her skin had been hidden under the gold, was a thin, shallow cut.

Sahar let out a small gasp. “Your Highness! What happened?”

Jenny gritted her teeth as the cut healed over, the skin knitting back together in a matter of moments - far faster than the wounds Set had left had healed over. A quiet, turbulent kind of anger was starting to burble in her stomach. Because Jenny knew what this meant. It was just like in the forest in England, after the church, when Prodigium had shot Ahmanet and Jenny had collapsed with the pain from it. Except the link was far, far stronger now. More mature. And instead of just transmitting the pain, it had transmitted the very wound itself.

That meant Ahmanet had been hurt.

Ahmanet had been hurt.

The quiet, turbulent rage burbling in Jenny’s stomach abruptly flared into something far, far more violent.

She stood abruptly, her bracelet clattering to the floor. Instantly, all the attention was on her. Jenny ignored it, pointing at one of the guards. “You.”

He snapped to attention. “My Queen?”

“Give me your bulletproof vest.” Her tone was deadly enough that the guard didn’t hesitate, hands instantly flying to the velcro straps and undoing them. In seconds, he’d handed it over.

Jenny all but tore her broad collar from her neck and shrugged the vest on, strapping it tightly. “Rifle.”

The guard all but threw it at her. Jenny caught it easily. The metal of the grip dented under her fingers as easily as softened butter.

“Highness?” Zara asked hesitantly.

Jenny ignored her, jerking her head at the guards nearest to the door. “Open the door.”

“My Queen!” One of the guards protected. “We cannot!”

“My Queen!” Jenny ordered.

“But the Pharaoh -”

“Open the door,” Jenny said slowly, tone deadly, “or I will go through it. Do you understand that?”

The guards exchanged glances. Then three of them relented, moving to take the metal beams away from the door so it could be opened.

“My Queen,” Sahar tried to stop Jenny. Jenny pried Sahar’s hand off her shoulder, barely remembering to rein in the strength thrumming in her bones.

“Stay here. Zara too.”

She’d damn well told Ahmanet to be careful! Jenny was not happy. She strode into the corridor, rifle
at the ready and bloodlust in her veins. She had a battle to fight, and a Pharaoh to tear strips out of for getting hurt.
Chapter 57

Chapter Summary

The battle.

Chapter Notes

Hello all, I am back. It's been a while, I know. I planned to only take two Saturdays off in relation to a couple of citytrips that I took, but I got notice that I had the opportunity to move apartments fairly suddenly, so then that got between updates as well. Also, I've started on an original project, which is also taking up a lot of my time right now. But fear not! I am back now, and I have a new chapter for you.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

The hallways were empty and silent. Jenny’s steps, her sandals against the stone floors, and the steps of the horde of armed guards on her heels were the only sounds to be heard.

A firestorm raged in Jenny’s veins. An inferno that felt like it could set the desert ablaze and turn it into an ocean of glass with the fury of it. There was a faint itch in her eyes too, and Jenny knew in her bones that if she looked in a mirror right now, she’d come face to face with double pupils and burning amber irises.

Jenny walked swiftly, fast enough that some of the guards on her heels had to jog a little to keep up, half of her mind tuned in to Ahmanet. It took a bit of effort not to get sucked in completely like when they’d killed Henry. It was not yet time to merge. Jenny wanted to fully herself when she killed the bastard who’d dared to shoot Ahmanet. Then, and only then, would she let the link draw her and Ahmanet into a single person.

Slowly, the noises of battle started to permeate the air. Soft, at first, and then increasingly louder as Jenny made her way closer to the courtyard. Her guards sped up a little, spreading out until they were walking next to Jenny and in front of her in a loose v-formation. They seemed to understand that if they tried to stop her, she’d rip off their arms and beat them to death with the severed limbs. And this way, they could still say they protected her if Ahmanet decided to read them the riot act for not keeping Jenny in the safe room.

The palace doors were closed when Jenny arrived, but not for long. It took just one kick to almost smash them off their hinges, and then she was walking into a bloodbath.

The palace gates were open, an armoured car apparently having driven into them hard enough to break the locks, as well as the hinges. Palace soldiers were fighting against government soldiers with rifles and swords and fists. Some of them were already dead on the ground. Others were groaning in pain, propped up against pillars of the wall or a heap of sand, clutching at deep, bleeding wounds and trying to stop themselves from bleeding out on the spot. Some of them were not doing very well.
Jenny barely contained a snarl of anger. The edge of her mind tugged, and she tugged back so it wouldn’t suck her in. The link was easy to manipulate, when she was like this. Easier than it probably should be. Jenny liked to think it was the heightened state of emotion, rather than the promise of violence. She made a mental note to try it sometime when she wasn’t this blazingly furious and about to rip someone’s head off their shoulders and use it as a football.

There was a body in front of her feet, and she stepped over it carelessly, not even bothering to look down to identify which side they had fought for before dying. If they belonged to the palace, Jenny would mourn them after the battle. She lifted her rifle, internally cursing the fact that she hadn’t been born an American - if she’d been American, she’d have known how to use a rifle from probably five years old. That sure would’ve come in handy now. Nevertheless, the basics were ‘aim and pull the trigger’, and that Jenny could do.

Soon enough, a government soldier hit the sand, riddled with bullets. He was wearing a vest, but vests stopped at one point, and it did not cover the lowest part of his belly or his arms, and they had not been spared. It was viciously satisfying to see him bleed out, helplessly scrabbling at the sand as blood dripped out of his mouth and nose with every desperate gasp for air. Jenny stepped over him too, ignoring the way the soldier tried to clutch at her ankle with his last strength. She could hear the rasp in his lungs, the wet noise he made with every breath. He would not last for longer than another minute, at least, and he’d suffer the entire time.

There was a probably terrifying grin on her face - she could feel it there, as sure as the cold metal of the rifle in her hands was. The metal warmed up quickly, though, once she started to put it through its paces. A second government soldier fell halfway through trying to charge, his own gun long lost, leaving him with nothing but a knife and an attempt at stealing a rifle from someone else. He had, foolishly so, picked Jenny as the weakest target to overpower. He didn’t do much overpowering once Jenny had pumped half a dozen bullets into his legs. Jenny stalked over to him, absently kicking at his arm when he tried to stab her. He gave a cry of pain as the bone gave under Jenny’s foot, the knife flying out of his hand.

“You’re trying to take my home from me,” Jenny said, voice coming out nearly a growl as she pressed the muzzle of her rifle against his head. “Die.”

She pulled the trigger before he could open his mouth to respond. Blood splattered over her feet and legs, bits of skull and brain flying everywhere. A bit of smoke curled from the muzzle of the rifle.

Jenny decided that she liked this rifle. She would be keeping it, even if she’d accidentally mangled the grip a little with her strength. Like she kind of wished she’d kept that candlestick from back in the church in England. She’d been on the wrong side then but damn if that candlestick hadn’t been good as a makeshift weapon.

A bullet whizzed past her face.

Jenny cursed and ducked, throwing herself behind one of the pillars that lined the path to the palace doors. Her team of guards scrambled around her, shielding her with their bodies.

“’My Queen,’’ one said hesitantly, “perhaps we should go back inside.’’

“Absolutely not,” Jenny responded, glaring at him. The guard flinched back a little. Jenny bared her teeth in a mockery of a smile. “’That scum out there hurt Ahmanet. Your Pharaoh was injured by the very same people who want to keep her from her birthright. And you want to go back inside and let her fight it out by herself?’”

“’The Pharaoh ordered us to keep you safe, my Queen,’’ the guard said meekly, not meeting Jenny’s
“Then you can keep me safe out here,” Jenny said decisively, and ducked back into the fray. Her guards scrambled to keep up, and she smiled a little at their muttered curses. It was kind of fun to piss off her guards.

There was a grunt and then a groan of pain as one of her guard darted forward, literally tackling a soldier out of the way, then bringing down a dagger hard and piercing through the soldier’s throat. Jenny slipped past it, making it to the next pillar to use as cover. She took a deep breath. The air was thick with the stink of blood and sweat and gunpowder. Jenny squinted, surveying the courtyard, searching for Ahmanet. It took a few seconds to find the Pharaoh, palace soldiers surrounding her as they struggled against a group of government soldiers about equal in number to their own. Mostly it consisted of hiding and shooting, and it was easy to feel how frustrated Ahmanet was with it. She seemed to concentrated on the fight to have noticed Jenny’s arrival yet.

“My Queen?” One of the guards, pressed next to Jenny against the pillar, asked.

“We’re going over there.” Jenny pointed at where Ahmanet was. And before her guards could try to talk her out of it - they wouldn’t succeed, and the anger lowkey churning at the back of her mind next to the insistent tug of the link meant she’d probably break something of theirs if they tried to stop her - Jenny did just that. She darted across the sand at a speed that was just a little more than natural, ducking behind a pillar across the path. There was a government soldier there.

He raised his rifle, and Jenny smacked it aside before he could fully bring it up, the bones in his hands buckling under the force. She didn’t give him time to recover. He cried out in pain as she punched him in the chest. Knees buckling, he slid down the pillar and came to rest in the sand, scrabbling at the mangled hole in his vest and the bruised, concave flesh underneath it. That was lethal. Maybe not quick, and far from painless, but definitely lethal if not immediately treated with extensive surgery.

The soldier would not be getting immediate treatment with extensive surgery.

Jenny stepped forward, grasped his head between her hands, ignoring the way he weakly tried to push her off, and snapped his neck as easily as she’d snapped Henry’s. The body went limp instantly. Jenny let it drop. It slouched to the side lifelessly, face pressed to the sand and the first rivulets of blood starting to leak where the skin of the neck had torn under the force Jenny had used to snap it.

Jenny stepped past the body, making sure no to step in the bits of sand where blood was starting to turn it sticky red, on to the next target. A couple of moments later, Jenny slipped into the space occupied by Ahmanet and her soldiers as they fought against the government troops. She didn’t have to say anything; as soon as she came within ten feet of Ahmanet, the link sparked with awareness, and in a split-second, the concentration that had led Ahmanet to not notice Jenny’s presence was blown wide open.

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet gasped, “what are you doing here?!”

“Helping,” Jenny responded shortly, peering around the pillar and bringing up her rifle to pull the trigger for a few shots. They missed, but came close enough to cause a bit of ruckus on the other side.

“You have to go back inside!”

“Not happening.”
Ahmanet whirled to face Jenny guards. “I gave you orders to keep her inside and safe!”

“I disagreed,” Jenny said sharply, before her guards could start to sputter excuses. “So if you want to get angry, get angry at me.”

Then, when Ahmanet opened her mouth to do just that, according to her emotions, Jenny added; “when we’re done here, I mean.”

Ahmanet did not look, or feel, pleased. At all. In fact, this was probably the first time Jenny could remember that Ahmanet actually felt actively displeased with her. At the moment, Jenny really did not give a damn. The government was trying to invade her home and had hurt Ahmanet, and she’d be damned before she let them do that a second time. People were going to die today, and Jenny was personally going to make sure of it. And if Ahmanet didn’t like it, she could damn well wait until Jenny was done here to express it.

Luckily, Ahmanet seemed to sense this, and instead of screaming at Jenny like she so obviously wanted to, she settled for an angry stare. “Go back inside, Jennifer.”

Jenny looked Ahmanet right in the eyes and said, “no.”

She wasn’t leaving until she was sure the government troops were taken care of. And by ‘taken care of’ she meant ‘slaughtered to the last man with the corpses thrown back out of the gates’. Seeing that Ahmanet was find had somewhat cooled Jenny’s temper, but she was still pretty pissed. Pissed enough that she wanted every government affiliated person within half a mile of the palace dead and rotting asap. Preferably after having suffered a moderately painful death. Jenny didn’t care if it was a slow or a quick death, as long as they didn’t go painlessly.

Let it be known that Dr. Jennifer Halsey, Queen of Egypt, Mother of God to-be, did not like it when someone shot at her girl. Also let it be known that when Dr. Jennifer Halsey, Queen of Egypt, Mother of God to-be, was pissed, no one was going to have a good time. Especially not the people who were trying to steal her home from her. She would personally make sure of that.

Either way, Jenny was not going inside, and she didn’t give a damn how displeased Ahmanet was with her because of that. They could fight about it later.

She peered around the pillar again, surveying the spots their opponents were lying hidden. None seemed to be in a position where Jenny could shoot them down. Not without moving out of hiding and potentially getting shot herself, anyway. Which would be bad. Both because Jenny was not keen to figure out what it was like to be shot, and also because Ahmanet would probably finish the job if she got herself hurt. Just being here was enough to make Ahmanet angry at the danger Jenny was putting herself in, let alone if she got herself hurt. A frontal attack was clearly not an option here.

Ignoring Ahmanet for the moment, Jenny eyed one of her guards. “Do you think we can sneak around them and strike from the back?”

The guard frowned and peered around the pillar as well, eyes flitting over the spaces between the pillars and the hastily assembled piles of sand and bulletproof shields the government soldiers were hiding behind. The shields certainly explained how they’d gotten this far into the courtyard before getting bogged down.

“There is not enough cover, my Queen,” the guard said after a second. “They will shoot us before we could reach the next pillar for cover.”

“Damn.” Jenny had really hoped they could just sneak around and then get this all taken care of
fairly easily. Then again, she already knew she was far from the luckiest person in the world, so really, she should have expected it to be harder than that.

“However,” the guard continued, “if provided cover fire, some of us could make the distance. If you do not mind, my Queen, I suggest some of us do this, while you remain safe here.”

“Do it,” Ahmanet ordered, taking over. She shuffled closer to Jenny, pushing her deeper into hiding behind the pillar. “And we will talk about this, Jennifer, once we are done here.”

Jenny nodded, not feeling guilty at all but shoving a little acceptance across the link so Ahmanet would know that Jenny realized how upset she was. Clearly they had to talk about this, and Jenny would probably apologize for running into danger when she could’ve stayed safe in the palace, but she would also make sure Ahmanet knew she didn’t regret it. Ahmanet had gotten hurt, and Jenny had reacted - she refused to feel bad about that.

“I wouldn’t expect any different,” she said to Ahmanet. Then she turned to her guards, four of which were preparing to make a break for the next pillar. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, my Queen.” One of them said.

“In that case, get going. And if you have a shot, take it. I want all of those soldiers dead and buried as soon as possible, you hear me?”

“Yes, my Queen,” the leader repeated.

“Then go,” Ahmanet said, still less than pleased. “And get it done.”

“Sire,” the guard agreed instantly, nodding to his teammates to get moving. At the same time, the rest of the guards and the soldiers Ahmanet had with her moved to provide cover fire. In seconds, the place air was thick with lead, and Jenny had to cover her ears to shield them from the noise that erupted around her. Through it, barely audible due to the sheer amount of sound generated by the guns, were a couple of pained cries.

Stuck against the pillar with Ahmanet’s hand on her shoulder to keep her there, Jenny was unable to see whether the cries came from the guards or from the government troops. She hoped it was the latter. She also hoped that, if it were indeed the cries of government troops, they’d been hit somewhere lethal and especially painful.

Luckily, she didn’t have to wait long to find out. Slowly, the roar of gunfire slowed to a stop - well, here it did, anyway. In pockets across the courtyard people were still fighting, and with that came the noise of guns also, as well as the occasional yell of pain.

“We lost one man, Sire,” one of the palace soldiers reported. “Another caught a graze, but nothing serious.”

“The enemy?” Ahmanet asked.

“Two down, Sire, from what I can see. One fatality. The other is not far behind.”

“Do they have the space to move further?”

“No, Sire. They are currently held in place.”

Ahmanet nodded a little. “Provide more cover fire. Draw them out.”
“Yes, Sire.” They went back to shooting at the government troops, with the result that said troops had to duck back into their hiding places, unable to shoot back due to the hail of bullets that was being rained down upon them. Jenny moved forward just a little, ignoring the way Ahmanet’s fingers tightened a little on her shoulder, and caught a glimpse of white fabric. The guards sent ahead took advantage of the opportunity instantly; they were met with bullets, but the government troops’ aim was bad, and in seconds, the three guards were upon them.

It was a slaughter. The government troops were visibly trained in close quarter combat, but they were also lying on the ground, hidden behind piles of dirt, or crouched behind bulletproof shields when the palace guards descended on them, and their combat knives didn’t measure up against the khopesh blades wielded by the guards. They did not manage to stand up to properly fight fast enough. A swing of a khopesh was enough to take off a hand, and bulletproof vests did not protect every part of the torso.

They struggled for several moments, and then six government soldiers lay dead in the sand. The guards swiftly picked up the fallen bulletproof shields to protect themselves with, and all of a sudden the palace had several guards capable of moving around the courtyard without being riddled with lead. It did not turn the tide of the battle per se; it certainly didn’t guarantee an instant win - but it did make things a little easier, since the guards didn’t have to fear the rifles of the government troops as much.

They formed a wall, three shields wide, nary a gap between them, and as they began to move forward, another couple of guards sprinted forward and joined them behind the shields.

On Jenny’s other side, guarding her back, several of the palace soldiers suddenly turned.

“Incoming!” One of them yelled. “Protect the Queen and the Pharaoh!”

In an instant, there was a living wall in front of Jenny. They did not have bulletproof shields. But that didn’t stop them from being one for Jenny and Ahmanet anyway.

There were two soldiers left over, and they charged at the approaching government troops without hesitation, diving into the fight without care for the rifles aimed at them. One was shot down before he reached the halfway mark, dropping like a sack of bricks with blood spurting from the mangled flesh that was once his face and neck. The second was luckier. With a swipe of his khopesh the ranks were opened and he slipped between the government troops, and once he was in the middle of them, started hacking in on everyone within his reach. He did not last long, but in the chaos he caused two government troops went down with cries of pain and another died from friendly fire.

Jenny watched it and felt her gut burble with anger at the deaths of her people. She was really, really starting to despise the Egyptian government. They were the ones who’d been trying to take the palace, and, through that, were at the root of all this violence. Not that Jenny and Ahmanet were blameless in this, because they weren’t, but neither of them had intended to bring this kind of violence into the palace. Jenny was of half a mind to ask Ahmanet to go burn down a couple of government buildings in retaliation for this. Or maybe have a couple of Infected soldiers cause a ‘training accident’ somewhere. Surely there was a military aircraft somewhere that could conveniently crash into a building? Though maybe she should consider that later, when she wasn’t in the middle of a battle.

The government troops slowly advanced, slowed down by the bullets from Jenny and Ahmanet’s guards that forced them into cover. Jenny growled a little, impatient. This was taking too long. She wanted those troops dead, and she wanted them dead now. She inched forward, wedging her rifle between two of the guards; the least she could do was try to shoot some people.
Ahmanet grasped her shoulder. “Jennifer, stay back.”

“I’m not going further than this,” Jenny told Ahmanet.

“See that you don’t,” Ahmanet responded. “I don’t want anyone to have a clear shot at you.”

“They won’t,” Jenny promised. She was hidden behind the guards, a living shield between her and danger, and the government troops would have to go through them if they ever wanted to reach Jenny.

Except that the other side had rifles too. And just like Jenny’s guard was not afraid to use their rifles, neither were the government troops.

A guard to the left of Jenny jerked violently and collapsed, blood blooming across his throat, his rifle falling from his hands. Jenny fought the urge to flinch, peering through the small gap her rifle was stuck through, and pulled the trigger. There was a cry of pain, but none of the opposing soldiers fell. Not a lethal shot, then. Pity.

A second volley of shots rang out from next to Jenny, and a quick glance showed that Ahmanet, too, was doing her part. Her shot was more accurate than Jenny’s; a government soldier dropped, a dozen bullets in his upper legs, and bled out quickly.

Another of the guards jerked and fell. He convulsed in the sand a few seconds and was still. Suddenly, the wall of guards was reduced to three. Barely enough to stand between Jenny and Ahmanet and the government troops.

And that was all it took - there was a whistle of air and a small gasp, and then a well of blood on Ahmanet’s shoulder just where her bulletproof vest ended.

It was like it happened in slow-motion; the small jerk Ahmanet gave at the impact, the way her eyes widened and her mouth opened in surprise, the way blood welled in the wound and began to spill over until it seeped down Ahmanet’s shoulder and arm, soaking into the fabric of the dress she was still wearing under her bulletproof vest. Shock and disbelief raced across the link, followed closely by pain.

Instantly, Jenny felt a searing pain in her own shoulder also, a small cry leaving her lips - it felt like someone had pressed a hot poker into her skin.

The guards cried out too, in shock and horror, but Jenny barely even registered it. Everything she was was focussed on the hot coal stuck deep in her shoulder, and on the emotions she could feel coming across the link with the force of a sledgehammer to her mind. Blood pouring down her shoulder, Jenny straightened up, gritting her teeth against the pain. The burble of anger in her gut, the one that had cooled when Jenny had found Ahmanet unharmed earlier, flared back up with a vengeance. When Jenny had stormed into the battle, her rage had burned with enough heat to turn a desert to glass.

The molten fury that flowed through her veins now wouldn’t leave enough of a desert left to set ablaze.

It was met with a similar fury from across the link, and in an instant, Jenny’s mind touched Ahmanet’s and clicked into place.

And then they were one.

They straightened up, all matching fury, matching hatred, matching bullet holes in their shoulders,
and began to move in perfect synchrony.

Bullets came at them and were flawlessly intercepted by little orbs of sand subject to their will. Soldiers tried to charge and were sucked down into the sand, boots getting stuck and falling forward, and once they were down, the sand poured into their noses and mouths and drowned them on dry land. It took barely a thought, nigh a whisper of power, a larger dose of sadistic glee. Where they passed, the palace guards fell to their knees in reverence, heads bowed, eyes fixed on the ground, murmurs of praise and prayer barely reaching their shared ears.

Just like that, the tide of the battle had turned, and they were winning.

Jenny breathed, and the breath was matched by the draw of air in Ahmanet’s lungs, and while her wound knitted closed and left her shoulder unmarked, so Ahmanet’s wound did the same.

A soldier tried to charge, and with the barest hint of a thought, sand wrapped around his legs and smashed him into the ground, crushing the bones in his lower legs at the same time. He screamed in pain, and their smiles were as sadistic as they were identical.

Jenny strode over, steps not faltering even though she was looking through four eyes at once, and crouched down next to him. Sand snaked around his torso and arms, sibilant and alive with power, and the soldier sobbed helplessly as it wrinkled around him and kept him captive and subdued. Jenny reached out. Her hand touched his skin, fingers clenching around his throat, and she dragged him up, the sand falling away to let her move him.

With Ahmanet’s experience guiding her, Jenny knew exactly what to do. Lips inches from his, she touched her lifeforce to his - and inhaled. The soldier screamed, high and hoarse and desperate - the scream of a man who knew he was going to die and couldn’t do a thing about it. Power flowed into Jenny. Not hers. Not Ahmanet’s. His. Life itself entered Jenny’s mouth, coursed down her throat like water into a parched riverbed after years of drought, and under her fingers, the soldier jerked, convulsed, went still. His skin turned leathery, then papery, then to a layer so thin and fragile it instantly collapsed under her touch.

She dropped him and stood. Upon impact with the sand, the withered husk instantly turned to dust. Jenny turned away, and strode towards the nearest palace guard corpse.

Energy writhed under her skin, a force that did not belong in her body - but it could belong to another, if she chose to gift it to someone. She did.

Jenny crouched down next to the body. It was littered with bullet holes. The excess life in her buzzed in anticipation. From Ahmanet’s eyes, Jenny could see herself bend down and press her lips against the guard’s forehead. There was a beat of nothing. Then, a slight glow where she touched his skin. It spread across his face, then down his neck, and then a faint light shone from each of the bullet holes before they began to close up.

Jenny leaned back. Put her hand over his heart. Commanded, “’live.’”

His eyes snapped open.
Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet and Jenny have a talk about the battle. This time, it's without screaming, and Ahmanet does not end up on the couch, which is progress.

Chapter Notes

Hello, all. Here's chapter 58 for ya. I'm currently almost done writing chapter 59, so I almost have everything done for next week as well. With luck, I can build up a bit of a buffer so I have some leeway in unforeseen circumstances. We'll see, I suppose.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

They won the battle.

Obviously.

Jenny had never doubted that they’d win, and by the time it was safe enough for palace residents to start on the clean up, no government soldiers were left alive.

Jenny, no longer merged with Ahmanet but still hyped up with the remains of excess life under her skin, had a hard time sitting still. Instead, she paced around the courtyard, watching as workers collected the bodies of the government invaders to be thrown out of the palace later. They were unceremoniously dumped in piles against the palace walls next to the gates, the rifles and other weapons confiscated to be added to the armouries. The bulletproof vests and shields had also been collected, and would also be added to the palace’s armouries. The government didn’t deserve to have them anyway, and the palace soldiers would be able to make good use of extra armour and weapons. It’d at least make the generals happy to have extras.

The bodies of the fallen palace guards and soldiers would’ve been treated with far more dignity - except that there were none.

Over two dozen had died in the battle. But Jenny had put her newfound ability to suck the life out of someone and transfer it to another to good use, and all the people who had given their lives to protect the palace had had them returned in short order.

Jenny had had absolutely no problem killing over two dozen government soldiers by sucking the life out of them to resurrect her own people.

It’d been remarkably easy, actually. With Ahmanet’s experience guiding her and her previous experience with resurrecting Chris (which, granted, hadn’t gone very well, but hey, experience is experience), Jenny had known what to do. That didn’t mean she was about to go around returning to people alive with her own life force, but if she happened to have some extra life around in the shape of enemies… well, Jenny had already demonstrated she had no qualms taking advantage of that fact.
“My Queen,” a servant snapped Jenny out of her thoughts, and she stopped pacing to pay attention to him.

“Yes?”

“The Pharaoh is requesting your presence in the royal quarters.”

Right. They still had to talk. Best to get that over with, then. Jenny gave a sharp nod. “Tell her I’m on my way.”

The servant bowed and quickly ran off.

Jenny surveyed the courtyard for another moment, noting that the palace gates, which had been pushed closed, were now being reinforced, and then followed the servant into the palace at a somewhat more sedate pace. She knew Ahmanet was still upset with her. She could feel it coming across the link. It was obvious the Pharaoh was not pleased that Jenny had put herself in danger by leaving the safe room in the middle of an invasion attempt. Jenny understood that. It had not been the smartest thing to do. She’d known that even as she’d ordered the guards to open the door. But staying in that room while Ahmanet was in a battle and had gotten hurt… well, that just hadn’t been an option. Jenny wasn’t going to sit around while the woman she loved got shot.

The hallways were swarming with people. A good many of them were carrying medical supplies towards where the infirmaries were (Jenny hadn’t seen those yet, but she knew they were in the direction the people carrying medical supplies were walking) and others were heading towards the courtyard with shovels and baskets, presumably to start cleaning up all the bloodied muck left over from the battle. Some of them were also carrying buckets filled with a white sludge and trowels, and Jenny assumed they were going to make sure all the bullet holes in the walls and pillars were repaired.

Less than twenty minutes had passed since the death of the last government soldier, and already the palace was scrabbling back onto its feet - a little battered, maybe, but very much unbroken and in good spirits. They’d won, no one on their side was dead (not anymore, anyway) - it was as much a positive ending as was possible for a battle.

Jenny rounded a corner near the throne room.

“My Queen!” The voice was familiar, and Jenny turned to see Sahar approaching at a pace that was almost a run, a mixture of worry, terror and relief written all over her face. Zara was barely a foot behind and not much better off. In a move almost identical to the first time Jenny had resurrected someone, and had almost died in the act, her handmaidens fell to their knees at her feet, hands grasping at the hem of her skirt and her waist.

“You’re hurt!” Zara’s gaze was fixed on the blood drying into Jenny’s bulletproof vest and the fabric of her tunic under it.

“It’s already healed,” Jenny assured her. “Nothing to worry about.”

“But the blood…”

“It’s already healed,” Jenny repeated. “I’m fine, Zara, Sahar. You don’t have to worry.” She eyed her handmaidens critically, a little worried herself. Sahar looked on the edge of tears. Zara looked like she’d almost bitten through her lower lip. “Are you two alright?”

Zara was the one to respond after a second of silence. “We were very worried, my Queen.”
“We were afraid you might be hurt,” Sahar added, a faint tremor in her voice. “Please do not leave us behind like that again. We could not stand it if something happened and we weren’t there to protect you.”

Jenny looked at them, touched, but also worried. “Are you two trained in combat?”

Sahar faltered a little. “We… know enough to protect you, my Queen.”

“So that’s a no,” Jenny concluded.

Zara’s head dipped a little. “I’m sorry.”

“Hardly your fault,” Jenny said. “But I can’t bring you along to a fight. I don’t want you two to get hurt, or die.”

“For you, we would,” Sahar said without hesitation. Jenny grimaced. Of course they would. They’d literally been raised to serve Jenny. They’d probably throw themselves into a volcano if Jenny asked it of them.

“Regardless, I won’t put you through that. Dying is not something to take lightly, trust me.” Jenny had experience, and it wasn’t a nice thing to go through. And while she could restore their lives easily now that she knew how it worked (and as long as she had a donor around, anyway), that didn’t change the fact that dying and returning to life was a harrowing experience. And if the way the soldiers she’d resurrected today had woken up was anything to go by, the terror and the tears and the throwing up, then their experience hadn’t been much better than Jenny’s had been. She didn’t want to put Zara and Sahar through that.

Their expressions fell. “My Queen…”

“That’s final,” Jenny said firmly. “I will not put you in danger like that if I can’t be sure you can handle yourself.”

Zara and Sahar did not try to argue. Apparently Jenny’s tone had been firm enough that they didn’t want to risk it.

Jenny tried to soften it a little by smiling at them. ‘’Get up, you two. You don’t have to kneel.’’

They quickly scrambled to their feet. Once they were up, Jenny resumed walking down the hallway, now with her handmaidens closely following.

“So,” Jenny said, “what happened to Muhammad and his crew? Have they left yet?”

“They are being held in a set of guest quarters until the head of guard decides it is safe for them to be escorted out of the palace,” Zara responded instantly.

“We expect that to be when the courtyard has been cleaned up enough that Muhammad will not be able to shoot any footage of a battlefield,” Sahar added.

Jenny nodded. Best to keep Muhammad from seeing something like that. Not because Jenny really cared if he was shocked or horrified, but more because she didn’t want it to show up on tv. It was bad enough that they’d be throwing half a platoon of corpses out of the palace soon enough, they didn’t need viral images of a battlefield on top of that.

Zara and Sahar fell silent after that, and Jenny did not feel the need to say anything either, so the rest of the walk to the royal quarters was spent in silence.
At the doors, Jenny paused to look at her handmaidens. “Ahmanet is not too happy with me at the moment. It might be best if you two make yourself scarce for a little while we talk.”

They exchanged a quick look of concern.

“Will you be alright?” Zara asked.

“I will be just fine,” Jenny told them, and she would be. Ahmanet would never hurt her, and Jenny could deal with raised voices no problem.

“We will wait out here, my Queen.” Sahar decided. Zara nodded in agreement.

“Very well,” Jenny said, “but feel free to do something else if we take too long.” She couldn’t imagine it was any fun to stand around a hallway, waiting, with nothing else to do. Zara and Sahar would certainly be driven to boredom before too long. Jenny wouldn’t blame them if they decided to go hang out at the library or get a snack from the kitchens or something. Especially since it was rapidly approaching dinnertime, or maybe a little past it already. The interview had taken time, and so had the battle.

“Of course, my Queen,” Zara said, but Jenny had a feeling that neither she not Sahar would be moving more than a few feet away from the door regardless of what they said. She decided that it wasn’t worth arguing over, and instead just nodded.

“I will call for you once I’ve talked to Ahmanet. If I don’t call for you in like, an hour or two, just wait until tomorrow morning, okay?”

Zara and Sahar nodded in understanding.

That done, Jenny slipped into the royal quarters, closing the doors behind her. Ahmanet was already present, pacing next to the couch. She looked up when Jenny slipped into the living room and stopped her pacing.

“Jennifer,” she greeted, sounding remarkably calm.

“Ahmanet,” Jenny returned. “I assume you want to talk about this afternoon?”

“Quite. We have much to discuss.”

That, Jenny agreed with. “Indeed.”

“Sit with me.” Ahmanet made her way over to the couch and sat, waiting until Jenny had joined her, and then waited another second until Jenny met her eyes. Jenny did so fearlessly; she had, after all, nothing to fear. For a moment, Ahmanet almost felt proud, and then the dismay and left-over fear seeped back in and overwhelmed it. After a second of silence, it was Ahmanet who took the first word.

“I wish for you to know, Jennifer, that I am very upset with you for what you did today.”

Jenny nodded. “I am aware of that.”

“We had discussed this before. You do not wish to be a part of this war if you can avoid it. Yet, the first true battle we have, I find you deserting safety and running into danger at the first opportunity.” Ahmanet took a breath. “I do not like it when you do that. The safe room exists to ensure you cannot be harmed, Jennifer, and I do not appreciate it when you eschew that and purposely endanger yourself.”
She said it very calmly, her demeanour showing nothing of the tumultuous emotions churning underneath the surface. Jenny was impressed. Ahmanet had clearly taken the experience of their first fight over Chris’ involvement in her death to heart, and made an effort to keep things civil. All that really showed how upset she still was was her choice of words; a little more formal and a little more carefully chosen than usual. Jenny was very much intending to do the same. Calmly talking like this was far more useful than screaming at each other and then sleeping in separate beds.

“I understand why you’re upset,” Jenny said, “and I understand that you were trying to keep me safe. But you must also understand that I cannot just sit by and do nothing while you get hurt. I could feel it, Ahmanet - your shock and confusion, and then the pain.” Almost subconsciously, she rubbed at her arm, where a smear of dried blood still signalled the spot where the cut had opened up without warning. “I will not apologize for wanting to keep you safe.”

Jenny wouldn’t, couldn’t, apologize for that. As much as Jenny belonged to Ahmanet, she Pharaoh was hers just as much. Jenny loved her more than anyone else in her life. She couldn’t imagine losing Ahmanet. Being able to resurrect her was irrelevant - the idea of Ahmanet dying, of feeling the link flare in agony and terror and then go cold like ice, of experiencing every second of it and being halfway across the palace and unable to do anything about it, terrified her. She completely understood why Ahmanet had been so afraid when Jenny had almost died resurrecting Chris.

Ahmanet sighed. “I wouldn’t ask you to apologize for that, Jennifer. All I ask of you is that you keep yourself safe next time. I wouldn’t be able to bear it if you were to get hurt.”

Jenny reached out to clutch Ahmanet’s hand. “I’ve already been hurt. Even if I hadn’t been there, I would’ve gotten hurt. The link transmits wounds, Ahmanet. When you get hurt, I get hurt. And vice versa.”

“Nevertheless, you cannot throw yourself into danger every time I get a scrape,” Ahmanet said firmly, tone decisive. “This will hardly be the last battle of this war, my love. And I daresay that, despite my skill in this particular area, it will not be the last time I get hurt either.” She pursed her lips a little. “Although now that we know the link transfers injuries, I will be more cautious.” Her eyes fell on the smear of dried blood on Jenny’s arm, and the small murder scene on her shoulder, both mirrored on Ahmanet’s body. There was a burst of fear and horror across the link. “I hate it when you get hurt.”

“Then you know how I feel,” Jenny said quietly.

“Jennifer,” Ahmanet said, a subtle tremor in her voice, “I need you to promise me to stay safe from now on. If there’s another battle at the palace, do not run out to help. Stay inside and let the troops deal with it.”

Jenny frowned a little. “And where will you be, then?”

“Fighting, as I must,” Ahmanet responded immediately. “And you must promise me to not repeat your actions today.” She squeezed Jenny’s hand a little. “I could not bear it if someone got in a lucky shot.”

Jenny gave a small sigh. She could understand Ahmanet’s point of view. Really, she very much agreed with it. She kind of liked being alive. But she wasn’t sure she could force herself to sit in some safe room with the knowledge that there was a chance Ahmanet would not be coming back. It was only hitting her now that war meant more than just dead guards. There was a very real possibility that Ahmanet, or Jenny herself, would not make it. And there was no guarantee there was a ghost left afterwards for Jenny to resurrect. She couldn’t bring Ahmanet back to life if she was Set knows where on a battlefield.
“Jennifer, please. Promise me you will stay safe.”

Jenny’s breath stuttered in her throat. “How can I just sit there while you are out there fighting, not knowing if you’ll come back to me?” She swallowed thickly. “You told me what it was like when I almost died resurrecting Chris. What it felt like to feel the link go cold. I never want to experience that.”

Ahmanet’s expression crumbled. “My love… I never want you to experience that either. But I cannot concentrate in battle if I am worrying about your presence. Please.”

That… was not an argument Jenny could fight against. She sighed. “Very well. Next time, I will stay out of it.”

Ahmanet sagged, and the relief that came over the link was strong enough that it almost bowled Jenny over. Clearly Ahmanet had been very serious about this, even more than she’d let on.

“Just promise me that you’ll be careful out there,” Jenny said. “Try not to get hurt.”

“I will do my very best to prevent it,” Ahmanet told her seriously.

“Maybe you should get, like, a bodyguard,” Jenny suggested. “Like I have the Queensguard.”

“I fear they would get in my way, or slow me down,” Ahmanet responded.

Jenny frowned. She didn’t want Ahmanet out on some battlefield without at least one protective measure. Armour, definitely. Something that covered more than just a bulletproof vest. “You said the generals had been preparing for war. Do they have something like an armour that can protect you?”

Ahmanet nodded. “Yes, there is the royal armour. I was planning to start wearing it soon, but the fake government struck more quickly than I had expected.”

“Start wearing it,” Jenny all but ordered. “Preferably today.”

Not to mention the fact that Ahmanet would probably look very attractive all ready to smack down a government. Though, to be fair, Jenny was talking about the same woman who’d looked unfairly good as an undead mummy. Jenny was fairly sure Ahmanet was not actually capable of being unattractive. Still… just armour seemed… lacking. Jenny wanted some extra insurance. An extra edge that would make sure Ahmanet came back home to her. She just needed to - oh.

Jenny sat a little straighter, mind racing. How could she had forgotten about Akar? Of course! He was still hanging around, as he was incapable of leaving and disobeying Jenny’s orders, and being a ghost, he wouldn’t form an obstacle for Ahmanet when she was fighting. And him being a ghost meant he could help her out without any enemies noticing. Only Jenny and Ahmanet could see him, after all. This was perfect.

“My love?” Ahmanet inquired gently, doubtlessly having noticed Jenny’s little eureka-moment.

“I have an idea to make sure you’re a little safer,” Jenny said. Ahmanet raised an eyebrow, but seemed content to await Jenny’s idea. She didn’t have to wait long, because Jenny wasted no time explaining.

“We use Akar,” Jenny said. “He’s bound to me, and he can’t disobey if I give him an order. I can tell him to shadow you if you’re in a battle. He can stop bullets from reaching you or give an enemy a nudge to make him stumble. And he’s incorporeal, which means he won’t get in your way like a
traditional bodyguard would.

‘‘And you are comfortable sending him away?’’ Ahmanet asked.

Jenny nodded. ‘‘Yes. I’ve got a whole palace of guards around me. It won’t be easy for anyone to reach me here now that we’re expecting attacks. Akar can go with you and make sure you come back to me without needing me to resurrect you.’’

‘‘If it will make you feel better, my love,’’ Ahmanet said, ‘‘I will take Akar along. And I promise you I will do everything I can to stay as safe as possible and come back to you unharmed.’’

That was exactly what Jenny wanted to hear. She leaned in, intending to give Ahmanet a short kiss before calling Akar to give him his orders, and was drawn into something deeper and more intense instead. One of Ahmanet’s hands was on the small of Jenny’s back to keep her close, the other on her jaw, hungry and demanding. Not the peck Jenny had been planning, but she was absolutely not complaining. She gasped out a small moan, pressing closer to Ahmanet, feeling heat start to pool in her lower abdomen.

‘‘Bed?’’ Ahmanet murmured, briefly parting their lips.

Jenny gave a hasty nod. ‘‘Bed. Now.’’

They went to bed, and absolutely missed dinner.

A few hours and several orgasms each later, Jenny found herself with her head resting on Ahmanet’s shoulder, feeling truly calm for the first time today. It’d been a stressful day, with the interview and the battle and the talk after - which, thank Set, had not turned into the fight Jenny had been expecting. It was good to know that they were both capable of staying calm and discussing issues like actual adults. She hadn’t exactly been looking forward to a screaming match, after all. That one time when Jenny had told Ahmanet to sleep elsewhere had been enough for her, thank you very much.

Yet, despite how calm Jenny felt, she could still feel a slight buzz under her skin, consistent and a little bit annoying. Like a low key itch she wasn’t able to scratch away.

Ahmanet drew random shapes on Jenny’s shoulder with her fingers. ‘‘It will go away, my love. Give it some time.’’

Jenny frowned a little. ‘‘The buzzing?’’

‘‘A side effect of absorbing life force,’’ Ahmanet explained. ‘‘Even if you passed it on to others, some of it will have lingered inside you. And since you already have your own life force, which is enough to sustain you, you’re dealing with an excess. It will burn off soon enough.’’

That did reassure Jenny a little. This part of magic was new to her - dealing with life force that wasn’t her own. She knew all about her own life force and how easy it was to drain it until she was all but on the edge of death. And now she knew what it felt like to drain another person to death - and how horrifyingly easy that was. More so, Jenny knew what it felt to literally overflow with excess life, and how it felt to let it seep into another person and bring them back to life as if they’d never died in the first place. Whole and hale and healthy like Chris had been, save for the obvious soreness that had come with an entirely new body rather than the original one that been used only shortly before.
“You did something great today, Jennifer,” Ahmanet said, as if reading Jenny’s mind. “There are dozens of families who did not have to lose a loved one today. I daresay you’ve gained some worshippers today.”

“I didn’t do it to be worshipped,” Jenny said.

“I know that. They know that too. Ironically, knowing that you didn’t do it to be praised might only make them love you more.”

Jenny shrugged a little, nuzzling into the soft skin under her cheek. Ahmanet was soft and warm, and Jenny was sleepy and not in the mood to worry about anything right now.

“I’ll deal with it somehow.”

Ahmanet hummed a little and started to pet Jenny’s hair. It was soothing enough that Jenny’s eyes drooped close in short order, and she snuggled in a little further, beyond ready to call it a day and get some well-earned sleep.

“I’m tired.”

“So am I, my love,” Ahmanet murmured back. “Sleep. We will continue our conversation tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow, yeah.” That sounded like a good idea. Tomorrow. First, Jenny was going to sleep. She was exhausted.

It did not take her very long at all to drift off to sleep, sated and comfortable as she was.

She did not wake all night.
Chapter 59

Chapter Summary

Jenny experiences the discomforts that come with pregnancy. Also, war meetings, which are a discomfort all by themselves.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 59 is up! People, we are well on our way to the last stretch! This makes me happy because I'm honestly dying to see this completed and being able to look at it and say to myself, "I made that." That's something I'm really looking forward to, I have to confess.

So, as I've pretty much always said; enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

It was a slow morning at the palace.

For once, Ahmanet was still asleep when Jenny woke up, curled warm and safe around Jenny’s back, even puffs of breath rhythmically washing over the back of Jenny’s neck. An arm was slung heavily over Jenny’s waist. It was nice. Jenny wasn’t often awake before Ahmanet. And since Ahmanet was usually already up and running by the time Jenny woke up, they didn’t get to do the whole morning cuddle thing as often as Jenny would’ve liked.

The reassurance was nice too. They’d both gotten hurt yesterday. It was good to have Ahmanet curled around her, peacefully asleep and in one piece. Jenny was well aware that a bullet to the shoulder couldn’t possibly kill either of them - the wound was far too small and healed too fast for them to bleed out or have complications or whatever - but still. It’d almost given Jenny a heart attack to see Ahmanet being shot. The fact that they’d merged immediately after did make things a little better. She’d personally been able to feel that Ahmanet was fine, and that she’d been angry rather than scared. They should probably talk about the whole merging thing at some point, though.

But not now. Ahmanet was asleep, and Jenny could still feel some remnants of exhaustion at the edges of her mind - a clear enough sign that she should let Ahmanet sleep a little longer. Jenny didn’t blame her - yesterday had been, by all meanings, an exhausting day. In fact, she was a little surprised she wasn’t more tired herself. But then, last night when she’d gone to sleep, she had had an excess of life force in her system… maybe that was why she was feeling perfectly rested and awake, even though she should’ve been tired.

At least that annoying buzz under her skin was gone like Ahmanet had promised it would be. That was a relief. Jenny had a feeling like that the kind of annoying that buzzing had been could very quickly turn to ‘pull-out-your-hair-in-desperation’-annoying. Still. She could use it to resurrect people. Compared to that, an annoying, low key itch of leftover life force was something Jenny was absolutely willing to deal with. Especially since it dissipated soon enough. Not like she was going to be walking around with an itchy buzz under her skin for the rest of her existence.
She squirmed a little to get more comfortable, freezing in place when Ahmanet murmured sleepily. After a second, the Pharaoh settled down again, and so did Jenny, relieved she hadn’t accidentally woken her girl up. Moving a little more slowly, Jenny fluffed the pillow so it would fit better under her head. This time Ahmanet didn’t move, deeply asleep and undisturbed. Jenny sighed a little in contentment, closing her eyes again.

A moment later they snapped open again as she experienced a lurch in her stomach.

It took a second before Jenny realized what was happening, and then she was scrambling out of bed, throwing Ahmanet’s arm off her waist as she all but sprinted towards the bathroom. The toilet, located in a separate space from the baths, was too far, so Jenny veered for one of the washbowls lining the walls. She was just in time to empty her stomach into the immaculate porcelain. Having missed dinner yesterday, there was not a lot in Jenny’s stomach to lose.

She gagged miserably on the bile that came up, and was very grateful when there was suddenly a hand on her neck, gathering up her hair and holding it out of the way.

“Get a glass of water!” Ahmanet snapped, then, gentler, to Jenny, “easy, my love. Just get it all out.”

Jenny was in the process of getting it all out. She was not enjoying that process. At least the bile didn’t burn her throat like she remembered it to do. That was a pro. A small one. Because throwing up still sucked. Badly.

She heaved again, grateful that Ahmanet was there to hold back her hair and rub calming circles on her back.

Finally, after several moments of gagging without any more bile coming up, Jenny managed to get herself under control. She looked up, and found that apart from Ahmanet, Zara and Sahar had also arrived. The latter two handed her a glass of fresh water and a thin robe respectively. Jenny shrugged the robe on so she wasn’t naked anymore and accepted the glass of water, rinsing her mouth thoroughly to get the bitter, sour taste of bile out of her mouth.

“Are you alright?” Ahmanet asked gently.

Jenny nodded, spitting a mouthful of water into the soiled washbowl. “I’m okay. Just an upset stomach.”

“I think it’s the morning sickness,” Ahmanet said.

“Already?” Sahar sounded a little shocked. Hastily, she added, “Apologies, Sire.”

Ahmanet waved it off. “It’s an accelerated pregnancy,” she said, but she looked a little concerned. “Though even for an accelerated pregnancy, it is a bit early.”

“Should I retrieve a doctor?” Zara asked.

Jenny shook her head. “No, no, I feel better. I don’t need a doctor.” Sure, she was still feeling nauseated, but not like she was going to hurl her guts out again. She might have to wait with breakfast for a bit, though. Or at least eat nothing that was really rich or pungent. Maybe some toast, or some simple porridge or broth. Definitely nothing like the savoury fish dishes that were served with breakfast, or the pungent Ful Medames, of which the palace version was heavy on the onion, garlic and chilli, apart from the cumin, lemon, parsley and other spices. Delicious, but also rich, and probably not a good idea right now.
“Are you sure you don’t need a doctor?” Ahmanet asked.

Jenny nodded. “I’m sure. I just want to brush my teeth, have a bath, and get on with the day.”

“Some peppermint tea, perhaps?” Sahar suggested. “It’s supposed to soothe the stomach.”

That… sounded good. Jenny thought she might like some peppermint tea. She nodded. “That sounds nice.”

“I’ll go fetch it,” Sahar said.

“And I shall retrieve your toothbrush,” Zara hurried off as well, though she only went to the washbowl that Jenny usually used to brush her teeth rather than to entrance of the quarters to send a servant like Sahar did.

In moments Jenny had her toothbrush, and proceeded to make good use of it as she brushed the lingering taste of bile out of her mouth. She brushed thoroughly, spit and rinsed, and then slipped off the robe she’d been handed to slide into the bath. Ahmanet did nudge her to take the less hot bath, rather than the scalding one Jenny usually preferred to bathe in. Still, the water was warm and heavenly, and Jenny was very glad to just soak for a while and forget the fact that she was pregnant. The fact that Ahmanet joined her and wasn’t shy about cuddling up only made it better.

Sahar soon returned with a cup of peppermint tea, handing it to Jenny before helping Zara gently wash Jenny’s hair. It was nice. The tea did soothe her stomach like Sahar had said, which was good because Jenny still felt a little queasy. Add Ahmanet cuddled into her, the soothing warmth of the water and the way the act of washing her hair was more of a gentle scalp massage than anything. It was enough to melt Jenny into a content puddle of goo. She had no intention of getting out of this bath anytime soon. Not for the next half an hour to an hour at least. Maybe longer than that.

After a very, very long, very, very appreciated bath, Jenny finally managed to convince herself to leave the bracing warmth of the water. Her hair had been washed thrice by her handmaidens, who had seemed reluctant to be too far away and had thus made excuses to continue the physical contact, and her body had been lathered and rinsed with luxurious soaps and oils. The end result was that Jenny felt like her bones were made of jello and her skin had been dipped in liquid silk. It was amazing, and Jenny was very, very relaxed. Also, she wasn’t feeling as queasy anymore.

Zara and Sahar dried her off with fluffy towels and then rubbed moisturizer into her skin, before helping her dress. It was the usual skirt/tunic combo she favoured, with some sandals and a little bit of jewellery. Jenny was relieved to see her flower crown was in good shape. It hadn’t been damaged in the battle. Jenny would’ve been devastated if it had been damaged, after everything that had gone into making this crown.

Ahmanet dressed less casually. Far less casually. As in, armour.

It was a beautiful piece, shining gold scale mail that covered Ahmanet from her neck to her shoulders to her hips and fit her like a second skin. She had a set of richly engraved, golden bracers for her lower arms. Underneath the scale mail she wore a thin leather shirt for extra protection, and the white linen pants were thick and almost looked like they had a protective layer on the inside. They were tucked into the winding straps of high sandals. With the shining gold of her armour and the deep blue crown of war upon her head, Ahmanet looked ready to go lay waste to a city somewhere. The only thing she was missing at this point was weapons.
Yet, despite how ready for war she looked, she was still Ahmanet. "Do you think you feel well enough to eat something?"

Jenny fiddled with the band around her arm as she nodded. "As long as it’s not too rich, I should be fine."

"I will go inform the kitchens," Zara said, already hurrying out of the room. Jenny had no doubt that, once she made her way to the dining hall, the royal table would be hosting a variety of mild, light foods designed to not agitate the stomach. Both her handmaidens and the kitchen were efficient like that. They always made sure Jenny got exactly what she wanted, when she wanted it.

She might be getting a little spoiled. More than a little, honestly, but Jenny didn’t mind enough to make a fuss about it. And it was quite nice to have people who’d make sure that she was happy. Frankly, Jenny was quite starting to get used to the crown on her head and all the perks that came with it.

With her hand tucked in the crook of Ahmanet’s elbow, they slowly made their way over to the dining hall.

It took… longer than expected. Less than twenty feet out of the royal quarters they were stopped.

"My Queen!" A woman nearly dropped the basket she was holding, pushing off against the wall. She hurried over, falling to her knees. "Forgive me for intruding!"

"That’s fine," Jenny said, a little bewildered.

Ahmanet was a little more prepared. "Say what you wish to say."

"Yes, Sire," the woman said. She glanced up at Jenny, then quickly averted her eyes as she held up the basket for Jenny to take. "A gift, my Queen."

"Thank you," Jenny said, accepting the basket. It was topped with a piece of cloth, and when Jenny pulled it away, the basket proved to be filled with a dozen of the prettiest filo pastries Jenny had ever seen in her life. From the smell of it, they were flavoured with pistachio, orange, and maybe some rose.

"You saved my son."

And that was enough to tell Jenny what this was about. "He was in the battle, yesterday?"

"Yes, my Queen. He came home, and he told me that it was because of you that he was alive. That you saved him." The awe in her voice was strong and clear, and two weeks ago Jenny would’ve been embarrassed beyond belief. She still was a little uncomfortable, but at least she could keep it together enough to respond.

"I’m glad to have brought him back."

The woman teared up a little and bowed her head even deeper than before. "I shall be sure to tell him, my Queen. Thank you."

"You’re welcome," Jenny said, not entirely sure what she was being thanked for this time. For bringing back this woman’s son, or for wishing him well? Either way, Jenny was glad to do it. If she could help it, no soldiers on their side would die in this war anymore. She’d glad resurrect each and every one. All she needed was donor lives. And she had a feeling that, if she asked, Ahmanet or the
palace soldiers would be happy to get her some. As long as they weren’t innocents, Jenny honestly didn’t really care anymore if she killed someone to save someone else. The revulsion had started to wane when she’d killed Akar and barely felt anything, and by the time she’d snapped Henry’s neck, Jenny had found herself actually enjoying it.

After the woman had left, never quite meeting Jenny’s eyes and keeping her head bowed until she was out of sight, Sahar gently took the basket from Jenny’s hands. “I shall place these in your living room, my Queen, so you may enjoy them later.”

“Sounds good,” Jenny said, “we’ll be making our way to the dining hall.”

“I will be back very soon,” Sahar said.

With a nod, Jenny and Ahmanet continued down the hallway. They were stopped another three times after Sahar returned, and each of the men and women ended up giving Jenny gifts alongside their verbal thanks for saving various family members; another basket of treats, a beautiful vase that obviously meant a lot to the man who gifted it to her, and a garment, hand-woven, that the man who’d made it apparently started working on the day Jenny had arrived at the palace. It had, as he said, always meant to be for her, except that he had worked all night last night to create an intricate embroidered pattern around the neck that symbolized her actions and the people she had given life yesterday. Hours upon hours of work, all compressed into a sleepless night of effort.

Once the man had left, Ahmanet said, “I told you they would love you even more now.”

“You did,” Jenny agreed, arms full with the richly woven dress, the vase and another basket of baked goods. Thankfully Sahar had already returned from dropping off the first basket, and wasted no time taking it out of Jenny’s hands to carry it for her. “Can’t say I expected this, though.”

“There will likely be more,” Ahmanet said.

“I really don’t need anything for resurrecting people. I’d have done it anyway.”

“They know that. They will still gift you things. It’s the only way they can express their gratitude.”

“Her Majesty is right,” Sahar said softly. “This is a way for them to thank you without feeling like they did not do enough.”

“Then I won’t insult them by refusing their gifts,” Jenny said, after taking that in for a second. She hadn’t considered the fact that the people would feel upset if she were to tell them she didn’t want anything in return. That was the last thing she wanted. Jenny had resurrected those soldiers because she wanted to stop her people from dying and because she didn’t want to put their families through that kind of grief. She wasn’t going to sabotage that by hurting their feelings anyway.

“First, though,” Jenny said, feeling her stomach give a little rumble, “I want some breakfast.” She wasn’t queasy anymore, and now she wanted some food. She was hungry.

When they arrived at the dining hall a bit later, having been left undisturbed for the rest of the trip, servants all but jumped into motion, and by the time Jenny took her seat, dishes of food were already being carried over. All were still piping hot, freshly made specifically for them. Jenny was glad to see that there was a plentiful selection of mild foods, as Zara had gone to instruct the kitchens for. There were two mild broths with lots of vegetables and some lean meats, as well as porridge with dates, bread with a very mild cheese, or a more Western option of buttered toast and scrambled egg whites.

Ahmanet received a selection of more traditional dishes, which she clearly preferred over Western fare. So far, Jenny had not once seen her eat anything other than traditional Egyptian and Middle-
Eastern food. It was probably all she knew, so Jenny hardly blamed her for it. Though she did have plans to introduce Ahmanet to the glories of pizza and bacon cheeseburgers at some point. Jenny was not willing to forego junk food for the rest of eternity.

She selected a little of the porridge, forgoing the dates, and also some of the toast. The scrambled eggs did not seem particularly appetizing today, good as they looked, and she wasn’t in the mood for broth or cheese. Porridge and toast sounded good; mild and bland, as unappetizing as it sounded, was exactly what Jenny needed right now. She bit into the toast, which was prepared just how she liked it, trying to ignore the worried glances from not only Ahmanet, but also both her handmaidens.

It took a moment before Ahmanet was apparently convinced Jenny wasn’t going to hurl her guts out at the first introduction of food to her stomach; then she started to serve herself her own breakfast. She went for the more pungent, spicy traditional foods, as always. As she placed a piece of fish, heavy with garlic and other spices, on her plate, the smell wafted over to Jenny as well.

Her stomach lurched.

Ahmanet’s neck almost snapped she turned her head so fast. “Jennifer?”

Jenny pressed a hand over her mouth, swallowing desperately as she felt bile crawl up her throat. In seconds, Zara and Sahar were on either side of her, gently taking hold of her upper arms and helping her away from the table. Jenny followed blindly, inordinately relieved when they led her to a small antechamber off the dining hall and the smell of the fish dissipated enough that she could barely scent it anymore. She took a couple of deep breaths, swallowing thickly.

“My Queen, how can we help?”

“The fish,” Jenny gasped, trying not to heave.

“I will take care of it.” Sahar swept out of the antechamber, just in time for Ahmanet to enter.

“What’s wrong, my love?”

“It was the fish, Sire,” Zara said.

Jenny nodded, finally sure she wasn’t about to hurl her guts all over the room. “The smell got to me. Sorry. I guess my stomach is still a bit tender.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Ahmanet said, “I will have a servant tell the kitchens not to prepare that fish anymore until after Set is born.”

“You like it, though,” Jenny pointed out.

Ahmanet shrugged a little. “I do not like it enough to let its presence bother you. I can have other foods for breakfast.”

Jenny placed her hand over her stomach, a little queasy. “Just… maybe ease up on the garlic a little?”

Much as she usually loved garlic, right now, it was a bad smell. Fish and garlic combined, though, was even worse right now… the thought of it was almost enough to make her gag again.

Ahmanet nodded. “I can do that. The kitchens will be informed today, my love. Before lunch.” She eyed Jenny worriedly. “Do you still want breakfast?”
Jenny really wasn’t hungry anymore, but she should probably eat something, if only because she was sure the child needed sustenance to grow. The last thing she wanted was to fuck that up and having to do it again. No thank you. “I’ll just have some toast, I think. That should be fine.”

“Alright,” Ahmanet said, glancing into the dining hall. “’The servants are gathering up the more pungent dishes. You should be able to sit there without feeling nauseated in a moment or two.’”

Jenny nodded, and once Ahmanet confirmed that the table was now safe from stomach-turning scents, made her way back into the dining hall and retook her seat. Most of the more traditional dishes had been removed, and in their place, more of the blander, less pungent dishes like toast, porridge and broth had appeared. Set next to Ahmanet’s plate and bowl was a small selection of bottles, though, the caps firmly screwed on, which Jenny assumed to hold spices and such so she wasn’t stuck with bland food herself. Jenny didn’t blame her. Bland food, in any other circumstances, would not have been welcomed by Jenny either. She generally liked it when her food actually had flavour.

She gingerly ate her toast, relieved when it didn’t make her want to hurl her guts out, and then drank some mint tea as well.

As they finished up breakfast, a servant hurried into the dining hall and over to Ahmanet. “Sire, the generals wish to know if you would meet them in the war room for a meeting.”

Ahmanet put down her spoon. “Very well. Tell them I will be there shortly.”

“They would like to know if her Highness will attend also,” the servant continued, glancing at Jenny.

Jenny nodded. “I’ll be there.”

Ahmanet glanced at her. “Are you sure?”

“I’ll be fine,” Jenny said. She was pregnant and a little queasy, not useless. She could stand to sit in a room for a while and listen to a bunch of old men talk. It was nothing she hadn’t done before. And at least these old men would be respectful.

“Very well,” said Ahmanet, “go inform the generals that we are on our way.”

“Yes, Sire.”

Jenny pushed away from the table, absently accepting Sahar’s hand when she reached out to help Jenny up. She didn’t really need the help, but it was nice to be offered anyway. Very chivalrous. “I assume the meeting will be about yesterday?”

Ahmanet nodded. “Yes. The generals are less than pleased with what happened. They will likely want to discuss our next move.”

“And what is our next move, exactly?” Jenny asked as they walked down the hallway.

“Well, our generals will most likely want to strike back at the fake government in retaliation for the attack from yesterday.”

Jenny frowned a little. That made sense, from what she knew of the generals. They’d struck her as very eager to attack the current government and overthrow it. Much like Ahmanet, really. No doubt they’d use this attack as an excuse to strike back with extreme prejudice.
Upon entering the war room, the generals were already present. Jenny took her seat at the head of the table, next to Ahmanet.

“Sire, my Queen,” spoke one of the generals, “thank you for agreeing to meet so quickly.”

“Of course,” Ahmanet said. “Let’s get down to business immediately.” She glanced around the room. “Yesterday the fake government attacked the palace. It is only thanks to my Jennifer that we did not suffer any losses. We cannot let this stand.”

“Agreed,” said the spokesman. “We must strike back, Sire. And we may have a good target.”

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow. “Which would be?”

“The capital,” the general said. “We suggest we strike at Cairo. If anything can get the attention of the fake government, that would be it.”

Jenny frowned a little. She didn’t like the idea of attacking a city. But she also knew that this was war, and it had to be won one way or another. Tactically speaking, Cairo was a good place to strike at. If they managed to occupy Cairo, they’d have the capital city of the country under their control. It was probably one of the most tactically important parts of the country - aside from… she narrowed her eyes and focused on the spokesman of the generals.

“Do we have enough resources to occupy two places at once?”

The generals exchanged looks.

“We should, my Queen,” said the spokesman, “thanks to her Majesty’s magic, we have a significant number of Infected soldiers at our disposal. We should be able to take Cairo and another location simultaneously without too much trouble, and still have enough Infected soldiers left over for other purposes. And we have loyalist soldiers beyond that, still.”

Jenny hummed in understanding. “Have you considered blocking off the Suez Canal? There are bridges we could take and collapse, the city of Port Said we could occupy, and the loss of the canal should impact the current economy pretty hard.”

“We have, my Queen,” the spokesman agreed. “We were planning to suggest that as our next step, after taking Cairo.”

“It will take effort,” said another general. “And we would be breaking the Convention of Constantinople. But it should be doable.”

Ahmanet sat back. “Nevertheless, it is a good suggestion, Jennifer. You are right to say the Suez Canal is a good target. But we mustn’t forget Cairo in favour of it.”

“What if,” said a general, “we use the Suez Canal as a diversion to start? We can blow up the bridges and collapse them into the canal, perhaps bomb Port Said. Then, at the same time, we can invade Cairo. It will divide whatever forces we have not yet taken from the fake government and leave them vulnerable to further attack.”

“If we do this, how fast can we march on Cairo?” Ahmanet asked intently.

“Well, it will not take the Infected long to get to the bridges of the canal. We have enough officers under control that they can sign it off as a control mission under the guise of checking if the bridges
need upkeep, or something like that. The Infected can place the charges, it shouldn’t take longer than a few days to smuggle those there. Then we can dispatch some planes or perhaps choppers to bomb Port Said while we blow the bridges. We don’t even have to hold the city or the bridges. We can always occupy Port Said later. And the bridges will be destroyed anyway.’’ The spokesman explained. ‘’I think it would only take a few days, perhaps a week at most before we can attack Cairo.’’

‘’Then do it.’’ Ahmanet ordered. ‘’I want troops at the outskirts of Cairo in three days. We will attack the day after we attack the canal, so the fake government has the time to send troops there and leave Cairo more vulnerable.’’

‘’And you, Sire?’’ Asked the spokesman.

Ahmanet reached out to squeeze Jenny’s hand, not meeting her eyes. ‘’I will be on the front lines of Cairo, as is my duty.’’

Jenny almost bit through her tongue to keep herself silent.
Chapter 60

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet leaves for war - and that leaves Jenny with new responsibilities as the regent of the palace.

Chapter Notes

Sooo... remember how I told you I am incapable of making a planning and then sticking to it? Yeah. It happened again. I've updated my planning (again) and now we're looking at 70 chapters rather than 68. So. I would say something along the lines of "let's hope it'll stay that way" but let's be honest, I suck at sticking to the plan.

Anyway, this chapter is a little longer than usual, I think, but I had a lot to get down, and I didn't want to add even more chapters to the list, so I just kind of stuffed everything into chapter 60 and hoped for the best. I hope it's not coming across as too hurried.

As I always say, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Two days later, early in the morning, after she’d hurled her guts out, Jenny found herself biting back tears as she watched Ahmanet don her armour. She was leaving for the front today, joining the soldiers the palace was sending to Cairo, and Jenny was absolutely not okay with it. Jenny was even less okay with the fact that said city was going to be a warzone very soon, and it’d only take one stray bullet for the head for Jenny to have to resurrect Ahmanet.

She really, really hoped it wouldn’t come to that. But the fact was that it was a possibility, and Jenny should probably make sure she had a couple of ‘volunteers’ in the dungeons to ‘donate’ their life force should push come to shove. She wasn’t yet capable of generating the needed life force to resurrect someone herself (at least without nearly dying), nor could she access the ambient magic of the Veil yet, so donor lives were definitely a necessity.

She made a mental note to have someone grab a couple of people, preferably government troops. Though if she really had no other choice, Jenny would happily take innocents as well. Compared to Ahmanet’s life, the lives of innocents really didn’t matter as much.

Ahmanet placed the blue crown of war on her head, looking every inch the conqueror, all confidence and power clad in shining golden scalemail. She had weapons now, a deadly-looking khopesh at her hip, a richly-carved bow and a quiver of blue-feathered arrows on her back. Yet, when she looked at Jenny, sat on the bed, trying not to cry, her eyes went soft and her posture became approachable, the harsh lines of her expression fading.

“I will come back, Jennifer,” she said quietly. “You needn’t fear for me.”

Jenny smiled wanly. “Wouldn’t you be afraid if I were the one leaving to fight?”
“I would be terrified.” Ahmanet took a seat on the bed next to Jenny, clasping their hands together. “But I do not have to be afraid. You will be here, safe.”

“I wish I could say the same,” Jenny said.

“I will come back. One way or the other.”

“I’d prefer it if you came back alive and unhurt.”

Ahmanet smiled, a little melancholic. “Even if I were to get hurt, my love, I will heal far faster than any human could. And I trust that, should I die, Set will bind my spirit to Earth as a ghost, and I will find my way back to you regardless of whether I am alive or not. And even more, I trust that you will bring me back, like you returned the lives of those soldiers a few days ago.”

“Should it come to that - and it better not - I will,” Jenny promised. No way she was going to let Ahmanet die and stay dead. “But if you die, Ahmanet, know this - I will resurrect you. And then I’ll kill you for dying on me before resurrecting you again.”

This time, the smile was loving and a little amused. “I wouldn’t expect any different, my love.” She squeezed Jenny’s hand a little. “Will you come see me off?”

“Of course,” Jenny said. As if she would miss it. No way she was going to let Ahmanet go off to war without being there to send her off and wish her well. Even if it’d break her heart to watch Ahmanet go, not knowing if she’d come back alive.

They walked down to the courtyard, where the soldiers were waiting for Ahmanet to arrive, very slowly. Jenny clutched at Ahmanet’s hand as if letting go would kill her. Ahmanet was squeezing just as hard, tension seeping across the link in staggered waves. She felt both eager and reluctant to go. Jenny mostly sympathized with the latter, because she, too, did not want Ahmanet to go.

Zara and Sahar, present as always, were quiet behind Jenny. They’d been there since Jenny had woken up, but they’d known to stay silent and just let Jenny and Ahmanet have their time together. At least until Ahmanet had left, and then they’d no doubt be chomping at the bit to make sure Jenny was okay. If Jenny hadn’t already gotten so used to having them around, she would’ve been uncomfortable with their presence during such an intimate moment. As it was, it was nice to have them there, their steady presence familiar and reassuring.

As Jenny and Ahmanet the courtyard to join up with the soldiers, she felt like she could really use some reassurance.

The courtyard was filled with soldiers, at least five hundred of them at first sight, lined up in ten neat rows of fifty. They formed only part of the army that was being sent to Cairo. Yesterday, a thousand men and women had been here; they’d gathered at the palace, with only a fraction actually living here, and after a small speech from Ahmanet, had left for Cairo to join up with the troops that had gone there directly. Jenny wasn’t entirely clear on why they’d gathered at the palace first, considering Cairo was halfway across the country, but apparently that was a thing. Probably some military thing Jenny didn’t understand - or wanted to understand, really.

The soldiers in the courtyard snapped to attention the moment Ahmanet and Jenny came into view.

“Your Majesty,” a general approached. “The troops are ready to leave at your leisure. The buses are waiting to take you to Luxor, where planes are waiting to transport you to Cairo.”

“Thank you,” Ahmanet said. “Prepare to be move out in ten.”
“Yes, Sire.”

With a sharp nod, Ahmanet turned to the soldiers to address them. “Children of Set! Sons and daughters of Egypt! Listen to my words! I am Ahmanet, Pharaoh of Egypt, the first of my name! We are at war! The fake government has attempted to subdue us, and failed! It is now time to strike back! We march on Cairo, the fake government’s beloved capital city, and we will make an example of what we, the true Egyptian people, can do! Egypt is ours! Our birthright! Our inheritance! And we shall have it!” Ahmanet raised her fist, golden armour shining under the sun, near-fanatical determination on her face. “Victory, or death!”

“Victory, or death!” The warcry came, five-hundred voices strong, almost loud enough to make the palace walls shake.

“Victory, or death!” Ahmanet echoed again. “Prepare to move out!”

As one, the soldiers snapped off the crispest salutes Jenny had ever seen before turning one-hundred and eighty degrees so they were facing the palace gates, ready to start marching to the buses.

“This is it,” Jenny said quietly.

“Yes,” Ahmanet said. “I will be back soon, my love. One way or another.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Jenny struggled to hold back tears. Ahmanet drew her into a gentle kiss. It was just a simple press of the lips, but it was tender and loving. It tasted faintly of desperation, in a way that said Ahmanet, too, was afraid to get hurt and end up dead. Jenny tried not to clutch at her too desperately, biting back a sob when they finally separated.

“Be careful.”

“I will be.”

“And come back to me.”

“On everything I am,” Ahmanet said intensely, “I swear that I will.”

Jenny took a deep breath, held it for a second, and then let it go. She nodded, though the movement was a little jerky, biting back a sob when they finally separated.

“The general barked, “March!”

As one, the soldiers began to move, and Ahmanet went with them. Jenny clenched her fists, watching as Ahmanet swiftly moved between the soldiers until she was leading them.

The slam of the gates closing behind them, several minutes later once the last of the soldiers had filed out, sounded strangely final.

“Her Majesty will be fine, my Queen,” Sahar said quietly, standing close to Jenny’s shoulder, barely half a step behind her. “She is proficient in battle.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it,” Jenny said, wishing she could ask Ahmanet to stay. Well, she could, but Ahmanet had a duty, and Jenny knew that she had to go. It would not help either of them if she demanded Ahmanet stayed with her.
"My Queen," Zara said quietly, "if you are amenable, the generals would like to speak to you soon, as well. Then Aaheru requests your presence at the temple, and this afternoon is the weekly audience. In Her Majesty's absence, the responsibility falls to you."

Jenny blinked. She'd almost forgotten. Ahmanet was gone. That meant that Jenny was now in charge of the palace and everything that happened in it. Fuck. The title of 'Queen' wasn't just a fancy title now. All of a sudden, it had become a job description. Damn. Jenny wasn't ready to be an actual Queen. She really should've taken that holiday, dammit.

"Right," she said after a second of letting that information sink in. "How quickly do the generals wish to see me?"

"As soon as you have time, my Queen," Zara responded.

"Though you are the Queen," Sahar responded, "if you choose, you can take a little time before meeting the generals. Your word is law now."

"Right," Jenny repeated. Because that was exactly what she needed right now. For her word to be the law around here. Another reason to miss Ahmanet, besides the fact that she was literally the love of Jenny's life. She sighed. She should probably go to that meeting, though. The generals usually had important stuff to say. "Let's go see the generals, then. They're in the war room, I assume?"

"Yes, my Queen," Zara said.

Jenny nodded sharply. She threw the gates a last longing look, already wishing Ahmanet was back, then then turned on her heel and marched back into the palace. She wasn't going to let Ahmanet's absence knock her down. If she was going to be in charge around here, she was damn well going to give it her best. If only to make sure there actually still was a palace for Ahmanet to return to once she was done at Cairo.

Still, despite her determination, it was weird to walk into the war room, the generals seated around the table, and know that Jenny was the one in charge here. That she spoke for Ahmanet now.

"My Queen," the same spokesman as last time said respectfully, "thank you for seeing us so quickly."

Jenny nodded as she took her seat at the head of the table, Zara and Sahar taking up their positions behind her shoulders. "Of course. What is it you wanted to discuss?"

"The defence of the palace in the absence of the Pharaoh, my Queen," said the spokesman. "We are aware of your inexperience with these kind of things, if you'll forgive me for stating it so bluntly."

Jenny waved it off. It was the truth, after all. And a couple of days of a war crash course wasn't going to change that.

"We would like your permission, my Queen, to increase the amount of guards we have on duty within the palace," said the spokesman, "and we would also like permission to station snipers on strategic places along the rooftops and walls."

"How many guards and snipers?" Jenny asked.

"Triple the current amount of guards, my Queen. They would number around five-hundred. And around two dozen snipers."
“Permission granted,” said Jenny. Because honestly, she didn’t really have a good reason to not approve it. They were at war. More guards was probably a good idea. Five-hundred did sound like a lot though, but if the generals thought that that was a good number, Jenny would happily go along with it.

“Thank you, my Queen. We are also planning to increase patrols, with your permission.”

“Also granted,” Jenny said. “In fact, any other plans to further protect the palace and won’t place anyone at undue risk, go for it.”

The spokesman bowed his head a little. "Many thanks, my Queen. We will implement the new measures as soon as feasibly possible."

“If I may,” said another general, “I know High Priest Aaheru has also requested to speak to you, my Queen. I believe he intends to ask permission to put in place the magical defences he and his apprentices have been working on for the past week.”

“Ahmanet did mention something like that,” Jenny mused. “If that’s what Aaheru wants to talk to me about, I can’t see why I would refuse.”

“Perhaps he wishes to explain the process,” said that same general. “I have not pried further, my Queen, except to ask about the expected effectiveness of the defences.”

“And what is your opinion?”

“I think they will work as intended, my Queen, and make the palace a safer place for us all.”

Jenny nodded. That already made her feel a little better about those defenses. And she’d probably approve of them anyway, because safer was better, right? “Was there anything else?”

“One more thing,” the spokesman said. “Tomorrow is the attack on both Cairo and the Suez Canal. We are expecting some kind of government response, perhaps another attack on the palace, most certainly something along the lines of a siege.”

Jenny frowned a little. “Do we have the supplies to last through a siege?”

“Yes, my Queen. With as many people as we are expecting to be housed here in the next couple of days, especially with the increase in guards, we should be able to last long enough.”

“How long exactly is ‘long enough’?”

“At the moment, at eight-hundred people as we expect, we should be able to last two weeks.”

Jenny resisted the urge to let out a low whistle. Two weeks’ worth of supplies for eight-hundred people? That was a lot of food and necessities. The palace had to have some truly humongous storerooms somewhere. Probably underground, at the same level of the dungeons and the embalming halls. “Are you expecting a siege to take longer than two weeks?”

“No, my Queen. The Pharaoh should return before then, and with her presence, we are fully capable of breaking any siege and thus opening up the ability to bring in new supplies.”

“Right,” Jenny agreed, because of course Ahmanet could break a siege. She literally controlled the desert. There was little a soldier or tank could do if they couldn’t move, and even less if they were dead or destroyed soon after. Jenny, however, was not capable of that; they needed Ahmanet for that. Jenny didn’t control the desert. Not that she knew of, anyway. “Did you wish to discuss
anything else?’

The spokesman shook his head. “This was all for now, my Queen.”

Jenny nodded. “Then if you’ll excuse me, I shall go speak to Aaheru about those defences.”

“Of course,” the generals hastily stood, bowing as Jenny made her way to the door.

“Let me know if you wish to discuss anything else,” Jenny said. “A servant will be able to inform me as usual.”

“Of course, my Queen.”

With a nod, Jenny left, Zara and Sahar on her heels as usual. “I presume I can find Aaheru near the temple?”

“You should, my Queen,” Sahar agreed. “Or in the spaces around the temple, where he and the priests and priestesses live and study the faith.”

“Let’s go there, then. I’d like to speak to Aaheru as quickly as possible.”

“We will follow, my Queen,” Zara said patiently. “Always.”

Jenny did not doubt that. Zara and Sahar had proven extensively that they’d follow without question. They’d been born to follow her, had been raised for it. Jenny was pretty sure she could walk into a volcano and they’d follow.

They made their way towards the temple and its surrounding quarters. When Jenny turned the corner, she spotted one of Aaheru’s apprentices leaving one of the quarters, a basket in his arms. She was pretty sure this one was called Bau.

“Bau,” she called, catching his attention.

“My Queen!” He placed the basket on the floor, bowing deeply. “How may I help you?”

“Where can I find Aaheru? I wish to speak to him.”

“He is in his quarters, my Queen. With your permission, I will fetch him.”

Jenny flicked her hand in agreement, and Bau was off quickly enough that he completely forgot to bring his basket with him. Mouth quirking a little in amusement, Jenny waited patiently for him to return.

It took barely a minute before Bau came back, Aaheru next to him. They bowed.

“My Queen,” Aaheru said.

“Aaheru,” Jenny greeted. “Zara and Sahar informed me you wished to speak to me. The generals were under the impression you wished to discuss the magical defences you’ve been working on.”

“Indeed, my Queen,” Aaheru agreed. “If you have the time.”

“I do.” Jenny said. “So let’s discuss this.”

“Of course. Would you mind joining me in the study?”
Jenny gestured him to go first, silently agreeing.

“Bau, go take care of that,” Aaheru nodded to the basket, “my Queen, if you would follow me, please.”

Jenny did. Aaheru led her to a space a few doors down from the temple, into a spacious room with bookshelves lining the walls and a large round table in the middle. A blueprint of the palace was laid out on the table, much like at the war room. Sahar held out a chair for Jenny, and while she sat down and accepted the glass of water Zara had poured from a pitcher she’d found, Aaheru gathered together some documents.

“So,” Jenny said, “tell me about these defences.”

“Think of them as magical shields, my Queen,” Aaheru said. “They are designed to keep out foreigners and alert nearby guards if there is an attempt from a foreigner to enter the palace without permission. We have a second layer of shields as well, which are designed to repel attacks, such as explosives. Both shields will be created by using glyphs from the Ancient Language, prayers to Lord Set to protect this palace and all who dwell within it, and to destroy those who seek to harm and destroy.”


“My priests and I can do the bulk of the preparations and the rituals,” Aaheru said. “In fact, we’ve already completed most of it. We’ve been soaking the central stone that will host the protections with the prayers in the blood of Lord Set’s devoted, that being the priests of his Cult, for the past twenty-four hours. The last part, however, demands the actions of, well, you, my Queen.”

That sounded a little less good. “What do you mean?”

“In the absence of the Pharaoh, you rule this palace. As the ruler, only you have the right to permit or deny these protections. We cannot make that decision for you. Lord Set would not accept it.”

“Right,” Jenny said, more than a little wary. “And how do I do that?”

“You must pray to Set and ask him to accept an offering in exchange for inscribing the glyphs of the protective prayers into the central stone and give them power. When it is accepted, you must make the offering to him.”

Now Jenny was really wary. “What kind of sacrifice?”

“An animal sacrifice. A boar to be exact.”

Jenny stared. “You want me to slaughter a pig in ritual sacrifice.”

“Yes, my Queen,” Aaheru agreed.

“And is there a reason this couldn’t be done, like, two hours ago? When Ahmanet was still here?”

“The ritual will likely tire out the person who performs it,” Aaheru explained. “Her Majesty needs to be well-rested and alert for battle.”

“And I don’t,” Jenny mused, and found herself agreeing. Damn. She did value the safety of the palace and its inhabitants over the life of a single pig. Well. Apparently she was going to perform an animal sacrifice. That was going to be a first for sure. She nodded; she was reluctant, but she’d do it. “Alright. Are there other side-effects I should expect except the exhaustion?”
"Perhaps a slight headache, my Queen, but certainly nothing detrimental to you or the child."

"Good. When do we do this?"

"The best time would be after sunset, but before midnight."

Jenny nodded. "If everything is ready then, we can do it tonight and get it over with."

Aaheru nodded. "We should be able to have everything ready by sundown."

"Then we will do it tonight," Jenny said. "I presume it's best if it happens at the temple?"

"Yes, my Queen."

"Then I will meet you there an hour after sunset." That'd leave her plenty of time to deal with the audience her handmaidens had informed her of, then dinner after that. And then she'd probably have a little time for herself, enough for a bath, before the ritual.

"Very well, my Queen. I will make sure everything will be ready by the time you arrive."

Jenny gave a nod as she stood up. "Thank you, Aaheru. Then I will see you tonight."

"Until tonight, my Queen," Aaheru returned.

With that, Jenny left. "What time is it?"

"It is almost noon, my Queen," Sahar supplied. "Lunch, perhaps, before the audience?"

"Yes," Jenny agreed. "Lunch sounds good." She was kind of peckish, and she could go for some food right about now. "Nothing too complicated, though. Some sandwiches, maybe."

Zara all but snapped to attention. "What kind of sandwiches would you prefer, my Queen?"

"I could really go for a chicken club and some fries right now, honestly." Because chicken, bacon, lettuce, tomato and mayo on plain white bread and some salty fries on the side? That sounded like heaven right now. Exactly the kind of comfort food Jenny needed at the moment. The fact that Ahmanet had left for a literal battlefield and Jenny was now in charge around here left her feeling more than a little unsettled. Comfort food always helped.

Zara nodded. "I will go inform the kitchens." She hurried off without waiting for an answer.

"To the dining hall, my Queen?" Sahar gallantly offered Jenny her arm, much like Ahmanet usually did.

"Yes," Jenny agreed, tucking her hand around Sahar's elbow. "The dining hall should be fine."

Lunch passed fairly quickly, and the kitchens did indeed produce the chicken club and fries wanted so badly. She was very grateful her stomach was settled enough to accept the food; the sandwich and fries were very good and she'd hate to not be able to eat it because the kid Set had saddled her with was in a mood. Seriously. Jenny couldn't wait to get this child out of her. She'd happily go through childbirth, the sooner the better.

After lunch was the audience. Jenny sat on her throne, and found that it was a little lonely with
Ahmanet’s throne empty beside her. Yet, as the current ruler of the palace, it was kind of her job to listen to the people and solve their issues, so it wasn’t like she had a whole lot of choice in the matter. Therefore, she did as was expected of her, and listened to the issues her people brought to her, and tried to solve them to the best of her ability.

There were a couple of things she had to deal with. Least stressful was a man who had been patrolling when the government attacked and had broken both arms when the government had crashed a car through the gates to open them. He was unable to work now, incapable of even doing paperwork, and being a palace guard, he had the right to appeal to the current ruler (that being Jenny) for a small stipend to tide him over until he could resume duty. Which was something Jenny was happy to grant him. It was hardly his fault he’d gotten hurt, and since he had been doing his job dutifully, Jenny didn’t see why the palace couldn’t provide him with enough to make ends meet until he could get on desk duty.

The worst, though, were the families of people who’d lost loved ones in the confrontation with Henry, and in the scuffle with Ahmed. Their loved ones had not been resurrected because at the time, Jenny had not known how to do it yet - but now that she knew, she got more than a few requests from people to bring their loved ones back to them.

Watching person after person all but begging at the foot of the dais almost broke Jenny’s heart. What finished it off was the fact that she had to tell them she couldn’t; they’d been gone for a while now, and there weren’t any ghosts of them around to create new bodies for. Jenny honestly wouldn’t even know where to look for their spirits to bring them back now that they were no longer lingering near their bodies. She’d learned in the battle that it took a few minutes for spirits to move on, even if they didn’t leave ghosts, and that within those few minutes, they could easily be returned to their bodies - that was why cpr worked. That was easy. What was harder was seeing through a Veil she hadn’t even learned to sense yet, and reaching into the very afterlife to pull back someone who’d already moved on.

She told the people begging for their loved ones’ lives so, and tried not to weep herself at their heartbroken cries.

That left Jenny, several hours later, to the sacrificial ritual for the palace defences. Something she couldn’t say she was really looking forward to.

Not only did she have to slaughter a pig in ritual sacrifice, she also had to deal with Set while doing it, probably. Jenny vividly remembered the last time she’d met Set, and it was not a happy memory. Sometimes Jenny wondered why Ahmanet hadn’t chosen a less… creepy god to follow. Probably because most other gods didn’t support patricide and infanticide. Needs must, Jenny supposed, but that didn’t mean she was all that thrilled about Ahmanet’s choice of deity.

Aaheru was already waiting at the temple. Jenny was a little pleased that at least she wouldn’t be doing this alone. It was bad enough that she had to go into the temple at all. After last time, she could sense Set more easily than ever. Cold, cloying, a slimy feel to the very air. Jenny didn’t know how Aaheru could stand to be around it all day.

‘‘Is everything ready?’’

‘‘Yes, my Queen,’’ Aaheru responded, stepping aside so Jenny could enter the temple. With a deep breath to steel herself, Jenny did. She was enveloped by that cloying press, settling on her shoulders and around her throat like a heavy weight. It gathered around her stomach as well, feeling much like
a thick, protective shell that Jenny didn’t really want.

On the altar was a rock, about the size of a human head, glistening dark red with still wet blood. A little puddle of it had gathered on the altar under the stone. It looked a little gruesome, but considering the things Jenny had seen and done, she wasn’t very impressed by a rock covered in a bit of blood.

No, what was more interesting was the fully grown pig lying on the floor before the altar, tied up tightly and seemingly drugged into compliance. Jenny was fairly sure it had to be, because it was lying too still to be fully awake, and it couldn’t be dead yet because that was apparently her job.

An intricately carved, gleaming athame carved out of a single piece of solid obsidian laid unsheathed on a small pillow next to the pig’s head.

“If you would please sit here, my Queen.” Aaheru gestured at the small, thick rug Jenny had used before to kneel on.

Jenny followed the instruction without complaint, eyeing the athame. It was within arm’s reach. So was the pig. It smelled of barnyard animal and a deep, almost feral terror, as if it knew what was going to happen and knew there was nothing it could do to escape it. That was probably why it’d been drugged. Frightened animals usually went wild.

“As you have not yet learned the Ancient Language,” Aaheru said quietly as he lit incense, “I shall pray in your stead, my Queen. While I pray, you must think of protecting the palace, of keeping out harm and danger. Think of Lord Set, my Queen, and demand he obey your request.”

Jenny looked up sharply, suddenly filled with incredulity and a hint of fear. “You want me to make demands of Set?!”

“My Queen,” Aaheru said steadily, meeting her gaze. “You are the Queen of Egypt. The Chosen of Lord Set’s favoured. Most importantly, you carry his mortal avatar. You will be his mother in blood and magic. If anyone can make demands of Lord Set, it is you.”

Well. When put like that, Jenny supposed she did have some right to tell Set to buckle down and do as told. Possibly. Maybe. Well, at least she wouldn’t be murdered on the spot. Not while she was carrying the child, anyway. So that was something. So. She was going to demand stuff from Set. That was probably going to go great.

“Alright,” she said, a little shakily. “Okay. Let’s get this over with.”

“As you wish, my Queen.” Aaheru finished with the incense, having also lit some candles that gave off a heavy, herby smell, almost bitter in its cloying sweetness. It did cover the smell of the pig, at least, even though the new smell wasn’t pleasant either. “When I give the sign, my Queen, please use the athame to slit the animal’s throat.”

At Jenny’s nod of understanding, Aaheru turned to face the altar and started to chant a rhythmical prayer. He spoke in the Ancient Language, slow at first, then gradually faster and louder, until he was all but shouting the prayer, barely managing to keep from stumbling over the speed of the words. With each word, Set’s presence in the temple swelled.

Jenny bowed her head, focussing on her will to protect the palace, to keep the people within it safe and provide them a safe haven from the current government. She focussed on her will to keep the current government and other threats out, and the need to destroy those who tried to get in and harm her people. She thought of Set, imagined imposing her will on him and him bending under it,
obeying her because she told him he should.

And still, Set’s presence swelled. It flowed around the temple, around the blood-drenched stone and the panting, drugged pig, then around Jenny, seeping into her nose and mouth until she was breathing it with every inhale. She could almost feel it slowly seeping into her veins, circulating though her body. Some of it lingered in her lower abdomen. Jenny didn’t dare take too much attention away from the stuff she was supposed to focus on, but she had a distinct feeling, a hunch deep in her bones, that if she took a nap sometime soon, she’d wake up with a baby bump reminiscent of the late months of pregnancy rather than the flat stomach she still had right now.

She tried to ignore it, focussing harder on bending Set to her will and making him do as she wanted. His presence almost seemed amused at it, an indulgent sensation she’d never felt from him before. Jenny wasn’t sure she liked it.

Aaheru’s prayer reached a crescendo. He all but shouted out the last words, voice ringing around the temple, and then turned to look at Jenny, giving a small nod. Jenny picked up the athame, the obsidian cool in her hands, and didn’t dare hesitate; she plunged the athame into the pig’s throat up to the hilt and wrenched it sideways to carve a long, deep laceration into the flesh.

The pig made a terrified noise, foam flecking at its mouth and the whites of its eyes showing. Blood poured out of the cut, pooling on the floor and soaking into the rug Jenny kneeled on until it started to soak into her skin and clothes as well.

The pig was dead in seconds. As it breathed out its last, Set’s presence spiked until the air felt like molasses and it was hard to breathe from the pressure on Jenny’s lungs. There was an unholy glow coming from inside the central stone, the blood on it boiling away from the sheer heat it emitted, which then turned to startling cold in a matter of seconds. Slowly, symbols began to etch themselves into the rock, the grind of stone giving Jenny goose bumps. The glyphs appeared in a spiral from the top of the stone, winding around it in clusters until most of the rock was covered in them. They shone from the inside like the stone did, the light a gleaming red, which remained even as the light coming from the stone slowly began to dim. With a last pulse of unholy light, the glow was gone, save for in the glyphs.

Jenny blinked as something nagged in the back of her head. Then, in a second, it engulfed her - and suddenly she knew the palace, every nook and cranny of it, from the lowest point of the embalming rooms and the storerooms to the highest point of the roof, from the royal chambers to the very outer inches of the walls, from the simplest servant to the highest ranking officials.

And, in between all of that belonging, a single note of discord.

Jenny’s eyes snapped open. “Aaheru.”

“‘My Queen?’”

“‘The palace wasn’t searched after the attack, was it?’”

“I’m not sure, my Queen. It should have been.”

Anger started to burble in her stomach. “Aaheru.”

“Yes, my Queen?”

“Search the palace. Find the intruder. Bring them to me.”

Aaheru nodded. “Yes, my Queen.”
“And Aaheru?” He paused at the door, waiting for her to speak.

“I want them alive.”

With a sharp nod, he was gone.

Jenny was still for a few seconds, still kneeling in the blood of the sacrificial pig, then stood up swiftly and left the temple.

Zara and Sahar were waiting outside the door, unphased at the blood that covered her.

“‘To the throne room,’” Jenny ordered lowly. “‘I have some business to take care of.’”
Chapter 61

Chapter Summary

The intruder is revealed. Things do not go well. The guards are incompetent. Jenny is not pleased.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 61 out of 70 is a go, people! We're nicely on schedule, I'm halfway through chapter 62 already, so I should have it done with plenty of time to spare, which gives me some breathing room. That's always nice. At least my class schedule isn't too bad right now, and exams aren't for another five weeks or so, so I have enough free time to write for you all. Yay!

It's not a super long chapter this time, it's actually a little on the short side, but shit happens, so...

Anyway, as always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

In the time it took Jenny to reach the throne room, guards had flooded the corridors of the palace, checking every room and every alcove for the intruder. Which they should’ve bloody done immediately after the battle, dammit. The generals should’ve ordered a search as soon as the last government soldier had been killed. It’d have been easy to search the palace while the courtyard was being cleaned up, it wasn’t like there hadn’t been space or time. And there certainly had not been a lack of available palace guards.

This was not a mistake.

This was incompetence, plain and simple.

And Jenny was pissed. There was an intruder in the palace, probably had been since the battle, and no one had fucking noticed! By now, the food supplies could be poisoned, the armories could’ve been sabotaged - hell, Jenny and Ahmanet could’ve been murdered in their sleep, and no one would’ve known about it until Zara and Sahar came to wake Jenny up!

No. Jenny was not pleased. She was livid.

Stalking into the throne room, she swiftly made her way up the dais and sat on her throne. “Zara, have someone bring in some tea.”

Zara bowed her head in silent understanding, apparently realizing Jenny was not in the mood for useless platitudes right now. She hurried over to a servant near the doors, spoke to the young woman quietly for a moment, and as the servant ran off, returned to Jenny to stand beside her throne.

“My Queen,” Sahar ventured carefully after a few seconds of silence, voice quiet. “Forgive me if I
am bothering you, but perhaps we could do something about the blood.’’

Jenny glanced down at her legs. Pig blood stained her shins and knees, as well as her sandals and the hem of her skirt. She had it on her hands, too, from when she’d slit the pig’s throat and the blood had poured out over the athame and her hands and wrists. There were even a couple of stains on her tunic. It was slowly drying, already going syrupy and sticky, but not yet to the point where it turned flaky and became easy to brush off. She gave a sharp nod. ‘‘Take care of it.’’

‘‘I shall arrange some warm water, soap and towels, my Queen,’’ Sahar murmured.

Still too angry to really react warmly like she usually did, Jenny just flicked her bloody hand at Sahar, silently telling her to get on with it. Like Zara had, Sahar sent a servant to arrange the items, wasting no time to return to Jenny’s side, standing on her right whereas Zara took up Jenny’s left side.

‘‘May I ask why you are upset, my Queen?’’ Zara asked carefully. ‘‘If possible, I would like to help.’’

Jenny scowled a little, and watched Zara flinch from the corner of her eye. ‘‘I apologize, my Queen. I should not have asked.’’

A little frisson of guilt settled in her stomach. Jenny hadn’t meant to upset Zara. She stifled a sigh. ‘‘It’s fine. The ritual provided a result I did not expect.’’

Zara opened her mouth to ask, then hesitated.

‘‘There has been an intruder hiding in the palace,’’ Jenny elaborated, very much aware of how low and angry she suddenly sounded. ‘‘Possibly since the government attacked. And no one knew of their presence until I sensed them here as a result of the ritual.’’

At that, both her handmaidens stiffened.

‘‘An intruder went unnoticed for that long?!’’ Sahar sounded incredulous and angry. ‘‘The palace was supposed to be searched after the battle! It’s basic safety protocol!’’

‘‘And yet,’’ Jenny said, ‘‘it was not. And when I find out who neglected to organize a search, there will be hell to pay.’’

Neither Zara nor Sahar seemed particularly upset about that proclamation.

Her tea arrived, and only seconds later the supplies Sahar had asked for. Zara brought over the tray of tea while a servant retrieved a small table from an antechamber for Zara to put the tray on. While the servant left, Zara began to put Jenny’s tea together just how she liked it, finally handing the delicate china cup to Jenny to sip from. It was good tea, a lightly sweet jasmine that was altogether quite pleasant.

Sahar fussed with the bowl of water and the towels. There was a fragrant soap, as well as an equally fragrant oil, and she added a little of the former to the water and stirred it around until it foamed just a little bit.

‘‘Your hand, please, my Queen,’’ she requested softly, and when Jenny extended her hand, set to washing off the blood. The water was pleasantly warm. Jenny found herself slowly calming down a little as Sahar washed her hands, drying them gently with a towel before massaging some of the fragrant oil into her skin. It was remarkably soothing. Once her hands were clean, Sahar kneeled down to unlace Jenny’s sandals, clearly intending to wash her legs and feet clean of blood as well.
She’d just placed the sandals aside and was about to start wiping away at Jenny’s knees when the doors of the throne room slammed open.

A small group of guards marched in, surrounding -

“Nick!” Jenny gasped involuntarily as she realized who the guards were escorting in. If Zara hadn’t been busy fixing her a second cup of tea, she’d probably have dropped it.

“Jenny!” Nick called out, held firmly at his upper arms by two burly guards. “Get them to let me go, ‘kay? I just wanna talk.”

“My Queen,” another guard took a small step forward and held up a handgun that seemed to be modified in some way. “We found him in the possession of this. It’s loaded.”

Jenny frowned, glancing at Nick. “You want to talk, yet you sneak in here with a loaded weapon?”

Nick stared at her. “C’mon, Jenny, don’t be like that! It’s not like I could’ve knocked on the gates and asked to be let in!”

“Show respect to the Queen!” Snarled one of the guards holding Nick. “It is by her will alone that you are still alive.”

“Fuck off!” Nick snarled back, trying to jerk his arm loose. “Jenny’s my friend!”

Not really. Jenny hadn’t considered Nick a friend in, well, ever, to be honest. She’d tolerated him, mostly, and she might’ve started to like him a little at some point, but all that had gone down the drain the moment he’d condemned her for being murdered. The best Nick could hope for at this moment was civility. True, friendly warmth just wasn’t in the cards.

“My Queen,” Sahar interrupted quietly. Jenny glanced down at her. She was still kneeling at Jenny’s feet, holding the now bloodied towel. “May I continue?”

“Go ahead,” Jenny said, momentarily ignoring Nick and the guards. She really did want that blood off her by now. It was starting to get a little itchy. “Zara, my tea?”

Zara quickly handed the cup over, prepared just how Jenny liked it. Sahar began to wipe the towel down Jenny’s shins, dipping it in the water and bringing it to her skin until the blood was wet again, slowly dripping to puddle at the foot of Jenny’s throne.

“Jenny, what the hell?!” Nick had followed her gaze down, apparently only now spotting the blood. “What the fuck! Are you hurt?! Why isn’t there a doctor?!”

“Calm down, Nick,” Jenny said, a touch annoyed. “I’m not hurt.”

“But you’re covered in blood! Did someone hurt you?!” Nick’s eyes were wide, a little bloodshot - he looked a mess.

“I’m not hurt.” Jenny repeated.

“But… the blood,” Nick said weakly. “Why’re you covered in blood if you’re not hurt?”

“Aaheru needed some help,” Jenny said vaguely, waving it off. “That’s not important right now. Why are you here, Nick?”

“Wha- I mean - Jenny, what do you mean ‘why am I here’?!” He looked flabbergasted. “I’m here to save you, obviously.”
Jenny stared back, just as flabbergasted. “Excuse me?”

Surely Nick wasn’t that stupid? If he’d been in the palace since the battle as Jenny suspected, he’d have had plenty of time to observe the going on’s and realize that Jenny was here out of her own free will. She wasn’t being forced to stay. If she wanted to, she could walk out and no one could stop her. No one had the ability to stop her, save maybe Ahmanet, and she wouldn’t if Jenny genuinely wanted to be let go. That was something Jenny was very sure of. How Nick had gotten the idea that Jenny was being held hostage or whatever, after having plenty of time to determine that she wasn’t, was beyond her. Seriously. He couldn’t be that oblivious, right? Or maybe he was just purposely ignoring that part, as if he could make it not be true by ignoring it. Jenny didn’t know, and she wasn’t particularly interested in finding out either, to be honest. Nick was her past. He had no place in her future.

“I’m here to rescue you, Jenny,” Nick repeated. “I mean, it’s obvious you wouldn’t have come here on your own, you hate Ahmanet.”

Jenny blinked. “No, I don’t.”

“You do, though, Jenny. You told me so yourself.”

Jenny sighed. Deeply and exasperatedly. By Set, she should’ve know that that would come back to bite her in the ass. “Nick,” she sighed. “Just shut up, okay? I don’t hate Ahmanet. I’m not being held hostage. I’m here because I want to be, and I don’t need you to save me, because I’m not leaving. Is that clear?”

He gaped at her ungracefully, then snorted a little and chuckled, shaking his head. “Very funny, Jenny. Now c’mon, tell them to let me go and we can leave, okay?”

The guards were starting to shift restlessly. None of them seemed too happy with the crap Nick was spouting. Jenny wasn’t either, to be totally honest. Not for the first time, she wondered how she’d ever fallen so far as to sleep with him. Alcohol, probably. Because she had drank a lot that night, and she wasn’t too good at holding her alcohol in the first place. And Drunk Jenny didn’t always make the best decisions. Such as sleeping with Nick. Which, honestly, was like the worst case-scenario.

“Jenny?” Now Nick was finally starting to look a little wary. “Let me go.”

“I can’t do that, Nick. You’ve been working with the Temple of Osiris. That makes you a threat to me, and to Ahmanet.”

That had the guards shifting closer to Nick, ready to take him down with extreme prejudice. No one within the palace liked the Temple of Osiris, and just the mention of them was sometimes enough to make people angry. As much as they said to be the good guys, the priests of Osiris had nonetheless done everything they could to exterminate the Cult of Set and it’s followers, by whatever means necessary. Centuries of persecution had bred a deep hatred. It was kind of ironic, Jenny thought, that the tables had been turned now - now the priests of Osiris were the ones on the run with their heads on the line. Literally.

Nick stared at her. “What, you think I’m going to hurt you? Jenny, that’s ridiculous.”

Except that it wasn’t. It really wasn’t. “You hate what I am. You think I should’ve stayed dead, that my ascension should have failed. I have no doubt, Nick, that if I hadn’t sensed your presence here, you’d have struck sooner or later.”

And suddenly, Jenny understood how Ahmanet could imprison Chris and Abdamelek so easily
without giving them fair trials. They were threats that had to be contained. Trial or no, they would
remain imprisoned. Their innocence or guilt was of no consequence. If they posed a threat, it didn’t
matter if they had yet to act on it. Meeting Nick’s gaze head-on, Jenny called to the guards; “guards,
take him down to the dungeons. Put him away from the High Priest of Osiris. Tell the wardens to
keep an eye on him, and don’t let him communicate with the priest.”

“J- Jenny?”

“Ahmanet will pass your sentence when she returns from the front,” Jenny declared calmly. She
was going to throw Nick into prison - but Ahmanet would be the one to keep him there. Much as she
understood it, Jenny didn’t want to be the one to put Nick away for life without a trial. “Until then,
I’m keeping you on ice, so to speak.” She gestured at the guards. “Take him away.”

“Yes, my Queen,” they chorussed, bowing.

Nick’s expression, bewildered and incredulous at first, turned thunderous. “Jenny, what the fuck?!”
He began to struggle against the grip the guards had on his upper arms. “Fucking hell, Jenny, I’m
your friend! I’m just trying to help you!”

Jenny ignored him, shaking her head when Zara tried to offer her some more tea. Sahar was almost
finished washing off the blood; she was now rinsing the last dregs of it off Jenny’s feet, having
already finished with her knees and shins.

“Jenny!” Nick bellowed, all incandescent rage.

“What time is it?” Jenny asked her handmaids.

“Nearing eleven pm, my Queen,” Zara responded.

Jenny hummed. She should get to bed soon. She was tired, and it certainly had been a long enough
day. Not just because she’d been up early, but also emotionally speaking. Not to mention Set; at least
today’s visit to the temple hadn’t ended up with her hurt. Though he had done something funky to
her stomach. She could feel his power there even now, concentrating right where the child should be
developing.

“Jenny!” Nick bellowed again. He was struggling wildly now, kicking at the guards around him as
he tried to yank his arms free from their grips. More rushed over to contain him, but Nick made it
hard for them, flailing and jerking and even biting at the hands trying to restrain him. He was not
silent; he was bellowing in rage, face red, eyes wide and wild.

Then, in a rather spectacular show of human strength, he managed to throw two of the guards off
him with a shout of exertion, rammed his shoulder into a third, and used the scramble to literally
tackle the guard carrying his gun.

Jenny felt her eyes widen as she watched Nick wrestle the weapon away from the guard. “Seize
him!” She shouted, all but jumping to her feet. “Take him down!”

The guards scrambled over. They were seconds too late. Nick took the gun, flicked off the safety,
took aim unerringly, and pulled the trigger.

The guards may have been too late - but Zara wasn’t.

She dropped the cup of tea she’d been holding, threw herself in front of Jenny - then jerked violently,
let out a horrible little noise of shock, dropped to the ground in front of Jenny’s throne like a puppet
with its strings cut, and didn’t get up again.
Half a dozen guards jumped on top of Nick, the gun skidding off to the side, his head hitting the ground with a sharp crack, a low noise of anger cut off as a punch to the side of his head finally put him down.

Jenny ignored it all, scrambling over to Zara. ”Zara?! Fuck, shit,” she looked around, found a guard who wasn’t actively tying up Nick, ”you! Get a doctor in here! Now!”

The guard all but tripped over his feet in his haste to leave the throne room.

Jenny turned her attention back to Zara. She was unconscious, face down on the stone of the dais. There was no blood. Jenny turned her onto her back, scanning her front - at stomach height, there was a dart with a hollow compartment - empty.

”Is tha- Is that poison?” Sahar’s voice was thick with tears. Jenny spared her a glance; Sahar had tears running down her face, fear and horror etched across her expression. Jenny did not blame her. She felt much the same.

Turning back to Zara, she ripped the dart out of Zara’s stomach, throwing it aside, and then ripped Zara’s dress open so she could see the spot where it had hit. There was a small needle mark, and, expanding even as Jenny looked at it, a darkish-grey stain. It grew quickly until it was the size of a pound coin, then started to break and spiderweb into a network of darkened vein-like marks.

”Shit,” she breathed, ”I think that it is poison.”

And she had a feeling she knew what kind of poison, too. Because she knew what Nick had been working on when he’d abandoned her, and she knew that he’d escaped custody with at least part of the recipe in his possession. If she was right - and she was probably right - then she was looking at a dose of the Blood of Osiris. And it had been meant for her. Would’ve hit her, if Zara hadn’t taken the shot for her.

Jenny was used to anger by now. Hot, violent anger, the kind that motivated her to kill and hurt anyone she deemed her enemy or below her. Cold, glacial anger that simmered and made her give terrible, terrible orders. This… this was something new. This was toxic, stinging at her throat, a kind of feeling that was as much anger as it was guilt.

”Where the fuck -” her voice rose to a shout halfway through her sentence, ”is that fucking doctor?!”

No one volunteered an answer. The guards, done with hogtying Nick, stood around looking uncomfortable and guilty. None of them met Jenny’s gaze. She glared at them, rising to her feet, and from the slight burn in her eyes she knew that she was back to double pupils and burning amber.

”Look at me.” Jenny demanded lowly.

About three of the guards dared look up at her.

A little frisson of anger exploded somewhere in Jenny’s ribcage. ”Look at me!” She bellowed. ”I am speaking, and I demand your attention!” She was their Queen, goddammit, and by Set, they would obey her even if she personally had to force them.

That was enough to have all eleven guards look at her, though they had an air around them that suggested they’d rather be anywhere else right now. Like, literally anywhere else.

”Are you,” Jenny seethed, ”all incompetent?! You are palace guards! Yet you are incapable of properly restraining an intruder?!”
‘‘My Queen -’’ one guard started.

‘‘Silence! I am speaking. You do not do anything except listen. Understood?!’’

The guard nodded hastily and didn’t even dare open his mouth to apologize.

Jenny glared at them, watching them flinch under the burning amber of her gaze. ‘‘I have never been more disappointed in the defence of this palace than I am now. Nor have I doubted the competency of its defenders as much.’’ That had them flinching in shame, to her vicious satisfaction. She drew herself up to her full height, fists clenching. ‘‘If my handmaiden dies from this poison, I will have all of your heads on spikes, do you understand me?’’

That way, she’d at least have plenty of excess life force around to resurrect Zara; if her handmaiden died today, she sure as hell wasn’t staying dead, Jenny would make sure of that. And she didn’t care if she had to slaughter all the guards in front of her to make Zara live; that was a sacrifice she was quite happy to make.

One of them was stupid enough to start; ‘‘The Pharaoh -’’

‘‘Is not here,’’ Jenny growled. ‘‘And that means I am in charge. My word is law.’’ She glared at the stupid one until his shoulders were hunched somewhere around his ears. ‘‘You are all suspended from duty, effective immediately. You will go to your quarters and you will remain there until called for. I do not want to see you. I do not want to hear you. If my handmaiden survives, I will hand you over to Ahmanet so she can deal with you. If my handmaiden dies… you die as well. Understood?’’

No response.

‘‘Is that understood?!’’

‘‘Yes, my Queen!’’ They chorussed, all but snapping into a salute.

‘‘Then get him,’’ she pointed at Nick, ‘‘to the dungeons, and thank Set that I am merciful and have not killed you on the spot!’’

The speed with which they moved was enough to suggest a real attempt at teleportation.

‘‘And get me a fucking doctor already!’’

A servant went scrambling after the guards.
Chapter 62

Chapter Summary

Zara gets to a doctor, Sahar is shaken, and Jenny is not done showing her teeth.

Chapter Notes

Sooo... Jenny is kicking ass, isn't she? Honestly, half of the last chapter was a surprise even to me, so I'm very pleased it turned out fairly coherent. And yes, the guards were fucking imbeciles. I did not plan it that way. However, I ran out of ideas and out of time to make the deadline, so stupid guards it was.

I'm sure you've noticed the chapter count has changed again, too... I'm not even going to bother anymore. Just assume that it's going to change again, because planning is not my strength.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

The poison had spread to cover an area the size of two hands by the time a doctor came rushing in. It was Ismail Abidaoud, the same doctor who'd attended Jenny after Set had infused his magic in the child she was carrying.

“'You're late,'” Jenny all but snarled at him. She pointed at Zara, who was still unconscious on the floor, pale and sweaty and breathing shallowly. “'Take care of her.'”

Ismail hurried over. “'What happened to her, my Queen?'”

“'She was poisoned by an intruder.'” Jenny said shortly. “'Fix it.'”

She’d do it herself, if she had a source of life force around to fuel her magic, but she had a sinking feeling that she couldn’t do much here. This was the Blood of Osiris, she was sure of it, and if she was right, it was designed to kill people like her. She probably couldn’t heal this if she tried, simply by virtue of being what she was. And it was designed to work even with her regenerative powers. No, Jenny knew deep in her bones that this was beyond her reach. And she did not like that. At all.

Ismail was already rummaging through his bag, taking out a stethoscope to check Zara’s heartbeat and lungs. “'What kind of poison?'”

“'I suspect it to be the Blood of Osiris.'”

That had the doctor looking up sharply. “'Highness?'”

“'The shot was meant for me. She jumped in front of me and took it instead.'”

“'Then we owe her a great debt,'” Ismail said after a second of thinking that over. “'I swear, my Queen. I shall do all that is within my power to save her.'”
“See that you do.” Jenny left it unsaid that she might do something to him if he didn’t. She didn’t think that she needed to verbalize that. And Ismail had, so far, not earned her ire. In the grand total of times she’d seen him, which was twice, today included, he had only shown respect and dedication to his work as a doctor.

“I will have to move her to the infirmary, my Queen. I have more equipment there.”

“Is it safe to move her?”

“Yes, my Queen. She’s a little bruised from falling, but moving her should not harm her further.”

Jenny nodded sharply and unceremoniously stooped down, scooping Zara into her arms bridal style. Her handmaiden was very light, but Jenny had super strength, so maybe to a normal person Zara would’ve been heavier. “Sahar, come.”

Sahar scrambled to her feet and followed after Jenny like a lost puppy. Ismail was barely a few feet ahead, leading the way to the infirmary.

As Jenny stalked down the hallways, eyes a burning amber and with a face like thunder, she was not surprised to see people scrambling to get out of the way. She probably didn’t look very approachable right now. She didn’t feel very approachable either, with Zara’s head lolling limply against her shoulder and a mess of darkened veins slowly creeping across her torso. Once she was sure that Zara would be fine, she was going to have to go down to the dungeons and have a long talk with Nick. He had some explaining to do. And if he was lucky, Jenny wouldn’t make him eat his own amputated fingers. Said fingers would not be taken off cleanly, or with anaesthetics. Jenny wasn’t feeling that charitable at the moment. If Zara died, Nick would pay. If Zara survived, Nick would still pay. Simple as that.

The infirmary was mostly empty, save for a young man who was having his hand bandaged by a nurse. They looked up when Jenny stormed in, and proceeded to stare until she disappeared into the private room Ismail pointed out to her. It was modern and well-stocked, with what looked like power lines disappearing into the wall - generators, Jenny presumed as carefully laid Zara on the hospital bed and then stood back. The palace didn’t have permanent electricity yet, so generators, or maybe solar panels on the roof, was likely to be the source that powered the few medical machines in the room.

“I will have to do some tests,” Ismail said, already snapping on some gloves. “Blood tests, to see if we can isolate the poison from her blood and have a cure synthesized, as well as to find out what it’s doing to her system.”

Jenny nodded, watching as he prepared a syringe and some tubes.

“Depending on how her condition progresses, we might have to move her to Luxor for more in-depth tests,” Ismail continued. “A CT-scan, for instance, to ensure her organs are functioning correctly and the poison is not affecting her brain.”

Jenny felt her brows furrowing, worry churning in her gut. “Is that likely?”

Ismail took a moment to answer, concentrated on carefully drawing several vials of blood from the crook of Zara’s elbow. “I… do not know, my Queen. It depends on the poison. But I do not know what the Blood of Osiris contains.”

Jenny frowned deeper. The Blood of Osiris. She knew little about it, except for the fact that the Priests of Osiris had used it five millennia ago to weaken Ahmanet enough to capture her, and had
imprisoned her after that. That, and the text she’d read in the tomb. “It’s a distilled poison with a mercury base,” she told Ismail. “That’s all I know.”

“Mercury is toxic.” Sahar’s voice was shaky. She was pressed against the wall next to the door, face pale enough that she looked close to passing out, hands pressed into her stomach in a vain attempt to hide how much they were shaking. She looked about a second away from taking an involuntary nap.

“It is,” Ismail agreed, looking worried. “Very much so.”

Jenny nibbled on her lower lip. “What can we expect?”

“If she survives heavy metal poisoning?” Ismail shrugged helplessly. “I truly do not know.”

Sahar let out a little desperate whimper, staggering against the wall like her legs were going to give out on her.

“I will have to put her on drugs,” said Ismail. “There are specific ones to help with heavy metal poisoning. It’s called chelation therapy. I’ll give her an IV with the drugs, which will bind to the metal in her blood. It’ll then get flushed out when she pees. We’ll get a catheter situated for that, in case she doesn’t wake up in time.”

“Do you have the drugs in stock?”

“I will have to check the stores. But it is unlikely. Cases of heavy metal poisoning are fairly rare, my Queen.”

“Then get some into the palace asap,” Jenny told him. “I want Zara to have the best care available. And send the bill to me.”

“Yes, my Queen.” Ismail agreed immediately. “Forgive me for asking, but if I may have some space…”

Jenny took the hint. She nodded curtly. “Remember, Ismail. The best care you can get her. Cost is no objective.”

“I understand.”

“Good. Sahar, let’s go.” Jenny gently took hold of Sahar’s upper arm and led her out of the room. Sahar followed like a lost puppy. She was definitely not in any state to accompany Jenny to the dungeons. In fact, Jenny was pretty sure Sahar was in any state to do much of anything right now. She’d grown up with Zara, seeing her shot and poisoned was probably enough to cause some serious trauma.

Instead of going down to the dungeons, Jenny led Sahar to the royal quarters, only pausing to tell a servant to send up a bottle of whiskey and a pot of tea. By the time Jenny and Sahar arrived, the drinks did too. Jenny poured Sahar two fingers of scotch and waited impatiently for her to drink it. When she did, she spent a few moments sputtering at the burn, and, a little more aware, accepted a cup of tea as well.

“Drink that,” Jenny said, “and then you’re going to go get some rest. You can use my bed for the time being.”

Sahar looked up. “My Queen…”

“Just drink your tea.”
Sahar drank her tea. She didn’t seem to have enough fight in her left to protest.

Once she was finished with her cup, ten minutes or so later, Jenny made her borrow a night shift and all but plunked Sahar into her bed. It took less than two minutes for her handmaiden to be out for the count, just as Jenny had suspected.

Well.

She supposed it was time to go see Nick. And, for his sake, he better have a decent explanation for this. Then he might get out of this mess alive. Possibly. Maybe.

She made sure Sahar was truly asleep and swept back out of the royal quarters. A servant was waiting just outside the doors.

“Keep an eye on my handmaiden,” Jenny told him. “If she wakes up, make sure she eats something, and tell her she has the rest of the night off. Tomorrow, too, if she wants.”

And Set, didn’t that remind her that it was late? It had to be around midnight by now, easily. Dammit. She’d wanted to go to bed at a decent time so she’d have at least a chance at a decent night’s sleep.

“Yes, Highness,” the servant agreed immediately. “Is there anything else I can do?”

Jenny shook her head. ”Not at the moment, thank you.”

“I am happy to serve, Highness.”

Jenny nodded in acknowledgement and made her way down the corridor. It was a little strange to walk on her own; she’d gotten used to having a shadow at either shoulder, and Ahmanet at her side. Jenny felt very acutely lonely all of a sudden. How strange that she’d gotten used to almost never being alone so quickly, when she’d spent the past thirteen years working basically on her own to find Ahmanet. She hadn’t had a work partner, and relationships had been few and far between. At some point she’d just gotten used to being on her own, be it in her apartment or somewhere in a library, looking for clues. Yet, in the time she’d been at the palace, that had been swept away and replaced with almost constant companionship, and somehow, Jenny did not mind that at all.

She’d been a solitary person for most of her life. Now, suddenly, she was not. And she didn’t think she liked the sensation of being lonely much at all.

She shook her head at herself, marching down the corridors quickly. There were more guards now, patrolling the hallways, checking every corner and alcove, like they bloody well should’ve been doing since the day of the battle. Jenny was not going to let that go easily. They hadn’t lost any guards. It wasn’t like there had been too little manpower for a full search. The fact that there obviously had not been a search was inexcusable, really.

Once she’d spoken with Nick, and had had a couple of hours of sleep, Jenny was going to have to go yell at the generals for that. It was about time she told them she would not tolerate mistakes like that anymore from now on. They’d do their job, or she’d kick them out. Simple as that.

The guards hurried to open the barred doors to the dungeons as Jenny approached, looking straight ahead and not meeting her eyes. Jenny didn’t bother to acknowledge them as she descended the stairs. They were not why she was here. And quite frankly, they should probably be glad for that at this point.

The head warden scurried over as soon as Jenny’s feet touched the floor of the dungeons. “My
Queen, how may I help?’’

‘‘I wish to see the prisoner that was brought in.’’ Jenny said. ‘‘Is he awake?’’

The head warden nodded. ‘‘Yes, Highness. He woke up a few minutes after arriving here.’’

‘‘Is he coherent?’’

‘‘We had to gag him to stop his shouting, Highness.’’

Jenny nodded curtly in understanding. Good to know Nick was in a good enough condition to talk. She had some questions she wanted answered. ‘‘Which cell?’’

‘‘The fourth on the left.’’

‘‘Thank you.’’ Jenny turned from the head warden and made her way over to the correct cell, not bothering to send away the guards flanking her. Apparently, even with solid metal bars between her and Nick, they wished to have at least two people there to protect her. Four if she counted the guards on either side of the cell, which she did. She hoped these were more competent than the fools she’d benched earlier. Jenny was still of half a mind to just have them killed so the palace wouldn’t suffer under their stupidity any longer than it already had. Seriously. Not restraining a prisoner and leaving his weapon loaded and out for the taking? Even a child would’ve known to do that. Jenny was disgusted. And also kinder than Ahmanet, because Jenny knew that her Chosen would’ve personally murdered those guards on the spot, no exceptions.

Nick was in the cell the head warden had pointed out to her, no longer trussed up like a turkey, but definitely far more restrained than he had been forty minutes ago. His ankles were shackled together, with only a short chain allowing him to shuffle a little, linked to an anchor in the floor. His hands were shackled together in front of his belly, with a chain going around his waist so he couldn’t bring his arms up more than maybe a few inches. There was yet another chain between the shackles on his wrists and the shackles on his ankles.

Definitely better restrained. This was a situation he wouldn’t be able to wrestle his way out of. And there certainly weren’t any weapons within arm’s reach - the swords of the wardens were on the other side of the bars, and the chain in the floor was so short Nick probably couldn’t reach the bars anyway. To finish it off, a gag was stuffed into Nick’s mouth, bound behind his head tightly enough that it had to hurt. The same way the shackles looked just a tad too tight to be comfortable. For as much as shackles could be comfortable at all, anyway.

He was awake, glaring impotently at the guards on either side of the cell. When he spotted Jenny, he perked up, the gag making his words incomprehensible.

‘‘Can we take out the gag?’’ Jenny asked one of the guards. ‘‘I’d like to speak to him.’’

‘‘It is possible, my Queen,’’ the guard she’d addressed responded carefully, not meeting her eyes, ‘‘but he has proven himself to be both loud and rude. We would not wish you to be offended.’’

Jenny smiled a little. ‘‘I grew up in modern London. I can handle rudeness. Take the gag out.’’

‘‘Your wish is my command,’’ said the guard. ‘‘Please excuse me while I retrieve the key of the cell, Highness.’’

Jenny waved him off, part of her relieved that these guards at least made sure Nick was incapable of easily getting to the means to open the cell, turning her attention back to Nick. ‘‘Do me a favour, Nick, and at least try to keep this civil. I don’t feel like having a shouting match.’’
Nick stared at her, face twitching between anger and something else. Jenny honestly wasn’t sure if he was going to act like an adult or not. Though, considering that this was Nick Morton, it was always a toss up if he was going to behave like an adult. In the time Jenny had known him, he had never shown anything more than juvenile asshole, with an occasional improvement to somewhat less-juvenile asshole. On very rare occasions, he even managed to be somewhat decent, but that had been before Jenny had ascended. Either way, he was a jerk the vast majority of the time. She wasn’t actually sure if he was capable of being a functional person for longer than a few hours at a time.

The guard returned with the key of the cell, swiftly opening the door. He made sure to hand the key to one of the other guards before entering the cell, a second guard on his heels. The second guard grabbed Nick by the upper arm, keeping him in place and unable to lunge (for as far as the chains would’ve allowed that, anyway, which was not far at all) so the first guard could undo the gag without having to worry about being attacked.

Definitely more competent than the idiots from before. Jenny might have to promote these guards to the position the idiots had occupied up until forty-five minutes to go. From what she understood, palace guards had a slightly higher rank than palace wardens. It would come with nicer-looking khopesh blades (the quality would be equal, but they’d have slightly more embellishments) and a slight pay rise. Definitely something to consider, anyway. These four guards would probably be enough to replace the eleven from earlier. Quality over quantity, after all.

“Jenny!” Nick exclaimed as soon as the gag was out of his mouth, voice slightly hoarse. “Are you here to release me? I knew you’d change your mind!”

Jenny had not changed her mind. She was here for answers, nothing more. “Why did you do it, Nick?”

Nick faltered. “What?”

“Why’d you do it?” Jenny repeated. “You realize that this could kill Zara, right? That poison has a mercury base, and she’s only human.”

Nick stared at her. “Who’s Zara?”

Jenny gritted her teeth at the sudden surge of outrage. She was of half a mind to rip the bars out of the ground and use them to teach Nick a lesson. Her voice came out sharp and poisonous. “The girl you shot. My handmaiden. Does that ring any bells?”

“Oh, her.” Nick blinked. “She survived?”

“Barely,” Jenny growled. By Set, she’d thought she couldn’t hate Nick more than she’d done when he’d abandoned her, but apparently she could. Zara was important to her. Very much so. Just like Sahar was. And both had been hurt today; one physically, the other emotionally. Having Nick act like Zara’s life and Sahar’s wellbeing were worth nothing was enough to have Jenny shaking with the urge to rip off his head and use it as a football. Her eyes burned with a renewed vengeance.

Nick flinched a little. “I didn’t mean to shoot her, Jenny.”

“No,” Jenny agreed. “You meant to shoot me.”

The four guards shuffled, dark glares fixing on Nick. Yet, they didn’t dare say anything in the face of Jenny’s burning amber irises.

“It’s not what you think,” Nick insisted, “I wasn’t going to hurt you, Jenny, I promise. I was only trying to help you.”
“You were going to poison me,” Jenny corrected, quietly seething, “with a poison that would have killed me if it had gotten into my system. You attempted to murder me. And it is only because Zara sacrificed herself that I am standing here.”

“Murder?!” Nick balked. “I was trying to cure you!”

“Goddammit Nick! There is no cure! I am ascended, and it’s going to stay that way!”

“But you’re wrong! There is a cure! I found it! Abdamelek and I, we found it!”

Jenny froze. “Abdamelek? He had a hand in this?”

Nick froze too. He looked like he regretted everything that had come out of his mouth in the past thirty seconds. “Shit.”

“Get the priest over here,” Jenny hissed at one of her guards. “Now.”

“Abdamelek is here?!” Nick yelped. “Since when?!”

Jenny lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug, only barely paying attention to Nick as she waited for Abdamelek to be delivered to her, and didn’t answer. Nick didn’t need to know that she had been the one to send a team to Dakhla and destroy the temple there.

Two guards literally dragged Abdamelek over. His condition had worsened since the last time Jenny had seen him, his broken shoulder gone uncared for. The bruises and cuts from his capture were on their way to healing, but the shackles around his ankles had taken their toll, and his feet were swollen and starting to show signs of black spots around his toes. The lack of care had seen him losing weight, too. He was in no state to walk by himself.

The guards roughly dumped Abdamelek on the ground at Jenny’s feet, remaining on either side of them even though he was nowhere near healthy enough to try to escape.

Nick looked horrified. “Jenny, what the hell?!”

Jenny ignored him. With a gesture of her hand, the guards still in the cell stuffed the gag back into his mouth to keep him quiet.

“Abdamelek,” she said, tone faux-pleasant. “Guess what Nick here just told me.”

He stared up at her, revealing the eye that had been swollen shut. It had a milky film over the pupil. Something, perhaps damage, perhaps infection, had blinded him in one eye. “I do not know what Mr. Morton told you, Jennifer.”

“It turns out that you were complicit in his assassination attempt of this evening,” Jenny said, watching him cringe at the falsely cheery tone of her voice. “An attempt, that, incidentally, involved the Blood of Osiris. Isn’t that interesting?”

“Very interesting, Jennifer,” Abdamelek responded weakly, not quite meeting the aggressive yellow of Jenny’s gaze.

Jenny wrinkled her nose. “That’s ‘my Queen’ to you, Abdamelek. Or haven’t my wardens yet managed to teach you that you’re in my home now?”

He dropped his gaze, apparently beaten enough that he didn’t protest. “They have been… kind, my Queen.”
"Yes," Jenny said, "so I can see." Kind was not the word she’d use. In fact, it was totally opposite of the word she’d use. ‘Cruel’ would be more appropriate. Though she supposed that Abdamelek could have been treated worse, and after the people who’d brought him in, he’d probably expected it. In fact, he’d probably expected to be killed on the spot when he arrived. Still being alive today had to have topped his expectations rather easily. Even if he wasn’t a hundred percent anymore.

He’d been cowed more easily than Jenny had expected, though.

"Did you know Nick was in the palace?"

"No, my Queen."

Jenny pursed her lips. Not the answer she’d been looking for. "Did you know that Nick was planning to come to the palace?"

"...No, my Queen."

One of the guards snarled, kicking at Abdamelek’s broken shoulder. He let out a howl of pain. Muffled noises of outrage came from Nick’s direction.

"Liar!" The guard snarled down at the priest.

"Quite," Jenny agreed. "I think you’re not being honest, Abdamelek. Care to change your answer?"

Abdamelek panted against the stone floor, not answering.

Jenny looked at one of the guards. "What are his current rations?"

"Standard, my Queen," the guard responded immediately, "as per the Pharaoh’s orders."

"Take out a third." If Abdamelek was going to lie to her, he was going to suffer the consequences for it. Two could play at this game.

"As you wish, Highness," agreed the guard.

Jenny turned her attention back to the priest prone at her feet. "Well? Did you know that Nick was planning to come to the palace?"

"...It had come up in conversation," Abdamelek finally mumbled.

Jenny felt a snarl grow on her face. "And I assume that attempting to assassinate me also came up in conversation, then."

"Not an assassination. We tweaked the recipe of the Blood. It was not meant to kill you, but to cure you."

That, she did not believe for a second. "That’s funny, because Zara wasn’t doing too well the last time I saw her."

"It’s a cure," Abdamelek insisted, still not looking up. "So you can be human again."

Jenny crouched down, clasping his jaw in her hand and forcing him to look at her. "I do not want to be human again. I am ascended. I am beyond humanity. Anyone who tries to undo that will suffer my wrath."
Abdamelek’s undamaged eye filled with sorrow. “So you have made your choice.”

“I have.” Jenny said. “And now you’re going to tell me what you did with the recipe of the Blood, and the recipe of this cure, and the names of anyone else who has access to it.”

Abdamelek stared at her. “What will you do if I don’t?”

Jenny already knew what she was going to do. It wasn’t pretty. In fact, it was probably one of the most horrifying things she’d ever do, if it came to that. “If you don’t,” she said, voice measured, “I will tell the bounty hunters currently hunting your priests that I will quadruple their pay if they bring the priests in alive. And then I will take those priests, and I will tear open their throats in ritual sacrifice to Set. Their souls will never reach the afterlife, I can assure you that. They’ll be Set’s playthings for the rest of eternity.”

Abdamelek opened his mouth and spilled everything Jenny wanted to know.
Chapter 63

Chapter Summary

Jenny deals with Nick, wakes up the next morning with the results of Set's magic from during the ritual showing, and there's a development in Zara's condition.

Chapter Notes

Well, I've managed to get it done on time. Yay me! I didn't write much last week, so I did half of this chapter this morning - pumped out a good 1700 words out in the past two hours, so if it seems rushed, that's why. Either way, I've not missed the deadline of this week, so I guess we're good here.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Once Abdamelek was back in his cell, spirit shattered for at least a short while, Jenny looked at the guards. One of them had managed to find some paper and a pencil in a pocket, and had dutifully written down the information Abdamelek had provided.

As a reward for Abdamelek for telling her what she wanted to know, Jenny had ordered the guards who returned him to his cell to get a doctor to look him over, maybe give him some painkillers or something as a temporary relief. He'd done what she wanted him to do, and Jenny wasn’t a complete monster. Also, she did not want him to die yet - he could be useful in the future. No, best to keep him alive for a little longer. Some medical attention would help with that.

"Get that to the generals," Jenny said to him. "Tell them that I want a team put together to chase that down. I want results within the week, no exceptions."

"Yes, Highness," the guard responded immediately, already backing away. As soon as he was close to the stairs, a warden broke loose from the small group there to replace him near Jenny. Four guards was apparently the minimum. Still better than those idiots from earlier.

Nick’s horrified gaze all but burned a hole into the side of Jenny’s head. He’d stopped trying to yell through the gag halfway through Abdamelek’s confession and had since settled for abhorred silence. Jenny kind of preferred that, honestly. It was annoying when he tried to scream expletives that just ended up as garbled noises anyway. And what he did have to say probably wasn’t anything productive, so.

Yet, Jenny still had questions for Nick. Plenty of them. This conversation was far from over. And like Abdamelek, Nick would answer her questions, one way or another. Preferably without violence or too many threats, but that was something Jenny was willing to compromise on if she had to. The end result would be the same, regardless; answers.

"Take his gag out," Jenny told the guard next to Nick.
Nick stared at her as if she’d just spontaneously grown a second head. Or learned how to breathe fire. Maybe both. Either way, she had definitely changed a lot in his eyes, and it was clear he did not appreciate it very much. Jenny was of half a mind to tell the guard to punch Nick if he got too antagonistic; she wasn’t in the mood to be yelled at right now. Not after the night she’d had. She just wanted answers, and then check on Zara before going to bed for some seriously overdue rest. She didn’t even care if Sahar was sleeping there also. It wasn’t like she wasn’t used to having her around. And that way she wouldn’t be lonely, at least, because it was going to be very strange to sleep without Ahmanet next to her.

“Jenny,” Nick croaked, voice hoarse from screaming and something very, very sad in his tone, “what did you do?”

“What had to be done.” Jenny said. “And I have some more questions for you as well. I suggest you answer them.”

He stared at her, shoulders slumping, something in his eyes going out.

“Are there any more intruders in the palace, Nick?”

After a moment, he shook his head. “No, Jenny. I came alone.”

“And if I order a search, will I find that you’ve lied to me?”


Jenny privately decided to have an extra search done anyway, just in case. She couldn’t trust Nick. And she couldn’t trust the guards to do their job right the first time either. It was probably a good measure to have a second search done. Maybe a third, depending on the outcome of the second search. It was quickly becoming apparent that even within the palace, Jenny could not be too careful. With two attacks and an intruder gone unnoticed, it was not safe even behind the walls of the palace.

Ahmanet was not going to be pleased once she returned from the front. In fact, she was probably going to be murderously angry. And Jenny just happened to know that there were about a dozen good targets around for Ahmanet to take that anger out on. That is, if Jenny didn’t get to them first. Though Ahmanet no doubt was aware of the fact something had happened - the link was strong, and Jenny’s emotions had been all over the place. And Jenny was sure that if she dared pay attention to the link, let it into her mind instead of shielding it off as much as possible, she’d be overwhelmed by worry in response. She’d let Ahmanet in when she was in bed and away from this whole mess for a bit. Now was not the time. She had to interrogate Nick first.

“Is there more of the poison?”

“We only had enough to make one dose.” Nick said defeatedly.

“But the recipe is still out there,” Jenny stated. Because she didn’t think Nick and Abdamelek would’ve destroyed something like that if they weren’t absolutely sure they wouldn’t need it again. And Abdamelek had told her it was, hidden, ironically, in Dakhla. As if he’d known Jenny wouldn’t have thought to have that place sacked again. Well. That was a mistake she wasn’t going to make a second time.

“Yes,” Nick sighed.

“No matter,” Jenny said, shrugging it off. She knew she looked far more nonchalant than she felt. But she wasn’t about to show Nick how uncomfortable the idea of a poison that could kill her being out there was. “My men will find it. And they’ll make sure it hasn’t been spread around.”
Nick stared at her as if he didn’t even recognize her anymore. To be fair, Jenny had changed. A lot. She was no longer the person she had been when Ahmanet had been unearthed. She wasn’t even the person who’d ascended to living godhood anymore. To someone who hadn’t seen her since their short stay at the Temple of Osiris, surely it would be an extreme change of personality.

That didn’t mean Jenny was going to cut Nick any slack, though. He’d done too much damage for her to show him any measure of mercy anymore. Zara had been poisoned - that was enough for Jenny to want to sentence Nick to death on the spot. The fact that the dart had been aimed at her would surely have Ahmanet baying for his blood. For as much as she hadn’t already wanted him dead, anyway.

Jenny sighed, suddenly exhausted and no longer in the mood to deal with this. “I’m going to leave you in here, Nick,” she said, “until Ahmanet comes back. She can deal with you.”

His eyes widened in horror. “Jenny, wait-”

With a gesture of Jenny’s hand, the guard stuffed the gag back into Nick’s mouth. He tried to yell through it, voice muffled, twisting against his chains in a futile attempt to get free. All it did was make them rattle and dig into his skin more - Nick was too well restrained. He was not going to be able to get out of this easily.

“Keep a minimum of two guards on him at all times,” Jenny said as the cell was locked again. “I don’t want any chance of an escape.”

“Yes, my Queen.” A guard agreed. “Anything else?”

“Give him two-thirds rations like the priest. You can take out the gag when he calms down, but if he gets too loud or rude, feel free to shut him up again.” Jenny instructed. “If he says anything of interest, report it to me.”

“Of course, Highness.”

“And let me know about the priest’s condition after the doctor has looking him over,” she continued, ignoring the muffled exclamations coming from Nick’s cell as she began to walk away from it. “I want him kept alive still. Make sure he’s coherent.”

“Of course,” the guard repeated.

“If necessary you can add painkillers or whatever to his rations. Enough to keep him going,” She left the ‘but not enough to have him healthy’ unsaid - she didn’t think she needed to add that for it to be understood. The guards here were smarter than the idiots Jenny was still contemplating killing. As it was, their continued existence hinged on Zara’s survival. If Jenny’s handmaiden died, she damn well wasn’t going to be the only one. Though she probably would be the only one to be resurrected. Jenny wasn’t going to waste magic on a bunch of idiots who couldn’t even remember to restrain a prisoner.

Jenny nodded at the head warden as she passed him, ascending the stairs out of the dungeons. It was about time she got some sleep. She was tired, and it had been an exceptionally long day. Going to bed and finally getting some rest sounded divine.

She made a brief detour past the infirmary. The door to Zara’s room was closed, but Jenny could hear Ismail speaking to nurses even through the door. Jenny hesitated for a moment, wondering if she should disturb them, before deciding that she should probably just let them do their job and save Zara. She could visit in the morning, when she’d slept some, and take Sahar along too.
Jenny left the infirmary again without being seen, an odd, heavy feeling in her stomach. It had been a long, long day. And not one she cared to repeat, to be honest. She just wanted to go to sleep at this point, and hope that the next day would be better. More so, she wanted to forget the fact that her handmaiden was fighting for her life and that her former kind-of friend was currently locked up in the dungeons after attempting to assassinate her. A long day indeed.

Jenny ignored the guards patrolling the hallways, entering the royal chambers with nary a nod of acknowledgement to the men guarding the doors. Inside it was dimly lit, but the light was warm and inviting, and someone had put hot water bowls with fragrant oils on various surfaces, so it even smelled soothing. Right now, Jenny appreciated it more than she could really articulate. She really felt like she could use some simple comforts like those.

Sahar was still asleep, which Jenny also appreciated. She didn’t know if she had the emotional fortitude to provide support right now. Instead, she ducked into the bathroom, wiping off her makeup, trying not to look at her reflection. Her eyes were back to normal again, except for the little flecks of yellow still visible in her irises. As she brushed her teeth, she noted that she looked as tired as she felt. Sleep was definitely a necessity. Preferably quite a few hours of it. As many as possible.

Jenny shuffled back into the bedroom, shucking her clothes and sliding on a nightshift before tucking herself into bed with a deep sense of gratitude. Yes. Bed. Rest. That was exactly what she needed right now. Sahar didn’t even stir, too out of it to notice her presence. That was fine with Jenny. She didn’t really want to be fussed over right now. She just wanted to rest.

Yet, sleep did not come easily. Jenny found herself staring at the ceiling, slowly peeling away the barrier she’d placed to shield off the link. Ahmanet’s emotions crashed into her like a wave, drowning her in worry and concern. With the day she’d had, it was overwhelming. Which was exactly what she didn’t need right now. Jenny stubbornly bit back tears, trying to push reassurance across the link. She didn’t think it worked very well. Still, Ahmanet responded, consciously pulling back some of the worry and replacing it with simple, wordless warmth instead. That… that was nice. Much better than the worry. Jenny couldn’t deal with worry right now. She just couldn’t.

She didn’t even have to try to send a wave of gratitude back.

With the warmth from Ahmanet’s side steadily lapping at her mind, Jenny found her eyes closing slowly, exhaustion finally spilling over. She thought she had the right to be exhausted. Seeing Ahmanet off, making an animal sacrifice and interacting with Set, seeing Zara intercept an assassination attempt on her behalf, interrogating Abdamelek and Nick - it had been an exceptionally long and draining day. Even, apparently, for someone who was ascended. Jenny wondered how she’d have fared if she’d still been human - not nearly as well, she figured. Then again, when she’d been human, she hadn’t been quite as hardened as she was now. She shook it out of her head - that was not something to dwell on right now.

She turned onto her side, back to Sahar, drawing the covers up to her ears. She was asleep in a matter of seconds.
The second thing Jenny noticed was that Sahar was still in bed with her, apparently not yet having woken up. Jenny did not blame her. Sahar had also had a hard day. She’d grown up with Zara, for fuck’s sake – it was only normal for her to be completely out of it.

The third thing Jenny noticed was the result of the magic Set had fed into her abdomen during the protection ritual. It was hard not to notice, considering the fact Jenny found herself with a baby belly all of a sudden.

Well.

Fuck.

Because that was exactly what she needed right now. A baby belly. Goddammit.

Jenny raked a hand through her hair, staring down at her swollen abdomen and wondering how this would affect the pregnancy. From the looks of it, it’d be over even faster than Ahmanet had predicted. Jenny wasn’t sure to be happy or upset about that. On one hand, the faster this child was out of her, the better. On the other hand, once it was out of her, she had to care for it, probably while Set already possessed it, at least until it was big enough that self-sufficiency was a possibility.

Jenny didn’t want to sound uncaring towards children, because she didn’t mind children as long as they weren’t hers, but that was something she was absolutely not looking forward to. There was a reason she’d never had children in her thirty-five years of life, and also a reason why she’d never planned to have them. Jenny was firmly of the mindset that children should only be had when the parents absolutely wanted them, no matter what. Having children was a choice between ‘fuck yes’ or ‘absolutely not’. If you weren’t totally sure you wanted them and were ready to accept them regardless of whether they were born healthy or sick and ready to accept them regardless of how they would turn out, then, quite frankly, you shouldn’t have children.

Jenny had never found herself truly wanting a child, so she hadn’t had one. Fuck social expectations and all that shit. Social expectations weren’t a good enough reason to have children. Because children were a responsibility you couldn’t back out of. Once you had them, you had them, and you couldn’t say ‘oh, no, thanks, I changed my mind’ halfway through.

Yet, here she was, with a baby belly reminiscent of probably the fifth month of pregnancy, with a child Jenny didn’t want stuck inside it. Because apparently this was her life.

Jenny was quite happy with her life as it was now, she had the woman she loved, financial stability, a whole palace of people to cater to her whims - but everything had its downsides. For her, it just happened to be the fact that she carried the unwanted child of a god she feared and hated in equal measures.

At this point, Jenny was just grateful that it had been magic channelled through Ahmanet that did the actual impregnating, and not Set himself. Because Jenny was fairly sure that that was the plot of a horror movie right there. And also that she wasn’t male and destined to have her body stolen and used as meat suit instead. Silver linings, right? Jenny just had to look for them a bit.

She tore her gaze away from her swollen stomach, deciding that she should maybe go take a nice, soothing bath and ignore the world for a little bit. Today was promising to be a long day also. She had to see how Zara was doing, of course, and make sure Sahar wasn’t going to have a mental breakdown right there in her bedroom. Considering everything had had time to sink in a little, Sahar was likely past the shock and about to head into the minefield of actual emotion regarding the whole situation. It probably wasn’t going to be pretty. On top of that, Jenny would probably have to deal with the whole pregnancy thing, because there was no way people were going to miss the fact that
she was suddenly walking around with a football in her stomach. And also, today was the day of the
attacks on Cairo and various locations along the Suez canal. So that was probably going to provoke a
response out of the current government; the general were expecting a siege of the palace, and Jenny
had a feeling that they might be right on the point. People had doubtlessly noticed the army leaving
the palace, and their arrival at Cairo at the very least. The connection wasn’t hard to make.

Already, Jenny wasn’t looking forward to today.

First, though, a bath.

Jenny slid out of bed and padded into the bathroom, shedding her night shift and dropping it on the
floor. It’d be picked up by someone. That was one of the perks Jenny had quickly gotten used to -
she hated cleaning.

She slid into the water of the less hot bath, not bothering with any oils or soaps or whatever, and laid
her head back against the edge of the bath, letting out a deep sigh. The water was lovely. And the
silence was nice too.

After a while, there was the soft pad of footsteps on the elaborately tiled floor.

“Highness,” Sahar murmured, voice hoarse as she knelt at Jenny’s shoulder, “I apologize for
sleeping so long. Allow me to assist you.”

“You have the day off, Sahar.” Jenny said. “Yesterday was a shitshow. You need some time for
yourself.”

Sahar’s breath hitched, and she took a few deep, audible breaths to stay calm. “With your
permission, my Queen,” her voice trembled, “I would prefer not to take the day off.”

Jenny glanced up at her; Sahar was pale, eyes red-rimmed and puffy. She looked like a stiff breeze
could snap her in half. Really, she should take the day off - but perhaps distraction was good too, so
Jenny nodded. “If you wish. But let me know if it becomes too much, then you can still get the rest
of the day off.”

“As you wish, Highness,” Sahar all but sighed in relief. “Shall I wash your hair?”

Jenny nodded. “Yes. I’d like the jasmine scented soap today.”

“Of course,” Sahar agreed, getting up to retrieve the shampoo and soaps.

After her bath and a quick breakfast, Jenny decided it was time to go see how Zara was doing.

Sahar was still pale, but she seemed eager to go see her best friend, so that was something at least.
Jenny would very much like it if Sahar felt a little better; she did care for her handmaidens, both of
them, and she didn’t like that Sahar was so subdued.

But as they approached the infirmary, a servant came running down the hallway. ”My Queen,” he
all but skidded to a stop. “Doctor Abidaoud requests your presence in the infirmary. It’s about your
handmaiden.”

Jenny frowned. ”What about her?”

“I do not know, my Queen. All I know is that doctor Abidaoud wishes to see you urgently.”
“Off with you, then,” Jenny said, waving the servant away. “I will go see him immediately.”

“Highness…” Sahar didn’t sound too well.

“We will see,” Jenny said determinedly, “and in the meantime, hope for the best.” But there was a sinking feeling in her stomach, and she had a feeling she already knew why Ismail wanted to see her so urgently.

She hurried the rest of the way, speed-walking more than anything, and arrived at the infirmary in a matter of minutes, Sahar close on her heels.

Ismail was quietly speaking to a pair of nurses, the door to Zara’s room closed behind him.

“Ismail, you wanted to see me?”

Ismail turned to look at her, face drawn. “Yes, my Queen. I’m afraid I have some unfortunate news.”

That was all Jenny needed to know. “Let me into the room.”

“My Queen, perhaps -”

“Now.” Reluctantly, Ismail opened the door and stepped aside so she could enter.

Jenny stepped in, faintly aware of Sahar following her and then collapsing to the floor with a horrified cry.

On the bed, pale and lifeless, was Zara’s body. Sitting next to it, not looking much better, was her ghost.
Chapter 64

Chapter Summary

Jenny deals with Set to resurrect Zara, and learns to do something new with her magic.

Chapter Notes

Here we are folks, chapter 64 is up for ya. I'm currently working hard on chapter 65, and I'm already a third of the way through, so I should have no trouble making next week's deadline too. Yay! One thing I'll say is that Jenny is not through showing her teeth just yet!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

“I am very sorry, Highness,” Ismail said sadly. “I tried, but the poison was too strong.”

Jenny swallowed thickly, stubbornly biting back her tears. Sahar was on the floor, sobbing, clutching at Jenny’s leg to keep from toppling over completely. Even if Jenny had been in the frame of mind to tell her to let go, she wouldn’t have.

“It is not your fault.” She finally stated. “You did what you could.”

“Nevertheless, I deeply regret this.” Ismail responded.

“I can fix it.” Jenny said. And she would, too. She had plenty of potential victims to drain the needed life force from. A dozen, to be exact. “What’s the damage to her body?”

“I believe it is the mercury that did it, Highness. It has likely affected her organs and brains to the point they shut down.”

Sahar whimpered at that, the sound much akin to something a beaten dog would make.

“The poison is still in her system?” Jenny nodded sharply, stepping up to the bed and dislodging Sahar from her leg in the process. Her handmaiden fell to the floor limply, so in shock she was unable to keep herself up. That would have to be taken care of too. “Ismail, please have a nurse take care of Sahar for now.” Jenny ordered lowly. “I want her calmed down and comfortable, but near me.”

There were two nurses in the room in a matter of seconds. They carefully helped Sahar off the floor and led her out of the room, presumably to situate her in one of the hospital beds of the main ward.

“Leave me for a moment. I will call when you can come back in.”

“Yes, Highness.” Ismail stepped out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Now alone with Zara’s ghost, Jenny glanced at the body on the bed. “I wish it hadn’t come to this.”
Zara’s ghost looked up, as if she’d only just noticed there were people in the room, but she had heard Jenny’s statement. ‘‘I do not regret it, my Queen. I would do it again.’’

Jenny exhaled sharply through her nose. ‘‘You shouldn’t have to. Nick will be punished for this. Harshly. And so will the guards who failed to incapacitate him.’’

Zara looked down at her body. She seemed a little out of it, as if the shock of death had muted her emotions. It was familiar. Akar had acted just as strangely at first, and Chris had had bouts of it too. Maybe it was just part of being a ghost. Jenny didn’t know for sure - she’d never been a ghost. When she’d died, she’d gone straight to Set and then back into her body without lingering somewhere in between. And from what she’d seen so far, she was glad for it too. Being a ghost didn’t seem to be the most comfortable level of existence ever. Meeting Set hadn’t exactly been fun either, but Jenny thought it was probably better than this kind of non-existence Zara was currently stuck in.

‘‘Will you bring me back, Highness?’’

‘‘Yes.’’ There was no question about that. Zara would not remain dead. ‘‘It is just a matter of seeing if this body can be saved, or if I have to create a new one like I did for Chris.’’

Because Jenny was fairly sure she could do that. Last time, she’d touched Chris’ ghost, and that was what had triggered the creation of the body he inhabited now. She was fairly sure she could repeat that feat. All she had to do, as far as she knew, was touch Zara’s ghost while channeling magic, and there was more than enough life force around to fuel it. Twelve lives’ worth, to be exact. And Zara was important to her. If she had to, she’d visit the temple and make a sacrifice to ask Set for instruction. She’d bent him to her will once, she could do it again. Zara was certainly worth the discomfort of doing a sacrificial ritual and interacting with Set.

Zara did not look away from her body. ‘‘This one gave out.’’

‘‘It did.’’ Jenny agreed, wondering if Zara was maybe in shock. She was very… apathetic about all of this. ‘‘Ismail thinks the mercury killed you before the rest of the poison could. I do not doubt his conclusion.’’ Mercury was exceptionally toxic even to people who didn’t have malevolent powers to suppress. Jenny privately thought it was a small miracle that Zara had survived as long as she did, with that crap in her system. She’d been hit head-on, too - the poison would’ve gotten into her heart quickly, and from there into the rest of her body. Jenny had no doubt that, if Zara hadn’t taken the shot for her, she’d be all kinds of dead right now.

Jenny frowned deeply, looking at Zara’s body as well. Darkened veins had crept all the way up her neck and into her face, contrasting sharply against the unnatural pallor of Zara’s usually healthy Egyptian skin tone. Frown deepening, Jenny drew back the covers a little, revealing more and more discoloration - the spot where she’d been hit was black as pitch, the little needle mark oozing a sickly-looking blackish fluid even now, hours after the poison had been introduced to her bloodstream. It had a silvery undertone of mercury.

Jenny reached out, touching her fingertips to the poison with the intent of smelling it to see if she could recognize anything by scent. She yelped, quickly yanking her hand back the moment her skin touched the liquid, wiping it off on the covers. A faint curl of smoke rose from the tip of her index finger. She looked at incredulously, feeling her flesh sizzle even as she could see the way it had blackened at even the slightest touch.

This was supposed to be a cure?!

Jesus fuck, this stuff would’ve burned her alive! How the hell had Nick ever thought that this would make her human again?! This wouldn’t make her human. This would kill her. Even a touch was
enough to eat away at her flesh. Either something had gone wrong in the making of this, or it had been deliberate, and Nick was trying to kill her after all.

Jenny was personally leaning towards the latter theory.

Still, that was not what she needed to focus on right now. She could punish Nick for this later. Right now, her priority was Zara.

Zara, who was staring at her in horror, all traces of apathy gone. "My Queen! Are you alright?!"

"I'm fine," Jenny said, even though the burn stung. "It will heal. But I think that your body is unsalvageable. I will make you a new one."

Zara looked worried. "Is that possible, Highness? Last time you fell ill." Her gaze fell, obviously so, on Jenny’s swollen belly.

"I have a supply of extra life force. I won’t be the one fueling the creation of your new body. I won’t be under any pressure at all." Jenny assured her. As long as she had enough of someone else’s life force to use, she wouldn’t be risking her own health at all. Nor would she be risking the child, which was also important.

That seemed to be enough to convince Zara. "I trust you, my Queen."

Jenny sure hoped she did, or this might not go as easily as she hoped. Now, to secure some life force. Jenny was very tempted to just use Nick for this - he certainly deserved it, and he didn’t have much use at the moment anyway. Except that he’d tried to assassinate her, and she wanted him to suffer more than just a quick drain-and-dust. No, she’d leave him to Ahmanet - the Pharaoh was sure to have some ideas for him once she was back from Cairo. That left her with those idiot guards. Certainly good sources of life force. Probably too stupid to be allowed to live anyway. And Jenny held a special grudge against the complete moron who hadn’t thought to empty the gun of ammunition. That took a special kind of stupid.

Well. Life force supply number one was selected, then. Now she needed a second, maybe a third just to be sure. She knew one life would revive a dead body. It’d take more to create a body from scratch; the energy requirements were so big it’d almost killed her, and she was pretty much immortal. So she should probably count on at least three people’s worth of life force. And she could always keep the other idiots around for emergence supplies as well.

"Come," Jenny told Zara. "We will do this in the temple. Set's presence might help."

"Yes, my Queen," Zara agreed readily.

Jenny stepped out of the little room, glancing at Ismail. "I am done here, Ismail. You may begin preparing the body for burial."

Ismail blinked. "Will you not resurrect her, Highness?"

"The body is too damaged. Zara will get a new one."

"Of course," Ismail murmured, bowing his head a little. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"Take care of Sahar. I will retrieve her once Zara is with us again."

"It shall be done."
Jenny gave a sharp nod and stalked out of the infirmary, sparing a brief glance at Sahar, who was situated in one of the hospital beds with a nurse fussing over her. She’d be just fine here. And when Zara was once again corporeal, Jenny would give both of them a few days off so they could reconnect and come to terms with recent events. They’d need it.

On her way to the temple, Jenny waved over a servant. ‘‘Collect the guards I grounded yesterday. I want them all to convene at the temple immediately.’’

With a nod of understanding, the servant veered off to do just that.

The temple was occupied when Jenny arrived. Tahirah was placing a new bowl of flowers on the altar, and Bau was lighting incense. Chafkem and Aaheru were not present, probably off doing other priestly things. Jenny didn’t hesitate to step inside anyway. She was the queen of this palace, and if she wanted to make use of the temple, she would.

As soon as she did, a by now familiar power curled around her. She managed not to shudder, and even sounded confident. ‘‘Tahirah, Bau, I have need of the temple. Immediately.’’

‘‘Of course, Highness,’’ Tahirah responded instantly. ‘‘Do you require assistance with anything?’’

Considering Set’s power was already blanketing her, signalling his presence and attention, Jenny didn’t think she needed help to reach him. She shook her head. ‘‘I’ll manage. Some guards will be arriving soon. Tell them to enter, but remain quiet.’’

‘‘Of course,’’ Tahirah repeated. She and Bau slipped out of the temple quietly, leaving behind their offerings. Not all the incense had been lit. Jenny stepped up to the altar and set to lighting the rest, peripherally aware of Zara’s ghost as she waited near the door. She had a distinct aura of nervousness around her.

‘‘Kneel, Zara.’’ Jenny said curtly. ‘‘You will not have to do anything. There is nothing to worry about.’’

She didn’t have to look to know Zara had instantly obeyed her. By now, she had come to expect it. She finished lighting the incense, breathing in the heady smell of it as she chose a prayer rug for herself. With her baby belly in the way it was a little awkward to sink to her knees, as it wasn’t as easy as it had been, but she managed.

Zara was blessedly silent, so Jenny paid her little attention, instead closing her eyes and focussing on Set’s presence. It took her a few moments to figure out how to direct her thoughts at him, but she was fairly sure she’d managed when his power thickened until it felt like heavy fog, swirling around her possessively. Behind her, she could hear the shuffle of feet. That had to be the guards, then, entering quietly as they’d been ordered. Jenny was too focussed to pay them any attention, thinking directly at Set.

*My handmaiden, she pushed at him, was murdered. I want her back. I have a supply of life force. Help me create a new body.* It was not a request. This was a demand. And, miraculously, like last time, Set radiated amusement and indulgence, and Jenny got the distinct sensation that he’d agreed. She wasn’t sure how, he hadn’t said anything, and even if he would have she wouldn’t have understood it. But she knew. He would help. He would guide her, as long as she provided the power.

And she happened to have plenty of that within this very room.

She opened her eyes, rising to her feet, and turned to the guards standing near the door. She pointed
at the one who’d failed to keep Nick’s weapon secured. ‘‘You. Come here.’’

He shuffled forward. ‘‘My Queen?’’

She grabbed his throat without warning, dragging him forward until his lips were barely an inch from hers, touched her power to his life force, and inhaled. He choked on his scream before it could escape his mouth. It took mere seconds for him to shrivel up and dry out and then crumble to dust underneath Jenny’s fingertips. His life force churned under her skin.

Not enough. She needed more.

Her terrorised guards were too frightened to run. Literally frozen in place by their own fear. With a few quick steps she was in front of one of the ones who’d failed to restrain Nick - the terror in his expression made him look like he’d already died. He did die a few seconds later when Jenny drained him dry and let him fall into ashes on the floor.

Still it felt like too little.

She took a third, snapped his neck simply by grabbing him, then sucked up his life force before it could abandon his dead body.

There. That was more like it. Jenny turned away from the remaining guards, feeling like her skin would burst from the strain of containing so much life. Zara was kneeling where Jenny had left her, had not dared to look up even when the guards had whimpered like abused dogs. Jenny stepped up beside her, reaching out to place her hand on Zara’s head.

Faintly, she noticed that her skin had a faint, unnatural glow, thin, shining cracks of light where her veins ran under her skin. She touched Zara. Set was there, helping guide the writhing energy, helping her funnel it into Zara’s spirit until she was shining so brightly Jenny could barely see her anymore.

A whisper of something else permeated the room.

The drain didn’t hurt this time. It felt good. Like letting tension out of her muscles.

Zara made a high, keening noise. Something that started out like an echo, then gained body and volume until it sounded like it came from a living person. - and then the light died down, and lying on the floor was a living, breathing, whimpering human in a brand new body. Zara’s hands twitched against the stone of the floor, ragged breaths piercing through the thickness of the air, shivering like a sodden cat.

She’d done it. Jenny had done it. She had created for her handmaiden a new body to live in. Zara was no longer dead. Jenny let her hand drop to her side, only slightly out of breath and very, very proud of herself. She had done that. On purpose. And this time, she hadn’t nearly killed herself in the process. Jenny took a moment to direct her fervent gratitude towards Set’s presence. He’d definitely risen in her esteem today.

She crouched down, brushing Zara’s hair out of her face. Her skin was a little warm, but that was probably because of the magic that had been involved in creating that skin. Still. Best to get her to the infirmary for a full check up.

The surviving guards were still there, huddled together near the door. On the floor was a puddle that told Jenny at least one of them had wet himself. ‘‘Get out of here!’’ She snarled at them. ‘‘And be grateful you are alive!’’
They all but climbed across each other to be the first out of the door.

Bau peeked around the doorjamb. ‘‘My Queen, is everything alright?’’

‘‘Everything is just fine,’’ Jenny said. ‘‘Help me carry Zara to the infirmary. I want Ismail to look her over and see if everything is as it’s supposed to be.’’

‘‘Of course,’’ Bau gingerly entered the temple, stepping over the puddle near the door, then crouched down and ever-so-carefully scooped Zara into his arms. She was conscious, but only just. She would definitely need some time to acclimate to her new body.

There was a pulse of power from Set, a little jab at Jenny’s awareness. She paused near the door, waiting for him to do what he wanted. Today, she was not going to flee.

The fog of magic thickened a little, and then an image appeared in her mind. A snake. Small, black as pitch, maybe ten inches in length and an inch thick. It had unsettling red eyes. With it, the distinct knowledge how to create them - just a simple matter of wanting to, a sliver of magic like she’d needed to heal the blossoms of her flower crown - and what they could do.

When Jenny did leave the temple, a few moments later, there was an unsettling grin on her face. It was good to know her power over death was good for more than just sucking the life out of people. And she had a feeling these snakes would come in handy indeed.

Sahar was awake when Jenny and Bau arrived at the infirmary, Zara limp but very much alive in Bau’s arms.

‘‘Sahar,’’ Jenny caught her handmaiden’s attention, enjoying the way Sahar’s eyes widened in shock and joy upon seeing who Bau was carrying. It was very, very gratifying. And after all Sahar had done for her it was good to see her so happy.

‘‘Is that…’’ Sahar scrambled off her bed, halfway to speechless.

Jenny jerked her head at Bau, silently directing him to lay Zara on Sahar’s bed. Sahar stared, struck dumb, like she couldn’t quite believe her eyes.

Jenny felt a small smile tug at the corner of her mouth. She’d done something worthwhile today, and that felt good. Even if she’d had to kill three people for it. Considering who they’d been, Jenny felt quite content with her choice. She’d have slaughtered all eleven of them if it had been necessary. Zara was worth more to her than all those guards combined. And their families could beg all they wanted - even if she knew how to reach beyond the veil, she wouldn’t bother. Not for them. Not when they were part of the reason Zara had died in the first place.

‘‘Highness…’’ Sahar’s voice was more tremble than anything. She was openly crying. Rather than saying anything else, she hurried over and all but threw herself at Jenny’s feet, arms locking around Jenny’s legs as she pressed her face into the side of Jenny’s thigh and unashamedly cried into the fabric of her skirt. Jenny reached down, placing her hand on the back of Sahar’s head - she was quite happy to let Sahar cry all she wanted. Her handmaidens had done nothing but be there for her, and she wanted to return the favour.

It took a few minutes before Sahar got herself under control again, sobs dying down to sniffles. When she pulled away, Jenny’s skirt was stained with tears and runny makeup. She couldn’t find it in herself to care. She had plenty of skirts, but she only had two handmaidens.
“Thank you.” Sahar looked up at her as if she’d hung the sun in the sky.

“Go spend time with Zara. Ismail will give her a check up, but she should be completely healthy,” Jenny said. “You both have the next few days off, so take that time to come to terms with all of this.”

“And you, my Queen?”

“I will manage.” Jenny had managed thirty-five years without handmaidens - she was pretty sure she could last a few days more. Even if it would be a little lonelier than she’d gotten used to. She could always have a few servants stick a little closer than usual. There were always plenty of servants around, usually to run errands and be generally helpful. Either way, it was unlikely Jenny would be left alone for long, if at all.

“Thank you,” Sahar said again, sincerity in every vowel.

Jenny nodded. “Get over there,” she said fondly. It’d be good for Zara and Sahar to have some bonding time. And in the meantime, Jenny could go take care of some other things. Like finding a clean skirt to wear. And also make sure the guards were patrolling the walls as they should and kept an eye out for government troops, who were probably going to be arriving today. It was still early, but today was the day Ahmanet would attack Cairo, so Jenny expected to have a war on her doorstep before dinnertime. Joy.

And while she made sure the wall patrols were doing their job, she could order another search of the palace as well, to ensure there were no other intruders in the palace. She hadn’t felt any, but she wasn’t sure if that was because she’d missed them because she was too occupied with Nick rather than there just not being any others. Whichever it was, Jenny wasn’t taking risks. She didn’t want another shooting in the palace.

Especially now she knew what this ‘cure’ would do to her - if just a drop burned her skin away, she didn’t want to know what would happen if she got a dose of it in her bloodstream. She had a feeling it would involve a lot of pain. Another thing her so-called immunity to pain didn’t cover. So far, it only seemed to cover non-magical damage done to her directly. If it happened to Ahmanet, it hurt. If it was magical in nature, like Set infusing her child with his magic or the Blood of Osiris, it hurt too. But a knife through her arm was fine. Because that made total sense. Seriously. Jenny was of half a mind to demand her money back, because this was just shoddy work. If she had to be murdered to be immune to pain she at least expected something that worked across the board.

Leaving Zara and Sahar in the infirmary, Jenny quickly swept by the royal quarters for a clean skirt, making sure to pick one with a wider waistband. She definitely needed it with her baby belly all of a sudden. She made a mental note to ask a seamstress to make up some pregnancy-friendly skirts, or, if Luxor was still accessible by tomorrow, to have a few brought into the palace, even though her pregnancy would probably be over fairly soon. The fact that her pregnancy was far shorter than normal didn’t mean Jenny didn’t get stuck with all the discomfort of it anyway.

Speaking of discomfort, she didn’t just want some new skirts; she also wanted some pickles for lunch, possibly doused in satay sauce and treacle. With whipped cream on top. Because that sounded really, really good right now.

First, though, she needed to go check on the walls, and possibly yell at some people. She had a feeling, though, that the deaths of the guards in the temple had already made its way around the palace, so that might make it a little easier to have people fall in line.

Some days, life was good.
Jenny was halfway through her loaded pickles (satay sauce, whip cream, molasses rather than treacle, and even some crumbled cookies on top - it was delicious), a few hours later, when the link sparked in the back of her mind. There was anticipation, violent glee, satisfaction and more violent glee in short succession. Jenny didn’t need a general to come rushing into the dining hall to know that Ahmanet had just attacked Cairo.

By the time dinner rolled around, the first government troops had started to arrive outside the palace walls.

Jenny stood on the balcony and watched as the government soldiers exited the trucks, wondering if the snakes Set had shown her to make could bite through boots. That might be worth a try, if the troops didn’t back down a couple of days from now.

Jenny continued to watch, wisps of black smoke escaping from between her cupped together hands. From between her fingers came a soft, low hissing sound.
Chapter 65

Chapter Summary

Jenny deals with running the palace, and then with the siege. Her new snakes come in very handy.

Chapter Notes

Hey, people! I'm a few hours earlier than usual, but I won't have time the rest of the day to do this, so I figured you'd prefer it if I published a few hours early than a day late, so here I am. We're nicely chugging along towards the end, I think. Only a few chapters left to go, according to my planning.

Today I am also introducing a tiny new character; Apep the Danger Noodle! All brand new and hissy for your enjoyment!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Jenny really, really liked the snakes Set had taught her to make.

Life at the palace had slowed down a little now that there was a hostile force stationed outside the walls, so in the past four days, Jenny had had plenty of time to play around with her new ability. She’d made several attempts at snakes so far, and had pretty much figured out the limitations around size. The biggest snake she’d managed so far had been around fifteen inches long, one and a half inch in girth, with fangs that were nearly an inch in length, razor sharp and dripping with shiny black venom whenever it opened its mouth. Jenny hadn’t tested its venom yet, but she had a feeling that it was very, very lethal. They wouldn’t have fallen under her dominion over death if they weren’t lethality incarnate.

Her first attempt hadn’t been as impressive, though. No, Jenny’s first attempt at a black magic snake (she wasn’t sure what they were actually called, so black magic snake it was - until she could find something better, at least) had been smaller. Eight inches, at most, and barely thicker than a pencil. Its fangs were barely more than needles. Still dripping with venom though.

It’s size made it look cute, despite the coaly black of its scales and the unsettling red of its eyes, and Jenny really quite liked her first attempt at a black magic snake, so she had decided to keep it. So she now had a tiny but very lethal pet. She’d named him Apep, after the ancient Egyptian serpent personification of chaos and evil. Because if she had a black magic snake, even a tiny one, she was damn well going to name him appropriately. This was not the kind of pet she could call ‘Blackie’ or ‘Coal’. Not without having an angry black magic snake on hand, anyway. Thankfully, Apep was created of her magic and thus hers to command, which meant he couldn’t hurt her. She wasn’t sure if his venom could hurt her, but Jenny would honestly rather not find out.

Jenny had, in the past four days, besides practicing with her magic snakes, spent a respectable amount of time in the war room, discussing options with the generals - Ahmanet had shown no signs
of returning from Cairo yet, and the few news reports that had managed to make it to the palace had all said basically the same; Cairo was a warzone, the city was being bombed in an attempt to defeat the palace troops, and it didn’t seem like it was going to stop anytime soon.

Clearly, Ahmanet had her hands full with that one.

Similarly, the whole Suez area was in a panic after several bridges had collapsed and Port Said had been bombed, leaving part of the harbour and a bunch of warehouses in shambles.

Considering that even in today’s times battles for cities could last weeks or even months, Jenny had a feeling that Ahmanet would not be coming home in the next week at least. Possibly for longer than that if resistance at Cairo was stronger than expected. They still didn’t have all of the military Infected, after all, so the current government still had troops to strike back with.

Which left Jenny to deal with the siege as the sole ruler of the palace.

The palace had enough supplies to hold out for a while still, but that didn’t mean the siege wasn’t a bother. People couldn’t travel to Luxor anymore as Jenny didn’t want any of her subjects to be shot or captured in the attempt. Therefore, everyone was limited to palace grounds. And the extra guards the generals had suggested hadn’t even arrived yet, which meant that, while the palace was guarded, Jenny did not have a small army at her disposal in case she needed to break the siege.

So yeah. It was a great time to be a Queen with zero war experience. At least she had Zara and Sahar back at her side. Jenny had initially tried to give them a week off, but on the third day after doing that she’d woken up to see them at her bedside as usual. Apparently two days was enough for them to come to terms with what had happened. Or, at least, that was how long they’d felt comfortable staying away, which was flattering. It was nice to have them around again, Jenny had to admit. It was very lonely in the palace without her handmaidens and Ahmanet around. Servants just weren’t the same.

But even with Zara and Sahar back at her side, Jenny was busy and a touch stressed. Running a palace was hard. Running a palace under siege was harder.

“We have food supplies for ten more days, Highness, at full rations a head,” said the head cook, who was also in charge of the pantries. “We will have to think of starting rationing soon, if the siege continues for much longer.”

Jenny nodded, frowning. “How many days, do you think?”

“Perhaps three more, my Queen.”

“And if we start rationing in three days, how long can we stretch the supplies?”

“At three-quarter portions, up to a week and a half. At half portions, maybe just over two. After that, we will be running on scraps.” The head cook said apologetically.

“So if we start on three-quarter portions today,” Jenny said, “two and a half to three weeks.”

“I think so, my Queen.” The head cook agreed.

It wasn’t ideal, but three-quarter portions didn’t mean people would starve. The normal rations were enough to have people full with some leftovers. Three-quarters of that wouldn’t mean empty stomachs. In fact, people wouldn’t even be hungry. And they’d stretch the supplies for longer, which meant Jenny would have more time to wait for Ahmanet to return before she had no choice but to take action.
She nodded sharply. ”Start giving out three-quarter rations today.”

”As you say, Highness,” the head cook agreed. ”Would you prefer the royal table to retain normal portioning?”

”No,” Jenny said, shaking her head. ”I’ll eat the same as everyone else.” If the rest of the palace got less, she would have a little less as well. Jenny didn’t want to be the sort of Queen who let her people eat less while she went and kept her normal portions. It wasn’t like she’d go hungry. And the cooks were very careful to make sure she got everything she needed to sustain her pregnancy, regardless. They’d gotten a list of dietary requirements from Ismail, and they stuck to it almost religiously.

”Of course,” said the head cook.

”I’ll leave you to it, then,” Jenny said, knowing that lunch was in just a few hours and that it had to be a lot of work to feed all the people who lived at the palace. Not something that could be done in an hour or two of work. Feeding the palace was a round-the-clock job. They probably didn’t need Jenny around to make it even harder on them.

”Sahar, have a servant inform the generals that we have a few more weeks’ time due to rationing,” Jenny ordered as she swept out of the kitchens. ”And that I want them to take the possibility that Ahmanet may not be back on time into account. I want options.”

Jenny didn’t want to be stuck in this palace with no idea what to do when food began to run out and Ahmanet had yet to come back. She was in charge, and that meant that the wellbeing of everyone within the palace walls weighed on her shoulders. Jenny was not planning to let any of her people down. She wanted to be a good Queen, if she had to be one. She’d still prefer to be an archaeologist, but since that was not a possibility, she might as well try to do a good job at ruling. Even though that wasn’t even half as fun as archaeology. Though she supposed she could just randomly visit archaeological sites and digs if she wanted to - it wasn’t as is people could tell her to go away. Not as long as she stayed within the Kingdom, at least.

There would probably be plenty of interesting things to visit, especially since it was very, very obvious that Ahmanet had no intentions to just stick to Egypt’s current borders. Egypt as it was was too small for Ahmanet’s ambitions. Quite frankly, Jenny would be surprised if Ahmanet stopped even at the directly surrounding countries. The Ancient Egyptian empire had been extensive before, and if things went well, it would be again.

Of course, it’d be nice if Ahmanet had a palace left to come back to in between conquering near and far countries.

Days passed. Three more made a full week of being besieged, and then almost another full week passed.

Word from Ahmanet had been far and few, but she’d gotten some brief notes past the government troops by using some of those crows she could control as messenger birds. Jenny tried not to feel pathetic even as she carefully saved those little notes; the link was active twenty-four seven, but a tangible reminder of Ahmanet was nice regardless.

She hated, truly hated, not having Ahmanet around all the time. Jenny understood that the government needed to be toppled. That, however, did not mean she had to like how it was done. Not
because because her conscious had suddenly gained a second wind, but because it meant Ahmanet was away. She did not like being the only one to occupy the thrones in the throne room, she did not like being the only one the people looked to to run the palace smoothly, she did not like being the only one the generals expected to approve or deny tactics, and she certainly did not like sleeping alone.

Luxurious as her bed was - and it was the best bed she had ever slept in in her entire life - it felt cold and way too big when she had to fill it by herself.

No, Jenny did not like Ahmanet’s absence at all. And on top of that, the stress of managing a palace in the middle of being besieged while pregnant with an accelerated pregnancy. Because that was her life right now. Jenny was not pleased. Her belly was bigger than ever - sometimes she was afraid she’d go into labour before Ahmanet would even return, because with Set speeding up the pregnancy, she was pretty sure that she’d be popping sometime soon - her back hurt, her breasts had gone up a cup and ached (not pleasant), her ankles were swollen and she felt like a whale most of the time. Not to mention the mood swings.

Jenny was very, very glad she had both Zara and Sahar around to help her out, because she definitely needed it nowadays.

Even getting up was hard with her belly in the way.

Yet, being heavily pregnant had its pros. Mostly because the bigger Jenny’s belly got, the more reverent people became. Like they were finally realized that, yeah, Jenny was not only the Queen - she was also the mother of Set’s mortal avatar. She was carrying the mortal avatar of their chosen god. And now they could see it from the size of her belly. Even two straight weeks of being locked into the palace and eating three-fourths rations was not enough to make the people look at Jenny with anything other than awe. It was a little uncomfortable, but Jenny would take it over discontent and criticism any day.

Being in charge of a whole palace was hard enough without people criticizing everything she did.

Another three days passed.

Jenny could feel the frown plastered across her forehead, the annoyed twist at the corner of her mouth, but there wasn’t much she could do about them - today was not a day to be happy. They’d been under siege for two and a half weeks. Supplies were getting low. People were slowly starting to wonder if anything would happen at all, or if they were just waiting to be overrun.

Something had to be done.

“’We have, what, one-hundred and fifty guards on the premises?’”

The spokesman of the generals nodded. “’Yes, Highness. One-hundred and sixty-seven to be exact.’”

“’What is the bare minimum for guarding the palace?’”

“’A skeleton crew would consist of one-hundred guards, Highness. But that is the absolute smallest possible amount, and even with one-hundred men and women, security would be compromised.’”

“’Any word from the extra guards you wanted to bring in?’”
‘They are stuck in Luxor, Highness. Not detained, as they are capable of blending in with the locals, but they cannot reach the palace with the government troops blocking the way.’

‘How many?’

‘Near three-hundred and fifty, Highness.’

Jenny nodded thoughtfully. ‘Do we have any way to contact them?’

‘Her Majesty’s crows are still on the premises, Highness. We can use them as messenger birds, like the Pharaoh has done.’

‘And how fast can they be here?’

‘If given time to mobilize, they can be here by tomorrow, Highness.’

Well. Jenny took a breath, then another, nodding to herself. ‘Send the notice. I want them here at dawn. Tomorrow, we break this siege.’

‘Highness… we are outnumbered.’ Said the spokesman, a touch hesitantly.

‘No, we’re not.’ Jenny reached into the pocket she’d had added to her skirt, lifting out a small black noodle. Apep hissed, showing off tiny needle fangs, and somehow managed to look threatening while doing so, even though he was barely eight inches long. Jenny smiled coldly. ‘I can make hundreds of these. One bite is enough to kill. And they thrive in sand. All I have to do is tell them to kill the government troops and release them into the desert, and they’ll do most of the work for us. Then, at dawn, our troops can come in to slaughter the stragglers.’

And with luck, fatalities on their side could be kept to a minimum. Maybe they could even capture some government troops to keep around as sources of life force. But only if it wasn’t too dangerous for their own people. Jenny would rather have less excess life force and no deaths than extra life force and immediately have to use it to resurrect the people who had died obtaining it.

That had the generals murmuring between themselves for several moments, debating the merits of the, admittedly, barely thought-out plan that Jenny had come up with on the spot. Because planning a war was still not one of her talents.

Apep curled between her fingers, hissing softly, scales oddly cold to her skin. It was much like holding a bendy, living piece of ice. One that didn’t leave trails of water everywhere, made hissing sounds and had fangs dripping with pitch black venom. And was also capable of killing people by biting them and injecting them with said venom. Maybe not such a great metaphor after all, but who cared? The point was, Apep was uncommonly cold even for a snake, and Jenny blamed that on the fact that he was made out of the dark magic. She had a hard time imagining anything made from instructions given by Set being warm. In all the times Jenny had felt Set’s power, it had never been warm.

The spokesman gently cleared his throat. Jenny looked away from Apep, lifting him up so he could curl up on top of her head within the circle of her crown and giving the spokesman her full attention.

‘How many snakes would you be able to produce by sunset, my Queen?’

‘Three or four dozen at least. More if I make them about the same size of Apep.’ The smaller they were, the less power they took to make. But Jenny figured Apep’s size was as small as she should go for the simple reason that the fangs would get too tiny otherwise. As it was, Apep’s fangs were already too short to make it through military boots, so they’d be useless if she made any snakes
shorter than him.

“Can they bite more than once?”

“They can,” Jenny assured him. Made out of dark magic as they were, like Ahmanet’s spiders, Jenny’s snakes were not easily killed or dispelled. Set had made that clear. And as long as they weren’t beheaded or burned or otherwise decisively killed, they’d happily continue to slither around and bite enemies. They could, if given enough food and the occasional hit of magic, even grow, becoming more dangerous as time passed. It was not a piece of magic just anyone could do. This was something halfway divine. Like no one else that Jenny knew of could resurrect people with magic.

“It is a viable plan,” the spokesman said finally. “But perhaps we can postpone one more day and strike tomorrow night, to ensure nothing is overlooked in haste.”

That was a concession Jenny was willing to make. And it would give her extra time to make as many snakes as she could without exhausting herself. She nodded. “Tomorrow night, then.”

“Tomorrow night,” agreed the spokesman.

“Alert the troops in Luxor,” Jenny ordered. “And the troops we can miss from the palace.” She paused for a moment, then added, “and make sure that those idiots who failed to contain Nick are at the front of the line. Make sure they know it’s kinder than what Ahmanet would do to them when she returns.”

That had the generals blinking. “Kinder, Highness?”

Jenny looked at them, calm and steady. “There are eight of them left. I do not expect any of them to survive the night.”

“...We will ensure they don’t, Highness.”

“I’d rather think so, yes,” Jenny agreed mildly. Because if her generals didn’t, her snakes would. Either way, the eight surviving guards would not return from the desert alive. Jenny would make sure of it.

One thing Jenny overlooked when preparing for a battle the next day was that she was way too pregnant to fight anyone. Seriously. Her belly was big enough that she couldn’t see her own feet nowadays, let alone wrestle anyone to the ground and smash their head into pulp. So, yeah. They were going to break the siege - but Jenny would not be participating beyond making and directing her black magic snakes.

Part of Jenny was disappointed, but the majority of her was relieved. She was getting more violent, more merciless, and she knew it - but that didn’t mean she revelled in it, and that didn’t mean that she was going to encourage herself. No, she was going to stay out of this battle and just let her snakes and the troops do the work for her.

Therefore, when sunset came and went, and darkness fell over the desert, Jenny found herself not in the courtyard waiting to march out of the gates, but on the balcony overlooking the courtyard. It was high enough that she could see over the palace walls. Conveniently, it was also low enough that Jenny could make out individual people, even without binoculars, so she could make sure that the idiots would, indeed, bite the dust tonight. Preferably early on, but in such a way that it took them a
while to die. Still kinder than what Ahmanet would do to them, though.

“Have the snakes been released?” Jenny asked the generals accompanying her on the balcony. She’d delivered no less than sixty-two snakes, all over twelve inches, an hour or two before dinner, and had not seen them since.

“A team of guards discreetly got them past the walls, my Queen,” agreed a general. “They have had plenty of time to hide in the sand and get between the government troops.”

Jenny nodded. “I’ve ordered them to attack whenever the people around them are least alert. Do we have any indication when that is?”

“There are always less people awake during the night shifts, my Queen. My experience tells me that it is quietest around three in the morning.”

It was barely ten in the evening. “So not for a while, then.” Jenny said. “The troops from Luxor are ready?”

“Yes, my Queen. They will be arriving around five this morning. They have orders to capture when possible, but kill whenever there is any danger to themselves.”

“Good.” That was exactly what Jenny wanted; the possibility of life force sources but not at the cost of lives. If she got her way, only eight of her people would die tonight.

At two forty-eight in the morning, the quiet of the night was rendered by screams.

Jenny jerked awake in her comfy lounge chair, and was somewhat disoriented for a few short moments. She was outside, still, having fallen asleep around midnight after the lounge chair had been delivered for her so she could sit down for a little.

“The attack has started, Highness,” a general informed Jenny.

She nodded, even though she didn’t need him to tell her - she screams and gunshots coming from the desert was enough to tell her what was going on. Rubbing at her eyes, she sat up. “Do we have binoculars or something?”

“We have military grade night vision binoculars, Highness,” the general agreed.

“Get me one. I’d like to see what’s going on over there.”

In moments, Jenny had a heavy pair of binoculars in her hands. She brought them up to her face, and found that they really did provide excellent night vision. The screams were coming from all around the palace, since it was surrounded by government troops, so it wasn’t hard to find a spot where people were panicking and running around in search of what was attacking them.

Jenny felt a mean little smile curl at her upper lip. Her snakes were pitch black, hard to see in the darkness, and could hide in the sand on top of that. The government soldiers were getting picked off one by one and they didn’t even know who or what was doing it.

Jenny aimed her gaze at one of the troops. Something small and thin shot out of the sand and latched onto the man’s leg; his movements suggested he screamed, and then he began to stagger. In moments he’d crashed into the sand, jerking and convulsing like he was having a seizure, limbs growing
thinner and thinner until they looked more like sticks than anything. Jenny watched in fascination as the man’s limbs grew so fragile that one of his arms snapped clean off mid-convulsion - it looked a lot like when Jenny sucked the life out of someone, right before they became so dry and fragile that they crumbled to dust.

In fact, Jenny realized, it reminded her of the zombies Ahmanet had used at the church. Except that these soldiers weren’t being controlled and were left to die as dried out husks instead.

Jenny was a little horrified. But only a little. The vast majority of her was impressed at the gift Set had given her - the lethality of the snakes he had taught her to make. Ahmanet could keep her mind control spiders. Jenny had mummifying snakes. That was way cooler.

“'My Queen,’” a general reported, “'some of the government troops are attempting to get to the palace.'”

Presumably for safety, then, Jenny concluded. Unless they somehow thought that they could take over the palace while being attacked and with no further backup. Well, no matter either way.

“'Shoot them down.'”

“'Yes, Highness.'” A guard pulled a walky talky off his belt and barked a few orders into it. At the gates, the men patrolling the walls aimed their automatic rifles and shot. There were more screams, some returning shots, and one of the guards ducked but wasn’t hit.

Other government troops were running for the cars and trucks now, climbing in as quickly as they could. Some of them started screaming and convulsing just as they reached the doors, one or two even died seconds after climbing in, the doors still open beside their dead husks.

In the parts of the desert Jenny could see from her perch on the balcony, dozens of government soldiers had already died. Jenny’s mummifying snakes were really very efficient, and impressively lethal. She made a mental note to maybe have another pig brought in from Luxor once the road was free again, as a sacrifice for Set. Maybe some of the regular offerings as well - flowers, fruits, incense, the whole lot. Some pastries, like those pistachio and rose water pastries she liked. Or the ones with orange syrup and nuts.

Jenny eyed the trucks and cars of the surviving soldiers as they raced off. “'Is there a way to get a message to Luxor before those vehicles arrive?'”

“'We should be able to reach the troops, yes, Highness.'”

“'Tell them to blow those vehicles to kingdom come. I do not expect any survivors.'”

“'Yes, Highness.'”

“'And send out the guards we can miss to pick off the stragglers.'”

“'Of course, Highness.'”

“'If they can afford to capture live enemies without risking their lives, have the captives sent to the dungeons immediately. One a cell, and I want them restrained properly.'”

The general continued to nod. “'The troops know their orders, Highness. They will obey.'”

Yeah. They would. Because Jenny was the fucking Queen, and her word was law.
She lifted her night vision binoculars again, watching the gates slowly open and several dozen men and women slip off the palace ground to hunt down the few surviving government troops. They would, Jenny knew, return with eight people less than they went out.

When the troops from Luxor arrived just before dawn, there was no one left for them to fight. And as the dawn broke, so did the siege.
The first thing Jenny ordered, after the troops coming in from Luxor had filed into the palace and taken up residence and the few prisoners that had been taken had been delivered to the dungeons, was for a dozen people (a couple of kitchen workers and about eight guards) to go to Luxor and restock the palace’s pantries. Over two weeks without replenishment had drained a good majority of the stores, and it would certainly be nice to get fresh fruits and vegetables back into the daily meals.

Jenny also made sure to give a more future-oriented order, and told the head cook/head of pantries that she wanted him to organize more food storage space, so that if they ended up besieged again, they’d be able to hold out for longer. That seemed like a reasonable measure, considering the fact that they were at war. Jenny held no doubt that there’d be more attempts at the palace; they may have won this battle (decisively, she might add, at the risk of sounding full of herself), but they had not yet won the war. And the palace was still the most obvious target.

She then proceeded to order that any left-behind weapons and supplies were to be collect and added to the palace’s armories, and to leave her snakes out in the desert as a more permanent first line of defense. They’d grow and multiply all by themselves, much like natural snakes would, and given maybe a couple of years, there’d be hundreds to take care of intruders before they could even reach the palace. People like Nick or Ahmed or Henry wouldn’t even reach the gates. They’d be dead and mummified the moment they approached the palace with the intent of doing harm.

Jenny did have to admit that that idea took some pressure of her shoulders. She was still responsible for the palace and the wellbeing of its inhabitants, but at least they now had a decent first line of
defence. She didn’t have to sit in her throne and deal with the fact that they had a small army on their doorstep anymore.

Lastly, Jenny ordered the troops to perform extra patrols around the palace and to double check all the walls and a hundred-meter radius around the walls to ensure no unpleasant surprises like landmines or whatever had been buried in the sand, and then she went to bed for some well-deserved rest. It had been a very, very long night, and she’d only had a few hours of sleep.

There was warmth at the edge of her mind. Gentle, unassuming warmth, seeping across the link and wrapping around Jenny’s brain until all she could do was lie limp and content, barely awake but feeling better than she had in a while. It was enough to kind of turn her brain to jelly for a bit, which was nicer than it sounded. Not thinking of anything in particular was a luxury Jenny had not had since Ahmanet had left for Cairo. It turned out that running a palace was a lot harder than it sounded. How Ahmanet did it and still had so much time to spend with Jenny was a complete mystery. Set knew Jenny had nearly been run ragged, even with the servants trying to solve as many problems as they could before taking them to her.

Being a Queen was surprisingly stressful.

Still. She was comfortable now. More so than she’d been in a while. The edges of her mind were gently steeping in a soft, steady warmth, the baby wasn’t quite pressing on her bladder so she didn’t have to get out of bed to pee, for once her lower back didn’t ache, and a warm body was curled around - wait.

There was a warm body curled around her back.

Jenny’s eyes shot open, body tensing up - and immediately slumped again when a very familiar arm wound around her expanded waist.

“Good afternoon, my love,” Ahmanet’s voice greeted from behind her.

Jenny turned as fast as her girth allowed her, drinking in the sight of her love, overcome with joy. It bubbled up in her stomach, making her entire body tingle with it, and she couldn’t have stopped the beaming smile if she’d tried. Ahmanet was back. Her woman was back, and Jenny wasn’t alone anymore. And she was as beautiful as she’d always been, all vibrant brown skin, dark eyes, and long, silky hair. Jenny reached out, grasped Ahmanet’s face between her hands, and kissed her like her life depended on it.

The press of soft lips against her own had something inside of her relaxing, like tension seeping out of a sore muscle. By Set, Jenny had missed her. More than anything, Jenny had missed her.

Ahmanet kissed back without hesitation, tangling her fingers in Jenny’s hair, a kind of joy that matched Jenny’s pouring across the link to meet her.

It was long, long minutes before they separated.

“You’re back.” Jenny’s voice had gone light with happiness.

Ahmanet smiled, tucking herself closer to Jenny. “I arrived a few hours ago. I am very glad to see you, Jennifer. I have missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Jenny responded, pulling Ahmanet in for another passionate, if chaste, kiss.
When they separated, minutes later, she added, "I didn’t think you’d be home for another while at least."

"I wasn’t," Ahmanet said, "but I heard about your decision to break through the siege and came as fast as I could."

Jenny blinked. "The generals?"

"Your handmaidens, actually. They were worried you’d overexert yourself." Ahmanet glanced down at Jenny’s belly. "Which, my love, is a real concern now."

"Set did it," Jenny mumbled, "when I made a sacrifice to bring up the protections on the palace."

"He must be impatient." Ahmanet concluded, but she looked concerned; the same sensation was lapping at the edge of Jenny’s mind. "He did not harm you?"

Jenny instantly knew what Ahmanet was hinting at. She grasped Ahmanet’s hands in her own, squeezing lightly and pressing a kiss to her cheek. "No, he didn’t harm me at all. It didn’t hurt."

Ahmanet sagged a little in relief. "I’m glad."

"And I didn’t participate in breaking the siege either," Jenny added, before Ahmanet could ask. "I stayed on the balcony the whole time. The government troops didn’t even know I was there."

"Good. I don’t want you anywhere near danger." Ahmanet pressed a quick kiss to her lips, pulling away before Jenny could deepen it. "How is the palace?"

"Good. We only lost eight men last night, and those were not meant to survive anyway."

That had Ahmanet frowning a little. "Why not?"

Jenny bit her lip. "You’re not going to like this," she warned.

"Tell me anyway."

Jenny did. "Nick infiltrated the palace during the battle of a while ago. I had some guards capture him, but they failed to restrain him. He attempted to shoot me with the Blood of Osiris." She paused, gauging the steadily rising level of rage emanating from Ahmanet. Best to just tell her everything, though. "If Zara hadn’t taken the shot for me, I would have died."

Ahmanet was frozen against Jenny. The overwhelming spike of terror and utter, complete rage was almost stifling, enough to rob the breath from Jenny’s lungs. Still, Jenny continued, eager to get the entire story out before Ahmanet decided to storm the dungeons and kill Nick on the spot.

"I have imprisoned Nick in the dungeons. He claims the poison is a cure, but when I touched it, it burned me. He has, however, told me that he had created the plan to infiltrate with Abdamelek, who has admitted to his involvement. The eight men who didn’t survive the battle were the men who failed to restrain Nick. I ordered their deaths for their failure."

To say Ahmanet was furious was an understatement. The emotion crashing across the link was nothing less than utter, consuming, incandescent rage. If Jenny hadn’t know it wasn’t directed at her, she’d have been afraid - as it was, she just felt a lot of pity for Nick, because if Ahmanet’s emotions were anything to go by, he had a hard time coming up. In fact, he’d probably be lucky if he was still sane by the time he died.
“I’m going to murder that bastard!” Ahmanet seethed, already halfway out of bed.

“Wait,” Jenny grabbed Ahmanet’s wrist, making her pause. “Let me get some clothes on. I want to come.”

Not because she necessarily wanted to see what would happen to Nick, but because Ahmanet was only just back, and Jenny honestly didn’t quite want to let her out of her sight yet. She’d missed Ahmanet too much. And since she probably wasn’t going to be able to stop Ahmanet from getting out of bed, the only other option was to just accompany her. Though Jenny would definitely prefer to stay in bed with Ahmanet and just cuddle.

Just having her back, though, was enough to soothe an undercurrent of anxiety she hadn’t even realized was there until it was gone. She didn’t have to stress as much anymore. She was no longer responsible for the palace. That was once again Ahmanet’s job. Jenny just had to be available for smaller, more mundane issues, and to sit on her throne during audiences and give advice where asked. And that was just how she liked it, honestly.

Ahmanet, though she didn’t show it, waited a little impatiently for Jenny to dress, which she did as quickly as she was capable of without Zara and Sahar helping her right now. Speaking of her handmaidens…

“Have you seen Zara and Sahar?”

“I asked them to give us some privacy.” Ahmanet responded. “We do not need an audience for something as private as reuniting.”

Jenny frowned a little as she finished putting on her tunic, making her way over to Ahmanet. “I’m sorry I ruined it by immediately dropping all of this on you.”

“No, don’t apologize. I’m glad you told me. This isn’t something you should’ve kept from me, even if it had only been for a short time.” Ahmanet pressed a quick kiss to her lips. “And once this is dealt with, we can take a few hours to ourselves. Just us, maybe some food, definitely a nice bath.”

Jenny liked the sound of that. Especially the part where she and Ahmanet got naked, and she was not ashamed to admit that. There was nothing wrong with wanting some intimacy when she had missed her woman so much.

“Get your crown,” Ahmanet said, “and then we can get this over with.”

Right. Her crown. She’d almost forgotten about that. She grabbed it off her nightstand quickly, unwinding Apep from in between the crystallized flowers. He hissed a little, but quieted down immediately when she carefully nestled him in her hair, within the circumference of her crown. It had kind of become his spot to be. Apparently the warmth from her head and hair made a pleasant spot for a very cold snake.

For a moment, the fury coming from Ahmanet was threaded through with curiosity. “What’s that?”

“That’s Apep,” Jenny explained, accepting Ahmanet’s arm. “Set showed me to make snakes out of magic, like you make spiders. Apep was my first attempt, and I think he’s cute, so I decided to keep him as a pet.”

Ahmanet stood on her tiptoes to see the tiny snake curled in Jenny’s hair. “Interesting. What can they do?”

“Their venom mummifies people.” Jenny couldn’t have hidden the smugness if she’d tried. “It’s
lethal in seconds.''

Ahmanet frowned a little. ‘’That does explain the mummies I passed when I arrived here. I had wondered about that.’’

‘’Yeah, that’s the snakes’ doing,’’ Jenny said. ‘’They’re still out there, by the way. They have orders to attack and kill anyone who comes to the palace with the intent to harm it or the people who live in it.’’

‘’A good measure, my love.’’

Jenny shrugged. ‘’I’d rather not get besieged a second time.’’

‘’Quite.’’ Ahmanet pushed the doors open, making Zara and Sahar jump to attention. ‘’Now let’s go deal with Morton, and then we can take some time to ourselves.’’

Well. That was as good a motivation as any. Hopefully Nick could be dealt with quickly, because Jenny was done with him. As far as she was concerned, this was the last time he’d tried to hurt her. The last time he had tried to do her harm and then make her think he just wanted what was best for her. Because that was bullshit. She’d seen the poison, had felt it burn her skin at the slightest touch.

Even if Nick wasn’t aware of the fact that it’d kill her, he had nonetheless tried to shoot her with it. And even if it really had been a cure, it was untested - they didn’t have someone like Jenny around to test it on. Set knows what it would’ve done to her if it’d hit her. Either way, poison or untested cure, Nick had been willing to risk it. He had been willing to risk killing her by shooting her with that stuff.

That was all Jenny really needed to know. If Nick was fine with potentially killing her, well, she didn’t have any guilt about having him killed either. So if Ahmanet did end up executing him today, Jenny wouldn’t mourn. Just like she hadn’t mourned Henry when she’d killed him.

They made their way down to the dungeons, Zara and Sahar close behind, and were let in without any trouble, as usual.

‘’Nick Morton’s cell.’’ Ahmanet demanded.

‘’Over here, Majesty,’’ the head warden quickly pointed it out.

Ahmanet stared at Nick in disdain. He was asleep, still trussed up like a pig for slaughter, leaning awkwardly on his cot in a way that could not be comfortable.

‘’Wake him up.’’

The head warden opened the door, gesturing one of the guards to step in and wake Nick up. He did so not too gently, giving Nick a hard shove that sent him crashing to the floor. Nick woke with a yelp and then a low groan of pain, face pressed against the floor, hands still chained in front of his belly. He couldn’t have broken his fall if he’d tried. Instead, his face took the impact.

Honestly, he made a pitiful sight.

It did not soothe the anger emanating from Ahmanet. At all.

‘’Jenny?’’ Nick garbled through his bloody nose.

‘’Amongst others,’’ Ahmanet agreed coldly. ‘’Although I do think that my Jennifer is the least of
your problems right now, Morton.’’

That was… more polite than Jenny had expected, really. Even if Ahmanet’s tone had been sharp enough to cut stone.

Nick jerked in shock, wiggling on the floor helplessly as he managed to glare up at Ahmanet with an expression of deep hatred on his face. ‘’You!’’

The sentiment was very much returned. Ahmanet stared down at him, disdainful, cold, cruelty licking at the very edges of the link, near buried underneath a deep, intense desire to just see Nick dead already. ‘’You are very lucky,’’ Ahmanet said gravely, ‘’that you did not succeed in murdering my beloved.’’

‘’What?!’’ Nick jerked in his chains. ‘’I didn’t try to kill Jenny! It was a cure!’’

‘’It wasn’t a cure!’’ Ahmanet hissed. ‘’Ask my Jennifer what it did to her when she touched it!’’

‘’Jenny?’’ Nick looked at her pleadingly.

Jenny met his gaze. ‘’It burned me. The moment it touched my skin, it started eating away at me like acid.’’

Nick stared at her in horror. ‘’No! No, it’s a cure! Jenny, it’s a cure!’’

‘’It’s poison!’’ Ahmanet spat. ‘’And you tried to murder my beloved!’’

‘’I didn’t! It’s a cure, I swear!’’ Nick cried out, twisting in his chains. ‘’I wouldn’t hurt you, Jenny! Never!’’

Except he already had. And he wasn’t going to stop. Not until he achieved a result he was happy with, or he died. There was something unhinged about his behaviour, something obsessive. Something that said he’d keep trying again and again without care for who he hurt in the process. Like how he’d killed Zara, and hadn’t even cared.

Jenny was not willing to sit around and wait for Nick to murder her in an attempt to turn her back into the person she was before her ascension. She wasn’t going to let that happen. So Nick had to be stopped. One way or another.

Jenny stared at the unhinged, babbling man in the cell, and let go of Nick as she’d once known him. It was remarkably easy. Something that had long been coming.

‘’My love?’’ Ahmanet inquired gently, sensing the shift in her mood.

‘’I have nothing left to say to him.’’ Jenny said. ‘’Do what you wish. I don’t care anymore.’’

That had Nick staring up at her in horror. ‘’What?!’’

Slowly, a somewhat sadistic grin grew on Ahmanet’s face. ‘’Guards, shut him up and ensure he is safe to transport. I want you to take him to the throne room. Make sure Aaheru and his apprentices are present, as well as a minimum of one-hundred guards, fully armed. And let the people know there will be a bit of a show on very soon.’’

‘’Don’t you da - ’’ Nick was cut off when a guard stepped forward and unceremoniously pushed a gag into his mouth, tying it in place with some cord and leaving Nick to shout incoherently through the fabric.
“My love, would you care to accompany me to the throne room?” Ahmanet offered her arm.

Jenny accepted it easily. “What are you planning?”

“I think it is time we set an example for those who think they have the right to harm us.” Ahmanet said as she led Jenny out of the dungeons, the guards dragging Nick not far behind. “We are royalty. We are ascended. The closest thing to living Goddesses there are in this world. Anyone who dares harm either of us shall pay a steep price indeed. And it is time people once again learned that.”

That… sounded very much like Ahmanet intended to do this in front of pretty much the whole palace. “You’re intending for everyone to see this.”

“I am. As many as will fit into the throne room.”

“And how many will fit?” Because the throne room was large. Very large, in fact. Even with one hundred guards lining the walls, the room wouldn’t feel busy. Jenny was sure hundreds of people fit in that room - it was the grandest room in all of the palace.

“The throne room will fit five-hundred people, aside from the guards, if we leave room in front of the thrones for Morton.” Ahmanet responded. She sounded, and felt, a touch smug.

“So around six to seven-hundred people,” Jenny concluded. That was… a lot. Not a big surprise, though, considering the sheer size of the throne room. And packed together, it was surprising how many people could fit into a certain amount of space. At this point, Jenny honestly didn’t care how many people saw Nick die - as long as he ended up dead. Preferably today. And then she could get back to the royal quarters and have some private time with Ahmanet, which was something she was really craving after not seeing Ahmanet for weeks. Being the sole ruler of the palace was lonely and stressful, and not an experience Jenny really appreciated, to be totally honest.

By the time they arrived at the throne room, the trip from the dungeons taking a few minutes, the throne room was already starting to fill up. Small groups of people entered, following the guards marching in and lining the walls. They looked curious, and then wary when they spotted Nick being dragged behind Jenny and Ahmanet.

From there, it didn’t take much to get everyone’s attention.

Ahmanet all but prowled up to her throne, taking a moment to make sure Jenny was seated in hers, before turning to the crowd that had gathered. The walls were lined with guards. A dozen more surrounded Nick, forcing him to his knees at the foot of the dais. He’d stopped trying to scream through his gag and now just seemed panicked, squirming and struggling against the chains and guards that kept him restrained and unable to run. He wasn’t succeeding in getting free; instead, the guards only seemed to cluster closer around him with every attempt, hands clamping down on his shoulders and upper arms and the back of his neck until he was grimacing in pain.

Ahmanet turned sharply to look at the crowd. They fell silent instantly, tearing their gazes away from Nick to look at their Pharaoh.

“My loyal subjects,” Ahmanet started, voice carrying clearly across the deadly silent throne room, “I have summoned you here today because I have a message to send. See, here, before me!” She pointed at Nick. “A murderer!”

There was a susurrus of whispers through the room.

“‘This… man,’” Ahmanet spat the word, “‘has murdered one of your Queen’s handmaidens! And before that, he attempted to commit an even more heinous crime! An unforgivable crime! This is the
coward who attempted to assassinate your Queen!’

Dead silence. Then, pandemonium.

Jenny had known that word of the attempt to kill her had spread through the palace. How could it not have, when she’d made a point of caring for Zara and ensuring those idiot guards didn’t survive for long afterwards? But she hadn’t expected the sheer outrage from the people now that they had the perpetrator in front of them. Compared to that, the guards had been utterly professional; they’d shown their dislike, sure, but they hadn’t expressed the sharp, violent anger these people were expressing now.

“SILENCE!”

The people obeyed, immediately and fully.

“I feel your anger,” Ahmanet said, a little calmer. “I share your anger.”

And she did - Jenny could feel it, simmering just under the surface, so close to spilling over into mindless violence. It was a small miracle Ahmanet was acting as calmly as she was.

“But rest assured. We have the criminal right in front of us. And he will not leave this room alive.”

That earned her some shouts of approval from the braver people. Nick started to struggle again, muffled shouts coming from behind the gag. One of the guard reached out, punching him in the cheek. Nick let out a muffled yelp of pain, and then another when he toppled over helplessly, smacking into the floor. No one bothered to help him up again.

Ahmanet drew herself up, standing tall and straight as she imperiously stared down at Nick. “Nick Morton, for your crimes against the Queen of Egypt and her handmaiden, I sentence you to death.” Ahmanet declared, all cruelty and not a shred of mercy anywhere in her emotions. “Aaheru!”

“Your Grace?” Aaheru took a few steps forward, until he was standing in front of the dais. “How may I be of assistance?”

Ahmanet pointed at Nick. “Bleed him dry, slowly, and send his soul to Set. Then use his blood and body for whatever ritual will bring him most torment in the afterlife.”

Nick stared up at her in horror.

A somewhat cruel smile spread over Aaheru’s face. “I shall obey, Majesty.” He turned to his apprentices. “Retrieve the athame and the ritual bowls! Incense, too, and fresh flowers!”

His apprentices hastily went scrambling out of the throne room.

“I apologize for the delay, Majesty,” Aaheru said.

Ahmanet waved it off, all but draping herself over her throne, all leonine grace. “No matter. I daresay this shall be an interesting show, don’t you think?”

At that, Aaheru was not the only one to nod in agreement. “If I may, Your Grace,” Aaheru continued. “perhaps I could involve the people in this, provided they are willing.” He threw a glance over his shoulder.

The crowd was starting to press forward a little, torn between aiming hatred at a fiercely struggling (but totally restrained) Nick and waiting with baited breath for the next thing to happen. The implied
question had murmurs of approval running up and down the ranks.

Ahmanet seemed not to care either way. "Those who wish to participate can do so. As long as Morton is dead by the end of it, and as long as he does so painfully and slowly, I do not care."

That actually surprised Jenny a little. From how angry Ahmanet had been - and still was - Jenny would've thought that Ahmanet wanted to do the honours herself. It wouldn't have surprised Jenny at all if Ahmanet had claimed Nick's life for herself and murdered him in front of hundreds of her subjects without hesitation or remorse. The fact that she was not only delegating the kill to Aaheru, but willing to let others participate - it was odd.

She glanced over at Ahmanet, wondering what her emotions weren't telling.

Glancing back, Ahmanet shot her a small smile, reaching over to gently squeeze her hand. "Fear not, my love. I have not lost my teeth."

"I had thought you would want to kill him yourself."

"I do, I admit. It would be a memory to cherish," Ahmanet admitted. "However, I have a feeling it would torment Morton even more were his death to be used to strengthen Set and leave him to be tortured eternally in the afterlife. Ritual sacrifice of a life has power, my love. Emotion, positive or negative, only enhances that power. You mustn't forget that."

"And you do plan to hurt him as much as possible," Jenny concluded. It didn’t bother her, and the fact that it didn’t bother her didn’t bother her either.

"As much as possible for as long as possible," Ahmanet agreed. "If I have to give up killing him personally to prolong his misery, that is a sacrifice I am willing to make. He will die slowly and in agony, and his pain will strengthen the sacrifice."

Jenny hummed in understanding. Really, she didn’t care all that much. As long as Nick was dead and unable to hurt her in the future, she was fine with it. And if Ahmanet wanted to use his death for some kind of ritual or whatever, well, who was Jenny to stop her?

After a few minutes, Aaheru’s apprentices returned to the throne room with the requested items. Tahirah carefully handed Aaheru the athame while Bau and Chafkem busied themselves placing the ritual bowls around Nick, filling them with fresh flowers and placing little holders with lit sticks of incense in between them.

"Remove the gag," Ahmanet ordered the guards. "I want to hear him scream."

The moment the gag was out of his mouth, Nick started pleading. "Jenny! Jenny, stop her! You can’t let this bitch kill me - augh!" He cut off with a groan of pain at the punch to his mouth.

"Do not dare to insult the Pharaoh!" Growled the guard who’d punched Nick, and then did so again when Nick opened his mouth to spit a retort. "Silent! You do not speak unless spoken to!"

Nick spit out a wad of blood, but didn’t say anything. He just stared up at Jenny, and she could see the realization sinking in - the knowledge that Jenny would not be interfering, was not going to jump in and save him. That she was going to sit on her throne and watch.

He was going to die here today.

And Jenny, quite frankly, would be very happy to be rid of him.
“Jenny, please!”

Jenny deliberately looked away. Turned her gaze on Ahmanet instead and gave a small nod, silently telling her to get this over with already.

“Aaheru, start whenever you are ready.”

“As you command.” Aaheru gave a small bow before turning to Nick, the inky black athame somehow managing to look even more sinister than the last time Jenny had seen it.

“Hey! Stay the fuck away from me!” Nick tried to sound as commanding as possible - the effect was pretty much undone by the way he tried to squirm back nervously. “Stop right there!”

At a gesture, two guards grabbed the chains keeping Nick tied up, pulling them taught between themselves and practically stringing Nick up for the slaughter. Four more guards joined in, until he could barely move, let alone try to escape. Bau hurried forward, taking one of the ritual bowls and holding it underneath Nick’s arm.

“In the name of our god, Lord Set, the Destroyer, the God of War, God of Chaos, God of Storms, Lord of the Desert, I sacrifice your life, enemy of the Lord, enemy of the Pharaoh, enemy of the Queen!” Aaheru lifted the athame, placing it against Nick’s upper arm. The obsidian went through the fabric of his sleeve easily. “Your soul beholden to Set, your blood and body beholden to magic, your life beholden to Pharaoh and Queen.”

At the first touch of the athame to his skin, Nick screamed like Set himself was clawing at his soul.
Chapter 67

Chapter Summary

The rest of dealing with Nick, a little private time with updates on Cairo, and the next Big Plot Point.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! I'm back, and I've got the new chapter for you, which, miraculously, I managed to get out in between studying for my exams, which start on Tuesday. Yay me! Anyway, it's got the next big plot point in it, which I've been working up to since, like, the first chapters. So yeah. I hope that came out reasonably well. As you'll see when you read it, I have little to no knowledge or experience on the subject, and Wikipedia can only do so much. Either way, this is how it's going to be.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

Nick did not die easily.

At all.

Jenny wasn’t sure what Aaheru had done, beyond the whole ritual speech, but magic was thick in the air, and every slice of the athame into Nick’s skin made a new trickle of it seep into the throne room. Nick’s blood was thick and dark, darker than it should be. Tahirah, Chafkem and Bau made sure to catch every drop of it in the ritual bowls, and for every bowl that was filled, they, along with the people witnessing, chanted prayers of power to Set.

And Nick never stopped screaming. High-pitched wails of utter agony and terror, loud enough that his voice broke over and over until all he was capable of producing were hoarse, guttural animal sounds of helpless pain and despair. By the time Ahmanet gave the order to finish him, he was slumped in his chains, silent except for faint unintelligible moans whenever the athame pierced especially viciously, on the brink of death, the light in his eyes long gone out. His spirit had already been broken. The fact that his heart still beat, if faintly, didn’t mean the rest of him hadn’t already died.

Then Aaheru slashed the athame across Nick’s throat, Chafkem holding the bowl to catch the weak spurt of blood that came out, and Nick slumped in his chains, his death rattle audible across the entirety of the deadly silent throne room.

Jenny stared at the corpse of her once-ally as it was lowered to the floor, and didn’t feel anything for it except for maybe a faint, detached sort of pity. She wondered what his harvested blood would be used for. It’d be ironic if it was used in some sort of protective spell; Nick would’ve hated being a part of something that protected Ahmanet or her goals.

Maybe Jenny would ask Aaheru sometime, if she could be bothered to remember. Honestly, it
wasn’t all that important to her. Nick was dead. The world was a little safer now that he wasn’t running around and trying to poison people. She didn’t think many people at all would miss him.

“’My love?’” Ahmanet inquired gently.

Jenny looked away from the body in front of the dais. “’I’m fine. It doesn’t bother me.’”

Ahmanet smiled a little. “’I’m glad. I feared you’d be upset.’”

“’No. I started letting go of Nick, I think, a long time ago.’”

“’When you came here, you argued for his life.’”

“’When I came here, I thought he wouldn’t hurt me.’” Jenny responded. “’He proved me wrong. It was time for him to die. Better than letting him live and make another attempt.’”

“’On that, we quite agree.’” Ahmanet gave a small nod. “’Nevertheless, I am glad that this has not upset you as I feared.’”

Jenny smiled a little. “’I will admit I’m less bothered by this sort of thing now than I would have been a while ago. Before Henry, before accepting my nature, I would have been horrified by this.’”

“’And now?’”

“’I can’t say I enjoy it like you do, love,’” Jenny said. “’But it doesn’t bother me either.’”

“’The fact that you do not revel in the pain of those below you says much of your strength of character.’”

Jenny gave Ahmanet a look. If not enjoying someone being tortured meant she had a good character, what did that say about Ahmanet, who did?

Ahmanet shrugged. “’I am well aware of the fact that I am not the kindest person in the world, my love. It does not bother me.’”

“’Well,’” Jenny said, “’I happen to like you just the way you are. It doesn’t bother me either.’”

And Set help her, but that was the truth. Much like she’d accepted her own nature, she had come to accept Ahmanet’s as well. She couldn’t change who Ahmanet was, and quite frankly, she didn’t want to either.

There was a little burst of affection across the link. Enough to make Jenny smile involuntarily. But damn her if she didn’t love Ahmanet. Because she did. So much that it frightened her a little sometimes, because she was pretty sure it was the most she’d ever loved someone. Romantically, anyway. None of her former relationships even came close. They’d never come close, even back when Jenny hadn’t even found Ahmanet yet. More than one relationship had crashed and burned because Jenny had cared more about finding her lost princess than she had about anniversaries and meeting the parents. In fact, she’d once gotten a lead, and even though it’d been a bust in the end, she’d been on a plane out of the country to track it down before she’d even considered informing her partner at the time.

Ahmanet gave a brief squeeze to her hand, before turning back to the people still in the throne room. No one had left yet, though guards had started preparing Nick’s body to be taken away for whatever purpose Aaheru had for it. Jenny doubted Nick’s body would be embalmed and buried as she’d seen happen to guards and residents of the palace. In fact, she’d be surprised if the corpse was allowed in
the embalming rooms at all. It was more likely to be dumped in an empty room near the temple until Aaheru had a use for it.

“My loyal subjects,” Ahmanet immediately managed to capture everyone’s attention. “I thank you for your faith and prayers today. I have no doubt Lord Set has heard us. But let this also be a warning to any who doubt my chosen Queen. Attempt to harm her, and suffer the consequences.”

Well. Much clearer than that wasn’t really possible, was it? Especially with Nick’s exsanguinated corpse sprawled across the stone floor in front of the dais. Jenny highly doubted any of the people in the throne room would be stupid enough to try anything after witnessing the way Nick had been ritually tortured to death.

“You are dismissed,” Ahmanet finished, waving them off.

They were gone in a matter of minutes, apparently quite satisfied to leave.

“I do with those guards would’ve suffered the same fate.”

Jenny shrugged. “They’re dead. I used three to resurrect Zara and create a new body for her, and the others died breaking the siege. I have no intention of resurrecting any of them.”

“I would not ask you to,” Ahmanet said easily. “I just wish their deaths had not been so easy. They did not deserve easy deaths, after their failure.”

“Set has their souls, no doubt. I’m sure he’ll take care of them.”

Ahmanet nodded in agreement, pushing herself up from her throne. “Let’s retire to our quarters, my love. I wish to spend some time with you in private.”

“I’d like that,” Jenny responded, accepting Ahmanet’s hand and standing up as well, though with a little more trouble. Set, she hated lugging all this extra weight around. She couldn’t wait to get this baby out of her, and then preferably not take care of it. Maybe she could hire like, a couple of nannies to take care of the child.

“Zara, Sahar!” Jenny jerked her head at her handmaidens to follow. They looked shaken and pale, but also viciously vindicated at the death of the person who’d murdered Zara. At least neither was on the edge of a breakdown, so that was at least something.

“Zara, tell the kitchens to send up some snacks to the royal quarters, please,” Jenny said. “Something sweet and light, and not too fancy. Tea, as well.”

“Of course, my Queen.”

In the royal quarters, Jenny took a seat on the couch, suddenly quite exhausted. She rubbed her swollen stomach, grimacing a little. She felt bloated and fat and a little achy, and hated every second of it. Why women did this voluntarily was beyond her. “I can’t wait to get this pregnancy over with.”

Ahmanet made a face of sympathy. “I can understand, my love. I had no wish for children either.”

“Yeah,” Jenny said, “not that we had much choice in the matter.”

“Set will get what he wants. And once the child is out, you will not have to have another.” Ahmanet promised. “We will live forever. We will not need heirs to inherit the throne.”
"And if we do need one, we can just adopt one, because I’m sure as hell not carrying another," Jenny added. One pregnancy was enough for her lifetime, thanks. Even if that lifetime was longer than usual. Set himself couldn’t convince her to do this again. If they had to have a blood heir for some inexplicable reason, Ahmanet could be the one to carry it this time. Jenny wasn’t ever doing this shit again.

"That won’t be necessary. We’re immortal. Even if we adopted a child to be our heir, they would die before they could ascend to the throne."

That was probably true. Unless they had a child that adopted a family-murdering streak like Ahmanet, they wouldn’t be sitting on any thrones anyway. Jenny and Ahmanet would outlive them easily, probably by quite a few years - if not by centuries. So no heirs were needed.

Jenny sighed, slouching into the couch a little more and very happy to cuddle into Ahmanet when she took a seat next to her. "How was Cairo?"

Ahmanet grimaced. "Stressful. It’s a warzone, my love. The unInfected soldiers are putting up a bigger fight than expected."

Well, obviously they would. Cairo was the capital city. No way the current government was going to give up the city without a fight. "How bad?"

"They attempted to defeat us by bombing our troops," Ahmanet said, "hitting the city in the process. The entire south side of the city is destroyed. I called up a sand storm to disorient the pilots of the bomber planes, and I sent some of my crows to fly into the engines, which caused several of them to crash into the city as well."

Jenny winced. She vividly remembered being in a plane crash herself and knew first hand just how terrifying it was. No doubt those pilots had not had extra help to survive like she had had. They had no Ahmanet to push their hands just that extra inch to grab onto something, or to feed them power and heal their injuries as if they’d never happened. If they hadn’t been able to get out by parachute, they had doubtlessly died as the place hit the ground. And to think they’d crashed into the city, after bombing it... thousands must’ve died. And the entire south side had been bombed into dust, apparently. That had to have caused casualties as well. There was no way it hadn’t.

"Our troops?"

"We lost men and women," Ahmanet admitted. "But many are still fighting. They are competent, my love, and do not die easily. And even so, the Infected are doing the most dangerous jobs, to spare our people as much as possible."

"Alright," Jenny said. "Once Cairo is taken, you can send the hurt and the ghosts of the recently dead to me. As long as I have enough life force donations, I can heal them without harming myself."

"I shall. You can use Infected soldiers, or captured unInfected."

That was fine. Jenny didn’t really care where the life force came from. As long as she had enough to do what needed to be done, the source was unimportant.

There was a small knock on the door, and Zara and Sahar entered carrying the tea and snacks Jenny had requested.

"Majesty, Highness," Sahar said, placing the tray she was holding on the table, "your refreshments."
“It looks good,” Jenny said. “Thank you.”

Ahmanet gave a curt nod. “Indeed. You have the rest of the afternoon off. We’d like some privacy.”

“Thank you, Majesty.”

Ahmanet waved them off almost negligently, and in a matter of moments, they were alone again. Jenny shuffled forward on the couch, bending a little uncomfortably to make herself a cup of tea. It smelled really good; floral and mild, which was her preference at the moment.

“As I was saying,” Ahmanet continued after a second, once Jenny had her tea, “we have not lost as many troops as we could have. The Infected, I admit, have come in very useful.”

Jenny sipped her tea, nodding. “That’s good. Were you still getting bombed when you returned here?”

“Not for a day or two, but I am expecting new attempts.” Ahmanet admitted. “But we have fighter planes too. Some of the Infected shall be patrolling Cairo airspace. They have orders to shoot down any plane that attempts to enter the airspace over Cairo. Preferably without warning. And I have given Infected ground troops to patrol the outskirts of Cairo as well, also with orders to eliminate anyone who tries to get in or out of the city.”

“What about long distance missiles?” Because Jenny knew that those could be deployed from very far away indeed. And also that they were hard to defend against.

“I have plenty of Infected within the military. Not all of them are openly on our side. Those still in hiding will keep an eye on impending attacks. If they spot an incoming missile, they will ensure a fighter plane is deployed to shoot it down. And I can always call up a sandstorm to interfere with the technology.” Ahmanet assured her, scooching a little closer. “Fear not, my love. I have things under control.”

“Alright.” Jenny gave a nod. She trusted Ahmanet to have things under control. After all, Ahmanet was the one who’d been trained as a child to be a ruler, even in times of war, and she had a whole cabinet of generals to advise where necessary. Which, granted, they’d failed at in the beginning, but they had pulled their shit together and actually made useful contributions nowadays. Jenny was quite glad to have them around, actually. Without them she wouldn’t have managed half as well running the palace on her own. Mainly because she had actually had to learn how to run one first. She sipped at her tea, which was just at drinking temperature, sighing in content. “I’m very glad to have you back, sweetheart.”

Ahmanet softened immediately. Even her emotions went mushy. “I am very glad to be back,” she responded. “I did not care to be so far from you, I must admit. It was… uncomfortable.”

That it certainly was. Jenny hadn’t liked it either, the knowledge that Ahmanet had been halfway across the country, almost as if she could feel the link tug at her. “I missed you,” Jenny admitted.

“As I missed you,” Ahmanet was all but curled around Jenny now, breath puffing across Jenny’s neck. “Like I have never missed anyone before. Even a man in the desert, thirsting for but a drop of water, could not comprehend how I longed for you.”

Well. Damn Ahmanet and the way she managed to effortlessly turn Jenny into a lovesick puddle of goo. But fuck if that wasn’t a romantic thing to say, and fuck if it didn’t immediately have Jenny melting. Seriously, how was that fair? “Dammit, you know what that does to me.”

She could feel Ahmanet grinning into her hair. “I am very much aware, my love. That is why I do
It was the sharp shoot of pain through her stomach and lower back that woke Jenny up in what she was sure was the middle of the night. She gasped a little, rubbing at her stomach in an attempt to soothe the ache. Not for the first time, she cursed the faulty not-so-great ‘immunity’ to pain she’d been granted, because fuck, that shit just wasn’t worth the trouble. Seriously. This shit couldn’t even be called an ‘immunity’ to pain.

The sharp sting in her abdomen faded little by little and soon enough it was all but gone again, like it had never happened in the first place. Jenny scowled to herself a little, still rubbing at her stomach, wondering what the hell was up with that.

Ahmanet murmured something against the back of Jenny’s neck. It sounded faintly inquisitive, but mostly just like she was half-asleep and not entirely aware of what going on. Unfairly, it was cute. Jenny didn’t sound cute when she did something like that. She just sounded like she was either dying, or like she’d been possessed.

She sleepily shunted some reassurance over the link, and when Ahmanet had dropped off again, barely seconds later, Jenny was quick to follow.

Morning came, and Jenny was in a foul mood. She’d woken up several more times to shooting pains in her abdomen, and though they hadn’t lasted long, they were still enough to turn her mood sour before she’d even gotten out of bed. Ahmanet, to her credit, hadn’t scuttled off or anything, though she did clearly remember the last time Jenny had been angry, and instead made sure to offer comfort where needed without pushing.

“I think I need a bath,” Jenny said, sat on the edge of the bed, feeling cranky and tired. She rubbed at her face. “God, I can’t wait ‘till I can get back into the really hot one.”

Because as nice as the warm bath was, she usually liked her water on the edge of scalding. Except she couldn’t have her water on the edge of scalding right now, according to Ismail, for some probably non-existing reason meant to poorly disguise overprotectiveness.

“Do you want me to join you?”

After a moment, Jenny nodded. “I’d like that.”

She was cranky, sure, but having Ahmanet around was very soothing. Probably because of the link. It let Ahmanet know exactly how far she could push and when she needed to just back down and let Jenny stew for a while. Not to mention the gentle, unassuming flow of reassurance and warmth that lapped at the edges of Jenny’s mind - not enough to influence her emotions, but enough to soothe a little, to take the edge off and let Jenny know that she wasn’t alone.
She heaved herself to her feet, grumbling at the extra weight she was carrying around, even if her strength meant she didn’t really notice it. At least her abdomen wasn’t actively cramping. Instead it was just a little sore, which honestly was a relief. Jenny didn’t consider herself a masochist, and she didn’t enjoy being in pain.

Nevertheless, the water of the bath was a relief. The warmth soothed her muscles, chasing away the soreness in a matter of minutes, and it was all Jenny could do not to go boneless with the gentle heat seeping into her bones. Yes. This was exactly what she needed. A soothing bath, Ahmanet next to her, warmth at the edge of her mind.

“Better?’’

“Much,’’ Jenny sighed. ‘‘I don’t ever want to get out of this bath again.’’

Ahmanet smiled. ‘‘We could have breakfast in here, if you wish.’’

“That sounds really good.’’

“I’ll be right back, then.’’ Ahmanet rose from the water, and Jenny took the opportunity to ogle a little while she fetched her robe. What could she say? Ahmanet was very attractive, and she was literally the love of Jenny’s life, so she figured she had permission to ogle. And she would do so with great enjoyment until Ahmanet told her to knock it off.

Once she had her robe on, Ahmanet swiftly exited the bathroom, and Jenny slouched back into the water, letting it come up to her chin as she closed her eyes and tried to relax. Yet, somehow, she felt tense. Like she was missing something she should’ve noticed by now.

Maybe she should double check on the palace defences - except that that wasn’t her responsibility anymore, because Ahmanet was back, and that meant Jenny was no longer the ruling force in the palace. Something else, then, because something was bothering her, and it annoyed her that she didn’t know what. She could go check on Abdamelek after her bath and breakfast, she supposed. After all, she had ordered medical care for him, so she might as well go find out to see if it had worked any, and if he was in any condition to keep him alive for longer and interrogate him about any of the Temple of Osiris’ future plans. Best to make sure they were prepared, so another Nick Incident could not occur.

There was a twinge in her abdomen. At least, it started as a twinge. Jenny groaned as it flared into something much more acute, curling her arms around her swollen belly. Fucking hell, what the fuck had she done now?!

“Jennifer?’’ Ahmanet hurried over, crouching next to Jenny’s shoulders. ‘‘Are you alright?’’

Jenny gritted her teeth as the pain began to ebb; a good twenty to thirty seconds had passed. She found herself snapping without meaning it. ‘‘Do I look like I’m alright?!”

Ahmanet’s face creased with worry as she glanced at the door. ‘‘Call the doctor! I want him in here in five minutes, or else!’’

“Fuck,’’ Jenny groaned, “I need to get out of the water. Help me out.’’

Ahmanet hurried to do so, carefully helping her out of the bath and to her feet, then hurrying to get Jenny her robe as she started to shiver the moment she was out of the water.

“You should lie down until the doctor is here,’’ Ahmanet murmured.
Jenny nodded. “Alright, yes, maybe that’s a good idea.”

They were barely at the doorstep between the bathroom and the bedroom when Jenny felt a gush between her legs, followed by the sound of liquid hitting the tiled floor. She froze, looking down.

That was not pee.

Suddenly she felt a little faint. “Ahmanet.”

“Yes, my love?”

“I think my water just broke.”

Ahmanet’s eyes went wide and round like saucers as she looked at the puddle of viscous liquid on the floor. “That’s…” For once, she seemed lost for words.

Jenny nodded, feeling a little bobble-headed. “Yeah.”

“Then the pains…”

“Yeah,” Jenny repeated faintly. Because holy shit, there was only one explanation for this, and she did not like it at all. Because if her water had just broken, and she’d been suffering repeated pains in her abdomen since last night… fuck.

“Bed.” Ahmanet ordered, the anxiety coming across the link as well as the faint tremble in her hands belying the calm, authoritative tone she’d taken. Jenny didn’t call her out on it, instead following directions until she was situated against the pillows, Ahmanet attached to her like a very concerned limpet.

She tried not to panic, fighting to keep her breath even as the first tendrils of panic began to creep up on her. She wasn’t ready for this. She wasn’t. Absolutely not. She didn’t want to be a mother. How was she supposed to deal with having a kid she’d never intended to have? Goddammit, she was not supposed to be in this position! And fuck Set for putting her in this position in the first place! Couldn’t he just get Aaheru to grab some random dude from the street and possess him instead of doing this to Jenny?

“Are you alright?” Ahmanet asked anxiously.

“I’m okay,” Jenny said, only partly lying. She wasn’t actively in pain right now, though the discomfort that came with realizing what was going on was considerable.

Ahmanet looked like she didn’t really believe her, but didn’t argue. Instead she all but wrapped herself around Jenny, clearly attempting to be as comforting as possible. The effort was very much appreciated.

Nearly ten minutes later, Ismail came rushing into the royal quarters, looking harried, doctor’s bag in hand and two assistants on his heels.

“You’re late!” Ahmanet snarled aggressively.

“My deepest apologies, Majesty,” Ismail was a little out of breath. Clearly he’d run all the way to the quarters. “I was informed her Highness is ill?”

“Not ill,” Jenny corrected. “In labour. My water broke a couple of minutes ago.”

Ismail’s eyes widened. “I see. Then we had better get to work. Would you prefer to give birth here,
my Queen, or in the infirmary?’’
Jenny shared a glance with Ahmanet. ‘‘Here should be fine.’’
Ismail nodded and turned to his assistants. ‘‘Bring me the supplies we stocked up on for this, quickly, now!’’
‘‘Yes, sir,’’ one of the assistants replied, the other one nodding in agreement. They were out of the door in a matter of moments.
‘‘Are you comfortable, my Queen?’’ Ismail turned back to Jenny.
Jenny shrugged a little. ‘‘As comfortable as I can be right now.’’
‘‘Good. Then if you would not mind terribly, I would like to check how far along you are, my Queen, so we may accommodate you to the best of our ability for the duration of childbirth.’’
Right. Jenny had forgotten about that. Because that was exactly what she needed right now; to have a near-stranger looking between her legs to make sure everything was going alright. Great. That was just fantastic. There was a reason Jenny had always made sure to take care of herself in that area - the less visits to the OB-GYN for checkups, the better.
With a sigh of annoyance, Jenny decided to get things over with. Though she did have a feeling she’d never be able to look Ismail in the eye again.

Hours passed, and Jenny did not enjoy any of them.
The contractions came fairly far apart at first, then faster, and by the time she was at the point where she was instructed to start pushing, she’d already threatened to take off Ahmanet’s head for putting her in this position, followed by very similar threats aimed towards Set, who, if she had anything to say about it, was going to suffer for making her have a child. Possibly for a very long time.
As for Ahmanet, well, she’d be lucky if she got to touch Jenny again before the end of the year. Jenny informed her of this at volume, and with plenty of curse words thrown in for flavour.
Ahmanet, in turn, took the threats as gracefully as she could, though she did look a little shocked at the profanity that spilled from Jenny’s lips.
Then, after fourteen hours, thirty-nine minutes and a few loose seconds, the child slid free from Jenny’s body with a faint gush of blood and amniotic fluids, and bare moments later, a shrill wail filled the air.
‘‘Congratulations, my Queen,’’ an exhausted Ismail said, placing the child in Jenny’s arms. ‘‘You have a healthy son.’’
Jenny stared down at the child. The boy didn’t look like her at all. He had the same brown skin colour as Ahmanet, the typical Egyptian bronze, a few little tufts of currently slicked-with-fluid black hair, plastered across the top of his little head. All in all, he was cute enough, Jenny supposed. But she didn’t feel any connection to him. There was no sudden rush of maternal affection at the little face that stared up at her. He was just a child that didn’t feel like hers at all - there was a fundamental disconnect there.
The boy let out a small wail, eyes clenched tightly shut.

“I believe he is hungry, my Queen,” Ismail said hesitantly.

Right. Shit. She had to feed him. Clumsily, Jenny peeled the light sheet away from her chest, rather thankful the child didn’t need her help to latch on. She grimaced a little when he began to suckle - it was a little uncomfortable.

Then the boy opened his eyes for the first time, and Jenny couldn’t have stopped the instinctive flinch if she’d tried.

Because his eyes weren’t the hazy newborn blue she knew they should be - they were a horrifyingly familiar amber, so bright they almost glowed, eclipsed only by the intensity of the abyss black that were his pupils and sclera.

From the face of a newly born infant, Set stared up at her.

Jenny felt the pulse of power that went through the palace all the way down in her bones.
Chapter 68

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet get used to having a child, have a meeting with the generals, and come to both an understanding as well as an important decision.

Chapter Notes

Heya people, I am back with the next chapter. We're getting close to the end now! As you can see, I've taken out a chapter. I'm playing around a bit with the planning for the next few chapters, but everything should run fine and work itself out before the end of the story. Probably. Hopefully. We all know how good (read: bad) I am at planning by now. Either way, here is chapter 68 for your enjoyment!

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

It was the high-pitched cry coming from the foot end of the bed that woke Jenny up, unreasonably early in the morning. She groaned, trying to stuff her head under the pillow, already fed up at being woken every couple of hours because Set needed a feed or a change.

"Jennifer," Ahmanet groaned.

Jenny groaned back, "I went last time. It's your turn."

She'd fed him just a couple of hours ago, anyway, so he couldn't be hungry yet. He probably needed a change. She'd leave that to Ahmanet, who was very much capable of changing Set's diaper.

And God, wasn't that a weird thought? There was an infant god in the crib at the foot end of the bed, and yet, for all the power contained in that tiny body, he still needed help cleaning his ass after messing himself. It was kind of ironic, in a terrifying sort of way. The worst part of it, though, was the fact that it was Set in that tiny body, and that meant his mind was the same as always. All that power and intelligence and cruelty was still there and very much unchanged. The only change was that his body was now tiny and useless, so the only way he could communicate his needs was by crying - loudly, and often.

Jenny was already getting really tired of it. Seriously. She did not understand why people did this and were happy about it. Don't get her wrong, Jenny didn’t mind children - she just liked them best when they were someone else’s, and didn’t wake her up four times a night. And also when they weren’t a literal god in disguise. Because the knowledge that Set had his adult mind was very awkward when she had to feed him.

"Fine." Ahmanet gave another exhausted groan, pushing aside the covers so she could get out of bed. Jenny could hear her shuffle over to Set, who was still crying. She couldn’t wait ‘till he’d grown up enough to be able to communicate his needs by speaking. Well, at least he wasn’t an infant in mind. Just Ahmanet picking him up was enough to quiet him, which Jenny was very, very grateful
for.

“I will be right back, my love,” Ahmanet said quietly.

Jenny mumbled something vaguely coherent in response, already half asleep again. If only Set would accept a couple of nannies. Except they’d tried to hand him off to a wet nurse, and he’d screamed loudly enough to cause several people to suffer from headaches for probably hours afterwards, and he hadn’t quieted down until Jenny and Ahmanet had taken him back. So, no nannies. Because apparently only the Pharaoh and Queen qualified as parental figures for an infant god. Even Aaheru had gotten disgruntled cries.

By the time Ahmanet returned with Set, Jenny was already back asleep, and very happy to be so. She really did not like being woken up like this.

Another thing Jenny had already learned to despise about being a parent was the exhaustion that came with waking up four or five times a night. Because waking up four or five times a night meant a significant decrease in actual rest, and a few days of that had Jenny ready to fall asleep sitting up.

She wasn’t in her teens anymore. She couldn’t pull all nighters like she’d done in uni, or function on only a few hours of sleep. God, when put like that, she felt old. But it was the truth. She was in her mid-thirties, certainly no longer a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed uni student with the ability to make it through sleepless nights with only coffee and junk food.

Having a kid certainly didn’t make her life any easier.

At least her handy-dandy little regeneration ability - which did work like advertised, and also fuck her ‘immunity to pain’ (yes, she was bitter about that, and she figured she had the right to be) - did mean that she wasn’t all that impacted by the actual birthing of said kid. According to Ismail the damage had been fairly minimal anyway (no disastrous tearing or anything, which Jenny had been very relieved to hear, because that sounded like a bitch and a half), and with her healing, Jenny was back up to par in a matter of hours. All it took was some rest and some food to give her some energy.

Though her regeneration hadn’t taken care of the little baby pouch Jenny had been left with - it had been a ridiculously short pregnancy, but she’d put on weight anyway. The fact that it was still there meant that her healing ability didn’t see a few extra pounds as something that had to be taken care of, so really, Jenny couldn’t be bothered to worry about it. A couple of extra pounds wouldn’t kill her, and Jenny had never really believed in dieting anyway. She was more of the see-food diet, in that she saw food, and then ate it.

So, exhausted or not, Jenny was as healthy as could be, and therefore, when morning broke, she got up to take care of Set, do her morning ablutions, have breakfast, and get on with the day. She tried not to grumble too much about it. Ahmanet was as tired as she was, and the fact that she could feel how grumpy Jenny was was bad enough already - Jenny didn’t have to go around and show it too. And Ahmanet did her the same favour; she was tired too, but didn’t show it.

At least Set wasn’t currently wailing. That was something. Probably because she’d just fed him, though, and apparently newborns, when not eating, crying, or messing themselves, spent most of their time asleep. Jenny had known this in a distant sort of way, but had never been close to a newborn infant for long enough to really experience it. She was quickly learning that quiet was a blessing.
She checked on Set anyway, though, and found him asleep in his bassinet, those unsettling eyes peacefully closed. The fact that she didn’t love the child didn’t mean she wasn’t capable of being a decent mother to him. She didn’t have much maternal instinct, but if there was one thing Jenny could not condone, it was neglecting or abusing a child. She was very much aware of what could’ve happened to her if her grandmother hadn’t insisted on keeping her; her own mother and father hadn’t exactly been prime parenting material. And she hadn’t heard much good of the foster system.

No, Jenny was very aware she was very lucky to have grown up with her grandmother, and she refused to be someone who perpetuated child suffering in the world. Even if said child was a fully grown god in an infant’s body. As long as he depended on her, Jenny would care for him, even if she didn’t like it and even if she didn’t love him like her grandmother had loved her. And it wasn’t like nannies were an option, apparently, so she had little choice anyway.

Assured that her child wasn’t about to mysteriously kick it, Jenny went to dress. She went for her usual combo, not bothering or wanting to make a change in that. Some jewellery, too, but not all of it, and her crown, Apep included. He curled up in her hair contentedly, as always, hissing faintly. Jenny took a moment to stroke her index finger softly over his little head, feeling his teeth gently scrape at her skin without actually doing any damage. He was a sweetheart, really. Docile, too, as long Jenny was the one handling him.

“My love, are you ready to go to breakfast?” Ahmanet, too, was washed and dressed.

Jenny nodded. “Shall I take Set?”

“No, I’ll carry him,” Ahmanet responded, already moving over to the bassinet to move him into his carrier basket. He stirred a little, but once in the basket with a small blanket tucked over him, he settled back down, much to Jenny’s relief. His tiny newborn body still needed loads of rest, and probably would for a fair while, unless he grew as fast outside Jenny’s womb as he had while inside Jenny’s womb. That, however, remained to be seen. In the few days since birth, he had not shown any unusual characteristics. Not counting the eyes, of course. Those were too obvious to ever miss.

With Set in the carrier basket, Jenny and Ahmanet made their way to the dining hall, followed by Jenny’s handmaidens. They didn’t offer to carry Set. The last time they’d tried to carry Set, even in his carrier basket, he’d started screaming like he was being murdered. It wasn’t just nannies Set disliked; it was pretty much everyone not named Jenny or Ahmanet.

Breakfast was already being served. Jenny, very glad that the whole pregnancy-based morning sickness had been over for a while, wasted no time filling her plate with some tasty foodstuffs. Today was definitely a ful medames day, and also a day for bread with soft, salty feta cheese and fresh parsley. With tea, of course.

“What’s today’s schedule?”

“There is a meeting in the war room this morning,” Ahmanet responded. “To listen to reports from Cairo and the Suez region. After that, another meeting with the generals, about strategy. Beyond that, I believe the day is mostly free.”

Jenny nodded in understanding. Meetings were a necessary evil she had grown accustomed to in Ahmanet’s absence, and, quite frankly, only two scheduled meetings was a good day. More unscheduled time than she’d expected, really. Though that could obviously be taken up by unforeseen circumstances or direct problems. Jenny hoped it wouldn’t, though. She liked having her personal time. Though she usually didn’t have much to fill it with.

Maybe she should pick up a hobby. She did have a bit of a hand for drawing, being an archaeologist
- not everything was done with computers yet, and a lot of finds that had to be logged and stored ended up being sketched as well. Jenny had done plenty of that in uni. She hadn’t been too bad at it, actually. And she could always write that book on the palace that she’d been thinking about. Hell, she could write it and illustrate it. It wasn’t like she hadn’t spent the past thirteen years of her life obsessing over Egypt and its secrets. Specifically the time Ahmanet had grown up in. She knew a lot about it. Enough to write at least a first draft without too much trouble. And she could ask Ahmanet for first hand accounts.

She ate her breakfast without any interruptions, enjoying every bite of it. It was very good to have some fresh food back into the palace. The cooks, as it seemed, had followed instructions to replenish the stores as quickly as possible. There was even fresh mint for in her tea, which was very nice alongside some honey and a slice of lemon. All in all, it made for a pretty good breakfast to start the day; definitely enough to tide her over to lunch.

“‘My love,’” Ahmanet offered Jenny her arm, a few moments after Jenny had finished. “‘The generals are expecting us in the war room.’”

“‘Let’s not make them wait too long, then,’” Jenny responded easily. By now she was used to how the generals worked, and they were always, always early. Sometimes ridiculously so. But they were always polite, they were always willing to listen, and they always let Jenny (or, now that she was back) Ahmanet take the final decision, and that was what mattered.

“‘Your Majesty, Highness.’” The generals, as one, stood when they entered the war room.

“‘Be seated,’” Ahmanet said mildly, waiting for Jenny to take her chair, and only then sitting herself. Jenny took a second to place Set’s carrier basket into the little stand the room had for just that purpose. It was set next to her own chair, within arm’s reach, so she was close in case he woke up.

“‘Sire,’” the spokesman said respectfully. “‘We have received reports from the troops in the Suez region, and a report from Cairo detailing events since you returned from the front.’”

Ahmanet waved her hand in a sort of ‘go on, then’ motion, silently telling the generals to start with the reports.

“‘We have received several reports from the Suez region,’” the spokesman started. “‘We have infected troops stationed in Port Said. They have managed to set off several explosives in the city, specifically at the docks, the airport and the train station. Confirmed dead number over three-hundred, injuries range into a thousand. The Infected are currently masquerading as loyal to the fake government, but are sabotaging relief efforts where they can. One team in particular has shown itself particularly effective after managing to sneak a second series of explosives into the port, which critically damaged not only the docks but also several cargo ships, causing damage worth millions.’”

Ahmanet nodded thoughtfully. “‘Note them down for recommendation. The Infection will keep them loyal, so there’s no harm in marking their files for future reference.’”

One of the generals was already marking it down on a notepad.

“‘We have also received reports on the other targets marked in the Suez region,’” the spokesman continued once the other general had finished writing. “‘The bridges that were selected, the Al Salam Bridge and the El Ferdan Railway Bridge, have both been damaged severely. We have managed to totally collapse the Al Salam Bridge into the canal, and the El Ferdan Railway Bridge has been critically damaged on the left bank of the canal. The entire left side of the bridge will have to be replaced for it to be functional again.’’
“Why only the left side of the railway bridge?” Jenny was, quite honestly, not really that familiar with the actualities of the Suez Canal. She knew it was there, and that it was an important target that got a lot of traffic, but that was about it. She’d never really bothered to look further than that, to be honest. Therefore, this bridge was mostly unfamiliar to her.

“It is a swing bridge, Highness. The halves were not connected during the attack, and since we only placed explosives at the left side, the right side was left undamaged.”

Jenny nodded. That was all she needed to know on that. She waved her hand at the spokesperson, gesturing at him to continue.

“The last two selected targets in the Suez region were the Suez Canal Authority headquarters, as well as the Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel. I am pleased to report that both structures were destroyed. The SCA headquarters are good only for bulldozing as it is beyond saving, and the explosives placed within the tunnel under the canal have caused the ceiling to collapse inward, flooding the tunnel.” Said the spokesman.

Wow. That was a lot of damage. Jenny had been informed of the success of the attacks during the siege, of course, but there hadn’t been any details like now. She wouldn’t have been very interested in the details anyway, beyond knowing that everything had gone as planned. She wondered quietly if she should be horrified at the amount of damage that been done on her and Ahmanet’s orders. Jenny didn’t feel bad about the damage; she did feel a little bad at all the work their people were going to have to do to repair it. It was going to be a bitch to rebuild all that once they had Egypt. But that wasn’t actual guilt. Or remorse. Jenny had a hard time caring about the fact that people had died or been injured. It was war. People died in war. And the people who had died in these attacks were not people who Jenny was willing to go resurrect. She’d reserve that for the loyal.

“And Cairo?” Ahmanet demanded.

“The report mentions that the fake government has attempted to bomb our troops again,” the spokesman said. “We managed to take down one plane, but couldn’t get to the others.”

“Casualties?”

“Mostly civilian. We only lost a dozen troops in the attacks.”

Ahmanet nodded slowly. “When I left, we still had a respectable amount of soldiers stationed at Cairo. Should I expect that number to start declining?”

“If the bombings continue, it is a definite possibility that we will start taking real losses sooner or later,” the spokesman nodded. “We’ve also received reports from Infected sleeper agents that the fake government will be sending in more ground troops over the coming week.”

That had Ahmanet frowning. “What can we expect?”

“A few hundred soldiers at the least. Vehicles, definitely. Some tanks and helis. The Infected who reported it will send us the details as soon as they find out more.”

“We’ll start taking more significant losses, then, I expect.” Ahmanet mused.

“That is inevitable,” the spokesman agreed.

“How many soldiers do we have on reserve?”

“We have another few thousand, Majesty. And all adult members of the Cult of Set are trained
warriors as well.’’

‘‘Give me a number.’’

‘‘Cult of Set included, Sire, we have nine thousand troops on standby still. Four thousand of those are Cult soldiers. We have currently just over two-thousand in Cairo, and about fifteen hundred Infected mixed into the government troops stationed throughout the Suez region.’’

‘‘Direct another thousand to Cairo, and have an additional thousand on standby in case the fake government sends more troops than expected.’’

‘‘Yes, Sire.’’

Ahmanet sat back in her chair. Faint displeasure radiated from her side of the link. ‘‘I don’t like this.’’

‘‘Sire?’’ Asked the spokesman.

‘‘Our people are a minority as we speak. We can’t afford to lose too many. If we lose too many before we have taken Egypt, we will have a country filled with people who do not follow our way of life, and have no knowledge of our way of life.’’ Ahmanet frowned. ‘‘We need them to convince Egypt’s population to follow.’’

‘‘...If I may, Majesty,’’ one of the generals spoke up, a touch hesitantly. ‘‘Perhaps it is time to show the world what we are capable of.’’

Ahmanet’s gaze hit him with laser focus. ‘‘Elaborate.’’

‘‘We do not have to lose more people, Majesty,’’ said the general. ‘‘You have the power to call and army from the very desert itself. Send the sand to fight the war for you. You could crush Cairo in an instant without losing even a single of our soldiers.’’

‘‘And with the entire desert against them, Egypt would not stand a chance. They could never win against the very ground they have built their country on.’’ Another general argued, clearly agreeing. ‘‘The vast majority of the country is desert. There is more power there than the enemy can possibly comprehend. Or fight against. Why not use it? Why not end this war instead of letting it drag on and kill our people?’’

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow, glancing across the table to look at all the generals present. ‘‘You all agree on this? That I should reveal my abilities?’’

‘‘We believe that it is the fastest way to end this war, Sire,’’ said the spokesman after a second of silence. ‘‘And that it will be a good deterrent for anyone else who is thinking of attacking while we are busy fighting for Egypt.’’

Frowning thoughtfully, Ahmanet leaned back in her chair. She glanced at Jenny. ‘‘What do you think, love?’’

Well. That was a loaded question if Jenny had ever heard one. Because this was kind of like a two-edged sword, wasn’t it?

On one hand, using an army of sand would end this war very quickly indeed - Egypt could be crushed in a matter of days, and if there was an entire desert fighting against them, the government would probably surrender fairly quickly. The same went for surrounding countries, which were also largely desert countries.
But at the same time, letting the world know about the supernatural and that they had powers, well, that was like pouring oil into the fire. Like a forest fire over a burst gas or oil pipe. Whatever the metaphor, it was going to cause a shitload of problems. It was going to have governments all over the world knocking the door down to get their hands on those powers, to imprison and experiment on anyone who even hinted at having them, or kill them if capture wasn’t possible. At the same time, it would have all kinds of religious extremists chomping at the bit to like, burn them at the stake or something, screaming about evil and witchcraft like it was still the 1700s.

So yeah, definitely not a decision to take on a whim. And also not a decision to take without knowing for certain they had extra safety measures in case they chose to reveal the existence of their powers. Jenny didn’t much fancy waking up strapped to a table somewhere. Though it probably wouldn’t get to that point.

“Jennifer?” Ahmanet prompted.

“I think,” Jenny said slowly, “that this is a decision that shouldn’t be made on a whim. If we do this, it will have consequences. The world will know what we can do, and their will either fear it, or covet it. Governments of other countries will see us as either a threat to be eliminated, or a weapon to be broken and controlled. The religious factions will see us as demons, probably. Either way, if we do this, we’re going to have to watch our backs very carefully, because it will paint a huge target on us. However,” she added, once she saw a few of the generals getting ready to protest, “I cannot deny the fact that using our abilities will make it far easier to win the war and save as many of our people’s lives as possible. And perhaps showing our power will indeed scare off those who think they can take advantage of our distraction with the fake government.”

“You raise good points, my Queen,” the spokesman admitted.

“I’m not saying I disagree,” Jenny said. “I’m just saying that maybe we should take a few hours to think this over and see if it is the best course of action right now.”

Ahmanet nodded decisively. “I agree with you, my love. This is an important matter. We cannot just make a decision in the next ten minutes.”

“Sire, this is not something we can delay for long,” said one of the generals. “Government troops will be moving in on Cairo very soon.”

“I understand that, general.” Ahmanet’s voice was just a touch sharp. “And I will make a decision. Today. But I will not be hurried into making it before I have had the time to think it over.”

“Apologies, Sire,” the general backed down immediately.

“We will reconvene here in three hours.” Ahmanet stated. “Then I shall announce my decision.”

The generals had no other choice than to nod their assent. Ahmanet was the one with the ability to turn the desert into an army. If she said wait, then they’d damn well wait, because without Ahmanet, they couldn’t do anything. And Jenny wasn’t going to let them hassle her for a decision either. Because she wasn’t going to let Ahmanet make this decision until she was sure she had a grasp on all of the possible consequences that it could have.

Set in tow, they left the war room to the generals.

“Would you care to walk in the gardens with me?” Ahmanet asked.

“I’d like that,” Jenny said. “We could go to the fish pond.”
"There should still be chairs there. We could have tea."

"That sounds good. It’s been a while since we did that."

"Once things settle down again, my love, we shall make it a weekly thing." Ahmanet promised, relieving Jenny of Set’s basket. "It shall be a good bonding activity for us."

"Spending some time together without having to discuss war or other critical issues whatever does sound good."

"Today, we must," Ahmanet said. "Because a decision has to be made."

That was, unfortunately, the truth. It wasn’t something that could be put off for long, if at all, really.

Before long they were settled into a couple of very comfy chairs overlooking the fish pond, a tray of tea nearby on a small table, Set arranged just as close with his basket set into a stand similar to a rocking chair. A small push was enough to have it gently rocking for a bit. Jenny was just glad Set was still asleep, though she suspected he’d be awake and screaming for a feed soon enough.

Jenny sipped her tea, watching as a fish lazily touched the surface of the water before swimming deeper. The water was clear enough that she could see the fish easily. She’d never considered herself a fish person, but she really did like them. Maybe she should see about maybe getting a few turtles in there, too. No crocs, though. Those were too big and too dangerous; Jenny knew what Nile crocodiles looked like and how huge they got. But turtles were good. Or tortoises. Whichever.

"What do you think, Jennifer?" Ahmanet broke the silence. "Consequences aside."

Jenny stared at the pond, thinking. But really, she already knew the answer to that. "If there were no consequences, I’d tell you to get on with it already and put this war to an end."

"Yes. That is what I wish to do as well."

"But we don’t live in a world where there won’t be consequences."

"We do not." Ahmanet agreed. "Do you think it will be as bad as you predicted earlier?"

"Honestly?" Jenny shrugged a little. "I don’t know. I don’t think there’s ever really been a situation like this, so I don’t know for sure what the reactions will be."

"But?" Ahmanet prompted.

"People fear what they can’t understand. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hatred, and hatred inevitably leads to violence." Jenny sighed. "And I don’t think they’ll understand magic."

"Yes. I do recognize that reaction." There was something heavy in Ahmanet’s voice and emotions. Something bitter, gone untreated, that had been festering for a very long time. Her own heart aching for Ahmanet’s pain, Jenny reached out to her, both physically and emotionally. She squeezed Ahmanet’s hand, simultaneously drowning her in comfort, hoping that it’d be enough to chase that bitter ache away for at least a while. She made it a point to keep away the anger that had flared; she hated that Ahmanet had been hurt like this, that she’d been imprisoned and left to rot for millennia without anyone caring or even knowing.

"I looked for you," Jenny said, trying not to choke up, "for so long. Years. More than a decade. I’m sorry I didn’t find you sooner."
Something in Ahmanet’s expression cracked a little. “I know, my love. And I am so grateful that it was you. If I’d known to person who would free me, I would have waited another five thousand years and been happy to do it.”

“Don’t say that. You never should’ve been in there in the first place.”

“I’m glad I was.”

Jenny blinked, suddenly feeling off kilter. “Why?”

That place had been hell. Five millennia of nothing, or darkness and hunger and anger and abandonment, never knowing when and if there’d ever be sunlight again. Jenny couldn’t understand why anyone would be happy to have been trapped in that tomb.

Ahmanet smiled bitterly. “Before… that place, I was not as I am now, my love. I was raised for the throne. I believed that everything was owed to me simply because of who I was. I still do, to some extent. But that entitlement would’ve meant I would not have appreciated my Chosen as I do you. I would’ve considered my Chosen as simply another thing that was owed me. And if they’d been male, they would not even have been mine at all.” That slow, bitter ache deepened, hollowing into something cavernous and agonizing, but threaded even through that were bits of wonderment and gratefulness. “I waited five thousand years for you, my Jennifer. I hungered and I thirsted, and beyond all of that, I longed for a companion. My Chosen. I waited for you, my love, and I am glad to have waited for so long, because you are the result of my torment.” Then Ahmanet smiled at her, and she still had something broken in her eyes, but also something that was slowly being patched together again. “I think, all things considered, that I got the better end of the deal.”

Jenny couldn’t have stopped the tears if she’d tried. Something felt hot and achy in her chest, but also strangely happy. It was almost painful to feel, but also not. She didn’t have the words to really express it, so instead she just shoved everything she felt in Ahmanet’s direction and hoped that everything she felt and wanted to same came across alright.

If the tears that slid down Ahmanet’s face were anything to go by, it did.

For a while, they sat in silence, clutching at each other’s hands, the tea gone cold. It was oddly peaceful. Like a barrier Jenny had never even realized was there had crumbled.

Then Set started to cry, and the moment was broken. Jenny sighed, standing up to take him from his basket. His diaper was dry, so he was probably hungry, then.

“My love,” Ahmanet said once Jenny had settled back into her chair, Set to her chest, “what shall I do?”

There was really only one thing Jenny had to say to that.

She adjusted Set a little, looking at Ahmanet, and decided that she’d take the danger if it meant Ahmanet wasn’t confined by the limitations of humans anymore. She’d been confined, in one way or another, for far too long. If anyone deserved to let loose for a bit, it was Ahmanet. And what did Jenny care if it meant they’d get even more attention from governments? With enough sand around, they could destroy anyone who tried to harm them. Egypt had a lot of sand. And it’d be monotheistic soon enough, so if religious extremists had problems with them, they could have problems all the way from another country. That, or from the afterlife.

So really, what else could she say other than, “crush them, of course.”
Chapter 69

Chapter Summary

Ahmanet raises an army of sand creatures to conquer Egypt with, and Jenny and Ahmanet go to visit Chris, with both fortunate and unfortunate consequences.

Chapter Notes

Hello, all! I have chapter 69 ready for your reading pleasure! Since we're in the home stretch, I'm trying my best to tie some loose ends that I probably should've taken care of before. Nevertheless, I am actually quite pleased with how this chapter came out in the end, even if it turned out to be way longer than expected. Didn't feel right to cut the thing in half, though, so you're stuck with it. Also, I finished it like, thirty minutes ago, so please ignore any spelling errors I might have made.

As always, enjoy and lemme know your thoughts!

The generals were clearly very happy with the decision once Jenny and Ahmanet had informed them that they’d be revealing their powers to the world. Or, more specifically, Ahmanet’s powers. Jenny’s powers were going to remain hidden for another while, since resurrecting people wasn’t really useful in a direct combat situation where their soldiers were literally unkillable. Not much for Jenny to resurrect there, except for enemies, and she wasn’t going to waste life force on those. And considering her dominion over death had yet to progress beyond sucking the life out of people and creating snakes, there wasn’t much she could do there either. Her snakes might come in handy, but they didn’t have the mind control of Ahmanet’s spiders, so really, they wouldn’t gain them allies. Though they might come in very handy indeed if people needed to be killed and were in a place where soldiers couldn’t get in as easily. There were possibilities there.

But the fact remained that Ahmanet was going to do most of the legwork here. And legwork meant literally turning the desert into a weapon of mass destruction.

“When would be preferable for you, Sire?” Asked one of the generals, clearly impatient.

Ahmanet frowned a little. “I shall raise the army soon. I wish to do something else first.”

“Sire?” Inquired the spokesman.

“I trust Jennifer is right when she says this will earn us significant international attention,” Ahmanet explained, “and that she is right to assume that attention will not necessarily be in our best interest. I wish to ensure we, and the country, are protected from outside attacks before I raise my army.”

Good to know Ahmanet had taken her concerns to heart. “What are you planning to do?”

“I’m going to raise a sandstorm,” Ahmanet said, “at the borders. Only a mile in width, but harsh enough that planes and foreign troops won’t go through it.”
Jenny blinked. “You can do that?”

“My love, I had London swallowed by a storm when there isn’t even a desert there. The closer I am to the sand, the more control I have, and we are right in the middle of it. Protecting the borders will hardly be an issue.”

“Alright, fair enough,” Jenny said. “How about height? Won’t planes fly over it?”

“A few miles will do,” Ahmanet said. “I will have crows flying at the top of the sandstorm. They will take down planes that try to enter our airspace.”

“Might I suggest having a few fighter planes on standby as well, Sire?” Said one of the generals. “It is always good to have extra failsafes.”

“If it makes you feel better.” Ahmanet waved her hand negligently, turning to offer Jenny her arm. “Accompany me onto the balcony?”

“Of course.” Jenny was actually kind of looking forward to witnessing Ahmanet raise the desert. Nowhere in history had something like this ever been mentioned - outside of myths anyway. Though those probably had more truth in them then people thought at first glance. As far as Jenny was aware, though, this was unprecedented. Henry might’ve known if it had happened before, but he was dead, and Prodigium was pretty much wiped out, so Jenny had no way to find out either. So yeah. There was no way in hell she was going to miss out.

The generals followed them out of the war room, and with Zara and Sahar also in tow, they made for a little procession down the corridors of the palace.

It didn’t take long for them to get to the balcony, which was a different one from the balcony that overlooked the courtyard. This balcony overlooked the gardens and the fish pond, and beyond the palace walls was only desert. That, and a few mummified corpses and some abandoned military equipment that hadn’t been dragged into the palace to be reused. Mostly because it’d been damaged at some point and wasn’t of much use anymore beyond scrap metal. The palace, huge as it was, didn’t have space to have damaged military vehicles lying around. Or, well, they probably did, but it’d clutter up the courtyard and make the place look untidy. And it wasn’t like the government was currently brave enough to come retrieve them anyway. They were staying clear from the palace at the moment. Reports said they’d stuck to a nice buffer zone of a couple of miles in the direction of Luxor, hidden behind a couple of dunes. Jenny would be very glad if they just stayed there, or fucked off entirely. She did have her snakes hidden in the sand if they came closer, though, and hundreds of troops on standby within the palace. Not to mention Ahmanet, with the entire desert at her fingertips.

Speaking of Ahmanet, she gently dropped Jenny’s hand and stepped up to the elaborate stone balustrade at the edge of the balcony, gaze fixed squarely on the sand beyond the palace gates. Her fingers twitched a little, there was a small furrow between her eyebrows - and then her eyes turned a burning yellow and Jenny almost staggered back at the wave of power that crested and crashed across the balcony.

It was like that day at Cairo when Ahmanet had come for her, but ten times, a hundred times as powerful. It didn’t have the richness, the depth, the sheer ancient strength of Set’s power - but it was close. And it was also far more warm, far more welcoming (to Jenny anyway), and, she had to admit, also kind of sexy. It was easy to understand now why Ahmanet had looked at her with such want when Jenny had first discovered her ability to heal things with the jasmine blossoms.

Jenny tried not to shudder, feeling Ahmanet’s power and magic wash over her, but if the tiny smirk
that flickered over Ahmanet’s lips was anything to go by, she didn’t quite succeed. And her emotions were probably screaming her arousal over the link as well.

Then, in a second, the power gathered together, intensifying until Jenny could barely breathe - and then it sank into the stone of the balcony, down into the ground, out towards the desert. For a moment, nothing happened. Then there was a faint ripple in the sand, a small, barely noticeable wave moving at such a speed that it was out of sight past the horizon in barely a few seconds.

Ahmanet sighed. The wrinkle between her eyebrows smoothed out, her hands uncurled from the fists she’d clenched them in, tension leached out of her shoulders and back. A faint sheen of perspiration shone on her face. She looked and felt pleased with herself.

“Sire?” Asked one of the generals hesitantly.

Ahmanet didn’t answer. Instead, she glanced at the general, and then back at the horizon, raising an eyebrow as if telling him to shut up and just look.

Jenny turned to look at the horizon as well. Her breath hitched a little.

The Red Sea marked one of the borders of Egypt. Luxor was approximately one hundred and forty miles from the Red Sea. The palace, three hours down on the map (if through the desert, which drastically increased travel time to distance and meant it wasn’t all that far from Luxor really) and about ten miles in bird’s flight from the banks of the Nile, was around one hundred and thirty miles from the Red Sea.

It was impossible to see that border from the palace.

Yet, there, on the horizon, so far away that it was just a haze, was the reddish bloom of desert sand. It was barely more than a faint red smudge at first, but slowly the colour got thicker and more opaque, and it rose higher into the sky, and in a matter of minutes there was a wall of red on the horizon, stretching in either direction as far as the eye could see - and it definitely was not a dune.

“Holy hell,” Jenny breathed, more than a little impressed. Because that wasn’t just the sandstorm that had popped up when she’d found the sarcophagus and transported it to England. It wasn’t even the sandstorm that had swallowed London whole. This was something far, far bigger. Something far more powerful. The other two didn’t even compare.

If Jenny hadn’t been very much aware how much Ahmanet loved her, she’d have been terrified at how easily she’d accomplished something like this.

Ahmanet made a broad, almost nonchalant sweep with her arm, flinging another swathe of power out into the desert as if it took no effort at all. Outside the palace walls, black shapes burst out of the sand. A murder of uncommonly large crows at least a few thousand big took flight, ascending unnaturally fast until they were barely specks against the blue sky.

Set was wide awake by now, squirming in his carrier basket, those unsettling black-and-amber eyes focussed on Ahmanet with almost scary intensity. Jenny picked him up, cradling him to her chest with a hand around the back of his neck to support his head. His hands were still too tiny to really properly grip onto anything, but he made a good attempt at clutching her tunic anyway, little fingers twisting into the fabric with the first hints of inhuman strength. He didn’t look away from Ahmanet, something deep and ancient rumbling from his tiny chest.

“Now,” Ahmanet murmured, fingers leaving dents in the stone of the balustrade, “an army.”

In an instant, the air was thick and heavy. Not quite as saturated as for the sandstorm at the border,?
but something quite similar to it.

Outside of the palace walls, the sand began to churn. Slowly, at first, barely visible, but slowly increasing in force. Jenny sucked in a breath when bulges formed in the sand, breaking open to reveal slowly forming sand creatures. They looked strange at first, like half-melted blobs, but they swiftly gained a solid outline and definition. Jenny wasn’t at all surprised to see them taking the shape of Set animals. Inhumanly huge, bipedal, jackal-like, with long snouts and ears. There were hundreds of them, and under their feet, the sand still churned, as if waiting for the created Set animals to step away so new soldiers could burst free and join them.

They didn’t though - each head was turned towards the palace, eyeless faces somehow managing to stare straight at Ahmanet. It was a little eerie, almost as if they were sentient.

Ahmanet’s voice easily carried over to them. “Go to Cairo. Kill every enemy soldier you come across! Destroy the government’s seat of power! Bring me the fake ruler, the one who calls himself the president of this country, and throw him at my feet!”

Well, that would certainly make a statement. Jenny shifted Set a little in her arms. Part of her was not surprised that Ahmanet wanted to have the president of Egypt at her feet. Knowing Ahmanet - and Jenny liked to think that she was slowly managing to worm her way into knowing every inch of the woman she loved - she wanted the president not only at her feet, but also begging for the opportunity to give her Egypt, even if he didn’t actually have the authority to do that. Probably in return for his life. And maybe the lives of other people as well. Jenny didn’t put it past Ahmanet to keep the entirety of Cairo hostage until she got what she wanted. Jenny also didn’t put it past Ahmanet to kill the president anyway, whether he actually ‘gave’ her Egypt or not. Whether the remaining population of Cairo would survive was a fifty-fifty chance, really, depending on Ahmanet’s mood and if the president folded quickly enough.

Ahmanet looked over the sand soldiers with a gaze of steel. “Go!”

In moments, the air was obscured with kicked-up sand as the Set animals took off at a supernatural speed, and in their wake, the area of sand they’d been standing on spat out more of them, until the desert was all but swarming with them.

Back when Ahmanet had murdered Jenny, only a dozen of those creatures had been enough to murder over a hundred men and women in a matter of minutes. It probably wouldn’t take long for the hundreds of creatures Ahmanet had called up now to complete their mission either. Jenny would not be surprised at all if they had the president kneeling in the throne room in a matter of days.

Once the last of the creatures had taken off, Ahmanet turned away from the balcony balustrade. Her eyes fell on Jenny, then on Set, wide-awake and staring back with astonishing clarity for a newborn.

“My lord,” Ahmanet murmured, gently accepting him from Jenny and cradling him in the crook of her elbow. There was still a layer of awe and worship to her voice and emotions, but it was less than before Set had been born. Having to care for him as an infant did a good job at wearing away the hero worship. It was hard to consider Set scary or all powerful when all he could really do was cry. Jenny figured that by the time he had his first birthday, Ahmanet would have a seriously hard time looking at him as her god at all.

“I expect we will see results in a matter of days,” Ahmanet said to the generals. “My soldiers will be able to reach Cairo in a matter of hours. It will not take them long to exterminate the government troops stationed there and capture the city.”

“I will have the wardens at the dungeons prepare a cell, Sire, for the expected prisoner.” One of the
generals volunteered. “Unless you wish to hold him in servant’s quarters?”

“A cell will do. Just put an extra blanket in there and give him some higher quality rations or something. That is more than enough luxury for an enemy, even a higher ranked one.” Ahmanet responded. “He shan’t be in there for long anyway.”

“Of course, Sire,” the general responded instantly.

“There isn’t much we can do now,” Ahmanet said. “Not until my soldiers return. You’re dismissed.”

The generals bowed, and wasted no time making their exit.

“My love, are you busy the rest of the day?”

“I shouldn’t be,” Jenny said, glancing at Zara and Sahar to be sure.

“Actually, my Queen,” Sahar said, “Jamila Kader asks your presence, as she has finished the project you commissioned from her. And Chris Vail wishes to know if you have time to visit him.”

Ahmanet frowned. “What does Chris Vail want?”

“I do not know, Sire, but he insists it is important.” Zara responded.

“Send someone over,” Jenny said, starting to leave the balcony. “I will go see him as soon as I have concluded my business with Jamila Kader.”

“I shall accompany you,” Ahmanet said, still cradling Set as she caught up to Jenny. “I do not trust Chris Vail.”

Quite frankly, Jenny wasn’t sure she did either. He’d led her to her death, after all. The fact that he seemed to regret it didn’t change that. But Jenny had a hard time hating him, because she knew what kind of situation he’d been in. Desperation like that was hard to blame. Nevertheless, Jenny was going to keep her guard up a little, because Chris was very much imprisoned and probably not too happy about it. And he was probably still upset with her for accidentally resurrecting him.

First, though, she was going to see Jamila Kader. Jenny was very curious about what she had in store. It’d been a while since she’d commissioned that ring. With this much time having passed, and with how skilled she clearly was, Jenny was sure Jamila had made something spectacular. She couldn’t wait to see the selection of rings Jamila had come up with. Hopefully there was one Jenny thought would fit Ahmanet.

“I’m curious to see what you commissioned from Jamila,” Ahmanet commented.

“It’s a surprise,” Jenny said. “You’re going to have to wait for a bit still.”

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow. “A surprise?”

“I had something made for you.”

Curiosity lanced across the bond, mixed with delight. “A gift?”

“Yes, a gift. But you’re going to have to wait until after we’ve visited Chris,” Jenny said. “I want to give it to you in private.”

It wasn’t long before they arrived at Jamila’s work quarters, at which point Jenny made sure
Ahmanet knew she wasn’t allowed to come in with her, because she didn’t want the surprise to be spoiled. Jenny was pretty sure Ahmanet wasn’t going to see a promise ring coming. Honestly, Jenny couldn’t wait to see her face and feel her emotions. She was sure that that was going to be something to remember. If only because it wasn’t often that Jenny got one over Ahmanet. At least, not in a way that didn’t involve sieges and murder attempts.

“Highness,” Jamila greeted as soon as Jenny stepped into her workshop, “please, come in, have a seat. Would you like something to drink?”

“No, thank you,” Jenny wasn’t thirsty. “I was informed you’ve finished the ring?”

“Yes, of course, I shall bring out the selection I made for you.” Jamila hurried to take a wooden box from a shelf. It was rickly engraved and lacquered. “I have made you eight rings, my Queen. Whichever you like best.”

Eight rings? That was more than expected. Jenny had really thought Jamila would’ve made two options, maybe three for redundancy. Eight sounded like a lot.

Jamila placed the box on her work table, undoing the little latch that kept it closed before flipping the lid open. There was a glint of gold and gems, and then Jenny’s eyes fell on one particular ring, and she knew without a doubt that she didn’t even have to look at the rest - this was the one.

Yellow and rose gold, delicately woven together into a smooth, thin band. The thinnest shards of emerald Jenny had ever seen were set into the gold, forming hair-thin vines that curled around the ring artistically, rounded and smooth as if the stone had simply grown that way. Set against the impossibly thin bits of emerald were pinpoint pieces of rich, vibrant ruby, and the near-invisible engravings in the gold around the ruby gave a stylized but distinct impression of roses.

Jenny reached out and took the ring from the little pillow it was laid on, inspecting it more closely. On the inside, as requested, was a prayer for protection, engraved into the gold in a borderline calligraphic script. It was, without a doubt, the single most beautiful ring she’d ever seen. And the craftsmanship was breathtaking. There really was no doubt about it.

“This one.”

“You do not wish to look at the others, my Queen?”

Jenny shook her head. “This is the one I want.”

“Of course.”

“I assume it’ll fit Ahmanet?”

Jamila nodded. ”I have her Majesty’s ring size on file, my Queen. It should fit perfectly.”

“I’d like to take it with me now.”

Jamila wasted no time gathering a small ring box. It was just as richly engraved and lacquered as the box the other rings had been presented in. The inside was clad with velvet the exact same shade as the little rubies set into the ring. Jamila gently took the ring from Jenny, took a moment to shine it (though it didn’t need to be shined, because it was already gleaming) a little bit, and then very carefully tucked it into the ring box and closed it.

“Your ring, my Queen.”
'Thank you,' Jenny said, accepting the box and sliding it into one of the very convenient pockets on her skirt. 'Remember to send me the bill for it, alright?'

'As you wish, my Queen,' Jamila said, but she didn’t quite meet Jenny’s eyes.

As Jenny left, the ring securely tucked into her pocket, she did so with the distinct feeling that she was never going to see that bill. Well, then she was just going to have to make sure that Jamila Kader received compensation another way. Maybe through an anonymous donation of some kind.

'My love, did you get what you wanted?' Ahmanet asked as Jenny stepped back into the hallway. There was a definite undercurrent of curiosity across the link.

Jenny tried not to smirk - it was kind of fun to make Ahmanet stew in her anticipation for a little. 'Yes,' she responded. 'It’s even better than I hoped it’d be.'

At that, the curiosity increased a little. Jenny definitely had a hard time keeping the smile off her face. She was sure Ahmanet could feel the amusement and smugness across the link. Jenny didn’t really mind that. The fact that Ahmanet could feel exactly how much fun Jenny was having only really made her enjoy it more.

'You are evil,' Ahmanet declared, but she was smiling and there was a distinct tinge of delight to her emotions that told Jenny she really didn’t mind.

'Only a little,' Jenny responded.

'Let’s go see Chris Vail, then,' Ahmanet said. 'Because I do not think I have the patience to wait very long before I get to find out what you commissioned from Jamila.'

'You’re going to love it,' Jenny said, one hundred percent sure that Ahmanet would, in fact, adore the ring. Even if she didn’t like the design, she’d love it simply for the fact that it came from Jenny.

It was a few minutes' walk to the quarters where Chris was being kept. Two guards were standing outside the door as always, and they bowed when Jenny and Ahmanet arrived.

'I’d like to see Chris,' Jenny said.

'Of course, my Queen,' one of the guards responded instantly. 'I must warn you, however, that the prisoner has been in a volatile mood lately.'

'Since when?' Ahmanet demanded.

'Since he heard of the death of the assassin, Sire,' responded the guard.

Jenny blinked, dread pooling in her stomach. He knew about Nick? Damn. This wasn’t going to be pleasant, then.

Ahmanet glanced at Jenny. 'Why are you dreading this, my love?'

'Nick was Chris’ best friend,' Jenny said. 'And I have a feeling Chris isn’t going to be happy we had him killed.'

'Not killed, Jennifer. He was executed,' Ahmanet corrected. 'And you are not obligated to visit Chris if you do not wish to. You have every right to just let him rot in those quarters and never see him again.'

That was a very tempting thought. Jenny didn’t really want to see Chris, if she was totally honest.
She wasn’t sure she wanted to face him when he was grieving the death of his best friend. Not to mention that he’d, without a doubt, blame her and Ahmanet for it - rightfully so, since they were the ones who’d ordered him killed. Executed. Whichever. Either way, the result was that Nick had died, painfully. And whether it was murder or execution probably didn’t matter to Chris.

And yet… part of Jenny felt responsible for Chris. She was the one who’d resurrected him. The fact that it had been an accident really didn’t matter much. He was alive because of her. That meant she was, at least in some part, responsible for him. And she was the reason he was in these quarters, too, where he could be visited regularly. Except that he didn’t have anyone to visit him except for Jenny. He was, apart from the guards, pretty much in solitary confinement. It was hardly the most comfortable situation to be in.

‘I’ll visit him,’ Jenny decided. ‘But I’d prefer if you came in with me. I have a feeling it’s not going to go like I hope.’

Ahmanet nodded. ‘As you wish. If you’d take Set?’

The ‘I can make sure you’re safe better with my hands free’ didn’t really need to be said out loud. Jenny didn’t really need to be protected, since Chris was only human, but she appreciated the gesture all the same. Set gurgled a little as Jenny took him from Ahmanet, little head leaning against Jenny’s collarbone and tiny fingers curling around the collar of her tunic. He was a little cold, but that seemed to be his normal temperature, so Jenny wasn’t worried.

Once Set was settled, sleepy and nearly out again already, Ahmanet nodded at the guards, silently telling them to let them in. They faithfully opened the door and stood aside.

‘Zara, Sahar, wait here.’ Jenny said as she stepped into the quarters. She didn’t want her handmaidens anywhere near a volatile Chris. Especially a volatile Chris grieving the death of his best friend. As it was, Jenny was already doubting this would end peacefully. Best to keep Zara and Sahar far away from that. They’d seen enough violence.

The door gently closed behind them.

‘Chris?’ Jenny called, wondering if he was maybe in the bedroom. He wasn’t in the living room/kitchen, anyway.

‘Jenny, you came!’ Chris indeed appeared from the bedroom - and faltered when he saw Ahmanet, expression going dark. ‘What is she doing here?’

‘I’m afraid I could not allow my Jennifer to visit on her own,’ Ahmanet stated coldly. ‘As you have already proven that you will hurt her.’

Chris snarled. ‘You’re the reason I had to in the first place!’

‘I simply killed you. The choice to lead Jennifer to me in the hope she would send you on once she received her powers was your own.’

Jenny winced a little at the reminder.

‘Not much of a choice, now was it?!’ Chris spat. ‘And Jenny can take care of herself perfectly well.’

‘The fact that she can doesn’t mean she should have to,’ Ahmanet said. ‘Now say what you called my Jennifer here for, so we can be on our way.’
Chris glared at her hatefully before turning to Jenny. His eyes fell on the infant cradled to her chest. He went white. "Is that… Jenny, what the fucking hell?!"

Ahmanet was between them before Chris could even finish his first step forward. Her tone was deadly, posturing radiating aggression. "I suggest you stay where you are, Chris Vail, before you find out if you can get stuck a second time."

Chris stopped in his tracks, but didn’t stop glaring. His voice was almost a shout. "Is that what I think it is?! You actually gave birth to that monster?! How could you!"

"I am warning you, Vail. Do not speak to my Queen in that tone." Ahmanet had gone tense, the desire to throttle Chris clearly coming across.

Jenny glared a little. "Shut up, Chris. You have no idea what you’re talking about."

"No idea?!" Chris all but screamed. "No idea?! I know exactly what kind of abomination you have there! And you’re just as bad for bringing it into this world in the first place! I should’ve known the moment you decided to come to the palace!" His fists were balled as he took a few more steps forward, ignoring the increasing aggression in Ahmanet’s stance. "Nick was wrong about you! You’re beyond salvation! He should’ve killed you when he had the chance!"

"Nick," Jenny said lowly, "is dead. He died because he tried to kill me."

"You murdered him!" Chris howled. "Monster!"

"He was executed for his crimes against the Crown." Ahmanet growled. "And if you’re not careful, you’ll go the same way."

"Crimes against the Crown?! Ha!" Chris barked out a strained, mocking laugh. "What Crown! There is no Crown! You’ll all be bombed back into the desert where you belong!"

Well. This was going exactly as Jenny had feared, actually. She wasn’t even really all that surprised. Chris was clearly out of his mind - whether it was anger or actual insanity, who knew. God knows he’d been through enough to unhinge him. And Nick’s death could’ve been the final push he needed to go over the edge. Best to see if she could de-escalate this, though. Maybe if they left Chris alone for a little bit, he’d calm down. She could always visit him again later. Without Set, since that was clearly what had set him off.

"Ahmanet," Jenny said, calmly. "Let’s go. Clearly there is nothing here worth discussing."

"That’s right!" Chris sneered. "Run away with your tail tucked between your legs like the cowards you are!"

"Shut it, Chris!" Jenny snapped back. "If you can’t control yourself, then don’t say anything at all! I didn’t come here to argue."

"Then you shouldn’t have brought that abomination, or the monster you’re fucking!"

There was a bolt of outrage from Ahmanet. At the same time, Set rumbled out a very inhuman noise, just loud enough to be heard, little fingers tightening enough around the collar of Jenny’s tunic to tear little rips into the fabric.

Jenny straightened up to her full height, now properly angry. She could almost feel her eyes turn yellow. "That abomination you’re talking about is my son," she said coldly. "And the woman you claim to be a monster is the woman I love. I suggest you clean up your act right now, Chris, or I will..."
Nor would she feel guilty for it. She was about half a second from handing Set to Ahmanet and just throttling Chris herself. It would, she knew, be very satisfying to watch him flail and turn blue as he gasped for breath and failed to suck in any air.

Chris spat on the floor, barely missing Ahmanet’s feet. ”I’d like to see you try!”

Jenny smiled with all her teeth, angry beyond civility or concern for human rights. ”I’d like to see you function on half rations. I wonder who’ll last longer.”

”That can be arranged, my love,” Ahmanet said, watching Chris’ every reaction closely. ”And I can have him returned to the dungeons to rot away under the desert until he dies from old age. Give him just enough food to ensure he doesn’t die, have some wardens force him to eat and drink so he can’t starve.” She grinned cruelly, making sure to meet Chris’ eyes. ”Maybe I’ll string up your friend’s body in the cell across from you. Make you watch as he rots away to nothing, knowing that he died screaming.”

Chris faltered.

”What, didn’t know he died in agony?” Ahmanet was very much enjoying this, Jenny could feel her glee across the link, could tell exactly that this was something Ahmanet took pleasure from. That she was enjoying the horror that flickered over Chris’ expression. ”Because he did. I strung him up in front of all the people in the palace. The High Priest of Set killed him in ritual sacrifice. It took the better part of two hours. By the time he died, he was so broken I’m sure he didn’t even remember his own name.”

A kaleidoscope of emotions flitted across Chris’ face. Horror, devastation, hatred, grief - a mix potent enough to have his breath stuttering in his chest and his face wet with tears. Potent enough to have him all but struck dumb. ”How could you?” He stared straight at Jenny, voice barely a whisper.

”All he tried to do was help you. Cure you. And you murdered him for it.”

”He tried to kill me.” Jenny said.

”He was your friend.”

”He hated me.”

”He loved you!”

Now Jenny was the one to falter. ”What?”

Chris’ entire form slumped, all anger suddenly drained away, defeat written across every inch of him. ”He loved you, Jenny. More than he’d ever loved anyone else. He was an ass to you, I know that, and he was wrong to abandon you at the Temple of Osiris, but his heart was yours all along. From the very day he met you in Baghdad, he was yours.” His voice broke with grief. ”And he died loving you. Because he loved you.”

The spike of rage and jealousy that came from Ahmanet almost had Jenny stumbling back with the force of it. Instinctively, she lurched forward, grabbing Ahmanet’s arm with the hand not cradling Set just as she raised it to smash Chris into paste for his words.

”How dare you!”

”It’s the truth!” Chris shouted. ”Nick loved Jenny! And he was a better match for her than you will
“Ahmanet, stop!” Jenny bodily yanked Ahmanet back, pulling her close and pressing her forehead against Ahmanet’s temple. “Calm down. You know I never returned those feelings. I didn’t even know.”

“I should kill him!”

“For what?!” Chris demanded. “Telling the truth?!”

“Shut up, Chris!” Jenny snarled. “You’re not helping!”

“I don’t want to help! This bitch murdered my best friend! She murdered your friend!”

“Nick wasn’t my friend! Now shut the fuck up before I do it for you!”

“No! I don’t want to shut up! I’m telling the truth, and you fucking know it, Jenny! Nick died for you! He adored the fucking ground you walked on, and you never even acknowledged him!”

“He wasn’t good enough for my Jennifer anyway!”

“How dare you! Nick wasn’t perfect, but he was a whole lot better than you!”

“He was a thief and a liar and his death was not nearly as excruciating as he deserved!”

“At least he wasn’t a filthy murderer like you!”

Jenny grunted as she tried to hold Ahmanet back from lunging at Chris, fingers tight around Ahmanet’s upper arm. Goddammit, this was even worse than she’d thought it would be! She’d expected anger, sure, but not a screaming match that was about to turn into violence. At least Set knew to hold on, because with only one hand to support him, and Ahmanet all but foaming at the mouth to get to Chris, all-consuming hatred and rage pouring across the link, it was a miracle Jenny hadn’t dropped him yet.

“Chris, enough!” She barked. “You too!” She added, yanking Ahmanet back a bit. “This has gone way too far!”

“It hasn’t gone far enough!” Ahmanet growled. “Release me, Jennifer! It is time someone taught this dog to behave.”

“No one is going to teach anyone anything today,” Jenny snapped. “We are going to leave now, and we are all going to calm the fuck down!”

“She murdered Nick!” Chris howled.

“I don’t give a shit!” Jenny shouted back.

That was the drop to make the bucket spill over. Chris lunged at Ahmanet, who was closest as she was still standing half in front of Jenny, fist cocked and undiluted hatred on his face. Ahmanet wrenched her arm out of Jenny’s hold and met Chris midway. There was a crunch as they collided, and then a truly horrifying scream of pain as Chris crumpled to the floor, scrabbling desperately at his chest.

The door slammed open, half a dozen guards pouring in, Zara and Sahar following. In an instant, Jenny was surrounded from all sides as they formed a protective wall around her and Set.
Outside the ring of people, Ahmanet wailed on Chris, the crunch of bones and the soft, wet snaps of tearing muscles barely audible under his screams of agony.

It was over in less than a minute.

The room was silent as the grave, the only noise Ahmanet’s laboured breaths. She was panting with rage, standing over Chris’ mangled body, fists clenched and dripping red.

“Everyone, out.” Jenny broke the silence. “Sahar, take Set.” She briefly glanced down at the infant as she handed him over. “I know you don’t like it, but this is something private.”

For once, Set did not start wailing the moment someone else held him. Sahar protectively pressed him to her chest as she carried him out of the room, sneaking glanced back over her shoulder.

“Out!” Jenny snapped when the guards failed to move. “Now!”

The room emptied in seconds, leaving Jenny alone with Ahmanet.

Gently, she took Ahmanet arm, tugging her away from the bloody mess on the floor. Ahmanet followed easily, dropping heavily into the seat at the table Jenny pulled out for her. The rage had already started to ebb, leaving behind an odd sense of regret.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes, Jennifer, I am fine.” Ahmanet responded, sighing. Her hands were leaving reddish stains on the fabric of her dress. “I apologize.”

Jenny blinked. “What for?” Sure, Chris was dead now, but quite frankly, with the way he’d been acting, he’d had it coming. Jenny wasn’t really surprised Ahmanet had lost her temper. Especially with all the insults, as well as the insinuation that Nick had actually been in love with Jenny. Which was, quite frankly, ridiculous. He’d sure never acted like he loved her.

“I know he was your friend, and that you didn’t want him to die.”

And now the regret made sense. Ahmanet didn’t give a damn she’d killed Chris. She did, however, care that his death might hurt Jenny.

“If you wish, I shall order a soldier to retrieve you someone to provide life force, so you can resurrect him again.”

“It’s fine,” Jenny said, and really, it was. “He wasn’t my friend, really. I barely knew him before you killed him, and afterwards he didn’t exactly have my best interests in mind.”

Ahmanet looked up. “You tried to save his life.”

Jenny shrugged. “I still don’t see the use in needless killing, to be honest. That doesn’t mean I valued Chris’ life all that much, to be totally honest with you.”

“If you cared so little, why did you insist on visiting him?”

She sighed. “I felt responsible. I’m the one who resurrected him when he really just wanted to move on. I’m the one who put him in these quarters with no one else to visit him. And really, when you think of it, those spiders that killed him didn’t appear until I broke the chain that kept you submerged in mercury.” There was a little shudder from Ahmanet at the mention of the mercury pool in her prison. Clearly that was a sensitive subject. “So really, I’m the one who killed him.” Jenny finished.
“His death was on me. The first man I had a hand in killing, ever. So I felt responsible for him, because of all the suffering I put him through.” She gave another shrug. “And I suppose he did give me somewhat of a shoulder to lean on back when I was just ascended.”

“Do you want to resurrect him?”

“Not really.” And that was the honest truth. She’d felt responsible enough to keep him alive once she’d resurrected him. But now that he was dead again, and no ghost had appeared yet, he might as well stay dead. “And he wouldn’t want to be resurrected anyway.”

Slowly, the guilt, which had already started to lessen, trickled away entirely. “Nevertheless,” Ahmanet said, “I am sorry you had to witness that. I didn’t mean to lose control like that.”

“It’s fine,” Jenny responded. She’d seen worse. Heard worse, too. She’d get over it. Though Zara and Sahar might be a little traumatized.

“What he said…” Ahmanet sounded hesitant. “Was it true? That Nick loved you?”

“I don’t think so. He never gave any indication of it, anyway. And even if he had, I wouldn’t have returned those feelings.” Jenny said, frowning when Ahmanet didn’t quite meet her gaze. “Hey. I don’t love Nick. Never have, never will. Okay?”

“I believe you,” Ahmanet said. “I can feel it. You didn’t care when I had him executed.”

“There was nothing for me to care for. I love you. Not him, just you.” And to put deed to word, Jenny opened the link as wide as it went and did her best to drown Ahmanet in all the love she felt. It was a lot. Far more than she’d ever felt for anyone. And it was unconditional. Ahmanet could do whatever the hell she wanted, kill whoever she wanted, and though Jenny might be a little annoyed at the mess, she would never love Ahmanet any less for it. She couldn’t. She was Ahmanet’s Chosen, and Ahmanet was hers just as much. They were meant to be together for the rest of their probably very long lives. And really, how could Jenny not love Ahmanet like her life depended on it?

Then, when Ahmanet looked ready to tear up, Jenny’s love echoed in her own emotions, Jenny pulled her close and kissed her, not even caring about the blood splattered across Ahmanet face or dripping from her hands. She could shower that off easily. Kissing Ahmanet and making sure she knew how much Jenny loved her was far more important. Jenny had a feeling not nearly enough people had shown Ahmanet she was loved.

It was long minutes before they separated.

“I was hoping to do this a little more romantically,” Jenny said, remembering the ring in her pocket. “But I do still have that present for you with me.”

Ahmanet laughed a little wetly. “Is now the right time for that?”

“I think there’s no better time than right now.” Because if that ring was something that could reinforce the knowledge that Jenny loved Ahmanet? That’d be worth more than the gold and gems Jamila had used to make the thing.

“Alright.” There was a little spark of anticipation. “I am very curious.”

“You should be,” Jenny teased, digging into the pocket of her skirt for her ring box. She wondered for a split-second if she should be getting on her knees, but this wasn’t a proposal, so she decided on staying in her seat instead. There wasn’t an ounce of nervousness or anxiety as Jenny offered her the
box; she felt confident that Ahmanet would love it.

Ahmanet carefully plucked it from her hand, fingers sliding over the engravings in the wood. The box alone was pretty. Jenny couldn’t wait to see her reaction to the actual ring. She tried not to look too impatient, though she was sure Ahmanet could feel it anyway.

Ahmanet opened the little box. Her breath caught. Surprise crashed across the link, followed closely by utter delight. ‘‘Jennifer, this is gorgeous!’’

‘‘Glad you like it.’’ Jenny couldn’t stop grinning. The joy she could feel coming from Ahmanet was exactly what she’d envisioned when she commissioned this ring.

‘‘I do. Thank you.’’ Ahmanet leaned in to press a kiss to Jenny’s cheek before taking the ring from the box. ‘‘Will you put it on me?’’

‘‘Of course.’’ Jenny took the ring and carefully slid it onto one of Ahmanet’s fingers. ‘‘Do you remember that conversation we had when I just arrived at the palace? About how being your Chosen doesn’t make us married?’’

Ahmanet paused in admiring her ring. ‘‘I do.’’

‘‘This isn’t a proposal. But, I was thinking, maybe one day we could change out that ring for something more fitting of an engagement.’’ And now Jenny was a little nervous. Only a little, though. ‘‘If you’re okay with that too.’’

A moment later Jenny found herself almost knocked out of her chair when Ahmanet lunged forward to wrap her arms around her neck, mouth slanting over hers almost desperately, new waves of utter joy and love pouring across the link. Well. Jenny decided to take that as an agreement. She’d best go see Jamila again sometime soon, then. This time for an engagement ring.

‘‘How about,’’ Jenny managed between kisses, ‘‘we take this back to our bedroom.’’

Because as much as she loved Ahmanet, and she did, Jenny absolutely refused to have sex next to a dead body.
Chapter 70

Chapter Summary

Jenny and Ahmanet do something fun, deal with an issue - and get a much anticipated visit from the president. Things do not go well for him.

Chapter Notes

Heya, guys! I'm a few hours - more than a few hours - late, but where I live, it's still Saturday, so I have not missed my deadline! Yay! I've got another long one for you guys, since I had a last few plot points to work through, and I didn't feel like cutting the chapter in half. I've some other things to say, but I'll do that at the bottom of the chapter. So without further ado, I will move on to my catchphrase:

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“'Well, we’ve certainly put the fox in the henhouse,'” Jenny stated, eying the stack of written reports on the table in Ahmanet’s office. Barely twenty-four hours had passed since Ahmanet had raised the sandstorm cutting off the country from the rest of the world and summoned an army to subjugate Egypt. Already, written reports had arrived, carried swiftly by crows clearly of Ahmanet’s magic, considering the size they were and the speed they were capable of.

“So we did,” Ahmanet agreed, absently reading one of the reports. “One of the Infected tells us that half of the government forces that were to be sent to Cairo have been redirected here. Apparently we’re to expect their arrival before noon tomorrow. Probably around five-hundred of them.”

Jenny hummed. That meant the extra soldiers that would’ve gone to Cairo would’ve been thousand - more than first expected. Still. “’That shouldn’t be too big a problem.’”

“’It won’t be. Now that I do not have to hide my power anymore, I can wipe them out with barely a thought,'” Ahmanet responded. “’I think I will let them cross the desert to come here and then wipe them out.’”

Ahmanet wasn’t looking up to see Jenny raising her eyebrow, so she sent a little jolt of curiosity and scepticism across the link.

Ahmanet shrugged. “’Theatrics, my love. I would like to see them die.’”

“’As long as they don’t get a chance to attack us, I’m fine with it.’” Jenny honestly didn’t care if Ahmanet wanted to massacre an army at their doorstep or not, she’d just hate for the palace to be damaged. It was far too beautiful a place to deserve that. It was bad enough that Henry’s people had been shooting in the corridors when they’d tried to invade; those bullet holes had had to be patched over, and then the patched places had had to be restored so it looked like the walls had never been damaged in the first place. It was an effort that never should’ve been necessary in the first place.
Jenny would very much like it if it was never necessary again.

“I shall ensure they will not have the chance, my love,” Ahmanet promised. “They shall die before
they will be able to respond.”

Jenny shrugged. “Alright. Anything from the borders?”

“Several parties have already attempted to brave my storm.”

“Have they been identified?”

“According to the generals, two planes were taken down. One was sent on behalf of the United
Nations, another from Saudi Arabia. Neither pilot survived.” Ahmanet flicked through the papers. “I
rather expect there will be more soon. They shan’t just stick to two planes.”

Jenny had no doubt about that. More planes would come - if only as scouts to find out what had
taken down the first planes. Then, perhaps, if they felt brave enough, bombers. Maybe manned
planes, or even drones. Either way, it didn’t much matter, as they probably wouldn’t even make it
across anyway. If the sandstorm didn’t stop them, the crows would, and if the crows didn’t, the
fighter planes with Infected pilots would. Jenny wasn’t worried.

“I rather expect we will end up at war with Saudi Arabia at the very least,” Ahmanet said. “They
do not seem like the type to accept killed soldiers, even if they are the ones invading our airspace.
But their country is vastly desert, too. We will defeat them sooner or later, and I doubt we will take
many losses.”

That seemed about right. And Ahmanet was right - there was plenty of sand in Saudi Arabia to
weaponise. No amount of soldiers was enough to fight the very ground they stood on.

Jenny sat back in her chair, picking up her wineglass and sipping it with relish. Now that Set was
born, she could drink again, and she really appreciated a glass of wine every now and then. “What
do you think of the other countries around Egypt? Will we end up at war with them, too?”

That had Ahmanet putting down the papers she was holding. “My love, I have every intention of
expanding my empire far beyond the borders of Egypt. I will rule an empire larger than it has ever
been in all of Egyptian history. War with our neighbours is unavoidable.”

Jenny couldn’t honestly say that she had not expected that. Because she had. She’d always known
that Ahmanet would not be satisfied with Egypt alone. Her thirst for power, her hunger for
recognition, the very way she’d grown up, told all her life she would rule and then to have it taken
away, the influence her god had had on her - all of that had created someone born and bred for war.
Ahmanet was not someone who could thrive on peace. Jenny knew that, and she’d pretty much
accepted that. Jenny was very much willing to go along with it, too. As long as Ahmanet kept her
promise about that romantic getaway on a ship down the Nile, anyway, because Jenny did need a
break from war every now and then. And they had eternity to expand Egypt, anyway. It didn’t have
to be done anytime soon.

“How big are you thinking?”

“Saudi Arabia, definitely,” Ahmanet responded with a small smirk. “And I shall take Jordan,
Palestine, Lebanon, and Israel at the same time. And I want Northern Africa in its entirety.”

Northern Africa consisted of Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, and
Mauritania. Combined with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Israel, that made for a
bloody big country.
“Well,” Jenny said after a second, taking another sip of her wine, “then it’s a good thing we’re not going to die anytime soon.”

“Quite,” Ahmanet agreed. “And considering how conquering Saudi Arabia goes, I might be tempted by some other neighbouring countries.”

“So basically North Africa and Most of the Middle-East,” Jenny summarized.

“To start with.”

Well. They’d better wrap up this war with Egypt, then, because as it turned out, there was plenty of work still to do. Not to mention the response of the international community is they started expanding the borders. Jenny couldn’t exactly say she was interested in triggering another world war. That’d probably be bad. She wasn’t super interested in a reenactment of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

“We’re going to have to do a lot of planning,” she sighed, eyeing her wine and wondering if it was a good idea to get drunk. Probably not. She did have Set to look after, and she doubted she’d do a good job wasted. Also, alcohol was not the answer to her problems. “And also find a way to make sure other countries don’t try to nuke us off the face of the Earth.”

“Yes. The generals have informed me of what happened at the end of World War Two.” Ahmanet agreed seriously. “We shall find a way to ensure it does not happen to us.”

Jenny sure hoped they did. She wasn’t sure her, or Ahmanet’s, regeneration covered direct hits from nuclear warheads. Probably not.

“Perhaps if I Infect some people who work with them, and have them sabotage the installations,” Ahmanet mused.

“Then we’d have to find out who has access first,” Jenny pointed out.

“The Cult could find out,” Ahmanet responded. “They are well informed and have many people who are good at finding accurate information. We could have them draw up a list of names and locations, perhaps.”

“It’s worth a try, at least,” Jenny agreed. Better than sitting around, doing nothing, and hoping no one got the idea to nuke them, anyway. “Anything else of interest?”

“Beyond the troops being sent to attack us and the attempts to bypass my storm? Nothing truly pressing.”

Jenny took a moment to shuffle some of the reports around. Even at a glance, she could see mentions of the storm and the sand creatures, and mentions of the panicked reactions from various parties. Clearly, revealing Ahmanet’s powers had caused a fuss. Jenny was not surprised. Nevertheless, right at this moment, there wasn’t much they could do. Ahmanet wanted to wait for the government troops to show up tomorrow around noon before she killed them, and beyond that, all they could do at this point was wait for the sand creatures to fulfill their orders and return to the palace with the president of Egypt in custody.

“Let’s go do something,” Jenny suggested. “I’m tired of sitting around.” She’d done enough of that during her very short, yet too long, pregnancy.

Ahmanet seemed quite happy to toss the reports aside. “What do you wish to do, my love?”
“I’m not sure. What is there to do around the palace, activity-wise?” Jenny had actually not done nearly as much exploring as she’d wanted to. There were still pieces of the palace that she had yet to see.

“I’m afraid that the life of a Queen tends to be one of leisure,” Ahmanet said in amusement. “More so than the life of a Pharaoh. There are games, such as Senet, Mehen, Aseb, and Hounds and Jackals. But most entertainment should be provided by others. Dancers, animal trainers, athletes. Perhaps even warriors. Shows and competitions, all for the participants to show off their skill and attempt to win your favour.”

Jenny, being kind of an expert on Ancient Egypt, knew the games Ahmanet had mentioned. They were typical Ancient Egyptian board games. Jenny had seen hieroglyphs and paintings of Pharaohs playing those games; Tutankhamun, notably, and Cleopatra. Senet, especially, had been popular, played by civilians and royalty around. Jenny didn’t know the exact rules, she had not paid that much attention to Ancient Egyptian games in her crusade to find Ahmanet, but she knew enough of them to have an idea of how they worked. Jenny wasn’t exactly in the mood for board games, though.

“There are plenty of soldiers at the palace,” Ahmanet stated, “perhaps an archery competition in the courtyard? All of the soldiers know how to shoot a bow. It would not take long to set up some targets, establish rules, and organize a prize.”

That actually sounded like fun. Jenny couldn’t shoot a bow to save her life, but she wouldn’t have to anyway - she had a feeling that her job was to sit in the shade, be handed drinks and snacks, and enjoy a show of athleticism. She’d still be sitting around, sure, but she wouldn’t be cooped up inside and there’d be entertainment. She was okay with that. Much better than spending the next few hours reading reports that all said the same thing, anyway. The generals had already skimmed over them, too, and there was nothing that stated or even hinted at something as devastating as a missile or something, so Jenny felt quite safe to leave the reports for later. If there was something truly pressing, she’d be informed.

“I’d like to see an archery competition,” she decided.

Ahmanet nodded. “Then I shall have one arranged. It shan’t take too long, I think.”

It didn’t take long. Jenny had lunch while the competition was arranged, enjoying a rather splendid meal involving a whole roast fish, fresh bread, and fresh vegetables, and by the time she had finished her food and her tea, Ahmanet had already gotten word from a servant that targets had been set up in the courtyard and that more than a few soldiers had volunteered to compete. Or, as Ahmanet told Jenny, so many soldiers had volunteered that they’d needed to decide who could compete by the age-old strategy of random selection. In the end, twenty had been chosen.

The palace had to have some sort of treasury somewhere too (and Jenny definitely needed to find it, because she was itching to get her hands on the contents and investigate each and every piece of it), because a prize had been arranged too. The prize came in the shape of a very gorgeous, and expensive, vase, with beautiful decorations in paint that looked like it’d been made of powdered gemstones. Jenny was willing to bet it was worth more than she’d made at Prodigium in a year. Probably more than she’d made in several years, actually. The fact that Ahmanet was apparently quite willing to just give it away as the prize in an impromptu competition said a lot about how wealthy she truly was. Or how little she liked the vase. Fifty-fifty on that one, really.

After lunch, Jenny found herself escorted to the courtyard by Ahmanet, Zara and Sahar, and when she arrived, a small dais had been raised out of nowhere. On it was a pair of more portable thrones than the ones in the throne room, with silk cushions to make them more comfortable. There were
little tables with carafes of ice water, which also had mint leaves and pomegranate seeds in it, and plates with elaborate little snacks with glass cloches over them to keep the sand and stuff out. A large swathe of white linen was strung above the thrones, providing a patch of shade to sit in. There were even servants with large fans to wave over cool air. It was very nice.

Jenny was quite happy to let herself be led over to one of the thrones, and found that it was quite comfortable. The silk cushions were plush and soft, and the back and armrests were padded too. Quite comfortable indeed.

In front of the dais, once Ahmanet had taken her seat too, a row of soldiers lined up. There were twenty of them, as Ahmanet had told them, mixed men and women, clad in traditional Egyptian garb, except that they also had some leather protection on the insides of their arms. Jenny supposed that was to protect their arms from the bowstring, because if she remembered correctly from documentaries she’d seen, the bowstring could really hurt when it snapped back. Which was about all that Jenny really knew about it, to be honest. The closest she’d ever come to archery had consisted of watching the Olympics on tv.

At a gesture of Ahmanet, the soldiers snapped to attention.

“'You have all been given the rules,'” Ahmanet said, voice carrying. “'This competition will consist of three rounds. The first round has the target at a distance of eighteen meters, the second round has a distance of twenty-five meters, and the third round has a distance of sixty meters. Each round will consist of three volleys, and you will all have three arrows per volley.'” Ahmanet explained the rules anyway, probably for the benefit of the people who had shown up to watch. “'The outer ring will earn you one point, the second ring two, the third ring three, the fourth ring four, and the bullseye five.'” She surveyed the soldiers for a moment. “'The one who collects the most points at the end of all three rounds shall win this competition and earn the prize that comes with it. You may take your positions for the first round.'”

As one, the soldiers bowed and took their places.

Archery, Jenny decided, was more fun than it looked like. It wasn’t as active as, say, a rugby match (and Jenny did enjoy watching a good rugby match every now and then), but it wasn’t boring by any stretch. And though Jenny was totally committed to Ahmanet and fully intended to spend the rest of eternity with her, she couldn’t not appreciate the variety of toned men and women flexing and posturing to show off their skill. She was bisexual as fuck, and this was a good reminder of why both men and women were hot.

Ahmanet, however, didn’t seem to appreciate it as much. Not the soldiers, but the fact that Jenny wasn’t totally resistant to those soldiers. It wasn’t even attraction, more of an unfocused appreciation of the aesthetic, but the first hints of jealousy nevertheless only took minutes to seep across the edges of Jenny’s mind.

Jenny reached out to take Ahmanet’s hand, sending back a wordless reassurance that Jenny loved her only. She could feel some of the tension that had started to gather ease, but it didn’t stop the jealousy and the definite edge of possessiveness from seeping, slowly but surely, into Ahmanet’s emotions. It was a familiar kind of possessiveness. Ahmanet kept it under lock and key very well. It only really showed when they were having sex and Ahmanet felt more confident in letting go a little bit and taking charge in a less gentle, a little more aggressive way. That same kind of possessiveness that gave an edge to lust and love when Ahmanet had Jenny screaming out her third orgasm of the night.

A little shiver went down Jenny’s back at the thought. Part of her didn’t mind the jealousy. She kind of liked it, actually. Not enough to provoke it, and not enough that she wanted it to be worse, but this
still felt like a relatively harmless jealousy, not something that would end up with people getting hurt.

Well, as long as Jenny continued to send Ahmanet emotional reassurance, anyway, because Ahmanet was definitely the type to murder whoever she felt threatened their relationship in any way whatsoever. She’d murdered people for less.

She wove her fingers through Ahmanet’s, holding on tightly, all but drowning her in a steady flow of reassurance and devotion, and didn’t let up until the archery competition had ended. At that point she had to, because Ahmanet had to go congratulate the winner and award them the vase as a prize. The woman who’d won, Jenny didn’t actually know her name, seemed quite pleased, glowing with pride as she accepted the vase and bowed.

Then, once Jenny had also expressed her appreciation of the woman’s skill, as was required, and which also had another small spike of jealousy rushing across the link, Jenny found herself all but dragged back to the royal quarters.

She did not leave them for the rest of the day and night. Nor did she want to.

The next morning came too early.

Jenny had not had much sleep between Ahmanet keeping her awake and Set waking her up when she’d finally fallen asleep. She’d attempted to hand him to Zara and Sahar for the night, since he’d accepted their presence yesterday when she and Ahmanet had dealt with Chris. He’d tolerated it for a few hours, but around four in the morning a very apologetic Sahar delivered him back to the royal quarters, explaining that he wouldn’t drink any formula and that he wouldn’t go to sleep or stop crying either.

As it was, Jenny was just glad he’d managed for so long. She’d been able to catch an hour or two in between Ahmanet being near insatiable and Sahar dragging her out of bed. Not nearly enough, but it was better than nothing at all. And now that Set was back, she could feed him and then go back to bed to catch a few more hours.

Ahmanet was still asleep, peaceful and exhausted. Jenny didn’t wake her up, deciding to just let her rest while she fed her child and put him down for some more sleep. He probably needed it too, being a newborn and all. Thank, well, him, for settling down the moment Sahar had handed him over to Jenny.

“You’re very fussy, you know that?” Jenny half-whispered as Set latched on and began to drink. She was starting to get used to it.

He glanced up at her with those unsettling yellow-and-black eyes.

“Not that you care,” Jenny continued. “You’re literally a god. What do you care about the opinions of mortals, right?”

One of his little hands curled into the fabric of the robe Jenny had thrown on to open the door for Sahar.

“Not that I don’t understand. At least a little. It’s hard to care for mortals, I’ve noticed, when I will outlive them all.” As it was, the only humans Jenny really connected to at this point were Zara and Sahar. And Jenny honestly had no intention of letting them die anytime soon. It was just a matter of experimenting with her healing magic until she figured out how to keep people young. She sighed,
looking down at Set. “I can’t imagine what it’s like to be like you. A god, all powerful, worshiped for millennia - and then confined in an infant human body.”

Set blinked up at her. His nursing was starting to slow.

Jenny sighed again. “I don’t love you.” She said bluntly. “I don’t know if I ever will. But I’ll be good to you. A better mother than mine ever was.”

There was, for a moment, a curl of power around her. It was not as stifling as usual. Not as pressing, not as cold and intrusive. Warmer and softer than usual. Jenny could almost imagine it was, in some way, affectionate. Almost. She wasn’t sure Set was capable of honest affection.

She finished feeding him, rocking him until he was asleep, and then placed him in his bassinet before returning to bed herself. Even asleep, Ahmanet sensed her presence, rolling over to curl into Jenny. Jenny yawned, cuddling back, and was out in moments.

She woke again to hasty footsteps walking through the bedroom, and Set waking up and letting out a sobbing cry. It was enough to have Jenny awake in a matter of seconds. She was getting used to waking up to the sound of Set crying. It was like the moment that sound hit the air, everything in her was awake and ready to react. Something she hadn’t expected, but now that she had a child, she found herself attuned to his moods in a way she hadn’t thought she’d be. As it turned out, she didn’t need to love Set to care for him.

“I’ll take him, my love.” Ahmanet’s voice came, and shortly after, Set’s cried quieted down considerably.

“He should just need a change,” Jenny mumbled, trying to work up the will to actually open her eyes. “I fed him only a few hours ago.”

“When was he returned here?”

“Sahar brought him around four,” Jenny mumbled. It was very tempting to just go back to sleep. But there was a faint edge to Ahmanet’s emotions, something a little hurried and faintly bloodthirsty. “Why the hurry?”

“We received report from a crow,” Ahmanet explained. “The government troops moved a little more quickly than expected. They’ll be here in maybe a few hours.”

For a moment, Jenny longed to just bury her face in her pillow and ignore it. Instead, she forced herself to sit up, rubbing tiredly at her face. “What time is it now?”

“Just past seven, my love.”

That brought her up to a grand total of maybe five hours of sleep. Not the worst amount of sleep, but definitely not the best either. “Right, do we have an estimation beyond “a few hours”?”

“Perhaps three,” Ahmanet responded, lightly bouncing Set in her arms. “Right now, based on what my crows told me, I expect them to arrive around ten, at which point they will likely attempt to attack as quickly as possible to make sure we cannot respond fast enough.”

“Right,” Jenny repeated. “I’ll go take a bath, then, if you’d change Set.”
"You seem tired. You could stay in bed, if you wish, and get some more sleep."

Jenny shook her head, throwing back the covers and getting out of bed. "Do you really think I'm going to be able to sleep while you're out there making sure we're not wiped off the face of the Earth?"

Ahmanet pursed her lips a little as they walked into the bathroom. "No, I suppose I do not. Yet I wish I could spare you from these kinds of things."

"You don't have to. We're in this together, remember?" Jenny walked over to the bath and slid in, sighing at the feel of the hot water. She hadn't even needed to undress, as she'd fallen asleep naked, and had not bothered to put on a robe.

"That we are."

Jenny was firmly of the opinion that if it was her job to feed Set, then Ahmanet could do her fair share and change his diapers.

Jenny slid down a little more into the water, enjoying the heat seeping into her bones and muscles. So. Government troops would be arriving at ten. That was going to be a slaughter for sure. Jenny had absolutely no doubt that Ahmanet would be successful at defending the palace. She was also sure that no enemy troops would survive to see noon. Hell, if they arrived at ten, it'd be a small miracle if they lived to see ten-thirty.

Jenny had no intention of not being there. She couldn't do much, but she didn't want to let Ahmanet take care of it on her own. She'd be there for emotional support. For as much as Ahmanet needed that, anyway, because killing did not bother her at all.

After her bath, Jenny dressed, with help from Zara and Sahar, who seemed a little put out Jenny had not called them in to assist her with her bath too. Jenny had intended to just let them sleep in a little, because they'd had a long night too, with babysitting Set and all. They'd grumbled a little, but seemed to accept the explanation.

Once dressed, and with both Ahmanet and Set also cleaned up and ready for the day, it was time for an early breakfast. Jenny wasn't very hungry, so she stuck with a light broth, with some bread and soft, salty feta cheese on the side.

After breakfast, the waiting game started.

Extra guards were posted on top of the walls, with binoculars to see if they could see any enemies approaching. They'd been ordered to report every fifteen minutes.

Soldiers, fully armed and ready, lined up in the courtyard. Hundreds of them. At least half of all the armed forces present in the palace. Bulletproof vests, helmets, modern weaponry as well as ancient, expressions of steel. They probably wouldn't be necessary, considering Ahmanet was probably going to turn the very desert on their enemies, but it was good to have a back-up plan, just in case.

Jenny had a bulletproof vest too. She had no intention of getting anywhere near a fight, but Ahmanet had insisted on it, so Jenny had agreed to wear one. It'd been a good decision, considering the tension that had seeped out of Ahmanet's shoulders once Jenny was at least partly protected. She had, however, refused to hide out in the safe room. If Ahmanet was going to slaughter a bunch of government troops, she was going to be there too. If only because she wanted to see what Ahmanet would do.
At ten-twenty-three, the signal came.

The servant all but burst into the war room, panting from having run all the way from the wall. "Hostiles incoming!" The servant gasped. "Approaching from the north side! They have combat vehicles with heavy firepower!"

Ahmanet’s gaze sharpened. "Continue."

"It’s tanks, Sire," said the servant hurriedly. "And rocket artillery. Enough to level a small city."

"Estimated time of arrival?"

"The men expect they will be within firing range in minutes, Sire. They have already started to slow down."

"Well," Ahmanet said, remarkably calm. "Then we’d best get moving."

That was an understatement if Jenny had ever heard one. Goddamn though. Tanks and rocket artillery? The government was definitely taking them seriously at this point. Jenny tried to remember the firing range of rocket artillery. She had a feeling that those things were able to rain down hell from quite some distance. Tanks would probably need to be a little closer. So either they were going to bomb the palace and then send in tanks to take care of the stragglers, or they were going to try tanks first and just blast the place to hell if the tanks didn’t work.

Either way, Jenny really hoped Ahmanet wasn’t going to let them try anything. Best to just take care of the fuckers without risking being bombed.

The north side of the palace faced in the direction of Luxor, which was about fifty miles away. It was clear why the government had led their troops past the city; nice, flat, paved roads that did a splendid job at letting them move at speed in a way the desert definitely did not. They could’ve taken the coastal road, but since that was getting hammered by a sandstorm, Luxor was definitely a better option.

Jenny shifted Set onto one arm and accepted a pair of binoculars, squinting through them. Standing on the highest balcony on the north side the palace had to offer, she could see over the dunes, and with the binoculars, she could see far enough to spot the government army. Rocket artillery indeed. Jenny knew next to nothing about that, but from what she could see, they were not the kind of thing she wanted within firing range of the palace.

Ahmanet had a pair of binoculars too. "What do you think, love?"

"I think you’d better take care of this," Jenny said. "And that sand creatures might not cut it unless you make them into giants."

"Yes, I was thinking the same thing." Ahmanet lowered the binoculars. "Perhaps I shall just bury them. It is not hard to pull them down and crush them."

"That'll do. As long as they’re unable to attack, it'll be fine."

"Quite." Ahmanet placed the binoculars aside. From across the link, Jenny could feel her focus, could feel her mind sharpening with concentration.

Then, power.

In an instant, the air was thick with it, and Set woke in Jenny’s arms almost immediately, eyes
flashing open and settling on Ahmanet.

"There are government troops with rocket artillery approaching," Jenny explained quietly to the god in infant shape, "Ahmanet it just going to take care of them so they can’t attack us."

Set’s fingers curled into the fabric of her tunic, a wordless noise pushing past his lips. It came out as a deep, unsettling rumble.

There was a similar rumble from the desert sands.

Jenny scrambled for her binoculars, quickly searching out the area where the government army was setting up to bomb them. It was quite a large area, considering the rocket artillery, the tanks, and the ground troops in Jeeps with machine guns mounted on top.

Near them, a dune shifted. Just slightly at first, like a breeze whipping up some of the fine red dust on the top, barely anything worth noticing. Then a second dune did the same, the top layer of sand silently breaking loose and harmlessly sliding down the side.

And then, in an instant, the power soaking into the sand broke loose - and the dune closest to one of the tanks moved and crested like a wave and crashed over the enemy troops.

They were too far away for the noise to reach the palace. Yet, Jenny could see through her binoculars that the soldiers were screaming as the sand buried them, rifles going off with shock, one of the Jeeps crushed with such brutality that it blew, spraying flaming fuel and red-hot metal before being dragged under. A second dune crashed over the envoy from the other side, dragging down a tank, silent explosions sending up clouds of sand dotted with metal shrapnel and torn-off human limbs.

Beside Jenny, Ahmanet cocked her head, raising an eyebrow. The desert obediently followed, a wall of sand raising behind the convoy of rocket artillery and smashing down with enough force that the trembles reached all the way to the palace. A series of muffled explosions disturbed the churning sand enough that chunks of flaming wreckage made it back up. Jenny winced as one of the soldiers was hit, rolling to a stop in the sand with a piece of metal the size of a tyre impaled through his chest. It’d gone through his bulletproof vest and other protective clothing like a hot knife through butter. Sand curled around him and dragged him down, smothering his weak struggles before he’d even managed to open his mouth to scream.

In a matter of maybe two minutes, it was over.

The only evidence there had ever been an invading force were the few bits of burning metal and some red-stained sand. Even those were absorbed in moments, leaving behind only disturbed sand. It’d be smoothed down by the wind soon enough.

Jenny lowered her binoculars.

"Well," Ahmanet said. "'Tea?"

And that was pretty much that.

Two days later, there was word of approaching sand creatures on the horizon. They were carrying a human prisoner. Multiple prisoners, actually. Ahmanet abandoned her dinner without hesitation, already barking orders to have the throne room prepared and that if the sand creatures arrived before
everything was ready, to stash the prisoners in the cell prepared for them.

Clearly, she was planning to put on a bit of a show. Probably to intimidate the prisoner, but also probably a little to stroke her own ego. Ahmanet was not a humble woman. She had power, and wealth, and prestige, and she liked showing it off.

Jenny quickly horked down the last few bites of her own dinner, barely tasting the exquisitely prepared pigeon, and followed without even finishing her wine, Set thankfully asleep in his carrier basket. ‘‘Can I do anything?’’ She asked, catching up to Ahmanet.

‘‘Do you remember when that representative was here? The one whose knees we broke before we threw him out?’’

‘‘Ahmed Qadir,’’ Jenny agreed, ‘‘yes.’’

It was hard to forget Ahmed Qadir. After all, they’d ordered his entire party murdered, and had then broken both of his knees beyond repair before throwing him out into the desert to rot. He’d probably gotten back to civilization with help from the people driving the vehicles that had gotten him here, but it had probably taken extensive and invasive surgery to get his knees anywhere near functional again. In fact, it wouldn’t surprise Jenny if he had had to get knee replacements. The bones had been broken pretty badly - bashed into bits, really.

‘‘I do not wish for the prisoner to have that kind of attitude. My soldiers will have cowed him, if only because of what they are, but I wish to show him my power nevertheless to further intimidate.’’ Ahmanet said. ‘‘Not to mention, this is to be the day I acquire my birthright. We ought to look the part, don’t you think?’’

Jenny sighed. ‘‘I’m going to have to wear all my jewellery, aren’t I?’’

‘‘I’m afraid so,’’ Ahmanet said, amusement curling around the edge of her emotions. ‘‘And some more formal clothes, perhaps.’’

Another sigh. ‘‘I’ll join you in the throne room after I’ve changed, then.’’

‘‘I will join you in a minute,’’ Ahmanet said, ‘‘as I will have to change, too. I have to go check on the throne room first, though.’’

‘‘Then I will see you in our quarters.’’ Jenny pressed a quick, almost absent-minded kiss to Ahmanet’s and was on her way.

‘‘I shall retrieve your clothing,’’ Sahar said quietly once they were in the royal quarters.

‘‘Do you wish to bathe first, my Queen?’’ Zara added.

Jenny pursed her lips, then nodded. She wasn’t one to pass up the opportunity to take a bath. And the president could wait. It might actually do him some good to wait. Or it’d make him more nervous. Either way, ten extra minutes wouldn’t hurt him.

‘‘A quick one,’’ Jenny allowed, entering the bathroom. She pulled her flower crown off her head, Apep curled around it, and placed it on a small pillow offered by Zara. ‘‘My hair doesn’t need to be washed, though.’’ She’d done that just this morning.

‘‘Of course,’’ Zara agreed, helping Jenny shed her clothes so she could slip into the water. It was heavenly warm, and the soaps and oils that had become her standard were mild and fragrant. Jenny was very pleased.
Fifteen minutes later, she was dry and in the process of getting dressed, and Ahmanet had just arrived to get cleaned up and changed herself.

''My soldiers have already brought in the prisoners,'' Ahmanet commented as she combed out her hair. She seemed pleased at the prospect.

''I hope they're coherent enough to talk,'' Jenny said.

''Hard to say. The guards who escorted them to the cell said they were injured and very shaken.''

''I'd imagine so, considering they were kidnapped by creatures made of sand, when, a couple of days ago, magic did not exist to the world.''

Ahmanet shrugged a little, stepping out of the bath and accepting a towel from Sahar. ''As long as they do what I want, I do not care what condition they are in.''

That was a sentiment Jenny could agree to.

It was a completely dressed up and prettied up Jenny who took her seat in her throne, a bit later. Ahmanet sat in her own throne, looking stern and forbidding, the blue crown of war on her head, an elegant khopesh unsheathed against one side of her throne and a spear with a shining blade leaned against the other side.

The Queensguard was lined up in front of the dais that held the thrones, twenty men and women standing to attention, each in traditional attire, but with assault rifles in their hands. Another hundred guards lined the walls, all the way from the main doors to the thrones. The generals, all of them, had received their own chairs, sat two steps below Jenny and Ahmanet on the dais, all decked out in jewellery broadcasting their status. Also present was Aaheru, standing next to Ahmanet’s throne, prayers to Set painted across his naked chest.

All things considered, it was actually quite an intimidating sight.

It was this sight that the president was met with as he was dragged into the throne room, arms shackled behind his back, one eye swollen and bruised, one of his legs dragging limply behind him, clearly broken. Behind him, dragged by more guards, were a middle-aged woman, a young woman, and a young man. The president’s family - his wife, and his son and daughter. They were also a little beaten up, but to a lesser extent.

The president was dragged until he was about twenty feet in front of the Queensguard and thrown to the ground; with his hands bound, he couldn’t break his fall, and he let out a ragged scream when his broken leg was jostled at the sudden movement. His family was dragged forward a little further, only a few more feet, and forced to kneel, gags in their mouths to keep them quiet. Each had a guard standing behind them, and each guard had a fully loaded assault rifle pressed to the back of their prisoner’s head. The safeties were off.

Already, the first trickle of glee was starting to seep through Ahmanet’s emotions. ‘‘Good evening, mister president,’’ Ahmanet drawled, derision in every syllable. ‘‘I do apologize for the kidnapping. I’ve been informed it was quite uncomfortable for you.’’

Jenny resisted the urge to snort at the very super villain greeting. Very dramatic. She was sure Ahmanet felt her amusement. She got a little spark of amusement in return, but mostly Ahmanet was focussed and sharp and almost choked with anticipation. Jenny consciously made an effort to reign
herself in. This was not a laughing matter. This was about Ahmanet’s birthright, the very thing she’d murdered her entire family and made a pact with Set for.

The president pushed himself up to his knees, grunting quietly. He glared. “Who the hell are you?!”

“Didn’t your little lackey, Ahmed Qadir, tell you?” Ahmanet grinned, all teeth showing, eyes hard. “I am your Pharaoh. The rightful ruler of this country.”

“Egypt is a democracy. It has no Pharaoh.”

“Egypt,” Ahmanet said measuredly, “is a kingdom. And it is mine.” Her gaze sharpened. “You are merely the steward. And now that I, the last of my bloodline, have returned, your only remaining task is to hand my country to me.”

The president, for all Jenny had seen on tv, had never struck her as a remarkably courageous man. Clever? Sure. Ruthless, on occasion? Considering the way some people were treated under his administration, definitely. But courageous? No, he’d struck Jenny as the kind of man who’d hide behind his desk and a veneer of civility and let other people do the dirty jobs on his behalf. Yet, faced with Ahmanet and over a hundred fully armed guards, his family chained up and with rifles to the backs of their heads, he straightened up as much as he could and spat on the ground.

“Egypt renounces you!”

Or, perhaps, just foolish.

Ahmanet visibly stiffened. “Allow me to remind you I have Cairo besieged. Thousands of troops, ready to slaughter everyone in that city, down to the last child. And no weapons can stop them. Tell me Egypt is mine, or be responsible for their massacre.”

“Egypt will survive,” the president spat. “We’ve weathered tyrants before!”

Ahmanet raised an eyebrow. “You are not at all bothered by the deaths of the millions of people who call Cairo home?”

“We can repopulate.”

Even Ahmanet was a little surprised at that, Jenny could feel it. The frustration was stronger though.

“Very well. Since you don’t care about lives…” Ahmanet gestured at the guards detaining the president’s family. “How about we start with your son.”

The president’s eyes widened in shock. “Wha-”

There was a gunshot. Blood sprayed from the president’s son’s head as his skull imploded, body hitting the ground with a dull, wet smack. Red spread across the flagstones.

Then, screams.

Muffled, from the wife and daughter, the gags in their mouths preventing them from properly screaming. Their guards held them back as they struggled, trying to get to their son and brother.

The president howled, throwing himself towards his son, worming across the floor desperately, broken leg dragging behind him and something far more shattered in his expression. “My son!” He wailed. “Khamul! Khamul!”

“I see you understand now.” Ahmanet said mildly, not even bothering to raise her voice. “Tell me
Egypt is mine, and you will even have his corpse to bury.’’

‘‘Khamul!’’ The president sobbed. ‘‘My son! My boy!’’

Ahmanet’s expression ticked with annoyance. ‘‘If you keep screaming like that, your daughter will be next.’’

He cried raggedly, face contorted with grief and horror, slumping to the floor. His forehead touched the spreading pool of blood, smearing it all over his face.

‘‘Tell me Egypt is mine.’’

The president did not respond beyond his broken cries.

‘‘Very well, then.’’ Ahmanet gave another gesture.

With a second gunshot, the president’s daughter joined her brother.

The president shrieked, an inhuman noise that could break glass, the sound almost animal-like in its horror and despair, mouth opened so wide his lips cracked and split under the tension. It wasn’t even discernible enough to form a name.

‘‘Tell me Egypt is mine.’’

The president was in no state to tell Ahmanet anything. Mostly because he had yet to stop screaming, wild, wide eyes riveted to his dead children, foam pink with blood flecking around his mouth. His voice was already starting to break.

Ahmanet sighed and raised her hand for the third time. ‘‘So be it.’’

‘‘NO!’’ The president shrieked. ‘‘No!’’

‘‘Tell me -’’

‘‘It’s yours! It’s yours! Egypt’s yours!’’ His face was contorted, desperate. ‘‘Not my wife! Please, not my wife too! I beg you!’’

The burst of satisfaction and released anticipation that bolted through Ahmanet, like lightning, was nearly orgasmic. Her smile was the stuff of nightmares. ‘‘Say it again.’’

‘‘Egypt is yours! All yours!’’ The president cried immediately.

Ahmanet gave a deep, pleased sigh. ‘‘Better.’’

And then she flicked her hand.

‘‘NOOOO!’’ The shriek that rang through the throne room was the loudest yet.

It was cut off abruptly as a bullet tore through the president’s head, killing him instantly.

For a few moments, the throne room was silent. Every eye in the room was riveted to Ahmanet as she sat in her throne, satisfaction dripping off her in waves, victory written all over her.

Then, as one, every man and woman turned to face the thrones and sank to their knees, one fist over their hearts. The chant, uninterrupted, shouted at the top of their lungs, was almost loud enough to shake the room.
‘Long live the Pharaoh! Long live the Pharaoh! Long live the Pharaoh!’

Chapter End Notes

So, as I mentioned above, I do have another little announcement to make. That announcement being that, the coming week, I will be on an excursion for school. It lasts four days, and therefore leaves me no time to write. As a result, you're going to have to wait for the last chapter, which I will post not coming Saturday, but the Saturday after. I'm sorry about this, but school takes precedence over fic, I'm afraid. But the last chapter is definitely coming, though! Just a little later than usual.
Chapter 71

Chapter Summary

The epilogue.

Chapter Notes

Hey people! I'm a week later due to school, as I explained in the notes of last chapter, but here I am! And with me, I bring - the epilogue! The very last chapter of this story. And it's been a ride, my friends. A ridiculous amount of words, so many pages, so many characters I've come to love - and you. I just want to say that I'm very grateful that all of you have stuck with me through this whole thing. I appreciate every hit, every kudo, and every comment. Thank you for that.

Also, as a last shoutout, I'd like to mention So58 and druid001 for leaving comments on the last chapter that were really helpful. My knowledge of war is basically zero, so it was good to have some help with that.

As always, enjoy, and lemme know your thoughts!

After the chants had died down, long minutes later, Ahmanet glanced at the dead bodies on the throne room floor.

"Have them thrown into the desert. They do not deserve to be in the embalming rooms of our ancestors," she told a couple of guards dismissively. She looked bored, but her emotions were anything but, a fierce, bright, nearly savage joy racing through her, like nothing Jenny had ever felt before. "Then send a message to Cairo to our troops there." Ahmanet continued.

Somehow, a guard procured a pen and paper out of nowhere, waiting attentively for Ahmanet to tell him what to write down.

"Tell them that Egypt is ours. They are to inform the people that their president is dead and that Egypt is mine, as it has always been supposed to be. The people are to immediately reject any authority other than my own." Then there was an edge of cruelty to her emotions, a veil of ruthlessness without pity of mercy. "And then order the troops to slaughter half of the population of Cairo, as a warning for those who are less likely to comply."

"Yes, Sire." The guard wrote it down hurriedly, scribbling away at his piece of paper.

One of the generals hesitantly spoke up, asking, "What of the other cities, Majesty? They might see it as a signal to rebel."

"Good point." Ahmanet agreed. "Send out a second message, one for the whole country alongside the declaration of my kingdom. Make sure the people know I will not tolerate dissent amongst my subjects. Those who deny my right to rule, will die, after which their bodies will be displayed
publicly to serve as a warning to their peers.’’

‘‘Anything else, Sire?’’ Asked the guard noting down the messages.

‘‘For now, that will do,’’ Ahmanet decided. ‘‘Go send them now. I want them spread throughout the country before noon tomorrow, no exceptions.’’

‘‘As you wish, Sire,’’ The guard went running out of the throne room to spread the messages as ordered, even as other guards started to collect the bodies on the floor.

‘‘Would you mind terribly to join me in our quarters?’’ Victory rolled off Ahmanet, but the need to have some time away from curious eyes was strong. Jenny had a feeling she wanted to celebrate, or perhaps let out all the emotion she was currently fighting not to show, and that she didn’t want people around to watch her lose it for a bit. As it was, the elation she was holding back was overwhelming.

‘‘Not at all,’’ Jenny said. ‘‘Perhaps Zara and Sahar can look after Set for a while, if you want some time for just us.’’

‘‘That would be very much appreciated.’’

Accepting Ahmanet’s arm, Jenny let herself be helped out of her throne, and with Zara and Sahar on their heels and Set carried along in his carrier basket, Jenny and Ahmanet made their way to their quarters. Zara and Sahar veered off just before they arrived, taking with them a mildly grumpy but not protesting Set, which left Jenny and Ahmanet on their own.

Jenny closed the door behind them, watching Ahmanet as she stalked over to the couch, paused, and then started to pace restlessly. Jenny could practically see the emotions boiling under her skin, itching for a way out. That bright, fiery, savage joy. Breathless elation. A deep, vicious victory. Mild disbelief. Underneath, weaker, some vindication, a hint of spite. It was a dizzying cocktail, nearly shattering in its intensity. Jenny didn’t know how Ahmanet could stand it without screaming.

Gently, Jenny approached. ‘‘Are you alright?’’

Ahmanet abruptly stopped pacing. Her eyes were suspiciously bright. ‘‘Jennifer…’’ her voice broke. ‘‘My love…’’

‘‘You did it,’’ Jenny said, wrapping Ahmanet in a hug. ‘‘You’ve done it. You’ve taken your birthright, love. Egypt’s yours.’’

‘‘Yes.’’ Ahmanet sounded a little dazed, ‘‘I’ve done it.’’

‘‘You’ve done it.’’ Jenny repeated.

‘‘Egypt is mine. Truly mine.’’

‘‘It is.’’

‘‘My birthright…’’

‘‘All yours,’’ Jenny assured her. She wasn’t sure to be worried or not. Maybe a little. Ahmanet had just done something she’d been trying to do for over five millennia, after all. In less than an hour in the throne room, over five millennia of waiting and wanting and suffering had come to a close. She’d spent five thousand years locked in a sarcophagus and submerged into a pool of mercury, aching for this very moment.
Not exactly a small achievement, or something to shrug off and move on from just like that.

And Ahmanet didn’t just shrug it off and move on. Her mouth opened and closed for a moment, as if she was lost for words. Slowly, the brightness in her eyes gained volume, until tears were brimming and slowly spilling over, tracking down her cheeks, smudging her makeup. Deeper down, past her skin, all the other emotions were swept away, until, coming across the link with the force of an eighteen-wheeler, there was nothing but a bone-deep, aching, breathless relief.

Jenny tightened her arms around Ahmanet, using her height advantage of about an inch to tuck Ahmanet into her, and attempted to send as much love and reassurance across the link as she was capable of, though she wasn’t sure if it would get through the wall of emotion coming from Ahmanet’s side.

It was the drop to make the bucket overflow.

Ahmanet sagged against her, and for the first time that Jenny could remember, Ahmanet cried. Deep, heaving sobs of relief from deep in her chest, tears squeezing past her eyelids, snot dripping from her nose - and to Jenny, she had never been more beautiful.

Alone with Jenny in their living room, bawling her eyes out ungracefully, Ahmanet’s first day as the undisputed ruler of Egypt started.

Ahmanet’s birthright, however, steeped in blood as it was, was only the start. It was not a kind start, or a peaceful one.

As ordered, the troops stationed at Cairo killed half of the people who had not already perished in the battles for the city itself. Considering the population counted at nearly ten million people, that was five million deaths. All those people were killed in the span of one week, dragged into the desert by soldiers and sand creatures, either shot or simply dragged down and crushed. No one was spared. Men, women, children, the sick and elderly. If they were unlucky enough to belong to the half that was written up for elimination, they were done.

With the thousands of casualties already having fallen during the swift war for the city, Cairo was left bruised, battered, razed to the ground, and utterly, completely cowed. From there, it was easy to take the rest of the city, the cowed survivors unable to really put up a resistance anymore. And with Cairo taken, the rest followed.

In under a week, Ahmanet had the entire country under her thumb.

Those who tried to protest were killed on the spot, their bodies hung from buildings and left to rot. This, of course, did not discourage everyone, and rebels went underground, resorting to guerilla tactics. Over the years, they were a thorn in Ahmanet’s side - but only a small one. They were neither numerous nor influential enough to cause real issues, though they certainly tried. The kill-on-sight orders issued for anyone who was even suspected of being a rebel stopped a lot of people from joining. Fear was a powerful weapon, and Ahmanet wielded it like a seasoned master.

And not everything was bad. Those who didn’t rebel, who kept their heads down and went on with their lives, who accepted the new leadership and hierarchy without struggle… they had pretty decent lives. Nothing much changed for them, except for the fact that they now had a Pharaoh instead of a president and weren’t allowed to vote anymore.

More protests happened when Ahmanet officially made Egypt a monotheistic kingdom. Religious
buildings - mosques, mostly, but also some churches and synagogues - were torn down and replaced by temples, holy books burned, effigies and statues destroyed. Any religion that was not the worship of Set was strictly and immediately prohibited, and even more harshly enforced. People, of course, were not happy. Especially the more orthodox ones. They were, like the rebels, exterminated on the spot without mercy or chance at leniency. Again the ones who did not rebel but quietly went with the changes were left alone to live their lives in peace.

Twice a day they attended religious services to Set, and though it was clear they were not happy about it, they were too terrified of the consequences of not showing up, and so accepted this aspect of life under Ahmanet’s rule as well. They grumbled, but did not disobey, which probably saved another couple million of lives. Ahmanet was not someone to let her subjects disobey her orders. She’d kill them to the last before she’d let them worship a god other than Set, or follow a leader other than her.

And it did not stop at Egypt.

Various outside parties continued their attempts to bypass the sandstorms at the borders. They did not succeed, their attempts either failing completely, or intercepted and stopped without fail.

But the borders were not closed forever.

Exactly one year after gaining Egypt, Ahmanet briefly lifted the sandstorm at the border between Egypt and Sudan, and attacked.

Between sandstorms, and quick, brutal battles involving sand creatures, it took barely two months before she had the country subdued, more than doubling the size of her empire. Thousands of Sudanese soldiers and civilians died. Egypt lost less than a few hundred Infected soldiers, conscripted from the defeated Egyptian soldiers who had been Infected shortly after Egypt had fallen. None of them were really worth resurrecting, so their bodies were absorbed by the desert, left there until they were needed to serve again. The surviving citizens were subjected to the same rule as the citizens of Egypt.

After Sudan, Ahmanet took Libya. It took even less time. The country was already ravaged by civil war and was subdued and assimilated even more easily than Sudan had been. It was hard to say whether the people were relieved to have a stable government or resentful of Ahmanet and her actions. Either way, they had become a part of the empire that was rapidly becoming known as New Egypt, whether they liked it or not. They quickly learned not to protest. It only took two protest groups getting slaughtered on the spot before they received the message and learned to just keep their heads down and get on with their lives.

Then came Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. They were invaded and assimilated in less than two years, falling to Ahmanet’s overwhelming power one by one. They struggled. Or attempted to, anyway. Tunisia was taken easily. Algeria put up a good fight, and had most of its population wiped out in response, forcing it to surrender or be wiped out entirely. Morocco capitulated less than a week after their desert began to stir.

Western Sahara anticipated Ahmanet knocking on their doors, and surrendered before even a grain of sand had crossed the border. Assimilation, the general opinion was, was better than being wiped out like Algeria, whose remaining people were not treated very well at all by the newly installed loyalist government. Mauritania, after about three days of resistance, came to the same conclusion, and surrendered after the first city had been buried, people and all.

This meteoric expansion had not gone unnoticed by the rest of the world. No country could grow this big this quickly without attracting attention. Said attention came in the shape of the UN
attempting to ‘free’ the occupied countries from Ahmanet’s hold on them. They did not succeed. But they did make a decent attempt.

The bombers came first. Fighter planes with missiles and other explosive weapons, flying so high they crossed over the sandstorms entirely, fast enough to evade most of the crows. Some didn’t make it across. Others did. A few even made it far enough to attack troops stationed outside of cities. Losses were taken.

Then the fighter planes started to go down. Pilots, trying to save themselves by jumping and floating down by parachute, were attacked and eaten alive in mid-air by murders of crows.

Ground troops attempting to make it through the sandstorms were flayed alive by the sand, sharp enough and fast enough to go through body armor like a knife through butter. The ones that made it to the other side bled out before they could be helped, the skin stripped off their bodies, flesh ripped to shreds, eyes wide and blind in their screaming faces.

Then the long-distance missiles came, and were slapped out of the sky by Ahmanet, the sands of the desert bending to her will, intercepting and containing the missiles before they could touch the ground. None of them hit their target.

Then, while the Western world’s bumbling attempts to dethrone her fell apart into squabbling and debates, Ahmanet turned her attention to the Middle-East.

Sharing a border with Egypt was Israel. Allies with, amongst others, the United States of America, Jenny had made sure to impress upon Ahmanet that this was not a country to play around with. Ahmanet took her advice. They hit Israel hard and fast, the desert swallowing the capital whole, the army grounded by sandstorms of epic proportions, the gales hard enough to probably qualify as hurricane level.

When America tried to help their allies, they were kindly reminded that their country had deserts, too, and if they wanted to keep Las Vegas as it was, they’d shut up, sit down, and keep their nose out of the Middle-East from now on. It was not their business what Ahmanet did within her own borders. Or beyond them, really.

America did not shut up, sit down, and keep their nose out of the Middle-East.

Ahmanet took the news of the missiles heading towards New Egypt, nodded, tore them from the sky and sent them crashing into Saudi Arabia instead (might as well get a headstart there, Jenny supposed), and utterly decimated Las Vegas. And a couple of other cities located in or near American deserts as well, just because.

With America cowed and out of the running for at least a while, Israel was taken easily, and with Israel, the rest began to fall, too. Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan were small and fell in line easily. Saudi Arabia took slightly longer if only because of its size, but in the end, too, was unable to fight the power of the desert and the one who commanded it. No desert country could fight the very ground it was built on, no matter how hard they tried.

In scant five years, Ahmanet took all the countries on her list.

New Egypt became an empire of the likes the world had not seen in a very long time.

Still, not all was well. Small groups of rebels, located throughout the empire, proved themselves hardy and determined, and they hid themselves well. While Ahmanet was occupied with making sure the borders were defended from outside parties, Jenny gave out orders to form death squads,
who were to track down rebels and kill them on the spot. Civilians who gave useful information were to be awarded with gold and privileges. Those who attempted to aid the rebels were treated as such and did not survive for long.

And there were rumours.

Whispers from beyond the borders. Glimpses of priests wearing the sign of the Dead Lord, and vague reports of men and women wearing the Templar’s Cross around their necks.

Jenny did not like those reports. The mere mention of Priests of Osiris and Templar Knights was enough to have Ahmanet in a snit. The idea that they were still out there, that not all priests had been hunted down and killed and that the knights hadn’t quietly died out over the centuries had Ahmanet enraged and screaming orders to have them hunted down and exterminated to the very last at a bunch of terrified generals. Yet, despite the teams smuggled past the borders to hunt them down, they stayed well-hidden, and the occasional sightings rarely offered result.

Jenny stood on the balcony, accepting some tea from Zara, and couldn’t help but feel like there’d be trouble from them yet. She wasn’t sure when, or in what way, but there’d be trouble, mark her words. She could feel it in her bones.

‘‘My love,’’ Ahmanet appeared at her side, still exactly the same as she’d been five years ago save for the fact that the promise ring on her finger had been exchanged for an engagement one. Jenny fully intended to replace it again soon, this time with a wedding band. ‘‘What are you doing?’’

‘‘Reminiscing,’’ Jenny said, swirling her tea around her cup.

‘‘About?’’ Ahmanet accepted some tea as well.

‘‘The past.’’

Ahmanet frowned a little. ‘‘What about the past? Something that bothers you?’’

‘‘No,’’ Jenny said. ‘‘Just thinking of everything that led me here.’’

And what a journey it had been. Five years ago, if someone had asked her if this was where she’d end up, she’d have laughed in their face. And possibly also suggested therapy, or at least some tylenol and a good, long nap in case overexhaustion was making them delirious.

But here she was. She’d completed her life’s work. She’d found Ahmanet, and through finding Ahmanet, she had also found happiness. And sure, it’d been painful at points, and terrifying. Even now, five years later, Jenny vividly remembered what it’d been like. The exhilaration of finding Ahmanet. The terror of the plane crash, and realizing that she had become Ahmanet’s Chosen. The church and the chase through the forest, followed by escaping London as it was swallowed whole by a sandstorm. Racing to find a way to kill Ahmanet and be free. The hope of discovering the Blood of Osiris.

And Cairo.

Jenny would never, not as long as she lived, even if she’d live for centuries upon centuries, forget Cairo.

She would never forget what it was like, pinned down into the sand, the dagger sliding into her chest, punching through bone and muscle before puncturing her heart. The way her lungs had filled up with blood and the pain of her failing heart trying to beat around metal as cold as ice. Waking up after, and realizing what had happened to her, what she had become in the process of dying and
being resurrected. Jenny remembered how horrified she’d been at the time, how angry and afraid and revolted with herself.

It was not a time she liked to revisit.

And then, after, the Temple of Osiris, killing Akar, and finally - by Set, finally - joining Ahmanet like she’d always been meant to. Resurrecting Chris on accident. Killing Henry. Killing Nick. Ahmanet killing Chris. The war to conquer Egypt. Not to mention the whole ‘pregnant with Set’ thing.

Jenny still held firm in her conviction to never have another child. One pregnancy was plenty for the rest of eternity. She was just glad Ahmanet had no desire for more children either. Just Set was more than enough.

Though having Set had silver linings, too. For one, her pact was complete. She did not owe her god anything else, except for her care as he grew. And his magic had been hosted inside her too. Carrying it around for weeks had made Jenny very sensitive to magic in general, and with the knowledge of what it felt like, it was much easier to learn how to control her own. Though it’d still taken her pretty much all of the past five years to learn. Still, her effort had paid off. More than.

Nowadays, Jenny was feared as much as she was adored by the people. Monster, they called her, sometimes, if someone had to die and made a real example of. Merciful, too, if someone had to be healed, brought back from the brink of death when no one else could possibly save them.

She could do both.

With her power over death, she could take the lives of entire armies with a sweep of her arm and a whisper of power. She’d done so, once or twice, and had not enjoyed it very much at all. She still preferred to leave the killing to Ahmanet or the soldiers.

But she also had her power over life, and with it, she could heal just about anything. She could take someone with their guts hanging out and most of their blood on the floor, and a simple touch would have them walking and talking like nothing ever happened. She could take the terminally sick, the ones who’d suffered horrendous illnesses for years, who’d been written off by doctor after doctor and told they wouldn’t last the month - and in a minute, they’d be healthier than they had ever been in their entire lives. She could take the weak and elderly and give them a new lease on life, take away the decades like they’d never passed at all. She could give people back limbs, even if they’d been lost years and years ago.

And, since her power was life itself rather than just healing, it wasn’t restricted to just humans. She could do the same for animals. Or plants. She could coax a seed into a tree in a matter of minutes. Make flowers bloom even if they were out of season. Have fruit grow to astounding size and sweetness.

Jenny honestly preferred that side of her powers. Even after five years and more death than she’d ever expected to see, she rather preferred to leave the violence to Ahmanet. She enjoyed it far more than Jenny did. Jenny was more than content with healing and creating. And she had to say she grew some rather magnificent strawberries. The best in the entire world, at the risk of sounding vain.

“‘But you do not regret it,’” Ahmanet stated.

“I don’t,” Jenny agreed, because how could she possibly regret the direction her life had taken? It’d been hard at times, that was undeniable. There’d probably be some hardship in the future, too. But there was so much good in her life, too much happiness and love to ever regret the bad parts. She
had someone she loved more than life itself. And in the past five years, she’d come to understand what Ahmanet meant when she said Jenny was the most important thing in her life, and that she’d burn the world for her if need be. Jenny would do the same. If anyone dared hurt her woman, Jenny would tear down the foundations of the Earth to make them pay for it.

There were footsteps at the doorway into the palace, bare feet slapping against the stone floors. “Mother.”

Jenny turned to look at her son. Set grew at a normal human pace, it turned out, so she had a five-year-old right now - or rather, she had a fully grown god in a five-year-old’s body. And beyond the eyes, he looked like a normal child, too.

“What is it, Set?”

He gazed at her steadily, yellow-and-black eyes meeting hers. His head was shorn except for a braided lock on the side of his head, a hairstyle traditional for children who had yet to reach the age of puberty. Since his body was young, Set wore his hair appropriately. He was dressed traditionally, too, a finely made wrap skirt, tied with a golden belt, blue decorations woven into the fabric. “Today the merchants I sent out should return. Do you know what time?”

“I haven’t heard anything yet,” Jenny responded, “but a servant will inform you the moment they are spotted, and again when they enter the palace grounds.”

Set nodded slowly. He looked a little mulish. “They are late.”

“If they are meant to return today, they shan’t be late unless they don’t return until tomorrow,” Ahmanet responded. By now, the hero worship for her god had worn off completely. It had, in fact, already worn off by the time Set had been learning to walk. Strangely enough, he actually seemed to appreciate this. Or, at least, he didn’t get upset when Jenny and Ahmanet refused to grovel. Which Jenny absolutely refused to do. She’d birthed him, she’d damn well order him around too if he misbehaved.

Set shrugged a little. “Then if they don’t arrive tonight, I’ll kill them. Because then they will be late.”

“Then try not to get blood in the carpets,” Jenny said, sipping her tea and not at all surprised or worried at the declaration. She was used to it by now, and killing people was kind of the go-to threat for Set. He was still as cruel as he’d always been, but having a child’s body had apparently also mellowed him out a bit. Either way, he didn’t leave behind a trail of people as broken as Akar. “They’re expensive.”

“I’ll kill them in the courtyard,” Set suggested. “You can just have a servant shovel some new sand over the stains.”

“I’ll make sure to do that,” Jenny responded dryly. “And aren’t you supposed to be at the temple with Aaheru right about now?”

“Aaheru grovels. It’s annoying.”

“Go anyway.”

There was a faint, deep rumble, but Set turned on his heel and went anyway.

“One day,” Ahmanet said, “he’s going to stop tolerating you ordering him around.”
“I’m his mother,” Jenny said. “It’s my job to order him around.” Or that’s what her grandmother had always said, anyway, whenever Jenny had misbehaved as a child. She liked to think she’d come out pretty well, so she supposed it was sound parenting advice, and one she made use of regularly. And it wasn’t like Set had made any dislike of it known anyway. He seemed to have a soft spot for her, as well as for Ahmanet.

“Dinner will be served soon,” Ahmanet changed the subject. “I was thinking we could have an early night, after, just the two of us. Some music, some wine, some dancing, perhaps.”

“I’d like that. But let’s just stay here for another few minutes first.”

“Of course.”

Jenny turned back to watching the desert and found her mind wandering to the reports of priests and knights beyond the borders again. “It’s not over.” She told Ahmanet, almost absentmindedly. “There’s still enemies out there. People who want to see us dead and buried, no matter the cost.”

“No, I dare say it is not. But that is a concern for the future. Today, we dine, and then we’ll dance, and we can worry about the future tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” Jenny agreed, feeling a desert breeze caress her face, the warm smell of out-of-season flowers wafting up from the gardens, the familiar, comforting presence of Ahmanet’s mind against the edge of her own, the warmth of her body just as close.

Yeah. The future could wait. For now, she had everything she needed, right here.

With the woman she loved at her side and the desert wind in her face, she was at peace.

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