Exodus

by unniebee

Summary

Chanyeol uncovers the archaeological find of a lifetime, but it isn’t until he brings it back to New York that things start to get strange. Egyptologist!AU.

Notes

I tried to make Exodus as historically accurate as I reasonably could, both to the 1920’s, and to what we know of Ancient Egypt. Many of the artifacts and events referenced actually exist or are true to what we have discerned so far, and I will include a list of references at the very end.

With that said, this is a fandom fic, and as a result, the characters are not racially accurate. (Bolded because there has been some confusion.) All East Asian characters are all still East Asian, racially speaking, no matter whether they come from America, Egypt, or anywhere else. Go ahead and imagine that this takes place in an alternate universe where all people have the racial characteristics of East Asians, if that helps you.
Chapter 1

October 14, 1927
The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut
Deir el-Bahari, Egypt

“I told you there was something here!”

As Chanyeol Park nearly vibrated out of his skin in excitement, his partner, Kris Wu, rolled his eyes, long-suffering. “You sure did,” he said dryly. “How about we see what it is, exactly, before you break out the champagne?”

Chanyeol cuffed Kris’s shoulder. “You’re awful. Alright, sourpuss, help me clear this stone.”

They’d come to suspect something was hidden behind one of the walls while they were studying the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Hatshepsut, but it had taken a bit of work to convince themselves that it was worth dismantling a section of the wall to find out. As it turned out, it was completely worth it. When the crew had worked several of the massive sandstone blocks free from the wall, it had revealed a hidden archway, covered in carved hieroglyphs and filled up with loose rubble.

No one in the crew had to be told what an incredible discovery this could be. Structurally speaking, there was no reason to fill this doorway with stones, no reason to block it off - unless there was something on the other side worth hiding, worth protecting. The prospect that they might have discovered an untouched chamber made Chanyeol, Kris and their six-person dig crew energetic, and it wasn’t long before the irregular boulders were cleared out enough to pass through.

“We’re going in,” Chanyeol said to the crew chief, impatient. “Finish clearing this doorway, and make sure you take the rubble outside the tomb and pile it somewhere. We’ll look at it later.” Double-checking that his pistol was still securely holstered, Chanyeol flicked on a flashlight and held it up to the opening.

Darkness.

“Come on.”

Chanyeol and Kris were both rather large men, tall and broad, but this was hardly the first time they’d squeezed themselves into some dark, unknown hole, so with a little bit of ungainly clamboring they managed to get over the half-cleared rubble and into the dry, stale, but open air of the passageway beyond. Kris had his own pistol out and ready in his hand, looking around warily, but Chanyeol was too busy looking at the walls around him to worry about whether some desert animal had made this passage its burrow.

“Christ, look at this,” he murmured, sweeping his flashlight around. The walls were carved floor-to-ceiling, hieroglyphs and artwork. The timeworn paint on the carvings was still visible in places, giving hints at how brightly colored the mural once was. “This is a burial procession, look.” He pointed out the representation of the Book of the Dead, the carving of Anubis welcoming the procession to his realm.

“A tomb?” Kris murmured, staring. “But whose? It can’t be Hatshepsut.” The Pharaoh Queen’s tomb had been found years prior, in the Valley of the Kings nearby, but though the walls had decreed who was meant to be buried there, the body was gone, looted by grave robbers centuries
“Let’s find out.” Chanyeol turned to continue down the passage.

Kris hurried to follow him. “You don’t want to translate this first?”

“We’ll have time to study it later.” The tunnel was short and sloped sharply downward. At the end was a small clearing and another stone archway, this one fitted with a single, massive stone block, carved exactly to fit.

“Shit,” Kris said. “There’s no way we’re going to move that thing ourselves, it’s gotta weigh a couple of tons at least.”

Chanyeol was already examining the stone door, his lantern on the floor at his feet. The hieroglyphs here were not rows and rows of complicated carvings as they were in the hallway, but rather two simple, oversized vertical lines, only a few characters each. He carefully sounded each one out, consulting his pocket notebook when necessary.

“Turn away,” he said aloud.

“What?”

“That’s what it says. Turn away.” Chanyeol glanced at Kris, his heart rabbiting excitedly in his chest. “A warning to tomb robbers?”

Kris snorted. “Or to nosy archeologists.” But he came up next to Chanyeol anyway, running careful, delicate fingers around the edges of the stone door. “Hey, look. There’s marks on the floor.”

Chanyeol looked where he was pointing. Scratch or scuff marks, in an oddly perfect curve, as if…

Oh. Oh!

“Turn away,” Chanyeol said out loud again. “Turn away?” He moved to the opposite side of the door and followed the edge down to the floor. Sure enough, once he brushed away the accumulated dirt and gravel, there was a tiny gap between the stone and the floor. Light from the flashlight passed underneath easily, except in the very center, where something cast a shadow. A post… a hinge?

“Yeol, what the hell are you - ”

“It’s not a warning, it’s an instruction.” Chanyeol breathed, scrambling to his feet. He pressed his shoulder to the farthest edge of the block and pushed. There was a horrible grinding noise, but the stone did give way under his shoulder just a little. Just enough. “Help me!” he demanded.

“Shit,” Kris muttered, hurriedly setting down his flashlight and reaching over Chanyeol’s body to add his own strength. The ancient stone slab protested, but it gave way, pivoting open on the post driven up its center. It scraped to a stop just a little shy of 90 degrees rotated, adding a new scratch mark to the ones on the floor.

Chanyeol picked up his lantern and held it aloft. Immediately, he was nearly blinded by the reflection of gold.

A lot of gold.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” Kris breathed behind him. “This is… Yeol, this is the find of the decade.”
As his eyes adjusted, Chanyeol started to make sense of what he was seeing. It was a royal burial chamber, no doubt about it, and it looked completely untouched. Sacks of grains, bolts of cloth, and elaborately carved furniture lined the equally elaborate walls. Gold, gems, and other treasures were arranged artfully around the room, plus several beautifully decorated chests that likely held even more riches. And there, in the very center, upon a raised dais, was an utterly fantastic gilt sarcophagus.

“Don’t touch anything,” Kris warned, as if Chanyeol was stupid enough to ruin a find like this with his own enthusiasm. Ignoring him, Chanyeol carefully picked his way towards the center of the room, standing before the sarcophagus.

It couldn’t have been longer than about five and a half feet end to end, completely covered with gold leaf and inlaid gems. Gingerly, Chanyeol stepped up onto the foot of the dais, looking down at the lid. The face depicted on the top was young and smooth, beardless, with long, dark hair, likely a representation of a wig.

Chanyeol looked over to the corner of the room, where Kris was crouched down, examining something on the floor. “Come here and look at this,” he called.

Standing, Kris brushed off his slacks and jacket and crossed the room. “No pharaonic headdress,” Kris observed aloud, coming up to stand beside Chanyeol. “No scepter shown, either. Probably not a Pharaoh, but still royalty, if this sarcophagus is any indicator.”

“A royal princess?” Chanyeol wondered. “There’s no beard.” He held the lantern closer, studying the painted-on face. The eyes were elongated and catlike, made even moreso by the heavy black eyeliner painted onto the mask, and the carved lips had an equally catlike curve. “Ah, look at her. She’s beautiful.”

Crouching next to the sarcophagus, Kris made a thoughtful noise. “She’s a he,” he said. Chanyeol blinked down at him, and Kris pointed at the cartouche carved along the side of the sarcophagus. “Prince Jongdae.”

Oh. “Still beautiful,” Chanyeol shot back, and Kris snorted again. “We should see if he’s still inside. I can’t imagine a robber would have taken the body and not all this gold, but we should check anyway.”

Kris agreed, and together, they carefully unsealed the sarcophagus and lifted the lid. And there he was - a small, slim human body, completely wrapped in ancient linen, his face covered with an elaborate mask that showed the same catlike features as the outer depiction.

Chanyeol stared at him, his breath coming quick. A man who lived thousands of years ago, buried in darkness and silence for all this time, waiting to be found.

“Hello, gorgeous,” Chanyeol murmured. “I’m going to learn all your secrets.”

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They stayed at the hidden tomb for nearly two weeks. First, they cleared out rubble and brought in lights so they could take dozens of photographs of the tomb before they touched anything. Then, they started opening chests, moving treasures, taking more photos as each new layer was revealed. Kris spent most of his time making detailed sketches of anything and everything, filling up an entire
sketchbook with drawings and notations, while Chanyeol directed the workers and catalogued pieces as they were removed.

Eventually, everything movable was brought out of the tomb. Chanyeol wished he could take down the wall reliefs as well, pry them carefully off the walls in sections and transport them back to America. He dreamed of setting up the tomb as an exhibit at the Met, reconstructing it behind glass, exactly as they had found it, for the education of the public. There had never been an exhibit like that, anywhere in the world; it would be the first of its kind. But they didn’t have the resources for that right now - it would take a dig crew much larger and more skilled than they currently had, and they currently only had enough money left to pay for transport back across the Atlantic. They would have to come back - but Chanyeol couldn’t bring himself to be even a little put out about that.

The excitement of the find permeated everything they did. Even Kris, who usually was pretty nonchalant about most everything, seemed intensely devoted to making sure this discovery was handled well, and in particular that the sarcophagus and the mummy inside were safe. He’d even taken to sleeping near it on the last few nights before they left, as if to protect it. It was unusual, but then, this was an unusual discovery.

The last thing the team did before leaving Thebes was replace the stone wall over the entrance archway, so their discovery would remain secret, for the time being. Grave robbing was still a real threat to archeology, and even within the field itself there were other practitioners who weren’t as thorough or responsible. Chanyeol didn’t want to give anyone a reason to rip more holes in Hatshepsut’s tomb, and he definitely didn’t want anyone to get the wall reliefs before he could return with more resources.

Then, they began the long trip back to New York.

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November 9, 1927
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York City, NY, USA

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was more Chanyeol’s home than the tiny flat he rented. Half the time, he even slept there, especially when he had a project.

And right now, he had a project.

The Egyptian dig team’s silence had been purchased with a promise of a place in the history books and a large sum of money. An equally large sum was paid to the captain of the ship that took them across the Atlantic, buying his no-questions-asked assistance in getting the large crates of fragile cargo on and off the ship.

The Director of the Met knew what Kris and Chanyeol were working on. They’d had to tell him, to secure the funds to bribe everyone, and since they were both employed by the Met, the find technically belonged to the museum anyway. Other than the Director, though, no one was told about the find. Their basement workshop was cordoned off, and the only people allowed inside were Kris and Chanyeol.
Unfortunately, this meant that they had to move all the cargo into the museum themselves, under the cover of night. Which is how they ended up running afoul of the Met’s Head of Security, one Officer Kyungsoo Do.

Well, no. How they actually ran afoul of him had more to do with Chanyeol walking right into a table of excavation tools and knocking most of them to the floor. The loud clatter made both of them wince, but thankfully, they didn't drop the heavy stone chest they were currently carrying into the workshop.

"What in blazes?"

At the sound of Kyungsoo's voice, Kris nearly did drop the piece. Swearing under his breath, Chanyeol readjusted his grip to take more weight and hurried to get the chest settled in a corner of their shop. Kris dropped his end a bit too quickly and rushed to dust his slacks off as the Head of Security came around the corner.

When Chanyeol had first been introduced to Officer Kyungsoo Do, he'd scoffed at the idea that he could secure a milk truck, let alone the most visited museum in America. That was before he'd seen the man take down a would-be art thief with a single shot, carefully aimed so it didn't even come close to harming the painting.

Officer Do was tiny, quietly dapper, and terrifying. Chanyeol had a healthy respect for him. Kris, on the other hand, had a bit more than a healthy respect.

"S-sorry, Officer," he stuttered, as Chanyeol ducked his head to hide his smirk. "It was an accident. Dr. Park, he's, you know, a butterfingers."

One thick, dark eyebrow raised appraisingly. "You know," he said conversationally, "usually when I catch idiots in here in the middle of the night, it's because they're trying to sneak something out, not sneak something in."

"We've got permission, Kyungsoo," Chanyeol said, saving Kris before he stuttered himself into the next age. Man was carrying a torch something fierce. "Or you gonna pinch us?"

"I'm gonna pinch something," Kyungsoo grumbled. "If you've got permission, how come I ain't heard about it?" He leaned around Kris's broad shoulders to peek into the workroom, and whistled. "What've you gotten yourself into this time, boys?"

Kris and Chanyeol glanced at each other. Kris's eyes said tell him. Chanyeol's flattened lips said not on your life. Kris's eyebrow pointed out that he was bound to find out anyway; Chanyeol's lips flattened further, but he looked away.

"Hey, Kyungsoo," he said. "Can you keep something under your hat?"

Kyungsoo jerked his chin at the cloth-wrapped stone. "Might be a bit large."

Kris's snort was too loud. Chanyeol rolled his eyes and contained his grin. "We found something this time. A big something. A lot of somethings."

Immediately, Kyungsoo snorted. "Lay off. You two never bring anything exciting back."

He was clearly teasing, but it stung anyway. Chanyeol raised an eyebrow and pulled the sheet off their high prize - the sarcophagus.

Watching Kyungsoo's eyes go wide was completely worth it.
Kyungsoo agreed to help cover their late-night comings and goings on one condition - that he be in
the room when the sarcophagus was opened and the mummy examined. Kris and Chanyeol agreed
readily, and a few days later, after their entire collection was carefully catalogued and stored for later
examination, they called Kyungsoo into the workshop to watch.

Inside the stone sarcophagus, the casket itself was wooden, painted with once-brilliant dyes and
inlaid with tarnished gems and gold. It took a little engineering to figure out how to get the mummy
out without damaging him; in the end they maneuvered a wooden plank underneath him, looped
cloth underneath that, and carefully lifted him out.

"Easy, easy," Kris breathed, as if Chanyeol needed the reminder. They lowered him onto the table,
leaving the board and sheets under him in case they needed to move him later.

"There. Comfy?" Chanyeol asked the mummy.

Kris shook his head, used to Chanyeol's clowning by this point. Kyungsoo, however, only crossed
his arms. "Stop cooing at the fossil," he muttered. "Gives me the creeps."

"You're the one who asked to be here," Chanyeol shot back. He was used to people thinking he was
screwy. Most times, when people said they were into embalming, they meant heavy drinking, not the
actual kind done on corpses.

"I've a fascination with the morbid," Kyungsoo said dryly, leaning against the wall. "Doesn't mean
I'm about to take that thing out on the town."

“Yeol would,” Kris mumbled, and Chanyeol didn’t resist the urge to sock him. Ignoring the punch,
Kris grinned at him. “You would, you can’t deny it! If you weren’t worried about it getting damaged
or stolen, you’d take that thing with you everywhere.”

As they carefully removed the burial mask, working together, Chanyeol sniffed haughtily. “He’s a
human, not a thing. And he’s older than most of the Bible, so show some goddamn respect.”

That seemed to catch Kyungsoo’s attention. “Older than how much of the Bible?”

As Kris settled the heavy, gilt burial mask in a protective shadowbox for later study, Chanyeol
started taking measurements of the body and noting them down. “Well, Howard Carter dated
Hatshepsut’s tomb to the early 18th Dynasty," he said, “which is a few hundred years before when
Bible scholars think Moses’s plea to the Pharaoh and the Exodus from Egypt took place. That’s the
second book of the Bible, right? Exodus?” He stopped, smiling fondly at his prize. “So he’s older
than all of the books of the Bible, except Genesis.”

Kyungsoo whistled. “Do you have an actual date?” he asked. “Does it say, somewhere in all that
fancy chicken scratch?”
Kris was the one who pointed to the line of hieroglyphs around the side of the sarcophagus. “Royal Prince Jongdae,” he read. “Born in the last year of the reign of his father, Pharaoh King Thutmose II.” They’d translated as much as possible on the long trip across the ocean, beginning with the sarcophagus itself. “Left this existence in the 18th year of the reign of Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut.”

He looked up. “So Our Royal Princelyness here probably lived 1480 BC to 1461 BC.”

Gently, Chanyeol touched the prince’s wrapped forehead. “Nineteen. He was only nineteen.”

“Too young to become Pharaoh, then,” Kyungsoo noted.

“He wasn’t the crown prince,” Kris explained, warming up to the topic. “The sarcophagus indicates that he was Thutmose II’s son, but not that he was Hatshepsut’s. Since Hatshepsut was Thutmose’s main wife, he must have been born to a secondary wife.”

“We know who the crown prince was,” Chanyeol added, pulling on a freshly cleaned pair of kid gloves and picking up some padded tweezers. “Thutmose III’s tomb was discovered years ago. This young man would have been a secondary prince.” Very, very slowly, he began pulling away the brittle bandages that bound the mummy’s arms down over his chest. “Perhaps he would have become a famous general. Or a scribe in his brother’s court, recording history as it happened. An architect. A scientist. A diplomat.” He dropped sections of bandage into the metal dish Kris held out for him. “With luck, something inside his tomb or even on his body may tell us who he was, what he wanted, what he loved.”

“How he died,” Kris added. “That’s the one I’m interested in.”

Kyungsoo laughed, which made Kris flush a little, hiding a smile. Chanyeol glanced over at them briefly before turning his attention back to his work. “You see, Officer Do,” he said as he gingerly lifted another section of bandage, “I got into the field of archaeology, and Egyptology in particular, because I am fascinated by the ancient world, the ancient cultures. So long ago, so very different from how we live today, and yet, a man is always still a man. We are more similar to this prince than you think.” He flashed a grin. “Kris, on the other hand, ended up in this field entirely by accident, and stays mostly for the treasure and the drama.”

Even Kris couldn’t help but laugh at that, and as Kyungsoo started curiously asking Kris how, exactly, he had gotten into Egyptology, Chanyeol focused his full attention on Prince Jongdae’s mummy. With the outermost layer of bandages unwrapped, he could more clearly see the shape of the body underneath. Even accounting for the shrinkage that would have come from the mummification process, Jongdae, like most ancient Egyptians, had been very small by the average standards of 1927. Thinking back over the few intact male mummies that had been found, Chanyeol internally conjectured that Jongdae may have even been small for his own time; though the fact that he had died at nineteen and had never finished growing probably had something to do with that.

He should probably finish unwrapping the body, first, since there were likely to be more tokens and artifacts wrapped in between the layers of bandages, but he was too impatient. Instead, he started unwrapping the face.

These bandages, with the extra layer of protection from the burial mask, were in slightly better condition, and could be unwrapped without breaking as easily. Layers and layers came undone, and Chanyeol carefully pulled back the tar-cast mask that had protected the facial features, and the darkened, preserved flesh underneath was revealed.

“There you are,” he murmured. “Hi, Beautiful.” Pretending he didn’t hear Kris making rude gagging noises behind him, Chanyeol let the last of the bandages fall into the dish and examined the mummified head. High, strong cheekbones and a sharp jawline were all he could really still see
amongst the sunken flesh; oddly, there was a little bit of dark hair left on the boy’s head. Very unusual - most upper-class Egyptians had shaved their heads bare under their wigs.

Glancing between the stylized, idealized image on the burial mask and the bone structure of the actual remains, Chanyeol tried to imagine what Jongdae would have looked like in life. The mouth opening seemed rather wide, considering his narrow face, but there was no real way to discern the shape of his cheeks, his lips.

Thinking that he should check the teeth, Chanyeol very, very carefully cupped the mummy’s dessicated jaw and gently pried his mouth open. On first glance, his teeth looked fine, mostly all in the right places and surprisingly straight for someone born before toothbrushes. One glance, however, was all Chanyeol got, because his attention was immediately captured by something shiny.

“What in God’s name…?” He reached into the mummy’s mouth and pulled out a small, bright blue stone tablet bound in and inlaid with what looked like pale gold. “Kris. Kris! Hey! Pipe down!” Kris stopped mid-sentence, blinking at Chanyeol. Chanyeol was often loud, but he rarely used a stern tone like that. “Look at this.”

He handed the stone to Kris, who was generally better at rocks than he was. Valuable rocks, especially.

“Lapis lazuli,” Kris said immediately. “It had to have been imported.” He dug his thumbnail into the pale gold-colored metal binding around the edge. “And this is electrum, that’s unusual. Where was this?”

“In his mouth,” Chanyeol said. Kris gave the tablet a skeptical look, and Kyungsoo recoiled, making a disgusted face. “We know their funerary rites included a ritual ‘opening of the mouth’, but have you ever heard of a mummy being buried with something actually in his mouth?”

Kris shook his head. “No, never. The only thing they ever put inside a body was spices, to preserve it. On a body, or with a body, sure. Not inside. That’s odd.” He turned the tablet over in his hands. “There’s writing on both sides. What does it say?”

He handed it back, and Chanyeol took it. “I’m not sure. I’ve never seen some of these determinatives before.” He gestured at the bookshelf. “Hand me the Budge.”

“The what?” Kyungsoo asked.

As Kris leaned back in his chair and stretched out a long arm to pluck the book from the shelf, Chanyeol explained. “Easy Lessons in Egyptian Hieroglyphics, by E. A. Wallis Budge.” He flipped the book open to the symbol list in the back and started looking for the determinatives.

It became apparent pretty quickly what the issue was. “Oh. It’s not that these are unfamiliar determinatives, it’s that they aren’t determinatives.” He frowned. “There are no determinatives.”

“Once more, for the non-scholar in the room,” Kyungsoo grumbled.

“Written Egyptian included an extra symbol after nearly every word that gave a clue as to what that word referred,” Kris explained, as Chanyeol grabbed a notebook and started writing out a phonetic transliteration of the carvings. Maybe he could figure out what the carvings meant if he could see the sounds in English letters. “Their language had a lot of homonyms and words that sounded extremely similar, so the determinative helped get the meaning across. Very helpful.”

“Aheh ait tier unpa setemet er anxuik,” Chanyeol read aloud. Not a single one of these words was familiar. “Men abek en utu tak maatu tuak.” He kept going, reading the sounds out loud, hoping that
even one word would twinge his memory.

None did. But as the last word fell from Chanyeol’s lips, a sudden crash made all three of them jump. Kyungsoo was on his feet instantly, gun out in his hand; Chanyeol reached for his own but of course he didn’t carry it inside the museum.

“What was that?” Kris asked softly. Kyungsoo was already moving, picking his way gracefully around the stacks of artifacts and pointing his gun at their back storage room.

He stopped moving, his eyes widening to an almost comical degree. “What the -”

Chanyeol started forward, but he’d only made it two steps before Kyungsoo yelled and hit the floor with an alacrity only a trained officer would have. Something dark and cloudy, too granular to be smoke, floated through the door over Kyungsoo’s head.

“Did you just release a plague?!?” Kris hissed. “Are we cursed?!”

“There’s no such thing as a mummy’s curse,” Chanyeol snapped, taking a few steps back as the cloud came closer. It was headed for the mummy. Of course it was. Chanyeol resisted the urge to throw himself over the body protectively. “Howard Carter is alive and well and living in London. If the man who opened King Tut’s tomb wasn’t struck down, neither will we.”

“Tell that to the cloud of death!”

Said cloud hovered over the mummified body for a moment, then trickled down, tails of granular smoke flowing into its opened mouth. The mouth Chanyeol had pried open, to get at the tablet.

Maybe Kris was onto something after all.

The last of the cloud disappeared, and there was silence. They waited, but nothing more happened.

Kyungsoo had moved into the doorway, dividing his attention between the two rooms, his shoulders still tight and his gun still out. “You fellas better come look at this.”

Exchanging glances, Kris and Chanyeol crossed the room and looked. One of the crates had toppled off the shelves and broken open, the artifacts inside smashed to pieces. It took Chanyeol a moment to realize what they’d lost.

“No,” he breathed. “No, no, not the jars, Christ, no.”

Kris’s eyes went wide. “The canopic jars? Aw, hell.”

“They’re important, then?” Kyungsoo asked, his gaze still flickering between the rooms.

Chanyeol wanted to cry. “A perfect, complete set of sealed canopic jars, containing the four major organs of our prince in there, perfectly preserved? Yes. Yes, they’re important.”

Kyungsoo grunted. “If they contained that thing’s organs, then why am I only seeing pottery on the floor?” His eyes flicked back, meeting Chanyeol’s. “Where are the organs?”

His mind connected the dots, but the constellation created made no sense. “You don’t think that…”

“Look, I’m not the expert here, you are. You tell me!”

Chanyeol blinked, turned, and strode back to the mummy, with Kris and Kyungsoo hot on his heels. The mummy looked exactly the same as it had a few minutes earlier. Still wrapped. Still petrified.
Still dead.

Except...

Chanyeol sat down.

“Kyungsoo,” he said quietly, “can you make sure there’s no one else in the workshop?”

“Yeol, there ain’t nowhere to hide. The only doorway in or out is the one I was leaning on.”

And the storage room was too narrow for anyone to hide in; it was little more than an oversized closet. “So it’s just been us in here, right?”

“Chanyeol,” Kris said warningly. “What does that face mean? I don’t like that face.”

“Neither of you touched the mummy… right?”

Holstering his gun, Kyungsoo shuddered. “Not with a ten-foot pole.”

“No one’s touched it but you.”

Right. “So you’re telling me he closed his mouth by himself?”

“I’m sorry, he what?”

Chanyeol pointed. “Am I crazy? I’m crazy, right? His mouth was open, I opened it myself to get the tablet out. It was still open when that… whatever, happened.” His hand dropped. “Now it’s not. Not open.” Blinking up at Kris pathetically, he said, “I’ve finally snapped.”

“Get it together or I will slap you.”

Looking back at the mummy - yep, his mouth was very firmly shut - Chanyeol closed his eyes and made a despairing noise.

Kris slapped him right upside the head.

“Ow!” The mummy’s mouth was still closed. Shit. Okay, Park, quit whining and start working.

“Thanks. Do we still have that stethoscope hanging around someplace?”

They did, actually, and as Chanyeol put it on and held the chest piece to the mummy. “If there’s a heartbeat,” Kyungsoo said, “I am on the next train to California, and hang the consequences.”

“Shut up so I can tell,” Chanyeol retorted. Kyungsoo shut up, and Chanyeol listened, his free hand tightening into a fist as his own heartbeat began to pound so loudly it nearly obscured his observations. “Alright, good news and bad news,” he said. “Good news is, no heartbeat. Bad news is… well. He’s sloshing.”

Kris stared. “Are you sloshed?”

“No. We established I’m not crazy, and I’m not drunk, either. Here, listen.” Keeping the chest piece pressed to the mummy’s wrapped torso, he yanked the earpieces out and handed them up to Kris, who leaned over him and put them in.

Kris listened.

“You know,” he said, too calmly. “If it wasn’t completely impossible, I would say it sounds like his
organs are re-forming."

Chanyeol blew out a breath. “I didn’t want to be the one to say that out loud.”

“Glad to be of service.”

Kyungsoo was staring. “You’re both wacky.”

Kris gestured at the rubber in his ears. “You want to give us your expert opinion?”

“Christ, no.” But he took a step forward, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“Come on.” Pulling out the earpieces, Kris took the stethoscope’s chest piece from Chanyeol and gestured for him to move. Chanyeol stepped to the side, around the mummy’s head. As Kris coaxed Kyungsoo forward to listen, Chanyeol ran a gentle, gloved finger over the mummy’s mouth, then cupped the side of his face.

Dry, withered lips parted. That wasn’t - that wasn’t his imagination, was it? He hadn’t moved the jaw, only touched it.

“I thought you said there was no heartbeat,” Kyungsoo said.

Chanyeol met his eyes. “There wasn’t.”

“Well, there is now!”

Kris hurriedly took the stethoscope from Kyungsoo and listened. His expression said it all.

With a terrible, rattling gasp, the mummy drew in a deep breath.

“Shit!” All three of them stumbled back, practically tripping over each other. Kyungsoo’s gun was already out and raised, pointed at the mummy’s head, and for whatever reason that was far scarier than the dead man breathing. “Kyungsoo, no, please, put it down,” Chanyeol begged. Kris had his hand on Kyungsoo’s arm already, in perfect agreement with Chanyeol for once.

“I am not going to let some undead monster out onto the streets of New York,” Kyungsoo snarled.

“If he has a heartbeat, then he’s not undead,” Kris said, very reasonably in Chanyeol’s opinion. “He’s coming back to life.”

“That’s not making it better, Kris.”

Chanyeol and Kris exchanged a quick glance over Kyungsoo’s head. Kris nodded solemnly.

“Soo,” he said, his tone more gentle and more intimate than usual, “please let Chanyeol handle this. We don’t know what’s going on here. It might not be a threat.”

Dark eyes narrowed. “You two don’t watch nearly enough horror cinema,” Kyungsoo muttered, but he did lower his pistol, pointing it at the floor. “Kris, you stay back here with me. If I have to shoot around him, I’d rather not have to try and shoot around you too.”

Kris rolled his eyes but didn’t protest, hanging back by the doorway. Chanyeol hurriedly put the stethoscope on and listened. Sure enough, the sloshing noises had quieted, replaced with a slow but recognizable heartbeat and the quiet hiss of a long, slow exhale.

Yanking off his gloves, Chanyeol held his hand over the mummy’s mouth. There was definitely
breath emitting from his lungs. Five minutes ago, he hadn’t even had lungs.

“I’m unwrapping him,” Chanyeol announced.

“You’re crazy! Keep him pinned down,” Kyungsoo ordered.

No. No. Chanyeol shook his head. “The embalming process causes flesh to shrink. If he’s coming back to life, the bindings will be too tight. It’ll injure him.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” Kyungsoo hissed, but Chanyeol was already beginning, pulling out a pair of small scissors and very, very carefully snipping through the ancient bandages. It was a slow process, but Chanyeol didn’t want to move too quickly, for fear of catching some bit of mummified flesh or an ancient trinket buried in the bindings.

He did, in fact, come across a few talismans, and each one he gently freed and set on the table beside him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kris taking them and cataloguing them, making certain to stay out of Kyungsoo’s line of fire, but Chanyeol didn’t really care what happened to them. What was ancient gold when he had ancient flesh coming to life right before his eyes?

And it was coming to life. Already Chanyeol could see that the prince’s withered face was less withered, his blackened, dried-out skin lightening and coloring. It was slow, very slow, but it was real, it was happening. The man was reviving right under Chanyeol’s hands.

There were nearly five full minutes of tense near-silence between the mummy’s first breath and his second, just as loud but much less rattling. Chanyeol had freed him halfway down his ribs, and he could see the sunken, withered chest actually lift with the breath. The third breath was close on the heels of the second, and the prince’s head actually tilted back, his mouth falling open in the desperate, silent plea of a man who was drowning.

It hit Chanyeol like a freight train, how painful and terrifying this might be for the prince. Was he aware yet? Could he feel what was happening? “It’s okay,” Chanyeol murmured automatically, reaching up again to cup the side of the prince’s face. For the first time, the prince responded to his touch, his head turning in towards Chanyeol’s hand, and Chanyeol’s insides twisted into all sorts of knots. “Breathe. Come on. Just breathe.”

“His diaphragm is still wrapped up,” Kris pointed out in a low voice. “He’s practically in a corset.”

Shit. Without another word, Chanyeol went back to cutting the bandages open, trying to move faster, not even bothering to catch the ritual talismans as they slid free. Kris moved around him like a very large shadow, clearing away ancient, severed cloth and moving the artifacts to safety, letting Chanyeol concentrate on freeing the prince. As Kris had implied, the man’s breath came easier once Chanyeol had completely freed his ribs and stomach, and as Chanyeol had guessed, he was already bigger, his withered flesh filling out as his skin softened. His bony, skeletal fingers were twitching, now, veins like spiderwebs pushing up against the skin as they filled with blood.

“If this wasn’t so terrifyingly impossible,” Kris murmured, sounding numb, “it would be the most fascinating thing I have ever seen.”

Chanyeol nodded vigorously. “Mummification in reverse,” he said. Cutting a horizontal slit in the bandages across the prince’s narrow hips, he started to snip down the top of one thigh, carefully avoiding the groin area for the moment. There weren’t likely to be talismans wrapped with the legs, so Chanyeol moved more quickly. The prince’s thigh had already lightened to a deep brown, and the muscles were shaping themselves right before his eyes.
A sharp exhalation caught both their attention, and Kyungsoo’s as well. Kyungsoo’s gun arm lifted again, pure instinct, and Kris quickly moved away from the body and back to Kyungsoo’s side. Chanyeol, on the other hand, moved to the prince’s head, a hand on his newly-broadening shoulder.

Dry, cracked, but filled-out and pink-tinged lips were working, like he was trying to speak. A pale tongue flicked out, trying to wet his lips with moisture he didn’t have.

Shit, of course! “Kris, he’s going to need water. A lot of water.” Chanyeol touched the prince’s cheek, trying not to get overwhelmed by how much softer and warmer it was than even a few minutes ago. “And that cream I use for my hands, that too!” The prince’s sunken eye sockets were lifting, and Chanyeol was really glad his eyes were closed, because he had a strong stomach as a rule but he wasn’t sure he wanted to see the man’s eyeballs re-forming. His eyelashes and eyebrows were growing back, too, right before Chanyeol’s eyes; his short-cropped black hair thickening to cover his scalp again. He saw the prince’s throat work as he swallowed, actually swallowed, his body reflexes coming back, and for some reason that made Chanyeol have to look away, his breath coming harshly as his mind scrambled to assimilate the reality of the situation.

He busied himself cutting the other leg free.

As Kris brought a glass of water and the jar of lotion, Chanyeol freed the prince from the last binding, around his feet. His legs still seemed too thin, but they were nearly a normal skin color, and the flesh was soft and malleable enough to get goosepimpled from the chill in the workshop.

“A blanket,” Chanyeol said numbly. “He needs a - he’s from the desert, he’s probably never felt cold like this in his life, we need to -”

Softness hit his hand, and Chanyeol took the blanket from Kris, meeting his eyes as Kris braced both his hands on Chanyeol’s shoulders. “Yeol,” Kris said. “Maybe you need to be told to breathe.”

Chanyeol laughed, a little hysterically. “Probably. Thanks for the advice.”

“Keep it together, Park,” Kyungsoo muttered. “At this rate, he’s gonna be awake and screaming any second here. You speak Ancient Egyptian, right?”

“Not enough to calm a frightened boy,” Chanyeol said, turning back to his charge. The prince was moving full-body now, weak twitches, his knee lifting and his fingers curling. The last of the bandages fell away as he shifted, and Chanyeol quickly covered him with the blanket, leaving his shoulders and face exposed. Without thinking, Chanyeol laid a hand on the prince’s forehead, feeling for his temperature. His skin was hot now, feverishly hot, and even starting to feel a little clammy, and he responded immediately to Chanyeol’s touch, his face twitching and his neck arching to push into Chanyeol’s touch like a cat. It made Chanyeol smile, his heart already filled with affection, inappropriately, dangerously strong affection.

“Hey,” he said. “You’re okay, you’re going to be okay. Don’t be afraid.”

Dark, heavy brows furrowed in response. He could hear! Encouraged, Chanyeol kept talking, murmuring nonsense in his most soothing voice.

“Chanyeol,” Kris said patiently. “English probably isn’t helping.”

Right. Of course. Chanyeol took a deep breath and started in on one of the only Ancient Egyptian texts he had memorized - the Inscription of Anebni, an inscription upon a well-known statue which was from the same period which this prince was from. “Arit em heset netert nefert nebt taui, Hatshepsut anxth, tetsh Ra ma fetta, hena senns nefer neb, ari xet, Thothmes, ta anx Ra ma fetta.”
He kept going, reciting the inscription, which was once his first study in translating Ancient Egyptian. The words were a whole lot of flowery nothing, no more meaningful than the dedication on the cornerstone of a courthouse, but they were rhythmic and flowing and fell easily from his lips.

The prince’s mouth opened, worked a little. Was he trying to speak? There was no voice coming from his throat, but there was breath, like a whisper. Chanyeol stroked his forehead and kept speaking, admiring how the prince’s face was filling out, his skin slowly becoming smooth and taut again.

His face twisted, and the prince arched, as if wracked with a spasm of pain. A soft, grating whine emitted from his throat, wordless but there. Worried, Chanyeol broke his recitation, and instead put his hand on the prince’s chest and called, “Jongdae?”

Black, bottomless eyes opened, and focused on Chanyeol’s. Confusion registered first, then those eyes widened, flicking over Chanyeol’s face, taking it in.


Jongdae’s smile was as bright as the first, incredible sunrise Chanyeol had seen over the Pyramids, and just as precious.
The first thing Jongdae knew was darkness and silence.

The next thing Jongdae knew was panic. He couldn’t breathe! He couldn’t - had he been breathing? Did he know how to breathe? What was air?

The third thing Jongdae knew was pain. Twisting, wracking, stabbing pain that he could feel, but not affect. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t scream. He couldn’t do anything.

Then, warmth. A touch to his… face? Yes. His face. The familiar, comforting heat of a body near to his own. He couldn’t discern anything else - it was like his skin was plastered over. He felt heat, he felt pressure, but he couldn’t tell what was touching him, or how, or where, exactly.

He could breathe. It hurt, but he could breathe, and with the air came back his life.

Relief from the pain spread down his body, as if he was unburied, unbound. Not all of it, just some. Just the worst. He could breathe, and the pain was less, and with great, great effort, he could move.

He tried to call out. For his mother, Iset. For his Queen-Mother, Hatshepsut. For Joonmyun.

There was no answer. He wasn’t even certain he’d made a sound.

The next thing he became aware of was a deep, bone-chilling cold, the likes of which he’d never felt. His insides shuddered, making him feel queasy.

Almost immediately, warmth covered him, and the cold began to fade. He felt that gentle touch again, and he tried to reach for it, his bones feeling like fractured stone as he tried to move.

That was when he became aware of the voice.

Deep. Very deep. Soft, soothing. He didn’t understand the words, couldn’t even make out the sounds, really. Just the tone. Jongdae’s mind quieted, listening to that voice. He breathed. He healed. He tried to move.

Eventually, the actual words came into focus. They sounded familiar, but the cadence was all wrong, alien. Some syllables fell flat, striking his ear like the scratch of nails on slate. What language was this?

Where was he?

He tried to open his eyes. A tiny sliver of light seeped in between his lashes, so bright as to be blinding, and he grimaced and shied away. A hand rested on his chest, heavy and warm and reassuringly real.

“Jongdae?”

His - his name? Yes! Not well-enunciated, but definitely his name. Jongdae tried again to open his eyes, fighting against the brightness until the shapeless blurring around him coalesced.

The first thing, the only thing, he could see was a handsome and utterly foreign face. Male, clearly
male. Pale, much paler than Jongdae was used to, with dark eyes reflecting oddly in the lamplight. His hair was bright, bright red, red like copper, redder than any henna dye Jongdae had seen, and it was carefully swooped up off his forehead and to the side, shining with some kind of oil.

He couldn’t have been Egyptian. He barely seemed mortal. Was he a spirit? A god?

Was Jongdae… dead? Was this the afterlife?

As if in response to his thought, the man - spirit? - smiled at him.

“Prince Jongdae,” he said, his accent thick and unidentifiable. “Greetings.”

This was the afterlife. He was safe. He was home.

Jongdae smiled. The guiding spirit’s own smile widened, showing very, very straight white teeth, too perfect to be real. Jongdae tried to reach for his face, wanting to touch him, to find out if he was solid or an apparition, but he was weak, too weak to move.

“Thank you,” he rasped. It came out almost soundless, and his tongue felt heavy and sticky. He realized he was very, very thirsty. It confused him - if he was dead, shouldn’t he be free from thirst?

If he was dead… how did he die?

Attempting to lick his lips, Jongdae asked the spirit for water. There was some sound to his voice, this time, but not much. He tried again, carefully over-enunciating, and winced as the movement made his dried-out lips crack painfully.

The spirit cocked his head, making his bright red hair fall like fine thread across his pale forehead. “Waataa… waetar?” It was like he was trying the word out, trying to find out how it fit. “Watterrrr… Ah!” He twisted to look over his shoulder, and Jongdae’s eyes broke away from his face for the first time, and it registered, what the spirit was wearing, where he was. Several layers of pale blue and deep brown, more structured and more complicated than any garment Jongdae had ever seen, somehow accentuating his long body while still utterly obscuring it. His shoulders were broad, though, and his torso long, hinting that he was tall. Possibly very tall. From this angle, it was hard to tell.

The spirit turned back, with a perfectly clear vessel in a huge, pale hand, filled with equally clear water. Truly, this must be the realm of the gods, for the water to be so pure, and the vessel so clear, as if made from the air itself. Only the slightest distortions of light let Jongdae even see the vessel’s shape at all.

With his other hand, the spirit dropped something into the vessel. A reed, it seemed, but perfectly white. He brought the vessel close and tilted it slightly, until the reed touched Jongdae’s mouth.

It took a moment for Jongdae to understand. Then he remembered - once, long ago, he’d heard tell of the ancient, far-off land of Sumer, where the royalty had drank beer using a golden reed, so that the solids which sank to the bottom would never touch their lips.

Carefully, Jongdae wrapped his cracked lips around the reed, and drank. The water was cool and tasted utterly pure, and he kept drinking until the vessel was drained. The spirit took it from him, his smile wide and pleased.

Jongdae lifted his hand instinctively to wipe away a drop of water he could feel beading at the corner of his mouth. The motion was painful, and touch of his own skin against itself was rough, far too rough. He’d always had smooth skin. Why -
He looked down at his own hands. They were like something from a nightmare, shriveled and dark, the skin pulled back from his nails. Startled, horrified, he struggled to sit up.

It was almost impossible. Nothing in his body would cooperate, and everything hurt. Only the spirit’s strong, warm hands made it possible for him to bend at the waist, and even that bare effort made him shudder, as if his once-strong muscles couldn’t even handle his own body weight anymore.

Weakly, he reached out, and clung to the spirit’s arms. He was… very solid, for a spirit. But then, this was the afterlife, his realm. Perhaps all spirits were solid as men, here.

Jongdae stopped to catch his breath, leaning on the spirit to stay upright. For the first time, he looked beyond the spirit, and into the room.

They weren’t alone.

Startled, Jongdae’s body tried to recoil, and he nearly fell. The spirit holding him made an incoherent exclamation, clearly words but in no language Jongdae had ever heard, and readjusted his grip to something more constricting, more confining. Behind him, the other two men - spirits - whatever - both took a step forward, clearly alarmed. The smaller raised his hands and pointed something at Jongdae.

Jongdae had no idea what that thing was. It didn’t look like any object he had seen before. A talisman? A wand? A weapon? For all Jongdae knew, it was a musical instrument, but the look in the smaller spirit’s eyes did not look musical. It was a look he knew all too well, a look he’d seen on Joonmyun’s face too many times.

A look that said If I must, I will kill you.

No. This was wrong. Everything was wrong. Terrified, confused, Jongdae scrabbled back, ignoring his screaming body and the spirits’ unintelligible warnings in a blind effort to get away. The hard table on which he had lain was not as wide as he thought, and his hand met nothing but air.

He lost his balance and fell right off the table with a terrible, disorienting crash, taking the blanket that had been wrapped around his legs with him. He wasn’t quite able to cushion his fall, and the impact jolted him to the core, his brittle-feeling bones screaming in agony. It winded him just long enough that he was not able to untangle himself and get up before the red-haired spirit was around the table and standing over him.

Jongdae felt like he looked up, and up, and up, forever. It was as if he was staring up at the great monuments of the old Pharaohs, so tall was the spirit. The small one, the one holding the alien not-instrument, he looked like he might have been around Jongdae’s height, perhaps a bit taller, nothing inhuman. But this one, and the other one with the angry face, they were too tall to be human, too tall to be real. No mortal reached those heights.

Instinctively, Jongdae looked around for an escape. The rush of his fear had made the world come back into focus, and for the first time, he really looked at his surroundings. He saw the carvings, the gems, the figurines, spread around the room haphazardly, out of order and out of place. And he saw the sarcophagus - and the burial mask, set up next to it, as if on display.

There should never be a burial mask that was not on a body. It defeated the point! What if the spirit came for its body, and could not find it?!

Then it clicked, in Jongdae’s head. The burial mask. That was his own style of kohl. He was known
for it. And the mouth, that was definitely his mouth.

It was his mask. Which meant, it was his sarcophagus. His tomb. But he wasn’t in it. His entire tomb had been emptied and taken away. He wasn’t where he was supposed to be.

They weren’t spirits, Jongdae realized, far too late. They were tomb robbers, foreigners. They’d taken him away from his resting place and now he was doomed to walk the earth forever. His spirit would never know peace.

Overwhelmed, Jongdae burst into tears.

xXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx

“Would you put the gun down?!” Chanyeol snapped at Kyungsoo as he crouched in front of the terrified prince. Jongdae’s sobbing was dry and rough and painful-sounding, his still-healing eyes trying to produce tears when his body had no moisture to spare.

“Kyungsoo,” Kris said, in a much more reasonable tone. “I really don’t think he’s a threat. Look at him, he’s just a kid.”

Kyungsoo didn’t sound convinced. “He’s a millennia-old mummy who just came back to life before our eyes,” he growled. “That isn’t ‘just a kid.’ That isn’t just an anything.”

Chanyeol understood where Kyungsoo was coming from - the word magic had crossed his mind a couple of times already, and it seemed less and less ridiculous every time - but he just really, really could not stand to see the ancient prince so frightened, especially when he’d seemed so calm and sweet at first. What had set him off? It was either the gun, the sarcophagus, or both, and the gun was easier to get rid of quickly.

He looked up at Kris with his most pleading look. Kris huffed, but Chanyeol didn’t relent, and eventually, Kris gave in. “Kyungsoo,” he said, “maybe we should leave them alone for a bit.”

Kyungsoo’s eyes flicked up to Kris’s face, but his steady aim didn’t waver. “I am not leaving an unarmed civilian alone with that thing,” he said firmly.

Chanyeol opened his mouth to protest the characterization of Jongdae as a thing, but Kris silenced him with a gesture. “I really don’t believe Chanyeol is in danger,” he said softly, coaxingly. “We can wait just outside. He’ll yell if he needs us. Right?” He glanced down at Chanyeol, who nodded.

Kris’s flattened lips and raised brows said you better know what the hell you are doing.

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Chanyeol had no idea, but he nodded and put on his most reassuring smile. Mollified, Kris followed Kyungsoo out of the room, closing the door behind him.
Immediately, Chanyeol turned to the prince. “Jongdae,” he called. “Jongdae, it’s okay. They’re gone.” He wished he knew how to say that in Ancient Egyptian, but he had a feeling that his pronunciation was so incredibly off that it wouldn’t have mattered. The way Jongdae had said water was completely different from the way he’d imagined it was pronounced; it had taken him an embarrassingly long time to understand the request.

Jongdae lifted his head, meeting Chanyeol’s eyes with his own reddened. The exposed skin Chanyeol could see - his face and neck, one shoulder and arm - was still wrinkled and withered, but so much more full and well-colored than before, and continuing to improve right before his eyes. Chanyeol tried not to get too distracted watching his flesh fill out, and instead reached forward and gently touched Jongdae’s bare shoulder, trying to ground him.

Jongdae jumped a little, twitching away from Chanyeol’s touch, but Chanyeol kept his expression open and said his name again, and Jongdae’s body language relaxed just a little. Okay. Jongdae definitely trusted him more than he’d trusted Kyungsoo or Kris. That was a good thing. Not having the words to reassure Jongdae, Chanyeol lifted his hand to cup the side of his face, carefully wiping away the sparse tears on his cheek with his thumb. Jongdae let him, keeping his eyes locked on Chanyeol’s face.

The prince’s skin felt painfully dry. With his free hand, Chanyeol reached up and groped around on the table until he found the jar of lotion. For the first time, curiosity seemed to break through the fear and confusion, and Jongdae cocked his head, looking at the jar questioningly.

Chanyeol didn’t know the Egyptian word for lotion or cream, but he did know the one for anoint, and so that’s what he said, cocking his own head to turn it into a question. Jongdae didn’t seem to get it, so he tried out a couple of different possible pronunciations, and opened the jar to show the contents to Jongdae.

Eventually, Jongdae got it, and nodded his permission. At least, Chanyeol hoped that a nod meant the same thing to Jongdae as it did to him. It would in most cultures, but there were a few in which a head nod meant no.

Slowly, giving Jongdae time to react if he changed his mind, Chanyeol dipped his fingers in the lotion and took Jongdae’s hand. When Jongdae didn’t pull away, Chanyeol smoothed the lotion over his palm.

The dry, withered skin sucked up the moisture immediately. Encouraged, Chanyeol began to massage the cream in, being gentle, concerned that Jongdae’s ancient skin was still brittle.

It seemed to have the effect Chanyeol was looking for. Both effects, actually - helping to soothe Jongdae’s physical pain, but also helping to calm him down. Recovered texts from just about every ancient culture spoke of servants and worshippers anointing those they served, and Chanyeol had conjectured that this would be a familiar, comforting action for Jongdae. It also might make him think that Chanyeol was lowering himself to the status of servant or caretaker, but that was not necessarily a bad thing. A servant was much less threatening than an unknown.

There was another effect, too, and that was one Chanyeol had not anticipated. It put both of their full attention on Jongdae’s withered shape, as it was still healing and changing. Jongdae seemed disturbed by the sight of his own skin, and Chanyeol couldn’t blame him. He could only imagine what it would feel like, to look down at his own body and see it in that state.

For his own part, Chanyeol was utterly fascinated with the changes. As he moved his ministrations up Jongdae’s arm, he could feel the prince’s blood pumping, his pulse strengthening, his muscles firming and filling up the shriveled skin. Under his hands, the color of the prince’s skin was still
changing, now a golden brown. He must have been very light-skinned, for an Egyptian. Perhaps, as royalty, he was able to stay mostly out of the unforgiving desert sun.

Unable to resist his curiosity, Chanyeol left his hand wrapped around Jongdae’s upper arm for a long moment. The swelling of the muscle was slow, but clearly perceptible. Absolutely fascinating.

Jongdae raised an eyebrow at him.

Surprised, Chanyeol laughed, feeling his ears redden. “You caught me,” he murmured, sheepishly continuing his ministrations by gesturing for Jongdae’s other hand.

Offering his hand willingly, Jongdae searched his face, and then said something, a few words. His voice was far less rattling than before, though still rusty, and his tone sounded questioning.

Chanyeol cocked his head. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand.”

Jongdae repeated it, carefully enunciating, like perhaps he thought Chanyeol was a little slow on the uptake. The only word Chanyeol recognized was the one for you, which wasn’t much help. His confusion must have shown, because Jongdae used his free hand to point at himself. “Jongdae,” he said, very clearly. Then, he pointed at Chanyeol, and made an inquiring noise.

Oh. Obviously. “Chanyeol,” he said, also pointing at himself. “My name is Chanyeol.”

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae repeated. His accent was adorable. Then, in clear Egyptian, “Greetings, Chanyeol.”

Chanyeol couldn’t help his wide smile. They were getting somewhere! “Greetings, Prince Jongdae,” he replied, trying to mimic Jongdae’s vowels and inflection.

Jongdae’s lips twitched, a half-smile. He pointed at something over Chanyeol’s head. “....Jongdae?” he asked, very softly and hesitantly.

Chanyeol turned to look. He was pointing at the burial mask.

Shit. Well, better he know as soon as possible, so he would have time to adjust to the idea. “Yes,” he said, a word he knew. “Jongdae.”

Jongdae’s eyes fluttered shut, his expression compressing. Letting him take a moment to absorb that, Chanyeol kept rubbing up his arm, observing the way his newly regrown eyelashes lay against his lightening cheek. He was growing more beautiful by the minute, even more beautiful than his mask had portrayed, so very human, so very young.

When he’d finished both arms, rather than starting in on more intimate areas like the neck or chest, Chanyeol pulled back a little and reached for Jongdae’s feet under the blanket. They were as dry as the rest of him, and considering how little Jongdae reacted, he was well-used to having his feet tended to by someone else. Chanyeol made a mental note, already planning his book on what these interactions were telling him about the long-lost Egyptian culture.

Jongdae attempted to ask more questions, but Chanyeol simply could not understand the words well enough to respond. The only question he guessed was what place this, and he didn’t have even the tiniest clue how to convey the answer. Frustrated, Jongdae gave up, and sat in silence as Chanyeol tended to his lower legs.

As Chanyeol’s hands tentatively slid up over Jongdae’s knee, Jongdae tried once more. “Death,” he asked, a word Chanyeol actually knew, since the vast majority of the writing they had translated was
from burial grounds. “Jongdae, death?”

Chanyeol shook his head. Carefully choosing his words from his memorized vocabulary, he said, “Death before. Not death now.” He was certain his grammar and pronunciation were horrendous, but Jongdae seemed to get it, because his eyes widened.

“Oh,” Jongdae murmured, and, well, Chanyeol didn’t need a translation for that. “How?”

Chanyeol shook his head. “I don’t know,” he said in English. “I wish I could tell you.” The prince’s thigh felt reassuringly firm and solid under Chanyeol’s hands. He resisted the urge to lift the blanket and see for himself.

Seemingly encouraged by this minor success of communication, Jongdae pointed at Chanyeol again. “Chanyeol,” he said. “Death?”

Chanyeol shook his head.

“Chanyeol, god?”

That made Chanyeol laugh. He probably should have guessed that Jongdae would think that, given the utter impossibility of their circumstances. “No. Chanyeol no god. Chanyeol man.”

Jongdae looked skeptical, so Chanyeol drew his hands out from under the blanket, took Jongdae’s hand in his own, and leaned forward so he could press Jongdae’s fingers to the pulse point in his neck. “Man,” he reiterated. “No god.”

Warm, still-rough fingers, slightly slick from the lotion, trailed against his neck, and then slid up behind his ear. Jongdae cupped Chanyeol’s face the exact same way Chanyeol had already done to him several times, and the contact made a shiver zip down Chanyeol’s spine, his skin flushing.

Jongdae grinned suddenly, looking genuinely amused, and lightly flicked his reddened ear. Chanyeol gave him an affronted look.

Jongdae laughed.

His heart lurching oddly, Chanyeol retaliated by reaching out and gently flicking the lobe of Jongdae’s own ear. Jongdae made a high, surprised noise, and said something Chanyeol couldn’t understand, and shoved his shoulder, playfully but with surprising strength. Chanyeol caught his hand and grinned at him, probably very stupidly.

He couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt this affected by someone he just met.

It was probably just the novelty, right? After all, it wasn’t every day Chanyeol got to meet a resurrected Egyptian prince.

Ignoring the fact that Jongdae’s bright smile was affecting him far more than his heritage, Chanyeol pushed the thought from his mind, and concentrated on his charge. “Are you hungry?” he asked, before realizing his mistake. “Food?” he tried again, in Egyptian, with a tummy-rubbing gesture to assist with translation.

Jongdae nodded, his expression telling Chanyeol that he’d just realized how hungry he really was. Chanyeol smiled, and gestured for him to wait, and stood to go to the door.

Kris was seated at his desk in their joint office, speaking in low tones with Kyungsoo, who was perched on the desk itself. They both looked up quickly when Chanyeol poked his head in.
“Hey, can one of you do me a favor and pick me up some grub?” He fumbled some bills out of his wallet. “Something simple. Soup, maybe. I have no idea how well his system is going to take to food, but coming back to life has to have left him starving.”

Kris and Kyungsoo exchanged looks. “I’m not leaving this room while he’s in there,” Kyungsoo announced.

“Fine,” Kris said, standing and taking Chanyeol’s money. “You want anything for yourself while I’m out, Yeol?”

Chanyeol took stock of his own stomach and found it growling. “Wouldn’t mind a bowl of chili,” he admitted. “It’s been a hell of a day.”

Kris snorted. “And you’re not planning to go to sleep any time soon, are you?” he guessed.

Sleep. Chanyeol hadn’t even thought of that. Where would Jongdae sleep? Well, there was really only one answer. He couldn’t be left alone in the museum, so he would have to go home with Chanyeol.

“I’ll fall off that log when I come to it,” Chanyeol replied firmly. “Food first. Thanks.” He closed the door without waiting for a response and turned back to his charge.

To his great surprise, Jongdae was standing, leaning heavily on the table with the blanket wrapped around his waist and held up with one hand. His entire body was trembling with the effort, and Chanyeol was across the room in a flash, reaching out to support him. “Christ, you’re gonna be a handful, aren’t you?” he muttered.

Jongdae huffed in exasperation, and looked up. He froze, his eyes wide, and it registered in Chanyeol’s mind just exactly how extreme the height difference between them was.

Ancient peoples of all cultures had been smaller on average than the peoples of the modern world. Chanyeol knew this. But it was one thing to know it, and another to look down at a nearly full-grown man who barely came up to the middle of his chest. He didn’t even reach Chanyeol’s collarbone.

And he was going to have to do something about that blanket, because it was already slipping.

“Kyungsoo,” Chanyeol called, not willing to walk away just yet. He was still partway convinced that if Jongdae fell, he would shatter something. “You got a second?”

He kept his hand on Jongdae’s shoulder, soothing him instinctively as the door opened and Jongdae tensed. It was a little bit like handling a skittish cat. Chanyeol loved cats, so fortunately, this was familiar.

Kyungsoo, for his own part, managed to keep his face expressionless as he eyed them. He didn’t have his gun up, thank God, but Chanyeol could see from his posture that it was in his hand, hidden by the doorframe. “Yeah?”

“Do you have a set of clothes he can wear? Just for tonight. He’d be swimming in anything of mine, or Kris’s.”

A snort. “Sure, but you’re paying to get them cleaned, afterwards. I prefer my clothes mummy-dust free.” He closed the door, and Jongdae relaxed under Chanyeol’s hand.

“Can you walk?” Chanyeol asked, in English. When Jongdae gave him a questioning look,
Chanyeol made a walking motion with his fingers.

Jongdae gripped his arm and very determinedly started to move forward.

The blanket wrapped around him, and the creakiness of his body, were definitely hampering him, but with Chanyeol’s help, Jongdae managed to walk across the room to the work table. Chanyeol helped him to sit in one of the chairs, and he collapsed with an audible sigh of relief.

Chanyeol couldn’t help it, he cheered a little, clapping his hands in glee. A glance at the clock told him it hadn’t even been an hour since the crash in the storage room - at this rate, Jongdae was going to be healed and whole by morning!

Kyungsoo came back at that moment, his street clothes slung over his arm, and tossed them at Chanyeol. “I’m still out here if you need me,” he said pointedly, and shut the door.

“Paranoid,” Chanyeol muttered. Untangling the pile of clothes in his hands, he held them up and inspected them. A plain, white button-front shirt, and navy slacks with white pinstripes. They still looked a bit too big for Jongdae, but definitely better than Chanyeol’s clothes, so Chanyeol held them out to Jongdae with a smile and what he hoped was an expressive gesture.

Jongdae looked skeptical, but he took the clothes, inspecting them curiously. Once he held them up to his own body, comparing the size, Chanyeol figured he’d gotten the idea, and he reached over to help Jongdae pull the shirt on and button it. Then, he unbuttoned the fly of the slacks, held them out, and averted his eyes.

With one hand on Chanyeol’s arm for balance, Jongdae stood, the blanket hitting the floor just outside of Chanyeol’s vision. Jongdae got the slacks on with quite a bit of difficulty - Chanyeol realized too late that Egyptian men wore kilts, and this whole one-leg-at-a-time business was probably completely foreign to him - but he did get them on, and did not fall over in the process.

Chanyeol turned back as Jongdae was just figuring out the buttons on the fly. He looked even smaller than before in the slightly-too-large clothes, but with the majority of his skin covered, he also looked far more normal.

He did pick up the blanket again, wincing a little as he bent down, and slung it over his shoulders. Fair enough - it was pretty chilly in the workshop. Jongdae sat back down and pulled his legs up into the chair, curling up like a little cat.

Covering his smile, Chanyeol turned away. He didn’t think a three-millennia-old royal prince would appreciate Chanyeol cooing over how adorable he was.

Kris came through the door at that moment, bringing with him two large paper bags and a waft of something delicious. The diner down the street was well-used to them taking food to go at all hours, fortunately. Kyungsoo was right behind him.

Jongdae tensed, his dark eyes wary, but he didn’t cry out or try to run this time. Progress. Chanyeol put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, and Jongdae glanced up at him and flashed a tight, nervous smile. The sheer normality, the humanity of the action struck Chanyeol like a blow to the chest.

Three and a half millennia between them, but a person was still a person. It was truly incredible.
Jongdae did not like that the other two spirits - or whatever they were - had returned. They didn’t seem as safe or as kind as Chanyeol. But Chanyeol did not seem concerned with their presence, so Jongdae did not protest. He was lost, and at their mercy, and it would do no good to anger them.

The clothes were strange and oddly restricting, but they covered his upsettingly afflicted skin and cut down the chill. The persistent coldness was possibly the most alien part of this strange place, even moreso than the flameless candles or the complicated clothing or the unknown language. Jongdae generally wore as little clothing as possible, preferring to deck himself in the jewels of his station, but clearly these were a covered people, and it seemed to be for good reason, if it was always this cold.

Chanyeol sat next to him, pulling the chair close to his side. The other two sat at the other side of the table, the taller one across from Jongdae and the small, fierce one across from Chanyeol. They began unpacking the sacks they had brought in, and as the bowls were lifted out, an incredible smell wafted into Jongdae’s awareness.

Food.

His stomach, more empty than it had ever been in his life, made a terribly loud and uncouth noise. The three men stopped and looked at him, and Jongdae felt his still-dry cheeks heat.

“My apologies,” he murmured. Chanyeol chuckled, sounding indulgent and fond, and Jongdae resisted the urge to glare. A big, pale hand reached over and gently patted his wrist, clearly meant to be a comfort. Jongdae appreciated the thought.

He also appreciated the tallest man setting a bowl of some kind of broth in front of him. Though he felt hungry enough to eat an entire ox, he recognized the wisdom of starting with a broth. Even his tongue felt dry and achy - he wasn’t sure he could chew large amounts of meat right now.

The bowl was made from some kind of waxed white papyrus, very pure-looking and surprisingly strong, without weave or grain marks. As the tallest man set out food and drink for the others, including that same clear vessel of water for Jongdae, Jongdae carefully lifted the bowl to his lips and drank.

The flavor absolutely exploded upon his tongue. Making a small, appreciative noise, Jongdae sipped eagerly at the warm broth. It tasted like salt and unknown spices, it had small chunks of vegetables and shreds of poultry, and was both very alien and very, very good.

As he drank, Jongdae quietly observed the table. They were all watching him, while pretending they were not; he caught them all glancing his direction multiple times. The conversation flowed around him in that unknown language, their voices deep, deeper, and deeper still.

Chanyeol, he decided, was their leader. It seemed clear from his expressions and gestures that he was in control of the proceedings, the owner of his surroundings; he was too effusive to be a servant. Was he royalty of some kind? A wealthy scholar? A priest, perhaps?

The other large man, by contrast, was likely a servant or seneschal. His actions and expressions were quieter, more controlled; despite being even larger than Chanyeol he seemed to take up less space. He was constantly doing small things to see to the comfort of others, things that Chanyeol seemed to take for granted. Chanyeol did not treat him as lesser, though, did not speak curtly to him, so Jongdae guessed the man’s role was definitely more as the scholar Senenmut was to his Pharaoh-Mother, or as the scribe Jongin was to his brother Joonmyun. Lesser in rank, but equal in esteem.
Though, that did beg the question of whether their relationship was entirely like Senenmut’s with Hatshepsut. That the Seneschal was the lover of the Queen Pharaoh was the capital’s worst-kept secret. Jongdae watched the tall one interact with Chanyeol and tried to see a similar connection, but if it was there, they hid it well.

The small one was much easier to figure out. He must be a guard, a soldier. The militant background was written all over his actions, all over his expressions as he sized Jongdae up. Jongdae kept a wary eye on him as they ate.

They were discussing something, or possibly arguing. Chanyeol’s tone was getting louder, his words coming faster. Clearly, he was a passionate man, though Jongdae wished he knew what he was getting passionate about.

Eventually, the food was done, and the argument seemed to have been cleared up, and Jongdae put his hand lightly on Chanyeol’s arm to get his attention. “What now?” he asked, making sure to enunciate clearly.

It didn’t matter. Chanyeol had no idea what he was asking. Jongdae tried a dozen different ways of phrasing the same question before one of them got through. Incredibly frustrating. It clearly wasn’t that Chanyeol was unintelligent; it simply seemed that his vocabulary in Jongdae’s language was extremely limited.

“Ah,” Chanyeol said, when he finally caught on. “House. Chanyeol house.”

Chanyeol… house?

Oh! Of course, this strange little room wouldn’t be Chanyeol’s home.

He was leaving?

Unconsciously, Jongdae’s grip on Chanyeol’s arm tightened. “And Jongdae?” he asked.

Thankfully, this one didn’t need five minutes of frustrated translation attempts. “Jongdae also Chanyeol house.” Chanyeol’s smile was bright, welcoming.

It took a moment for Jongdae to realize what he meant. “You’re bringing me to your home?” he asked. Chanyeol only smiled, clearly not understanding, but Jongdae was pretty sure that was what he’d meant. “Thank you,” he said softly.


“That isn’t what you say when… oh, nevermind,” he murmured. It didn’t matter, in any case.

The tallest one, the seneschal, was already clearing away the used papyrus bowls, so when Chanyeol stood, Jongdae did too. His legs were still shaky, though, and nearly buckled under him.

Unfamiliar hands caught him. It wasn’t Chanyeol, whose attention was momentarily elsewhere; Jongdae looked over his shoulder and found himself face-to-face with the guard. With a solemn nod, the guard let him go, his hands hovering around Jongdae’s waist, ready to catch him again.

Not liking having to rely on others, particularly those who didn’t seem to be very happy with his presence, Jongdae lifted his chin and attempted to walk. The strange, bulky clothes did not help, but he managed to move away from the table and stand steady on his own two feet in the center of the room.
He looked around just as Chanyeol spotted him. Emotions flew across the tall man’s face - surprise, confusion, fear, pride. Jongdae waited for Chanyeol to rush over and scold him like he did before, but it didn’t happen.

Instead, Chanyeol came over with a large, heavy garment, and a pair of... were they sandals? No, slippers. Slippers, and a large coat, the likes of which Jongdae had not seen. Were they... going outside?

It seemed that they were. Chanyeol helped Jongdae into the extra clothes - which were, of course, far too large - and then, calling cheerful farewells to his companions, guided him through the door.

Only once they had passed through several chambers and out into a darkened main hall did Jongdae realize the building they were in was absolutely massive. Darkened, empty, but clearly grand and beautifully kept. A temple, it had to be a temple. Or a palace? Jongdae regarded Chanyeol again. Was he actually royalty? A priest? A spirit? A god?

It frustrated Jongdae that he couldn’t clearly ask. Chanyeol had asserted that he was just a man, but given how unclear their communications had been, Jongdae wasn’t completely convinced Chanyeol had understood what Jongdae was asking. And he could have been lying - after all, didn’t the gods sometimes disguise themselves, to test the faith of their subjects?

They went through one last door, and icy wind hit Jongdae like knives. He cried out, stumbling backwards on already-unsteady legs. Too weak still to catch his balance, Jongdae hit the ground.

Chanyeol was at his side in the blink of an eye, exclaiming, checking him over, cupping his face in a warm hand and earnestly asking him if he was alright. At least, that’s what Jongdae assumed he was asking, from his tone.

“I am alright, I am fine,” he muttered. He ached, but he was pretty sure he wasn’t injured. “It is so cold. Why is it so cold??”

Chanyeol helped him up, and - to Jongdae’s relief - wrapped his arms around Jongdae’s shoulders. It was too familiar of a gesture, but Jongdae could not bring himself to be insulted, because Chanyeol was very warm, and his large body blocked some of the terrible wind, and the white flakes of ice which were flying through the air with it.

With Chanyeol’s help, Jongdae moved forward, through the biting wind. As they got further from the building, Jongdae chanced to look back.

*Oh.*

“This is the Afterlife,” he murmured in awe. “And this is the temple of passage.” There was nothing else the towering white building could be. By the gods, it was glowing, as if lit by its own divinity.

And if this was the Afterlife, it would explain the cold.

Chanyeol ushered him down a massive staircase, and Jongdae got his first good look at the world around the temple. It was... loud. Utterly filled with people. Other souls who had passed on? From how many different lands? The whipping wind and ice obscured much of his vision, but Jongdae could see rows of buildings, dozens of people, fast-moving chariots and lights that seemed to burn despite the wind.

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol called, and Jongdae moved forward.

Chanyeol led him to one of the chariots, which was stopped on the street. It was a terribly imposing...
thing, black and square and enclosed, with wide-set white-and-red wheels. Opening a door, Chanyeol gestured.

Inside, the chariot was blood-red, but surprisingly comfortable. A long seat stretched across the width, padded and smooth, and the walls protected from the wind. Jongdae tried to put a hand through the opening in the door, and found it stopped by something smooth but perfectly clear, again as if the very air had solidified.

Coming around the other side, Chanyeol sat on the other side of the seat. Once his door was closed, the sounds of the outside were muted, and the wind was no more.

Then, the chariot rumbled like a great, angry beast. Jongdae gripped the seat fearfully, feeling the vibration all the way through his bones.

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol’s hand landed on his knee. “No afraid.”

Jongdae looked up. In the shifting lights of the hellish landscape outside their shaking sanctuary, Chanyeol looked ghostly pale and very kind. His shadowed eyes said what his vocabulary could not - you are safe.

Taking a shaky breath, Jongdae tried to relax.

Chanyeol smiled at him reassuringly. Then, his long legs shifted, his hands wrapped around the wheel and the stick in front of him, and - they were moving they were moving. How could they be moving?! There were no slaves, no oxen, nothing at all to pull this beast!

Only then did Jongdae look outside and see that none of the other chariots were pulled, either. He hadn’t gotten a clear enough look before.

“This is incredible,” he mumbled. He glanced at Chanyeol, who glanced back before turning back to the road. “You’re causing us to move, aren’t you? With your body, your mind. You are moving us.” He cocked his head, thinking out loud, safe in the knowledge that Chanyeol couldn’t understand more than one out of every dozen words. “How can you expect me to believe you are not even a little divine? If not a god yourself, are you the son of one?”

Chanyeol murmured something in return. His voice was deep and calming, his tone friendly and fond, his words flowing but completely unintelligible.

“If you are pretending not to understand me, you are doing a fine job of it,” Jongdae huffed. Chanyeol chuckled. Jongdae squinted at him, not sure if he was laughing at what Jongdae had said, or just at his exasperated tone.

The ride seemed to take forever, and no time at all. Truly, Jongdae had pretty much ceased to have a concept of time. His senses were overloaded, his body was exhausted, and he just wanted to be warm so he could sleep.

Eventually, the chariot came to a stop, and the rumbling ceased. Chanyeol hopped out of the chariot and practically ran around it to Jongdae’s door, showing no sign that he even felt the cold or the whipping wind, other than a reddish tinge to his pale skin. He helped Jongdae out, and Jongdae looked up at the building.

Large, dark, square. There were surprisingly large window openings in perfectly even rows, and the way the flying ice piled against them told Jongdae they were protected the same way the window openings in the chariot were. Truly, a land of wonders.
Ushering him forward, Chanyeol guided him through the door of the building and up the beautifully grand and implausibly supported staircase. How were these stairs staying up? The air was empty beneath them! Were they made of bronze? But bronze could not support itself like this, and there was no forge large enough to create these poles, thin enough for Jongdae to grip in his hand but stretching up and up several stories high.

They climbed three levels, and by the time Chanyeol halted him, Jongdae’s legs were screaming. It was as if he hadn’t used his own muscles in decades. The straight, flat floor of the hall was a welcome relief. All the doors looked exactly the same - what was this place? - but Chanyeol chose one and stopped in front of it, fumbling with the handle for a moment.

“Greetings,” he said again, opening the door with a flourish.

The chambers were large, darkly colored, and crowded with things. Things that Jongdae recognized, like chairs, plates, rugs, but many, many more things that Jongdae had never seen and had no words to describe. But it was warm, and enclosed, and Chanyeol’s demeanor changed as the door shut behind them. He obviously felt safe here. That was a good sign.

Chanyeol helped him out of the heavy coat and the slippers, and guided him through to the bedchamber. The bed was huge, raised high off the floor, covered in luxurious fabrics, and looked soft as a cloud. It looked so inviting that Jongdae actually whimpered a little bit.

Patting his shoulder, Chanyeol gestured at a room off to the side. “Come,” he murmured. With some expressive gesturing, he managed to convey that the room was for the chamber pot, and showed him that it was self-cleaning. (A world of wonders, truly.) Then, he allowed Jongdae to return to the bed chamber.

“Night-time,” he said, as if it explained everything. He smiled encouragingly, nodded slightly, and pulled the door closed behind him, leaving Jongdae alone for the first time since he had awakened.

Jongdae went immediately to the bed. Oh, it was every bit as soft and incredible as it looked! Clumsily kicking off his borrowed, uncomfortable clothes, Jongdae burrowed under the covers like a lizard under sand and sighed his great relief at the warmth and softness.

A noise, and a slight dipping of the bed under him, had him looking up, startled.

It was a cat. A beautiful, ethereal, silvery-grey cat with delicately yellow-green eyes. Fearlessly, the cat climbed right up onto his chest and started to sniff him.

“Hello, beautiful child of the goddess,” Jongdae murmured, admiring it. Her? Yes, it was a her. He reached out, hoping she would deign to allow him to pet her.

She did, immediately starting to purr.

“Were you sent to comfort me?” he wondered. “Are you a vessel of the goddess Bast? Do you live with Chanyeol?” When she heard the name, her eyes slid closed, an expression of pleasure. “Ah, you do. That speaks well of him.” Any man who had the trust of a cat could be trusted by a human as well.

The silver cat settled onto his chest, curling up. With one hand buried in her fur, Jongdae quickly was lulled to sleep.
You got questions? *I've got answers.*
Chanyeol awoke with the morning sunlight across his face and the bleary notion that everything he’d seen the night before had been a dream. It took him a few moments of swimming up to consciousness before he realized he was on the couch, not his bed.

Jolted awake, Chanyeol sat up. It was real!

Wait, was it? Now that his senses were coming back, he could clearly remember watching the mummy come to life, but maybe it was just a very, very vivid dream.

There was only one way to find out, really. Staying as quiet as he could manage, Chanyeol padded over to his bedroom door and peeked inside. Yep, there was a head of dark hair on his pillow, a body under the covers curled around his cat, Freyja. She lifted her head and met his eyes, blinking sleepily.

Unable to contain his smile, Chanyeol pulled the door silently shut and left Jongdae to rest. Undoubtedly, he was exhausted. Thinking through the contents of his cupboards, Chanyeol went to go put coffee in the percolator.

An hour later, his hands full, Chanyeol put his shoulder to the bedroom door and peeked inside. To his surprise, Jongdae was not only awake, he was out of bed, sitting in the window seat next to the radiator and watching the world outside.

Chanyeol stopped where he was, leaning against the doorframe for a moment, his insides doing strange, excited, fluttery things. Jongdae had still been somewhat darkened and withered when Chanyeol had brought him home, but it seemed he’d shed the last of that as he slept. He was bare down to the waist, and his skin was a perfect, evenly tanned gold, taut over surprisingly defined musculature. His hair and eyes were dark, dark black, his eyelashes long enough that Chanyeol could see them across the room. At first, it seemed that he’d somehow found a linen kilt to wrap around his waist, but Chanyeol quickly realized it was one of Chanyeol’s own shirts, an oversized white one, cleverly wrapped and tied to give a similar effect.

He was absolutely, utterly stunning, like something from a painting. The perfect picture of young Egyptian royalty. All he needed was to be draped in gold and gems, and Chanyeol had the strangest urge to run back to the Met and get all of the prince’s burial riches for him.

Chanyeol cleared his throat. Jongdae looked up, and Chanyeol got his first real look at the prince’s face, once again whole. The artist who had created his burial mask had not done his beauty justice at all, but they had managed to capture his most distinctive feature - his curved, catlike mouth.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said. His voice no longer rasped; it was smooth, musical.

“Food?” Chanyeol asked in Egyptian, holding up the tray in his hands. Jongdae smiled - oh Christ he was handsome - and beckoned.

Chanyeol came over to the window seat and set the tray between them. He’d kind of overdone it on
the food, not knowing what Jongdae would like or how much he would be able to eat, so there was a lot there. Eggs, sausage, toast, and oatmeal, plus juice, water and coffee. He’d considered pancakes, but the last time he’d attempted those, he’d somehow gotten one stuck to the ceiling.

It hadn’t escaped Chanyeol’s notice that Jongdae had ignored his spoon last night and drank his broth straight from the bowl. He’d been delicate about it, clean and mannered, but it was as if he hadn’t even noticed the spoon, or even known what it was. There wasn’t any evidence that eating utensils had been used in Egypt until well after it was conquered by the Romans, so Chanyeol took the time to show Jongdae what a fork was and how to use it.

As they ate, they conversed. Which was to say, they both kept up running commentary in their own languages, trading back and forth as if they had a clue what the other was saying. Chanyeol was utterly thrilled to be able to hear the lost language spoken aloud, to get a feel for its flow and its sound, and he told Jongdae so. He also told Jongdae how frustrating it was, to have access to someone who could answer every question he’d ever had about Egypt, but not have the right words to ask.

What Jongdae was saying to him was a mystery, but he sounded very animated about it. His face was fun to watch, and Chanyeol tried to use his expressions to figure out how the language used tone. And he absolutely adored Freyja, beckoning to her with little noises and feeding her bits of sausage from the tray.

The front door opened, and through it came Kris, stomping the snow off his boots and closing the door behind him. Chanyeol knew it was Kris, because no one else had a key to his apartment, but Jongdae jumped and tensed at the noise. Chanyeol wanted to show him it was okay, it was normal, so he just called out, "You missed breakfast."

"If it's your cooking, I didn't miss much," Kris shot back, without missing a beat. He came into view of the bedroom doorway, glancing over the room. His eyes caught on Jongdae, but Chanyeol could see he was purposely covering his reaction to finding a gorgeous, half-naked, ancient Egyptian prince sitting on Chanyeol's window seat with a forkful of eggs clutched awkwardly in his fingers.

Instead, he only nodded cordially to Jongdae, and came over to perch on the edge of the bed. "I brought some of the smaller artifacts from the dig," he said, "in case you wanted to show them to your guest. And I brought this." He tossed something at Chanyeol.

Chanyeol caught it. It was the Budge. "Why?"

"So he can teach us how to pronounce things correctly, why do you think?"

Oh! “See, this is why I keep you around.”

Kris snorted and leaned over, helping himself to a slice of toast. “Greetings, Prince Jongdae,” he said, bowing a little. His accent was a little more stilted than Chanyeol’s, since he wasn’t as versed in Egyptian, but it was similar enough. “Kris, my name.”

Jongdae inclined his own head, wary eyes never leaving Kris’s face. “Kris,” he repeated. His accent twisted the word around a little, made it sound exotic. Then, he said something else, a sentence of flowing, alien Ancient Egyptian. Kris glanced up at Chanyeol.

“Sorry,” Chanyeol muttered, shrugging. “I have no idea.”

“We’ve got to break through the language barrier,” Kris grumbled. “Go on.”

So Chanyeol opened the Budge and set it out on the table in front of him, flipping to the study
passages in the back. He stopped on the same excerpt he’s been reciting to Jongdae the night before, the Inscription of Anebni, and started to read it aloud.

Jongdae stared at him, head cocked, for a long moment. It wasn’t until Chanyeol said the Pharaoh’s name, Hatshepsut, that his eyes widened in recognition, and he reached out to turn the book towards himself. Tracing one finger over the hieroglyphs, Jongdae began to read.

Fascinated, Chanyeol listened, his mouth hanging open. It sounded completely different than how Chanyeol had been taught to pronounce it. Not just the syllables themselves, but the cadence of it, the inflections. It barely sounded like the same passage at all.

So caught up was he in listening, that it took too long for Chanyeol to realize Jongdae’s voice was choking up. Startled, he looked up, and saw tears gathering in Jongdae’s eyes, his hand raising to cover his mouth as he read, as if in shock.

“Why is he…?” Kris asked softly.

“I don’t know,” Chanyeol murmured. “It’s just a dedication on some statue.”

He didn’t get it until the prince got to the very last line of the dedication, the line which named the person depicted in the statue. Because Jongdae didn’t pronounce that name as “Anebni” as Chanyeol had been taught.

He pronounced it “Jongdae.” And then promptly collapsed into tears.

“Christ,” Chanyeol breathed, as the truth slapped him across the face. “Do we have a photograph of this statue anywhere?”

“Yeah,” Kris said, “I think it’s - ” He got up and strode out to the main room, returning a few moments later with a book in hand, already flipping through the pages. “It’s in the collections at the British Museum, isn’t it? Yeah, here it is.” He held out the book.

The photograph was of a very old and clearly Egyptian statue, of a figure seated on a pedestal. The inscription was carved into the pedestal around the bottom, but that wasn’t what Chanyeol was looking at. He was looking at the statue’s face. It wasn’t a perfect representation by any means, but it did bear a striking resemblance to the burial mask they had found on Jongdae’s body.

He held the book out, and Jongdae, blinking through his tears, took it and examined the image. “I knew this inscription was from around the same time frame, because it mentions Queen Hatshepsut,” Chanyeol murmured. “But it’s not just from the same general period. It’s from the exact same time. It’s him, the statue is of him. Dedicated to him, to his memory, by his family.”

“Lord in Heaven,” Kris muttered. “What he must be thinking, right now?”

Chanyeol shook his head. “I can only imagine. Christ, I balled this one up good. That’s probably the worst way to find out you’re dead - reading your own damn eulogy.”

Kris glanced between him and Jongdae, who was staring at the statue in the book and trying visibly to pull himself together. “You couldn’t have known. How the heck did Budge mess up the transliteration that badly, anyway?”

“Well, considering how the language sounds when a native speaker speaks it is entirely different than what I was taught, it’s possible we know even less about it than we thought we did.” Chanyeol reached out tentatively, his heart aching sympathetically for Jongdae’s distress. “Jongdae,” he said softly, getting his attention with a hand on his knee. He didn’t know how to ask are you alright, so
he tried to communicate his concern with his expression.

Jongdae covered Chanyeol’s hand with his own, and tried to smile. Chanyeol’s heart cracked. Leaning over, he wrapped the smaller man up in a hug. Jongdae buried his face in Chanyeol’s shoulder and sighed shakily.

Silently, Kris got up, took the tray of mostly-eaten food out from between them, and left them alone.

Jongdae began murmuring into Chanyeol’s shoulder. Talking to himself. Working through this new, disturbing knowledge out loud, most likely. Chanyeol held him and let him talk, knowing the lack of ability to clearly communicate had to be stressful on his psyche.

Eventually, Jongdae took another deep breath, and pulled back enough to look up into Chanyeol’s face. His eyes were reddened, and without thinking about it, Chanyeol cupped his face and wiped away a tear track with his thumb.

“Death,” Jongdae said, slowly and clearly. One of the few words Chanyeol actually knew. “Jongdae, death.”

Chanyeol didn’t know a lot of words, so he could only reiterate what he’d already said the night before. “Death before. Not death now.”

Jongdae asked him another question. Chanyeol shook his head, not understanding. Huffing, Jongdae re-worded it, and then re-worded it again. Finally, Chanyeol caught the word for years, and realized what Jongdae was trying to ask.

The Egyptians had not kept a unified calendar, but rather had re-started their count of years every time the throne had changed hands. Jongdae would not understand a date, but he would understand a count of the years that had passed. Fortunately, Ancient Egyptians actually had decimal numerical system that was relatively easy to understand and translate, so Chanyeol grabbed a pencil and notepad from his bedside table and wrote out the number in hieroglyphics.

Jongdae gasped, his eyes very, very wide. Chanyeol couldn’t blame him. 3,400 years was a nearly unimaginable length of time. He knew he could not possibly have even a concept of what life would be like 3,400 years from his own present, in the year 5327. It was, frankly, an absolute miracle that Jongdae’s body had been as well-preserved and untouched as it was, let alone the literal miracle of him coming back to life, which Chanyeol still could barely comprehend. The only other mummy they had from Jongdae’s time, the body of Pharaoh Thutmose III, had been robbed, unwrapped, re-wrapped, and moved so many times that when it had finally made it to a museum, it was so damaged it was nearly unrecognizable.

The thought of Thutmose III got Chanyeol to thinking. The statue of Anebni - of Jongdae - had been dedicated by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III during their joint reign, and it referred to the man depicted as a royal son. Was Jongdae actually directly related to the Pharaohs? A secondary son, or perhaps a half-brother or cousin?

Hoping both to assuage his curiosity and to distract Jongdae from the enormity of his displacement, Chanyeol picked up the Budge again and pointed at the cartouche of Hatshepsut’s name. “Hatshepsut,” he said.

Looking hazy and distracted, Jongdae nodded. “Hatshepsut,” he agreed, and Chanyeol made note of the difference in how he pronounced it. “Ramaatka.”

Ramaatka had been the Queen’s birth name, before she took on a Pharaonic name. Aha. Thinking
that they were on the right track - or at least some kind of track - Chanyeol moved his finger to the other cartouche. “Thutmose,” he said.

A tiny, sad smile. “Thutmose,” Jongdae agreed, again with a significantly different pronunciation. “Joonmyun.”

Joonmyun? Was that the Pharaoh’s birth name? As the boy had been crowned at the tender age of 3 years old, there weren’t any records of his name beforehand. If Jongdae knew the sitting Pharaoh by his birth name, they must have been very close indeed.

“Jongdae, son Hatshepsut?” Chanyeol asked, carefully pronouncing the name exactly as Jongdae just did.

“Mm?” Jongdae hummed, cocking his head in question. Then, Chanyeol’s meaning seemed to sink in. “Ah. No. Jongdae, Joonmyun.” and he said a word Chanyeol couldn’t understand.

Chanyeol made a frustrated noise. “I wish we could just speak,” he complained.

Jongdae took the pencil and paper from his hand, and started to draw.

Fascinated, Chanyeol shut up and watched. Jongdae held the pencil oddly, as if it was another implement entirely, a stylus or brush. It took him a moment to get the feel for the graphite on paper, but soon enough he was sketching - writing - in earnest. Hieroglyphs, encircled in slightly wobbly cartouches and connected with lines, and, oh, it was a family tree! How clever!

Jongdae turned his work to face Chanyeol, and Chanyeol studied it. Here was the former Pharaoh, Thutmose II, and Hatshepsut as his sister and primary wife. Under them, the only fully-royal child Nefurere, a royal princess that Chanyeol knew had died as a teenager.

Another line from the former Pharaoh to his secondary wife, Iset, and from her, two children - Thutmose III, and Jongdae himself.

“So you actually are the Pharaoh’s brother,” Chanyeol murmured. “Next in line for the throne.” With the Royal Princess having passed at such a young age, the kingdom would have fallen to the sons of the Pharaoh's second wife.

Jongdae was still drawing, so Chanyeol scooted closer to his side, looking over his shoulder. Another line from the former Pharaoh connected to a third wife, Meketaten, and their son Minseok, who would have been Jongdae’s half brother. Chanyeol blinked, recognizing the name as the birth name of the pharaoh who would become Ahmose II, Hatshepsut’s successor.

Of course, Jongdae hadn’t written Minseok as a Pharaoh, because as far as Jongdae was concerned, he never would become one. He had no idea that his brother, the rightful Pharaoh, would die only a short while after Jongdae himself, leaving the country with their third-choice king when Hatshepsut passed away a year later.

What was millenia past to Chanyeol would still feel like the future to Jongdae. It was... difficult to comprehend.

On the other side of the page, Jongdae drew a broken, dotted line from Hatshepsut to another name Chanyeol recognized, Senenmut. From that line came a child, and Chanyeol made a surprised noise.

“So they were lovers,” he said. Certain historians had posited that the relationship between the widowed Pharaoh Queen and her brilliant seneschal Senenmut was less than perfectly professional, but this was a first-hand account confirming it. They’d even had a child, a name Chanyeol did not recognize. He tried to sound it out.
“Sehun,” Jongdae corrected him. Chanyeol repeated it, memorizing the glyphs. Jongdae pointed to each one, speaking the sound it represented aloud. This lead to Jongdae drawing out more glyphs, teaching him sounds the way one would teach a small child, and they became completely absorbed in it.

It was hours before Chanyeol realized Kris had never come back, when he went out into the main room to find his dishes drying in the rack and a little note on the table that said only see you tomorrow.

Chanyeol, as it turned out, was a very fast learner. Jongdae was incredibly thankful for that, because the way Chanyeol butchered his language was physically painful. But he absorbed Jongdae’s corrections very quickly, only needing to be reminded perhaps twice before each element was incorporated into his speech. Jongdae wished he could teach grammar and cadence as easily as pronunciation, wished he had an easier way of verifying that Chanyeol truly understood the meanings of the words. It seemed, though, that Chanyeol had a better grasp of meaning than of pronunciation, as his written language was much easier to understand than his spoken language, if a bit messy.

Which led Jongdae to wonder how, exactly, Chanyeol had come to learn the language in the first place. Obviously, he had not learned it from a native speaker. If Jongdae had understood Chanyeol correctly, so much time had passed that it was likely there were no native speakers left. His language, his culture, was long gone.

Everything he knew was long gone, and he was trying very hard not to think about that too closely.

It was easier to ignore while he kept busy. Chanyeol stayed by his side literally the entire day, learning from him and asking questions, even though even Jongdae’s brain was starting to spin from exhaustion. It kept Jongdae occupied, which he greatly appreciated. When they started to get hungry again, Chanyeol beckoned for Jongdae to follow him to the other room, and Jongdae sat on a high stool, his legs dangling, and watched Chanyeol prepare the meal.

That, on its own, was absolutely fascinating. Chanyeol seemed able to call fire and water at his own silent will, by touching this or turning that. It was impossible; it had to be magic. Jongdae asked him again if he was a god, but Chanyeol only cocked his head, which meant he hadn’t understood, so Jongdae didn’t press the issue. Why someone like Chanyeol didn’t have servants to cook for him was beyond Jongdae’s understanding as well, but it wasn’t as if Jongdae had the words to ask him about it.

The food was, again, completely foreign, and surprisingly delicious. It was also heavier than anything he’d had since waking, with red meat and cooked tubers and deliciously fluffy bread with a choice of condiments. Jongdae had chosen the honey, the only thing on the table that was known to him, and it was a familiar and wistful taste of home.

After dinner, Chanyeol picked up a dark bottle and two beautiful stemmed cups, carved seemingly out of the purest crystal. He guided Jongdae to sit on the long couch, set the cups on the low table in front of them, opened the bottle with some kind of complex silver tool, and poured.

Wine. It was wine. Red wine, smelling sharp and acidic and just exactly like it did at home.
Chanyeol handed him a cup, and Jongdae took it, surprised by how solid and heavy it felt. Not made of air, after all, then, and much too smooth to actually be cut crystal. Was it glass? It felt like glass, but Jongdae had never yet seen glass that was this thin, this clear and flawless. In it, the wine shone like blood.

Jongdae drank. It was not the same as the wine he knew, but it was close enough, and the alcohol immediately warmed him. Sighing happily, he leaned back on the couch, cradling the cup close.

For a while, they simply sat in companionable silence. The bound scroll Chanyeol had used earlier to show him the statue had been left on the table, so Jongdae picked it up and carefully leafed through it. Much was in strange, angular writing he couldn’t even begin to decipher, but there were images on many pages, images that were so clean and lifelike that only the absence of color hinted the things they portrayed weren’t actually magically shrunken and captured upon the page. The artist who painted these must have been incredibly gifted.

Every image showed artwork from Jongdae’s world, though each showed damage and age and weathering beyond any Jongdae had seen. Some of it was familiar to Jongdae, though hundreds of years old even to his own frame of reference. Some of it was contemporary with what he had known. And some of it was from the future, his own near future, years or decades or centuries ahead of what he knew. A glimpse into his own future, seen from the perspective of a society who viewed it all as long-past.

After some long minutes of this, Chanyeol set down his cup, already drained, and got up, crossing the room. He sat down instead at a bench, in front of a large, oddly shaped wood case that Jongdae could not even begin to guess what it might be. Flashing Jongdae a smile, Chanyeol set his hands on the ledge in front of him and began to move them, pressing down on the white tabs. Jongdae jumped in startlement as, of all things, music filled the room. Loud, beautifully tonal music, reverberating from the body of the wood case. How was he - where was that - what.

Too surprised, at first, to move, Jongdae simply sat and listened, the scrolls lying forgotten in his lap and his cup clutched oddly in his fingers. The music was utterly haunting, emotional, gorgeous. Completely unlike anything Jongdae had ever, ever heard. Something about it brought tears to his eyes, even as he felt himself smile. What was this? It was magic, again, it had to be.

Setting his cup down, Jongdae stood, and made his way across the room so he could see more clearly. The case was, indeed, a musical instrument of some kind, and Chanyeol’s huge hands were practically dancing over it. Fascinating, and beautiful. Jongdae sat down next to him on the bench, watching with avid interest.

The music changed, to something happier, faster and sharper and brighter. And Chanyeol began to sing. Jongdae couldn’t understand the words, but he could tell this was no solemn religious hymn, no lullaby or dirge for the dead. This was a song of life and happiness, and of humor, if the twinkle in Chanyeol’s eyes was any indication.

The lyrics were incomprehensible, but the melody was simple, and Jongdae found himself humming along. Chanyeol nudged him with his shoulder playfully, pulling a smile from Jongdae’s lips.

When the song was over, Jongdae cheered and clapped his hand on his knee to show his appreciation. Grinning at him, Chanyeol started immediately into another.

They sat together, with the music, until Jongdae was so exhausted he could barely keep his eyes open. Chanyeol finally urged him to go to sleep with gestures and concerned facial expressions, and Jongdae went back to the bedroom, shed the cloth he’d tied over his waist, and collapsed into the
cushions. He was asleep within moments.

The next morning saw Jongdae waking up with indisputable evidence of his complete return to the land of the living, in the form of both an intense need to urinate, and a very familiar morning erection.

Rolling out of bed, Jongdae looked around for the chamber pot, before remembering it was in a separate room. Sleepily scratching his hand through his short, messy hair, Jongdae made his way to the tiny room where the chamber pot was. There was a rushing sound from behind the curtain next to the pot, but Jongdae paid it no mind. He used the pot, and then, tentatively, pressed down on the lever to make it clean.

The water in the pot rushed away, and a startled yelp sounded from behind the curtain. Frightened, Jongdae jumped back as the curtain opened.

Oh. Chanyeol. A very wet, very naked Chanyeol, standing under a waterfall. An indoor waterfall. Jongdae couldn’t even stop to try to comprehend that, because naked Chanyeol.

By the blessings of all the gods, he was perfect.

There had been a part of Jongdae that had wondered if Chanyeol kept himself so covered because he was somehow deformed or disfigured. If he had some ailment of the skin, or something. But Chanyeol’s body was carved as if from alabaster, impossibly pale and exaggerated in all proportions. The length of his arms, of his legs, was unreal. His perfect musculature, lean and chiseled, was unreal.

His cock was unreal. Long, and beautifully proportioned, half-hard and growing harder before Jongdae’s eyes the longer he stared. Chanyeol made a noise, a rather weak noise of confusion, and Jongdae dragged his eyes away from that, that obelisk, to look up at his face.

Chanyeol was flushed pink from his ears all the way down his chest. It could have been the heat - the water falling from the wall was hot enough that Jongdae could see it actively steaming - but his expression said it was at least part embarrassment. Hastily, Chanyeol pulled the curtain over himself, covering his lower half. He asked a question, one Jongdae could not understand, so Jongdae only cocked his head, in what was fast becoming their joint symbol for I don’t understand what you’re saying.

“Why are you hiding yourself?” Jongdae asked curiously. He knew Chanyeol couldn’t answer him, but he’d found voicing his thoughts aloud to be comforting. “You have nothing to be ashamed of. You’re a vision of perfection. Why do you cover your body as if it is unfit to be seen?” Jongdae, himself, had no such qualms, and clearly Chanyeol was unsure what to make of that, if his incredibly obvious attempts to keep his eyes from wandering below Jongdae’s waist were any indication. Amused, Jongdae shifted his weight, cocking his hip to one side and making his morning erection bob gently. Chanyeol’s face went from pink to scarlet, and he pulled the curtain all the way closed between them, calling out something flustered and probably insulting.

Laughing, Jongdae took his leave, letting Chanyeol finish bathing. He would have to try that wall-waterfall himself someday.
Returning to the bedchamber, Jongdae found the cloth he’d used as a kilt yesterday and absently tied it, knowing now that keeping his genitals covered was important for his host’s comfort. A silly practice, but not entirely unknown to Jongdae; he knew there were other such cultures, where nudity was shameful. And indeed, it seemed that the colder the climate, the more likely that was to be the case, so upon retrospect it did not surprise him.

Such perfection. Jongdae fell back onto the bed and stared unseeingly at the ceiling, his imagination eagerly recounting every detail of what he’d just witnessed. Male beauty unparalleled, such that it could only have been a divine gift, and yet bodily reactions - the blush, the hardening of his cock in response to attention - were all too human. It confirmed a theory that had been bouncing around in Jongdae’s head for all of the day and night before.

Chanyeol insisted he was human, a mortal, and now, Jongdae believed it. But Chanyeol must be touched by the gods. Born of the gods. Or, at least of one. Hathor, if Jongdae wasn’t mistaken, must be Chanyeol’s divine mother.

Yes, it could be no other. Chanyeol’s smile, his infectious laugh, his twinkling eyes, his good humor - Hathor was a goddess of joy. His talent for song and his resonant voice - Hathor was a goddess of music. His pale skin and red hair, his language - Hathor was a goddess of foreign lands. His beautiful, massive, visibly virile cock - Hathor was a goddess of fertility.

It made perfect sense. Jongdae closed his eyes and sent up a prayer, thanking his Pharaoh-Mother’s favorite patron goddess for sending him her own son in his time of confusion and need. Hathor had always smiled upon him and his family, and he was grateful as ever for her divine love.

It was reassuring to know that even though everything around him was different and strange and unknown, the gods were as present in his life as they had ever been.

xXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx

Hopping quickly out of the shower to lock the bathroom door, Chanyeol hurriedly stepped back under the spray and finished rinsing the soap from his hair, his mind racing.

It was fine. It was - it was good, even, right? Jongdae had to use the john, that meant his systems were fully functional again! And of course, there was no way he would have known that flushing would make all the cold water disappear and scald Chanyeol. He hadn’t… done that on purpose.

Right?

Right. Of course not.

But Chanyeol couldn’t shake the shivery feeling that the rest of the encounter had been purposeful. Lord have mercy, he hadn’t had someone look at him like that since… well, probably since university.

Well, no. That wasn’t true. Women sometimes looked at him like that. The dolls down at the gin mill, in particular, sometimes got pretty brazen. And when he was spifflicated he didn’t mind the attention, but it didn’t really affect him, because, well. He’d known he was a left-handed pitcher, so to speak, since he was a kid.

Finding other, um, southpaws to play with became a bit more difficult once he was out of school, so
Chanyeol was out of practice with flirting. The most forward-thinking of his peers wouldn’t have batted an eye, but those were still far outnumbered by folks who decried it as a sin or worse, and Chanyeol’s own mother had been one of those. Over the years, Chanyeol had gotten good at pushing his urges away.

Jongdae, clearly, had no such qualms. As Chanyeol stepped out of the shower and started drying off, he forced his mind to distance itself from his body’s visceral reaction to such obvious sexual intent, and instead look at the situation like the scholar he supposedly was.

The nudity, first of all. Jongdae was clearly unconcerned about walking around a near-stranger’s home nude, and honestly that was no big surprise. Egyptian artwork depicted citizens unclothed nearly as often as clothed, and though it seemed casual nudity was more reserved for the lower classes, there was no real way to know if that was representative of real life or just artist bias. Jongdae’s tan had certainly indicated he went unclothed a good portion of the time, in that the only break in his perfect golden color was a line very, very low across his waist, where he would wear his kilt. It wasn’t an extreme difference, and the color faded smoothly back to gold down his thighs, probably indicating that he wore kilts of varying lengths, from below the knee up to so short it barely covered anything.

Chanyeol blinked, frozen, for a long moment, as he considered that image. His cock twitched, reminding him that he hadn’t paid it any attention for days.

No. He was not going to rub himself off to… no.

Decisively, Chanyeol wrapped his towel around his waist and started working on his unruly red hair.

Flirting. That had been flirting, right? Jongdae had eyed him up, posed for him, teased him about his flusteredness. It certainly felt like flirting.

But he’d been so open about it, so unconcerned. There was no evidence in the historical record that Egyptians had allowed open homosexuality, so perhaps there was a cultural disconnect, and what Chanyeol was reading as flirting hadn’t been meant that way at all. He certainly wasn’t about to risk insulting or disgusting Jongdae by responding to it the way he… the way he wanted to.

An image flashed behind his eyes of what he wanted to do, and Chanyeol groaned, leaning on the sink and dropping his head to glare at his merrily erect cock. “You need to get lost,” he grumbled at it. “All you ever do is get us into trouble.”

His cock paid him no mind, because it never did. It just twitched happily under the towel, reminding him how smooth and strong and golden Jongdae’s lithe little body was, how much heat had sizzled in his black eyes as they dragged down Chanyeol’s body.

“Rats,” Chanyeol muttered, scowling. “Why couldn’t I have accidentally resurrected some wrinkly old priest or something.”

But he hadn’t. He’d somehow, impossibly, resurrected Jongdae, and nearly sixty hours later, it was looking like this fact was not going to change anytime soon. Beautiful, intelligent, lost little Jongdae, simultaneously too young and far, far too old for Chanyeol. He was over three millennia old - but he was also nineteen, for Chrissakes.

Of course, in Egyptian culture, nineteen was old enough to marry. Have children. Rule a country. In Jongdae’s time, it was rare for an individual to live to see 60. Nineteen was already a third of the way through his life expectancy - about the same as Chanyeol, actually, 28 years into his life expectancy of around 85.
And Jongdae hadn’t looked at him like a curious virgin child. There was knowledge in those eyes. 
*Carnal* knowledge.

He needed to stop thinking about this.

Christ, the way Jongdae had *smirked* at him. The way his eyes had zeroed in on Chanyeol’s cock, and his own cock had twitched and risen at the sight.

No. He needed to *not*. He needed to *stop*.

It was too late. Chanyeol’s hand was already grinding into his cock through the towel, his hips shifting, thrusting against his palm. Fuck, he was so close already, and his forever overactive imagination cheerfully provided him with the sense memories he already had, of slim wrists and strong arms under his hands, of the warmth and smell of Jongdae’s nearness, of his smooth, musical voice gasping in surprise. It was too easy to imagine crawling over him, spreading those lean, golden thighs and pushing inside his tiny, tight -

Gasping, Chanyeol shoved the towel down and out of the way just in time to come all over himself. Shit, that was quick. He must have been more on-edge than he realized.

The distinctive sound of his front door opening and closing, of heavy boots stomping, yanked Chanyeol out of his post-orgasm high.

“Yeol!” Kris yelled.

“One second!” Chanyeol yelled back, hiding the shudder in his voice and swallowing down the familiar guilt that crawled up his throat. Quickly, he rinsed off his sticky stomach, checked to make sure his hair was reasonable, and re-tied the towel. Sticking his head out the bathroom door, Chanyeol glanced at the clock. “Christ, Kris, it’s not even seven yet.”

His partner came around the corner, a paper shopping bag in hand, completely unconcerned with Chanyeol’s nudity. Having been on numerous digs far from civilization together, they had basically lost all modesty with each other, anyway. “We’re going in early,” Kris informed him. “And I brought your guest a present. Hope I got the sizing right.”

Curious, Chanyeol followed Kris to the bedroom, realizing with a jolt at the last second that Jongdae might still be nude. Fortunately, he’d kilted himself in the same white shirt he’d used yesterday. He was still shockingly, exotically handsome, but he was decent.

He also was completely obvious about sweeping his eyes down Chanyeol’s bare, still-damp torso, lingering on the towel. He cocked his head and murmured something thoughtful, and Chanyeol had no idea what Jongdae said, but he flushed anyway.

“Quit making eyes at each other and get dressed,” Kris grumbled, making Chanyeol’s slight flush abruptly blaze. “Jongdae. Gift.” He said it in stilted, badly pronounced Egyptian, pulling his offering out of the bag and held it out with a little nod.


Kris shrugged easily. “That’s why you have me, right? Here, get dressed, I’ll help him.”

So Chanyeol turned his back and went to his closet, waffling for a moment over the choices before pulling out a deep green shirt he knew made his hair seem blazing fire-red. Tan slacks and suspenders came next, then a gold-and-taupe necktie. He’d finish it off with his tweed sport coat
before they left.

As he settled the knot of the tie into his collar, Chanyeol turned back, and stopped dead mid-motion.

Kris had dressed Jongdae in deep chocolate brown and warm, rich maroon. A stylish, single-breasted waistcoat showed off his beautifully slim waist, accentuated his pert ass. There was no tie, and the top button of his collar was undone, leaving a little triangle of golden skin showing.

He seemed incredibly uncomfortable in the heavy, restrictive clothes, scratching under his cuff and tugging at his collar, but he looked fantastic all dolled up. More importantly, he looked normal. Modern. Still pretty obviously foreign, but no longer in an ancient, out-of-place way.

He looked like he belonged. Belonged in New York. Belonged in Chanyeol’s bedroom, his house, his life.

Unsettled, Chanyeol cleared his throat and finished tying his tie. “So what’s the plan?”

“Got Kyungsoo to agree to let us in an hour before opening,” Kris said. “I figured your guest would like a tour of the museum.”

Oh. Yeah, that was a good idea.

“In the meantime, you haven’t eaten, right?” Chanyeol shook his head. “Alright, we’ll stop at Lucky’s. What’s the story on him if anyone asks?”

Um. Chanyeol thought fast. “Transfer student from the University of Egypt in Cairo.”

Kris flashed him an okay sign, and they bundled up and left the building.

Jongdae stuck very close to Chanyeol’s side out on the streets. It wasn’t snowing today, but it was chilly, the sun just beginning to rise. The streets were already busy and noisy, and Jongdae watched everything with wide, wary eyes.

“You have to wonder what he’s thinking,” Kris said conversationally. “This must look like a completely alien planet to him.”

“I think he’s still at least partially convinced that it’s the Afterlife,” Chanyeol admitted. “He keeps asking me if I’m a god. I did explain to him that it was the future, but I have no way of knowing if he understood what I was trying to say, or if he believed me.”

“Well,” Kris muttered, “he’s about to see centuries of his culture reduced to a few rooms within a museum. If that doesn’t get the point across, I don’t know what will.”

It was a sobering thought, and Chanyeol shut up.

Both the ride downtown and eating at the diner were relatively non-eventful. Jongdae was jumpy, but he trusted Chanyeol enough to follow his lead, and seemed very intrigued by the entire concept of a restaurant. Chanyeol ordered for him, pancakes and eggs and bacon, asking for honey instead of table syrup. Jongdae seemed to appreciate that bit of familiarity.

The sight of the Metropolitan in broad daylight seemed to completely awe Jongdae. It made Chanyeol look at it with new eyes. The Met was a massive, classically styled building, built to look like an ancient place of worship. Chanyeol wondered if that’s what Jongdae thought it was.

Kyungsoo met them at the side entrance, exchanging greetings with Kris and Chanyeol and a nod of
recognition with Jongdae. Inside, the museum was dark and quiet. The overnight cleaning staff was already gone, and the building wouldn’t open to the public for another hour, so they had the place completely to themselves.

They took Jongdae to the Egyptian Wing. Almost forty rooms of artifacts spanning four millennia of human history, some of which had been discovered by Chanyeol himself. Chanyeol and Kris hung back with Kyungsoo, letting Jongdae move through the dimmed halls at his own pace, silent and wide-eyed.

“I wish we could talk to him right now,” Chanyeol murmured. Kris nodded, trailing behind as Jongdae moved on to another room. “He must be in shock.”

Finally, Jongdae reached the the section of the museum Chanyeol had both been anticipating and dreading - the so-called Hatshepsut Room. Jongdae stopped immediately in the doorway, frozen, staring up at the displaced monuments to his Queen. The statuary was in various states of disrepair - all paint gone, but also details worn away, pieces broken off, discolored, damaged, or in some cases, completely broken apart and then reassembled. But it was the same face depicted on each statue, no matter the pose, the costume, or the damage; soft-featured and feminine, with a small, sweetly curved mouth that Chanyeol realized with a start was oddly similar to Jongdae’s own.

She was his aunt, after all.

Unable to hang back any longer, Chanyeol moved to Jongdae’s side as he entered the room. There were tears in Jongdae’s eyes, but pride, too, fierce and loyal. Pride, and love.

“You know,” Kris murmured softly, “the field theorizes that Thutmose III was bitter towards Hatshepsut for holding his throne for so long. You would think, as his brother, that Jongdae would hold the same bitterness.”

Chanyeol watched as Jongdae reached out a tentative hand, brushing his thumb down the side of a statue’s arm. “You would think,” he agreed. “But he doesn’t look bitter, does he?”

Then, Jongdae looked up, and caught sight of another statue in the next gallery. He made a small noise of surprise and disbelief, weaving around the displays to cross the room. When he realized which statue Jongdae had fixated on, Chanyeol made a small, pained noise himself.

Slightly larger than life-size, the statue was of a kneeling man, carved of black diorite. The head and hands were gone, along with anything he might have been holding, but the remnants of a pharaonic headdress lay on his shoulders, and in front of him, carved into the pedestal on which he knelt, was an inscription, still clearly legible after all this time.

Jongdae read the inscription aloud. Chanyeol had never heard the words pronounced correctly, but he knew what they meant, because he had been the one to translate them. For Kris and Kyungsoo’s benefit, Chanyeol translated aloud as Jongdae read.

“Made at the request of the good goddess and ruler of the land, Queen Hatshepsut, and presented in this, the nineteenth year of Her reign, at the procession towards the Afterlife. May this offering please the gods, Osiris, Amon-Ra, and Anubis, that they accept the good god and ruler of the land, King Thutmose III, in peace forever.”

Falling to the ground, Jongdae prostrated himself in front of the monument, laid his hands over his brother’s knees, and sobbed.
The moment they returned to Chanyeol and Kris’s basement workshop, Jongdae was wheeling on Chanyeol, his reddened eyes determined. He snapped out a question, too fast for Chanyeol to understand.

“I’m sorry, I don’t…” Chanyeol said.

Frustrated, Jongdae huffed a breath out his nose, and made a hand gesture, using a finger to brush shapes onto his palm. “Oh!” Chanyeol exclaimed. “Right. Um, here.” He went digging through the mess on his desk until he came up with a pencil and a notepad. Jongdae took them and started to write, drawing out hieroglyphic symbols with a speed and accuracy only someone who had done it their entire lives could accomplish.

Curious, Kris leaned on Chanyeol’s desk, watching over Jongdae’s shoulder. “Is it easier to understand his writing?”

“Yeah, it is,” Chanyeol confirmed. “Besides not having to worry about pronunciation, the determinatives help me a lot.” Jongdae turned his paper towards Chanyeol, and Chanyeol examined it. “Joonmyun… death… how?” There were more words than that, but that was enough for him to get the point. “He wants to know how his brother died. Do we actually know that?”

Kris frowned. “Not off the top of my head. I think most of the artifacts from that tomb ended up in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.” He went to their bookshelf, pulling a couple of volumes down. “Let’s see what we can find.”

So, they looked. Even Jongdae was looking, perusing the photos and drawings in the books. The tomb of Pharaoh Thutmose III had been discovered in 1898, before Chanyeol had even been born, and everything found with him had been thoroughly studied.

Not that there was much there, unfortunately, thanks to multiple grave robbings. However, eventually Chanyeol found what they were looking for, in a description of the body written by the Frenchman who had found it.

“It says here that there’s a hole in the back of the mummy’s neck that doesn’t match up with any known embalming method,” Chanyeol said. “They found a splinter of ivory in the wound. Apparently it sparked a big argument, since ivory wasn’t widely used for blades. Some think the pharaoh was killed in some kind of accident, and some think it was a ritual murder, a blood sacrifice, with a special blade.”
Kris whistled. “Jeeze. Don’t tell him all that. He doesn’t need to know.”

Yeah, especially since the reigning theory was that Queen Hatshepsut had ordered the young pharaoh’s assassination as a preemptive strike.

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol said, getting the prince’s attention. With stilted words and some gesturing with a pencil, he communicated how Joonmyun had died.

Jongdae closed his eyes, his expression compressing in pain. Chanyeol put a steadying hand on his shoulder and waited until he’d pulled himself back together.

Shaking himself, Jongdae turned the book he’d been looking at forward, displaying a photograph of Joonmyun’s tomb. He asked a question Chanyeol couldn’t understand; Chanyeol only caught the word where. Curious, he handed Jongdae the pencil in his hand, and Jongdae wrote out his question.

“Where are… ugh, what does that mean,” Chanyeol grumbled, picking up the Budge and flipping to the symbol list. “The determinative is a necklace?”

Kris leaned over and eyed the hieroglyphics. “Is he asking where all the burial riches are?”

Oh! Yes, that had to be it, it was an obvious question. Chanyeol scribbled an answer in his own, much clumsier glyphic handwriting. Grave robbers.

Jongdae’s expression darkened angrily. “When?” he asked.

Chanyeol wrote 1000 years. From what the archeological community had been able to gather, there’d been a surge of grave robbing around the time of the Roman occupation of Egypt, resulting in the damage, destruction, or disappearance of dozens of tombs and mummies from Jongdae’s time. That Joonmyun’s mummy had been found at all was a minor miracle; no other mummies from that era had yet been found. Plenty of statuary, wall carvings, etc., but no bodies.

Until Jongdae.

Which, Chanyeol realized, meant that Jongdae’s father and mother were missing. As were Hatshepsut, and Senenmut, and every other person Jongdae had named. His was the only body to survive untouched, the only tomb that was unspoiled.

Huh.

“Kris, what did you do with the tablet we found in Jongdae’s mouth?” Chanyeol asked, his mind racing. Jongdae looked up at the sound of his name.

“Uh. I catalogued it. Why?”

“Just thinking. Until Jongdae, Thutmose III - or, rather, Joonmyun, I suppose - was the only early New Kingdom mummy ever found, and his mummy was robbed of all its burial trinkets and damaged so badly it was barely recognizable. Is that a coincidence? The only mummy that wasn’t robbed, wasn’t unwrapped or damaged or missing, was the one who came back to life?”

Kris blinked at him. “Are you trying to say that if the other bodies hadn’t been robbed, they would have come back to life too?”

“What? No.” Although, that was an interesting theory. “No, I mean, Jongdae’s tomb was hidden, wasn’t it? Not just buried, but actively hidden, the entrance disguised to look like a part of the wall. That’s not normal, for a tomb. I don’t know, maybe there’s a connection?”
He had Kris’s full attention now. “You mean, maybe he was hidden on purpose… by whoever put the tablet in his mouth?”

Chanyeol shrugged. “I don’t know. It sounds bananas, I guess.”

Kris snorted. “You’re sitting next to a resurrected Egyptian prince, Yeol. All of this is bananas.” He got up. “Well, maybe there’s some clue in this pile of treasure we’re currently ignoring.”

It was a place to begin, anyway, so Kris and Chanyeol began pulling crates from the storage room and unpacking them. Jongdae came over to see what they were doing, and Chanyeol communicated to him with gestures and broken words that these were his burial treasures, and together, the three of them started looking.

Chanyeol began by showing Jongdae the tablet they’d found in his mouth. Jongdae looked it over, but it didn’t seem like he recognized it, and he wrote out, what this? Chanyeol tried to explain, but his grasp of Egyptian was too limited and gesturing just seemed to confuse Jongdae further. Frustrated, Chanyeol handed it to Kris, and started with the things Jongdae did recognize, the statuary and the wall carvings and the sarcophagus itself.

Jongdae read aloud the glyphs on the sarcophagus. "Left this existence," he repeated. "Why? Why left?"

Kris eyed them. "This would probably be easier to figure out if we could examine his body," he said dryly. "You know… while he was still kaput."

"His brother was assassinated," Chanyeol thought out loud, ignoring Kris's smart mouth. "Or, at least, probably assassinated. I suppose it could have been an accident. Was Jongdae also assassinated? He was second in line for the throne."

"Honestly, I'm more interested in how he came back to life than how he died," Kris said. "Obviously, the tablet had something to do with it, but what is it? Was this something that was done regularly, or only for Jongdae? And if it was only for Jongdae, why him?" He huffed. "For that matter, who actually made that tablet? Who put it in his mouth?"

Chanyeol stared sightlessly at Jongdae as he considered, watching the small man without really paying attention to what he was doing. "I would have to assume the people that mummified him put it there," he muttered. "It had to have been, right?"

"Unless someone put it there later. He was sitting there for three millennia, you know."

"But then they would have had to… unwrap… his head… Wait. Kris, did you save the bandages?"

He received an emotionless blink. "You think I would throw out 3000-year-old fiber? Of course I saved them." Kris pointed. "They're over there."

Chanyeol looked. Sure enough, they were there, and sure enough, a few of them were made of a slightly different fabric. Hard to tell after all this time, but the fabric was a slightly different weave, a slightly lighter color, a slightly thinner width. Chanyeol had vaguely noticed as he was unwrapping Jongdae, but it hadn't occurred to him that it might mean something.

"I think his face was unwrapped and re-wrapped," he said, carefully cradling the ancient cloth in his hands and bringing it to show Kris. "Look, most of his wrappings were like this, but around his head, it was this."

Kris took a piece and examined it. "Looks like it's from the same era," he said. "The same style of
weave, the same fiber, the same amount of deterioration. But you're right, it's not exactly the same material." He looked up. "So someone... what? Broke into his tomb to plant the tablet in his mouth? But didn't steal any of the royal riches, or touch anything else? Why?"

"Maybe so he could be brought to life." It was the only thing that made sense, and it didn't make any sense, at all.

"That would imply that Jongdae was specifically chosen. Why Jongdae? Why not his brother, or his father, or anyone else?" Kris cocked his head. "Other than being a royal prince, Jongdae didn't have a title or a particular influence. He died so young, he never got the chance to be important."

"Maybe there's something else in the tomb that's out of place," Chanyeol said. "Jongdae." He got the prince's attention and beckoned him over. Does anything look wrong? he wrote out. Or, well, that's what he meant to write, but it came out more like wrong things any?, which was close enough.

Jongdae took the pencil and scrawled back, Is this all things? Shaking his head, Chanyeol showed Jongdae to the storage room, where they began unpacking crates one at a time.

It took a while. The treasures were so old, Chanyeol wanted to be careful with them, and Jongdae handled everything with the reverence reserved for a holy object. A few things, Chanyeol asked Jongdae what they were, and on even fewer things, Jongdae was able to communicate an answer, which Chanyeol was excited about. But, according to Jongdae, none of it was unusual, out of place.

Eventually, they came upon a small box, wood inlaid with intricately designed gold. Jongdae opened the box and pulled out a pair of silver wire earrings, shaped into dangling spirals.

"Beautiful," Jongdae murmured. He tugged at his own earlobes, and Chanyeol noticed for the first time his ears were pierced. Jongdae put the earrings in, his fingers dancing curiously over the silver.

"Yours?" Chanyeol asked. Jongdae shook his head, and took the box from Chanyeol to inspect it. He found something Chanyeol hadn't seen - a carving inside the lid.

"In memory of the young prince," he read aloud. In Greek. Ancient Greek.

Wait, what?

Chanyeol took the box back and looked. Yes, those were Greek letters, and that was, indeed, what it said.

"You speak Greek?" he asked, in Greek. Jongdae stared at him in shock. "You speak Greek!"

That didn't make any sense. "Kris!" Chanyeol yelled. "Get in here!" Seconds later, Kris barrelled around the corner, looking worried. "He speaks Ancient Greek!"

Heavy brows furrowed. Looking Jongdae in the eyes, Kris asked, “Can you understand me?” in Ancient Greek.

Jongdae blinked. “Yes, I can,” he said, in the same language, clear as day.

The implications of it hit Chanyeol hard. “Oh my God,” he said. “We didn’t think the Egyptians
made contact with the Hellenic peoples until the 7th or 8th century BC. He’s over six centuries older than that.” Switching to Greek, he asked Jongdae, "Did your people trade with the Greeks?"


Okay, so his Greek wasn't completely clear to Chanyeol, but it was a heck of a lot more understandable than Egyptian. Chanyeol knew his own Ancient Greek wasn't great, either. But still. It was a common language, and one historians actually knew how to pronounce.

Chanyeol could ask Jongdae anything. All those thousands of questions that had been swirling in his head for the past two days, he could ask them. He could learn anything Jongdae could tell him.

It was overwhelming. Chanyeol's mind went completely blank, all his questions lost and forgotten. He just sort of… stared at Jongdae, with a stupid grin on his face.

"These are pretty," Kris commented, filling the awkward silence. He reached out and touched one of the earrings in Jongdae's ear.

To Chanyeol's surprise, Jongdae brushed his hand away. "You do not have permission to touch me familiarly," he said sternly.

Kris's eyebrows hit the roof. "But Chanyeol does?"

"Of course. He is of equal rank. You are not.” Jongdae said it so confidently, so assuredly, and Chanyeol was reeling so hard from hearing and understanding entire, complete thoughts coming from Jongdae’s mouth, that it took a moment for him to register what that thought actually was.

"You think, Kris and I, different ranks?” Chanyeol asked.

Black eyes turned curiously to meet his. "He is your servant, yes?"

"Why would you think this?” Chanyeol asked again, confused. "He is my partner."

Jongdae’s eyes widened. Kris choked on his own breath and hurriedly said, “Colleague, he means colleague.” In English, Kris explained, “Partner used in that context means lover, Yeol.”

Oh. Shit. His face heating, Chanyeol muttered, “My Greek is rusty, okay?”

“Ahhhh,” Jongdae said, the shock melting to understanding. “But, he does serve you? As seneschal, if not servant.” The word seneschal was in Egyptian, not Greek, but it was a word and a concept Chanyeol was familiar with. “He brings you things, he brought us the meal the first night. He cleans after you. He assists your work.”

“And I never get thanks for it,” Kris complained teasingly.

Jongdae cocked his head and looked up at him. “A seneschal is not thanked. Their thanks is their master. They serve their master, so that their master may be free to serve them and others.” Fascinated, Chanyeol gestured for him to go on, and Jongdae did, explaining as if to a child. “My brother, Joonmyun, is Pharaoh. When my aunt leaves this world, he will - ” He choked on his own words, his expression twisting as he remembered.

Chanyeol squeezed his shoulder, trying to be comforting.

“Pardon,” Jongdae murmured. “My brother would have ruled the Kingdoms alone. He could not be troubled with smaller, everyday tasks, for he must see to the armies, the people, the court. This takes
up all his time, his attention. And so, Jongin is his seneschal. Jongin sees to the everyday tasks himself, or through commanding the servants. Jongin serves Joonmyun, so that Joonmyun may serve the kingdom.”

Shit, Jongdae was extraordinarily articulate. Well-educated, bright, observant. It was very difficult to reconcile that with the somewhat barbaric ancient culture Chanyeol unconsciously pictured when he thought of Ancient Egypt. And his Greek was far better than Chanyeol’s or even Kris’s, but that was to be expected. After all, he’d likely learned it firsthand.

“All done,” Jongdae said, sitting up straighter. “I have questions, and now I have words to ask them. Tell me, where am I? And when? And how did I come to be here?”

Settling in, Chanyeol did his best to answer. After a few moments, Kris silently got up and left them there, sitting on the floor of the storage room, talking.

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It must have been many hours later before Kris interrupted them.

“You have been talking for ages,” he said. In Greek, for Jongdae’s benefit, which Jongdae appreciated. “Get out of here. I need to do actual work.”

Chanyeol gestured emphatically between Jongdae and himself. “What do you suppose I have been doing?”

“Courting. Which you can just as easily do elsewhere.” Chanyeol made an affronted noise, and Jongdae blinked. Had he misunderstood? Their accents were a bit inscrutable sometimes. “Perhaps Jongdae would like to see the rest of the museum, now that you could actually answer his questions?”

The word museum was in their native language, but Chanyeol had already explained it when he’d answered the where part of Jongdae’s original questions. “I would indeed like that,” Jongdae agreed.

His expression brightening with excitement, Chanyeol scrambled to his feet, then reached down automatically to help Jongdae up. Hiding his smile, Jongdae allowed Chanyeol to help him, musing again how oversized Chanyeol seemed, his hands engulfing Jongdae’s. Chanyeol had insisted throughout their conversation that he was not a god or born of one, and that his height was not unusual for people of his time, citing Kris as an example. Jongdae still didn’t believe him.

“It’s going to be busy now,” Chanyeol said, “so stay close. I don’t want to lose you in the crowd.” Jongdae nodded, and they left the workshop, climbing the stairs to the public area.

As Chanyeol had predicted, the huge, open spaces of the museum were filled with people, flowing like a river. They entered the flow, and Chanyeol’s hand came up to the middle of Jongdae’s back, a light, guiding touch, barely there. He steered Jongdae back into the rooms filled with the memory of Jongdae’s people, and that is where they began.

Chanyeol told him that these were the oldest works in the museum, that they had very little to remember any culture that came before Jongdae’s. He talked about each piece, particularly the pieces he had discovered and brought back himself - where they were found, what his own people had learned from them. Jongdae corrected him a few times, when history as he knew it didn’t match the
history Chanyeol knew, and each time, Chanyeol lit up like a bonfire, like a sunrise, scholarly excitement over new knowledge.

They spent a long time in the chambers devoted to Jongdae’s aunt and brothers. Here, Jongdae did more talking than Chanyeol, explaining the context for each piece, the politics surrounding it. How Hatshepsut, as the first female Pharaoh in three centuries, had ordered the mass production of statuary to firmly cement herself in the people’s minds as the true Queen, a living goddess just as every other Pharaoh had been a living god.

“So when the Queen passed on, your brother would have ruled alone?” Chanyeol asked curiously. “Were they both happy with that? There was no resentment, no jealousy, between them?”

“Ah, this is a question many have asked,” Jongdae said with a smile. “Hatshepsut is as much a mother to us as Iset, the woman who bore us. She is my aunt and stepmother, but she is my Pharaoh-Mother most of all.” His smile faded. “We love her. Very much. And she loves us, of this I have no doubt. No, there is no ill will between the Pharaohs. Hatshepsut has worked tirelessly to prepare Joonmyun for the day when he will rule alone, and my brother is grateful for all she can teach him. He has lead the armies of the kingdom, in her name, as her general, since he came of age two years ago.”

“That’s beautiful,” Chanyeol said softly. “I am glad that politics hasn’t corrupted your family.”

Jongdae snorted. “Not for lack of the courtiers trying. But what is fated by the Gods is fated by the Gods, and my brother was meant to rule. Hatshepsut knows this, and is proud to be trusted with the task of preparing him.” Jongdae remembered the truth he now knew, that his brother and aunt had both passed only a few short years after he had, and he sighed heavily. “I am sad to say, it does not surprise me to hear that my Queen died young.”

Chanyeol cocked his head. “Why do you say this?” he asked.

“My Queen is ill,” Jongdae murmured. “Was ill. A slow, wasting disease. It was clear the gods meant to take her, sooner rather than later. It was time, we all knew it, anyone could see that Joonmyun was ready to rule on his own, but I wish…” He closed his eyes. “Pharaoh is a position that is kept for life. For my brother to come into his full birthright, we must lose our mother. There is - was - no other way.”

“But he didn’t,” Chanyeol reminded him softly. “He was killed. By accident, or by purposeful assassination, we don’t know.” He studied the damaged statue of Joonmyun, the headless one. Jongdae wondered what he imagined, when he thought of the now long-gone Pharaoh. The sculptors had never captured Joonmyun’s kind smile. “Scholars of this time just assumed that Hatshepsut had ordered him killed. But from what you’re telling me, that doesn’t seem likely. Especially if she was already dying.” He glanced down. “What of her successor? Ahmose II? Or, I suppose you would only have known him as Minseok.”

“Do you have images of him?” Jongdae asked. Chanyeol nodded, and guided him to the other side of the room, where there was a slightly larger than life-size statue. This one was in better condition than the one of Joonmyun, and Jongdae tried not to be bitter about that. “He is our half-brother. A man of loud action and soft words.” Remembering, Jongdae sighed. “Minseok never wanted to be Pharaoh. He would often joke with us that he was glad he was only a third wife’s son, that he might never be bound to the throne.”

“According to what we have found,” Chanyeol told him, “he ruled for twenty years. He named his son co-regent as soon as he came of age, and shifted responsibility to him over the course of several years, before disappearing.” He shook his head. “We found his tomb, and his son’s tomb. They were
stripped completely bare by graverobbers. Nothing left but the carvings on the walls.”

“That is vile,” Jongdae hissed. “To damage the grave is to destroy the soul’s eternal peace. I hope he haunted his defacers for generations. It would be well deserved.”

Chanyeol touched his shoulder reassuringly. “Perhaps he did,” he said. “That was so long ago, we may never know. Here, here is his son. Your nephew.” Guiding him forward, Chanyeol began to tell him about his future, the future he hadn’t lived to see.

It was a powerful thing, to learn about his people in this manner. To see where they had gone, what they had become. To learn how long they had survived.

They moved from that through more chambers, showing other cultures, other lands, centuries upon centuries of human creation. The amount of diverse beauty gathered together in one place was overwhelming, and eventually Jongdae no longer had the words or the energy to ask all the questions swimming through his head about the incredible and increasingly alien artwork.

Chanyeol must have noticed, because he stopped halfway through a story about a painting to ask, “Are you alright?”

Jongdae tried to reassure him with a smile, but he was pretty certain it came out faint. “It’s… so much. So much history, between you and me.” He turned a slow circle, taking in the outlandish fashions and foreign faces and far-away lands depicted all around him. “In the world I know, my family is the pinnacle. My country, the strongest. This, this is…”

“Humbling?” Chanyeol guessed.

“Frightening,” Jongdae corrected him. “You insist that this is not a world of gods, but you have the history of all of humanity contained in one temple. Is this not magic? Is this not a holy place?” He gestured to one of the paintings. “This image here, it is so real, I feel that I could speak to this woman. I feel that she could walk towards me. And yet, the clothes she wears, the shape of her face, the whiteness of her skin, unlike anything I have ever known.” He shook his head. “Apologies. Perhaps we should leave this place.”

“Of course,” Chanyeol said hurriedly. “I’m the one who should be apologies. I have studied this my entire life, but of course all is very new for you.” He was flustered enough to be losing the language, which made Jongdae smile a bit. “We will go home.”

As he began guiding Jongdae through the crowd, Jongdae commented, “You remind me of Sehun.”

“Sehun?” Chanyeol glanced at him, curious. “Ah, yes, I remember. The son of Senenmut? Your… cousin, yes?”

“Yes. My cousin, and my Seneschal, though not officially. My… my Kris.” Chanyeol nodded, understanding the comparison. “He is also a scholar of history. This place, he would…” The image, of how the younger man’s face would light up, how many questions he would ask, how well he and Chanyeol would get along, brought tears to Jongdae’s eyes. Like the rest of his family, Sehun was long, long gone. “He would love it,” Jongdae finished, putting it simply.

Chanyeol squeezed his shoulder, but said nothing.

Outside, there was no wind, but ice bits were falling from the sky again, a soft drifting fall instead of the driving harshness of the first night. Jongdae burrowed into his borrowed coat and hurried to follow Chanyeol to the chariot. He still didn’t know why ice fell from the sky, or how the chariot was able to move without oxen, but he was so overwhelmed with knowledge that he didn’t even
attempt to ask. He just got in when Chanyeol opened the door for him, and tried not to be unsettled by how quickly he had become comfortable with riding inside a blood-red, too-heavy, horseless chariot that roared like a lion when it moved.

Getting in the other side and shutting out the cold, Chanyeol turned to him and asked, “Are you hungry?” Jongdae nodded. “I do not have anything to prepare at home. Would you be interested in going out?”

Frowning, Jongdae asked, “Going out where?”

“To a - I don’t know the word for it in Greek. I’m not sure they had a word for it. There is a place, where people gather. Food, and music. Wine.” He flashed a crooked grin. “We finished my only bottle last night.”

Hmm. Jongdae considered. Food, music, and wine all sounded nice, but the gathering of people sounded tiring. Still, he was curious. “Yes, let’s go out,” he agreed.

Chanyeol’s grin widened, blinding. “Great!” He moved his hands and feet, pressing this and pulling that and turning something else, and the chariot roared to life at his touch.

Jongdae pressed his forehead to the window and watched as the outside world drifted past, trying to see the wonders before him as the natural progression of human society over thousands of years, and not as an alien realm of magical fantasy. It was difficult. But, if this was to be his home now - and it seemed that he had no choice in that - then he had best get used to it, for his own sanity.

It made him realize, for the first time, how very lucky he was to have Chanyeol at his side. Another man could have cast him out, in fear or disgust. Another man may not have been willing to share his home, his food, his bed; to spend an entire day speaking a long-dead language just so that Jongdae could ask questions.

“Thank you, Mother Hathor, for your gifts to me,” Jongdae murmured, switching back to his comfortable, familiar Egyptian. “For your protection, I honor you. For your son, I praise you.”

Chanyeol glanced at him. “You pray to Hathor?” he asked softly. Jongdae nodded, surprised that Chanyeol recognized the name of his goddess. “Your aunt, Hatshepsut, she built a sanctuary dedicated to Hathor at her burial temple.”

It pleased Jongdae that even after all these years, his aunt’s devotion was known. “As my Pharaoh, Hatshepsut’s goddess is Sekhmet.”

Chanyeol nodded. “The lioness of war.”

“You have studied our gods?”

“Of course I have.” Again, Chanyeol flashed him a glance, a quick smile before he had to return his attention to driving the chariot. “One of my favorite subjects, especially as a youth.”

The image of Chanyeol as a gangly, wide-eyed youth, eagerly learning of a culture long-past, made Jongdae smile. “As my aunt, though, Hatshepsut’s goddess is Hathor, and always has been. Hathor was also my birth-mother’s favored goddess. Hathor guards my family, guards me. She sent you to me. To guide me.”

Chanyeol’s brow furrowed. “You believe Hathor sent me to you? Why?”

“Because you are too perfect to not be holy in some way, and Hathor is the god I see most in you.”
That seemed to catch Chanyeol by surprise. Either he was a good actor, or he was completely unaware of the divine touch Jongdae saw in him. Having gotten to know him more today, Jongdae suspected the latter. “Truly? Of all the gods your people worshiped, you see the god of childbirth in me?”

That made Jongdae laugh. “Hathor is much more than that,” he pointed out, “though I would not be surprised if your virility alone was more than enough evidence of her interest in you.” Chanyeol abruptly flushed, his pale skin turning bright red. “You may deny it, but I know divinity when I see it. I was raised alongside a god.”

“You compare me to your brother,” Chanyeol said softly. “That’s high praise. Thank you.”

Jongdae reached out and touched Chanyeol’s knee, the way Chanyeol had often done to comfort him. “There is a light about certain people, that marks them as great,” he murmured. “My brother has it. My aunt has it. And so do you.” He turned his head to contemplate the mass of buildings and people outside the chariot. “This world I now live in is different and frightening. I am blessed to have you to guide me.”

Chanyeol dropped his hand from the wheel, covering Jongdae’s, but he said nothing.

As they left the chariot and walked up the street, Chanyeol explained more about where they were going. “We call it a club,” he said. “A few years ago, the sale of alcohol was made illegal, so places like this are…” He grinned. “They don’t exist, officially.”


“Political reasons. Most people find it unnecessary, which is why these places appeared. I just wanted to warn you, so if we need to leave quickly, you would know why.”

Oh. Jongdae stepped closer to Chanyeol. “Does that happen often? Are we in danger?”

“No, not often, and probably not.” Chanyeol smiled and patted his back. “Don’t worry, Your Highness. I’ll protect you.”

That made Jongdae smile. “My loyal guard?”

“Absolutely.” Chanyeol bowed, with a silly flourish, and Jongdae laughed.

He was glad that Chanyeol had warned him, though, because otherwise he would really be questioning the wisdom of entering a dirty, claustrophobic alley between buildings, to knock on a metal-barred door with a small cutout through which a man’s suspicious eyes stared. Chanyeol exchanged words with the man through the cutout, and then the door opened, leading to a darkened staircase.

At the top of the stairs, through another door, the space beyond was completely different. It was open, with a high ceiling, and it seemed richly decorated to Jongdae’s eyes, with carved dark wood and golden lights. Playful music, of the style Chanyeol had played for him the night before, was coming from a group of musicians in the corner. People, mostly young people but some older, were eating, drinking, dancing, laughing, talking. Voices were hushed but energetic, as if everyone in the
room was sharing some delightful secret.

Fascinated, Jongdae followed Chanyeol unseeingy, preoccupied by watching the people. Chanyeol led him to a table in the back corner, and asked him what he would like to eat. This lead to a long conversation about the foods served, and Chanyeol ended up ordering for Jongdae, requesting something from the pretty young serving girl who came to the table. He also seemed completely oblivious to the way the girl was eyeing him, which Jongdae found amusing.

While they waited, Chanyeol asked that Jongdae tell him about his family, his brother. Jongdae started to talk about his childhood, warming up to the topic, and found it to be soothing to his nerves to speak of something so familiar. And Chanyeol seemed completely engrossed, watching him with wide, interested eyes, all through the meal and their drinks and even after.

Eventually, though, they were interrupted. A young woman - not the serving girl, but a patron, in a very flashy dress - came to the table and greeted them. Chanyeol smiled at her and they conversed for a moment, while Jongdae watched them, trying to determine the context of the conversation from tone and body language alone.

Chanyeol turned to him. “She wants me to dance with her,” he said. “Will you be alright here for a little while?” Caught off-guard, Jongdae nodded reflexively. “Alright, I will be back soon!”

He got up, and took the woman’s hand, and led her to the dance floor.

Jongdae sank back into the booth seat, picking up his drink and sipping as he watched. He hadn’t guessed Chanyeol was a dancer, and the dancing of this time and place was so wildly different from anything he had seen, he was very curious as to how this would go.

To his shock, Chanyeol was a surprisingly good dancer. Not naturally graceful, but practiced. The song was a fast one, and the dance was energetic, with partners spinning around each other and complicated footwork. It was fun to watch, and so watch Jongdae did. He did observe some of the other couples, but his eyes kept drifting back to Chanyeol, more sure than ever before that the goddess had blessed him.

Chanyeol was flushed from the exertion, a huge, exhilarated smile splitting his face, and he was just so, so handsome. He said something wry, and the girl laughed, throwing her head back shamelessly.

Something uneasy began curling in Jongdae’s gut.

The music changed, to something with a slower, less hectic beat. With it, so also did the dance change, as men around the room pulled their partners closer to them. The crowd calmed, no longer swirling like eddies in a pool.

The girl tucked herself against Chanyeol’s side, rested her hand on his shoulder and her forearm on his upper arm. He curled one large hand around her back, making her seem small, and clasped her hand in his other. Still amicably chatting, they rocked in slow patterns, moving across the floor.

Jongdae shifted in his seat. His drink was gone now, so he set the cup down, feeling the alcohol buzz through his blood. He wasn’t sure he liked this dancing business anymore. No, more accurately, he wasn’t sure he liked Chanyeol dancing with someone else. The dancing itself was fine.

But he was the stranger here, so he stayed where he was, absently spinning his glass on the table with his eyes glued to Chanyeol’s back.

That lasted through an entire song, but right around the beginning of the next song, the woman reached up on tiptoe to whisper into Chanyeol’s ear. Chanyeol tugged her close, leaning down to
hear her better, and the woman steadied herself with hands on his chest, and Jongdae was on his feet and halfway across the room before he realized he was moving.

Chanyeol spotted him over the woman’s shoulder, his eyes widening in surprise. “Jongdae?”

“We are leaving now,” Jongdae told him, in no uncertain terms. He took Chanyeol’s hand off of the woman, grabbing him by the wrist, and tugged.

Flustered, Chanyeol said something in his own language, then blinked, realized, and switched to Greek. “I have to pay for our food before we leave,” he pointed out.

“Then do,” Jongdae snapped. Chanyeol turned to the woman and made his excuses, then went to the man behind the counter and paid, shooting Jongdae worried looks the entire time. Jongdae lead him outside as soon as possible.

The moment the metal door closed behind them, Chanyeol asked, “What’s wrong?” His hands came up to cup Jongdae’s shoulders instinctively, and Jongdae wished he didn’t have to wear this heavy coat. “Have I offended you? I’m sorry.”

“Why were you like that with her?” Jongdae wanted to know. “Touching her like that?”

Chanyeol looked confused, worried, apologetic, and for some reason that upset Jongdae even more. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know it would offend you. It’s normal here, that kind of thing is normal. I won’t take you there again.”

“Answer me!” Jongdae found himself in Chanyeol’s space, pushing right up against him, blocking him against the wall. “Why did you touch her like that?!”

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol said, very gently, “it was just dancing.”

Jongdae surged up and kissed him.

Shocked, Chanyeol froze. Jongdae stayed where he was, his mouth pressed to Chanyeol’s, tasting the alcohol he was drinking, living in the heat of his mouth. After a moment, the shock melted, and Chanyeol’s arms wound around Jongdae’s waist. He pulled Jongdae closer and opened his mouth. Sighing in relief, Jongdae kissed Chanyeol thoroughly. A vague thought crossed his mind, that it was interesting to note that absolutely nothing about kissing had changed in several thousand years, and that this was the most in tune the two of them had yet been. The rest of his attention, however, was too busy wanting to climb up Chanyeol’s long frame to pay attention to such philosophical thoughts.

Too quickly, Chanyeol pushed Jongdae away, gentle but firm. “We can’t,” he said softly. “We can’t, I’m sorry.”

Immediately, Jongdae’s upset came crashing back. “Why not?” he demanded. “You can hold a woman like you intend to bed her, but you can’t kiss me?”

Chanyeol’s eyes fluttered closed, pained. “Yes,” he admitted. “Come on, it’s cold.”

He started down the alley towards the street, leaving Jongdae scrambling to catch up.

xXxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx
Chanyeol knew that Jongdae was upset, but frankly, he was too shaken to try to fix it that night.

Jongdae had kissed him. And Chanyeol’s mind was all balled up because of it.

Not because of the kiss itself, of course. That was fine. Better than fine. A whole lot better than fine. That part was just ducky. It was the rest of it, the context, the implications, that kept Chanyeol up that night.

Point one: Jongdae was attracted to him. Or was he? It seemed like it, but considering Jongdae’s circumstances, could he just be latching onto the only person who had shown him kindness in a strange place? Jongdae had only been in the world for less than three full days. They’d only just begun really communicating a few hours prior!

Point two: apparently, Jongdae saw absolutely nothing wrong with men kissing men. Which implied he saw nothing wrong with men getting physical with men, since that was not a just-friendly kiss. As a historian, that was absolutely fascinating to Chanyeol, an exciting new discovery about a culture long gone. As a modern Catholic, though, it was bloody confusing. And distressing, because if Jongdae’s culture didn’t believe it was wrong, how in God’s name was Chanyeol going to explain the modern viewpoint to him? Would he even understand?

Point three: Jongdae, apparently, had gotten jealous of Chanyeol dancing with Sooyoung. Really jealous, and possessive. Chanyeol had known Sooyoung his entire life, so the idea of someone getting jealous of her was baloney. She wasn’t just another skirt, she was practically his sister.

But of course, Jongdae couldn’t have known that. Chanyeol hadn’t stopped to try to explain, hadn’t taken the time to figure out the words in Greek. Just swanned off to hoof it with his friend without thinking about how Jongdae would react.

Point four: Chanyeol was an idiot.

It was all of that, but mostly the last bit, that kept Chanyeol tossing and turning on the couch all night long. Around sunrise, he gave up, and went out onto his tiny balcony to light up.

He probably shouldn’t have been surprised when Jongdae joined him only a few minutes later, barefoot but wrapped in a blanket.

“Aren’t you cold?” Jongdae asked, sounding sleepy, and grumpy. “The bitter winds of the Afterlife blow through this place.”

His very existence was a marvel, and his relatable humanity only made him more fascinating. He was so different, so strange, but so, so human, too. Chanyeol wanted to pull him close, warm him up, protect him. If it was yesterday, he would have, without a thought. But now, he was second-guessing everything, so he kept his distance, saying only, “I’m used to it.”

Jongdae leaned on the railing, glancing down into the alleyway and to the right at the street, before turning back to Chanyeol and jerking his head at the cigarette. “What are you doing?”

Neither Ancient Greek nor Ancient Egyptian had a word for smoking, as far as Chanyeol knew. “Breathing the smoke helps calm me,” he said instead, a clumsy explanation. “But I can’t do this
inside, the smoke can damage my…” Neither language had a word for books, either. Books wouldn’t be invented for over a thousand years. “My treasures.”

“So you stand in the cold, to calm yourself?” Jongdae asked, very skeptically.

Chanyeol couldn’t help but laugh. “You may not have realized this yet, but I don’t always make the most sensible decisions.”

Jongdae snorted, and went silent, watching the street and shivering. Chanyeol took a long drag of his cigarette, and a deep breath.

“Jongdae… I’m sorry. I pushed you away.”

Still not looking at him, Jongdae nodded. “You did.”

“It wasn’t because of you.” Chanyeol mirrored Jongdae’s position, leaning his forearms on the railing with the half-gone cig dangling between loose fingers. “I don’t want you to think it was because of you.”

Another nod. “It was because of the woman,” Jongdae guessed.

Wait. Shit. “No, no,” Chanyeol said immediately. “That woman, she is a friend. She was close with my sister, when we were children. She is not - We are not - There is nothing between us.” He had no idea if his point was coming across correctly, and it pained him. He was used to being articulate. Verbose, even. “She is as a sister to me.” This didn’t seem to make an impression on Jongdae, and Chanyeol abruptly remembered that Jongdae’s own father had married his sister. He tried again. “I have no… sexual interest in her.”

That got his attention. Jongdae looked over, eyeing him. “Why not?” he asked shrewdly. “She is a beautiful woman.”

Chanyeol shook his head and searched his mind for the right words. “I have no interest in women at all,” he finally admitted. Very quietly, and only because he couldn’t think of another way to say it.

Jongdae showed absolutely no surprise. “Neither do I,” he said. Simply. Easily. As if he didn’t even have the thought that he might be condemned for it. “But I have interest in you.”

Shakily, Chanyeol took another drag. “I know,” he said, because he wasn’t an idiot. “But. Here, that is… In my religion, it’s not…” His eyes fluttered shut. “I don’t know what words to use.”

A small, cold hand slid tentatively over Chanyeol’s wrist. “This troubles you greatly,” Jongdae observed, sounding surprised. “I didn’t realize. Why?”

How to explain? “In my culture,” Chanyeol tried, “men like me, who wish to lie with other men. They are condemned. Reviled.”

Dark eyes went very, very wide. “What? Why?”

“It is wrong,” Chanyeol said, because there was no other way to put it. “We are taught that it is wrong. It is an affront to our God.”

“But why? There is no harm in this.”

Chanyeol laughed, but it wasn’t a happy laugh. “I don’t honestly know,” he murmured. “But I was taught this from when I was very, very young. It’s… it’s a hard thing to unlearn.”
Jongdae nodded, and leaned close, pressing his shoulder to Chanyeol’s. He was so cold, but he was trying to lend his strength to Chanyeol anyway, and Chanyeol gave in and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. “I understand now,” Jongdae said. “Why you pushed me away. But you don’t have to. I do not revile you. I will not judge you. Perhaps you are wrong in the eyes of your God, but in my eyes, you are perfect.”

Christ. For the first time in a long time, Chanyeol silently prayed, for forgiveness, understanding, strength. And he pulled Jongdae close and kissed him.

Instantly, Jongdae turned towards him, melting into his embrace. Encouraging him. Reassuring him. Also, kissing the crap out of him. His tiny frame fit perfectly into Chanyeol’s arms, and when Chanyeol burrowed a hand under the blanket, he found bare skin. Jongdae was only wearing Chanyeol’s shirt around his waist again.

Unable to resist, Chanyeol slid his hand down until it curved over Jongdae’s ass. He managed to resist squeezing it, but Jongdae immediately responded anyway, mewling into Chanyeol’s mouth and squirming closer. His response was so enthusiastic, so completely without restraint, that Chanyeol was jarred back to reality, and abruptly pulled away.

Jongdae pouted at him. Chanyeol squeezed his eyes shut, his heart thunking oddly. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.


Putting out his cigarette, Chanyeol followed Jongdae inside. The apartment felt like a sauna compared to the biting wind outdoors, and Jongdae immediately shed his blanket, completely unselfconscious. Chanyeol envied him that.

Dragging Chanyeol down onto the couch, Jongdae asked, “You have a sister?” He was obviously trying to change the subject, and Chanyeol appreciated it. He started telling Jongdae about Yura, about growing up as second-generation immigrants in the Lower East Side. Jongdae listened to his stilted Greek with rapt attention, asking questions and distracting Chanyeol from noticing how closely he was cuddling up. It was easier to accept his attentions while talking, and soon Chanyeol was sprawled out comfortably with Jongdae half in his lap.

It was far, far too easy to hold Jongdae, to cuddle him, be intimate with him, and Chanyeol tried not to think about it too much. He was in the privacy of his own home. Anyone who had a problem could shove it.

It was much easier to think tough in his head than to be unaffected in real life, though, and when the phone suddenly rang, Chanyeol jumped, his heart pounding like he’d been caught breaking the law. Jongdae, wide-eyed and alarmed, asked, “What’s that?”

There was no Greek word for phone, of course, so Chanyeol didn’t answer, he just got up and picked up the call. “Park speaking.”

“You’re coming into work today, right?” Kris asked, without preamble.

Chanyeol blinked, reflexively glancing at the clock. “Yeah, of course, but it’s only seven-thirty. Why?”

“Well I’ve been going through these artifacts -”

“Kris. Did you even go home last night?”
“Nope. Listen, I found something. You need to see it. Jongdae needs to see it. Jongdae needs to tell us what it means. Get your asses in here.”

Kris hung up. Chanyeol blinked, then turned to Jongdae. “I guess we’re needed at the museum.”

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At Chanyeol’s urging, Jongdae again put on layers of restrictive clothing and a heavy coat and followed him out into the cold. They picked up food from a different establishment, this time, and then went to the museum. Kris was already there - or still there, if the state of his clothes and hair was any indication.

“Good, you’re here,” Kris said, in Greek. “Jongdae, I have something to show you.”

He reached, as if to grab Jongdae’s hand, and Jongdae stepped back even as Chanyeol stepped forward protectively. Kris stopped, looked between them, and snorted a little laugh, then instead beckoned Jongdae over to one of the worktables.

There was a papyrus scroll spread out on the table, with ancient, curled edges weighed down by cups and bound papers. It wasn’t very large, perhaps just big enough for a cat to lay upon it, and the writing was faded, but still surprisingly legible.

“Where was this?” Chanyeol asked, coming around to Jongdae’s side. “I don’t remember seeing it when we were packing things up.”

“It was inside one of the canopic jars,” Kris told him. “I found it amongst the pottery shards.”

Jongdae looked up sharply. “A scroll was interred with my organs?” he asked sharply.

“I take it that’s not a normal practice?”

“No,” Jongdae confirmed. “Not at all.”

Chanyeol nudged him. “What does it say?”

Translating it into Greek slowed him down, but the message was not long. “If my prince shall read this, my prince shall come find my place of rest, and I shall bring my prince again home.” Jongdae’s eyes widened. “Sehun. That’s his seal. Gods of sea and sand, Sehun.”

“Did you just swear?” Kris asked, but Chanyeol seemed to understand the implications, his fingers dancing over the papyrus.

“Your seneschal?” Chanyeol ran his finger over the cartouche seal. “If he put this in your canopic jars, it had to have been after you had passed. But he’s addressing you as if you are alive. If my prince shall read this.”

Kris caught up. “He knew this would happen. He knew Jongdae would be resurrected. And that could only be if…”

“If he was the one who did it,” Jongdae whispered. “That tablet, the lapis tablet you found in my mouth. Let me see it.”
Kris fetched it and handed it over.

“Don’t read it aloud,” Chanyeol cautioned.

Jongdae blinked up at him. “Why?”

“That’s what… what brought you back.”

“Ah.” Examining the tablet, Jongdae shrugged. “Well, if there are no other mummies near, it should be safe enough.” And there, yes, it took him a bare second to see it. “Sehun wrote this.”

Leaning over his shoulder, Chanyeol regarded the tablet curiously. “How do you know?”

“Here.” Jongdae pointed at the character heh. “It is a rope, yes? Sehun’s were always twisted the wrong direction.” He demonstrated with flicks of his hand, as if holding a stylus. “The lines to represent the twist should go diagonally from upper right to lower left, but Sehun always drew them left to right. His father reprimanded him many times, but he never changed it.” Jongdae looked over his shoulder at Chanyeol. “Sehun preferred to write with his left hand. He said, for him, this way was faster.”

Kris caught Chanyeol’s eye. “A southpaw,” he murmured. Jongdae didn’t know what that meant, exactly, but Chanyeol chuckled, his cheeks pinking.

“So, what does it mean?” Chanyeol asked. “I was able to speak the sounds, but I couldn’t comprehend the meaning. There are no determinatives.”

Jongdae ran his fingers over the carving. “It does not mean anything,” he murmured. “It is nonsense. These are not words, only sounds.” He cocked his head. “And you are right, there are no determinatives. It must have been meant to be without meaning.” He turned the tablet over, running his hands over the binding. It was finely done, intricate patterns beaten into the soft metal.

On the bottom edge, his fingers caught on something carved into the beaten electrum. A date. “The eighth year of the reign of Ahmose III,” he read aloud.

“Ahmose III was your nephew, right?” Kris asked. “Your half-brother’s son?”

“I suppose,” Jongdae muttered. “Minseok had no wife when I last saw him, let alone a son.” He did the math, his fingers working nimbly as he counted out the years. “You told me that Minseok ruled for twenty years, yes? If that is so, then…” His eyes widened. “This was carved thirty years after my… death.”

“Wait.” Kris’s eyes drifted up to the ceiling as he tried to replicate the math. His method for counting on his fingers was very different, but obviously achieved the same end. “Ahmose II took power when?”

“Joonmyun passed a year after Jongdae,” Chanyeol said. “Queen Hatshepsut, a year after that. Two, plus twenty, plus eight. Thirty years.” He looked at Jongdae. “How old was Sehun, when you… when you last saw him?”

Jongdae huffed in disbelief. “Seventeen,” he said. “Two years younger than I. When he carved this, he would have been forty-seven. An old man.”

Kris cocked an eyebrow. “Forty-seven isn’t that old,” he said.

“It is when your maximum life expectancy is sixty,” Chanyeol pointed out, and wait, that implied
people lived longer in this time. How much longer? Jongdae had assumed from his good health and bright complexion that Chanyeol was not much older than he, was that assumption wrong? “You know… something like this. Magic, or… or a lost science, or whatever it is that your Sehun accomplished here. It must have taken him years to learn it, to figure it out. Decades.” Chanyeol took a breath. “For all we know, this was his life’s work. Finding a way to resurrect you.” He eyed Jongdae carefully. “You must have been extremely close.”

“We were,” Jongdae confirmed. “My blood brother was always away, learning at my Queen’s side or serving in the army. Sehun was my companion for my entire life.” He ran his thumb over the tablet, his heart glowing with pride and regret. “Senenmut was a great scientist, astronomer, magician. I always knew Sehun would someday be greater still. He was quiet, but he was so, so clever.”

“I still think it’s strange that someone would go to such lengths for this,” Kris muttered. “Why Jongdae? Was it only because Sehun missed him, or was there something more to it?”

Jongdae wished he could remember how he had died. That had something to do with it, he was certain of it. “Was Sehun’s tomb ever found?” he asked.

Kris and Chanyeol exchanged glances. “I don’t think so,” Chanyeol said slowly. “I don’t remember hearing about it.”

“I’ll look it up,” Kris said. He waved a hand at the scroll, the ceramic shards of the canopic jars, the tablet. “See if you can figure anything else out about this stuff in the meantime.”

So Jongdae and Chanyeol sat down at the desk and started looking everything over. Sounding out the tablet incantation aloud, examining the scroll closely for more clues. Unfortunately, by the time Kris returned, they had found absolutely nothing else.

“I don’t think Sehun’s tomb was ever found,” Kris said. “The only tombs we have from that time period were empty, but we were able to identify who they were meant for by carvings left on the walls. And he was high-ranked enough to be fully mummified and entombed?”

Jongdae nodded. “He was the Queen Pharaoh’s son. A bastard son, unable to claim the throne, but of royal blood nonetheless, and his position at Court held high honor.”

Kris shook his head. “Then no, he was not found.”

“So he might still be buried out there,” Chanyeol said. “Hidden, as you were.” Then, his eyes widened. “Wait, if Sehun was the one who wrote this, that means he must have been the one to hide your tomb.”

What? This was new information. “My tomb was hidden?”

“Yes. Sealed behind a wall in Hatshepsut’s burial temple. Sehun must have entered your tomb, unwrapped your face, put the tablet in your mouth, then re-wrapped you and sealed you away, hiding you from robbers. It wasn’t an accident that your grave was the only one untouched.”

“He had to have opened a canopic jar and sealed the scroll inside, as well,” Kris pointed out. “That’s a lot of work to go through, and considering he was breaking into a royal tomb, it’s likely he did it alone.”

“Unless Jongin helped him,” Jongdae theorized. “They were very close, in age, in rank, in position. They spent much time together. And Jongin would have…” The very idea of it made tears spring to Jongdae’s eyes. “Jongin would have been destroyed by my brother’s death. Especially if he was
“So then, why only you, and not your brother, the heir to the throne?” Kris asked. “Not that I don’t enjoy your company, Jongdae, but it would seem that Joonmyun would be a more likely choice.”

“Maybe Sehun set both of them up,” Chanyeol wondered. “Thutmose III’s tomb was robbed, remember? Maybe he had a tablet like this, a scroll interred with his organs. We would never know. All the treasures of his tomb were stolen by Romans around the turn of the millennium.” He shook his head. “Even his body was robbed. They unwrapped him, stole all of the talismans that had been inside the bindings, and then dumped his corpse on the floor.”

“Chanyeol,” Kris said, warningly. Probably because Jongdae had gone pale, bile rising in his stomach. The idea of his brother’s sacred body being treated like a… He was going to be sick.

Chanyeol took one look at him and swore in his own language. “I’m so sorry, I wasn’t thinking,” he said quickly. “I’m sorry, Jongdae.”

“It’s alright,” Jongdae breathed, even though it wasn’t, at all. Thousands of years, he reminded himself. The criminals who did it were thousands of years gone.

“In any case,” Kris said quickly, “the reasoning is immaterial. You are now resurrected, and the only clue we have is Sehun asking you to find his place of rest.”

Chanyeol dropped his chin into his hand, blowing long strands of red out of his pale eyes. “Why?” he asked. “This is an immense, impossible amount of work, for no obvious reason. He must have dedicated his entire life to figuring out how to do it. For what purpose?”

A good question, and one that already burned like a hot coal in Jongdae’s mind. “Until I know why he did this, I will not be able to rest,” he said. “We have to find Sehun’s tomb.”
Chapter 5

Convincing the Director of the Met to authorize another expedition to Egypt was easier than Chanyeol anticipated. All he’d had to do was tell the Director that evidence they’d found in the tomb pointed to the existence of another untouched tomb from the same era in the same area, which wasn’t even a lie. The Director agreed with Chanyeol that it was important they find the tomb before any grave robbers or art thieves or rival museums did, and so they had their permission, and tickets on an ocean liner leaving in only two weeks. They’d be back on Egyptian soil within a month.

Convincing the Director to let Kyungsoo accompany them was much more difficult, but Kris absolutely insisted on it. They needed someone to help watch Jongdae’s back, he’d said, and Kyungsoo had apparently been making noises about wanting to go on a dig for some time anyway. Chanyeol thought the excuses sounded flimsy, but he didn’t fight it. If Kris wanted to show off to his crush, Chanyeol wasn’t about to get in the way.

Chanyeol expected the hardest part would be getting Jongdae passage on the ship, but to his surprise, Kyungsoo handled it, returning one night with a ticket of passage and identification papers that named Jongdae “Kim Chen,” a university student visiting from Greece. He didn’t volunteer where he’d gotten obviously forged legal documents, and Chanyeol did not ask.

All that was left, then, was to learn as much from Jongdae as he could.

They spent every waking moment together. Jongdae taught him to write the language, to read it, to speak it, to understand it. He taught him about the religion of his time, about the politics, the history, the culture. The science and technology. Chanyeol’s head start was helpful, but Chanyeol was shocked at how much the scholars had gotten wrong, how much misinformation he had to unlearn. He threw himself into it eagerly, pestering Jongdae constantly. Jongdae, bless him, seemed more than happy to share his culture, to talk about his homeland, to teach.

Jongdae represented Chanyeol’s Holy Grail of knowledge and learning. Chanyeol told himself that that was why he was so obsessed with spending time with the displaced prince, because Jongdae could teach him what no one else could. Not… any other reason.

It had nothing to do with the way his bedsheets smelled these days. Or the way Jongdae would squirm his way under Chanyeol’s arm when Chanyeol was reading aloud from Egyptian texts, practicing his pronunciation. Or how Jongdae now had a small wardrobe of his own, classy tailored clothes that made his lithe form look sharp, but he still dressed only in Chanyeol’s white shirt, kilted around his waist, when they were at home.

It had nothing to do with how adorable Jongdae’s shock was when he discovered Chanyeol’s red hair was dyed, or the way he somehow managed to charm all the ladies at the salon without speaking a word of English, or the way he laughed at Chanyeol’s hair all wrapped in smelly chemicals but wouldn’t stop staring in awe at the final, bright-copper result.

It certainly didn’t have anything to do with how Jongdae took every opportunity to steal a kiss, swift and light. Or how, despite his fears, Chanyeol’s will to push him away was crumbling fast.

XxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx
Yura opened the door with a smile. Chanyeol smiled back and held up the cat carrier.

Immediately, Yura’s face fell. “For cryin’ out loud.”

He didn’t get a chance to answer; a moment later a couple of high-pitched tots barrelled past their mom and right into Chanyeol’s legs, yelling “Uncle Chanyeol! Uncle Chanyeol!” Laughing, Chanyeol pushed Freyja into Yura’s arms, box and all, and picked up the closest kid, swinging her up into his arms. The other one ended up on Kris’s hip, and Yura rolled her eyes and stepped back to let them all into the house.

That was how they stood when Yura saw Jongdae, and cocked her head curiously. “Yura,” Chanyeol said as he adjusted his grip on his niece, “this is Chen. I told you over the phone.”

“Yeah, I remember.” Setting the carrier down on the sideboard, Yura nodded her head and twiddled her fingers in a little wave. “Hi, Chen.”

“Hello,” Jongdae said, with a little nod of his own. It was the one of the few words he knew, and somehow his accent was still so thick it could barely be understood. But he smiled, bright and pretty, and Chanyeol could tell Yura was struggling to hold back the urge to coo. She got that look around other people’s puppies, too.

“You said he doesn’t speak any English, right?”

“Not a lick. Kris and I can speak to him though, so if you wanna chat him up, one of us will translate.” He turned to Jongdae and switched to Greek, since his Egyptian was still squeaky. “Take off your coat, it’s alright.”

So Jongdae took off his coat - used, but purchased for him, so it actually fit him correctly - and followed Chanyeol into the house.

Thanksgiving at the Parks’ was always a relatively noisy affair, if for no other reason than the Parks just being generally loud people. Between the Park siblings, the kids, and Yura’s equally loud Italian-born husband, even with Chanyeol’s parents gone now the house was lively and cheerful.

Jongdae looked completely lost, staying close to Chanyeol’s side. He ate carefully but seemed to enjoy the meal, watched the conversation without participating but seemed to enjoy observing. Then, after dinner, he caught the kids’ attention, and, well, apparently one didn’t need to speak the language in order to pretend to be a monster and chase the kids all over the house.

With Jongdae entertaining the rugrats and Kris distracting Yura’s husband with small talk about the Yankees, Yura tugged Chanyeol into the kitchen.

“Yeol. Level with me. You said you’d be home for Christmas this year.”

Chanyeol sighed. He was hoping, that by telling her on the holiday, he’d somehow avoid this conversation. “Something came up. We’re leaving Sunday.”

Her eyes widened. “Yeollie. You’ve only been home for a few weeks!”
“Ahhhh, don’t give me that face,” Chanyeol groaned. “This could be really big, Yura, really big. We can’t wait, and even if we could, the Museum wouldn’t want us to.” He shrugged, glancing into the living room, where Jongdae was holding his nephew piggyback. “And we’ve gotta get Chen home.”

Yura pursed her lips. “How long are you gonna do this, Yeol? You’re comin up on thirty fast. Ain’t you ever gonna settle down?”

“Yura.”

“It’s a valid question! I don’t like seeing you alone all the time, kid.”

Chanyeol spread his arms out to gesture at the chaos around them. “Do I look lonely?” he asked.

Huffing, Yura crossed her arms and gave him a Look.

Goddamnit. “I love my work,” Chanyeol told her, not for the first time. “I don’t need to handcuff myself to some skirt to be happy. And I don’t need you henning me, either, ma.”

“Chanyeol,” Yura said, sighing. “I - damnit, kid, I know. But you’re gone for months at a time, and with the things you hear on the radio, I just…” She closed her eyes. “I don’t ever want to tell my kids they ain’t gonna see their uncle no more.”

Chanyeol pulled her into a hug. “I ain’t goin nowhere, sis,” he murmured. “But I ain’t gonna stop doing this, either. It’s my calling.”

“Yeah.” She knocked her head into his shoulder. “I know. And we’re proud, you know? The kids tell their friends about you and the ladies at the hen coop always want to hear stories.” Reaching up, she tweaked his nose. “Next year, you’ll be home for Christmas, alright? That’s an order.”

He grinned and ruffled her hair. “Yes, ma’am.”

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November 27, 1927
New York Harbor
New York City, NY, USA

According to Chanyeol, the ship was named the SS George Washington, after a near-mythical historical figure from several generations ago.

That was interesting, and all, but Jongdae was mostly concerned with how the ship was literally the most massive man-made thing he’d ever seen.

“This can float?” he asked under his breath, staring up at the monstrous, metal machine. It had to be at least six times the size of the Royal Palace where Jongdae grew up, huge and sprawling.

“A ship this big barely feels the waves,” Chanyeol told him as they lined up with the crowd. “Unless there’s a storm, of course.”

“Or an iceberg,” Kris mumbled, and Chanyeol immediately elbowed him.
Jongdae didn’t know what an iceberg was, and he didn’t ask. He only watched in silent awe as dozens upon dozens of people walked up the ramps and disappeared into the belly of the beast. “How many will be aboard?” he asked.

“Nearly three thousand,” Chanyeol murmured. “I wish we could have gotten first-class tickets. You deserve the finest, Your Highness.” He flashed a grin. “But the museum would only pay for third-class. We’ll have two cabins, one for you and me, and one for Kris and Kyungsoo, with a chamber pot between us.”

At the sound of his name, Kyungsoo briefly glanced at Chanyeol, then went back to watching the crowd. Chanyeol and Jongdae mostly conversed in Egyptian now, and Jongdae stuck to Greek with Kris, but he had no language in common with Kyungsoo. That was alright - one of the others was always around to translate, and over the weeks Jongdae and Kyungsoo had developed a habit of communicating in gestures and facial expressions alone. The soldier was a quiet, serious man, but now that he was more familiar with Kyungsoo, Jongdae felt he could trust him. There were worse people to have as a guard.

“And the trip will take only three weeks?” Jongdae asked. Chanyeol had tried to show him how far they had to go, but the distance was genuinely too far for Jongdae to comprehend. The world was so much larger than he’d ever, ever suspected.

“Twenty days on the sea,” Chanyeol confirmed, “assuming there are no delays. Another day of travel by riverboat.” He quirked a smile. “And two days of travel by camel.”

That last word was not one Jongdae knew, though it sounded Egyptian. “Camel?” he asked.

Chanyeol blinked at him. “Yes. Camels. Large animals, for riding or carrying loads. Very odd-looking, smelly, but very capable in the desert.” Jongdae knew his expression was blank. “You… don’t know what I’m talking about? You didn’t have camels?”

“We have oxen,” Jongdae said. “Bull oxen and cow oxen. But they are not for riding.”

“But there are accounts of camels in Egypt going back millennia,” Chanyeol said, confused. “Long before your time.”

Kyungsoo tapped them both on the arm and nodded ahead, warning them that they were nearly to the front of the line. Chanyeol and Kris hurriedly pulled out their papers, and with some nervous trepidation, Jongdae did as well.

The official at the bottom of the ramp asked him a question, but Chanyeol smoothly jumped in, spinning some story with a winning smile. Jongdae stood up straight and tried not to appear in any way untrustworthy.

It took a moment, and some conversation, but eventually, the official waved them through, and the four of them began to climb the ramp. Jongdae clutched at Chanyeol’s arm, making Chanyeol look down at him.

“You’re not afraid of heights, are you?” he asked.

“No,” Jongdae murmured. “I am afraid of things I don’t understand.”

Chanyeol’s face softened. He slid his hand down Jongdae’s arm and intertwined their fingers, hidden between their bodies from the crowd.
Normally, Chanyeol was very twitchy about touching another man in public, particularly a young, attractive man whom he was attracted to. Something about the press of the crowd, the anonymity in the sea of faces, made him feel bolder than usual, and Jongdae’s fingers felt good between his own, like they belonged there.

“Hey,” Kris murmured. “Soo and I are gonna take the luggage to our rooms. Why don'tcha take Jongdae up to the observation deck?”

Chanyeol nodded. “Good idea, thanks.” And then, in Egyptian, “Come on, Jongdae, this way.”

This was probably the sixth trans-Atlantic voyage Chanyeol had made, and it wasn’t his first time aboard the George Washington, so he had a pretty good idea where he was going. His height and size was an advantage, allowing him to push through the crowd, with Jongdae following close in his wake.

They had to climb four levels to get to the observation deck, and there were already dozens of people up there. Chanyeol muscled his way through the press of people to the railing, carving out a spot for himself and Jongdae overlooking the harbor.

New York Harbor was spread out all around them, with the city skyline framed against the early morning sunlight. Jongdae swayed a little, gripping the railing with wide eyes, and Chanyeol put an arm around his back to steady him.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” he murmured.

Jongdae swallowed heavily. “It is,” he said. “It is incredible.”

The view was amazing, but Chanyeol had seen it a dozen times, so he watched Jongdae instead. It was another thirty minutes or so before boarding was finished and the foghorn sounded to signal departure.

“Last chance to decide to stay,” Chanyeol muttered.

“I have to know,” Jongdae whispered, dark eyes flashing up at him. “I have to at least try to find out why Sehun did this.”

Right. Chanyeol nodded.

“You know,” he said, after a long moment of silence. “Today is the anniversary of my birth.” Jongdae looked up at him in surprise. “I'm 28 years old today.”

“Good fortune to you, then,” Jongdae said, with a smile that narrowed his eyes to crescents. “It’s a lucky day to begin a journey.”

Chanyeol laughed. “I guess so. Some people like to celebrate with lavish parties but… I don't know. It's just another day, for me.

Humming, Jongdae shifted his weight. His hand brushed Chanyeol's thigh absently. “I was born on the equinox,” he said quietly. “The last date I remember from… from before, was barely a month until my twentieth birth anniversary.” He blinked. “Wait. How long have I been here in this world? How many days?”
It took a moment for Chanyeol to figure that out. “Fifteen days.”

“That’s fifteen days?” Jongdae asked, looking out at the harbor. “I will reach twenty while we are at sea, then. We will have to find a way to celebrate.” He glanced up at Chanyeol again. “Perhaps we can celebrate together.”

The thought made Chanyeol smile. “Perhaps we can.” He tightened his grip on Jongdae’s waist as the ship began to move. “You don’t get sick at sea, do you?”

His expression lightening, Jongdae smiled at him. “Not at all. Do you?”

“Only if the sea is rough.” He used to, but by this point, he’d spent so much time at sea that his body was just used to it. “I’m more likely to get sick riding a camel.”

“I am curious about these animals,” Jongdae said, leaning on the railing to watch the skyline recede. “And curious as to why you are convinced my people knew of them. Was there a carving? Perhaps from another part of the kingdom? But the Pharaoh’s family would know of such a thing, even if we did not have them in our own herds.”

Yeah, that had been bothering Chanyeol, too. He’d been certain the Egyptians had domesticated camels as far back as the Old Kingdom, let alone the New Kingdom era which Jongdae was from. Why did he think that? Where had he read it?

It took him ten minutes to remember, and then, only because a preacher began to pray over the crowd, asking God for a safe voyage. It was the Bible. That was where he’d gotten the idea that ancient Egyptians had camels - they were mentioned in the Book of Genesis, in the story of Abram and the Pharaoh.

It was such a small thing, but if Jongdae was correct that camels hadn’t yet been domesticated, it meant the Bible was wrong. Likely, because the story had been written down many centuries after it had taken place.

The thought of it shook Chanyeol. How much more was written incorrectly? How much had been muddied over time? How much of his religion, everything he’d been raised to believe, was based on misrememberance, misinterpretation, or nothing solid at all?

There was no way to know. Unsettled, Chanyeol stared out at the ocean, just thinking, until Jongdae gasped at his side.

“What is that?” he asked.

Chanyeol looked up, and smiled. The light of sunrise turned the Statue of Liberty from bright green to pale gold. Now that would never get old.

“Her name is Liberty,” he said softly. “She’s always there to welcome me home.”

Despite the size of the George Washington, the three-week sea voyage was long, claustrophobic, and boring.
Even though Jongdae was perfectly capable of handling himself, Chanyeol refused to let him out of the room without himself, Kris, or Kyungsoo with him. “If something were to happen,” he’d argued, “you would have no way of communicating your distress to the crew.” Jongdae countered this by suggesting that Chanyeol teach him some of his own language, and Chanyeol did try, but he wasn’t as good a teacher as he was a student, and far too often his lessons got derailed when Jongdae made some comparison between their cultures that got Chanyeol asking him still more questions.

And Jongdae admired how dedicated Chanyeol was to learning everything he could, but the long hours of teaching were wearing on his mind. There were so many other things they could be talking about, could be doing, but all Chanyeol ever wanted to do was question him about culture and learn new vocabulary.

Unexpectedly, Jongdae found himself very thankful for Kris and Kyungsoo. For a few hours every day, Kris would distract Chanyeol, taking him to the smoking lounge or to the gaming decks or simply to walk around the ship. It was the only time Jongdae got to himself, or sometimes, he would spend time in the other cabin with Kyungsoo, company with little conversation.

The only item he had brought with him that was genuinely his was his senet board, which had been buried with him. It was the same one he’d had as a child, now thousands of years old. On the very first night on the ship, Chanyeol had asked Jongdae to teach him to play, and Kris and Kyungsoo had wandered in mid-lesson and sat down as well. Of the three, Kyungsoo had taken to the game the fastest, and now he and Jongdae played at least every other day, silently, speaking through the game instead of through words.

And that was all fine and good for the first few days, but out on the open sea, they hit a very large rainstorm, and everyone was confined below-decks. For days. Jongdae was not used to confinement like this, and it was doing odd things to his mind.

By the third night of cabin confinement, Jongdae was feeling restless and stressed, and when Chanyeol opened yet another book with yet another boring inscription copied into it and started to ask him to translate it, Jongdae snapped. “I will not,” he said sharply. Shocked, Chanyeol closed his mouth, his eyes going wide and hurt, and no, Jongdae couldn’t take this anymore. He advanced on Chanyeol, pushing him until he sat down on his bunk, and climbed into his lap. “Jongdae?” Chanyeol asked. His tone was slightly alarmed, but his arms automatically raised, one looping around Jongdae’s waist and the other sliding up his back. He was so warm and strong and solid, and Jongdae determinedly made himself at home there, cuddling into Chanyeol’s arms.

“How do you want to teach tonight?” Jongdae growled, his annoyance rumbling in his throat. “You are being ridiculous. Hold me, I command it.”

“Of course,” Jongdae replied, and Chanyeol pulled back enough to give him an incredulous look. “Why would I not? Sehun, in particular, counted it amongst his duties.”
“Full lips compressed unhappily. “Sehun. I see.” Silence, for a moment, a moment in which Jongdae leaned his head on Chanyeol’s shoulder and took several deep breaths, trying to let go of the unrest buzzing in his body. “You and Sehun… you were very close.”

“Yes. Very.” No response, but Chanyeol’s hands were tightening, balling into the itchy fabric of Jongdae’s restrictive clothes. “If you wish to ask, ask,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol blew out a breath. “It isn’t my affair,” he murmured.

“But you want to know, yes? Whether Sehun and I were intimate?”

Heat bloomed under Jongdae’s cheek, warning him of Chanyeol’s unease. “Were you?”

“Once, yes. We were each other’s constant companions as we came of age, and in my culture, it is expected that close friends will learn of intimacy and sex together, just the same as it is expected that they will ask questions of their father and mother. As Sehun and I reached that age, we naturally began to explore this.” He realized, vaguely, that he was teaching again, but this was something that he wanted Chanyeol to understand. Though this future world held many wonders, the way that sexuality and intimacy was treated seemed backwards and barbaric, and he was eager to show Chanyeol a different view.

“This is expected?” Chanyeol asked, disbelieving. “For children to - to play in this way?”

“It is a part of becoming adult,” Jongdae told him. “These first bonds are very important. They can tie friends together on a deeper level, for life. Forging those connections builds strong loyalties, strong families, a strong kingdom.” He shifted, locking his hands together in a loose loop around Chanyeol’s waist, and tried to think of the best example. “My birth-mother and my Pharaoh-Mother are as this. Both were pledged to my father at a young age, but what might have happened if they were not close in this way? What jealousies or strife might have driven them apart, if not for this bond of belonging to each other, first?”

Chanyeol pulled back enough to stare at him, wide-eyed. “Iset and Hatshepsut were lovers as young women? But they were both married to the Pharaoh!”

Jongdae blinked. “What does marriage have to do with love?” he asked. Chanyeol’s jaw dropped. “Marriage is about family, stability, politics. It is not for friendship, not for love. For sure, there are some couples for whom these are all the same, for whom their advantageous match is also their love, but they are rare, an exception.” He cocked his head curiously, taking in the complete shock on Chanyeol’s face. “This is not how it is for your people?”

“No,” Chanyeol said immediately. “Marriage is the most sacred bond. It is love, and sex, and friendship, and partnership. It is a man and a woman becoming one, to the exclusion of all else.”

Wrinkling his nose, Jongdae asked, “Leaving all other bonds behind?”

“Except the bonds of blood family, yes. That is how it is, that is what is natural and…” Chanyeol stopped, and made a face. “I apologize. My mother is talking through my mouth right now.”

That made Jongdae laugh. “No apologies are necessary, I understand the influence of a parent’s words. It is an interesting way to build a society, but does it not cause strife? What if you were forced to choose between your wife and Kris, for example? What would you do?”

Chanyeol’s eyes squeezed shut. “If there was such a choice, I would have to choose my wife. If I had one. Which I do not intend to, ever.”
“Then you intend to remain alone? No wife, but no lover either? Your friendship with Kris, you are very close, but you aren’t intimate. Is that enough?”

Chanyeol sighed. “I probably shouldn’t tell you this,” he muttered, “but we were intimate, once. Years ago.” Oh! Jongdae blinked at him, not very surprised by the revelation but surprised Chanyeol would admit it. “It did not… it was not a good fit, for us. He wanted to be more open with it than I could bring myself to be. We clashed so often, we fought. It nearly destroyed our friendship.” He sighed. “Our world wouldn’t accept us. It is… easier… to maintain that distance, than it is to try and hide.”

How awful. “If your society did not revile love between men, would you be together still?”

“I do not know,” Chanyeol admitted. “Perhaps we would. But perhaps not. We are both… strong-willed. We argue a lot.”

“But you love each other.”

“Yes.” Chanyeol smiled at him, but it was not a happy smile. “As brothers. Comrades.”

“That is very sad,” Jongdae said. “But selfishly, I am glad. If you and Kris were lovers, I would not be here in your arms now, I think.”

Chanyeol cleared his throat. “Selfishly, I am glad to have you in my arms,” he murmured. “Even if my people would condemn me for it.”

His grip on Jongdae tightened, and Jongdae looked up, leaned in, his heart in his throat. Longing and hesitation warred in Chanyeol’s eyes, and it broke Jongdae’s heart to see it. He closed the distance first, pressing a warm kiss to Chanyeol’s slack lips.

Chanyeol made a deep noise and licked into Jongdae’s mouth, hauling him close. Thrilled, Jongdae kissed him back eagerly, but Chanyeol’s passion didn’t last. He started to pull away.

“No,” Jongdae whispered, tightening his grip to halt Chanyeol’s movement. “Please don’t. Kiss me.”

"Dae," Chanyeol murmured, right against his mouth. Jongdae's heartbeat tripled - Chanyeol had never shortened his name like that before. "We shouldn't - we can't - "

"We can," Jongdae whispered. He rolled his body sinuously forward, grinding into Chanyeol's lap, and was rewarded with a groan and the very obvious pulse and stir of his cock. "Why not?" He lifted his eyes to meet Chanyeol's, satisfied to see they were already blown wide with lust, just from that. "Do you want me?"

Groaning, Chanyeol's hands slid lower, palming his ass. Ahh, his hands were so big. "I do," Chanyeol breathed. "I want you."

"Then take me," Jongdae purred. "It is what I wish. I am not in the custom of being denied, Chanyeol."

A large hand migrated up Jongdae’s side, cupping his neck and jaw. With his thumb, Chanyeol tipped Jongdae’s chin up, the sheer strength in that tiny motion making Jongdae’s breath come short. “I am not one of your subjects, little prince,” he murmured.

If he was trying to make Jongdae want him less, he was going about it entirely the wrong way. But as frustrating as it was, Jongdae recognized that this was difficult for Chanyeol, and that he would need to go slowly, as one approaches an injured bull. He let his body go pliant in Chanyeol’s hands -
not a hardship - and murmured, “If you are not mine, then I must be yours, yes?” He let his gaze flutter up through his eyelashes, demure.

Chanyeol spat out a curse in his own language and pulled Jongdae in. His mouth landed on Jongdae’s neck, and it was as much teeth as lips. Gaping, Jongdae melted into his hands, against his body, letting his head tip to the side to give Chanyeol access. Despite the hesitation in his words, Chanyeol’s touch was competent, practiced, *experienced*. He kissed up the side of Jongdae’s neck and sucked into the sensitive skin behind his ear, and Jongdae moaned, squirming delightedly in his arms.

“You are impossible,” Chanyeol growled, so deep and close that it vibrated right into Jongdae’s skull. “Ah, God, I could kiss you for hours.”

“Yes,” Jongdae whispered. “Yes, please, my soul hungers for your touch.”

“How can you say things like that so openly?” Chanyeol grumbled. “My soul hungers for your touch, but you will not hear me announcing it.”

Jongdae’s chuckle was half moan as Chanyeol tugged the collar of his shirt open and delved inside. “It is only us here,” he murmured, his hands clenching into Chanyeol’s broad shoulders, wondering if unbuttoning Chanyeol’s vest would spook him. “I promise you, I will not judge you, I will not condemn you. With me, you are safe.”

Chanyeol pulled back, but only enough to press his forehead to Jongdae’s temple. “I know,” he said, more softly. “Please, have patience. I’m trying.”

Turning his head, Jongdae kissed Chanyeol’s cheek. “I know. It’s alright.”

He nosed into Chanyeol’s skin, sliding his hands up to dig into Chanyeol’s fiery hair. Chanyeol tugged him still closer and again captured his lips, and Jongdae settled down for what he hoped would be an entire evening of gentle pleasure.

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*December 7, 1927*
*Aboard the USS George Washington*
*East Atlantic Ocean*

For a brief moment upon waking, Chanyeol felt enveloped in a sense of serenity. He’d slept like a log, the ship’s rocking had quieted to the usual gentle sway of the open sea, and he was warm, comfortable, and buzzing with a low level of pleasant arousal that had his hips rolling forward as he sleepily stretched.

The small, warm body in his arms shifted and groaned, burrowing into his side. A slim thigh slid between his own, brushing against Chanyeol’s morning wood, and hot breath feathered across his collarbone. Chanyeol froze as the memory of the night before came crashing back.

Okay, Yeol. Do not panic. Sure, you spent hours rubbing on and groping and making out with an ancient Egyptian prince last night but at least you didn’t *completely* shame your mother.
Jongdae’s hand slid down Chanyeol’s side to rest on his hipbone, shifting closer still. The pressure of his thigh on Chanyeol’s morning hardness was sinful and wrong and so, so good, and Chanyeol swallowed, his will to resist crumbling in the face of this sweet, sleepy pleasure. He should pull away, get up, pretend last night never happened, but he was increasingly certain he wasn’t strong enough to do it.

He tucked his face against Jongdae’s soft, black hair, and pushed forward, pressing himself more firmly into Jongdae’s thigh. Heat shuddered up his spine, his cock jerked hungrily, and Jongdae shifted in his arms, waking.

“Chanyeol?” he murmured, sleep making his accent thick and heavy. The way his name sounded on Jongdae’s lips had Chanyeol groaning, unable to stop another thrust. Jongdae moaned, responding immediately, tugging Chanyeol closer and rubbing sinuously into him, like a cat.

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol whispered, because what he wanted to say was I’m sorry but he knew Jongdae wouldn’t accept it, or even really understand why Chanyeol felt like he had to say it.

Dark eyes fluttered open, and Jongdae tilted his head up to look at Chanyeol, his handsome face filled with adoration and sexual heat. Chanyeol’s stomach flipped like a line cook flipping a hotcake.

He leaned down, before he thought the better of it, and pressed his lips close-mouthed to Jongdae’s. Jongdae’s arms wound around his neck, pulling him close, and he moaned right into Chanyeol’s mouth, sounding unreasonably ecstatic about this. His thigh pushed up further, purposeful, and Chanyeol lost control of his hips.

“Hey, wake up fellas, the storm’s finally passed and - Whoa!”

Terror and shame lanced through Chanyeol’s mind, killing his arousal in a bare second; he pushed Jongdae away and sat up. Kyungsoo, fully dressed and fully awake, was standing frozen in the doorway, jaw dropped and eyes locked onto where Jongdae’s legs were still entangled with Chanyeol’s, obvious and damning. Over his head, Chanyeol saw Kris frozen in the act of reaching out, a wince just fading from his face, like he’d tried to stop Kyungsoo from opening the door and wasn’t fast enough.

Jongdae swore in Egyptian, something too fast to catch.

“Kyungsoo,” Chanyeol muttered, pulling his legs from between Jongdae’s and tugging the discarded coverlet over the prince’s mostly-nude form. “I can - ”

Can what? Explain? There was no explanation but the obvious, and they all knew it.

“Mother of God,” Kyungsoo whispered, and Chanyeol winced, feeling like he’d been struck. “You, Park?”

“For cryin’ out loud,” Kris muttered. “Soo, don’t just stare.” He grabbed Kyungsoo’s shoulder, pulled him back, and shut the door.
Chanyeol collapsed against the wall. “Jesus,” he moaned, covering his face with his hands. “There goes the neighborhood.”

Pushing the cover off himself, Jongdae sat up, getting to his knees in front of Chanyeol’s slumped form. He was wearing nothing but his new underdrawers, stark white against his golden skin, and so beautiful that Chanyeol felt damned just looking at him. Jongdae reached out, clearly intending to comfort Chanyeol; Chanyeol stiffened and Jongdae halted mid-movement.

“Kyungsoo is your friend, yes?” Jongdae reasoned. “He is only surprised. It will be fine. Yes?”

Chanyeol laughed, short and derisive. “Sure, just like every other friend who’s found out.”

Jongdae leaned a little closer, tentatively dropping his hands to Chanyeol’s knees. Chanyeol half-wanted to pull away, but another part of him was desperate for the comfort, so he didn’t. “Kris has remained your friend,” Jongdae pointed out.

“Kris is like me,” Chanyeol countered. “Kris understands. Kyungsoo will not. He cannot.” Raised voices, not quite yelling but sharp, sounded from the other side of the wall, and Chanyeol winced. “And that would be Kyungsoo realizing Kris already knew.”

“Kyungsoo will not abandon you over this,” Jongdae said with conviction. “Either of you. He is too honorable.”

That made Chanyeol laugh again. “How would you know? You have never exchanged a word with him.”

“But I have met him on the battlefield,” Jongdae said, and it took Chanyeol a moment of confusion to realize he was referring to their senet games. “Trust me, Chanyeol. My role in Court requires me to read people. Kyungsoo is shocked, but he will not abandon you or Kris over something such as this.”

He scooted a little bit closer, reaching, and Chanyeol sighed and gave in to his need for comfort. He opened his arms, and Jongdae crawled into them, straddling Chanyeol’s lap and cuddling into his chest.

“I pray that you’re right,” Chanyeol murmured. “I can’t believe it, but I hope for it, all the same.”

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The second half of the ocean voyage was, to Jongdae’s mind, excruciating.

The stiff awkwardness between Chanyeol and Kyungsoo was ever-present and intensely frustrating. It was days before Kyungsoo seemed to have loosened up enough for Jongdae to offer another senet game, extending a hand of friendship even though he just wanted to shake the man. Kyungsoo accepted, and they silently played, and Jongdae wished he had sufficient language to talk to him, to find out what he was thinking and to reason with him.

Still, the game did help, and when Chanyeol and Kris returned from another long walk on the deck, Kyungsoo’s tone when he spoke to them was the most congenial it had been since that morning. Jongdae counted it a success, but Chanyeol was clearly still cautious.
During the nights, Chanyeol was distant, more distant than he had been thus far. He stayed on his own bunk and did not invite Jongdae to join him, and his sleep was restless, waking Jongdae with his tossing and turning more than once. Jongdae reached for him when he could, hating the distance, and Chanyeol always accepted his touch, but he never reciprocated or initiated his own. They talked, sometimes, but Chanyeol had ceased even asking for vocabulary lessons, and that was worrisome in its own way.

The evening before they were due to arrive in Egypt, Kris surprised Jongdae by inviting him out for a walk on the upper decks instead of Chanyeol. It left Kyungsoo and Chanyeol alone in the rooms, and Jongdae figured out that was the idea when Kris shot Chanyeol a very pointed look as he closed the door behind them.

“You want them to talk,” Jongdae accused as he fell into step beside the tallest man.

Kris snorted. “They’re two of the most stubborn people I’ve met in my life. Yeah, I want them to talk. We can’t have them fighting like this.” His expression sobered. “Not when… when we don’t know what we’re going to find out there.”

They climbed the stairs to the upper deck. The weather was warm here, the comfortable, well-known heat of home, and the shoreline slipping past them in the distance was both alien and familiar. According to the map Chanyeol had shown him, they were due to dock the following morning, from there to board a smaller ship headed down the Nile.

“What do you think we will find out there?” Jongdae asked.

Kris leaned on the rail, long legs and broad shoulders and wheat-yellow hair turned gold in the setting sun. “I don’t honestly know,” he muttered. “It seems unlikely that we’ll be able to puzzle out where Sehun’s tomb is, if it has not already been found. But there are secrets buried under those sands still, and the impossible does happen. It’s not possible for you to be here at all, and yet, here you are. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed.”

Jongdae snorted and leaned on the railing next to him, watching the shape of the shore. “It’s no less unbelievable when you’re living it, trust me.”

A smile flashed in the dim light. “You are good for Chanyeol, I think,” he said. “He’s… He’s pretty well enamored with you.”

Jongdae snorted. “Chanyeol is enamored with the people I represent.”

“It may seem so, but I know him better than most. He’s also enamored with you.” Kris’s expression turned wry. “He would never have allowed himself to be in such a compromising position as he did, if he was not enamored. Not even in private.”

Blowing out a sigh, Jongdae twisted his fingers together. “I feel badly about that,” he admitted. “I really thought he was… exaggerating. I never would have expected Kyungsoo to go cold on him like that, over something so small. Until that moment, I didn’t really believe that your people were this way.”

Kris shrugged. “Every culture sees this kind of love differently,” he said easily. “The Greeks, we know, were open to it. Now, we know your people were as well. Even now, across the world, everyone has a different opinion.” He shifted his weight. “Chanyeol was raised in a very strict, traditional household. I was not. He has a harder time accepting himself than I do.”

Jongdae shook his head. “What was the Goddess’s purpose in placing him in this situation, I
wonder?” he mused. “Why this trial, for him?”

“Which goddess?” Kris asked, glancing down curiously.

“Hathor,” Jongdae replied without thinking. And then to clarify, “The Greek peoples, they call her Aphrodite, if I recall.”

“I know the goddess of which you speak,” Kris murmured. “What does this have to do with Chanyeol?”

“He is Hathor’s - Aphrodite’s - son. It is clear to me, as clear and plain as the view across the desert in the cool sunrise. Though Chanyeol does not believe me.”

Kris blinked at him. “You believe he is born of a deity? Truly?”

Jongdae huffed. “Why is this such a hard thing to comprehend?” he grumbled.

Chuckling, Kris said, “Well, our God does not make it a habit to sire mortal children. It only happened once, and that was a long, long time ago.”

“Our gods are among us always, present in the earth, in the air, in the great people of our times, watching and guiding as a parent watches children at play,” Jongdae shifted his weight on the railing. “What must it be like, I wonder, to follow a God so distant, but so strict?”

Kris didn’t answer. They stood side-by-side for a while, watching the shore and listening to the chatter of other passengers, before Jongdae again broke the silence.

“Chanyeol said that you and he were lovers once,” he said, safe in the knowledge that no one around them could understand his words.

Full lips quirked. “Chanyeol has a big mouth,” Kris rumbled.

“Yes, of course. Chanyeol is many things, but a liar is not one.” Kris glanced down at him. “Alright, out with it. What do you wish to know?”

Jongdae snorted. “I am not probing you for Chanyeol’s secrets,” he said. “I only… want your opinion. He has expressed his interest, multiple times, but he is hesitant. He stops himself, holds himself back. I want to push for more, but…” He sighed. “I am not sure if it would be a good thing to do.”

For a moment, Kris was silent. “You must ask yourself, what are you asking Chanyeol to sacrifice, to be with you?” Confused, Jongdae looked up at him. “This is his religion. His family. Maybe even his way of life. If you are going to ask him to leave these things behind, you have to be sure what he gets in return is worth it.” Jongdae stared, and Kris flashed him another smile. “Come. We should make sure they do not kill each other.”

They started back to the cabin, Kris’s hand hovering protectively behind Jongdae’s back, guiding him through the crowd. Now that the weather was better, it seemed all three thousand people on the ship were on the deck at once.

Below decks, though, it was quieter, and Kris said, “If it helps, I think Chanyeol wants to be with you. Perhaps the right push is all he needs.”
It was awkward, but Kris was right, Chanyeol couldn’t hide from Kyungsoo forever. Beginning the next day, they were going to be travelling through the desert as a foursome, and Chanyeol needed to know that Kyungsoo could still be trusted with Jongdae’s safety, would still watch Chanyeol’s back.

He wasn’t the type to sit down and have a Long, Serious Chat though, so he tossed a pack of cards on the table. “Gin and gin?” he asked.

Kyungsoo eyed him. “You pour, I’ll deal.”

Chanyeol did as he was told, and they started to play. Chanyeol let the hand get going, let Kyungsoo get far enough into the giggle water to loosen up, before he opened his mouth. “So are you plannin’ to crucify me, or what?”


He discarded, and Chanyeol looked it over distractedly. “I mean, I didn’t think you coulda gotten a tommy gun past customs, but you just never know, do ya?”

“Guess you don’t.” Chanyeol played his turn, and Kyungsoo kept his eyes on the cards. “You and Kris sure had me fooled.”

Chanyeol sighed. “We don’t intend to fool nobody,” he murmured. “Just want to be left alone, is all.”

“I get that.” Kyungsoo trailed his fingers over his cards, rearranging them in his hand. “Caught me by surprise, though.” He discarded. “I mean, you look like the kinda fella that wades into bar fights bare-knuckled. And Kris, he’s MGM material. Both of you have dames panting after you like dogs, I just never…”

Chanyeol picked up Kyungsoo’s discard and added it to his hand. “I’ll have you know I haven’t gotten into a bare-knuckle bar fight in at least three years.” Kyungsoo snorted. Chanyeol eyed him, and hesitantly added, “Kris… told you? About himself?”

“Yeah. Tryin’ to pull attention off you, likely. That’s the kinda man he is.”

Discarding, Chanyeol muttered, “He’s a good man.”

“I know, Yeol. I wouldn’t be halfway across the world with you two clowns if I didn’t think you were both good men.”

Kyungsoo drew, and Chanyeol slumped back in the chair. “Thanks,” he murmured, feeling quite like a weight had lifted off him. “Maybe don’t bust into my room next time.”

“Trust me, that lesson is learned.” Kyungsoo discarded. “Look, I ain’t sayin’ we’re all copacetic, here, but I ain’t gonna turncoat on you neither.” He laid out his hand. “Gin.”

“Gods of sea and sand,” Chanyeol swore in Egyptian. Kyungsoo cracked up, failing to hide his
laughter in his booze glass.

“That kid’s a bad influence on you,” he chuckled. “Or a good one, I ain’t sure which yet.”

“Hiya, fellas. Did we avoid bloodshed?” Kris ushered Jongdae in and closed the door behind them.

“Only because you walked in right then,” Chanyeol grumbled, setting Kyungsoo off chuckling again. “Christ, how is it you always win?”

Kyungsoo patted his shoulder. “Because I think before I act, Yeol,” he said. “Here, I’ll pour the next round. You boys want in?” He stood, ambling over to the cabin’s bar.

Kris translated the question to Jongdae, who nodded, looking curious. “Sure, we’re in,” he said.

Chanyeol met Jongdae’s eyes, watching him with apprehensive curiosity. He’d been kind of a jerk the past few days, hadn’t he?

“Dae,” he called, switching to Egyptian. “Come here, I’ll teach you the rules.” He patted the couch beside him.

Jongdae lit up, and all but bounced to Chanyeol’s side. At the last moment, he glanced at Kyungsoo’s back, and sat himself a respectable distance from Chanyeol. It felt like a gulf, but Chanyeol appreciated the gesture. Jongdae might not really understand the why, but he was trying.

“Did you speak to him?” Jongdae asked, softly and in Egyptian.

“I did,” Chanyeol said, keeping his tone normal and pulling out the cards so it would look like he was starting to explain the rules. “I do not think he approves, but I do not think he will give us trouble, either, as long as we are discreet.”

“Ahh.” Jongdae nodded. “That is good, yes? I will do my best not to seduce you in front of him, then.” He quirked a smile. Chanyeol cleared his throat, his cheeks heating, and fanned open the deck of cards to actually explain the rules.

He was nearly done when Kris and Kyungsoo sat back down, dropping gin-and-tonics in front of Chanyeol and Jongdae. “So Yeol,” Kris said in English. “You didn’t tell me Jongdae thinks you’re literally Cupid.”

Chanyeol blinked, confused. Kyungsoo’s eyebrow cocked up so high, it disappeared into his hair.

“What?”

“Son of Venus, aka Aphrodite, aka Hathor.” At the sound of his goddess’s name, Jongdae looked up curiously.

Oh. Chanyeol waved a hand. “He doesn’t literally believe that. It’s, I dunno, a metaphor or something.”

Kris hummed, amused. “Pretty sure he actually does literally believe that.” He switched to Arabic, the only other language they both knew that neither Kyungsoo nor Jongdae could understand. “I mean, if you don’t want a beautiful young man who thinks you are literally the God of Love, you can always send him my way.”

Chanyeol’s heart jerked jealously. It must have shown on his face, because Kris smirked. “Ass,” Chanyeol sniped back, in the same language. “Keep your hands to yourself.”
“Sure,” Kris said easily, plucking the deck from Chanyeol’s hands and shuffling it. Jongdae watched his big, long-fingered hands manipulate the cards with interest. “Just remember, a guy like him won’t wait forever. If you’re gonna make a move, it better be soon.”

He started to deal. Chanyeol pursed his lips and pushed that out of his mind, forcing himself to focus on the game.
This time, Kyungsoo knocked. “Get up, fellas, you’re gonna want to see this!”

Chanyeol groggily pulled himself to wakefulness, blinking across the cabin where Jongdae was doing the same. It took him a minute to realize what the significance of today was.

“We’re docking,” he said, sitting straight up. Jongdae made a confused noise, sleepily rolling over and regarding Chanyeol with glazed, half-open eyes, and Chanyeol blinked and tried to remember what language he should be speaking. “The ship is coming into port,” he said, in Egyptian this time.

“Oh!” Jongdae shook himself and pushed himself up. The sheet that had been tangled around his form fell away, and Chanyeol let his eyes drag over Jongdae’s bare skin for a bit longer than was really appropriate before he tore his gaze away and busied himself getting dressed. They’d packed up their belongings the night before, knowing full well that the quicker they got into the disembarking line, the better.

Breakfast was hurried, and they did manage to beat most of the crowd, hauling their luggage up the stairs to the decks just as the sunrise was breaking over the horizon. Jongdae slowed, his eyes widening as he looked over the rail at the port city they were approaching.

“Where are we?” he asked softly. “It feels like home, this air, but the city is…”

Chanyeol briefly rubbed a hand over his back. “The city is named Alexandria,” he murmured.

Kyungsoo looked over at them, recognizing the name of the city. “Probably looked a lot different in his time,” he commented. “You know, before the library burnt down.”

Kris snorted. “The library wasn’t built yet. The city wasn’t even founded yet, when Jongdae was alive.”

His eyes widening, Kyungsoo asked, “Isn’t this one of the oldest ports in the world?”

“You underestimate just exactly how far back Jongdae is from,” Chanyeol told him. “He’s a thousand years older than this city.”

Kyungsoo stared.

“Just wait till we go past Giza,” Kris said, ushering them all along with a sweeping gesture of his long arms. “The Pyramids were already over a thousand years old when Jongdae was born.” Kyungsoo’s stare got more incredulous, and Kris grinned. “Oh yeah. The Egyptians were around for a real long time.”

Hauling his borrowed suitcase, in modern clothes he was only just becoming accustomed to, Jongdae hardly looked like the only surviving member of a great, ancient people, but to Chanyeol, that only made him all the more fascinating.
They got in line, and with his view of the harbor blocked by the bodies around him, Jongdae turned back to Chanyeol. “But where, exactly? I do not see the great river here. Will we not be sailing to the Upper Kingdom?”

Chanyeol held up his hand, thumb tucked in and four fingers outstretched. “If this is the Nile delta,” he said, wiggling his fingers, “we are here.” He pointed at a spot just to the side of his smallest fingernail. Jongdae nodded, realization dawning. “We’ll drive along the coast this morning,” Chanyeol explained, “to the mouth of the Nile. From there, yes, we will take a riverboat down to where Waset once stood.”

Jongdae’s eyes clouded. “Where it once stood?” he murmured. “Is there anything… no, that would be impossible, it’s been too long.”

Poor kid. “Not the houses, no,” Chanyeol said softly. “But the monuments, the temples. They lasted, Jongdae.” He squeezed Jongdae’s shoulder. “What your people built has lasted longer than almost anything else made by man, in the history of the world.”

It seemed a small comfort, but it did get Jongdae to crack a smile.

Once they made it through the disembarking line, Kris lead the way through the crowds on the dock to the auto rental service they usually used, using his stature to carve them a path. Chanyeol kept Jongdae close, guiding him, as he gawked at everything and paid little attention to where they were going.

The car ride took an hour. Kris drove, and Chanyeol sat with Jongdae in the back, answering dozens of questions. It was a good opportunity to practice his conversational Egyptian, and besides, he owed Jongdae this, since he’d spent most of the last three weeks doing the same.

Once they’d reached their destination, Chanyeol left Kris to handle paying the rental shop and took Jongdae outside to get a glimpse of the city.

“Where are we now?” Jongdae asked.

“We call the city Rosetta,” Chanyeol said. “You would have known it as Khito.”

Jongdae’s eyes widened. He spun on his heel, taking in the streets and buildings around them. “I’ve been to Khito,” he said wonderingly. “My brother sent me here last year, to greet the Greek ambassadors and accompany them back to Waset. It was no more than a fishing village.”

“It was the Greeks who eventually made that little village a port,” Chanyeol said, “as they did with Alexandria. Rosetta didn’t really come into importance internationally, though, until -”

“Hey, dingbat. Quit chin-wagging and let’s go!” Kris slapped Chanyeol on the shoulder and started down the street.

Jongdae’s first glimpse of the Nile was every bit as gut-wrenching as Chanyeol had suspected it would be. He distracted himself by watching for Kyungsoo’s reaction, which was less emotional and more just plain impressed. That didn’t stop him from choking up a little when Jongdae slid his hand into Chanyeol’s and squeezed, but it kinda helped, maybe.

The steamboat was a big, fancy thing, and they boarded along with several dozen other passengers, making it just minutes before the ship was set to sail. The cruise down the Nile would take the rest of the day, and it would probably be the last comfort of modern civilization they would have for a good long while.
Giza was difficult for Jongdae. Chanyeol didn’t have to be a mind reader to know that; he didn’t even need his newly-expanded Egyptian vocabulary. Jongdae’s awe - and his pain - was scribbled all over his face. The modernity of the city of Giza made a harsh, striking backdrop to the ruins of the ancient capital of Memphis, and even though half of the destroyed buildings were not even built yet in Jongdae’s time, the sight of tumbled stones and weathered carvings definitely affected him.

Chanyeol let Jongdae look, and purposely did not mention the Museum of Cairo a short drive away, where, among other things, Joonmyun’s mummy lay in storage, too damaged to be on display. If Chanyeol wanted to, he probably could have wrangled permission to see it, but frankly, he was worried about what the sight might do to Jongdae’s mind. Jongdae remembered his brother as a vibrant, healthy, powerful young king, and Chanyeol was loathe to damage that image.

The steamship did stop for an hour or so in Giza, though, so instead, they went to see the pyramids.

“Was this where Jongdae lived?” Kyungsoo asked on the cab ride down to the Giza Plateau.

“No,” Chanyeol told him. “By Jongdae’s time, the capital had been moved to Waset in the south, the city we call Thebes. But he did tell me that he studied here with his brother as kids. It was where all the young nobles were sent.”

Kyungsoo nodded. “I’m trying to imagine returning to my boarding school three thousand years later,” he muttered. “Christ, that’s mind-bending.”

“Yeah.” Chanyeol wanted to pull Jongdae into his side and hold him; only Kyungsoo’s presence with them in the back seat stopped him from doing it. Once they actually got to the Pyramids, though, Chanyeol took Jongdae’s hand, and damn what anyone around them thought. He could feel Jongdae shaking.

Kris, who was leading the way, stopped a few hundred feet out, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked up. “You know,” he said, “I never get bored with them. This is, what, the fourth time we’ve been here?”

Kyungsoo prodded him in the side. “It’s my first time, so how about you quit stalling already. Come on, educate me.”

Grinning at him, Kris started forward, already gesturing and going on, leaving Chanyeol and Jongdae trailing behind at a slower pace.

“Are you alright?” Chanyeol asked softly.

Jongdae drifted closer to his side. “They’re too small,” he said, sounding distressed. “Why are they -”

“The casing was taken away,” Chanyeol told him. “Thousands of years ago. But the core still stands. Four thousand, five hundred years later, they still stand, Jongdae.”

Jongdae nodded, and they kept walking in silence for a moment, both with eyes on the Pyramids as they approached. “They were white,” Jongdae murmured eventually. “Polished. They shone in the sun, lit with the divinity of our ascended kings.” Squeezing his hand, Chanyeol silently willed himself not to tear up. “The Hor-em-akhet,” he exclaimed suddenly. “What... Gods above, what happened to it?”

Not recognizing the name, Chanyeol looked where Jongdae was looking. Oh. The Sphinx. ‘Horus on the Horizon.’ Yes, of course, Jongdae would not have called it “The Sphinx.” Like the majority of the names modern scholars used for Egyptian things, that word was Greek, not Egyptian. “Time,”
Chanyeol said simply. Jongdae didn’t need to know the face of the great monument was purposely disfigured by monotheists in later centuries.

His pace speeding, Jongdae started dragging Chanyeol forward. “Come. I must see if - does it still stand?” Curious, Chanyeol let Jongdae drag him forward. He seemed to be headed for the Sphinx, not the Pyramids themselves.

As they approached, Jongdae slowed. “The Horus, it has been… Oh, this is glorious. We believed there was more under the sand, but we never…”

Chanyeol cocked his head. “The statue was buried, even in your time?” A full excavation of the Sphinx had only recently been undertaken; even now workers were still trying to get the entire thing cleared of sand. The Egyptological community was hopeful that they could keep it clear for decades to come.

“Given enough time, the sands will take everything,” Jongdae murmured. “We could never justify devoting the resources to unburying it, especially when we didn’t know if there actually was more under the sand. But there is. There is more.” He picked up his pace again. “But that isn’t what I need to see.”

He dragged Chanyeol towards the front of the Sphinx’s paws, and then around, and Chanyeol abruptly realized.

“The temple, the northeast temple, it’s newer than most of the complex,” he said aloud. “We think it was built by -”

“My father,” Jongdae said. “Yes. It was commissioned by my father.” They reached the temple in question, and Jongdae stopped. “It’s… it’s gone.”

“Not entirely,” Chanyeol assured him quickly. “Look, the foundation still stands. Think about how much time has passed, Jongdae. That any part of it still exists is incredible.”

Jongdae was barely listening. Instead, he dragged Chanyeol over to the northwest corner of the crumbled foundation, and dropped to his knees in the sand.

“Here,” he said. “This stone.” He reached out reverently, running gentle fingers over the very bottom cornerstone. “If you unburied it, pulled it out, you would find the dedication carved on the inside face, and the offerings buried beneath. The cornerstone was laid by my father and my half-sister, Neferure, when she was just a child.”

“Hatshepsut’s daughter, the royal princess?” Chanyeol asked. Jongdae nodded. “We know very little about her. Some believe she married your brother, but there’s no proof.”

Jongdae shook his head. “She was supposed to. As the only fully-royal child, their marriage would have cemented Joonmyun’s claim to the throne. But she died before the wedding.” He sighed. “Plague. My brother was very affected; they were close friends.”

“How old was she?” Chanyeol asked, dreading the answer.

Jongdae stood, and turned away from the stone. “Sixteen,” he said. “I remember the funeral, and my brother holding vigil with our queen for days and days. I was twelve, myself.” He looked up at Chanyeol. “Her body…?”

Chanyeol had to shake his head. “Her tomb was found,” he said softly, “but it was empty.”
His lips flattening angrily, Jongdae looked up at the Sphinx, towering over them in silent vigil.
“What good is it if the tombs last, but the souls they were built to protect do not?”

Chanyeol didn’t have an answer for that.

The river boat, though still impossibly advanced and so very much bigger and faster than anything Jongdae had ever known, was smaller and rockier than the George Washington. By the time they finally reached their destination, Jongdae was fully sick of riding in boats and ready to have his feet once more on solid ground.

They arrived well after nightfall, in a city Jongdae couldn’t hope to recognize until Chanyeol named it. The modern peoples called it Asyut, but Jongdae had known it as Seyawt, a city that was already centuries old when he was born, dating back more than ten dynasties. It looked nothing like that now, but Jongdae was too physically and emotionally exhausted to try to comprehend that kind of distance or time.

Supper was taken in an open-air establishment on the streets. The meal seemed less alien than the foods Jongdae had been eating for weeks, made with spices and ingredients that were more familiar to him, if not quite the same. It did help him to feel a bit better about their travels, just as the familiarly warm, dry air and the darker coloring of the townspeople did. Here, Kris and Chanyeol stood out far more than Jongdae did, too tall and too pale.

Not that it really seemed to matter much. Chanyeol seemed as comfortable here as anywhere, or even moreso, switching smoothly between his native language, the language of the local peoples, Greek, and Jongdae’s own Egyptian. He smiled winningly and bowed politely, he flirted the serving girl into bringing them extra wine, he shone. His presence at Jongdae’s side kept Jongdae from falling too deeply into his thoughts, which were murky and upsetting, overwhelmed with the sheer weight of just how much of history was between Jongdae and everything he’d ever known.

After supper, they wandered through the market. It was beautiful, lit with lanterns and busy with people, but not so crowded that Jongdae felt lost. At one point, he stopped at a stall to look at some utterly fantastical inlaid woodwork, and when he looked up, Kris and Kyungsoo were nowhere to be seen, and Chanyeol was leaning on the wooden support post of the stall and watching him with heart-twisting fondness in his dark eyes.

“If we come back this way,” Jongdae said, “I would like to buy one of these chests. My senet set will need something to keep it safe.”

Chanyeol’s gaze softened. “We will come back this way, and I will buy one for you.” He pushed off the wall, and came to look at the inlaid chest Jongdae was inspecting. “It is beautiful craftsmanship, is it not?”

Jongdae nodded. “It would look good on the shelves with your treasures.”

Startled, Chanyeol looked down at him, and Jongdae suddenly had a realization. All this time, he had been thinking in the back of his mind that after he found his answers, he would simply return to Chanyeol’s home, and learn to live a new life in Chanyeol’s world. But now, he realized how silly that was. Chanyeol wouldn’t want him to just insert himself into Chanyeol’s life. Chanyeol would
want him to get his own life. To learn to fend for himself. And he should.

He should, but the idea was so unsettling, Jongdae had to take a deep breath and walk away.

Chanyeol followed him, long strides eating the distance and keeping him easily at Jongdae’s side. “Dae? What is wrong?” he asked, as they turned a corner into a little alcove, away from the bustle of the street.

“Nothing, nothing, I just…” Jongdae laughed, shaky. “I still think, sometimes, that this is a dream. That I will awaken, and I will be at home in the Royal Palace, and my brother will be there telling me how lazy I am to sleep past sunrise.” He took a deep breath. “My mind has not yet come to understand that I will never see him, or anyone I love, again. I find it hard to plan for my new future. It seems so uncertain, so… impossible.”

Regarding him for a long moment, Chanyeol stared. Slowly, he pulled Jongdae into an embrace, and Jongdae pressed his face into Chanyeol’s thin linen shirt, letting the sound of his heartbeat soothe him.

“I will help you,” Chanyeol murmured. His hand cupped Jongdae’s jaw, tilting his face up so Chanyeol could look in his eyes. “You can stay with me until you are stable enough to live on your own, or…” He trailed off, cleared his throat. “Whatever you decide, I will be content. I will support you.”

Swallowing hard, Jongdae pushed up and kissed him. Chanyeol stiffened for only a moment, the shortest moment yet, before he wrapped strong arms around Jongdae’s back and kissed him back with gentle fervor.

“Maybe this is a blessing,” Jongdae whispered, sinking back down off his tip-toes and clutching at Chanyeol’s shirt. “Maybe I really can give it all up, and live out the rest of my days in your world, not as a prince but as someone new. I feel that I could make myself a new life, as long as you were there with me.”

Chanyeol smiled, but it was so, so sad. “I’m sorry, Jongdae,” he whispered. “I keep forgetting how hard this must be on you. You never talk about it.”

Jongdae shrugged helplessly. “I keep forgetting that it is real,” he admitted.

Warm lips pressed to Jongdae’s forehead. “Your new life is yours to make, but you don’t have to make it tonight. Come, let’s just enjoy the market.”

They did exactly that, and Chanyeol distracted Jongdae with narrating made-up stories about the lives of people that passed and badgering him into helping him pick out a gift for his sister, Yura. They finally decided on a beautiful shawl woven with genuine silver threads, a technique which, though greatly refined, Jongdae recognized from as far back as his own time.

When they finally returned to their rented suite, Kris and Kyungsoo were already there and playing cards. Jongdae and Chanyeol joined them for a few hands, until they could no longer keep their eyes open.

Their room had only one bed, though it was large. Jongdae hesitated, but Chanyeol didn’t, inviting him with a gesture to join him. For the first time in days, Jongdae fell asleep again in Chanyeol’s arms.
December 19, 1927  
Eastern Desert  
Near Asyut, Egypt

Chanyeol was right about camels.

They were strange, smelly beasts, and riding them was a very odd, jerky experience. They had five between them, though Jongdae rode with Chanyeol on his, leaving two camels for their luggage. It was too hot to be pressed so closely together for so long, but Jongdae did not complain; Chanyeol’s considerably larger frame shielded his own from the burning sun, and his arm around Jongdae’s waist made him feel much less like he was going to keel off of the beast’s side.

They had set out early in the morning, while the air was still cool and the skies still dim, and at first they had been alive with chatter in multiple languages, as Kris and Chanyeol told Jongdae and Kyungsoo about previous adventures, about the local Egyptian laborers they usually contracted to help them, about funny things that had happened on other trips. Through Chanyeol’s translation, Jongdae told them about what they would have seen on the river as they followed this path in his time, told them about learning to skip rocks with his brother, told them about the weathered monuments they passed.

But then, the sun rose too high, and the path took them away from the river’s banks, cutting across the desert to shorten the distance where the river’s bends would take them too far out of the way. Talking was a waste of air and spit, and made your mouth dry and sandy; they all fell silent, nothing but the sound of the camel’s steps, the jingle of tack, and the wind.

Jongdae was never so thankful for Chanyeol and Kris’s knowledge of this desert as he was when a large rock formation came into view. It was the only shade visible in any direction, and they stopped in the shadow, small though it was with the sun so high overhead. They all took off the white scarves they had used to veil their heads against the sun and sat down to eat, rest, and cool off as much as possible.

The rest was helpful, but not nearly long enough; as soon as the shadows reached a certain point Kris was urging them back onto their feet, reminding them that they needed to reach their next stop before nightfall if they wanted to rent rooms.

The problem with the long hours of not speaking was that Jongdae was left with nothing but his thoughts, which were getting increasingly unsettled and anxious. Perhaps it was the heat - Jongdae was used to travelling in shaded caravans, with frequent stops and servants to see to his needs, not this push to cover as much ground as quickly as possible - but his mind was running itself in circles. He couldn’t stop thinking about what he might see, visiting his home city so many thousands of years later; couldn’t stop thinking about what they might find in Sehun’s tomb, if they found it at all.

After several more impossibly hot hours of mindless travel, they did reach their destination, perhaps an hour after the sun had set. It was a city, and one that Jongdae did not recognize.

“I don’t think this city existed in your time,” Chanyeol told him when he asked. “Or if it did, it would have been a mere village, and its name has been lost to us. Today, it is called Dendera.”
Jongdae took a deep breath. “Of course it has,” he murmured, but it hurt him anyway. The vastness of what had been lost so heavily outweighed that which lasted.

Dendera was smaller than any of the cities they had yet visited, but still too strange for Jongdae to truly feel at home. He was quiet through their meal, and through washing up afterwards.

When he came down from the single room they had rented for the night, refreshed in body if not in mind, he found Chanyeol and Kris deep in a rapid discussion with the innkeeper. Kyungsoo came to his side with a small smile and a stiff demeanor, his dark eyes skimming restlessly over the room like the soldier he was. Jongdae appreciated his protectiveness, even if he didn’t think it was warranted.

After a moment, Chanyeol and Kris came over to them. “There is only the one room available,” Chanyeol told Jongdae in Egyptian, as Kris told Kyungsoo the same in their own language. “One room, with one bed. It is not big enough for four. Kris volunteered to sleep on the floor, but I have a different idea, if you are willing.”

Something in his tone - nervousness? - caught Jongdae’s attention. He agreed, trusting Chanyeol completely. Chanyeol said something to Kris, and Kris pursed his lips unhappily but nodded.

They ended up taking their packs off of the camels, slinging them up onto their own backs and heading back out into the desert, away from the city. “More travelling?” Jongdae asked.

“No,“ Chanyeol assured him. “It’s not far at all.”

As much as Jongdae was sick to death of being on the move, travelling in the evening was much more pleasant than by day. The air was rapidly cooling, and the heat of Chanyeol’s fingers weaving through his own was a welcome comfort, rather than just sweat-inducing.

Chanyeol was right that it wasn’t far. In only a few minutes, they reached the side of the Nile valley, and there, right at the very edge of the desert, was a massive and clearly ancient temple complex. This late, there was no one around, and so Chanyeol was able to lead him right up to the entrance built into the surrounding wall.

“I do not know this place,” Jongdae murmured. “When was it built?”

“We think it was nearly a thousand years after your time,” Chanyeol said. “That is part of why it is much better preserved than many other buildings; it’s considerably newer.” Chanyeol’s deep voice seemed to boom in the quiet night. “You have seen what the peoples who came after you have done, but this - this is your people, your descendents. This is what your culture became.”

Taking a deep breath, Jongdae squeezed Chanyeol’s hand, and started forward.

They walked past a line of smaller temples on their right side, but Chanyeol did not veer towards them, staying on the path to the largest temple. He kept the lantern aimed at their feet, allowing them to see where they stepped without ruining their night sight, lit by a perfectly clear and wildly starry sky and the light of a just-rising, close-to-full moon.

They got close enough for Jongdae to clearly see the temple, and he gasped, his grip on Chanyeol’s hand tightening. The face of the temple was lined with massive columns, each one topped with a huge carving of a woman’s face. “Hathor,” he whispered, recognizing his goddess immediately.

Chanyeol nodded. “It’s the biggest temple dedicated to Hathor that was ever built, as far as we are aware,” he murmured. “And the best-preserved building your people ever built, period.”

Jongdae broke away from Chanyeol, picking up his pace until he was nearly running. He stopped in
front of the entrance, staring up at the massive temple face, completely covered in carved reliefs. The people portrayed were not ones he knew, kings and queens from his own future, but the style of the art, the language, was so comfortably familiar.

“It’s so beautiful,” he murmured, awed. “It’s unlike anything we’ve built yet. I wish my brother could have seen this. I wish he could have seen what our people would do.”

Chanyeol’s face compressed. “I know,” he said, “but even if you had a way to show him, you would have to be careful, you know?” Jongdae blinked up at him, confused, and Chanyeol shrugged. “I can only show you this because you’re here now to stay. People shouldn’t know too much about their own future, lest they try to change it.”

Jongdae frowned. “But - ”

“Come on,” Chanyeol said to him, as a warm arm encircled his shoulders. “Let’s go inside.”

The inside of the temple was considerably darker, but the walls were open at the top thirds, the ceiling supported only by the columns, between which beams of moonlight shone. The sheer majesty of the temple’s entrance hall alone nearly brought Jongdae to his knees, tears springing into his eyes against his will. He leaned into Chanyeol’s side, letting the larger man hold him as they walked through the forest of columns and into the main body of the temple itself.

Chanyeol, as it turned out, was quite familiar with this temple. He began to show Jongdae around, telling him about each chamber, the shrines and the courts and the treasuries, telling him about how later explorers had deciphered what each room was used for and what had been found there.

In the very center of the temple, through four doorways, was the main sanctuary. Chanyeol let go of Jongdae here and let him walk on his own towards the carving on the far wall, setting down their packs just inside the room.

Jongdae dropped to the ground and prayed. The words just... flowed from him. Hathor was an old friend, as comfortable to speak to as his own mother; he knew he was mumbling and speaking quickly but she would hear him as she always had, she would understand him. He poured out his worry, his fears, his hopes, to her.

When he had no more words left, he stood, and reached down to touch the goddess’s carved feet. “I have nothing to offer her,” he said aloud, raising his voice again.

“Do you need to offer something?” Chanyeol asked, soft and serious.

Jongdae turned, and found Chanyeol still frozen just inside the room’s entrance. The lantern in his hand and the moonlight from the open walls above lit him in silver and gold, white clothes and pale skin and red, red hair.

He was so intensely, ethereally perfect that Jongdae ceased to breathe.

Walking towards him, Chanyeol reached out a hand. “Jongdae?” he asked, his deep voice echoing across the stone chamber. His shadow flickered up onto the wall, cast by the lantern in his other hand, and for one split second, it matched the carving there on the wall exactly, of the king giving honor to Hathor.

And Jongdae understood.

He took Chanyeol’s hand, pulled him close, and leaned up to kiss him, pressing himself firmly into
Chanyeol’s arms. Chanyeol sucked in a surprised breath, but soon relaxed and kissed Jongdae back, his free hand sliding up to cradle the back of Jongdae’s head, fingers carding through his hair.

“We have something to offer,” Jongdae murmured against Chanyeol’s mouth. He let his hands slide down Chanyeol’s chest, tilting his head to lay kisses on Chanyeol’s jawline. Chanyeol lifted his head, and Jongdae glanced up between kisses to see the taller man’s eyes locked on the carving of Hathor along the back wall of the sanctuary. “We can make an offering of each other.” He licked Chanyeol’s neck, right along the line of his tendon, and relished Chanyeol’s shudder.

It seemed to take a moment for Jongdae’s meaning to settle into Chanyeol’s mind. “You want to - ” He said something in his own language, something Jongdae couldn’t understand but which sounded incredulous. “Jongdae, we - We can’t.”

“Why not?” Jongdae purred. His stomach was churning, but his Goddess made him brave. He knew what he wanted, and Kris was right - Chanyeol needed a push to take that last step.

“Because, it’s - We’re - This building is two thousand years old,” Chanyeol said, sounding aghast. “We can’t defile it like that!”

“I take that as an insult,” Jongdae shot back haughtily. “To share our first sexual experience with the Goddess is an act of worship. And one she would be honored to receive.” Chanyeol blinked, clearly not having thought of it that way. “Trust in me, Chanyeol. She is, after all, my goddess.”

“Jongdae, I - ” Jongdae waited, watching Chanyeol’s face as his desires warred viciously against his upbringing. “I could not - ”

Reaching up, Jongdae cupped Chanyeol’s jaw in his hand. “Must I drop to my knees and beg you?” he asked softly. “Must I prostrate myself? When will you see that I want you as much as you want me? When will you understand that what is between us involves no one else?”

Chanyeol covered Jongdae’s hand with his own. “No one but our Gods,” he whispered. “And it’s not your Gods I’m worried about.”

And that was exactly the issue, wasn’t it? This wasn’t about Hathor, this was about Chanyeol’s God. “Chanyeol, you told me your God is omniscient,” he said. “You told me he loves you unconditionally. Is that not true?”

Chanyeol’s moonlit eyes fluttered shut. “It’s true.”

“Then He already knows what is in your heart,” Jongdae reasoned. “And He loves you still.”

Silence. Jongdae leaned up, taking it slow, giving Chanyeol time to pull away. He pressed his lips to Chanyeol’s, and slowly, Chanyeol melted, his spine curving in and his body melding to Jongdae’s.

Pulling back, gaze locked onto Jongdae’s eyes, Chanyeol took a deep breath. “Not here,” he said softly. “There are local guards who check on this place late at night. Follow me.” He took Jongdae by the hand and led him out of the sanctuary, dipping down to scoop their packs off the ground as they passed.

After the second doorway and just before returning to the inner hall, Chanyeol turned left and led Jongdae into a doorway he hadn’t seen before. A flight of stone stairs rose before them, worn down so far from use that their center had nearly become a ramp. The stairs turned again and again and again, taking them higher, with carvings of worshippers walking beside them on the walls the entire way up.
Finally, they emerged onto the roof of the temple. The roof was surrounded by high walls of its own, taller than a person, even one of Chanyeol’s stature; though it was completely open to the sky, it was shielded from the bitterly cold night winds of the desert.

Chanyeol pulled Jongdae over to the opposite corner of the roof, where a small shrine was built, a tiny temple on top of the temple. It was perhaps as large as one of the shrine rooms in the temple below, set aside from the rest of the roof by miniature versions of the grand columns at the entrance, each with Hathor’s face carved on all four sides.

“What is this?” Jongdae asked, blinking at it, as Chanyeol guided him inside. “Why put another shrine on top of the temple?”

“If you had the time to read this,” Chanyeol said, gesturing at the carved walls and pillars around them, “you would find that the priests would bring the statue of Hathor up here once a year, to allow her to feel the sun.”

“Yes!” Yes, that made sense. “So this is as much a home for Hathor as the sanctuary below?”

“A vacation home, if you will.” Chanyeol dropped the packs. “What do you think? Will this be... suitable?”

Jongdae turned in a slow circle, then tilted his head up to look at the stars. They were a little fainter now than he remembered, but he could still pick out familiar constellations. “Yes,” he said softly. “Yes, this will be perfect.”

Chanyeol knelt to unpack.

It didn’t take him long. Jongdae watched curiously as he deftly unrolled and shook out blanket after blanket, piling both of the contents of their bed-rolls on top of each other. He draped the entire thing with the thickest blanket, and set up two small pillows at one end.

"We can't build a fire up here," he said, setting the lantern to the side as he sat down on the edge of the blankets and pulled off his boots. "So we will have to share our body heat." Looking up at Jongdae, he smiled, half suggestive and half shy.

Hurriedly, Jongdae pulled off his own boots - he was getting good handling at the unnecessary amount of lacing - and sat himself astride Chanyeol's lap, his favorite seat. Chanyeol immediately slid big, warm hands around his sides and up his back, making Jongdae arch and purr. Slowly, almost reverently, Chanyeol bent his head and pressed his lips to Jongdae's pulse as it leapt excitedly in his neck.

Jongdae moaned softly and rolled his hips forward, restlessly rocking against Chanyeol's thighs. "I suspect," he murmured, "that it will be less sharing, and more me taking, your heat."

"Mm." Chanyeol pulled him closer. "Is that all you will be taking, my Prince?"

The question had layers, questions inside of questions, and buried at the center of it Jongdae felt Chanyeol's passionate nature still warring with the frigidity of his upbringing. "Beautiful son of the goddess," Jongdae murmured, stroking Chanyeol's hair with his hand, "I will take anything you give, and be overjoyed with it."

Closing his eyes, Chanyeol groaned, deep within his chest. He whispered something in his own language - a prayer? - and wrapped Jongdae tightly in his arms. Twisting, he gently bore Jongdae down onto the blankets, laying himself out on top.
Jongdae shuddered, as much from the sudden warmth as from the feeling of Chanyeol's lean body against his own, and pushed fingers under the hem of Chanyeol's tunic to skim against skin. Chanyeol arched back, sat up, and in one fluid motion pulled the tunic off over his head, leaving his hair disheveled and his pale torso moonlit.

With a small, worshipful noise, Jongdae reached up and tugged Chanyeol back down on top of him, his breath taken by the sheer heat of Chanyeol's bared skin. Bumps were already raising in protest against the cold, so Jongdae tugged more, pulling Chanyeol down to the blankets beside him.

They switched places, somewhat clumsily, and as Chanyeol arranged the blankets to cocoon them, Jongdae pulled off his own shirt, and then the trousers and socks too while he was at it. Too many clothes, too many layers, pressing full-body against Chanyeol's side was so much more satisfying bare like this, and even moreso still when Chanyeol pulled the heaviest blanket up to their shoulders.

It was comfortable, but Jongdae could not lie still; his body was thirsty for the feeling of Chanyeol's against him and would not stop rocking and writhing. He took a risk and threw his leg over Chanyeol's hips, relishing the pressure of Chanyeol's thigh against his cock; when that only made Chanyeol groan and tighten his grip, he took an even bigger risk and lifted his knee until it brushed over Chanyeol's groin. The response was satisfyingly immediate. Chanyeol's moan grew in volume and he slid his hand over Jongdae's thigh, long fingers gripping tight. His own cock pulsed against Jongdae's flesh, separated by Chanyeol's trousers but growing harder by the second.

Chanyeol initiated the kiss this time, a bruisingly passionate one, holding Jongdae close to him with one hand on his thigh and the other wrapped around his ass.

They stayed there for a long moment, kissing fervently and rocking against each other and clinging, and then, to Jongdae's surprise, Chanyeol caught his hand by the wrist and pulled it down his own body. He pushed Jongdae's knee out of the way, and very slowly, very deliberately laid Jongdae's hand right onto the mouthwateringly thick bulge of his trapped cock.

"Ohhh," Jongdae breathed. He squeezed, a delighted smile pulling across his features when Chanyeol groaned and his cock kicked wildly. "Thank you," he said.

Chanyeol snorted a little unbelieving laugh, but that lasted only until Jongdae squeezed again, grinding his palm slowly into the shaft. Then, his moan reverberated off the ancient, sacred stones, as rich an offering as Jongdae had ever made.

Shaking off Chanyeol's grip, Jongdae slithered down Chanyeol's body, burrowing under the blanket to rub his face enthusiastically into Chanyeol's bulging cock. Big hands immediately landed on his head, and Jongdae felt Chanyeol begin to push, begin to take control, but then he stopped himself, pulled back. Still fettered by invisible chains.

Jongdae would take care of that.

A trouser fly was still a bit alien to him, and even moreso when backwards like this, but with some fumbling Jongdae got the trousers undone. He could pull Chanyeol out like this, since that was what a fly was for, after all, but he wanted more than that. He wanted to feel Chanyeol's skin against his own.

So he pulled Chanyeol's trousers and underclothes off entirely.

Chanyeol's hands were a little shaky with nerves, but he was cooperative, even eager, kicking his clothes away. Jongdae took a moment to shuck his own undergarments - and good riddance - and then they were blessedly, gloriously naked, and Jongdae let impossibly long legs surround him as he
knelt to press a worshipful kiss to the underside of Chanyeol's swollen shaft. The way that Chanyeol's thighs convulsed around him at that simple, bare touch made Jongdae smile.

"Christ, Jongdae," Chanyeol rumbled. It was in English, one of the few words Jongdae knew, mostly because Chanyeol said it so much. Jongdae would have pinched Chanyeol for calling on another God in the very temple of his Goddess, but he knew what oaths could fall from one's lips in the throes of passion, so he let it pass.

"Do you object?" he asked instead.

"No, God, no, I just... It's been a long time, since I've let anyone... do that."

Shyness didn't become Chanyeol, so Jongdae licked at Chanyeol's cock again, savoring his taste. "That is a shame," he murmured, pretending he didn't notice Chanyeol's muscles twitching. "You have a cock worthy of worship."

Chanyeol huffed, his head falling back onto the pillows. "How can it be so easy for you to just say that?" he asked the night sky, as his hands crept again into Jongdae's short hair. "Aren't you even a little ashamed? Embarrassed?"

Jongdae pursed his lips unhappily. "I have nothing to be ashamed of, and neither do you," he said. "Now hush. I have an offering to prepare." Before Chanyeol could respond, Jongdae laid another long stripe up the shaft with his tongue, and then another, and another, pursing his lips to suck at the underside of the head.

Beautiful, deep moaning vibrated from Chanyeol’s body into Jongdae’s skin, musical. Jongdae took Chanyeol’s shaft in hand and sucked marks all the way down, keeping his grip firm as he tongued at Chanyeol’s sac and pressed kisses to his thighs.

Chanyeol was swearing, Jongdae knew he was, his constant stream of groans and gasps punctuated with vehement words in his own language. Clearly, he was trying to stay quiet, and Jongdae rested his head against Chanyeol’s thigh for a moment and looked up at him. "There is no one here," he pointed out. "No one for leagues and leagues. You said the guards do not come until late at night, yes?"

Panting, Chanyeol nodded. "Yes."

"Then why are you still holding back?" He reached up and tapped a finger to Chanyeol’s slack lips. "I want to hear you."

With a groan, Chanyeol fell back onto the bedroll. "You are a terror," he muttered.

Not good enough. Jongdae smirked to himself, leaned down, and took as much of Chanyeol’s perfect cock into his mouth as he could fit.

Chanyeol did not scream, but his gasp was startled and satisfyingly loud. Jongdae sucked hard, closing his eyes and enjoying the stretch of his lips around the shaft. After a moment, he pulled back just far enough to breathe, found Chanyeol’s hand with his own, and brought it to rest on his head.

"Gods of sea and sand," Chanyeol muttered, cursing in Egyptian this time. Jongdae chuckled, his laughter vibrating against the flesh in his mouth, and Chanyeol made a strangled noise halfway between a groan and a snarl. His grip suddenly constricted on Jongdae’s hair.

Jongdae waited. Slowly, Chanyeol pushed, pushed him down onto Chanyeol’s cock, as far as he had just gone and then farther. Jongdae couldn’t help but whimper as the head of Chanyeol’s cock
breached the back of his throat and slid further down, until Jongdae was kissing the side of his own fingers, still wrapped around the base of Chanyeol’s shaft.

He half expected for Chanyeol to pull him back off immediately, half expected him to be concerned for Jongdae’s well-being. But he didn’t. He held Jongdae there, choked on Chanyeol’s cock, for several very, very long seconds. Jongdae breathed harshly through his nose, forced himself not to gag and swallowed hard. He rolled his eyes up as best he could and found Chanyeol leaning up again to watch him. Their eyes met, and Chanyeol’s expression twisted with terrible need. His cock flexed hard in Jongdae’s mouth, pulsing with his lust. Jongdae dropped his eyes and moaned wholeheartedly.

Chanyeol pushed himself up further, until he was leaning back only on one hand. The other, which was in Jongdae’s hair, slid around to the side of his face, still holding Jongdae in place but reaching down to run his thumb over Jongdae’s widely stretched lips. As he did, his cock pulsed again, bitter precome dripping down Jongdae’s throat.

Jongdae wanted to praise him, wanted to tell him how incredible he was, but he couldn’t speak. So he moaned. He moaned like this was the best thing to ever happen to him, squirming and rubbing his face clumsily into Chanyeol’s hand. It pulled an equally desperate moan from Chanyeol’s lips, his strong body shuddering.

Finally, Chanyeol released Jongdae, urged him up. Jongdae popped off of Chanyeol’s cock with a gasp, his vision flickering momentarily from the sudden increase in air. He swallowed, and panted, and prepared himself to go down once more, but Chanyeol apparently had different ideas.

Jongdae found himself hoisted up onto Chanyeol’s body, and then their positions flipped. While Chanyeol quickly readjusted the blanket to cover him up to the waist, Jongdae wriggled until he found a comfortable position and then spread his thighs, urging Chanyeol’s body between them.

Lowering himself down, Chanyeol blanketed Jongdae’s entire body, completely engulfing him.

“You’re so little,” Chanyeol whispered, his head bending to nuzzle into Jongdae’s hair. “Ah, God, you feel so good.”

“I’m not little, it’s you that’s huge,” Jongdae grumbled playfully. In truth, Chanyeol’s size absolutely thrilled him. He loved the way his thighs wrapped so easily around Chanyeol’s lean waist, but his arms couldn’t come close to doing the same around Chanyeol’s broad shoulders. He was so solid and smooth and warm and alive.

Chanyeol reached over Jongdae’s head, feeling around inside the discarded pack. He came back out with a bottle, and Jongdae blinked. “Is that…”

Opening the top with one hand, Chanyeol tipped the bottle into his palm. The contents glistened in the moonlight. Oil. What kind of oil hardly mattered; it was oil and Chanyeol had brought it, which meant…

“Yes,” Jongdae breathed. “Yes, Gods, please, Chanyeol, please -” He could feel his thighs trembling already, his heartbeat pounding wildly enough to shake the ancient stones, but that was oil, and Chanyeol had brought it.

Hushing him, Chanyeol pressed a kiss to his forehead. “Sweet Prince,” he murmured, his accent making his attempt at endearment all the more endearing, “please let me serve you.”

Jongdae melted. His knees dropped to the sides, his body went lax against the blankets, and only his
hands remained on Chanyeol’s shoulders, stroking restlessly as Chanyeol got settled. Large, warm, wet fingers skimmed down his thigh, and Jongdae let his gaze drift up to the stars.

As his fingers probed gently around Jongdae’s hole, Chanyeol bent his head, as if he was too shy to look Jongdae in the face. His red hair tickled Jongdae’s face, so Jongdae brushed it aside, pressing his lips to Chanyeol’s jaw and exhaling shakily as Chanyeol breached him with one finger, so very careful.

He could be as careful as he liked, the fact was, his fingers were thick, and Jongdae had not had opportunity to be touched like this since his body was restored. His mind remembered what to do, but his body was tight as an untouched virgin, and the burn of the stretch was so much more intense than Jongdae ever remembered it being. But Jongdae was afraid to scare Chanyeol, to make him second-guess himself, so he breathed and relaxed as best he could, kissing Chanyeol’s skin absently.

Then, Chanyeol moved, a bare stroke of his finger. Tiny, but the feeling it elicited was immense, and Jongdae arched, choking on a cry. Chanyeol stroked again, deeper, and Jongdae practically convulsed in his arms.

“Sorry,” he gasped, when Chanyeol stopped and looked at him wide-eyed. “Apparently it has been a very, very, very long time. Please don’t stop, I need you.” He reached down and urged Chanyeol’s hand deeper.

Slowly, with concentration written all across his face, Chanyeol opened Jongdae’s body. His touch was careful, but experienced, and by the time he was up to four fingers, Jongdae was a gooey wreck of a person, melted and twisted like a gold cup left too close to the fire.

Then Chanyeol crooked his fingers, pressing them very deliberately up and rubbing them along the inside of Jongdae’s channel, and Jongdae moaned as loudly as he ever had, his thighs shaking and untouched cock jerking. “More, more,” he begged, pawing at Chanyeol’s tensed arms. Leaning up, Chanyeol kissed him thoroughly and obliged, fucking him deeply with his fingers, stroking that precious, magic spot over and over.

Vaguely, Jongdae was aware that something like a prayer was falling from his lips, mumbled and choked but ecstatically thankful. When a warm, wide, oil-slick palm closed over his cock, Jongdae lost language entirely, and could only clutch Chanyeol tightly and shout his pleasure at the silent night sky. Orgasm welled within him, swelling like the banks of the Nile in spring, taking him over completely without warning.

Jongdae came, spilling into Chanyeol’s hand, his hole clenching and fluttering helplessly. It wrung him out - his first orgasm in over three thousand years. He shook as he came down, curling into Chanyeol’s body, clutching onto him for stability. Chanyeol was murmuring to him, praising him, slipping between languages seemingly at random. He pulled his hand out and wiped it off on a rag, and Jongdae realized too late that he meant to stop there.

“No, no,” Jongdae said, though his tongue felt a bit numb. He tugged on Chanyeol’s arm, pulling him back atop. “Take me. Please, please Chanyeol.”

“Dae,” Chanyeol murmured, surprised. “No, pretty one, you should rest. You’re shaking.”

Jongdae would have to come back to that little ‘pretty one’ thing later, when his brain was working. And maybe teach Chanyeol some actual endearments. “Take me,” he insisted. “Fuck me. Please, Chanyeol, I need you inside me.” He could see in Chanyeol’s eyes that his begging was having an effect, so he reached down and palmed Chanyeol’s cock, which, sure enough, was still stone-hard. “You have prepared me to be offered. Make your offering, Chanyeol.”
Chanyeol stared. Jongdae pouted, prettily as he could. Murmuring oaths, Chanyeol took a deep breath and reached for the oil.

The first press of Chanyeol’s blunted cock to Jongdae’s already overstimulated hole made Jongdae whine, high-pitched and desperate. After being so meticulously prepared, the first slide was easy, a little release of pressure and then he was in.

But then, Chanyeol pushed, and Jongdae clawed into Chanyeol’s back, lightning shooting up his limbs and fire consuming him. Chanyeol’s cock was bigger than his fingers, far bigger, and it seemed never-ending. He pushed and pushed until finally, his hips were pressed to Jongdae’s ass.

“Oh, oh,” Chanyeol groaned. Jongdae pried his own eyes open to meet at Chanyeol’s, wide with pleasure. “So tight, so tight, my God, Jongdae.”

Jongdae was impaled like a fish on a hunter’s spear and he absolutely loved it. “More,” he urged, pushing Chanyeol deeper with heels in his back. Growling softly, Chanyeol pulled back, and that on its own was beautiful pleasure.

Then he slammed forward, and they both shouted in ecstasy, the same sentiment on two notes.

Chanyeol’s body took over. Instinct made him rut, fast and sharp, long strokes at first that drove Jongdae wild with friction. But soon enough, his strokes became shallower, his beat less even, and Jongdae clung to him and buried his face in Chanyeol’s sweaty, freckled shoulder as Chanyeol drove in deep and let out his pleasure in rapid, strong pulses of come and a deep-voiced, snarling moan that just didn’t end.

Finally wrung out, Chanyeol’s body relaxed. His arms were shaking with the effort of keeping himself up, so Jongdae pulled him down entirely, letting him rest atop Jongdae’s body. He stroked Chanyeol’s shoulders as Chanyeol came down, whispering a prayer to see their offering into the hands of the Goddess.

“Christ,” Chanyeol said finally. “I can’t feel… my anything.”

Jongdae chuckled. “Good. All that you are has been given as offering.” He kissed Chanyeol’s ear. “We can rest easily, knowing Hathor is pleased.”

Chanyeol rolled to the side, sliding out of Jongdae’s body but pulling him close to his side. “We should clean you up,” he murmured, sounding already half asleep.

“In the morning,” Jongdae whispered. “Rest, beloved.”

It was a term Chanyeol didn’t yet know, and that was purposeful. Ignorant of Jongdae’s deeper meaning, Chanyeol cuddled closer and soon fell asleep.
Chapter 7

December 20, 1927
The Temple of Hathor
Dendera, Egypt

Chanyeol, always a light sleeper when sleeping outdoors, was up before the sun. He pulled on his trousers, careful not to wake the sleeping prince in his bedroll, walked over to a lower part of the wall surrounding the roof and hoisted himself up to sit on the ancient stones.

He sat there for a long while, watching the sky lighten, lost in thought. Eventually, shifting and shuffling behind him made him look back, and Jongdae, naked as the day he was re-born, walked sleepily over to the wall.

Resting his chin on his hand, Chanyeol watched him approach with fondness and longing squeezing his heart. "You might want to put on some clothes," he called.

Sleepily, Jongdae squinted at him. "Whatever for?" he grumbled. "The weather is nice enough."

Chanyeol smiled helplessly. "Sure," he replied, "but the wall is kind of sandy." He cocked his head. "Unless you're magically immune to the discomfort of sand up your butt."

Jongdae snorted. "Ah. I bow to your wisdom." He flourished a silly little bow with his hands folded prayerfully in front of him, then turned around and headed back to the bedroll. Chanyeol watched his ass sway and sighed, his heart thunking dangerously in his chest.

After a moment, Jongdae returned, with undershorts pulled on this time. He was still mostly unclothed, but Chanyeol decided not to bother commenting. They were in Jongdae's world now, his climate, in a temple built by his people.

Instead, Chanyeol straddled the wall, squeezing it with his legs to keep his balance as he reached down and helped pull Jongdae up. They settled with Jongdae cuddled into Chanyeol's side, and silently watched the sun rise over the city of Dendera in the distance.

Once the entire orange disk of the sun was above the horizon, though, Chanyeol squeezed Jongdae's shoulders and said, "We should get back. We still have a ways to travel, before we reach the capital."

Nodding, Jongdae pressed himself closer. "What do you think we will find?" he asked.

"I don’t know," Chanyeol said into his hair, “but I’m excited to find out.”

They dressed, packed, cleaned away all traces of their stay, and left through the temple. Jongdae stopped in the sanctuary once more to say a soft prayer to Hathor, and then they headed back to the city to meet with Kris and Kyungsoo for breakfast.

This last leg of their journey was the shortest and easiest, and Chanyeol told Jongdae so as they set out. Even following the river and moving at an easy pace, they would reach the ancient capital no later than mid-afternoon. Since they didn't really have much of an idea where to start looking for Sehun's tomb, they figured they would begin by showing Jongdae his own tomb, empty now though it was, and see if there were any clues to be gleaned from that.
But the ancient capital was home to multiple temple and funerary complexes - Karnak, the Valleys of the Kings and the Queens, the Theban Necropolis. If there wasn’t a hint to be found within Jongdae’s tomb, perhaps other ruins from the same era would hold clues, for someone who could recognize them. After all, the emptied tombs of Joonmyun, Hatshepsut, and Senenmut had already been found and identified, as well as the tombs of Joonmyun’s successor Minseok and his son; it would be easy enough to go take a look at any of them.

Though it was blazingly hot, they were travelling along the riverbank that day, and thus were at least occasionally in the shade. There were people all around, mostly Egyptian citizens but the occasional traveler as well, and the bustle kept them all awake and alert in a way they were not the day before.

They stopped for lunch in a smaller town on the riverbank called Naqada, which was the oldest settlement they had so far visited, having been originally settled before written history. It was one that Jongdae remembered, one that he visited multiple times in the past, and he exclaimed over what had changed and what had not. This close to the ancient capital, Jongdae was much more familiar with the terrain and the settlements, and Chanyeol was glad to see him finally getting excited.

Kris and Chanyeol argued for a while after they set out as to whether or not they should cross the river. They were already on the west bank, which was the side the Theban Necropolis was on, but Chanyeol wanted to cross to the east bank so they could ride through Karnak, the city which now stood on top of the ruins of Thebes. Kris argued that it was too far out of their way, and that they had to reach Hatshepsut’s temple as soon as possible, but Chanyeol was in no real rush to get there; he was enjoying travelling with Jongdae too much.

In the end, their travelling companions put an end to the argument by both siding with Chanyeol. Jongdae wanted to see what had become of the ancient temple that had been so important to his everyday life, and Kyungsoo just wanted to see the temple, period. They ended up crossing the river via ferry and riding the last half an hour or so along the east bank.

Karnak rendered Jongdae speechless. Chanyeol listened with half an ear as Kris told Kyungsoo about the temple, its history and its uses, about the thirty or so different Pharaohs over the course of almost two thousand years who contributed to building it.

Slowly, Jongdae found his words again, and as they walked through the temple, he pointed out those additions which had been made by his grandfather, by his father, by Hatshepsut. He then, haltingly, told them of the addition his brother had planned, a festival hall that he had intended to build in preparation for his 30th year jubilee. He pointed out where it would have been, described what changes his brother would have made. It sounded grand, beautiful. Chanyeol found himself wishing it had come to be.

"We spent so much time dreaming of the great things that we would accomplish during my brother's reign," Jongdae said softly, as they walked through the hall built by Minseok's son. "Joonmyun, Sehun, Jongin and I. We would hide away in the evenings with a jug of wine and make plans, we were so full of ideas. The three of us were so excited to be a part of his legacy, to help him make history. To have that taken away... " He sighed. "More than just my brother was lost when Joonmyun was killed. Our homeland lost one of the brightest, most driven kings it never had."

Thebes had always been one of Chanyeol’s favorite places on Earth. Modern buildings were built almost right up to the ancient monuments themselves, separated only by short stretches of open space, history and progress coexisting right next to each other. As they rode south to the ferry, Chanyeol kept Jongdae’s hand in his own, and they talked about the remains that they passed. There was much that Jongdae recognized, and much that would come after his time. Thebes, or as Jongdae had known it, Waset, had been inhabited since at least the time of the Pyramids, and had been the
capital of Egypt off and on since Jongdae’s great-great grandfather Ahmose I united Egypt at the beginning of what Chanyeol’s peers now called the New Kingdom period.

Chanyeol had to stop for a moment and really think about that. Jongdae was the twice-great grandson of the man who united Ancient Egypt. He was only four generations removed from that great king. To Jongdae, a unified Egypt was less than sixty years past - considerably younger than the United States of America was to Chanyeol.

That was mind-bending.

He was still trying to wrap his brain around that when they reached the ferry. The trip to the west bank was relatively short, all things considered, and then they were riding past the rows of temples of the Theban Necropolis.

Ahmose III. Ramesses IV. Memphath. Tausret. Ramesses II. Every single one of them came after Jongdae’s time, but not by much; these were the temples of the kings and queens who had followed after Jongdae’s nephew took the throne.

Then, they turned west, up the avenue and towards Hatshepsut’s temple.

The temple could be seen from quite a distance; the clear, hot air and open, barely-sloped ground left it stark against the sandstone cliff into which it was carved. Chanyeol felt Jongdae tense in his arms as they neared it.

“Does it look as you remember?” Kris asked Jongdae, in Greek.

“No,” Jongdae said frankly. “But I still recognize it.”

Kyungsoo was paying them no mind, unable to understand the conversation anyway. Instead, he was shading his eyes against the afternoon sunlight and squinting at the temple. “Are there people up there?” he asked.

There were, in fact. Multiple figures moving around on the second terrace, and what appeared to be a camp. Chanyeol pulled back on their camel, slowing. “Kris…”

“I see them. Taking bets on nationality.” He flipped the end of the long scarf that was wrapped around his head back over his shoulder, freeing the stock of the pistol at his hip.

Chanyeol shifted the reins, and Jongdae, to his left hand, freeing his right. “French,” he guessed.

“My money’s on German,” Kyungsoo shot back.

“Chanyeol?” Jongdae asked, his voice very quiet. “What’s going on?”

“It is likely nothing to worry about,” Chanyeol told him, switching to Egyptian.

Jongdae blew out a breath. “You are an awful liar,” he muttered.

They were at the base of the ramp up to the temple now, and while the camels were capable of going up it, Chanyeol signalled a halt anyway and dismounted. “Jongdae,” he said, “please stay with the animals.”

Jongdae dropped to the ground next to him and nodded, taking all five leads in his hands. His eyes were wide, but his movements were calm, and whether accidentally or purposefully, he put the camels between himself and the temple.
Feeling slightly better, Chanyeol came around to Kris’s side, and with Kyungsoo on Kris’s other side they started up the ramp.

“At least three,” Kyungsoo muttered. “Can’t tell if the are more, or what they might be packing.”

“Let’s find out who they are and what they’re doing here before we start shooting, hmm?”

“I don’t know, Yeol,” Kris said, “something doesn’t feel right here.”

Chanyeol didn’t get a chance to retort. Indistinct yelling interrupted them, and the people in front of the temple flew into a tizzy, some running and some diving behind crates. The flash of desert sunlight off of metal was the only warning Chanyeol got, and he balled his fist in Kris’s shirt and dropped, yanking his friend with him. They hit the ancient stones as bullets whizzed overhead.

“Hey, calm down!” Chanyeol yelled in Arabic, as Kris yelled something similar in French. Neither one seemed to have an impact, though, and Chanyeol ended up rolling off of the ramp and dropping down off the side. He risked a moment to glance back at Jongdae. The camels were still there, looking spooked, but he couldn’t see Jongdae behind them.

He tore his gaze back to the people with the guns. “Kris?”

“Here!” Kris yelled. It sounded like he was on the other side of the ramp.

“Keep their attention!” Pressing close to the side of the ramp, Chanyeol started forward at a full sprint.

After three weeks in a confined ship and two days on camelback, sprinting felt alien and strange, but Chanyeol couldn’t really spare the brains to contemplate the burn in his thighs right now. He just ran full-tilt towards the first colonnade, knowing that the temple itself was his only cover out here. As soon as he was close enough to the colonnade that he could no longer see the attackers standing on the terrace above, Chanyeol cut a hard left, zipping past the columns.

It was a good thing he’d been on the left side. On the right, the temple was pushed right up against the cliffs, but the left side was open and a pile of stone rubble at the corner made a convenient makeshift stair. Chanyeol scrambled up to the terrace - long legs and arms coming in handy, for once - and snuck around behind the attackers.

There were only three of them, plus a donkey, tethered to a stake driven into the terrace. That made Chanyeol angry enough - who the blazes would drive an iron stake into a three thousand year old temple? - but then he realized that the open crates and half-filled bags were filled with artifacts, and almost exclusively the shiny ones. The gold, the lapis, the amber, the carnelian. No scrolls, no pottery.

So probably not archeologists, then.

It took a moment for Chanyeol to weigh his options, but then he saw it. The donkey was loaded up, but not with treasure. It was holding their food, their bedrolls, their supplies. They must have been getting ready to leave.

Chanyeol took very careful aim, and fired.

The lid of a nearby crate, leaning against its other half, exploded with splinters. As Chanyeol had hoped, the donkey spooked, rearing and ripping free of its tether. It took off down the ramp.

Unthinkingly, two of the three robbers took off after it, yelling in a language Chanyeol didn’t
immediately recognize. The third hesitated, looking around wildly until he found himself face to face with the barrel of Chanyeol’s gun.

Chanyeol jerked his chin at the ramp. “Get out of here.”

The man hesitated, but when Chanyeol took a step forward, he bolted. Chanyeol let him go, and watched as Kris and Kyungsoo warily let him run past as well.

It was only then, looking down the ramp, that Chanyeol realized that two of the camels were gone, and Jongdae was on the ground. “Jongdae!” he yelled, and bolted down the ramp.

His cry made Kris and Kyungsoo look. Kris started running as well, but Kyungsoo climbed up onto the ramp and started towards the temple, with his pistol drawn. Chanyeol blazed past him.

Kris got there first. He was helping Jongdae to his feet when Chanyeol skid to a halt, nearly losing his balance in the sand. “Are you alright?” he gasped.

Jongdae blinked at him.

“That was English, Yeol,” Kris muttered.

Oh. “My prince, are you injured?” Chanyeol asked, switching to Egyptian.

“Bruised,” Jongdae said, “but otherwise, no. But I could not keep hold of the beasts, they ran!” He sounded very distressed about this.

“Don’t worry about that,” Chanyeol said immediately. “You’re alright, that’s all that matters.”

Jongdae looked back over his shoulder out at the desert. “But one was a pack animal,” he said. “Our food, our bedrolls and supplies…”

Chanyeol tugged him close. “We’ll be fine, Dae.” Truthfully, it would make their lives a little more difficult to have their supplies halved, but civilization wasn’t so far away that it was a devastating blow. “Please, do not worry.”

Jongdae’s fingers curled into his shirt. “Who were they?” he asked. “Why did they attack us?”

Sighing, Chanyeol looked over Jongdae’s head and into Kris’s eyes. “Graverobbers,” he said, in Greek.

In his arms, Jongdae stiffened. Over Jongdae’s head, Kris snarled soundlessly, his face twisting with contempt.

“What were they after?” Kris asked, in English. “Hatshepsut’s temple is all but empty. They weren’t pulling the carvings off the walls, were they?”

Chanyeol shook his head. “Nah. Not that advanced. Just the usual glitz.” Then, the realization hit him, and his eyes widened.

Kris hit the same realization in the next second. “An undiscovered tomb? What if it’s - ”

“Sehun’s tomb,” Chanyeol finished for him. “Shit.” He made to move away, but Jongdae’s arms tightened around him, holding him in place.

“What did they take?” Jongdae asked him. His voice was too soft, too flat. “Who did they disturb?”
“I do not believe they got away with any of it,” Chanyeol quickly assured him. “It’s all still up there. Let us go see.” Jongdae nodded, and they started up the ramp, leaving Kris with the camels.

At the top of the ramp, Kyungsoo met them both. “Took a look around,” he said. “No lollygaggers, but I found what they were pickin’ at.” He jerked his chin at the second ramp, leading up to the main body of the temple. “Straight back, all the way into the cliffside.”

Chanyeol murmured his thanks and guided Jongdae up the second ramp and through the colonnade to the forecourt of the temple itself.

In the center, Jongdae stopped, and slowly turned in place, taking it in. “My queen’s sanctuary… It is destroyed?”

Chanyeol looked where he was looking - to the west, past the crumbled wall. “Partially,” he murmured. “And beyond that, your half-brother’s temple, as well.”

Jongdae’s eyes widened. “Oh!” He took a few steps forward, almost running, and pressed himself to a gap in the wall, looking out over the plateau directly beside it, where the toppled ruins of the mortuary temple of Ahmose II - of Minseok - lay strewn and scattered.

“This should have been my brother’s temple,” Jongdae said. “I helped him choose the site, we were starting to talk about the design - ” He stopped. “It’s destroyed.”

“Almost,” Chanyeol murmured. “Rock slide. Not much long after it was built, we think. Three hundred years later at the most.” He came up behind Jongdae and slid a comforting arm around his waist. “The back half, that which was built into the cliffside, it survived, and so we discovered it. If it had been built only a little further forward, it would have been completely destroyed.”

Wide-eyed, Jongdae stared at the unrecognizable rubble. A few carved stones still remained, vaguely outlining where the temple used to be. “I wonder if he used our design, or if he chose his own,” Jongdae said. “I suppose I will never know.”

Chanyeol didn’t really know what to say to that; he couldn’t imagine what Jongdae must be feeling. “Come on,” he said softly. “Kyungsoo said the robbers were in here.” He led Jongdae into the sanctuary at the very back of the temple, carved directly into the cliffside itself. The sanctuary of Amun-Ra.

The space was dark and somewhat claustrophobic, a long, thin room with little alcoves on either side depicting scenes of worship. As they passed through to the very back, though, they found a beam of sunlight streaming in from a carefully placed light-box opening, high in the ceiling.

“Oh,” Chanyeol said. “I’ve never been here this late in the year before. In the summer, no sunlight gets through.”

“Yes,” Jongdae replied. “That is purposeful. Senenmut’s genius, and his devotion.” He ran his fingers very lightly over the carvings on the wall. “On the day of the lowest sun, the light will shine here, and illuminate our God, Ra.” He moved his hand in an arc, skipping over carvings and holes in the stone, to the next figure. “As it travels, it will then shine here, on the face of my brother, the embodiment of Ra in this world.”

Chanyeol blinked. “The cartouche names that figure to be Ahmose II. Minseok.”

Bitterly, Jongdae chuckled. “Of course it does. My half brother would have had to scramble to assert his legitimate claim to the throne when Joonmyun died. I am sure many depictions of Thutmose III have been renamed Ahmose II.” He looked over his shoulder, with pain in his eyes that punched
Chanyeol in the gut. “After all, how would history ever know the difference?” He turned back. “But I know. I was still alive when this chapel was finished. What you see here, this is but a bare shadow of the beauty and majesty once held in this room.”

He dropped to his knees. Silently, Chanyeol stepped back, and let him pray.

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When Jongdae had his emotions back under control, he thanked his gods for listening, and stood. Behind him, Chanyeol waited, leaning against the doorway to the chamber with the beam of sunlight behind him turning his hair to flame.

“Are you alright?” Chanyeol asked him.

“As much as I can be, I suppose,” Jongdae murmured. “It’s just that… This is the home of my family. It was meant to be our home forever.”

“I know.” Chanyeol reached out his hand. “I hate to make things worse, but… I found what the robbers were after.”

Jongdae’s heart got stuck in his throat. “Show me,” he choked out.

Chanyeol led him back out of the furthest chamber, into the body of the sanctuary. “Here,” he said, and pointed into one of the side alcoves, sunless and black.

Carefully, Jongdae started forward. There was rubble on the floor, he could feel it even through his awkwardly heavy shoes, and once Chanyeol turned on his hand-lamp, he could see the rubble illuminated in the unnatural beam, casting too-sharp shadows. It was a lot of rubble, and it took but a moment to discover why.

The back wall of the alcove had been ripped out. Beyond it, a dark but obviously manmade passage loomed.

“I was here not even a quarter of a year ago,” Chanyeol said quietly. “This was not open then, I promise you.”

There were tools on the ground, discarded in the rubble. “It was recently opened,” Jongdae guessed.

“Yes. And not very skillfully.”

“You said that my own tomb was behind a wall in this very temple, yes? Was it not here?”

Chanyeol shook his head and pointed, gesturing back and to the right. “Yours was on the east side, behind a wall in the Sanctuary of the Sun. Directly opposite the sanctuaries which are dedicated to Hatshepsut and to your brother.” He cocked his head. “If you’d like, I can show you.”

Jongdae took a deep breath. “Perhaps,” he muttered, “To be quite honest, now that I am here, I’m not entirely certain I… want to see it.”

Stroking a hand across Jongdae’s back, Chanyeol nodded. “I understand,” he said. “You can decide later.”
With Chanyeol illuminating the floor in front of them, they started down the passage. It was flat, not sloping as so many burial passages generally were, and it turned to the left twice.

“No carvings on the walls,” Chanyeol murmured. “That’s unusual, for a burial chamber.”

Jongdae’s heart thundered like stampeding oxen in his ears. “It is,” he said. “But I don’t believe this passage was ever meant to be seen.”

The end of the passage flared into an antechamber, just large enough to frame out a large doorway, flanked by two matching statues of the same kneeling man. Jongdae’s eyes widened.

“The man is holding a tablet and stylus,” Chanyeol murmured. “He wears no headdress. Not a Pharaoh.”

“No,” Jongdae said. “A scribe. This is Jongin.”

Chanyeol looked at him sharply. “You’re sure?”

“He looks old,” Jongdae said helplessly. “But yes. Even if I did not recognize him, even if the tablet did not identify him, he is named. Here, look.” He pointed at the base of the statue, where Jongin’s name was carved.

“Scribe of Kings,” Chanyeol read aloud. “Kings, plural?”

“He must have remained in Minseok’s court,” Jongdae said. “Perhaps the court of Minseok’s son, as well.” He approached the door. “Is this Jongin’s tomb, or is he here to guard someone else?”

Chanyeol came up to his side. “Only one way to find out.”

The doorway had clearly been blocked off with rubble and stones, but apparently the robbers had already broken through. With Chanyeol’s hand to steady him, Jongdae climbed over what was left and into the burial chamber itself.

The chamber had clearly been rifled through, and very recently. Sacks of grains and stacks of pottery were pushed aside in favor of the more expensive items, which were mostly gone. But the sarcophagus was still in the center, and Jongdae pushed away the horror in his gut at the occupant’s eternal rest being disturbed in favor of going to make sure the occupant was even still there.

He stepped up onto the dais, and dropped to his knees in relief. “The seal is unbroken,” he called. “The body is safe.”

Chanyeol came to his side. “Who is it?” he asked.

Jongdae ran his fingers over the cartouche. “It is Sehun,” he replied. “As we suspected.”

Turning in a circle, Chanyeol shone his beam of light onto the carved and painted walls of the chamber. “Then our answer is probably here, somewhere,” he said.

A voice called out, and Chanyeol turned and called back. In a few moments, another beam of light came around the corner, and Kris entered.

“Went through some of the things taken out by our friends,” Kris said, in Greek. “The scarabs are from the reign of Minseok’s son.”

“That lines up with the dates we had for Sehun,” Chanyeol replied.
“Is that who we have here?” Chanyeol nodded. Kris spun in place, flashing his light on the walls the way Chanyeol had. “Right. Guess we’d better start reading.” He pulled a second light from his bag, turned it on, and presented it to Jongdae. “It will be nice not to have to spend weeks translating, for a change.”

Jongdae took the light - someday, he would have to ask Chanyeol to explain how their flameless lamps worked, since he insisted it was not magic - and went to find the beginning of the narrative on the wall.

Most of it was standard. Scenes from the Book of the Dead, funerary scenes, scenes of the afterlife. Scenes of Sehun’s mortal life, his accomplishments, his servitude to his kings and his gods. Jongdae forced himself to stand and study the scene depicting Sehun mourning at Jongdae’s own burial, and then again at the burials of Joonmyun, Hatshepsut, and finally of his father, Senenmut.

Sehun had lost so much. It was nearly incomprehensible.

“Jongin is depicted at his side,” Chanyeol murmured, startling Jongdae. “Right from here, see?” He pointed at a smaller figure holding a tablet and stylus, in the scene depicting Joonmyun’s burial. “In each scene from this point forward, Jongin is at Sehun’s side.”

Of course. “They would have had no one but each other,” Jongdae murmured. “We four became we three, became we two. I was so concerned with what Sehun had lost, I failed to consider what Jongin had lost.” He moved further down the wall, to the depiction of Sehun’s own funeral. “And here Jongin stands again, burying his last friend. He must have survived us all.”

Kris stepped up to Jongdae’s other side. “The story doesn’t end there, though,” he mutters. “Look. And is it just me, or does the art style change here?”

Jongdae brought the light closer. “Yes,” he agreed, “yes it does. This is not the art of a Court sculptor.” The high-relief, accurately proportioned and well-detailed carvings faded into figures depicted in a few shallowly carved lines, more of a suggestion of portraits than actual portraits.

More tellingly, though, the twists of the character heh suddenly changed direction.

“Sehun carved this himself,” Jongdae guessed. He stepped back to get a broader view of the panel. “This is... he is telling the story of bringing me back. Look here, this shows him in deep study, with all his father’s knowledge around him.” Though it was sketched in the barest of lines, Jongdae recognized the setting. “That is his father’s place of rest.”


Jongdae looked at him. “That tomb is out underneath the second terrace of this very temple. Your people found it?”

“Yes,” Chanyeol said. “Actually, we found it. Kris and I. Two years ago.” He glanced at Kris, who was watching them curiously. “We were too late, though. The tomb was robbed, the body and treasures were gone. But the ceiling is amazing, easily the most important thing we ever found.” A flash of a smile. “Until you, of course.”

The coincidence was incredible, in a troublingly vast way. “Even before it was completed, Senenmut would spend hours in his tomb. Many people thought it ill luck to spend time in their final resting place before their death, but Senenmut was a singular man.” A soft laugh broke from Jongdae’s throat. “He would always say that he wanted to get comfortable there, before it became his eternal
home.”

“A wise man,” Chanyeol murmured. “That would take a lot of the fear out of death and burial.”

“Yes, I admired him very much, we all did. Joon and I talked about doing the same thing, but we… We did not get the opportunity.” Jongdae moved to the side. “And here, it shows Sehun entering my tomb and placing the tablet in my mouth.”

“Not just you,” Chanyeol said. He pointed to the next scene. “Look at this. He did the same thing with Joonmyun.” Jongdae looked, wide-eyed, and found it to be true. The same scene was depicted, but the figure laid out on the dais was wearing a pharaonic crown. “We were right,” Chanyeol said, switching to Greek for Kris’s benefit. “If Joonmyun’s body hadn’t been robbed, it might have been him coming back to life.”

Kris shook his head. “And if we had been but a few hours later than we were, today, this tomb might have been empty as well.”

The thought struck Jongdae like an arrow. Had the George Washington left harbor even a day later, had they loitered even an extra hour in Karnak, Sehun’s tomb may have been cleaned out, his eternal rest destroyed. Jongdae muttered an oath under his breath.

“Hello,” Kris murmured. “What is this?”

Jongdae moved to the next scene in the sequence. It was… Destroyed. Completely scratched out, chiseled lines cutting through the carvings and rendering them unreadable.

“I don’t understand,” he murmured. “Did someone do this on purpose? It looks purposeful.”

Chanyeol came up to his side. “Yes, that’s deliberate, you can tell by the way the marks are cut.” He ran a finger carefully along the edge. “Someone did not want anyone to see this scene. Why?”

“No all of it was removed, though,” Kris said. “Look here.” He pointed. At the upper left side of the scene, a round disk was still discernible, with lines like rays coming from it. “That looks like sunlight, does it not? And if the scene was oriented the way the scenes before and after it are…” Kris shined his light on the wall to their left, illuminating a depiction of Sehun offering up his heart to Anubis to be weighed, a classic scene from the Book of the Dead. So classic and normal was it to Jongdae, in fact, that until this moment, he hadn’t realized that there was no heart in Sehun’s hands.

“There’s a hole in the wall,” Jongdae said, rather dumbly. “Sehun holds nothing in his hands.”

Chanyeol crossed the room and stepped into the beam of Kris’s light. Tall as he was, he had to stand on tiptoe to put his eye to the hole in the wall.

He pulled back. “You’re kidding.” In the next moment, he was gone, stepping over the rubble in the doorway. Trotting footsteps circled the room, and only because he could hear Chanyeol moving around them did Jongdae finally guess where they were.

“This tomb is directly behind the Sanctuary of Amun-Ra,” he realized.

“Yes!” Chanyeol’s voice was muffled, but not as much as it should have been. A beam of light shone through the hole, too weak and cold to be sunlight. “This hole is not an accident. On this side, it is in the hands of your brother as he offers to Ra.” The light went away, and Jongdae saw a shadow of movement through the hole. “Why would they depict both your brother and Sehun as offering nothing to their gods? That seems strange.”
“It’s more than strange, it’s sacrilegious,” Jongdae murmured. “Unless there used to be something there, and it was stolen? A gemstone, perhaps?”

“Chanyeol,” Kris called. “Shine your light through the hole again.” Chanyeol did as he asked. “Lift it up. No, further. As if the light was coming from the ceiling.”

The beam of light fell right across the sarcophagus, completely illuminating it.

“Oh!” Jongdae looked at the drawing on the wall, and then back at the room. “That is what this is meant to show!” He pointed at the disk in the carving. “This is the sun on the day it is lowest in the sky. It pierces the temple and shines through the hole onto Sehun’s sarcophagus.”

A hand on his arm - big, rough-skinned, not Chanyeol - got his attention. “That isn’t the end of the story,” Kris said, and pointed.

Shining his light on the last scene, Jongdae studied it. The drawing of the sarcophagus was open, but there was nothing shown within it. There was a single line of text under the scene, and when Jongdae read it, his heart leaped.

“Ahh?” Jongdae asked softly. “What does it say?”

A thunk announced that Chanyeol had returned. “What have I missed?”

“Jongdae?” Kris said softly. “What does it say?”

A thunk announced that Chanyeol had returned. “What have I missed?”

“Sehun planned to sacrifice his immortality,” Jongdae said softly. He was too in shock to even attempt to give those words the weight they deserved; too in shock to continue speaking in Greek. “That is what the spell is meant to do. As the final part of the spell, Sehun will give up his eternal rest, and return to Earth.”

It obviously took Chanyeol a second to realize the implications. “You mean… The spell was supposed to bring him back to life as well?” he asked. “You’re sure?”

Mutely, Jongdae pointed at the final scene. Chanyeol stepped closer, and read the inscription aloud. “I return to Earth and there I remain, that my brothers may live again happily, and I with them.” He blinked and looked back at the remnants of the previous carving. “Sehun wished to be brought back to life to be with Joonmyun and I again, but someone didn’t want that to happen.”

Chanyeol looked from the wall, to the sarcophagus, to the hole in the far wall, and back again. “So the trigger is the solstice.”

It was so obvious. “On that day each year, the light of the sun will shine down from the sky and penetrate to the farthest wall of the sanctuary to Amun-Ra,” Jongdae said. “It will pass right over the hole, and illuminate the sarcophagus, and Sehun’s body. The spell will be complete, and...” He blinked. “But… If that is the case, then, why has this not happened in the thousands of solstices since Sehun’s death?”

“Unless it has,” Chanyeol said. “Unless Sehun was accidentally raised a long time ago, and has already lived and died again without you?”

They all three stared at one another for a moment, and then they all three jumped into motion, converging on the sarcophagus. Chanyeol quickly stayed Kris’s hand. “My Prince,” he said, uncharacteristically formal. “This should be your decision. May we open this sarcophagus?”

As much as he was loathe to disturb Sehun’s resting place, Jongdae had to know. “Yes,” he breathed. “Do it.”
With the back of his light, Kris shattered the ancient clay seal holding the lid of the sarcophagus in place. Together, he and Chanyeol carefully - and with a coordination that told Jongdae they had much practice - slid the lid of the sarcophagus at an angle, allowing them all to look inside.

The painted mask of Sehun’s face stared up at them, and Jongdae breathed a sigh of relief, because the mask was still safely atop a very well-wrapped and clearly untouched mummy.

“He’s still here,” Chanyeol murmured, as Jongdae reached down and ran his fingers over the carved wooden mask, now dried and cracked. “But then… why has the spell not come to pass? Was he wrong?”

“He was right enough to bring me to life again,” Jongdae pointed out. “We must assume he was right about all of it. So why did it not work?” He cocked his head. “Was it because the sarcophagus was closed?” A horrible, terrifying thought occurred to him. “Oh Gods, what if he came back to life inside the locked sarcophagus, with no one to help him as you helped me?”

Chanyeol put a steadying hand on his back. “There’s no signs of struggle, Jongdae.”

Oh. That was true. Relieved, Jongdae deflated.

Kris shined his light down Sehun’s body. “What is this?”

It was a box, a chest, resting atop Sehun’s hands, which were bound to his body near his stomach as if he was holding the box. Gently, Jongdae reached down. The box slipped from his fingers at first; it was far heavier than it looked like it should be. He had to use both hands to lift it.

The box was stone, tied shut with a simple length of gold wire, easy to snap with his fingers. Jongdae sat down on the dais with his back to the sarcophagus, balanced the box on his knees, and opened it.

Chanyeol and Kris sat down on either side of him, flanking him like huge guards. Jongdae found it steadying, and he leaned on Chanyeol’s shoulder as he handed him the lid of the box and shined his light inside.

Carefully nestled in a bed of ancient cloth was a gemstone unlike any Jongdae had seen before. It appeared to be made of cut crystal quartz, but the center was dark, shining red as Kris passed his light through the side. Setting his own light down, Jongdae reached in and gently lifted the stone.

The insides sloshed.

“That is filled with blood,” Chanyeol said dumbly. “How could it… It’s been thousands of years.”

Kris’s light shifted, passing over the gemstone to fall on the stone lid in Chanyeol’s lap. “There’s writing carved in there,” he said.

Chanyeol shone his own light on it, as sure enough, there were carvings on the inside. “I am… something… for what I have done, my friend,” he read.

“He killed Jongin’s seal!” Kris muttered, as Chanyeol pulled Jongdae close. “He killed
himself? He must have left Jongin with instructions for how to set up the tomb.”

“The spell had two parts,” Chanyeol said, picking up on the trail of what Kris was thinking. “The incantation on the tablet, and the sunlight shining on Sehun’s body. Sehun wanted Jongin to complete the second half for him, but Jongin couldn’t bring himself to deny Sehun access to the Afterlife.”

“For all we know, Sehun wanted Jongin to complete both parts. Maybe he was supposed to break into the tombs and revive Jongdae and Joonmyun himself. Maybe he was supposed to somehow set up his own tomb to do the same.” Kris shook his head. “It’s possible that all this was meant to happen not long after your original death. We might never know.”

Jongdae looked down at the gemstone in his hands. Was the blood inside the stone Sehun’s? Jongin’s? Someone else, a sacrifice? He wasn’t sure he wanted to know. “We can finish what he started, though,” he said numbly. “This must go in the hole in the wall. Without it, the spell will not activate, but with it…”

Chanyeol’s large hand slid over his knee and squeezed. “He’ll come back, and… You won’t be alone,” he finished. His tone was very carefully blank.

“Jongdae.” Kris’s tone made them both look up. In the darkness, Kris’s eyes were black and wide. “The solstice is tomorrow.”

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Jongdae ended up going to the chapel dedicated to Hathor to pray.

Chanyeol couldn’t blame him. He had a huge decision to make, and not a lot of time to make it. They’d sat and talked about it over dinner, talked over everything they could think of. The consequences of finishing the ritual, the consequences of not finishing the ritual. The likelihood - or lack thereof - that they could get Jongdae another ticket to Egypt, if he chose to leave and wait for another winter solstice.

They were pretty much only guessing on what would happen. From the wording of Jongin’s message inside the box, and the fact that he’d gone to such lengths to destroy the carving on the wall, Jongdae was worried that bringing Sehun back would somehow ruin his chance for eternal rest forever. Would Anubis take back a soul which had already slipped away from him once? Or would reviving Sehun grant only temporary life, hurling his soul into nothingness when he next died?

There was also, as Kris pointed out, the fact that Sehun was, at minimum, 47 when he died. Jongdae had returned to life at the exact age which he had died; they had to assume Sehun would do the same. Chanyeol had assured Jongdae that lives were longer in the modern age thanks to more advanced medicine, but still, at most they would have perhaps 20 to 30 years together, and with a 30-year gap in age that they had not had before.

But even with these things to think about, Jongdae argued, it was clear that the completion of the spell was what Sehun had wanted, his last dying wish. Jongin had refused him that wish, but Jongdae could grant it.

There was a lot to consider, but in the end, Chanyeol wasn’t the one who had to consider it. Sehun was Jongdae’s best friend, his former lover. This had to be Jongdae’s choice. And Chanyeol didn’t
envy him having to make it. If he was in that position - if Kris was the one long-dead and long-buried - he honestly had no clue what he would do.

So Jongdae was praying on it, and Kyungsoo was standing outside the chapel, silently keeping watch. That left Kris and Chanyeol setting up the campsite for the night.

With so much rattling around in his head, Chanyeol couldn’t stop talking. “I can’t get past knowing that there might be another Ancient Egyptian with us by this time tomorrow,” he was saying, as he unrolled one of their two remaining bedrolls. “And not just any, but the son of Senenmut, and Jongdae’s former lover. How the heck am I supposed to prepare myself for that?”

Kris snorted. “Don’t forget what Jongdae is going to go through if he decides not to do it. The guilt is going to consume him.”

Shit. A good point. “Either way, we need to be ready,” he said. “I’ve been thinking, we need to get him - or them, I guess - vaccinated,” Chanyeol murmured. “He’s already going to be vulnerable to diseases that didn’t exist in his time. And he’ll have to learn English, really learn it. And get a job. Maybe we can get him a position in the museum? He’d make a great curator.”


Chanyeol stopped mid-movement and sat heavily on the bedroll. “I know,” he said. “I know he does. But how can I even ask him to consider not doing it?” He dropped his head into his hands. “He’s so lonely, Kris, I see it in every move he makes.”

Familiar heat plopped down next to him. “He’s happy to be with you,” Kris said gently. “It’s not enough. He’s only been here a few weeks. Whatever this is, whatever we have, it isn’t strong enough to override his desire for something familiar, something he can feel connected to.” Chanyeol shook his head. “I can’t ask him to forget his entire past, to abandon this chance, just for me.”

Kris didn’t answer that, but he did slide his arm around Chanyeol’s shoulders. Sighing, Chanyeol dropped his head on his partner’s shoulder.

“Listen,” Kris finally said. His voice was low, uncharacteristically rough. “Whatever happens tomorrow, I’ve got your back, okay?” Chanyeol looked up at him, surprised. Kris was staring unseeingly out across the temple’s terrace. “You’re the best friend I’ve ever had, you’re my brother. If you need anything, anything, all you gotta do is ask.”

Glancing to the side, Kris flashed him a crooked smile. Chanyeol felt a smile of his own creeping over his face, and he nudged Kris’s side with his elbow. Kris wrapped his arm around Chanyeol’s neck and gave him a Dutch rub, digging his knuckles into Chanyeol’s hair. Chanyeol squawked and shoved him, which devolved into an extremely childish little slap-fight.

Eventually, Kris just yanked Chanyeol in and wrapped him in a bear hug. “You’ll be okay,” he muttered. “You always make the best out of any hand you’re dealt, you’ll be fine.”

“Ah, lay off,” Chanyeol mumbled, but he hid his face in Kris’s collar for a long moment anyway. It’d been an age since Kris held him like this.

Kris held on for a beat too long. Chanyeol was just about to poke him and ask what cat had gotten his tongue when he finally pulled back. “Hey,” Kris said, “what say we all get ourselves ossified
tonight?”

Chanyeol sat back just in time to see Kris scrubbing the back of his hand over his eyes. When it dropped, his eyes were reddened. “You alright?”

“Yes. Sand.” Kris pulled his thumb across his eye. “So? You, me, that bottle of panther sweat I picked up while you were necking with Jongdae?”

“Oh no. You’re not gonna catch me drinking that coffin varnish you like again. I nearly went blind last time.”

“Oh ye of little faith.” Kris leaned over and dug in one of their remaining packs. He pulled out a green bottle and handed it to Chanyeol.

Before he even took it in hand, Chanyeol knew what it was. “Jameson? Where the hell did you get a bottle of Jameson? And how much did it cost you?”

“Ran into a harp on the George Washington, and don’t you worry ‘bout the dough, Yeol,” Kris said, a smile twitching around his mouth. “It’s your favorite, yeah?”

It was, and Chanyeol hadn’t had a drop in ages. Seven years into Prohibition, and it seemed every remaining bottle of Jameson in the entire US had long since been consumed. He ran his thumb over the familiar label. “I should save this for a special occasion,” he said.

Kris shrugged. “Suit yourself,” he said. “I’d think this was occasion enough, but either way, it’s yours.”

Chanyeol resisted the urge to hug the bottle. “Thanks, Kris,” he said. Kris flashed him another crooked smile.

Then, his eyes slid up over Chanyeol’s head, and his smile fell away. Chanyeol turned around to see Jongdae and Kyungsoo approaching the camp. The sun was setting now, low and deep orange on the horizon behind Jongdae’s form, and Chanyeol was struck by the picture it made. He wondered what it would have looked like when the temple was new, when Jongdae visited in his official capacity and the man walking at his side was not a stranger, but his brother, the young Pharaoh.

“Have you made your decision?” Kris asked in Greek as they approached.

“I have.” Jongdae folded himself down onto the cooling sand in front of them, simple and graceful. “I must honor Sehun’s last wish, or at least try.” He took a deep breath. “If we are right, then tomorrow, I will bring him back, to live here with us in this world.”

Kris leaned over and rummaged through his bag again. This time, he pulled out a bottle of red wine, wrapped in woven reeds to protect it for travel. “Then tonight, we celebrate,” he said. His eyes flicked to Chanyeol, and he switched to English. “And you can keep that Jameson for a special occasion.”

Right. Like consoling himself on the voyage home, when his bunk was too empty. “Crack it open,” Chanyeol said. Kris saluted and reached into his bag for a corkscrew; Chanyeol reached out and pulled Jongdae over to his side.

He saw Kyungsoo look away from them, and for once, he didn’t care. His time was running out.
December 21, 1927
*The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut*
*Deir el-Bahari, Egypt*

One bottle of wine between four full-grown men - all of them well-accustomed to drinking, and all of them bigger than Jongdae - was not enough to warrant even a headache the next morning. Jongdae came awake at dawn, wide awake, the knowledge of the day ahead pulling him too early from his cozy slumber in Chanyeol’s warm embrace.

Carefully, Jongdae slid out from the bedroll. As he’d lost one of their camels the day before, they’d been forced to share, two to a bedroll, a situation which Kyungsoo had been plainly uncomfortable with the night before. Now, though, Kyungsoo’s dark head was cozily pillowed on Kris’s arm, snoring away without a thought to his discomfort. Behind Kyungsoo, Kris’s eyes slit open, reflecting the flickering light of their dying fire.

Jongdae pointed at himself, and then to the north, to the chapel of Hathor. Kris tilted his head to look where he was pointing, then nodded, acknowledging him. Flashing him a smile, Jongdae went to visit his Goddess once more, and gather his strength for the day ahead.

He meant to pray, but instead he found himself thinking about Chanyeol, about hot hands wrapped around his hips and hot breath ghosting down his neck and solemn emotions whispered quietly in his ear in three languages. Chanyeol had been just drunk enough last night to be willing to express things he normally would never say, and Jongdae had been just drunk enough to feel Chanyeol’s words like flint in his gut. That Chanyeol was terrified that the events of the day ahead would change their relationship inexorably was very obvious.

He could still change his mind, he told himself. All he had to do was not put the gemstone in the furthest wall of Ra’s shrine. He could simply not do it.

But it was what Sehun wanted, what he’d dedicated his life to. And Jongdae knew - even if Chanyeol did not - that Sehun would understand. Sehun would be happy to be at Jongdae’s side again, even without returning to being lovers. After all, even at the time of his death it had been nearly a year since they were last intimate in that way. They were friends first, always.

It wasn’t a choice, honestly. If he didn’t try, he’d never sleep again. Then he and Sehun both would be eternally tormented, and he’d go to the afterlife with a heart too heavy and be cast out and they’d probably both haunt the Earth - and each other - for eternity. A fate he alone could prevent, for both of them.

He had to try. He just hoped it was the right choice.

A touch on the shoulder startled him out of contemplation. It was Chanyeol, looking tired and oddly jittery, his flame-red hair wild and dark freckles standing out on too-pale cheeks. Jongdae took his hand, and let Chanyeol pull him onto his feet and into Chanyeol’s arms.

They stood like that for a long moment, unmoving and silent. Eventually, Chanyeol sighed, and nosed along the side of Jongdae’s head. Jongdae turned his face up and received his kiss as a priest receives their god’s blessing. “Do not be afraid,” Jongdae said, when they finally parted. “Today
should be a joyful day.”

Chanyeol took a deep breath, and flashed a smile. “Of course,” he murmured. “Are you nervous?”

Jongdae chuckled. “Terribly. If it works, it will not be reversible, and I will have to deal with the consequences.” He leaned his head on Chanyeol’s shoulder. “As will you. I pray it won’t become a burden to you.”

“I will not let it,” Chanyeol said. “You love Sehun, so I will accept him as a friend. And someday, perhaps, as a brother.” The twist of his lips was wry. “Besides, then someone else can take on the task of answering my hundreds of questions.”

That made Jongdae laugh outright, and they walked out of the shrine hand-in-hand. Back at their little camp, Kris was just pulling some kind of meat off the fire - bacon, it smelled like, which was possibly Jongdae’s favorite thing about this future world that wasn’t Chanyeol himself. Kyungsoo was helping to serve it, and Jongdae was struck with the thought that he had become accustomed to them, too. The way Kris quietly took care of everyone and everything around him was so much like Jongin, the way Kyungsoo constantly watched and protected was so much like Joonmyun, and suddenly he was glad that they were here to help him in this. They would help Sehun to feel at home, as they had helped Jongdae.

Jongdae quickly wiped his eyes and sat down to eat. They chatted as they ate, three languages and multiple conversations, but the mood was somber. Everyone was keeping an eye on the sun as it rose higher.

Finally, the morning became hot, and Chanyeol stood, slinging his bag up onto his shoulder. “We need to go get ready,” he murmured. “Can’t risk missing your opportunity.”

They went. Inside, the ancient temple was cool and dim, light coming in through vents high in the walls. The sun’s rays were only just beginning to penetrate into the furthest chamber, a square of light hitting the wall just to the left of the carved face of Ra.

Looking at it from this angle, Jongdae could hardly believe he hadn’t noticed that the depiction of his brother held literal nothingness in his hands, a clearly carved empty space. Coming closer, he reached up to touch it, and realized there were traces of wax in the hole.

“This must have been plugged up at one time,” he said, running his finger around the inside of the hole. “This is beeswax.”

Light appeared on the other side of the hole. “That explains how the tomb remained sealed,” Chanyeol said, somewhat muffled by the wall between them. “The only reason we have so much from your culture and so little from the cultures that existed at the same time is because your people purposely sealed the dead in air-tight tombs.” Though the hole was too high for Jongdae to see through, he did spot the tip of a finger prodding the sides. “I suppose Jongin must have sealed it, to ensure the sunlight wouldn’t touch Sehun’s body?”

“And then those robbers broke the seal.”

“ Likely, yes.”

Jongdae brushed his fingers over the carving of his brother’s face, and then went past it and down the side passage, around the back of the temple and into Sehun’s hidden tomb.

He entered just in time to see Chanyeol pick something up off the floor. “Here’s the seal. They just pushed it out - maybe that’s how they figured out there was something to find back here?”
Jongdae huffed. “I suppose I must thank the gods that they didn’t just break through the carved wall.”

The light in the tomb was dim, coming from a single lamp Kris had set up near the middle of the room, but it was enough for Jongdae to see the look Chanyeol was giving him.

“Are you alright?” Chanyeol asked.

“My stomach is eating itself with nerves,” Jongdae immediately, and ruefully, replied. “The jewel, we should… We don’t really know how much time we have.”

So, they set up the room. Jongdae was tasked with fitting the blood-filled crystal into its hole - the traces of wax were quite helpful, actually, and the gem fit snugly in place once he figured out how to orient it. Meanwhile, Kris and Chanyeol carefully lifted the top of Sehun’s sarcophagus off and set it gently to the side, and Kyungsoo, who had not yet been inside the tomb, stared in wonder at the carvings and conspicuously refused to touch anything.

With Sehun’s body completely exposed and the gem securely in place, all they had to do was wait. Jongdae busied himself studying the scenes on the wall, trying to determine if there was anything they had missed, if there was a spell to chant or if he needed to stand anywhere in particular. But as far as he could tell, all that was needed was the gem, the sun, and Sehun’s body.

“It’s noon,” Kris said, breaking the silence. “The sun passes Ra’s face now.”

“How do we know when it will pass over the gem?” Chanyeol asked.

Kris shrugged helplessly. “We don’t. But judging by how close together they are, I would be surprised if there was an hour left.” He took a deep breath, hesitant, and looked around the room. Then, he put his hand on Chanyeol’s shoulder. “Soo and I should back off,” he said. “Judging by how disoriented Jongdae was… We don’t want to overwhelm Sehun, right?”

Chanyeol nodded, and patted his hand. “Yes, good idea. We’ll call you if we need you.” Vaguely, Jongdae saw Kris squeeze Chanyeol’s shoulder for a long beat, then pick up the lantern and guide Kyungsoo out of the room, passing through the doorway of the tomb and leaving the two of them in near-complete darkness, only the ambient light filtered from the doorway and through the gem.

Reaching forward, Jongdae found Chanyeol’s hands, warm and huge. “Chanyeol…”

In the corner of his eye, Jongdae saw a beam of light suddenly appear. It was just slightly to the left of Sehun’s sarcophagus, so thin it was barely there, tinged red.

Chanyeol took his hand. “If you’re having second thoughts,” he said, “if you don’t want to put him through this, you have to decide now.”

In the dark, he saw Chanyeol turn to look over at the light. The beam was stronger already, and falling across the very corner of the sarcophagus. They had minutes left, maybe less. “No,” Jongdae said. “Sehun went to his grave hoping that I would wake him. I won’t let him down.”

Chanyeol nodded, and they waited, hand in hand. The beam was thin enough that Jongdae could see it move, and he held his breath as the sunlight finally reached Sehun’s body itself.

Sehun’s body burst into flames.

The sight froze Jongdae in place with horror. For a moment, all thoughts were replaced by What have I done? Beside him, Chanyeol was just as frozen, his eyes wide and reflecting the firelight.
“No,” Jongdae breathed. “No, this is wrong, this wasn’t supposed to - ”

Then he heard Kyungsoo screaming Chanyeol’s name, and they both turned.

Kyungsoo was at the doorway of the tomb, but his hands were up in front of him as if pressed against something invisible, some barrier holding him back. He beat his fists against nothing, only to be yanked away by Kris.

Chanyeol turned on his heel and bolted for the doorway. He was there in barely three strides, but he hit nothing at all and rebounded, forced back into the tomb, which was quickly filling with choking smoke.

Kris’s face was twisted into a mass of agony, tears streaming down his cheeks. He called something out, something Jongdae didn’t understand, but Chanyeol obviously did.

Chanyeol screamed. Kris sank to his knees, sobbing, still holding Kyungsoo back as the smaller man stared in wide-eyed horror.

Suddenly, the tomb was moving. Treasures appeared, one after another after another; lights that weren’t coming from the fire flickered on and off. Jongdae caught a glimpse of himself, a flash like a spirit walking around the perimeter of the room, walking backwards.

The doorway of the tomb suddenly sealed, separating them from Kris and Kyungsoo.
Chapter 8

Light was blinking, strobing, thousands of sunrises flashing through the room in an instant. Feeling numb, Chanyeol backed away from the door, so slowly in comparison to the speed with which time was moving.

A hand reached out and grabbed Chanyeol’s, small but solid. Chanyeol’s head whipped around, terrified, but it was only Jongdae, looking just as frightened. Chanyeol tangled his fingers between Jongdae’s and held on tight.

The flashes of sunlight sped into nothing but a blur. Slowly, the things around them grew cleaner, younger, newer; the carvings on the wall regained their colored paint and the cloth sacks of grain grew whiter and more supple. The entire time, Sehun’s body burned, but the smoke was clearing, and Chanyeol could no longer feel the heat of the flames.

Then, the door to the tomb opened, and Chanyeol saw the barest impression of an old man ghost through the room, backwards and too-fast. “Jongin,” Jongdae gasped. He reached out, but his hand passed ineffectually through Jongin’s body as the man sped backwards around the room.

The old man’s hands passed over the carvings on the wall, and the deep chisel marks that had obscured the second to last scene on the wall disappeared, and Chanyeol could see what it showed, and swore aloud. Sehun’s body was clearly aflame in the drawing. If they’d known that, if they’d had that clue…

Then, the figure reached down into the flames of Sehun’s sarcophagus, as if the fire wasn’t there. He moved away with the stone box clutched in his hands, he left the room moving backwards, too quickly for Chanyeol to catch more than the barest glimpse of the tears in his eyes. But time was slowing, the sun’s light through the hole was blinking more slowly, and now there were more people - servants? Priests? - taking the treasures of Sehun’s grave away, then taking away the sarcophagus itself - except it remained right where it was, still burning.

Chanyeol could barely breathe. He was watching history happen. Backwards.

Then came another man, also old, half bent over but moving with terrible purpose. Jongdae tried to call out to him, but the man looked through them, moved through them, as if they weren’t there. The carvings displaying Sehun’s ritual disappeared at his hands, unmade, and Chanyeol realized that he was looking at Sehun himself, possibly only days before he died.

The man shuffled out, backwards. Artisans appeared next, doing the same to the more conventional carvings of scenes of Sehun’s life and unlife, and then after that, moving slower now, were the workmen. The tomb began to fill in at the corners, consumed by the cliffside.

Chanyeol suddenly realized that the tomb was being unmade. They were going back to the time before it existed - the time when this was a solid cliff. A fear unlike anything he’d felt yet gripped him. “Run!” Chanyeol yelled, and dragged Jongdae forward. They all but leapt to the doorway, but they were still held back by something unseen, and as workers appeared to bring blocks of stone into the room through their very bodies and un-chisel them back into the mountain, Chanyeol turned and watched in breathless horror. The tomb was closing in around them.

The rock consumed Sehun’s sarcophagus, hiding the flames from view, and something popped. Jongdae stumbled forward, pulling Chanyeol with him, and then they were running, immaterial as ghosts as they passed unseen through the river of workers going to and from the tomb in reverse.
double-time.

The tunnel started to close behind them. They ran, rounding the corners twice, and burst out into the main sanctuary of Ra just as the wall closed down behind them. People came through the room, through them, but no one saw them, no one could touch them, and Jongdae held tightly onto Chanyeol, his shoulders heaving and his hands trembling. Chanyeol gathered him close and held him as the world around them was unmade, thinking blankly that this must be what the Rapture felt like.

Then, the sun began to slow. The days, passing backwards, took nearly an entire second each, and then longer, and longer. Sunlight lit the room in stretches long enough that Chanyeol could finally see their surroundings clearly, and the incredibly bright colors of the painted carvings on the walls took his breath away.

The light stilled, and Chanyeol felt a change in pressure that made his ears pop. He gasped, yanking in a breath like he hadn’t breathed in hours.

Someone screamed.

xXxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx

22 Hathor, 1460 BC
Hatshepsut’s House of a Thousand Years
Waset, Egypt

The walls around them were bright, freshly painted. The stone blocks were sharp-cornered, unweathered. Jongdae could hear the rustling of wind through palm trees outside of the temple, in the garden he knew was there, which had been barren sand the last time he walked through it.

He was home. Somehow, magically, he was back in his own time, or close to it. Did something go wrong, or was that what the spell was meant to do?

An oath, clearly spoken in his own language. Jongdae looked up and saw lined eyes, a dark braided wig, kilted hips, golden skin - Jongdae nearly threw himself at the man’s feet, because everything about him was so familiar and so right.

He didn’t get the chance, because the man threw himself at Jongdae’s feet, prostrating face-down with trembling shoulders, and Jongdae abruptly realized what he must look like, with his hair oddly overgrown and his outlandish clothes and a redhaired giant beside him.

Chanyeol!

Jongdae whipped his head around, but even as he did so he became aware that Chanyeol’s hand was still wrapped around his own. Frightened eyes darted wildly around the shrine, coming back to the shaking figure on the floor more than once. Chanyeol was in shock, but he was here.

The spell had brought him along. Was that Jongdae’s fault?

A tremulous voice startled Jongdae from his thoughts. The man on the floor was praying, asking for mercy. Jongdae stepped forward and sank to his knees, wrapping his hands around the man’s
"Do not be afraid," he murmured. "We are not gods."

Tentatively, the man sat up. Now that he could get a good look at his face, Jongdae saw that the man was very young indeed, barely out of boyhood. The amulet around his neck said that he was dedicated to Ra, but judging from the plainness of his kilt and his lack of jewelry, he was an acolyte, nothing more.

"But Lord, you appeared from nothing, right in front of my eyes." The familiarity of his cultured accent made Jongdae’s heart leap. It had been months since he’d heard his language spoken this way. "You were not there, and then you were there, and - " The boy’s eyes widened, darting around Jongdae’s face. "I know you. I know you. You are Prince Jongdae, are you not?"

Jongdae blinked. "You recognize me?"

He hadn’t thought it possible that the boy’s eyes could get wider, but he was wrong. "My Prince, I - I was among those who… who attended to your. Your. Body." He dropped his gaze, barely able to stammer out the words.

Of course. The local priesthood would have attended to the preservation of his body. "What is the date?" Jongdae asked.

The boy blinked, but didn’t dare look up. "My Prince?"

"The date. Tell me. What date is today?"

"It is the twenty-second day of Hathor, my Prince."

The flood season was nearing its end, then. "And the year?"

Still, the boy did not look up. "The nineteenth year of our Queen Pharaoh, Hatshepsut."

Quickly, Jongdae did the arithmetic on his fingers. The last day he remembered was 17 Mesori of the prior year. Seventeen from thirty was thirteen, add five for the Days Upon the Year and two thirties for Thoth and Phaophi, plus twenty-two so far in Hathor… "A hundred days," he said aloud. "I have been dead for one hundred days."

Fearfully, the boy nodded. "Your tomb was closed three days ago," he whispered. "We have only just finished mourning."

"And my brother?" Jongdae asked urgently. "The Pharaoh?"

A slight frown of confusion. "He… he left three days ago, when the tomb was sealed. He returned to the palace."

Joonmyun was still alive, then! "This must be what was meant to happen," Jongdae breathed. "This was no accident." Re-focusing on the boy, Jongdae found him glancing over Jongdae’s shoulder, eyeing Chanyeol with curiosity and no small amount of caution. "Young priest, what is your name?"

Black-lined eyes refocused on his. "I am called Tao, my Prince."

Named for the old King, no doubt. "Priest Tao, listen well to me," Jongdae said, his mind racing. "It is true that I was dead, that my body was embalmed and buried and my tomb sealed. But it was not yet my time, and the gods have returned me to the living, and sent a messenger to guide me."
looked over his shoulder at Chanyeol, who was frozen in place, watching the proceedings wide-eyed. “The gods, in their wisdom, saw fit to send us forth with little preparation, and so I find myself in need of your assistance.” Tao cocked his head, curious. “I must ask you to find appropriate clothes for us both. Dressed as we are, our presence in the streets would cause an uproar.” Jongdae’s smile was winning and conspiratorial, his charming diplomatic expression. “Gods don’t seem to consider these mundane things.”

The priest looked confused for a moment, then realization dawned. “Ah! Yes, of course, wise Prince. I will see to it.” Tao pulled back, and Jongdae let him stand, getting to his own feet. The boy was quite a bit taller than Jongdae, but he still had to tilt his head up to look Chanyeol in the eye - which he didn’t, not for very long, anyway. “If it pleases you, remain here?”

Jongdae nodded, and Tao left, glancing behind himself at them as if he was afraid they would disappear the moment he turned his back. When he was gone, Jongdae turned to Chanyeol.

“Chanyeol…” Chanyeol’s eyes were so wide, his face so pale, that Jongdae was afraid he might faint. He reached for Chanyeol’s hands, and Chanyeol took them, allowed Jongdae to pull him close. Jongdae wrapped his arms around Chanyeol’s back. “Are you alright?”

A short, sharp, ugly laugh. Chanyeol squeezed him, but otherwise didn’t respond. Jongdae, who was used to Chanyeol being calm and steady and cheerful, didn’t know what to do. So he stood there and held Chanyeol in his arms, unmoving and silent, as Chanyeol slowly went from frozen still, to trembling, to violently shaking. He wasn’t crying, wasn’t making a sound, but his body was shivering so hard that Jongdae had to guide him down to the floor. They collapsed together to the stones, and Chanyeol buried his face in Jongdae’s shoulder and just clung.

“It’s alright,” Jongdae finally said, the only thing he could think to say. “I’m here. I will not leave you, Chanyeol, I am here.”

xXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx

Chanyeol’s mind was a roar of static, a radio caught between channels, unable to parse multiple lines of thought into anything coherent. He was lost in the too-recent, too-real memory of the impossible thing that had just happened to him, of the stunning beauty of the new, majestic temple he now found himself in, of the reality of watching Jongdae converse so easily with an actual, living, no-longer-ancient Ancient Egyptian, weaving a clever and simple cover story with barely a second’s thought. And he couldn’t stop hearing Kris’s last words in his head, over and over, shouted through the barrier and over the roar of Sehun’s body bursting into flames.

Don’t leave me!

After what felt like an eternity of white noise, Chanyeol became aware of a voice, a melody. Jongdae was… humming? Yes, humming something Chanyeol didn't recognize, something alien and haunting and no doubt thousands of years old. Only it wasn't, anymore. Whatever it was, it was probably the height of popular culture now.

“Oh, God,” Chanyeol murmured, the first thing he'd said aloud since time stopped moving backwards.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae whispered, and Chanyeol squeezed him hard. “Chanyeol, you're going to be
alright. Everything will be alright.”

He sounded worried. He also sounded Egyptian, obviously, because he was speaking Egyptian, and the thought suddenly hit Chanyeol that there was a very real chance he would never hear English spoken aloud again, by any voice other than his own.

“Oh, God,” Chanyeol repeated, and he could hear hysteria climbing in his voice. Jongdae adjusted his grip, pulling Chanyeol in closer, and Chanyeol realized somehow that he was panicking, and he should probably stop that. Or try to, anyway.

He buried his face in Jongdae's shoulder, took a long, shuddering breath, and started pulling himself together. Concentrating only on his situation and what would come immediately next was hard when the consequences of that situation were so vast, but he did his utmost. It wasn't the first time he'd had to force himself out of a panic, but it was the worst.

“Ohay,” he said aloud, in English. “Get a grip, fella. That priest will be back in a jiffy, and you've gotta act like a messenger from the gods.” Jongdae's hand rubbed soothingly down Chanyeol's shoulders. “He's gonna need you,” Chanyeol told himself, referring to Jongdae. That thought gave him the strength to slow his breathing to something a bit less panicky and to lift his head.

Jongdae took his face in hand and kissed him, slowly and reverently.

Chanyeol's instinct was to shy away, to look around for judging eyes, but he stopped himself. They were alone. Instead, he accepted Jongdae's kiss, and after a moment, kissed back.

It did what it was meant to. Chanyeol's thoughts quieted to an ominous hum in the back of his mind, and he was able to focus once more. Breaking away. Chanyeol pressed his forehead to Jongdae's. “I am alright,” he murmured, back in Egyptian again. “What is our plan? What do we do now?”

Jongdae smiled softly at him. “We will go to the palace and rejoin my brother,” he said. “We will tell the Court what we told the young acolyte. I was returned from the dead, and the gods sent you to guide me.” His brows furrowed. “Unless you think it would be better to tell the truth?”

IT DOESN'T MATTER, NOTHING MATTERS ANYMORE, Chanyeol's mind screamed, but it did, of course did. It probably mattered more than anything else right now. “No,” Chanyeol made himself say. “I think you are right. If people knew where I came from, they would never stop asking questions I would be unable answer.”

Jongdae embraced him tightly. “No one will have trouble believing you come from another realm,” he said reassuringly, “and if you tell them you are forbidden to speak of it, they will leave it alone.”

“I hope you're right,” Chanyeol murmured. Something was brewing in his mind, a thought that cut through his haze of shock. “We cannot tell them what happened.” Jongdae looked up, confused, and Chanyeol gripped his shoulders tightly, the importance of this crashing through him. “We can’t do anything that could change history.”

Looking skeptical, Jongdae said, “How could we possibly change history?”

Chanyeol cast his mind about frantically for an example that would illustrate how imperative this was. “What would happen,” he said, “if you were to tell your Queen that you know she will die within a year? Would she not make different choices, take different actions? She’s probably the most influential person on the earth right now!”

“But, my Queen already knows her time is coming,” Jongdae replied. “She would not act differently if I told her this.”
Desperate, Chanyeol retorted, “What about Joonmyun? What if you told him he was going to die?”

That clearly had not occurred to Jongdae, and frankly it hadn’t occurred to Chanyeol either until just that second, and the moment he said it he wished he could take it back. Jongdae’s face went ashen.

“Joonmyun,” he said. “We could save him. I could save him.”

“You cannot!” Chanyeol hissed, but immediately shut up as footsteps announced that they were no longer alone. He made himself turn, setting his face into the calmest expression he could muster.

The young priest - Tao, if Chanyeol remembered correctly through his panic-numbed stupor - entered, carrying a bundle of linens in his arms. He dropped to his knees in the center of the room and lifted the cloth over his head like an offering.

Chanyeol’s first instinct was to tell the man to get up, but this wasn’t his world anymore and he wasn’t familiar with the customs. So he remained silent as Jongdae took the linens from Tao’s hands and inspected them. They all looked the same to Chanyeol, but Jongdae’s critical eyebrow told him there was more to the garments than plain strips of fabric.

“These are very fine,” Jongdae murmured. “They came from the priesthood?”

Tao ducked his head further. “A gift, my Prince.”

Jongdae’s mouth twitched. “Is the High Priest aware of this ‘gift’?”

“The gods cannot steal that which already belongs to them,” Tao replied, and glanced up at Chanyeol. Chanyeol’s surprise must have shown on his face, because Tao’s kohl-lined eyes widened and he dropped his head again fearfully. “My deepest regrets, my Lord! I assumed - I did not -”

Goddamnit. Chanyeol couldn’t handle this kind of scraping. He stepped forward and dropped to one knee, gingerly touching the young man’s shoulder. His skin looked ghostly against the young priest’s deep golden-red tan, reminding him of how alien he must appear.

“Priest Tao,” he said carefully.

Tao’s head shot up, eyes wide at the sound of his voice. “Do not bow to me. Though I am sent here by the gods - ” he nearly choked on it, but managed to get the words out - “I am not a god myself. I am a man. No more.”

He heard a huff, and looked up to find Jongdae watching them with fond exasperation. “What he means,” Jongdae said, “is that you need not fear him. Chanyeol’s purpose here is for the gods to know; we only must see to his comfort as we would any respected visitor.” Chanyeol watched as Tao’s expression flicked between them, the fear draining from his eyes. By stating outright at what social level Chanyeol was to be treated, Jongdae eased Tao’s nervous instinct towards overcompensation. Clever.

“I understand,” Tao said, and slowly, he stood. He was a few inches shorter than Chanyeol, which likely made him quite tall indeed for an ancient Egyptian. “My lord… Chanyeol?” He had a little trouble pronouncing it. Chanyeol nodded and repeated his name. “Chanyeol. Yes. My lord, do you require attendance?”

Chanyeol blinked, not understanding what he meant, but Jongdae apparently did. “Yes, Tao, attend to him.” Switching to Greek, Jongdae looked up at Chanyeol and said, “Allow him to dress you, so that it is not apparent that you do not know what these clothes are.”

Oh. Right. Chanyeol fought back a blush. He inclined his head towards Tao, and tried not to glare at Jongdae behind the younger man’s back as they separated the garments between them.
Chanyeol ended up having to undress himself when it became apparent that Tao didn’t have even the slightest clue what to do with buttons. He pretended he didn’t notice Tao’s eyes going wide - it had to be because of his skin tone, right? Nothing else about him was that unusual - and hesitated for just a second before stripping off his undershorts as well.

Leaving him stark naked, in the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, in the 13th century BC.

It was so ludicrous, Chanyeol actually giggled a little. Jongdae, already naked himself and somehow managing to look at home in the surroundings despite, shot him a look.

Tao dropped his eyes and set to work, and Chanyeol let him.

First, there was a kilt of sunbleached linen, wrapped twice around Chanyeol’s hips, folded and tucked carefully. The fabric seemed coarse to Chanyeol, but when he looked closer, he saw that the edges were delicately embroidered with thread that had to be made from real gold, and suddenly understood what Jongdae had meant by his comment about the quality.

Tao tucked a second piece of linen into Chanyeol’s kilt, this one a surprisingly bright blue, letting the short end drape across his hip and trail against his knee. The blue linen was so widely woven that it was sheer, and when Tao crossed the longer end up Chanyeol’s torso and over his shoulder to drape down his back, Chanyeol could see his own moles through the fabric.

The last was what made Chanyeol’s own eyes widen. A broad collar of finely worked gold and lapis lazuli beads, row after row after row. Tao laid it reverently on Chanyeol’s shoulders, and walked around his back to fasten it. The heavy collar effectively kept the linen drape from sliding off his shoulder, and Chanyeol was surprised to find that the weight of it was reassuring, making him feel far less naked, somehow.

“My lord, I must apologize,” Tao said quietly. “I was unable to find sandals which would fit a man of your stature.”

I.E., his feet were gigantic. “That’s alright,” Chanyeol said. “I will be fine barefoot for now.”

“You should have jewelry,” Tao continued, sounding upset.

“He will.” Chanyeol looked up and met Jongdae’s eyes. His felt his jaw drop, and Jongdae smiled at him, dressed now in an elaborately pleated kilt dyed deep indigo, leather sandals with curled toes, and a collar that matched Chanyeol’s except with carnelian stones. “He will have all the gems I can bestow upon him.”

Chanyeol forced his jaw closed and fought back the heat he could feel creeping into his ears. How could Jongdae just stand there and - and smolder at him like that? There was a witness!

Not that Tao particularly seemed surprised by Jongdae’s seductive tone or fiery expression, if he noticed it at all. He seemed too upset by his lack of jewelry to offer Chanyeol, and Chanyeol found his mind distractedly theorizing explanations. Was it because visual markers of rank were so important in Egyptian culture? Did Tao think he would be punished somehow, or was it simply Not Done the way that a flapper wouldn’t be caught dead without her heels?

“Jongdae.”

Chanyeol’s theoretical reverie was interrupted by a new voice, and all three of them looked up at once. There was another man standing in the doorway. With the sun behind him, Chanyeol couldn’t see his face.
“Sehun,” Jongdae breathed, and ran. Six steps to cross the room, and he leapt directly into the man’s arms. Sehun caught him and spun him in place once, and then they collapsed to the ground, on their knees in each other’s arms.

Swallowing, Chanyeol took a step forward himself, just enough so that the angle of the light changed and he could see. Sehun was long and lean, lighter-skinned than Jongdae or Tao, but Chanyeol could not see his face as he had Jongdae in a death grip and was heaving sobbing breaths into Jongdae’s shoulder.

A touch to his wrist made Chanyeol look down. Tao bowed his head. “If it pleases you, Lord,” he murmured, “shall we leave them to reunite?”

Chanyeol looked back. Jongdae was rocking Sehun in his arms now, whispering reassurances. “Yes,” he replied, even though there was a not-small part of him that was loathe to leave Jongdae with anyone, let alone a former lover. But Sehun had far more claim to Jongdae than Chanyeol did, and had spent the last hundred days believing his friend was dead, so Chanyeol resettled his bag on his shoulder - a bag which now contained his only mementos of home, his only belongings in the world - and gestured for Tao to lead on.

The midday sun was beating down on the courtyard. Chanyeol could feel his skin start to sizzle the moment it touched him, and readjusted his linen to cover as much as possible. There was a reason he usually covered up completely in Egypt, despite the heat.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Tao making a gesture up towards the sun, and stopped himself from asking what it was. “You tended to Jongdae’s body?” he asked instead. “You assisted his burial?”

“I did,” Tao said. “That is how I came to know Lord Sehun. He was charged with overseeing the burial.”

With Chanyeol’s mind still numbed from the shock, it took him a moment to realize what that probably meant. “So you sent for him! That’s how he knew to come?”

Tao’s lip twitched. “I did, my Lord. Lord Sehun grieved much; his love for his prince is great.” He looked up. “I hope I haven’t overstepped?”

Chanyeol didn’t actually know that last word, but he could guess its meaning from the context and the linguistic roots. “I am thankful for your foresight,” he said carefully, “and I suspect Jongdae is as well. I know he missed his friends and family very much. And our journey has been…” He took a deep breath and pushed Kris’s anguished face from his mind. “Difficult.”

“I am eager to hear the tale,” Tao said, “as will his family be.” They were walking forward now, falling into step. “My prince’s tomb is there,” Tao said, pointing to the east, exactly where Chanyeol knew Jongdae’s tomb to be. “His body is no longer there, is it? Is the tomb open?”

His brow furrowing, Chanyeol thought about it. It wouldn’t be, right? Jongdae’s mummy would still be there, just beginning its three-millennium wait. But that would mean his body was in two places at once, one alive and one dead. Was that possible? “I don’t know,” he said slowly. “Can we look?”

They crossed the temple to look. The Sanctuary of the Sun itself was much more open than the Sanctuary of Ra, and the carvings were new, crisp, brightly colored and utterly breathtaking. It took too long for Chanyeol to tear his eyes from the beauty and realize that the tunnel leading to Jongdae’s
tomb was open and obvious, an elaborately carved and decorated archway.

Tao led him down the tunnel, taking a lit torch from the wall as he passed. Chanyeol breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the tomb itself, at the far end, was still sealed. The hieroglyphic warning - *turn away* - was not there, but the door was, untouched.

“I will open it, Lord,” Tao offered, and stepped forward.

Chanyeol pulled him back. “No,” he said quickly. “It mustn’t be disturbed, do you understand me?”

Frozen, Tao studied his face. Chanyeol realized he was being intense, but this was important, *vitally* important. If Jongdae’s tomb was disturbed because Jongdae came back in time, then Jongdae would never be able to come back to life, let alone travel back in time in the first place. Chanyeol had no idea what such a paradox might do to history.

Finally Tao nodded. “I will see to it,” he promised.

Relieved, Chanyeol flashed him a smile. “Please,” he said. “Much relies on this.”

Tao inclined his head, and Chanyeol gestured to lead him out of the sanctuary. They wandered in the direction of the terrace, falling again into step. Passing through the colonnade, Chanyeol got his first real look at the temple, and stopped dead.

The ramp in front of him was as long as he remembered, but it was clean, new and whole, no crushed sections, not a brick out of place anywhere on the entire first terrace. Beyond that, another ramp stretched down to the ground level, flanked on either side by lush and carefully tended gardens. Down the center of the gardens lay an entire avenue of sphinxes, each the size of an actual lion, dozens of them in two perfect rows stretching towards the Nile in the distance.

Chanyeol stared, his heart fluttering like a caged songbird, as it hit him that he was *here*. He was *in Ancient Egypt*, seeing something no one had seen in thousands of years. Except they *had*, because they were *living it now*, and *hell* but his worldview was going to take a bit to adjust to that.

“My Lord,” Tao murmured, “please breathe.”

It made Chanyeol laugh, which resulted in him breathing, and Chanyeol decided he liked Tao. “I need to see everything,” he said. “All of it. This is incredible.”

A glance. “You are not from Egypt,” Tao observed.

“What was your first clue?” Chanyeol said wryly.

Footsteps behind them interrupted, and when Chanyeol turned and saw Jongdae emerging from the sanctuary in linens and jewels, with the majesty of the temple surrounding him, his breath stopped again. He could feel Tao looking at him - *smirking* at him - but how could he pay even a little bit of attention when Jongdae was *right there*, looking like *that*?

Jongdae spotted him, and his expression *melted*, from concern into something that Chanyeol was almost afraid to name. Behind him, Sehun - taller than Jongdae, with a disinterested, almost haughty set to his features, belied by obvious youth - looked Chanyeol over with veiled curiosity.

The prince’s smile was utterly radiant, and he quickly crossed the terrace, stepped into Chanyeol’s arms, and tugged Chanyeol down onto his lips.

Chanyeol froze, but only for a moment, just long enough for him to register that Jongdae was kissing
him in broad daylight, in a public space, in front of two strangers. But one of those strangers was Sehun, and Chanyeol wasn’t above the primitive urge to stake his claim, so he pulled Jongdae close and gave back the passion he received. When Jongdae finally pulled away, eyes wide and lips swollen, they were both breathless.

“So,” Sehun said. “You seduced your way out of the afterlife, then?”

Chanyeol’s first instinct was to flip Sehun the bird, but he stopped himself, because of his mother’s voice in his mind reminding him not to be rude, and because Sehun wouldn’t have a clue what the gesture meant anyway. Jongdae, though, reached out and slapped Sehun across the shoulder, without even looking. Sehun chuckled, but Chanyeol could see the fondness in his eyes, and the relief.

“He can understand us, Lord,” Tao murmured to Sehun.

“No, no,” Chanyeol replied, “it’s much more amusing if he thinks I cannot.” Sehun blinked at him, surprised, and Chanyeol tried out that respectful head-bow thing Tao kept doing. “You must be Jongdae speaks of you often.” He was pretty sure his grammar was terrible, but hopefully the idea got across.

Sehun returned the bow with one of his own, gesturing with hands pressed together the way Jongdae did sometimes. “I am he. Thank you for bringing our Prince back to us.”

I didn’t, Chanyeol thought but did not say. You did.

“Come,” Jongdae said, looping an arm through Sehun’s and intertwining his fingers with Chanyeol’s. “I am eager to see my brother, my family. Let us be off, and I will introduce you on the way.” He craned his head around Chanyeol’s chest to look at Tao. “Acolyte Tao, come this evening to the palace. I wish to reward you for your assistance.”

Tao bowed, and Jongdae pulled both taller men with him down the ramp towards the Nile.

On the long walk to the Palace, Jongdae managed to steer Sehun away from asking Chanyeol too many questions by telling him that they would relate the story later, for the entire family. Instead, he kept Sehun talking about everything that had happened in the meantime, including his funeral. Chanyeol, on Jongdae’s other side, was uncharacteristically silent and solemn. Jongdae made certain to keep a hold on his hand, knowing from experience the gaping emptiness that came from having your entire world pulled from you. He was still trying not to think about whether he was personally at fault for Chanyeol’s presence; he couldn’t afford to break down now, not in public, not when Chanyeol needed him in a deeply personal, reliant way that no one had ever needed Jongdae before.

Once they got down to the valley, though, and Chanyeol saw the fields, Jongdae felt him perk up, taking in the view. “It’s flooded,” he said quietly.

Jongdae looked at him, and switched to Greek. “Is that strange?” he asked.

Chanyeol followed his lead and switched to Greek as well. “No, of course not, it’s just… It doesn’t, in my time. Not like this. They built a… I don’t know the word in this language. They built a wall to control the waters.”
“Why?” Jongdae asked, wrinkling his nose.

Glancing at Sehun, Chanyeol said, “By making the flood season less, they could release the water during the dry season. I shouldn’t say more.”

“How not?”

Chanyeol took a breath. “Do you not think that the man beside us, so talented as to learn to harness time itself, if he were to learn there was a way to make growing season year-round, he would not figure out how to do it?” He did not look at Sehun, but it was easy to determine who he was talking about. “I cannot give your people that kind of advantage a thousand years before anyone else.”

Jongdae blinked, and let it go. They were nearly to the ferry, anyway.

Though the people bowed to them as they passed, recognizing the richness of their garments and the royal insignia Sehun was wearing, no one recognized Jongdae. No one screamed or cried or thanked the gods for his return, which had Jongdae feeling a bit put out, but of course, the farmers would not recognize him like this, if at all. Once he had his clothes and his wigs again, once he was able to line his eyes again, then he would be recognized.

Chanyeol, of course, received stares, and whispers, and a few people prostrated themselves fearfully as he passed. It was clear to Jongdae that Chanyeol didn’t like standing out, but there was nothing to be done; he was so pale, and his hair so red, that he practically glowed in the afternoon sunlight.

Jongdae nudged Sehun. “When we arrive at the palace,” he said, “send a servant to fetch one of your robes for Chanyeol. He would prefer to be covered, and his place in Court will be similar to a seneschal’s anyway.”

Sehun eyed him. “Am I replaced?” he asked.

“No,” Chanyeol said immediately, even as Jongdae shook his head fervently. “Sehun, I am not here to replace you. I couldn’t if I tried.” Chanyeol bit his lip. “I would appreciate if I could borrow something, though. Jongdae is correct, I am unused to being so exposed, and unused to being stared at this way.” He shaded his eyes with his free hand and glanced up towards the sun, making a face. “Also, unused to the brightness.”

Chanyeol’s tone was much more conciliatory than Sehun’s, and it seemed to mollify him. “As you wish,” he said. “I admit, I am curious as to why you are here, exactly.”

Chanyeol’s mouth flattened, holding back unsaid words; Jongdae jumped in quickly. “We will explain in due time,” he said. “I’d rather only have to tell the story once.”

Inclining his head, Sehun said, “Of course. I look forward to hearing it.”

They reached the ferry, and crossed the river on a flat-bottomed barque, pushed across by a ferryman with a long pole. On the other side of the river, the temple of Karnak loomed in the distance, and Jongdae saw Chanyeol stare at it longingly.

“We will visit the temple,” Jongdae assured him, amused. “Tomorrow, perhaps.”

Chanyeol nodded. “Everything is so beautiful,” he murmured. “It is beyond imagination.”

Jongdae squeezed his hand, and remained silent.

It was hard to describe the relief Jongdae felt when they stepped off the ferry and started walking through the city proper towards the palace, because everything was so familiar. He had become
acquainted to being out of place, to not recognizing anything, not knowing where he was or what
he was looking at.

Now, though, it was Chanyeol in that position. Jongdae made certain to keep tight hold of
Chanyeol’s hand as they walked through the marketplace, because Chanyeol’s eyes were getting
wider and wider, and more than once he nearly wandered off to look at something. The third time
Jongdae had to drag him back, Sehun caught him doing it, and Jongdae saw him biting back a grin,
digging his teeth into his cheek until the urge to smile faded.

When they approached the palace, though, people finally began to recognize him. Gasp, pointing,
shouting, and as they got closer and closer, praying. Jongdae’s heart jolted when he realized the
prayers were out of fear, but of course the people were afraid. He died.

“Sehun,” Jongdae murmured, because the commotion was growing quickly, and he didn’t know
what to do. How should he respond to this? He couldn’t say nothing, gossip would take the city over
before sundown, and with gossip would come fearful misunderstanding, and possibly even violence.

Taking his hand, Sehun pulled Jongdae into the middle of the plaza in front of the palace and made
him face the crowd. “People of Egypt,” he called, putting weight and authority behind his voice, just
the way his father had taught them. “Behold the miracle before you!”

It got the crowd’s attention. Chanyeol pulled his hand from Jongdae’s, his cheeks pinking. Jongdae
let him go, and took a step forward so the attention was on him.

“We mourned because our Prince was taken from us, too young, too sudden, too soon.” The words
were rhythmic, nearly a chant, and they captivated the audience. Sehun had always been much better
at this kind of grand posturing than Jongdae was. “Behold your Prince, whom the Gods have seen fit
to return from the Land of the Dead!”

Gasps, clamor, restless shifting in the crowd. “Heresy!” someone called, and someone else, “Prove
it!”

Jongdae happened to spot the source of that that last, an older woman he vaguely recognized. Her
amulet was clay but bore a family seal; Jongdae quickly searched his mind for the name that matched
it. “Tadukhipa,” he called. “The Weaver.” She blinked, obviously not expecting him to recognize
her, but Jongdae knew she and her family had supplied linen to the palace for at least two
generations now. He went straight to her and held out both hands, palms up. “I promise you, elder, it
is me.”

She stared, half hopeful, half fearful and all skeptical. Jongdae inclined his head and gave her the
innocent-little-boy eyes and his most winning smile. Sehun might have been better at the grand
posturing, but this, Jongdae excelled at. “If you cannot believe your eyes, elder, use your hands.
Touch me, and tell them all what you feel.”

Tadukhipa hesitated - commoners were not permitted to touch royalty under normal circumstances -
but when she lifted her wizened hand, Jongdae took it, and pressed her fingertips to the pulse point in
his wrist. It took her a moment, but then her eyes went wide.

“There is life,” she said, shakily.

She pulled back, but the people around her made exclamations and reached for him in her place.
Jongdae startled as half a dozen hands landed on his skin, too many, but he held his ground, even
stepped forward, wading into the river of people as a bather wades into the Nile. Vaguely, he heard
Sehun calling his name in alarm, but Jongdae kept going. If his people were going to believe this,
they would have to experience it for themselves.

In moments, he was completely enveloped in the crowd. The faces around him were awed or concerned or fearful, the hands touching his body were curious. He glanced back over his shoulder, but he was penned in completely; he couldn’t see the palace stairs or the plaza any longer.

Jongdae stepped backwards, intending to gracefully make his way back out of the crowd, but his shoulders hit someone’s chest and he was pushed forward by the press of people. Everyone was clamoring to touch him, shoving into each other and shouting, and Jongdae suddenly realized he may very well have just started a riot, and he was stuck in the middle of it.

Mind and heart racing, Jongdae looked frantically for a way out. He couldn’t just order the people to stop - he’d invited this, and his voice would be lost in the din anyway. Already, he was pushed, turned around; he wasn’t even really certain which direction the plaza was anymore. Jongdae was jostled roughly as someone shoved someone else into him, and he spread his stance to catch their weight, bracing himself against the real threat of being knocked down and trampled.

A ripple passed through the crowd, of voices and movement and energy, and the people closest to Jongdae suddenly stopped moving, moved back, with wide eyes trained over Jongdae’s head. The moment he had the space to do so, Jongdae heaved a relieved breath.

Warm, large, familiar hands landed on Jongdae’s shoulders.

“Your prince has indeed returned,” Chanyeol said, his voice firm and booming without shouting. His accent was striking, marking him instantly as foreign. “But he remains your prince, and is to be treated as such.”

Around them, the people stared, clearly not sure what to make of this. Seizing his opportunity, Jongdae raised his own voice. “Lord Chanyeol led me from the Land of the Dead and returned me to you,” he said. “Heed his words. He is an instrument of the gods.”

That made clamor break out all over again, but at least the people kept their distance as Chanyeol led Jongdae back out of the crowd.

“Why did you have to add that?” Chanyeol muttered in Greek.

“Hush. It can only help for the populace to revere you.” Jongdae re-settled his mussed linens as they broke through the edge of the crowd and back out into the plaza. “Reverence is safer than fear.”

If Chanyeol had a response for that, Jongdae didn't hear it, because there, standing at the top of the palace stairs, was a sight that nearly brought Jongdae to his knees. He leapt forward instead, dashing to the foot of the stairs.

“Prince Jongdae,” Joonmyun said. The crowd went silent; Joonmyun didn’t have to be loud to be heard. “For our brother’s return, we give thanks to all the gods, and also to the messenger Chanyeol who has delivered him.”

Behind him, Jongdae felt Chanyeol start with surprise. Jongdae was pretty surprised himself - until he looked up and realized Sehun was on the stairs near Joonmyun, close enough to murmur to him.
“Bow, Chanyeol,” Jongdae muttered. Chanyeol hesitated, then copied Jongdae’s posture, facedown and arms forward.

Footsteps down the stairs. “Rise, beloved brother,” Joonmyun said. “Rise, messenger.” Jongdae rose and found Joonmyun within arm's reach, smiling benevolently. He ached to reach out, but he knew he couldn’t. Joonmyun searched his face for a moment, his smile broadening. “Tonight, People, we raise our voices and our cups to the gods. Tonight, we celebrate this miracle!”

The crowd burst into cheers. In the commotion, Joonmyun started up the stairs, and Jongdae took Chanyeol’s hand and followed.

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It was confusing to Chanyeol, possibly even concerning, that the young Pharaoh, Thutmose or Joonmyun or whatever his name might be, had such an impassive reaction to Jongdae’s return from the dead. That is, until the doors of the palace closed behind them, and Joonmyun rounded on his brother.

“What is this?” he demanded, the formality gone from his tone. “Are you truly my brother, or are you a trickster? A god in disguise? A spirit?”

If Jongdae was taken aback by this, he didn't show it. He took Joonmyun's hand.

“When we were boys,” he said, “our half-sister, Princess Neferure, dared us to climb the tallest of the ancient pyramids. I was too afraid, but you were not. You nearly made it to the top before your grip failed, and you slid most of the way back down on your bottom.” Joonmyun's eyes were wide, as were Sehun's. “When Senenmut questioned how the young Pharaoh came to be so scraped up, I told him we had been playing war games, and that I had lost my temper. He believed me, and punished me in your stead.” Jongdae's eyes glittered with humor. “You made me swear to tell no one, for the shame that a younger brother should take the punishment due an elder. And I have not. This secret went with me to my grave.” His grin widened. “Of course, now that I am beyond the grave, there are many such secrets that I am no longer obligated to -”

“Yah, you little brat!” Joonmyun said, and yanked Jongdae into an embrace. Laughing, Jongdae hugged him back, just as tightly.

“Even back then,” a new voice said, deeper. “I knew you were lying, young Prince. But who am I to turn down a boy so eager to take lashings in his brother's place?”

Chanyeol, and everyone else, looked down the hall. Coming towards them was an older man, tall and thin, in long, loose robes likely no more than a piece of linen with a cord to tie it. His jewelry was regal, though, as was his bearing, and the moment he drew up even with Sehun, Chanyeol could see the resemblance.

This was Senenmut, it could be no one else. He was… younger than Chanyeol expected. Mid-thirties perhaps, no older than 37. It reminded Chanyeol that Egyptians married and bred young, out of necessity - it was relatively unusual for even a Pharaoh to live past 40.

There was a chance that Chanyeol was closer in age to Sehun’s father than to Sehun himself, and that - that was sobering. Chanyeol didn’t get much of a chance to think about it, though, because Senenmut stepped to the side, revealing behind him a lithe, dark young man lending his arm to a very
richly dressed woman.

Sehun and his father immediately dropped to their knees, and very quickly Jongdae followed. Even Joonmyun bowed his head, and that alone told Chanyeol who she was. There was no one else in Egypt that the younger Pharaoh would bow to.

“My Queen,” Jongdae said, as Chanyeol also dropped to his knees. “My Goddess. I rejoice at the sight of you.”

“As we do, at the sight of our lost Prince,” Queen Hatshepsut said. Her voice was soft and a little raspy, and it made Chanyeol look up curiously. Hatshepsut stepped into a beam of sunlight that cut between pillars, and Chanyeol stared, because she looked nothing like her statues. Well. That wasn’t exactly true. Her facial features were actually surprisingly recognizable, and her family resemblance with Jongdae and his brother was noticeable. But she was a more portly woman than Chanyeol would have expected, considering her statues were all slim and feminine; moreover, she seemed to have trouble walking, leaning heavily on the younger man. Her eyes landed on Chanyeol immediately, and she cocked her head curiously, making her black wig brush against her shoulder. “This visitor you have brought, who is he?”

Her wig made the linen drape resting on her shoulder slip, just a bit. She reached to re-settle it, and Chanyeol got a glimpse of her shoulder and neck, and of her hands. There were ugly brownish-black growths on her skin, on shoulder and collarbone, and her first two fingernails of her right hand were also blackened, and Chanyeol, very suddenly, realized why Hatshepsut died so young. He had seen this before, in the little old German man who had given Chanyeol his very first job sweeping floors.

She had cancer. Skin cancer.

The thought hit him like a runaway Ford. Chanyeol barely heard Jongdae introducing him; he was too busy absorbing the knowledge that the greatest Queen in the ancient world was dying right here, right now, right before his eyes, and there wasn’t a physician in Egypt who could stop it. Cancer could take anyone, in any century - if his own people, over three thousand years later, hadn’t figured out how to cure it, what chance did this ancient Queen have?


“Forgive him, my Queen,” Jongdae said, shooting Chanyeol a reproachful glance. “The journey from the Land of the Dead has been difficult for us both.”

“Of course,” Hatshepsut said, with a gracious incline of her head. “Our Seneschal, see to the messenger's lodgings. This family has much to discuss.”

Chanyeol blinked, the words not registering until Senenmut gestured for Chanyeol to follow. He glanced at Jongdae, unsure about being separated, but Jongdae only nodded encouragingly, so Chanyeol got up off his knees and followed.

Senenmut led him through the palace, down a maze of corridors. The space was quite large, but made from what looked like mud brick; it wouldn't last the centuries the way the stone tombs would. Chanyeol had the fleeting thought that he could suggest that more buildings be built from stone in the future, and then realized what a catastrophic change that could bring about. He couldn't risk changing the past in such a far-reaching way.

He would have to be so careful, from this day forward, not to affect history.
“Do you speak our language?” Senenmut asked in the silence.

Chanyeol looked up. Though several inches shorter than Chanyeol, Senenmut had quite a large presence. It made him seem taller than he was. “Not well,” Chanyeol admitted. “Prince Jongdae has been teaching me.”

“While you traveled through the Land of the Dead?” Senenmut asked.

“...Yes.” Chanyeol glanced at Senenmut's face, but it was basically expressionless. “It is a beautiful language.”

Senenmut nodded, as if this was just accepted fact. “You are not Greek, I think,” he said, “or Semite, and you certainly are not Nubian or Puntian. From whence do you come, messenger?”

Chanyeol hesitated. He could not say too much... could he say anything?

“I have come… Far,” is what he finally said. “Very, very far.”

Senenmut stopped right there in the hall, and with a hand on Chanyeol’s wrist he halted Chanyeol as well. “Messenger,” he said, “we are a hospitable people, as a rule. But you cannot expect that we will house and clothe a stranger that will not say from whence he comes, or why.” Black eyes searched Chanyeol’s. “You must understand that I will not abide any threat to my Pharaohs - or to my family.”

The way he said it made Chanyeol realize something he had never thought of before. The former Pharaoh, Hatshepsut’s husband, died when Jongdae was barely two years old, and Senenmut was likely the strongest adult male presence in Jongdae’s life beyond that time. In a very real sense, Chanyeol was facing Jongdae’s father figure.

Senenmut’s absolute devotion to his family was obvious, beautiful, and dangerous, and Chanyeol had not a single clue what to say. He could feel the stress of the day crawling up his throat and gathering behind his eyes; he turned his face away so the ancient scholar wouldn’t see his lashes filling with tears. “You are a wise man,” he said, slightly choked. Clearing his throat, he tried again. “I have heard tell of your wisdom, and I must ask you if you will... keep a secret.”

Rough fingers slid under Chanyeol’s chin and forced him to turn his head back. Senenmut held his chin and studied him. “I will keep no secret if it could bring harm,” he warned.

Chanyeol shook his head minutely. “No. I mean no harm, this I swear to you. I…” He took a breath. “I was not supposed to follow Jongdae,” he confessed. “I was not prepared to be brought with him. The… the magic, which allowed him to return to the land of the living, I was standing too close, and it… caught me. By accident.”

Senenmut’s eyes narrowed. “Then you do not have a mission here;” he said. “You did not mean to be here at all?”

Shaking his head again, Chanyeol said, “No. Jongdae told the people that I was a divine messenger so that they would respect me, and not harm me. But I am no such thing.” He lifted his eyes over Senenmut’s head, to the depiction of the ibis-headed god Thoth on the wall behind. “Your gods are not even my gods. I am a man out of place.” He nearly said out of time, and stopped himself.

“And the only way for you to return to the land of the dead would be to die,” Senenmut muttered thoughtfully. Then, he blinked, and cocked his head, as if something had occurred to him. “If they are not your gods, what gods do you revere?” Senenmut asked shrewdly.
Chanyeol’s laugh was short and barking. “I only know one,” he said softly. “My God. Singular.”

Senenmut hummed thoughtfully. “Yahweh,” he said.

Surprised, Chanyeol blinked at him. “Yes,” he breathed. “I - you know of…” But then, of course he did. Of any Egyptian, the head of the Pharaoh’s household would of course know who Yahweh was, and there were literally no other monotheistic religions at this time, so the guess was easy to make. Chanyeol was just surprised Senenmut had the balls to say the name aloud.

But then, this far back… Had it even been forbidden to speak that name yet? Chanyeol didn’t know. This was long before Judaism even truly existed.

“I see,” Senenmut murmured. “For now, I will keep your secret… Messenger.” He inclined his head. “As long as you are a guest here, this will be your chamber.”

He gestured behind Chanyeol, and Chanyeol turned, realizing they were standing outside of a doorway. There was no door as Chanyeol thought of one, but layers of beaded linen curtains were hung from the archway, and Senenmut pulled those to the side. “Remain here, until someone comes for you,” he instructed.

Chanyeol stepped into the room, and with a final nod, Senenmut let the curtains fall shut behind him, leaving Chanyeol alone with his thoughts.

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As he wove the tale of his journey for his family, Jongdae tried to keep it as close to reality as possible, without saying too much. Chanyeol’s warning about changing time rattled about in his head like beads in a pot; circling and crashing into other thoughts.

Thoughts like what place will Chanyeol have, what life can I offer him, if he refuses to allow himself to make an impact on the world? And like, I must save Joonmyun from his fate, but what if Chanyeol is right, and it changes history? And, of course, Have we not already changed history?

His distractedness obviously showed, because before he had even really begun to tell his tale, Hatshepsut interrupted him. “My child, you are exhausted,” she observed. “You have failed to complete your thought thrice in the last ten sentences.”

Flushing, Jongdae bowed his head. “My apologies,” he said, but offered no explanation. He was rather tired, but it was his spinning mind that kept his story from flowing cleanly.

“Go rest,” his Queen-Mother commanded. “Tonight, at sundown, we have called for a feast in your honor, and the people will eagerly await your tale then. Gather your strength so you may tell it.” She glanced at the young men surrounding her. “I will require Joonmyun and Sehun for preparations. Jongin, please ensure Jongdae is settled, and then return also to me; we have much to do.” She made to stand, and instantly Joonmyun jumped to her side, helping her. He looked up and flashed a familiar look to Jongdae, one which said, we will meet later, we will talk.

Jongdae let Jongin lead him from the room.

When they were out of earshot, Jongdae reached over and squeezed Jongin’s hand. “My quiet friend, you have been quieter than usual,” he murmured.
Jongin flashed him a smile. “As always, I await my turn,” he said. “You will be busy in the days to come, my Prince. Everyone will want your attention.” Jongin returned his hand-squeeze and let his fingers drop. “When this has settled, I will beg your time.”

Studying him, Jongdae said, “It unsettles you, doesn’t it. My return.”

Another smile, now wry. “Yes, my friend. Yes, it does.”

Coming from the direction they were travelling, a young slave man dropped immediately to his knees in the hallway, prostrating himself. “My Lords,” he said, getting their attention.

Jongdae and Jongin exchanged an alarmed look - the palace slaves were well-trained to never utter a word unless spoken to, or there was an urgent matter. “Speak,” Jongin commanded.

Remaining face-down, the slave spoke, quiet but hurried. “The visitor, the one they say is a messenger of the gods,” he said. “I was sent to tend to him, but he is in obvious distress. He sent me away, he was - he was distraught, Lords.”

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae gasped, his mind instantly filled with a hundred things that could be wrong.

“Who sent you to the messenger, slave?” Jongin asked sharply, and oh, that was a good question.

“It was the Queen’s Seneschal, Lord,” the slave immediately responded.

Jongin deflated. “Likely not a plot, then. You were right to bring this to us, slave. You are dismissed. Return again to the visitor in no more three hours’ time, and pass the word that until then he is not to be disturbed.” The slave immediately rose and backed away, keeping his eyes down, and Jongdae brushed past him with Jongin hot on his heels. “That should buy us some time. Jongdae, do you need… Will you be safe with this messenger?”

“Yes,” Jongdae said, without even a second’s hesitation. They were close enough now that Jongdae could hear Chanyeol sobbing. “Yes, I will be safe, but I need to see to him. Please, leave us. I will see you tonight.” He absently patted Jongin’s shoulder and brushed through the curtains to the chamber Chanyeol had been given.

Chanyeol was sitting cross-legged on the bed, head down, curled in on himself and crying uncontrollably. Around him, the contents of his leather bag were spread - his fireless light, his clothes, a few other things. One thing caught Jongdae’s eye in particular as he carefully approached - resting against Chanyeol’s knee was the green bottle Kris had given Chanyeol the night before. Jongdae knew it was the same, the decoration was very distinctive, and he also knew, without a doubt, that he had seen Chanyeol carefully pack that bottle in the camel’s saddle-bags for the return trip.

“Chanyeol?” Jongdae asked, with dread growing in his heart. At the sound of his voice, Chanyeol lifted his head, uncurling enough for Jongdae to see that he had something clutched in his hands. Jongdae sat on the low platform bed next to Chanyeol, resting a hand on his shoulder. Chanyeol was trembling violently.

“Jongdae - He -” Chanyeol’s face screwed up so tightly with pain, he could barely get the words out. “He knew, Jongdae.”


Chanyeol held out what was in his hands, and abruptly, Jongdae recognized it. It was Kris’s journal, the book in which he was constantly writing or drawing. That thing never left Kris’s side - why had
it been in Chanyeol’s bag?

“He knew this would happen,” Chanyeol whispered through his choked tears. “He knew the entire time that this was going to happen, oh God, why. Kris! Kris, why?!” He curled in again, clutching the journal to his chest, and screamed, something in his own language that Jongdae couldn’t understand.

Shocked, Jongdae wrapped his arms tightly around Chanyeol’s shoulders, and held him as he sobbed.
Chapter 9

22 Hathor, 1460 BC
The Royal Palace
Waset, Egypt

Jongdae leaned against the cushions and stared at the walls in the fading light of sunset. He would need to light the lamps, soon - but to do that, he would have to disturb Chanyeol, who had cried himself to sleep on Jongdae’s lap. It could wait.

Truth be told, he was thankful for the moment of peace. He needed time to think, to process what had happened. Questions swirled in his mind, each with more implications than the last, each bringing up still more questions. Did they interpret Sehun’s writings in the tomb incorrectly, or did Sehun himself mistake what would happen when the magic was activated? Was it truly a fluke, a freak accident, that Chanyeol had gotten caught up in the spell and brought along with Jongdae, or was he here for a reason, some unknown divine purpose?

Could it really be true that Kris had known, all along, that this would happen? How was that possible? Chanyeol had been too distraught to explain, and Jongdae hadn’t pushed it - he could plainly see how overwhelmed Chanyeol was with what had happened today.

Was Chanyeol right? Were they obligated to try and uphold the path of history as it currently stood, obligated to stand by and do nothing when his brother, the rightful Pharaoh, was killed?

But hadn’t Jongdae’s return to this time already changed history? How could they hope to preserve history when that had already happened? And -

Oh.

Oh, Gods.

If they let Joonmyun be assassinated… Jongdae would become Pharaoh.

No. If they were to preserve history, Joonmyun would have to die, and Jongdae would have to… what? Abdicate? Disappear? Run and hide, forever, from his duty to his people, so that Minseok would become Pharaoh as the future he saw foretold?

The idea was anathema to Jongdae, but it would certainly explain why Minseok was described in all texts as being a reluctant king. Jongdae couldn’t imagine doing that to him - but did he have a choice? Couldn’t he just ban all ivory blades from the entire Capital city, double the royal guard, beg Joonmyun to wear a bronze neck guard day and night for the rest of the year?

Many questions. No answers. Jongdae was so glad to be home, but the circumstances made it hard to enjoy his relief. Worse, in a few hours he would need to explain exactly what happened to his family and his people, and he still wasn’t certain what he should tell them.

The tingle of a chime interrupted Jongdae’s thoughts. He blinked, sat up straighter, and called out, “Enter.”

Two figures brushed through the curtains, immediately bowing - one slightly familiar, and one very familiar. Jongdae felt a smile tug at the corners of his mouth, and he held out a hand.
“Liyin.”

His maid came immediately to the bedside and knelt, taking his offered hand lightly between her own and bowing over it. “My Prince,” she said, her voice shaking. “The hearts of the entire palace rejoice in the miracle of your return.”

“My own heart also rejoices,” Jongdae said truthfully, “for I believed I would never see you or anyone else here again.” Liyin had been his maidservant since he was sixteen, and she was one of many people he hadn’t realized he loved and relied on until she was no longer at his side. “I assume you were sent to us?” He glanced over at the other servant - the same young man who had stopped him in the hallway, earlier.

“Yes, Prince,” Liyin murmured. “Lord Senenmut requests your presence, and the presence of this… ah, messenger, in one hour.”

Technically speaking, now that he was a prince grown, Senenmut could not actually command Jongdae, but Jongdae knew better than to disobey his ‘request.’ “Chanyeol,” Jongdae whispered. “My love, it is time to wake.”

He saw Liyin’s eyebrows raise at his endearment, but she did not hesitate in her movements, going to help the other servant to bring in water and wash-cloths, oils and paints, clothes and jewels. As they set up, Jongdae nudged Chanyeol into wakefulness, trying not to coo over his sleepy expression.

Sleepiness gave way too quickly to sadness when Chanyeol’s memory of recent events returned, but he saw that they were not alone and visibly pulled himself together. He said something in his own language, something Jongdae couldn’t understand, then blinked, bit back a pained expression, and changed to Egyptian. “What is going on?”

Jongdae cupped his cheek and kissed his forehead. “There is a feast tonight,” he said, as Liyin went around the room and lit the lanterns. “We are obligated to attend, as it is in our honor.”

“Your honor, you mean,” Chanyeol grumbled. He pulled himself up off the bedclothes, and Jongdae tried not to smile at the expression on Liyin’s face when she saw how huge he was. “I very much doubt anyone wishes to honor me with this feast.” He seemed to really notice, for the first time, what the servants were doing, and he stopped mid-motion. “What is this?”

Jongdae switched to Greek. “We are to be bathed and dressed,” he explained.

Chanyeol shot him a look of disguised panic. “I can bath myself, thank you.”

“Of course you can,” Jongdae said, amused. “But you will not. You are an honored guest of the Palace, Chanyeol. You must accept our hospitality.” He took Chanyeol’s hand, squeezed his fingers. “I will be right beside you.”

Chanyeol did not seem very reassured by this, and his discomfort must have been clearly obvious, because as Jongdae led Chanyeol to step onto the drip linens Liyin had spread on the stone floor, the other servant hesitated, wary of approaching a man who so clearly did not wish to be approached.

“It’s alright,” Jongdae said to him, switching back to Egyptian. “He is unused to being attended, no more.” To Chanyeol, he said, “Senenmut has selected this servant to see to you. I suspect he will be assigned to you as long as you are with us, yes?” The servant silently nodded confirmation. “Yes, I thought so.”

Biting his lip, Chanyeol stepped towards the servant. “What is your name?”
Surprised, the servant glanced up at him. “I am called Yixing, Lord.”

Chanyeol nodded, and stuck out his hand. Yixing looked at him in confusion, obviously unsure as to what Chanyeol wanted, and Chanyeol huffed. “In my culture, this is the greeting. Take my hand,” he instructed, gesturing at Yixing’s right hand. Yixing did, tentatively, and Chanyeol pressed their palms together, gripped firmly, and shook once. “See?”

Yixing’s smile was pleasantries covering both discomfort and curiosity. “Yes, Lord,” he said softly.

“That is a greeting of equals,” Jongdae pointed out, in Greek so the servants would not understand. Chanyeol glanced at him. “Yes,” he said pointedly. “It is.”

Jongdae huffed, but held back a smile. He’d always found Chanyeol’s notion of extreme social equality to be charming, if a little fanciful. “You will have to become accustomed to being waited on,” he said, automatically lifting his arms so Liyin could undress him. “Such things are a necessary, outward mark of rank and power. If you cast these marks aside, the people will lose their awe, their respect.” Liyin pulled his clothes away, not letting them touch the floor, and carefully set them aside. “And people who do not respect you, do not fear you, may come to resent you.”

“Lord,” Yixing said, very softly. “Please… allow me…?” He brushed his fingers against Chanyeol’s kilt, obviously wary of startling or offending this very large stranger. Flushing, Chanyeol nodded and lifted his own arms, fixing his eyes on a point above Jongdae’s head. With a gentle touch, Yixing undid Chanyeol’s linens, folding each piece over his arm as it came away.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, speaking still in Greek, “are you able now to tell me what you found in Kris’s journal?”

Chanyeol stiffened, and the moment he did so, Yixing stopped moving, wary. Noticing this, Chanyeol forced himself to relax. “He, um. He told me that he…” Chanyeol sighed. “I told you that he and I were the ones to find Senenmut’s hidden tomb, yes?”

“Yes,” Jongdae agreed, as Liyin brought over a stool and indicated he should sit.

“In the letter, he said that he… Found something, in that tomb. When I was out dealing with our dig crew, he found a loose stone in the floor, and lifted it. Underneath was a papyrus scroll in a scroll case,” Chanyeol’s smile was tight. “It was written in English, in my handwriting, and addressed to him by name.”

It took Jongdae a moment to process that, blinking at nothing as Liyin prepared the razor. “Oh! You… you left him a note, in a place you knew he would find it! Or… you will leave him a note?”

“So it would seem.” Chanyeol glanced at him. “Is she shaving your head?” Jongdae nodded. “I don’t have to shave my head, do I?”

Jongdae resisted the urge to stroke his face reassuringly. “I think we can skip that part tonight,” he said. “Your hair color will only help the people to believe our story.” Liyin put a gentle hand on his forehead, and Jongdae stilled, letting her shear off his too-long hair. “What did your letter to Kris say?”

Now completely naked, Chanyeol crossed his arms over his chest self-consciously as Yixing prepared the wash-cloths in the basin of water they had brought. “He said I told him exactly what would happen,” Chanyeol said. “The date, the time, how you would be brought back to life, how long we would be there before the spell would send us both back to this time.” Yixing reached up with the cloth and began to wash Chanyeol’s shoulders, making him jump in startlement. “And I said
I left him another note, too, in your tomb. The first note told him where to find the second note, and told him not to open it until I was gone. So I guess I’m going to break into your first tomb and plant it there, and three and a half millennia in the future, he’ll read my words.”

“So he really did know everything,” Jongdae murmured. “He’s known for years that he would lose you.”

Chanyeol swallowed hard, glancing at Yixing as if worried the servants would pick up on his emotions. “Yes,” he said. “I guess I thought - I will think - that it is necessary to put him through that.”

“But he never said anything to you?”

“No. In my letter, I told him not to.” With a gentle touch, Yixing urged Chanyeol to lift his arm so Yixing could wash it. “I could not risk either of us acting differently, I guess. If we’d known what would happen…”

“Then it wouldn’t have happened,” Jongdae finished his thought. “This makes my mind ache.” Finished, Liyin set down the razor and wiped loose hairs from Jongdae’s now-shorn head, then began to wash his shoulders as Yixing had with Chanyeol. The servants always worked from the top down, that the dirt and excess water would flow to the cloth at their feet. “Why would you have thought - or, I suppose, why will you think - it is necessary to do this?”

Chanyeol sighed and lifted his other arm for Yixing. “Because when we came back in time, we removed your cousin’s reason to devote his life to discovering a way to bring you back,” he said. “Now that you are alive in this time again, Sehun will never learn how to manipulate time or life, and frankly, I think that’s a blessing.” Chanyeol blew out a breath. “It’s not a secret I want to ever be widely known. Imagine the chaos if it was!” An excellent point, and one that Jongdae had never considered. “So now that this has happened… the future is already changed?” he guessed. “When I die, I will be buried again, and Sehun will never hide my original tomb or place the tablet in my mouth, and even his own tomb will be different… So this won’t happen. I won’t come back to life, we won’t be sent back in time.” He frowned. “Two different histories, each caused by the other.”

“A paradox,” Chanyeol agreed. “That is why Kris had to know what would happen. I told him - I will tell him - to carefully record everything that was in your first tomb, everything in Sehun’s. That’s what’s in his journal, detailed sketches of the way these tombs were found. Now, it is up to us to ensure that these tombs are set up this way, so that the spells will again be activated in the future that is yet to come.” He drew a line in the air with his finger. “Once, the first time history played out, you died, and Sehun devoted his life to bringing you back.” He looped his finger in a circle, doubling back on the imaginary line. “But each time after that, it has been Kris who has ensured that the cycle continues.”

Jongdae's brain hurt. “How many times has this cycle happened?” he asked. “How many times have I been brought back to life?”

Chanyeol barked a laugh. “There’s no way for us to know,” he said. “And it doesn't matter. We will only know one such cycle, the one we are currently living. We will never know if we change history, for better or worse.”

Yixing had reached Chanyeol’s legs now, and urged him to lift one foot so it could be cleaned. Liyin was nearly there, wiping down Jongdae's flanks. “Chanyeol, I'm sorry,” Jongdae said. “I feel it is my fault that you are in this position, that we are… trapped, I suppose.”
Chanyeol shook his head. “No,” he said, “it is my own doing. I left Kris the instruction not to interfere. I could have told him to stop this, I could have told him to simply delay our voyage by a few days. Sehun’s tomb would have been robbed before we arrived and we would have been unable to complete the spell, and you would be living out a second life in my world, and neither of us would ever have known the difference.” He rubbed a hand quickly over his eyes, wiping away tears before they could fall. “I did this to us. And I will do it to us again.”

Reaching out, Jongdae put a hand on his arm, damp now. “You don’t have to,” he said. “We are stuck with the consequences of your actions in a previous timeline now, but you don’t have to make the same decision this time. You could change things for the future you, the future us.”

“Can I?” Chanyeol replied, shaky. “Can I really? What happens if I do? What if it’s worse, what if something... breaks?” He shook his head. “How fragile is time?”

Jongdae didn’t have an answer.

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Wearing a full-length robe over his kilt, though still so finely woven as to be nearly sheer, made Chanyeol feel a little less exposed. Jongdae had made good on his promise of jewels, and Chanyeol’s upper arms, wrists, ankles, and neck were ringed with gold. The ostentatiousness of it made Chanyeol feel very strange, but the weight was oddly reassuring. Between that and the black kohl with which Yixing had painstakingly lined his eyes, Chanyeol felt like a completely different person, like he was acting a part in a play.

That helped. That actually helped a lot.

At his side, in a deep indigo kilt that draped in complex pleats to his calves and a gold-embroidered drape over one shoulder, Jongdae looked less like a different person and more like he was finally back where he belonged. If Chanyeol was ringed in gold, Jongdae was dripping in it, not only arms and neck and ankles but also in his ears, around his waist, on six out of ten fingers, encircling his forehead, and woven through the long strands of his complex, black-and-blue dyed wig.

He was, literally, the most beautiful person Chanyeol had ever seen. And Chanyeol dearly hoped no one got it in their heads to push Jongdae into the Nile, because he would sink like a stone.

“Will I be executed if I insult the wrong noble?” Chanyeol muttered as they walked down the halls.

“Yes, of course,” another voice said, “for we are often in the practice of beheading god’s messengers for minor slights.” Chanyeol looked back over his shoulder and found Sehun coming up the hall behind them, long strides eating the distance.

“You certainly seem to be in the practice of taunting god’s messengers for minor slips,” Chanyeol grumbled.

Sehun, coming up even on Jongdae’s other side, shot him a sharp look. In a clatter of gold and ivory bangles, Jongdae smacked them both in the stomach. “You two will behave, for we wade together now into a river of crocodiles.” As he said it, they passed through the doorway at the end of the hall and into the festival court.

The courtyard was huge and open-air, a covered colonnade around the perimeter lit with dozens of
lamps and the clear skies above fading from dusk to twilight. Already, the space was filled with people, with chatter and music and the waft of burning incense, and Chanyeol stopped in his tracks and just stared at the sheer, otherworldly beauty of it all.

A quick drumbeat got the attention of the room, and Chanyeol suddenly found himself at the center of that attention as someone announced them in a booming, well-trained voice - Crown Prince Jongdae, Prince’s Seneschal Sehun, and Chanyeol himself, as the God’s Messenger. Jongdae and Sehun walked together down the entrance stairs, and Chanyeol hurried to keep pace with them as they made for the tables.

As they passed, everyone else bowed in rippling waves of subservience. It made Chanyeol want to jump onto a table and tap-dance just to get them to stop kowtowing like that, but he kept his chin up and did his best to look regal and otherworldly, like he was used to being bowed to.

They ended up at the head table, a few seats to the right of center. Chanyeol figured out where he was supposed to sit when he saw Yixing, dressed now in nicer but still plain linens with a single amulet laying against his bare chest, already standing behind one of the chairs. Liyin was behind the next one, where Jongdae sat, and another servant Chanyeol didn’t recognize was behind the chair Sehun took.

Chanyeol already had dozens of questions. Did every noble have a single, dedicated servant? Were other servants allowed to tend to Jongdae, or was Liyin it? Who were all the people in the room? Was Chanyeol going to have to speak in front of them, or was Jongdae planning to handle that? What was for dinner, how much had it cost, how had all this been prepared so quickly?

But Chanyeol was pretty sure he could not ask those questions without betraying how lost and confused he was, so he kept his mouth shut and just observed. Observed the way the people in the room were grouped, their clothes, their jewelry, the way they glanced at the upper table. Some of those glances didn’t seem particularly worshipful or pleased at Jongdae’s return.

Under his breath, Chanyeol murmured, “Anything I should be watching for?”

Jongdae flashed a smile at a small knot of people who were clearly gossiping about him. “Just be your charming self,” he whispered back. “You are under royal protection and chosen of the Gods, no one would dare speak ill of you tonight.”

A snort from his other side made Chanyeol glance at Sehun. “Not to your face, in any case,” Sehun muttered.

Chanyeol shot him a look, subtle as he could make it, too aware of the number of eyes watching his every move. “How do I keep them from speaking ill behind my back, then?”

The serving woman who was standing behind Sehun accepted a colored glass cup from another servant with a tray, sipped from it, and then set it on the table at Sehun’s right hand. “What matter is it to the Messenger of the Gods, if visitors and nobles whisper in the shadows?” Sehun asked.

As Yixing took a cup, sipped, and set it by Chanyeol’s hand, Chanyeol resisted the urge to sneer at Sehun. “I’m not simple,” he muttered. “I know the people will see me both as a representation of their Gods, and of their royalty. I want to represent Jongdae well, and I suspect you should want me to as well.” The cup looked like wine, so Chanyeol reached for it.

Sehun stayed Chanyeol’s hand with his own wrapped discreetly inside Chanyeol’s elbow. “Wait, do not yet begin,” he said. “Have you not had a taster before?”
A taster. Of course. That was why the servants drank first from the cups. His heart pounding, Chanyeol covered his nerves with a smile. “In the Land of the Dead, poison is no longer a concern,” he said sweetly.

On his other side, Jongdae squeezed Chanyeol’s knee. Chanyeol glanced over and caught shadows of amusement fading from Jongdae’s curved lips.

“Well,” Sehun snapped, “in the land of the living, it is, especially after Jongdae.”

Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s hand tense, and his own stomach flop as Sehun’s meaning sunk in.

“What?” Jongdae asked. He was still facing forward, still smiling, but Chanyeol could see his skin blanching. “Sehun, what do you mean by that?”

Sehun’s brow furrowed. “What do I mean? Don’t be ridiculous.” He leaned forward a little, glanced at Jongdae’s face around Chanyeol’s body, and then sat back, his own face paling. “You mean… Do you not know?”

Jongdae was frozen, so Chanyeol said it. “He has no memory of how he died, Sehun.”

“I was poisoned?” Jongdae murmured. “Someone… assassinated me?” Sehun didn’t answer, which was apparently answer enough. “Who? Who would do such a thing?”

“We do not know,” Sehun whispered. “You were fine at dinner; we only discovered what had happened… after.” He glanced over Jongdae’s head. “Liyin was the one who found you.”

Jongdae shuddered. “I’m so sorry,” he breathed. Behind him, Liyin kept her head down, but Chanyeol saw her hands twining together in front of her. Poor girl.

“Truth be told,” Sehun continued, “some voices argue that we cannot know for certain it was assassination, that it could have been rancid food or the bite of some unfound creature. But my father examined you. He believes it was assassination, and I trust his judgement.”

Their conversation was cut off as the drumbeats announced another entrance - Joonmyun, in full Pharaonic regalia and with at least six flowery titles following his name. With him was the lithe, dark-skinned young man from earlier, and as he was announced Chanyeol realized that this was Jongin. They hadn’t been introduced, earlier.

Sehun pulled Chanyeol to his feet, and then down to the floor, as everyone in the room prostrated themselves, even Jongdae. In a jingle of jewelry, the young Pharaoh crossed the room, and stopped before the front table.

“Rise, beloved Brother,” Joonmyun said. “Rise, Messenger.” Sehun let go of Chanyeol’s arm, and Chanyeol followed Jongdae’s lead and got to his feet. The amount that he towered over both Jongdae and his brother was a little bit disconcerting, but if the Pharaoh was discomfited, he sure didn’t show it. His smile was calm, beatific, as he held out both hands. Jongdae took Joonmyun’s left hand in between his own, so Chanyeol did the same with the Joonmyun’s right. He was surprised to find that the Pharaoh’s hand, while small compared to his own, was roughly calloused and quite strong.

Joonmyun started to pray over them, thanking multiple gods for Jongdae’s return and referring to Chanyeol as a gift and a blessing. Chanyeol dropped his head, feeling awfully strange about the entire thing, and was about to close his eyes when he noticed something odd.

Everyone on the floor had raised their hands over their heads, palms pressed flat together, in what
Chanyeol assumed was a gesture of supplication. Everyone except Yixing, whose hands were still flat on the floor close to his shoulders instead.

Huh. Interesting.

Joonmyun released Chanyeol’s hands. As he did so, the drumbeat sounded again, and Jongdae tugged Chanyeol back down to the floor as Queen Hatshepsut entered the room, with Senenmut on her arm.

They went through the same song-and-dance - kneel, stand, take hands, receive prayers. Chanyeol only half paid attention, instead furtively glancing around the room to see if anyone else was not participating in the supplication. Besides Yixing, he didn’t see anyone.

Very interesting.

The Pharaohs took their seats, Joonmyun next to Jongdae and Hatshepsut near some of the older nobles with Jongin and Senenmut between them. The drums sounded again, a different tattoo, and a veritable flood of servants entered, all carrying food. Chatter began, and also some quiet music from a trio of musicians in the corner, and Chanyeol let out a sigh as they all settled into their seats.

“Don’t relax just yet,” Sehun murmured. “The prayers are over, but now, the conversation begins.”

“Must you be so dramatic?” Jongdae asked lightly. “We will eat before we see to the well-wishers.”


Sehun’s attitude was really amping up Chanyeol’s nerves, and Chanyeol wasn’t entirely convinced he wasn’t doing it on purpose. “Is he always so suspicious?” he asked.

Jongdae and Sehun answered in unison. “Yes.”

“Peachy,” Chanyeol mumbled in English.

The servants had come around to the front of the table to meet the food-bearers, and Chanyeol watched curiously as Yixing delicately assembled a plate for Chanyeol from the offerings.

There was a massive amount of food. There were several kinds of red meat, fish, and poultry, and while Chanyeol could not identify the exact species of the meats by sight alone, all of it smelled absolutely amazing. Cooked and fresh vegetables - lettuce, onion, beans, radishes - sat next to loaves of fresh-baked bread and cakes made of honey and dates; Yixing selected a handful of figs and bunch of grapes to finish off the plate. He turned, bowed low, and presented the plate to Chanyeol in a very ceremonial fashion, before setting it on the table.

Chanyeol met his eyes. “Do I eat, or wait?” he asked, under his breath.

Yixing’s lip quirked slightly. “If it pleases you, Lord, I will test these offerings first.”

Right. His stomach was snarling with hunger, but Chanyeol waited patiently as Yixing turned, accepted a shallow wooden bowl filled with water from another servant, and set it on the table next to the plate.

Yixing, Liyin, and all of the other servants at the head table began to eat, pulling off single, small bites of each type of food with their hands and dipping their fingers in the bowls of water to clean them in between. It was very ceremonial, but also very practical; Chanyeol was utterly fascinated.
When every item on every plate had been tested, the servants walked back around the table and each knelt behind the noble they served. Hatshepsut began to eat, and then Joonmyun, and only once Sehun had started in on his food did Chanyeol dare to begin.

The food was incredible. Chanyeol wasn’t really prepared for that. He might have moaned a little bit. At his side, Jongdae chuckled. “The river blesses us,” he murmured.

“I can taste that,” Chanyeol said. “What is this? It melts like a sweet in my mouth.”

“It’s roasted heron,” Jongdae told him, as Chanyeol carefully rinsed the grease from his fingers. “Your world has many nice things,” he said, switching to Greek and lowering his voice, “but I have dearly missed this.”

Oh, why did he have to say that? Now Chanyeol was thinking of the things he would never eat again - hot dogs, pizza, his grandmother’s cookie recipes that Yura made every Christmas…

Chocolate. Coffee.

Dropping his eyes, Chanyeol shoved that thought away and concentrated on the incredibleness around him. If he didn’t at least try to focus on the positive, he was going to go wacky. So Chanyeol ate, and listened, and watched. There was a lot to take in.

Eventually, he noticed a surprisingly familiar face lurking nervously around the edges of the room, and nudged Jongdae with his elbow. “Looks like we have a visitor,” he murmured.

Jongdae looked where he was looking. “Ah, Tao! Good. Liyin, the gift?”

His servant produced a carved wooden box, inlaid with gold and gems, from somewhere indiscernible. “That young priest in white, who is watching us. Send for him.”

Liyin slipped away. Chanyeol didn’t see where she went or who she spoke to, but moments later she was back at Jongdae’s feet, and only a minute after that, Tao was nervously approaching the high table.

Jongdae stood. Tao dropped to his knees and bowed. Conversation quieted, and in the hush, Jongdae began telling the story of their journey from the Underworld.

It was a story that he and Chanyeol had come up with while they were getting dressed. They’d decided to follow the narrative of some scenes from the Book of the Dead, and extrapolate the rest from there; it had been easy enough to spin a believably fanciful tale. They’d made sure to weave in as many elements of the truth as they could - the long journey on the impossible ship, the encounter with the grave robbers, the spell. Sehun’s role was kept out of it, his tomb replaced with the hall of Anubis and his mummy with an embodiment of the god himself, who performed the spell upon them.

Jongdae had insisted that Kris and Kyungsoo be kept in the story, reasoning that it would allow Chanyeol the freedom to speak of them. As Jongdae wove the tale, the two of them were refashioned as spirits of the Underworld which had guided the journey; the scholar and the warrior. Chanyeol found himself wishing he could tell Kris about this, but shied quickly from that thought. He couldn’t afford to get weepy thinking about Kris, not when there were strangers in the room watching his every move.

Jongdae was quite a good storyteller. Unlike Sehun, whose earlier public announcement had been grandiose and pompous and very official-sounding, Jongdae spoke to the room as if they were all his circle of friends and he was sharing an amazing secret. Gasps and murmuring filled the room as
Jongdae described the feeling of the magic working, of watching the temple around them change from faded and broken and dead to new and bright and living. If he was at all nervous, at all unsure, it didn’t show.

Chanyeol forgot, sometimes, that Jongdae was royalty, and had been raised under the eyes of a nation. He’d been in the spotlight his entire life. Seeing Jongdae in his element like this made Chanyeol’s heart crawl up into his throat and sit there like a lump.

When Jongdae’s tale was finished, he asked Tao to rise, and thanked him very publicly for his assistance and service, for greeting them when they emerged from the Underworld and providing them with clothes. It kind of made it sound like they’d landed butt-naked, but Chanyeol figured that was probably better than explaining that they’d been wearing the clothes of another time.

Jongdae presented Tao with the box, and bade him open it. Inside was an amulet carved of ivory, inlaid with gold and hung on multiple strings of carnelian beads. Tao murmured profuse thanks and slid the amulet on over his head; its richness seemed glaringly obvious against Tao’s very plain and serviceable clothes.

Tao attempted to give the box back, but Jongdae refused to take it, and offered him a seat at one of the nobler tables, one where the men sat on stools instead of on the floor. It was a overt sign of royal favor, obvious even to Chanyeol’s uneducated eyes, and several people in the room looked surprised or uncomfortable with it, but they all covered up their reactions and a servant appeared from somewhere as if by magic to wait upon Tao.

“That box alone probably cost as much as his year’s pay,” Sehun muttered, glancing past Chanyeol at Jongdae. “My prince knows what he’s doing, I hope?”

“I haven’t been gone that long, Sehun,” Jongdae said as he took his seat.

Black eyes narrowed. “You’re up to something.”

Jongdae cheerfully resumed eating and didn’t reply.

“If my Prince is handing out favors,” a new voice said, “perhaps my timing is fortunate.”

Standing before the table were two men and a woman, dressed richly and nearly as bedecked in jewels as Jongdae himself. One of the men was older, around the Queen’s age perhaps, and the other two were younger, impeccably made up, and stunningly beautiful. The one who had spoken, the younger man, flashed Jongdae a very toothy crocodile smile.

As the three of them moved past Jongdae to greet Hatshepsut and Joonmyun, Sehun leaned discreetly to the side. “Trouble,” he murmured to Chanyeol. “Watch your tongue.” Chanyeol was pretty sure that was a warning, not a threat, so he only nodded and continued to sip his wine.

When they were finished paying their respects to the Pharaohs, the elder gentleman stayed where he was and conversed with Senenmut, but the younger two moved back towards Jongdae. “My Prince, we are blessed by the Gods at your return,” the woman said, as Jongdae offered her his hand across the table.

“I praise the Gods that I again have opportunity to look upon your face,” Jongdae said smoothly. “To our royal guest and God’s Messenger, Chanyeol, I present Satiah, the intended of our King.”

Chanyeol froze, his thoughts and memories flying. Satiah. This was Queen Satiah? The Great Royal Wife of Ahmose II?
Oh - the intended of our king? Satiah was betrothed to Joonmyun! But when he was assassinated… She would marry Minseok. They knew this from the historical record. Satiah wasn’t only the Great Royal Wife of Ahmose II, she was the bearer of his son, the future Pharaoh Ahmose III. Chanyeol had seen her tomb, he and Kris had discovered carvings naming her on multiple occasions. Chanyeol had even written a paper on her life, her influence.

He knew this young woman’s entire future.

Oh, God.

Sehun elbowed Chanyeol sharply in the ribs, and the as-yet-unnamed young man burst out laughing. “It seems that even God’s Messengers are not immune to my lady’s beauty,” he said.

“I apologize,” Chanyeol said, and copied Jongdae’s gesture, offering his hand to the lady. Satiah took it delicately and bowed over it, not nearly as deeply as she had for Jongdae. That might be an insult but Chanyeol couldn’t really care, because Queen Satiah. “I am honored to become your acquaintance.”

Judging by the huff from Sehun, Chanyeol hadn’t said that quite right, but Satiah only smiled at him graciously. “The honor of the meeting is mine,” she said.

A beat of silence, in which the other young man stared at Jongdae, and Jongdae stared challengingly back, one eyebrow raised. It was very much outside of the etiquette that Chanyeol had so far observed, and, frankly, Chanyeol found it pretty rude.

Sehun broke the silence. “To our God’s Messenger Chanyeol, I present Baekhyun, Chancellor of the South.”

Chancellor. A pretty high title, though certainly not the highest in the room. Chanyeol nodded and extended his hand the way he had with Satiah.

Baekhyun glanced at it, but did not take it. “That was a very interesting tale you spun for us just now,” he said, turning his attention back to Jongdae. “Very… fanciful.”

Now, Chanyeol was certain he should be insulted. Fortunately, as these weren't even his own customs to begin with, he only arched an eyebrow and went back to his meal. He would have waited - he’d noticed that no one else at the table ate while they were speaking to a visitor, not even the Pharaohs - but if Baekhyun wanted to be rude, Chanyeol could be rude right back.

Satiah definitely noticed, as did Sehun, but neither of them drew attention to it. Jongdae, for his part, smiled pleasantly, and said only, “It gladdens my heart that you enjoyed it.”

"Indeed,” Baekhyun said, and flourished a small bow that somehow managed to look both gracious and sarcastic. “I look forward to hearing the rest, as I am certain you have not told us everything.” Before anyone could respond, he gestured to Satiah, and the two of them moved away.

"Ass," Sehun mumbled. Chanyeol snorted into his wine. "He should be flogged for that insult."

Flogged. Chanyeol set his cup down and opened his mouth to protest, before shutting it again. A different society, a different set of rules, and he wasn't entirely familiar with them yet - he had to remember that.

Jongdae shrugged. "He won't be, and you know it." Seeing the look of curiosity on Chanyeol's face, he explained, "Baekhyun's father is the royal vizier." He sat back just enough that Chanyeol could see that the older man who had come up to the table with Baekhyun and Satiah was now seated on
Hatshepsut's far side, conversing animatedly with Senenmut.

"Someday," Sehun grumbled, "he will have to stand on his own feet outside of his father's shadow. I hope I am there to see the sun beat down upon him."

"Sehun has never liked him," Jongdae said in conspiratorial tones. "Me, I'm used to him; he has been around my family for our entire lives. He's nothing but a barking jackal - loud, but harmless."

Interesting. "And Satiah?"

This time, it was Sehun who snorted into his wine. "Likely not interested in you, so you might wish to cease the panting and the staring."

"That isn't why he was staring. Was it, Chanyeol?" Jongdae said. "You recognized her name."

Chanyeol dropped his eyes. "Yes. She, um..." He glanced at Sehun and revised what he was going to say. "Yes, I know her name."

That got Sehun's attention. "Really? Of all the people in this room, that is the only name you recognize?"

"You say that as if I did not recognize the Pharaohs’ names, or yours, or Jongin's or your father's." Chanyeol ripped a corner off his bread and swept it through some of the honey left from the date cake. "But yes. Satiah, and many others, are... known. To me. By name and reputation, at least." He flicked his gaze to the other side of the table. "The vizier is Useramun, yes? He who is Baekhyun's father?"

"You are somewhat informed, then." Sehun sounded surprised about that.

"Satiah's mother. Ipu? The royal nurse." He glanced at Jongdae. "Your nurse?" Jongdae nodded. "And her father... Ahmose Pen-Nekhebet. Wasn't he the previous chancellor?"

Sehun was staring. Jongdae only nodded again. "Pen-Nekhebet and Useramun were extremely close friends, as Sehun and I are. When he died several years ago, Useramun became as a father to Satiah."

"Ahmose Pen-Nekhebet chose Baekhyun to succeed him in the office of Chancellor of the South, as he had no sons of his own." Sehun jerked his chin across the room, to where Satiah now sat at a table of noblewomen. "He was also, as the name suggests, the last known descendant of the Great God-King Ahmose. Now, Satiah is the last."

Wait. What? "But the Pharaohs, and Jongdae. Are they not descended from Ahmose?"

Jongdae blinked. "Not by blood." Chanyeol's shock must have shown on his face, because Jongdae said, "I assumed you knew! My grandfather Thutmose the First was related to his predecessor by marriage only. His mother was Amenhotep’s sister-in-law, but they were close. Because Amenhotep had no sons, he named my grandfather his successor, but... The decision was not universally popular." His gaze shifted to the other side of the room, where Baekhyun was seated. "Some call my family usurpers."

"I see," Chanyeol murmured. "Is that why she is betrothed to Joonmyun?"

"Yes," Sehun agreed. "It was my father's idea, but both Hatshepsut and Useramun saw the wisdom and agreed. A royal marriage between Joonmyun and Satiah will reunite the two bloodlines, and bring the legacy of the Great God-King back into the royal bloodline."
That certainly explained why, when Joonmyun died, they immediately decided to marry Satiah to Minseok. As the third-choice king, Minseok would need the legitimization even more than Joonmyun. “What do Joonmyun and Satiah think of this match?”

Sehun shrugged, popping a grape into his mouth. “It is advantageous.”

But that wasn’t what Chanyeol meant, and Jongdae knew it. “They are… Not close,” he murmured. “Satiah can bring out the childish sniping in Joonmyun better than most. But both of them recognize that the match is necessary.”

Chanyeol squashed his reaction to that. “Sounds like a good time,” he said dryly. He didn’t have time to say more, though, because there was a new pair of men approaching them.

These two were different, Chanyeol could spot that immediately. Different clothes, different hair - their natural hair, which set them apart from pretty much everyone else in the room. Slightly paler complexions and a slightly different set to their features. They also greeted Jongdae differently, a polite but not overly subservient bow of the head with hands held palms-up.

Jongdae returned the gesture. “Greetings to you, my friends,” he said in Greek, and - oh, obviously. These must be the Greek ambassadors. “My heart is glad to be in your presence again.”

“That you are in our presence at all is a miracle for which we must give sacrifice and praise to the Gods,” the younger of the two replied. He sounded pretty genuine about it, as well. Switching to heavily accented Egyptian, the man faced Chanyeol and said, “Greetings, messenger. I am called Luhan. I represent the state of Minoa, far to the north.”

Chanyeol copied the gesture Jongdae had made, dipping his head with his palms turned up. “Please, call me Chanyeol,” he said in Greek. “It is my pleasure to greet you.”

Luhan blinked, obviously surprised. The older man jumped in. “This is Hangeng,” Jongdae said. “He represents Argolis.” He glanced across the room. “Why does Zhoumi of Thessaly remain seated?”

Luhan and Hangeng exchanged a glance. “I am certain he means no offense,” Luhan said diplomatically. “It is only that…”

“That is is unnatural for a man to return from the dead,” Hangeng said bluntly. “That your people are celebrating this monstrousness instead of condemning you is, honestly, beyond me.”

Ouch. Chanyeol felt both Jongdae and Sehun stiffen affronted at his sides, and raced to come up with something to say to diffuse the tension, but Luhan got there first. “What he means to say is that we are impressed by the open-mindedness of the Egyptian people,” he said smoothly. “And for my own part, I am very curious as to whom you may have encountered upon your journey. You spoke of spirits and of Hades, but what of the others that have passed on? Ancient kings, or philosophers, or artists - you must have met someone on your path.” He glanced curiously between Chanyeol and Jongdae.

Shit. This was sticky. Chanyeol knew from Greek mythology that their perception of the Underworld was a little different from the Egyptian perception. Greeks saw Hades as a relatively small place filled with the souls of famous people, but if he claimed to have met any of said people
and then got details about them wrong, he’d reveal the lie. Thinking fast, he said, “The path through the Underworld is a personal one, different for each. We came upon signs of others that have died or will die, upon writings or images that told of their journeys, but actually met few souls, and spoke with fewer.” It sounded like an excuse, so Chanyeol tried to shore it up with more description. “The Underworld is not a solid Earth as the land of the living is; it is mutable and flows like an ocean, hiding or destroying the proof of an individual’s passage until only fragments remain.”

“Fascinating,” Luhan said. Hangeng looked like he’d caught a bad case of the heebie-jeebies. “And the trappings with which your people buried you, your clothes and food and furniture,” he said to Jongdae. “Did you truly find use for them as you travelled?”

“For some things more than others,” Jongdae said honestly. “But all gifts were well appreciated. The earrings, for example - those were from you, yes?”

Luhan’s jaw dropped open. Internally, Chanyeol cheered for Jongdae’s good sense - what a perfect way to convince Luhan that they were telling the truth. “Yes! I - did they suit? Do you like them?”

Jongdae’s smile was gentle. “I loved them, and appreciate your thoughtfulness. You know my tastes well, Luhan.” He brushed one hand over his earlobe, currently adorned with ostentatious gold and amber earrings. “I regret only that I was not able to bring them back to this world with me. Had I known, I might have put them on before the spell.” He sighed. “Alas, that they are buried now, in a tomb which I may not enter - for who knows what might happen if my current form were to contact the shell of my previous?”

That was too much for Hangeng, it seemed. Looking a bit ill, he left without a word, moving back to the table where the other Greek ambassador was seated. Luhan glanced after him, sighed, and lowered his voice. “Prince Jongdae, though I must admit that your return puzzles and concerns me, I am also relieved. Relations between our peoples have suffered without your presence.” He flicked his gaze over at the Pharoahs, then back. “May I have an audience tomorrow? Privately?”

Jongdae raised an eyebrow. “I am likely to be meeting with many interested persons tomorrow,” he pointed out. “But I shall send for you over the morning meal.”

Luhan bowed. “Thank you. I look forward to it.” He turned and bowed to Chanyeol as well, then followed Hangeng’s path back to his seat.

“Is there something I should know?” Jongdae murmured to Sehun.

Sehun shook his head. “It is not an issue we can discuss openly here,” he said, very softly. “Trade relations have been strained since your… passing.” He signalled his servant to fetch him more wine. “Minseok has taken your place in those negotiations, with some interesting effects.”

“Where is Minseok, anyway?” Chanyeol asked. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting him.”

Pulling apart a date cake with his fingers, Jongdae said, “I assume he had to go get his mother, yes?” Sehun nodded, and Jongdae explained, “Meketaten is a frail woman, and the loss of our father was hard on her. She lives in a villa on the outskirts of the city. Minseok is very protective of her and often makes a point to escort her when she must travel, even when he could send a servant or a soldier to do it for him.”

Chanyeol frowned. “So he heard you were back and the first thing he does is leave the palace and travel across the city? That seems rude. He’s your brother, the least he could do would be to stop in
and say hello before he left.”

“He’s my half-brother,” Jongdae pointed out. “It is of no consequence, Chanyeol. We will see them soon enough.”

It bothered Chanyeol that a member of Jongdae’s own family seemed so uninterested in Jongdae’s miraculous return from the dead, but again, this was not his culture, not his family. He returned to his food and let the matter drop.

By the shape of the stars, Jongdae knew that it was near midnight when the feast drew to an end. Hatshepsut was the first to depart. She made no excuses, but Jongdae, and likely everyone else in the court, could see that she was feeling weak and exhausted. Out of consideration for his Queen, Joonmyun stood and announced the close of the feast, thanking the guests for celebrating with them. Clamor arose as people all over the room said their goodnights and prepared to leave, and in the commotion, no one noticed how heavily Hatshepsut leaned on Senenmut’s arm, how slowly they made their way up the stairs and out.

At Jongdae’s side, Chanyeol was staring unseeing at the remains of his meal, obviously lost in thought. Jongdae was worried about him. He was taking his unexpected change of scenery very hard, and though this feast had intrigued him enough to be distracting, Jongdae was afraid of what might happen if Chanyeol was left alone with his thoughts tonight.

So he gestured for Liyin, and bent to whisper in her ear. “See that my quarters are prepared for a guest tonight,” he said. “Tell Yixing I command that he help you.”

Liyin flicked her gaze from Yixing, to Chanyeol, and then back to Jongdae. “It is done, my Prince,” she murmured, and slipped away, getting Yixing’s attention with a silent touch to his wrist. Jongdae watched her go, his heart filled with a new appreciation for her skill, her discretion, her loyalty to him. Months of seeing to everything himself made him really realize what an asset she was. He made a mental note to speak to Senenmut about her living conditions. She was an indentured slave, and thus did not receive a wage, but there were other things he could do to show his appreciation.

From Chanyeol’s other side, Sehun shifted. “Finally,” he muttered. Jongdae looked where he was looking. In the doorway to the court, Meketaten stood speaking with Hatshepsut, whip-thin and trussed up in a great many gems. Beside her was Minseok, dressed a bit more subtly and glancing around the court. When he met Jongdae’s eyes, he leaned over to whisper to his mother, and led her down the steps.

Most of the crowd was no longer paying attention to the head table, so Jongdae stood. Chanyeol, seeing where he was looking, stood as well - but the moment he was on his feet, both Minseok and Meketaten stopped in their tracks, eyes wide. Quickly, Jongdae came around to the end of the table and met them.

“Stepmother,” Jongdae greeted. “Thank you for coming. I know the journey is tiring for you.”

“My child,” Meketaten said, her voice familiarly raspy, “when I heard this incredible news, I had to see for myself.” She reached out for him, her bangles jingling as she moved. “I thought it must be a dream, but here you are, beautiful as ever.”
Jongdae stepped forward and pressed her hands between his. Her touch was cool as always, but Jongdae found it comforting in its familiarity. “I know not how or why the Gods have seen fit to return me to the living, but yes, here I am.”

“A miracle,” Meketaten murmured, studying him. “And this man, that they call Messenger. For what reason does he accompany you?”

Glancing back over his shoulder, Jongdae gestured for Chanyeol. Approaching them, Chanyeol bowed. His Court bow was a little bit childish looking, which Jongdae found adorable. “My Lady, I am Chanyeol,” he said. “My purpose here is a mystery the Gods will reveal in time.”

He was getting better at that. Good. Jongdae knew Chanyeol was talented at blending in with new cultures, but he’d still been a bit worried.

“How fascinating,” Meketaten said. “I look forward to seeing what it is.” She bowed her head. “Your pardon; I go to see to our Queen. Young prince, again, welcome back.”

Meketaten returned to the doorway, following Hatshepsut and Senenmut out. Jongdae turned to her son, who had hung behind, silently watching. “Minseok,” he said. “My brother, I rejoice at the sight of you.” He reached out, to pull Minseok into an embrace.

Minseok took a step back. “Do you?” Jongdae stopped moving, confused, and his stomach dropped as Minseok’s lips flattened.

“Brother.” Jongdae stepped forward again, palms up. “It is me, I promise you.”

Dark, suspicious eyes glanced from Jongdae, to Chanyeol, and then to Sehun. “Is it true?” he asked.

“It’s true,” Sehun assured Minseok quietly. “He is himself, in every way I could think to test.”

Sehun had been testing him, and Jongdae hadn’t even noticed. Jongdae would be insulted, but it was so typical of Sehun, and Jongdae had missed Sehun so much.

That got him a raised eyebrow. “Every way?” Minseok asked dryly.

A shadow of a smile flashed over Sehun’s features. “Well. I haven’t had time for every way.”

Minseok sighed. “If Sehun says it is you, my Prince, then I must believe it is the truth.” He reached out a hand, hesitant. Jongdae wasted no time in taking it, in pulling him into a hug.

Though he turned his face in towards Jongdae’s neck, Jongdae could feel that Minseok was still tense. He held his brother close, but it took Minseok an awfully long time to relax even minutely. Unsettled, Jongdae let him go. He pulled back and searched Minseok’s face, but Minseok’s eyes were shuttered, his expression cool and closed-off.

Jongdae flashed him a smile. “We will speak tomorrow,” he promised. “You missed the telling of our travels, I’m sure you have questions.”

Minseok returned his smile, but it seemed flat. “Yes,” he agreed. “I’m certain it will be quite a tale.” With a curt nod, Minseok moved away, to go greet Joonmyun.

Warmth against his shoulder told Jongdae that Chanyeol was hovering. “He doesn’t seem very excited to see you,” Chanyeol muttered in Greek.

“I was dead,” Jongdae pointed out. “He is not the only one unsettled by my return. Once he gets
used to that idea, he will come around.” Reaching behind himself, Jongdae slid his hand into Chanyeol’s and squeezed his fingers. “Shall we leave?”

They said their goodnights to Joonmyun. His brother was disappointed that they were leaving, and Jongdae could see him holding back an invitation to stay late - no doubt he was planning to have just those closest to him back to his rooms to drink and celebrate for real. But Jongdae was exhausted, physically, mentally and emotionally, and if he was this tired he couldn’t imagine how Chanyeol felt. So he promised his brother that they would catch up tomorrow, and they left the feast court.

The walk back to Jongdae’s rooms was slow. It was also the first time they had really been alone together all day, at least the first quiet moment, and as they walked, Jongdae ran his fingers up Chanyeol’s bared arm, admiring the way the jeweled bangles and armbands highlighted his strength. “How are you?” he asked softly.

A flash of teeth. “Overwhelmed,” Chanyeol admitted. “And grateful for you.” He glanced around. “This isn’t the way back to my rooms… is it?”

“No,” Jongdae said. “You shouldn’t be alone tonight. I had the servants move your things.” They reached his quarters, and Jongdae nodded to the guards outside the doorway, who were clearly disguising their discomfort at seeing him alive. He wouldn’t be sorry when that look went away - it was already getting tiresome to be treated so fearfully. “You’ll stay with me tonight.”

He swept aside the curtains and guided Chanyeol into the rooms. Chanyeol stepped inside and then stopped, his eyes wide. Jongdae let him take it all in. For his own part, he could see that his appointments had been somewhat hastily re-decorated, and several pieces of his furniture had been replaced, likely because the originals were now buried in his tomb. But it was clear that someone had made a considerable effort to ensure that his space looked as much like it had before his death as possible, and Jongdae was fairly certain that someone was currently kneeling in the middle of the rug next to Yixing, awaiting instruction.

“Liyin, Yixing, you are dismissed,” Jongdae said, as Chanyeol turned a slow circle and stared at the riches around them. He saw Liyin’s expression shift, saw Yixing glance at Chanyeol, but he raised an eyebrow, and they obeyed without a word, both rising and leaving soundlessly.

They left behind a basin of water and several wash-cloths, though, so while Chanyeol continued to stare in fascination at Jongdae’s furniture, Jongdae began removing his jewelry, taking his time and enjoying the quiet.

Eventually, the jingling got Chanyeol’s attention. “We’re not making the servants undress us?” he asked.

Jongdae smiled at him. “I thought you might want to be left alone this time.”

“You thought correctly.” Chanyeol started pulling his bangles off his wrists, setting them carefully on a table nearby. “Jongdae, this is… Your home is beautiful. More beautiful than I could ever have imagined.” He reached for the armband wound around his bicep, but it was on too tightly, and wouldn’t slide off.

Reaching up, Jongdae found the latch that loosened the golden band and opened it. “But you miss your home,” he guessed. “Of course you do.” He pushed up on his toes so he could reach the clasp of Chanyeol’s heavy jeweled collar. Chanyeol didn’t answer him, just dropped his gaze and watched as Jongdae slowly undressed him.
“You know,” Jongdae said conversationally. “On that first night, right after I had… come back. When you were taking care of me, just like this. Dressing me, and anointing me, and bringing me to your home.” Curious, Chanyeol cocked his head. “That was… It helped. It helped me so much, made me less afraid. I don’t think I ever thanked you.” He pushed the robe, now freed from the gems that held it in place, from Chanyeol’s shoulders. The linen pooled on the ground, leaving Chanyeol in only his kilt and his kohl.

Gods be praised, he was spectacular. Jongdae leaned in and pressed a reverent kiss to Chanyeol’s shoulder.

Big hands slid up Jongdae’s back and under the wig, searching for the clasp of Jongdae’s collar. “I’m glad,” Chanyeol said. “I was hoping it would.”

The collar came off, and Chanyeol set it aside. “How many other people would have known what to do?” Jongdae mused aloud. “Who else, from your time, would have known how to calm me, after such an experience as that?” He raised his hands, and Chanyeol gently pulled off his rings, then his bangles. “You are extraordinary, Chanyeol.”

A dry chuckle. “I am lost,” Chanyeol muttered. “Lost, and stuck, and so far away from everything familiar.” His hands paused at Jongdae’s armbands, his eyes shuttered and glassy. “Oh, God.”

Jongdae cupped his face in both hands. “Look at me,” he commanded, and when Chanyeol looked, he said, “I am so sorry this happened to you. I never meant - ” He stopped, because what words could he use to express this? “I would not have wished this on you.”

“I know.” Chanyeol sighed, bringing a hand up to cover Jongdae’s on his cheek. “This is not your fault.”

Jongdae wasn’t so sure of that, but he didn’t say so. Instead he brushed his thumb under Chanyeol’s eye. “You should take that kohl off.” He leaned down and dipped a cloth in the washbasin near their feet, and also picked up the jar of olive oil that had been left behind. “It’s not good for you to sleep with it on.”

Chanyeol looked at the cloth, and then back at Jongdae, with such confused pleading in his eyes that Jongdae nearly burst out laughing. “Your people do not wear face paints,” he remembered.

Jongdae cupped his face in both hands. “Look at me,” he commanded, and when Chanyeol looked, he said, “I am so sorry this happened to you. I never meant - ” He stopped, because what words could he use to express this? “I would not have wished this on you.”

“Men do not, no. Unless they’re on stage, I mean.” He glanced down at the cloth, the oil. “Do I just… Wipe it off?”

So Jongdae showed him how to remove the kohl, how to use the oil when the water alone wasn’t enough, but not too much because oil in the eyes was never good. It was a process, and Chanyeol flinched quite a lot for a man who just yesterday had run directly towards several armed graverobbers, and they ended up giggling and streaked with black.

Eventually, both of them were clean and bare-faced, and Jongdae pulled off his wig and gently set it aside. He rolled his head to stretch his neck out. “One would imagine, after so many years, it would take longer than a few months for me to forget how heavy those… What?” Because Chanyeol was staring at him.

Chanyeol shook his head, ran a hand through his hair, flashed a quick smile. “You,” he said. “Tonight, you were… Stunning. Regal and beautiful beyond compare.” His fingers trailed up Jongdae’s arms. “And here you are, no makeup, no jewels, not even any hair… And still so beautiful.”
Smiling, pleased, Jongdae pressed up and kissed him.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

23 Hathor, 1460 BC
The Royal Palace
Waset, Egypt

Chanyeol’s first morning in Ancient Egypt saw him waking just after dawn, mostly because the east-facing light boxes cut into the ceiling threw strong beams of morning sunlight right across his face. He rolled over, rubbing at his eyes - and came face-to-face with Jongdae, who was watching him with a downright dopey expression.

"Hi," Chanyeol said dumbly.

"Hi," Jongdae responded, in English.

Even with just that one syllable, Jongdae's accent was pronounced, and it brought Chanyeol crashing back to reality, sweeping away his lingering sleep. He sat up, the bedlinens falling away from his bare body, and for a moment he panicked, thinking that he and Jongdae had had sex and he couldn’t remember it - but then he recalled that sleeping naked was just how it worked in Ancient Egypt and nothing beyond a lot of kissing and cuddling had happened.

Not that it would matter, if it did. Right? No one in this time and place would care, and for all Chanyeol knew they would actively encourage it. But there was still that little voice in his head, that soundless thought that still somehow reminded him of his mother that said this is evil, and you are evil if you give in.

The issue was all in Chanyeol’s head, and intellectually, he knew that. As a silent fuck-you to his inner demons, Chanyeol leaned forward and kissed Jongdae softly, and allowed himself - no, forced himself - to really enjoy it, to revel in Jongdae’s surprise and subsequent submission, to run his hand up Jongdae’s chest and face the fact that Jongdae’s body felt more exciting and arousing and right than any woman he’d ever touched.

It was thrilling, terrifying, and a lot for his mind to handle this early in the morning. Chanyeol pulled away first, his heart giving a pleased little hop-skip when Jongdae whined and chased after his lips, resuming the kiss. Finally, though, they broke apart, and Jongdae pressed his forehead to Chanyeol’s. “Good morning, my ray of sunlight,” Jongdae murmured with a smile.

My ray of sunlight. Chanyeol hadn’t heard the phrase, but it didn’t take a linguistic genius to figure it out. He couldn’t help but to smile back. “If I am your sunlight, will you be my starlight?” he asked.

Jongdae flushed, laughed, and nodded, dropping his eyes shyly. “Of course,” he said. “I will guide your way.” He picked up Chanyeol’s hand and started playing with his fingers. “How are you this morning? Where is your head?”

It took a second to parse the unfamiliar idiom and figure out what Jongdae was asking. “I feel a little better,” Chanyeol admitted. “I still… the enormousness of this weighs on me. But everything always seems lighter in the morning, doesn’t it?”
“In a way, yes,” Jongdae agreed. He pushed Chanyeol down onto the bed and laid his own head on Chanyeol’s shoulder, cuddling close. “After you fell asleep last night, I thought a lot about this. About being back here after having died, and about you, and about Joonmyun.”

Chanyeol wrapped his arm around Jongdae’s back and frowned. “Dae… you know you can’t save him. You can’t. To change who is on the throne of Egypt is to change history in a massive way, with unimaginable consequences.”

Jongdae sighed heavily. “Yes. I think I know that now.” He tilted his head up so he could look at Chanyeol’s eyes. “This is a chance to be with my brother in his last days, isn’t it? I wish it could be more than that, but… if nothing else, at least I have bought myself more time to be with him.”

That was a very good way of looking at it, actually. “Yes, I suppose you have. And it’s a chance very few people get, in any time.” He wracked his brain, trying to visualize the Egyptian calendar. “We’re nearing the end of the third month of the year, correct?” Jongdae nodded. “So there’s a little over nine months to go, and we don’t know when, in that time, that it will…”

“You have no hint of the date?” Jongdae asked. “There was nothing in his tomb?”

“No, nothing that we found. Only that it was in the calendar year following your death. So, some point this year, that’s all we know.”

“Chanyeol.” Jongdae pushed himself up onto his elbows and met Chanyeol’s eyes very seriously. “I will bow to your knowledge of these matters, and not attempt to stop my brother’s murder. But you must know that I will not allow his murderer to go unpunished.” He pursed his lips. “I will find them, I will find proof of their crime, and they will be brought to justice. If I must allow my brother to die, I must also see that his soul can rest in peace.” Pressing his hand to Chanyeol’s chest, his expression turned pleading. “Will you help me?”

Chanyeol covered Jongdae’s hand with his own. “I will,” he promised. “Of course I will.”

Jongdae’s smile wasn’t a happy one, but his kiss was filled with gratitude. Chanyeol held him and kissed him and prayed that circumstances wouldn’t make him into a liar. Prayed that bringing the murderer to justice wouldn’t also change history.

Soon, though, Chanyeol’s worries were lost in Jongdae’s kisses, and he rolled them both over, settling on top. Jongdae’s mouth was latched onto his collarbone and Chanyeol was just beginning to consider the notion of pushing his thigh between Jongdae’s when the rattle of a chime startled them apart. Pulling the bedclothes up over Chanyeol’s back, Jongdae called out, “Enter.”

Liyin entered the room, dressed in plain unbleached linen, and with her was Yixing in the same. Both carried stacks of cloth and gems in their hands.

Chanyeol groaned. “Is it already that time?” he grumbled.

“Unfortunately. Liyin, have arrangements been made with Luhan of Minoa for the morning meal?” Liyin nodded, kneeling, and Jongdae sighed. “The duties of my position call to me, whether I wish it or not.”

He got up, heedless of his nudity, and Chanyeol followed, automatically wrapping the sheet around his waist. “I don’t have duties. What should I do while you are busy?”

“You could call for a meal yourself, or… Well, I was going to say visit the temples, but I’m not sure it is a good idea for you to wander by yourself just yet.”
Chanyeol noticed that Yixing had looked up, his mouth opening and closing again. “What? Yixing, speak, if you have something to say.”

Yixing glanced at Jongdae, and then dropped his eyes again. “My lord, you have a guest already waiting in your rooms. With breakfast.”

Chanyeol blinked. “Oh. Well then.” He put a hand to his chest pompously. “Hear that? I have a guest.”

Laughing, Jongdae picked up the armband Chanyeol had been wearing the night before and chucked it at him. Chanyeol caught it reflexively. “Get dressed, High Lord Importantness.”

Chanyeol allowed Yixing to dress him - a blue-green kilt today, with a sheer, pale yellow robe over it - and then he kissed Jongdae goodbye, and followed Yixing back to his own rooms to begin his first full day as an Egyptian citizen.

Odd as hell, honestly.

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The meal with Luhan was… Enlightening, to say the least.

“I had no idea the negotiations were going so poorly,” Jongdae murmured, as Luhan broke open a pomegranate. “I am surprised my brother would take such an unbending stance.”

“I am not surprised, though I wish I were,” Luhan said, handing over half of the pomegranate. “Your brother’s willingness to compromise has always come from your ability to make him see the benefits of alliance. Minseok, unfortunately, is more inclined to argue with him.”

Jongdae delicately scooped out a few pomegranate seeds with his fingers. “And arguing with Joonmyun is the best way to make him stubborn. I see your problem.” He popped the seeds in his mouth, licking the blood-red juice from his fingertips. “You find Minseok to be agreeable, though?”

“Mm.” Luhan’s approach to eating the pomegranate was more direct; his mouth came away red-stained. “Very much so. Minseok is not a conqueror, he is a trader. He sees the value of the agreement we have proposed, and feels quite passionately that Joonmyun does your kingdom a disservice by refusing.”

Interesting. Jongdae was quite sure there was more to it than that, but he only nodded and made sympathetic noises as Luhan continued to sigh woefully about the state of the trade negotiations. It did seem like a bit of a tangle, but hardly one beyond detanglement.

“It almost makes me wish it was Minseok who was Pharaoh,” Luhan said, mid-thought and offhand. He kept talking, continuing his thought, but Jongdae’s mind froze, caught on that statement.

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The walk back to Chanyeol’s room was leisurely. It seemed few people were awake yet; Chanyeol
saw only servants scurrying about, each of them bowing hastily as they passed. Yixing remained silent, his eyes downcast, as he led Chanyeol through the halls.

Chanyeol was never one for silence, and if Yixing was going to be his - his valet, of sorts - then Chanyeol wanted to get to know him. So he started with the thing that had been bothering him the most.

“Yixing,” he said, his voice soft. “Will you answer a question for me?” Yixing stopped and turned, hands clasped behind his back and eyes downcast. Chanyeol huffed, uncomfortable with the subservience, but let it go. “Last night, at the feast, I noticed you were not praying. Why not?”

Yixing’s eyes went very wide, his body tense, but he did not look up, did not move. “I meant no offense,” he murmured, fearful.

Shit. “I have taken no offense,” Chanyeol assured him quickly, cupping Yixing’s shoulder gently with one hand. “I am a stranger here, and curious. No more than that.”

Dark eyes flicked up to his face, quickly taking in his expression before dropping again. “I… my Lord. It is only that I… do not worship the gods of this place.”

“Oh.” Interesting. Chanyeol cocked his head. “You don’t? What do you believe, then?”

Biting his lip - the most emotion Chanyeol had yet seen from the man - Yixing swiftly unlaced the simple leather cuff around his right wrist, and turned the inside of his arm to show Chanyeol. Tattooed in black ink on the inside of his wrist was a single character.

It took Chanyeol a moment to figure out what he was looking at. It wasn’t a hieroglyph. Chanyeol took Yixing’s hand in his own and studied the symbol for a long second.

Then, he realized what it was. It was a character of the very little-known Proto-Sinaitic script, the alphabet that connected Egyptian hieroglyphs to Phoenician, to the Latin alphabet, and eventually, to Hebrew. He only recognized it because it looked so similar to the Egyptian hieroglyph it was derived from, hundreds of years previous.

Aleph, the first letter. Would one day become Alpha, as in ‘the Alpha and the Omega.’

“Yahweh,” Chanyeol breathed.

Yixing’s eyes widened to match Chanyeol’s. “You - but -” He snapped his mouth shut.

No, no, no. “Yixing, speak. Say what you were about to say.”

“Lord, I - I dare not.”

Chanyeol let his hand go, and gestured for him to put his cuff back on. Yixing did so, dropping his eyes again, and they began moving once more. Once Yixing appeared to be breathing again, Chanyeol spoke. “You are not Egyptian.”

Yixing glanced at him. “I was born in this very city.”

“But your people, they are not native to this land, are they?”

“No, Lord.” Yixing kept glancing at him, clearly trying to decide how much he dared to say. “My people are of the Shasu tribes, from the north. We were taken as prisoners of war by the armies of the Pharaoh’s grandfather.”
Of course. Of course. They weren't called Jews, because Judaism had not yet been founded. They weren't called Hebrew, because the Hebrew language was centuries away from creation. But Yixing was one of the slaves of Egypt, hundreds of years before their liberation.

And the God that he worshipped was Chanyeol’s God. The very same one.

The sheer overwhelmingness of that had a lump rising in Chanyeol’s throat; he quickly swallowed it down, as something else occurred to him. “Yixing,” he asked, “who assigned you to me?”

“The Lord Seneschal assigned me to you personally.”

That wasn’t an accident. Chanyeol made a mental note to thank Senenmut as soon as he got the chance. “As my personal servant, you are obligated to keep my secrets, is that true?” Yixing nodded, glancing up with curiosity in his eyes. “Then I will tell you my secret, that only the Seneschal knows.” He glanced around, but this hall was empty. “Your God is also my God, Yixing.”

Yixing didn’t look up, but Chanyeol could feel his reaction in his body language. “Can this be true?” Yixing asked softly. “You are not of my people.”

“No, I am not. And I expect we worship in different ways.” Chanyeol let out a long breath. “Still. I am comforted to know I am not alone, here.”

For the first time, Yixing smiled at Chanyeol. Feeling emotional and shit at hiding it, Chanyeol smiled back. “Lord, I am at your service,” Yixing said, with more meaning than the words were saying.

“Thank you,” Chanyeol murmured, as Yixing brushed aside the curtain door of his room and gestured for him to enter.

Inside, Chanyeol had honestly expected to find Sehun waiting for him, or perhaps Senenmut, the only two people in this time he had yet spoken with at any length. To his surprise, though, it was Jongin, waiting with an elaborate and delicious-smelling spread on the table in front of him.

Chanyeol bowed, holding his palms out. “King’s Scribe Jongin. I was not expecting you.”

Jongin copied the gesture and then waved a hand at the floor cushion across from him. “We have not yet had a chance to speak, and I, like the entire capital, am curious about you, Messenger. Please, come eat.”

As he moved to sit, Chanyeol noticed Yixing out of the corner of his eye, kneeling on a smaller cushion in the very corner. He pulled something from the pouch at his side - a wooden drop spindle?

Yes, that was what it was, because the next thing Yixing pulled out was a bundle of flax fiber. Chanyeol almost called across the room to ask him about it, but then remembered that servants were supposed to remain silent in the presence of nobles, and instead turned to Jongin. “Yixing, my servant. He spins?”

Jongin glanced at the corner. “Many servants in the palace spin, Lord,” he said, as Yixing began doing just that, dropping the spindle and feeding the fiber into it, spinning it into thread. “No servant is to be idle at any time, and so many spin, or embroider, or polish jewelry while they are engaged to wait for their masters.” He regarded Chanyeol curiously. “Is it not this way with your servants?”

Chanyeol nearly said I have no servants, before he remembered that he was supposed to be from the Land of the Dead and that Egyptian nobles were buried with statues of slaves specifically so they would have servants in the afterlife. “It is not the same, no,” he said vaguely, and changed the
subject. “You will stay and eat with me?”

Smiling politely, Jongin nodded, and touched something on the floor beside him. Chanyeol leaned around the table and looked - a large papyrus scroll, an ink palette, reeds and a black block of solid ink. “I actually would like to record your tale, if you are willing to tell it again,” Jongin said.

Shit.

Could Chanyeol allow their wild story to be recorded? To his knowledge, nothing like the story they had told existed in any historical record. They’d be essentially creating a new myth, passed down through generations, twisted and changed into who knows what. Could that change history?

Better not to risk it.

“I’m sorry,” Chanyeol said, and meant it. “I cannot allow our story to be written down. Such knowledge must not live on in that way.” Jongin blinked, looking surprised and more than a little disappointed, and Chanyeol scrambled to find something to change the subject. “Instead, I would like to hear about you, and about the Pharaohs and life in the palace. And… I would greatly appreciate if you would teach me to write with reeds, as you do.”

That definitely got Jongin’s attention. “Lord Messenger, learning to scribe is more than a morning’s lesson,” he said carefully.

“You misunderstand,” Chanyeol said. “I know how to write, in general. But I have not before used a reed to do so.” He gestured at the solid ink, the small pile of fresh-cut reeds. “I ask only that you teach me to use the tool.”

Jongin looked him over, obviously seeing him in a new light. “Perhaps, after the meal, we will try it,” he acquiesced. “Please, Lord. Let us eat.”

Grinning, Chanyeol did just that.

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Jongdae knew he was going to be in high demand the day after he came back, and it seemed his prediction was proven correct when a messenger came before he was even finished with Luhan. He politely made his excuses and headed towards the Pharaoh’s suite with Liyin keeping pace one step to the right and one behind.

Sehun met him on the way. “Oh good, you’re still here,” he said, in lieu of a greeting. “Did you think I would not be?” Jongdae asked, laughing. Sehun shot him a look, and Jongdae’s laughter died. “I see. I’m sorry.” Looking over his shoulder, Jongdae said, “Liyin, you are dismissed for the remainder of the morning. Meet me in the messenger’s suite at midday.”

Liyin hesitated, obviously surprised - it was pretty rare that she got a chunk of time to herself during the day - but Jongdae shooed her away. When she was gone, Jongdae slid his hand into Sehun’s and squeezed it. “Luhan had some very interesting things to say about the negotiations.”

Sehun snorted. “I am sure he did.”
“Want to tell me what is actually going on?”

Looking around, Sehun dropped his voice, and told Jongdae exactly what all was in the trade agreement the Greeks had proposed.

Jongdae blinked. “That’s... very one-sided.”

“To put it politely, yes.” Sehun’s thumb stroked up the side of Jongdae’s hand. “They were hoping to take advantage of Joonmyun’s grief to get what they wanted, by arguing it’s what you would have wanted. Minseok bought what they were selling, but Joonmyun did not. Now, they’re playing them against each other.”

“Well.” Jongdae pursed his lips. “That will need to stop.”

“I hope you can make it so,” Sehun said. “Minseok has gotten a taste of this side of politics now, and he has become quite close with Luhan and the other Greek ambassadors in the past few months. He would not appreciate being cut out of the negotiations, but he’s too sympathetic to the pretty pictures of economic harmony that they paint.” He shook his head. “If the Greeks get their way, they will drain Egypt dry. Your death put blood in the water and they are crocodiles come to feed.”

Jongdae was getting a clearer picture of the problem, now. “Joonmyun responds to crocodiles with spears,” he murmured. “Minseok would rather sacrifice an ox to sate them.”

Sehun flashed him a smile. “Welcome home.”

Jongdae laughed. “Truth be told, I missed it. Even the politics.” Thoughtfully, he pursed his lips. “I have much to catch up on, and much to plan.”

“That is why our Pharaohs called you, is it not?” Sehun replied, as they passed through the doorway of the Pharaoh’s Suite. “My Queen, I bring your wayward nephew,” he called out.

“Come to the back,” Joonmyun’s voice responded.

Sehun gestured for Jongdae to go, patted his shoulder, and left. In the Queen’s bedroom, Joonmyun sat on the corner of the bed, dressed casually and munching absentmindedly on a tray of bread and fruit. Hatshepsut herself, dressed in a similar fashion, sat at her vanity, inspecting the blemishes on her neck and shoulder in her polished-bronze mirror.

“Good morning,” Jongdae said, and went to kiss his stepmother.

Hatshepsut smiled and cupped his cheek in her hand. “My heart is glad to see you, my son.” Her hand was so cold; Jongdae pushed it into his own skin to warm it. “A runner was sent to your mother last night. We expect her to return by the end of the month.”

“Thank you.” His birth-mother Iset lived in the religious city Abydos, a few days’ travel to the north. He couldn’t wait to see her, couldn’t wait to introduce her to Chanyeol.

As Hatshepsut reached for her favorite jar of skin cream - fine ceramic inlaid with a golden emblem, scented with the imported myrrh that was her signature perfume - Jongdae went to sit next to his brother. He laid his head on Joonmyun’s shoulder, and Joonmyun smiled and offered him a fig. “We have a lot to talk about,” he said.

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Chanyeol’s first week in Egypt was a whirlwind.

No, not week - his first *decan*. Egyptians measured the days in decans, ten-day increments. Each month had exactly three decans, which was, frankly, much more reasonable and easy to learn than the Gregorian calendar, but it still took some getting used to.

He had a *lot* to get used to.

Over those first few days, Chanyeol toured the palace, the capital, the temples and the tombs. He witnessed and even took part in bartering, in worship, in politics. It was pretty obvious that someone had ordered that he never be left alone when outside his rooms, but Chanyeol didn’t mind it much. He spent time with Sehun, Jongin, and Senenmut by turns or together, and even visited Tao to get an introduction to the capital’s priesthood. It was clear to him now that being the recipient of Jongdae’s royal favor had opened doors for Tao within the priesthood; he had already been promoted from acolyte to shrine priest, and rumors were going around that the High Priests had their eyes on him as a possible future candidate to join them.

It was exhausting, and also the best experience Chanyeol ever had. Still, it was hard to imagine that this was his life now, this was his home. He kept thinking about what he would tell Kris when he saw him, or Yura, or his colleagues at the museum - and then remembering that he never would, ever again.

Eventually, he asked Yixing to get him writing supplies and a scroll of papyrus. Writing with the ink reed was different than with a pen, messier and harder to control, but Chanyeol got the hang of it eventually. He addressed the scroll to Kris, and poured out everything that had happened so far in the smallest, neatest English print he could manage with the messy reed.

It took hours. By the time Chanyeol was weighing down the scroll so it could dry without curling in on itself, the sun was setting, and Yixing was padding into his room and kneeling before him. “Lord,” he said, “your presence has not been requested by anyone tonight. Do you have a wish?”

A free night sounded nice in theory, but Chanyeol had actually been alone for most of the afternoon, and wasn’t really sure what he would do if he was alone for hours more. “If you had the night to yourself, what would you do with it?” he asked curiously. “Where would you go?”

Yixing glanced up. “Lord, if I was released from my duties tonight, I would go to worship,” he said. “There is a service tonight, at a friend’s home. Would you…” He bit his lip. “If you wish it, I will take you there.”


“Anyone who wants to be there is welcome,” Yixing said, with a soft smile.

Jumping to his feet, Chanyeol looked around himself, at the few belongings he’d acquired so far. “Do I need to change? What should I wear?”

Yixing got to his feet as well. “We cover our heads,” he said, “which, considering your… It would not be a bad idea in any case.” He glanced up, and Chanyeol’s hand automatically went to his hair. Despite understanding now why so many Egyptians, particularly royalty, shaved their heads, Chanyeol had stubbornly refused to do so. According to Tao, who was out among the populace more than most of Chanyeol’s acquaintances, some of the bolder citizens had started referring to him as the Copper Lord. His hair was becoming his trademark and Chanyeol was already considering
asking about henna dyes so he could keep it that way. “The service is in the slave’s quarter, so it may be wise of you to wear plainer clothes.”

Chanyeol agreed. Yixing quickly ducked away to find something less regal, and while he waited, Chanyeol removed his jewelry and debated bringing some kind of a gift. He thought it would be polite, but he was also wary of presenting anything too rich, for fear of seeming like he was showing off or trying to buy trust. Eventually, he stuck his head out of his room and called a servant from the hall to run to the kitchens.

As he let the curtains fall closed behind him, he realized what he’d just done - treated the palace as his home, the kitchens as his kitchens, the servant as a tool to accomplish his ends. Unsettled, he sat down and waited.

Yixing was back quickly, and the other servant not long after that. Chanyeol thanked the servant - unnecessary, he had been told, but he kept doing it anyway - and came back with two linen-wrapped loaves of bread. “I wanted to bring a gift,” he said, by way of explanation.

“It will be appreciated,” Yixing assured him.

He changed, and they left, sneaking out through a servant’s passage. As soon as they were out into the fading light of dusk, Yixing helped him to wrap a piece of linen around his head and shoulders, entirely covering his hair.

The neighborhood Yixing lead him to was one Chanyeol hadn’t yet visited. The houses were small and rather shoddily built of mud brick; and some weren’t houses at all, but more like tents. The people were dressed simply, if at all, and many were dirty, scarred, or sickly-looking.

Honestly, it reminded Chanyeol of the Lower East Side of Manhattan where he’d grown up, people all stacked on top of each other and unable to stay out of each other’s business as a result, and he told Yixing so. Yixing clearly found it difficult to believe Chanyeol had been born in an ethnic slum, so Chanyeol told him a little about it, as much as he dared.

The house where the service was to take place was a bit on the larger side, not that that was saying much. Inside, there were maybe a dozen people, all men, all different ages, all looking at Chanyeol with curiosity and distrust.

“My friend wishes to join the assembly,” Yixing told the eldest man in the room, who appeared to be the leader. “He brings a gift.” He gestured, and Chanyeol stepped forward and held out the bread.

The elder and two others debated quickly in a language Chanyeol didn’t understand. Then, one of them took the bread from Chanyeol’s hands, and another spoke to Yixing, and Yixing smiled, nodded, and returned to Chanyeol’s side. “You have permission to observe,” he whispered. “After, if you wish to join permanently, you may petition for entrance.”

“Thank you,” Chanyeol told the elders, bowing his head.

Yixing pulled Chanyeol toward the back of the room, and when the elder motioned for the room to kneel, they both did so.

The service was very interesting. For one thing, it was conducted entirely in that other language, which Chanyeol assumed must be the spoken form of Proto-Sinaitic. For another, the prayers were directed at an actual, physical idol, a bull carved from ebony with horns of ivory and gold. That was shocking to Chanyeol, who had grown up with the disdain of idol-worship ground into his mind. But of course, the doctrine thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image had come from the Ten
Commandments, which wouldn’t happen for several centuries at least.

He was watching a proto-Judaic worship service from before the creation of the Ten Commandments.

Wow.

There were things about the ceremony that were familiar, though. Kneeling, standing, kneeling again; the singsong nature of the chanted prayers; the call-and-response that Chanyeol tried to follow. The gesture the elder used when leading the prayers - elbows held close to the sides, hands up and held out from the body with palms forward - was so very similar to the gesture used by the Catholic priest at his childhood church, that Chanyeol got more than a little choked up.

When the elder unwrapped his gift and said a blessing over it, then broke it into pieces and passed the pieces around the room, Chanyeol found it hard to contain his emotions. He accepted his piece, and the blessing the elder said over his head, and wondered at the vastness of the idea that millions of people across thousands of years would practice such a similar ritual, for a similar end.

He kept his head down, so the room wouldn’t notice his expression. But Yixing noticed, and a calloused hand slid into his own. Chanyeol squeezed Yixing’s fingers, ate his offering, concentrated on the prayers and tried not to cry.

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2 Kharka, 1460 BC
Hatshepsut’s House of a Thousand Years
Waset, Egypt

When Jongdae’s mother finally arrived from Abydos, the first thing she did was order a feast. Not a big, political feast like the one Joonmyun had ordered on Jongdae’s first day returned, but a family feast, a real celebration.

They set up in the forecourt at Hatshepsut’s temple, away from the prying eyes of the palace. Only those closest to the royal family were there, but it was still a sizeable group. The tables were low to the ground, the guests seated on cushions, and only a few of the most trusted servants were there to set out the food.

Cuddled comfortably into his birth-mother’s side, Jongdae poured wine for those nearest to him and absorbed the sounds of revelry. On his right side, Iset was interrogating Chanyeol in the way only an overprotective mother could; on his left, Joonmyun and Sehun were engaged in spirited and slightly drunken debate with Baekhyun and Satiah. On their far side, Minseok and Jongin had already pulled out a senet board, and on Iset’s other side, Hatshepsut, Senenmut, Meketaten and Baekhyun’s father Useramun were eating blue lotus and making pithy comments about the proceedings.

“Iset,” Meketaten cut in, as Jongdae’s mother was just asking how Chanyeol ended up in the Underworld in the first place. “Come, beloved sister, you have questioned the poor boy enough. Leave the young people to their revelry, and join us in ours.” She caught Iset’s elbow and tugged her up. “We are retiring to our Queen’s suite in the palace.”
Laughing, Iset got up, and took the gauze-wrapped hand that Hatshepsut reached towards her. Jongdae’s eyes slid away from his queen’s hand, already so damaged that it had to be wrapped, looking far too mummified for Jongdae’s piece of mind. He focused instead on Chanyeol’s reaction as Iset pressed her lips to the Queen Pharaoh’s cheek. The previous generation said their goodnights and started back towards the city, with Iset and Senenmut helping Hatshepsut into her litter chair just through the doorway.

“You had told me that they used to be…” Chanyeol muttered in Greek, trailing off before his sentence was complete. “But I did not really believe.”

Jongdae smiled and pulled him close, nuzzling in against his shoulder. Chanyeol’s grip on him was stiff at first, but after a moment, he relaxed, like he consciously forced himself to do so. “You will become accustomed to all this,” Jongdae assured him.

“I know,” Chanyeol murmured. “Be patient with me?”

Taking Chanyeol’s hand in both of his, Jongdae played with his long fingers. “Of course, beloved.”

Chanyeol didn’t respond, but after a moment, Jongdae felt lips pressed to his temple, and smiled, pleased.

“My prince, why do you sit separated?” Sehun asked. He’d had quite a bit of wine and was moving more fluidly than normal, flopping to the side on the cushions and reaching over his head to poke Jongdae’s knee.

Jongdae laughed and shoved his head, then rose up and knee-walked over to the others, tugging Chanyeol behind him. “Make room,” he said. They settled with Jongdae between Sehun and Chanyeol, Joonmyun on Chanyeol’s other side.

Eyeing the senet game on the other side of the table, Jongdae said, “I see Jongin is rousting you yet again.”

Minseok snorted. “He always does.”

“Yet, you insist on playing,” Jongin said, moving a piece.

“I will defeat you someday.” Minseok wagged a piece at him before moving it. “It is good mind exercise, especially when I am drunk.” He leaned back against Baekhyun’s shoulder, his eyes drifting half-closed as Baekhyun wrapped an arm around him. “And I am quite drunk.”

“Minseok, you are a better opponent drunk than most of the court is sober,” Jongin told him. “But not quite good enough.” He moved one last piece. “I win.”

Minseok flicked the piece at him, and everyone laughed. “Quite the strategist,” Satiah commented. “That must be a great asset when you are on campaign.” She glanced at Joonmyun.

“It is,” Joonmyun said, tugging Jongin back against his side. Jongin folded against Joonmyun’s chest, easily and comfortably, and Joonmyun dropped a kiss on his bare shoulder. Between them, Jongdae felt Chanyeol stiffen, and looked up to gauge his reaction.

Chanyeol’s eyes were wide. Had he not realized yet that Jongin was Joonmyun’s lover? Jongdae watched him glancing in confusion between Jongin and Satiah, and willed him not to say anything rash. Everyone else here was aware; Chanyeol would look quite the fool if he made a fuss.

“Will his strategy be as great an asset in the court as it is on the battlefield, I wonder?” Baekhyun
mused aloud.


“It is a valid question! And one I know many are asking.” Baekhyun leaned forward, his eyes glossy and cheeks reddened with drink. It disturbed Minseok, who grunted and repositioned. “The health of our Queen is failing, anyone can see this. Are you ready to rule alone, Joonmyun?”

“Hey!” Jongdae sat up indignantly. “What do you imply?”

“I imply nothing, I speak! Our younger Pharaoh has more than proven himself on the battlefield, but he is untested in courtly politics.” Picking up his wine cup, Baekhyun waved it in Joonmyun’s general direction. “It takes more than spears to rule a kingdom.”

“He isn’t wrong,” Satiah said. “The world grows smaller every day, and more crowded. Foreign powers close in on all sides, and no army is strong enough to defend from them all. Hatshepsut has wielded our army as a surgeon wields a knife, very precisely and only as necessary.” She took a sip from her own cup. “Voices whisper fears that you will be too heavy-handed.”

“Do you share this fear?” Joonmyun asked archly.

Satiah raised an eyebrow. “It is… a concern, perhaps.”

“Considering how he has dealt with the Greeks, I would say it certainly is a concern,” Minseok added.

Jongdae scoffed at the same time as his brother. “The Greeks are trying to embalm us,” Jongdae said, “drain us dry and scoop out everything valuable. They are politely worded thieves.”

This was an old argument, and Jongdae could see Minseok’s eyes spark with the same retorts as always. “They are a valuable, powerful trading partner and we have nothing to gain by alienating them!”

“They manipulate you, Minseok,” Sehun jumped in, exasperated. “Especially Luhan! He bats those pretty eyes and you become clay for him to mold.” He ripped a date cake apart rather vindictively. “You’re too smart to let him blind you like that.”

“Refusing them and insulting him is not the way to create a strong alliance, and you all know it.” Minseok huffed. “Our Pharaoh needs to wield the crook as well as the flail, to be the shepherd of his people, not just the punisher.” He crossed his arms. “I am not convinced Joonmyun is that Pharaoh.”

Jongin shifted. “Our King is more than capable of being gentle,” he said softly.

“Being a good lover does not equate to being a good King, Jongin,” Minseok shot back.

“Though it’s good to know,” Satiah mumbled, prompting a snort from Sehun.

Baekhyun, who had been munching dates, gestured at Joonmyun with the one in his hand. “Hatshepsut has been the most successful pharaoh since Ahmose, by any measurement.” He popped the date in his mouth, and kept talking around it. “A king who knows only war will undo all that she has done. We need a king with a softer touch.” He arched an eyebrow. “Or a Queen.”

Silence. Jongdae’s heart stopped. Baekhyun’s meaning was clear, and from the defiant way Satiah stared at Joonmyun across the table, it was one they had talked about before.
Joonmyun set his elbow on the table, and his chin in his hand, and met Baekhyun’s eyes steadily. “Is that a threat, Chancellor?”

Baekhyun spread his palms, conciliatory. “It is a suggestion. You are a brilliant general, Joonmyun. Perhaps that is what you are meant to be.”

“And Ahmose’s great-granddaughter was meant to rule?” Jongdae said, hiding the tremble in his voice, the ugly suspicion that was beginning to rear its head. “Is that what you mean to say?”

“A female Pharaoh and a male royal General has worked beautifully for years,” Baekhyun pointed out. “Why upset that system now? Satiah has as much claim to the throne as Joonmyun. It would not even be much of a change - you would remain serving as you do now, as the greatest General of this age.”

“Satiah is to be the Great Royal Wife.” For the first time, Chanyeol spoke. He’d been so quiet, Jongdae had nearly forgotten he was there. “She will sit at Joonmyun’s hand, and influence every decision he makes. Is that not enough?”

Satiah cocked her head. “That depends,” she said, “on whether he would deign to listen to me.”

“He listens to me,” Jongin pointed out. “He listens to Jongdae, and to Sehun.”

“He doesn’t listen to me,” Minseok muttered.

Jongdae shot him a look. “That’s because you’re bull-headed.”

“Yes, well, it runs in the family.”

Joonmyun held up both hands, halting conversation. “This argument is without purpose,” he said sternly. “Baekhyun is right to say that Hatshepsut’s health is failing. Soon, I will be Pharaoh, without regard to what anyone at this table thinks.” He looked around the table, meeting each set of eyes in turn. “When that day comes, I will need all of you at my side. I will need to be able to trust you. The day of my coronation is the day I ask everyone here to swear fealty to me as my court, an oath before the people and before the Gods. Will you be able to swear such an oath?”

It sounded so good, so rousing, and Jongdae’s heart ached like it had been burned out of his body, because it would never come to pass. Joonmyun would not become Pharaoh - and only he and Chanyeol knew it.

Joonmyun was waiting for an answer, so Jongdae swallowed his emotions and said, “Yes, of course.”

“We belong to you, my King,” Sehun said, and Jongin nodded, tucking himself close to Joonmyun’s side.

Satiah leaned back. “You have my regard, as long as I have yours,” she said, and Joonmyun nodded, accepting that. He glanced at Baekhyun and Minseok, who were silent.

Minseok grunted. “I’m not going to stop telling you when you’re being an idiot,” he muttered.

“I wouldn’t ask you to,” Joonmyun said. “A King whose decisions are never questioned too quickly becomes a tyrant.”

“So long as we’re in agreement on that.”
“Baekhyun?” Jongin asked, after a moment of silence.

A dramatic huff, overly put-upon. Baekhyun, clearly, had had too much to drink. “I serve the throne, no matter whose ass is sitting in it,” he grumbled.

Though it felt unnecessarily portentous to Jongdae, Joonmyun accepted it, and raised his wine cup to the table. “We drink to the future we will lead,” he said. “Together.”

They drank.

As the cups dropped again to the table, Chanyeol shifted uneasily at Jongdae’s side. “Joonmyun,” he murmured, “what about me?” All eyes turned to him, and Chanyeol shifted again, uncomfortable. “Do I have a place in this future? Can I serve?”

Joonmyun turned to face him. “You are a guest,” he said. “Do you wish to serve? To be a part of my court?”

A nod. “I do. I do not know what, ah, purpose the gods have for sending me with Jongdae, but it is clear to me that regardless of that purpose, Egypt is my home now.” His ears turning red, Chanyeol bowed his head. “You are Jongdae’s King, and so, you are also mine. Tell me how I may serve.”

Joonmyun studied him for a second, and then nodded. “I see. I appreciate your offer, Lord Chanyeol. I will ruminate on a possible position for you in my court.”

“Thank you,” Chanyeol said, a little shakily. He pulled away from Jongdae and abruptly stood. “Please excuse me, friends, I need to take some air.”

He left, striding out of the forecourt and out to the terrace.

Joonmyun raised an eyebrow. “Did I offend?”

“No,” Jongdae said quickly. “It is just that… Speaking of his future here makes him think of the past he lost.” He took his brother’s hand. “Thank you. The question of his place in this life weighs upon him. I know you will make a good decision.”

“I am sure if I do not, you will make certain I am aware of it.” Baekhyun chortled, and Joonmyun squeezed Jongdae’s fingers. “Go to him and reassure him. It seems he needs to hear it.”

Jongdae went.

Chanyeol was sitting out on the very edge of the second terrace, his legs dangling over the top of the colonnade. He looked up as Jongdae sat beside him.

For a moment, they sat in silence, staring out at the night, at the gardens stretched before them and the river in the distance reflecting the river of stars above.

“Three thousand, three hundred and eighty-seven years from now, Kris will be standing on this very spot,” Chanyeol murmured. “How can he feel so close, when we are as far apart as two friends have ever been?”

Jongdae dropped his head onto Chanyeol’s shoulder. “What would he have thought of you now, Copper Lord?”

Chanyeol smiled. “He would have teased me mercilessly, but secretly been proud.”

“And rightly so,” Jongdae said. “No matter what position Joonmyun assigns you, I know you will do
well.”

“If he does at all,” Chanyeol pointed out. “Will Minseok also allow me to remain in the court, when…”

Right. Of course, there was a chance that Joonmyun would not live long enough to come to a decision. If he didn’t, it would fall to Minseok to decide.

Jongdae didn’t want to think about that, so he just took Chanyeol’s hands in his own, and sat with him in silence.

Chanyeol’s days started to fly. At Joonmyun’s order, he spent significant time with each major member of the court, travelled through the city and to other major centers both up and down-river, and learned everything he could stuff into his head in hopes that the position he was best suited to would become apparent.

Some were more open to it than others. Sehun and Jongin were his greatest assets, and Senenmut, when Chanyeol could catch some time with him, was invaluable. He also shadowed a number of other officials and courtiers, including Baekhyun, Minseok, Luhan, and Satiah, learning about their positions in the government and their roles in politics. They were pretty universally accepting of him, mostly because Joonmyun made it clear they had to be, though Minseok was clearly uncomfortable with Chanyeol’s presence and Baekhyun, while often hilarious, could be utterly caustic as well.

Outside of the palace proper, the populace was less welcoming. Stares, whispers, sometimes jeers followed him as he passed, when the people weren’t cowering in fear. Getting the citizens of Egypt used to his extremely foreign presence was going to take quite a lot of time, but Chanyeol tried not to hold that against them. He was certain they’d never seen anyone like him in their lives. The fact that he’d started using henna to keep his hair red probably didn’t help, but so much else had changed in his life, Chanyeol couldn’t bring himself to let go of this one. He’d even taken to using a combination of beeswax and oils to style his hair the way he would have in New York, regardless of how out-of-place it looked. It helped him to recognize himself when he looked in the mirror.

There were only two places outside of the palace that Chanyeol was beginning to feel at home - the priesthood of Ra, where Tao had been tutoring him in religion and the priests were always willing to talk ethics and philosophy with him for hours, and the slave quarter where he attended services with Yixing every decan. The elders there had been teaching him their own religion, and Chanyeol found himself slowly adopting their customs, and in it, speaking to God more often and more genuinely than he had in a long time.

Through it all, Jongdae remained at his side. As the days passed, Chanyeol could see him getting more and more anxious, knowing that each day was bringing him closer to his last with his brother. They were starting to plan for the day when it happened, how Jongdae would announce his
abdication from the throne, acting instead as Minseok’s right hand. Minseok wouldn’t thank him for it, but the other choice would alter history, and they couldn’t risk that.

Though they had their suspicions as to who might be behind the assassination plot, no further evidence presented itself. Chanyeol knew Jongdae was still looking, carefully snooping around the courtiers and visitors in the palace, but there wasn’t much to point to a would-be assassin. Their suspicions, their conjecture, was all they had. Nothing actionable.

It frustrated Jongdae, but Chanyeol was secretly relieved. Considering their three top suspects at the present time were the Greeks, Baekhyun and Satiah, and Minseok himself, punishing any one of them for treason could have a massive impact on the historical record. As much as he hated it, it was probably for the best that they never know who was behind the plot.

All the while, Chanyeol’s relationship with Jongdae deepened. About a month after their arrival, Jongdae seduced Chanyeol with poetic words about blessing the growing season, and they consummated their relationship for the first time since coming back in time. Chanyeol woke up with less panic than usual, and a few days later when Jongdae again tugged him down onto his bed, he found his hesitations much abated. From then on, the voice in his head that sounded like his mother was considerably less loud - though it never truly went away.

Months went by. The growing season was coming to an end, marking two-thirds of the way through the year. Chanyeol was settled enough that Joonmyun wanted him to take an active part in the Harvest Festival that night, standing with Jongdae, Senenmut, and Satiah as helpers while the two Pharaohs blessed the land for a bountiful harvest.

To that end, Jongin and Sehun were giving Chanyeol a crash course in religious ceremony, including how he should stand, what he should say, and what he had to do. His posture was not good enough for Jongin and his diction was not good enough for Sehun and Chanyeol was starting to think they were doing this on purpose.

Finally, they were interrupted. “Sehun, have you seen - ” Jongdae stopped, took in Chanyeol’s position in the middle of miming an offering, and leaned against the wall. “No matter, carry on.”

“Did you need something?” Chanyeol asked hopefully.

Jongdae waited, but Chanyeol was not about to continue making an idiot out of himself with Jongdae there, so eventually Jongdae huffed and said, “I was looking for my longest wig, the one with the red strands. I sent Liyin to fetch it, but she hasn’t returned.”

Sehun eyed him. “It was buried with you.”

“Oh.” Jongdae blinked. “Oh. Gods of sea and sand.” He blew out a breath. “Do either of you have a red wig? I really wanted to wear red hair tonight.” He glanced up at Chanyeol as if to gauge his reaction to this, seeming almost shy, and, oh.

“Baekhyun has one,” Jongin told him. “You may have to bribe him. And you’ll need to have it adorned as befits a Prince.”

“Excellent thought. I can handle Baekhyun, don’t worry about that. You two go send for the adornments.” He waved his hands at Jongin and Sehun. “Go on!”

It was obvious to everyone that he was trying to get Chanyeol alone, so Jongin and Sehun just exchanged looks and went, but not before Sehun murmured, “We aren’t done here,” to Chanyeol.

When they were gone, Chanyeol pulled Jongdae in close. “Red hair, hmm?”
“I didn’t think you would want to stand out so much,” Jongdae told him, smiling cheekily. “Why, don’t you think it will look good on me?”

“You,” Chanyeol murmured, “look good in anything.” He bent and brushed his nose against Jongdae’s. Pleased, Jongdae pressed up and closed the kiss, his lips tugging softly on Chanyeol’s.

Between kisses, Jongdae spoke, his lips moving right against Chanyeol’s mouth. “I didn’t want to say this with them in the room,” he whispered. “But my brother has requested your presence before you get dressed. He’s waiting in his rooms.” Jongdae pulled back slightly and met Chanyeol’s eyes. “You know where to go?”

Chanyeol tore his gaze from Jongdae’s already swelling lips. “Yes, I think so,” he said. “Should I be worried?”

Clever fingers walked up his chest. “I have no idea, to be honest. I’m sure it’s not that he wants to test you or question you or anything like that.” Chanyeol groaned, and Jongdae laughed. “You’ll be fine. You should hurry, though, we still have a lot to prepare before tonight. Oh, and while you’re there, would you make certain he doesn’t object to me wearing red hair?” He flashed a winning smile. “He’s a lot less likely to say no to it with a famous red-head right in front of him.” Chanyeol laughed, and Jongdae tugged him down by the amulet around his neck and kissed him one more time. “Go.”

So Chanyeol left him, and hurried down the halls towards the royal wing.

The palace was jumping, nobles and servants and guests all scuttling through the halls, making preparations. The harvest festival was one of the most important events on the Egyptian calendar, second only to the five-day festival at the very end of the year. It made Chanyeol nervous to see how anxious everyone was, how excited; this was his first time doing anything official in front of the Egyptian public and he was determined not to screw it up.

Joonmyun’s quarters were in the center of the palace, the most guarded and difficult to get to, but Chanyeol had been granted access at the beginning of last month and every person in the palace knew who he was on sight, thanks to his height and his hair. The guards stepped aside for him with no more than a deferential nod, and Chanyeol had the fleeting thought that he wished Kris could see him like this, treating the royal palace as his home and the Pharaoh as his family.

Family they sort of were, but completely comfortable they were not quite, so Chanyeol still stopped, straightened his robes, and took a deep breath before he tapped the chime that hung from the doorway. Joonmyun called a greeting, and Chanyeol pushed the curtains aside and entered.

Joonmyun was sitting alone with a stylus and a clay tablet. He looked up as Chanyeol bowed. “Ah, it is our Copper Lord!” he teased.

Chanyeol smiled, one hand smoothing his slicked-back hair self-consciously. He actually liked the epithet, honestly - more and more people were saying it with fondness these days. “My King, Jongdae said you wished to see me?”

“Yes.” Joonmyun rose to his feet and handed the tablet to Chanyeol. “Read this aloud for me.”

Was this a test? Chanyeol studied it. Joonmyun’s hieroglyphs were not the neatest, but Chanyeol was getting better at reading the scribbles of those who were not professional scribes. He started to read aloud. “Blessed is this day upon which we begin our harvest from the Earth, when the gifts of the revered Hapi beget the fruits of the harvest.” He kept reading, naming the gods, trying to keep his voice as smooth as possible and his cadence clean the way Sehun kept beating into his head.
When he reached the end, he lowered the tablet and met Joonmyun’s gaze. “Is this your speech for the festival tonight?”

Joonmyun nodded. “It is. What do you think?”

The Pharaoh of Egypt was asking him his opinion? On speechwriting? “Ah, it is very strong, I think,” he stammered, his mind spinning as he considered the question. “The imagery used in the third stanza, in particular, is powerful. However, would it not make more sense to name Osiris first, as the god who brought farming to the people, rather than Hapi?”

Cocking his head curiously, Joonmyun said, “But without Hapi bringing the floods, there would be no soil to farm.”

“True, but the floods are not what we celebrate tonight, is that not correct? We celebrate the labor of the people, the hard work that they have put in for the last four months of the growing season. Should the focus not be on that art which they have dedicated so much time, rather than attributing the success of the season to something that is not in the people’s control?”

Joonmyun stared. Chanyeol’s cheeks heated. But then, Joonmyun took the tablet from him, already smudging out words from the soft clay. “You are as wise as I have been told,” he said crisply. “And your grasp of the language has improved immeasurably, in an extremely short time. By my own observation, and those that others have related to me, you would certainly be an asset to the Court. I have been considering your request for a formal position and title for some time now. It has been a difficult decision, as not every position would be suited to an outsider.”

He flashed a smile. “Our Messenger, will you consent to be tutor and guardian of my firstborn?”

Chanyeol’s jaw dropped open. “I - My King, that is a - ” He swallowed. “That is an enormous honor.” A tutor was the strongest, most influential figure in a young royal’s life. It was a position reserved for the wisest and most learned, but traditionally it need not be held by a relative of the royal family or even, necessarily, a noble. Senenmut, who was born a commoner, had been tutor to both Jongdae and Joonmyun, and also to the Princess who had died young, Nefurere. To be placed on the same level as Senenmut… Chanyeol’s mind reeled. “If you wish it, it would be my privilege to tutor your child. But I fear I have too much still to learn about your culture.”

Joonmyun reached up and clasped his shoulder reassuringly. “You have time,” he said. “I will not marry until I am sole Pharaoh, and cannot bear an heir until I have a Great Royal Wife to bear him. Or her, for that matter.” He cocked his head. “Jongdae tells me you had a nephew once, yes? And a niece?”

Oh. Chanyeol’s heart suddenly ached. “Yes, my sister’s children. They are - were - very dear to me.”

Strong fingers squeezed, and then let him go. “Then I ask only that you treat my children as you would your sister’s.”

“Of course,” Chanyeol agreed immediately. “Of course, my King.” He bowed his head, and wiped at his eyes somewhat unsubtly.

Joonmyun chuckled. “That is all I wished to ask. Go, go, you are dismissed, I am certain you still have much to prepare. I will see you tonight.”

Bowing and murmuring repeated thanks, Chanyeol backed from the room, and once the curtains had fallen closed he started down the hall with his mind spinning like a tire on ice.

So caught up was he in his thoughts that he didn’t see Liyin coming around the corner until he’d
literally run her over. She rebounded off his much larger form and hit the ground, the stack in her hands going everywhere.

“Ah, my apologies!” Chanyeol said quickly, and knelt to help her. She seemed unhurt, so he helped her to gather up her stack - garments, jewelry, her spindle.

Liyin scrambled to her feet and took the stack from him with trembling hands and a bowed head. “My deepest apologies, my Lord,” she murmured, very soft.

“It’s alright, it was my fault,” Chanyeol started to say, but Liyin was already moving, brushing past him and towards Joonmyun’s quarters. “Huh. Everyone’s in a rush today,” he said to nothing.

Chanyeol brushed himself off - the collision had been much worse for Liyin than for him - and started again back towards his quarters. He got as far as the guarded doorway before he slowed.

Something was odd.

He stopped, just inside the arched entrance of the royal’s wing. Those had been Jongdae’s clothes, Jongdae’s jewelry. Why was Liyin taking them to Joonmyun? Was Jongdae trying to solicit his brother’s opinion on what he should wear tonight? But Jongdae must have known what he was going to wear, because he would have coordinated it with the red... wig...

Shit, Chanyeol forgot to ask about the wig!

Muttering English curses under his breath - the only English he used with any regularity, these days - Chanyeol turned on his heel and headed back to Joonmyun’s rooms. It was a relatively short walk. “My King,” Chanyeol called as he pushed unthinkingly through the curtains. “Apologies, but I forgot that I was asked to - ”

He stopped mid-sentence. Yelled. Leaped forward, hand outstretched, to stop what he could see about to happen, what he was too far away to stop.

But his yell, and his gesture, alerted Joonmyun to the danger, and the Pharaoh spun in place with a warrior’s reflexes and caught Liyin’s hand before she could stab him.

It obviously took him a moment to recognize who was holding the blade to his neck, and when he did, his eyes widened, and he hesitated. Liyin twisted her hand free, ripped herself from his grip and bolted. Chanyeol reached out to catch her, to stop her, but her blade flashed, pain sliced up his forearm and he lost his grip on her.

She dashed down the hall. As Joonmyun bellowed for the guards, Chanyeol bolted after her. She didn’t have a chance, honestly - though she knew the halls well, and ducked down side passages seemingly at random, Chanyeol’s stride was twice the length of hers and he wasn’t hampered by a knee-length, close fitting sheath dress. In moments, he was tackling her to the ground like this was a pick-up game of football back in university. She struggled, but he pinned her easily, and wrestled her weapon away from her hand.

Hands pulled him back, trying to pull him off her, and Chanyeol fought until he heard Jongdae’s voice. “What is this??”

Liyin froze, shaking. Chanyeol sat back, keeping hold of her, and looked up to find Jongdae looking confused and concerned and Joonmyun striding up the hall looking thunderous. When Jongdae realized who, exactly, Chanyeol had tackled, shock washed over his features. “Chanyeol, what is this? What are you doing?”
“She attacked Joonmyun,” Chanyeol said quickly. “It was just luck that I forgot to ask him about the wig and went back, I got there just in time to see…”

His eyes widened.

Just in time to see Liyin about to stab Joonmyun. In the back of the neck, with something white.

Chanyeol opened his bloodied hand and actually took a good look at the weapon. It wasn’t a knife as he’d thought, it was a spindle, a simple drop spindle just like the ones all the other servants carried. Except the shaft had been sharpened into a wicked point like an assassin’s stiletto, and it wasn’t made of wood, like the rest. It was ivory.

The implications hit Chanyeol like a tsunami. His mind blanked out, and he froze, right there on his knees over the would-be killer that he had just stopped.

He’d just changed history.

Chapter End Notes

you’ve got questions? I’ve got answers.
Chapter 11

Chanyeol couldn’t hear anything over the roaring in his ears.

He was vaguely aware of movement, of shouting, confusion and action. Vaguely aware of someone helping him to his feet, someone taking the spindle from his hands, someone speaking to him.

He’d done it. The thing he absolutely could not do, the thing with unimaginable consequences. He’d saved Joonmyun’s life. *Accidentally.*

And now, an entire line of Egyptian Pharaohs would never hold the throne.

“Chanyeol. Chanyeol.”

Jongdae’s voice, saying his name, pulled Chanyeol back into his own mind. He blinked down owlishly, wide dark eyes and concerned features coming into focus.

Chanyeol frowned. “Your hands are bloody.”

His brow compressing, Jongdae said, “I don’t speak your language. Please speak Egyptian?”


Jongdae’s grip on his hands tightened. “I am not hurt, Chanyeol,” he said softly. “You are.”

Was he? Chanyeol looked down, and saw that his right forearm was bleeding from a long cut. Jongdae had one palm pressed to it, trying to staunch the blood. “Fetch a healer,” Jongdae snapped at a nearby servant. The servant scurried away, and Jongdae looked over at Joonmyun. “We’ll be in your suite.”

Chanyeol let Jongdae lead him back through the halls. It seemed to take forever - had they really run so far? - but then they were pushing through the heavy gemstone-beaded curtains and Jongdae was urging Chanyeol to sit on the Pharaoh’s bed. His hand was still pressing down on Chanyeol’s arm, blood seeping from between his fingers, and Chanyeol stared down at it blankly.

“Until this moment,” Jongdae murmured, “I was not convinced you *could* bleed.” He exhaled, long and shaky. “Chanyeol. You. You saved him.”

Shit. “I did not intend to,” Chanyeol said, distressed. “I did not stop to think about it, I did not realize. It was just instinct.” And now the history of the world was all balled up. “How could I be this stupid?”

Jongdae stilled, staring up at him. “Would you have let him die?” he asked sharply. “If you realized in time, would you have stood there and let her kill him in front of you?”

Chanyeol muttered an oath to Yahweh under his breath. “I don’t know, Jongdae,” he said pleadingly. “I don’t know what I would have done.”

Before Jongdae could respond, the beaded curtains clattered, and in came Joonmyun, with two guards dragging Liyin between them. Behind them were Sehun and Jongin, both with arms full of accoutrements.
Sehun came straight for Chanyeol. “I’ll take care of this,” he murmured. “Go help your brother.”

Cool hands pried Jongdae’s away from Chanyeol’s arm, and Jongdae, with his eyes fixed on his maid, moved away. Sehun pulled out a rag and a pottery jug of water - very warm, probably freshly boiled - and began cleaning Chanyeol’s wound.

Joonmyun pulled two long, beautifully decorated knives from a wooden rack on the wall and handed one to Jongdae. “You are dismissed,” he told the guards. “Wait outside for my call.”

As the guards left, Chanyeol half-expected Liyin to run for it, but she didn’t. She simply remained on her knees in the center of the floor, silent tears running down her face and trembling fingers twisting together in her lap.

Jongdae started in first. “How dare you?!”

Liyin flinched.

“If everything this family has done for you. After everything I have done for you. Clothed you, fed you, showered you in gifts and riches far beyond your station.” The knife remained down at his side, but Chanyeol hardly thought he needed it - his tone was cutting enough. “You were trusted by a god and you betrayed that trust.” He spat on the floor, right in front of her. “Vile.”

Liyin raised her eyes then, looking up at Jongdae. “I’m sorry,” she said desperately. “I’m sorry, I had no choice. No choice.”


As Sehun began applying poultice to Chanyeol’s cut, Joonmyun stepped forward and put his hand on Jongdae’s shoulder. “Liyin,” he said softly, “who made you do this?”

She let out a sobbing breath. “I cannot tell you,” she said miserably. Jongdae snarled, and Liyin hurriedly held up her hands. “I cannot! I never learned his name, I never found out who sent him!”

When no further threat was made, Liyin took another breath, deeper. “A man. I know not who he is, I did not recognize him. He would find me wherever I was, either here in the palace or outside it, near my home. He… he said he was working for someone who could destroy me with a word.”

Joonmyun dropped to one knee, gently placed the blade under Liyin’s chin, and tilted her face up to look at his own. “I can destroy you with a word, Liyin.”

She squeezed her eyes shut. “I know,” she whispered. “But he - he said he would - ” Her words dissolved into tears, her face scrunched up with pain so deep she couldn’t seem to finish her sentence. Chanyeol and Sehun exchanged a look, and Jongdae and Joonmyun did the same. In the corner, Jongin’s reed scratched quietly at a pottery shard, recording the proceedings. All of them remained silent until Liyin composed herself.

“He said he would kill my son,” she whispered. “Burn him, so that he would never see the Afterlife.”

Jongdae took a step back. “Your son?” he asked, sounding confused.

“A boy of eight years,” Sehun supplied, as he began wrapping Chanyeol’s arm in bandages. “He is a message-runner for the kitchen staff.”

Glancing back at him, Jongdae frowned. “I didn’t know.”
“Of course not. It is not your job to know, it is mine.”

“You would trade the life of your King for the life of your son,” Joonmyun said softly.

Liyin met his eyes. “Any mother would.” She glanced around the room frantically. “As soon as it is known that I failed, he will be in danger. Please, you have to save him!” Jongdae said nothing, and Joonmyun, though he dropped the knife from her neck, didn’t acknowledge her either. “Please!” she cried. “My son!”

“I cannot look at you,” Jongdae snapped. “You make me sick. I -” He stopped mid-thought, his jaw clenched and fist tightening around the knife.

“My Lord,” Liyin pleaded, crying openly now. “My Prince. For nothing less than this would I have ever betrayed you, but he is my child.”

“Joonmyun is your God!” The blade of Jongdae’s knife snapped up, the point brushing Liyin’s cheek. Terrified, Liyin held herself very still.

“Jongdae.” Joonmyun soothed his brother with a hand across the back of his neck. “She is no danger to anyone right now. She will be brought to justice. There’s no need for this.”

Jongdae glanced at him. “You would have died, Joonmyun,” he said, with the complete certainty of someone who had seen it come to pass. “She killed you. My servant, my own maid, she was the one who killed you.” Joonmyun carefully took the knife from Jongdae’s hand. “She killed you.”

“I am not dead,” Joonmyun reasoned. “Chanyeol saved me, Jongdae. I am fine.” He tugged Jongdae’s head around, making his brother look at him, and frowned. “This isn’t like you.”

Jongdae shut his mouth, dropped his eyes, and didn’t respond.

Sighing, Joonmyun glanced back at Sehun, and jerked his head at the door. Sehun immediately moved from Chanyeol’s side to Jongdae’s, wrapped an arm around his shoulders, and led him from the room.

“You should go too, Chanyeol,” Joonmyun said. “I will be questioning her for a while.” He flashed Chanyeol a tight smile. “I will thank you properly later.”

Right. For saving his life. Swallowing, Chanyeol dropped to a crouch, and waited until Liyin met his eyes. “Where is your son?”

She inhaled sharply, surprised. “He will be in the lowest kitchens of the palace,” she said quickly. “His name is Kheper. Will you...?”

Chanyeol nodded. By stopping her, he’d not only irrevocably changed history, he was responsible for putting an innocent boy in mortal danger. If Jongdae was too angry and betrayed to do this for the woman who’d served him his entire adult life, Chanyeol would do it in his stead.

Liyin sagged in relief. “Then there is nothing left but for me to face my fate,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

Numb, Chanyeol nodded again, stood, and left the room.

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The crowds at the festival were as joyous as ever, which meant that word of the assassination attempt hadn’t already spread. If Jongdae had his way, it never would, and the populace would never know how horrifyingly close they had come to losing their King.

The feast afterwards was jubilant, but at Jongdae’s side, Chanyeol was silent. He’d perfectly performed his part in the ritual earlier, but to Jongdae he’d seemed as if he was sleepwalking, his body moving and his mouth speaking while his mind was far away. Now, at the feast, he kept rubbing his hand over his bandaged arm, such that Jongdae was afraid he was going to rip the bandages off in his absentminded distress.

Jongdae had never seen him like this before, not even after they were flung back in time, and he didn’t know how to help. So he simply remained at Chanyeol’s side, deflecting well-wishers with polite conversation and pretty excuses about Chanyeol being overwhelmed by the power of the ritual in which he took part.

Then, Yixing came, and whispered in Chanyeol’s ear. His eyes widening, Chanyeol lurched to his feet, and Jongdae only barely managed to catch up with him before he was out of the festival hall entirely.

“What is it?” he asked, as soon as they were out of earshot of the festival. “What has happened?”

Chanyeol didn’t answer him, so after a moment, Yixing did. “Liyin’s son has been found.”

Jongdae blinked. “Her son? You sent for her son?”

“You would not promise to protect him,” Chanyeol said quietly, “so I did.” Stung, Jongdae gaped and didn’t respond. “She said he would be in the kitchens, but the cook had sent him on an errand. I had guards out looking for him.” He glanced out at the night sky between the pillars. “I did not expect it to take so long to find him.”

Yixing led them down a wing Jongdae hadn’t visited since he was a child, and when he realized where they were headed, he said, “Is the boy in Senenmut’s rooms?”

Coming to a stop in front of the curtained door, Yixing bowed his head. “Yes, my Prince,” he said softly.

Exchanging a glance, Chanyeol and Jongdae entered. Immediately, Jongdae knew something was wrong. Senenmut’s work table had been cleared off, and on it lay -

A body. A very small body.

“No,” Chanyeol breathed. “No, no -” He leapt forward, and Jongdae went with him. “We were too late. Too late.”

The boy looked like he was sleeping; not a mark marred his skin. Only his unnatural paleness and stillness belied the truth. “What happened?” Jongdae asked, sliding his hand into Chanyeol’s.

“Guards found him in an alley,” Senenmut said quietly. “He was being held by shrouded figures, but they fled immediately. The boy died as he was being brought back to the palace.”

“What?” Chanyeol asked. “How could -”

But Jongdae knew. “Poison,” he murmured. “The same poison that… killed me?”
Senenmut nodded. “I will need to examine the body to be certain,” he said. “But upon visual
examination, it is similar. It seems likely it was the same poison.” He eyed Jongdae. “Which would
seem to point to the same killer.”

Chanyeol brushed the boy’s lax hand with his fingertips. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “This is my
fault.” he glanced up at Senenmut. “Please let me know what you find,” he requested. Senenmut
nodded, glancing curiously at Jongdae, and Jongdae tugged Chanyeol’s hand, leading him away.

Outside of Senenmut’s quarters, Jongdae caught Yixing’s attention. “Return later,” he commanded.
Yixing bowed and disappeared, and, finally alone, Jongdae led Chanyeol back to his room.

They were silent for the walk, both lost in thought. It wasn’t until they passed through the curtain to
Chanyeol’s room that Chanyeol turned and spoke.

“He wasn’t supposed to die,” he said. “That little boy was not meant to die. He died because of me.”
He took a shuddering breath. “Tomorrow, at sunrise, Liyin will also die because of me.”

“Joonmyun is alive because of you,” Jongdae said sharply. “And I will take my brother’s life over a
the life of a slave child I do not know any day.”

“That isn’t the point, Jongdae!” Chanyeol suddenly cried. “This isn’t about whose life is more
valuable! This is about history changing!” Pulling out of Jongdae’s grip, Chanyeol started to pace the
room, digging his hands into his hair. “What have I done? What have I already set in motion?”

This was unbearable. “You saved my brother’s life,” Jongdae shot back. “I will not allow you to
regret that!”

Chanyeol’s laugh was short and ugly. “Hah. I may have just erased my entire culture from the
history of the world, but sure. You won’t allow me to regret that.” Jongdae’s surprise must have
shown on his face, because Chanyeol turned on him with wild eyes. “You really cannot see how bad
this might be, do you? No, of course not. How could you?” He collapsed back against a wall, both
hands dug into his hair and tugging the strands until they stood out wildly. “Minseok was supposed
to create a trade network that would cover the Mediterranean,” he whispered. “His son was supposed
to have expanded the borders of Egypt to their widest influence of all time. What becomes of history
if that does not happen? What if a different history in Egypt leads to a different history in Greece,
Assyria, Arabia, Turkey? What if the history of Rome is changed? My entire country is built on the
ideals of Greece and Rome.” He shook his head, his eyes glazing. “We aren’t that far away from the
Exodus. What if that changes, too? What if my religion is never founded, or, or it’s changed
irrevocably?” His breath was shuddering. “What have I done?”

This was insane. “Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, taking Chanyeol’s shoulders in both hands and shaking
him. “You saved my brother’s life. That is what you have done!” He shuddered. “Saved him from
Liyin, of all people. My own maidservant.” Then, something occurred to him, something awful.
“Gods of - Was she the one who poisoned me?!”

Chanyeol blinked at him, wide-eyed.

“Sehun said Liyin was the one who found my body. She brought me my food that night, she tested
it.” It made sense, and that made Jongdae angrier than he’d ever been in his life. “That scheming
demon.”

“She was protecting her son, Jongdae.”

“Why do you defend her?!?” Jongdae snapped. “I don’t care why she did it, it was evil.” But
Chanyeol’s point reminded him that though Liyin had carried out the act, she wasn’t the one who planned it. “I need to know who is behind this,” he said. “I need to know who is killing my family.”

His brows compressing, Chanyeol said, “If you find out, they will be put to death. That could change history even more.”

“I don’t care!” Jongdae cried. “How could I care about that?! What’s done is done, Chanyeol. You saved my brother’s life. It’s over. You can’t change it.”

Chanyeol stared at him, silent. Something about the look in his eyes made Jongdae freeze in place, searching his face.

“You cannot change it, Chanyeol,” he said warningly.

“Could I not?” Chanyeol said softly. “Am I not obligated to?”

Jongdae took a step back, with nausea crawling up his throat. “I am not hearing this,” he said.

“Jongdae,” Chanyeol pleaded, “this is so much bigger than you or I or your brother. This is the world. This is time itself.” Tears were gathering in his eyes, even as he laughed humorlessly. “I may have just prevented the birth of millions of people, including Kris, or myself. I may have sparked a war a thousand years down the road that will wipe out nations. I may have just set off a plague. There’s absolutely no way for me to know the damage I have done.”

His words barely registered in Jongdae’s ears. “I don’t care,” he hissed. “I do not care and I never will. If you try to reverse this - if you even think about harming my brother - I will kill you with my own hands.”

Chanyeol’s eyes fluttered shut. “Maybe you should,” he whispered. “Before I cause more harm.”

Jongdae couldn’t listen to this anymore. He turned and left the room, pushing through the curtain in a clatter of beads.

Letting his feet carry him through the empty halls, Jongdae tried unsuccessfully to keep Chanyeol’s words from bouncing around his head. He personally couldn’t see how saving Joonmyun’s life was so world-altering that it would cause entire nations to rise or fall or never exist in the first place, but he didn’t have the benefit of knowing 3400 years of history between where Chanyeol came from and here, and he knew Chanyeol too well to think that he was reacting like this without good reason. If Chanyeol said it was a possibility, then it was a possibility. But that was it - a possibility. Not a certainty. And nothing less than complete certainty that Joonmyun’s life was the price needed for the success of the human species would get Jongdae to allow even the entertainment of the thought of his death.

Chanyeol had saved him. It was done. His brother was safe and nothing else mattered. Nothing.

Jongdae didn’t realize he’d walked down to the holding cells until he looked up.

He considered turning around, but ended up pushing through the door, turning the corner. Looked down into the holding pit where a small, dirty figure was curled up against the wall.

Liyin had freely confessed to plotting to murder the Pharaoh. The punishment for treason was the harshest the law required - burned alive at the stake. A long, painful, torturous death, with nothing left over to bury. Body and soul completely destroyed, no hope of peace in the Afterlife.
As a consideration for her years of service and the circumstances that pressured her into the act, Joonmyun had softened the sentence. At dawn, Liyin would be beheaded, a quick and painless death without witnesses. Her body would be allowed a burial fit for her station, and she would go to the judgement of the Gods.

It was far more lenient than Jongdae would have been, but then, Jongdae knew how close Liyin had come to succeeding.

“...My Prince?”

Liyin’s voice was small. Hopeful. She sounded so terrified. Jongdae opened his mouth to ask her if she had been the one to kill him. She had nothing left to lose; there was no reason for her not to tell him.

Instead, what he said was, “We have found your son.”

Liyin scrambled to her feet. “My Prince! You have? Is he safe?”

“He is,” Jongdae lied. “He will be raised here, in the palace.”


Jongdae nodded. “I will.”

Liyin dropped her head. “Then I go to my death at peace,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

Jongdae didn’t respond. He just walked away.

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8 Pachon, 1460 BC
The Royal Palace
Waset, Egypt

Chanyeol was, by now, used to writing with a reed. Enough so that he could scrawl out text reasonably fast, anyway.

Weirdly, writing with the reed was now easier than writing in English. He actually had to pause several times to remember words, really basic words in some cases. He could see that his syntax had changed, as well; his grammar was a little bit stilted and he didn’t use nearly as much slang as he used to.

But writing was the only way he had to get all the jumbled-up thoughts out of his head. He couldn’t talk to Jongdae, because Jongdae was clearly and purposely avoiding him - great job there, Yeol - and he didn’t have anyone else to turn to.

So he turned to the person he’d always turned to. He wrote out his thoughts in a letter to Kris.
I wish I didn’t know how bad it might be, he wrote. I wish I didn’t know so much about what Minseok would accomplish, what his son would accomplish, what his grandson would accomplish. I wish I couldn’t see the thread from this critical point in time all the way up to where you are, but I can. And I’m so afraid I’ve already unravelled it.

After years together, Chanyeol could practically hear Kris’s voice in his head, saying but wasn’t history changed the moment Jongdae returned from the dead?

I know things have already changed, he shot back. But there’s a difference between one man existing when he shouldn’t, and an entire line of kings changed out for a different line. This one change has affected, at minimum, the next century of history. And the world is so small right now - what happens on the Egyptian throne right now affects the entire basis of Western AND African civilization.

Kris, I’m scared, Chanyeol wrote, taking comfort in the notion that there wasn’t a single living person who could read it. I don’t know what to do, but if this needs to be stopped, I’m the only one who knows to do it. And whatever I do, I have to do it before Hatshepsut dies.

She doesn’t have long. It’s getting hard for her to breathe. Joonmyun has effectively taken over the governance of the country and I’m watching him already moving national policy in a different direction from what it was supposed to be.

The tinkle of his door chime made Chanyeol look up, instinctively moving to cover his papyrus before he remembered that no one could read it even if they saw it. “Jongdae?” he called out, and then immediately winced at how forlornly hopeful he sounded.

It wasn’t Jongdae. It was, surprisingly, Jongin, dressed relatively casually in a carmine-dyed kilt and with a covered basket in his arms. “I hope I have not disturbed you,” he said, his manner gentle as ever.

“No, of course not,” Chanyeol replied, setting his writing surface aside and standing. “How can I help you?”

Jongin flashed him a smile. “We have not had a chance to speak since you saved Joonmyun’s life,” he said, and Chanyeol tried very hard not to wince again. “I have not had a chance to thank you.”

Chanyeol cleared his throat. “Do not thank me,” he said gruffly.

“Ah, but I must. Not only for what you have done for the country, but also, what you have done for me.” He knelt, setting the basket on the floor at Chanyeol’s feet. “There are not words to describe the pain it would cause me to lose Joonmyun, and so, there are not words to express my gratitude. I bring to you instead a gift, which I hope may express what words cannot.”

Chanyeol’s brow furrowed. “Jongin…”

Sitting back on his heels, Jongin held a hand up to stay Chanyeol’s words. “I freely admit that I did not trust you,” he said. “When you first arrived, I was worried that there was more than what you have said, more behind Jongdae’s miraculous return and your arrival than we could predict or control. I feared you would cause harm, by malicious intent or by simple accident.” He gracefully rose to his feet. “I should have had more trust in the Gods than that. Your purpose here is clear to me now, and I welcome you into it.”

What the hell could Chanyeol say to that? “Thank you,” he choked out, and tried to make it sound grateful and not conflicted.
Jongin smiled at him again. “No, thank you. And… Welcome to our family, Chanyeol.”

He left. Chanyeol stared after him, his emotions and his thoughts crashing like a tsunami against a cliffside, unstoppable force versus immovable object.

Then, the basket moved.

Scrubbing his hand across his eyes, Chanyeol knelt and gingerly pulled the lid off of the basket. Inside, a tiny, copper-colored kitten blinked sleepily up at him.

“Oh my God,” Chanyeol cooed, melting into a veritable puddle. “Hello! Oh, look at you!” The kitten mewed at him curiously and Chanyeol gently scooped it up into his arms. A little female, absolutely beautiful, looking him over with feigned disinterest, belied by her purrs.

Maybe it was because Chanyeol had just been writing to him, but the kitten’s expression reminded him a whole lot of Kris.

“I think I’ll call you Kris,” he murmured. “It’s a good enough name for a girl, don’t you think?” Kris squeaked at him, and Chanyeol sat back and let her curl up on his chest, one hand under her little rump to keep her stable. “I wonder if Jongin just guessed that I like cats, or if Jongdae…”

Reminded suddenly of his situation, he let that thought hang without finishing it. Instead, he settled on the floor with his back to his bed, nuzzled his nose into the fur at Kris’s nape, and stared at the now-empty basket for a long time.

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10 Epiphi, 1460 BC
The High Priesthood of Ra
Waset, Egypt

“But I thought that - This doesn’t make any sense,” Chanyeol whined.

Grinning, Tao refilled Chanyeol’s beer. “You say that every time,” he teased. “I would have thought you would be used to it by now.”

“Stories should be told in order,” Chanyeol grumbled. “They should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Just one of each! And they all need to connect!”

“Why?” Leaning back on the cushions, Tao cocked his head. “We speak of the Gods. They are not bound by time, Chanyeol. They are not bound by reality. They are Gods and that is the point.”

It had been four decans now since the assassination attempt on Joonmyun, and Chanyeol’s life was settling again. His appointment as the future tutor of the next King, as well as his sudden status as Joonmyun’s blessed favorite, meant both that his studies had deepened and that he was involved in basically everything that happened in the Palace now.

Jongdae was still acting cold towards him, and Chanyeol missed him terribly, but frankly, it was for the best. He hadn’t acted, hadn’t lifted a finger against the man he now called King, but the nagging
feeling that he should, that he was obligated to, still hadn’t gone away, and until Chanyeol made up his mind it was probably better that he and Jongdae remained distant.

That was what he’d been telling himself, anyway.

“Isis can be the mother of Horus, or his sister, but she cannot be both,” Chanyeol insisted. “She cannot be birthed by Horus’s mother if she is Horus’s mother!”

Tao blinked at him. “Ah! I see now your confusion!” He leaned forward and pushed aside a corner of the furs on which they sat, revealing the dusty stone floor of the temple. “You are viewing Isis like this,” he said, and dragged his finger in a straight line through the dust. “As a human, with one life that marches forward from birth to death. No stopping, no turning. But Isis, and all the Gods, they are not a straight line.” He drew another line coming off of the first, and then another beside it that met up with the first near the end, and then another, and another, some crossing others, some looping back on themselves. “Isis exists in many forms, many lives, all at once. Some of them converge, some diverge, some come back around to the beginning. But all exist.” He drew one more line, which crossed over several others. “No form of Isis erases or replaces any other form. Each new iteration of an infinite being only adds.” He smiled. “Nothing is ever destroyed, and thus every version of every tale of all of the Gods is valid, and worth learning from.”

Chanyeol stared. Tao sat back, picked up his beer, and let him absorb that.

Tao was talking about a theoretical infinite being, a God. But didn’t Chanyeol already know this theory? Hadn’t he experienced it first-hand?

Chanyeol had come back in time. That had been caused by Sehun, originally. But if he understood what Kris had written to him, Chanyeol himself would perpetuate it. Chanyeol came back in time because he himself will carve the tablet, will place it in the mouth of Jongdae’s first mummy, will set up Sehun’s tomb so that the spell could be re-created.

But if that was true… Where had the vision of Sehun and Jongin come from?

When they were travelling back through time, Chanyeol had clearly seen Sehun, old and wizened, setting up his tomb. He’d clearly seen Jongin, also old, scratching out Sehun’s message in a vain attempt to preserve his friend’s immortal soul. But if Kris was right, in the timeline which Chanyeol came from, Sehun and Jongin had not done these things. Just the fact that Chanyeol existed in the past to send Kris a message meant that there would have been no reason for those things to happen.

Maybe Tao was right. Maybe each new iteration only added, and nothing was ever destroyed.

Did that mean he hadn’t irrevocably damaged history by saving Joonmyun’s life?

Or was Tao wrong? Was there only ever one timeline, and each time someone looped back on it, it was changed forever?

Chanyeol knew he’d probably never know the answer to that. He knew that it was possible time and reality functioned completely differently from any theory that anyone had ever had. But it made him think maybe - just maybe - there was a chance that his accidental heroism was not so bad as he assumed.

Until this point, he hadn’t allowed himself to think that. It was… a revelation.

“Chanyeol? I apologize, was that too much?”

Chanyeol looked up and found Tao watching him with curious concern. “No, no. It was helpful,
“Thank you.” He cocked his head. “This is how all Egyptians view their Gods, isn’t it? Infinite, and not bound by time or reality.”

“Only on the surface of this Earth are any beings bound by time or reality,” Tao replied. “The Gods may travel between worlds, and thus they may choose to be bound or unbound. Humans only make that transition once - when they die.” He chuckled and poked Chanyeol’s knee. “Or, at least, most of us do.”

Chanyeol snorted. “Sorry to tilt your world view.”

“You haven’t,” Tao said easily. “If anything, your story only confirms what we already believe. Prince Jongdae’s death was premature, his resurrection was necessary, and you were sent with him to prevent the death of his brother. This is the Gods working in our lives, breaking the rules by which humans are bound to protect and serve us.”

Shifting his weight, Chanyeol studied Tao. “You really believe that, don’t you?”

“Of course I do, and I praise the Gods for it.” Tao lifted his hands briefly in a gesture of supplication. “I greatly look forward to the day when I will make that journey, and join with the Gods in the Afterlife. I have begun already to plan my tomb, to consider what I will bring with me on such a journey.” Tao cocked his head. “Do you have suggestions?”

Chanyeol blinked, and in a flash he realized that he could tell Tao exactly what to leave behind so that Egyptologists in the future would be able to learn things they never had learned before. He could say ‘list the entire priesthood in your Book of the Dead’ or ‘bring a ledger detailing all your possessions’ or ‘make sure literally everything is sealed in stone and wax.’

He could say ‘hide your tomb so that robbers will never find it,’ and that thought was what made words fall from his lips before he could think the better of it.

“Tao, the tombs will be in danger,” he said.

Immediately, he knew he shouldn’t have. He was changing history again! Tao’s eyes went wide, and he sat forward sharply, and Chanyeol knew he wasn’t going to get away with demurring this now that he’d said something.

But... This was a change that wouldn’t be felt for millennia, right? Could it really have so much of an impact?

Feeling reckless, Chanyeol decided it was worth the risk.

“A thousand years from now, robbers will find and break into the tombs of the Kings and Queens of this age,” Chanyeol said, a nervous thrill in his chest. “All of them, from Pharaoh Seqenenre Tao forward, will be desecrated and destroyed.”

Tao made a gesture to the Gods. “That cannot be allowed to happen,” he said urgently.

“I know,” Chanyeol replied. “That’s why I’m telling you this.” He raised an eyebrow.

“A prophecy,” Tao breathed. “I understand, of course. We will take care of it.”

Wait. What? “A prophecy? It’s not a prophecy, it’s just…”

Tao gave him a look. “Just you telling me something that hasn’t happened yet, in hopes that I can change it?”
Oh. “I suppose… I suppose it is a prophecy, when you put it like that,” Chanyeol muttered.

Smiling fondly, Tao patted Chanyeol’s knee. “It will be recorded as a prophecy from the Gods,” he said. “I will not mention your name, I will tell the High Priest it came to me in a dream. We will not be here in a thousand years’ time, but the Priesthood is forever. Our descendents will know what to do.” He nodded his head. “Thank you, Chanyeol. You care for the souls of our Kings as your own.”

That wasn’t why Chanyeol had done it, of course, but he nodded anyway. “It’s getting late,” he murmured. “I should return to the Palace.”

“Oh of course.” Tao reached out his hand, and Chanyeol clasped it. “Until next time, my friend.”

The walk back to the Palace was one Chanyeol knew well by now. His status was such now that he actually could have called for a litter chair and been carried through the streets, but the very idea of that made him balk, and in any case, he enjoyed wandering through the districts. There was always something to see, some conversation to observe, some person doing something both alien and completely human that gave Chanyeol one more little piece of understanding of the world that was now his home.

The sun was beginning to set, orange and pink streaking across the clear skies, and the market was winding down for the day, stragglers rushing to make their trades before the stalls closed down. Chanyeol was nearly run over by a group of children playing a chase game through the streets, and smiled, because that never changed.

“Lydia, well met! From whence do you travel?”

The voice cut through the chatter of the market mostly because the words were not Egyptian, they were Greek. Curious, Chanyeol slowed his pace, glancing around until he found the speakers.

A man and a woman, obviously Greek by their hair and skin tone, obviously servants by their dress. Part of the Greek diplomatic contingent at the Palace, most likely - relations between the two countries were still so new that there were almost no true immigrants yet.

“I come from the house of the King’s brother,” the woman said, quickly adjusting the folds of her peplos dress and flashing him a flirtatious smile. “Our lord sent to him a gift of Laurium silver. Earrings, and a collar, and an amphora filled with wine.”

The man blinked, and said what Chanyeol was thinking. “That is a very rich gift.”

“It isn’t the first. I have been sent to that house so often, the servants there know me. And they speak freely in my presence, thinking my grasp of Egyptian is not great.” She leaned against the wall, and Chanyeol stopped at the next stall over, pretending to look over the pottery that was displayed there. “They are bold in their words, I say. They speak out openly against the throne, they gossip without fear.” Chanyeol’s hands froze as the implications sank in, and the woman said, “I am shocked that they are allowed to be so free in their treason. In Greece, such a sentiment would be ruthlessly stamped out.”

The man snorted, and with a hand on her elbow, lead her back out into the flow of the crowd. “Egypt has gone unthreatened for too long. They are all complacent.” His words were already fading into the noise of the crowd, but Chanyeol caught one more sentence. “I will be glad to be rid of this place.”

Staring after them, Chanyeol watched as they disappeared.

Such a short conversation, but such a disturbing one. The implications were making Chanyeol’s head
spin. He knew by now that despite the Greek servants’ opinions on the stringency of the Egyptian rulers, openly anti-Throne sentiment from the servants in a household would never be tolerated.

Not unless the sentiment was shared by the master of the house.

And honestly, where else would the servants get the idea to even have anti-Throne sentiment? The only masters that really mattered to them were their immediate masters; the only people they would have enough care to hate would be the ones directly responsible for their conditions. But if the masters of the house voiced treasonous sentiments in front of their servants, would not the servants come to believe and share that opinion?

And since Jongdae lived in the palace, there was only one “King’s brother” the servants could have been referring to. Minseok.

Leaning against a wall by the corner of the booth, Chanyeol contemplated this. Jongdae had stated several times that he didn’t believe Minseok was behind the assassination attempts, and the historical record they knew from Chanyeol’s time supported that. Every indication pointed to Minseok being a reluctant Pharaoh, ascending the throne only because he had no choice and relinquishing it the moment his son was old enough to take over. It was practically unheard of for a Pharaoh to abdicate by their own choice; the position was meant to be for life.

But historical records could be unreliable, and it was entirely possible Minseok had put on a great show of grieving for the benefit of the people. And with Luhan - because Chanyeol knew neither Hangeng nor Zhoumi would be that generous - apparently courting Minseok’s favor, it was also entirely possible the Greek ambassador was whispering in the future Pharaoh’s ear.

If that was true, then it was also possible that both Joonmyun and Jongdae were still in danger. What was to stop Minseok, if he was behind the assassinations, from trying it again?

Chanyeol could warn Jongdae of this. He could relate what he’d overheard, and spark an investigation.

Or, he could remain quiet, and allow this to play out. There was every chance that a second attempt would be successful, and history would be reset to what Chanyeol knew it was meant to be, without Chanyeol having to take matters into his own hands.

Could he do that? Could he stand by and watch a political coup? Could he lose Jongdae, in exchange for reality as he knew it?

Either way, he had to decide, now. No decision was now the same as making a decision; either he acted, or he didn’t.

He was out of time.

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Sehun and Joonmyun meant well. Jongdae knew this. They cared for him, they cared for the kingdom, they cared for the future. But after nearly a month of fielding constant questions about why he was not speaking with Chanyeol, what had Chanyeol done, what was wrong, did they fight, would Joonmyun have to go introduce Chanyeol to the pointy end of his spear - honestly! - Jongdae was really quite done with the entire thing.
Their constant questions meant that Jongdae had not been able to really enjoy his relief that his brother would live, had not been able to move past what Chanyeol had said. Without telling anyone, he’d quietly ordered the guard on Joonmyun doubled and had at least one servant with eyes on Chanyeol at all times. So far, Chanyeol had made no move towards his vague idea of resetting history by killing Joonmyun, and Jongdae could only hope, the more time passed, that his hesitation meant he was rethinking the issue, coming around.

In truth, Jongdae could not imagine Chanyeol raising a hand against Joonmyun. But it was a risk, no matter how small, he was not willing to take. Not now, not knowing how very, very close it had been. And until he heard - and believed - reassurances from Chanyeol himself that he’d truly abandoned the idea and embraced the changed timeline, Jongdae could not relax.

His pride stopped him from asking Chanyeol outright, but even that was wearing thin, because Jongdae missed Chanyeol, missed him terribly. He had not realized how accustomed he’d become to Chanyeol’s voice, his presence, his laugh and his touch, until he was no longer near.

But then this morning, Sehun had realized that Jongdae was having Chanyeol tailed, and was so alarmed by this that he’d dragged Jongdae into Joonmyun’s rooms, and now they were both demanding answers Jongdae could not give.

Jongdae was never so glad for an interruption as he was when Jongin burst into the room, wild-eyed and out of breath. “Joonmyun, I - ” He suddenly realized Joonmyun was not alone, and quickly looked around the room. When he saw that it was only Jongdae and Sehun, he lowered his voice, and stepped closer, drawing them all in. “What I have just seen, you will not believe.” A hundred possibilities flitted through Jongdae’s mind, each less probable than the last, but Jongin knocked them all away when he said, “Baekhyun and Satiah, I saw them hiding in a servant’s hallway. Embracing. Kissing.”

Joonmyun blinked. Sehun’s hand flew up to cover his gasp. Jongdae stilled, his expression frozen.


“They didn’t see me,” Jongin said. “I do not think they saw me, in any case. Joon, this was not the first time. The way they touched was... I know familiar lovers when I see them.” He shook his head. “This has been going on for some time, I would wager upon it.”

Joonmyun sank gracefully to the floor, crossing his legs and dropping his chin thoughtfully into his hands. The rest of them followed his example, forming a square on the floor the way they used to as children. “I am surprised they would take that risk,” Jongdae said. “The punishment for adultery is very harsh.” A woman who betrayed her husband would be facially disfigured, usually by having her nostrils slit, and a man who dallied with a married woman was severely beaten. Nobility, royalty, it didn’t matter; the law applied to everyone, right up to the Pharaohs themselves.

“It isn’t adultery until we’re married,” Joonmyun pointed out, “and Satiah and I have already agreed not to hold one another to that standard in any case. I have no intention of giving up my lover, and so I will not force her to do the same.” He flashed Jongin a smile, which Jongin quietly returned. “I was not aware that she was speaking of an actual lover and not a hypothetical one, but it hardly matters.”

“This does explain Baekhyun’s recent behavior, though, does it not?” Sehun said thoughtfully. “They have always been close, but it still struck me as strange for Baekhyun to push so hard for Satiah to become Pharaoh. What reason, I thought, would he have, to risk the accusations of treason? What reason, to openly defy the existing Pharaoh? His assertion that you are too militant always rang
Oh. Oh, obviously. “But if Satiah is Pharaoh, the man she marries becomes a King,” Jongdae realized. “Even if she remains unwed, being the lover of the Pharaoh comes with its own perks. Look at Senenmut.”

“And it could put his sons, if they ever had any, next in line for the throne,” Joonmyun said. “I see.”

They all looked at each other. “Could it have been Baekhyun behind the assassination attempts?” Sehun asked, voicing what they all were thinking. “Baekhyun alone, or perhaps both of them?”

“I certainly hope not,” Joonmyun murmured. “It would sadden me greatly to have to put either of them to death.”

“But it is possible,” Jongdae said.

Jongin took Joonmyun’s hand and squeezed it. “I would think, if Baekhyun was plotting against you, that he would have been more circumspect in his dissenting opinions,” he said thoughtfully. “But love can make anyone lose their sense. I can look into this for you, Joon.”

Nodding, Joonmyun cupped Jongin’s cheek with his hand. “Carefully,” he requested. “And let us try not to embarrass them in the process? If they are innocent, I would rather not alienate them further.”

“I… I need to go,” Jongdae said, and stood. “I need to think.” He left the room before anyone else could protest. And yes, he escaped in part so he could avoid answering the questions he’d been asked the moment before Jongin entered, but truthfully, he did have a lot to think about.

After meeting Satiah on the first night, Chanyeol had told Jongdae that Satiah was known to him because in the history he knew, she had been Minseok’s Great Royal Wife and bore him his heir. So Jongdae knew that Joonmyun’s death would not stop Satiah’s marriage - it simply would give her a different groom.

But Baekhyun would have no way of knowing that. If he was thinking straight, he might guess that courtiers would insist that Minseok further legitimize his position on the throne by marrying Ahmose’s great-granddaughter, but if he really was plotting Joonmyun and Jongdae’s deaths, it was obvious he was already not thinking straight.

Baekhyun was hot-headed, easily ruled by his emotions. He’d also served the Throne his entire life, and grown up right beside Joonmyun and Jongdae himself. He wasn’t family, exactly, but he might as well be.

Was he the one who had ordered Jongdae’s death? Threatened Liyin’s son, to force her to turn against her Pharaoh? The idea made Jongdae feel ill. He sincerely hoped it wasn’t true - but he couldn’t afford to ignore the possibility.

“My Lord.”

Blinking out of his reverie, Jongdae looked up as a servant dropped to her knees in front of him. She held a small pottery shard up over her head. Jongdae took it and murmured her dismissal, already reading the writing, wavery hieroglyphs scrawled in messy black ink.

_I need to speak with you. Meet me at moonrise, where we slept our last night before our journey._ - CY
The initials were spelled out in English letters, leaving Jongdae no doubt that the missive was real, but the rest was so cryptic as to be obtuse. Chanyeol was not generally cryptic by nature - had something happened? Had he seen something, learned something?

Did Jongdae still trust him?

The messenger had been sent, but it was hours until moonrise, and Chanyeol, his mind spinning through possibilities and implications and the frozen feeling of not knowing what to do, needed to think. More than that - he needed to pray. Fortunately, it was the last day of the decan, and as had become their custom, Yixing was waiting for him in his rooms with a change of plainer clothes, a shroud to cover his head, and the offering he would bring to worship.

Chanyeol was more silent than usual as he changed and they slipped out through the servant’s entrance, and once they were out in the streets, Yixing cleared his throat. “My lord,” he said carefully, “are you troubled?”

Glancing at him, Chanyeol forced up a flash of a smile. He knew how much it cost Yixing to treat Chanyeol as an equal - it was Chanyeol’s wish, but it went against everything Yixing had been taught his entire life. “I am,” he admitted.

Yixing nodded thoughtfully. “You bring your troubles to our God,” he said. “That is wise. He will lift your burden.”

Chanyeol snorted. “Perhaps. Or perhaps I will leave the service tonight as troubled as when I began.” He glanced around, wary, as they moved from the market district into the slums. “Yixing, have you ever overheard something… bad? Something you thought you should tell someone?”

“My Lord… I did not know Liyin would betray the Pharaoh,” Yixing said softly.

Damn. “That’s not what I mean, Yixing, I know you didn’t know.” Chanyeol took a deep breath and tried to think of another way to explain. “It is not you, it’s me, something I overheard. Something that could be important, but if I am wrong, and I tell the wrong person, I might make things worse.”

“Ahh, I understand.” Rubbing his hand over his wristband - Chanyeol had noticed he often did that when he was thinking - Yixing pursed his lips and considered this. “I suppose you must weigh the consequences, of course. Which consequence is worse? Which would do the most harm?”

“Not always,” Yixing said easily. Confidently. “Liyin knew there were bad consequences to refusing to attack our Pharaoh, but refusal still would have been right. Even if it meant her son was in danger, attempting to take a life is wrong. Always. No matter what the circumstance.” He tapped his wristband, and let his hand drop. “This is what our God teaches. Murder is always evil, even if it is
intended to save another life. Men are not meant to take these decisions into their hands; these decisions must be entrusted to Yahweh.” He flashed Chanyeol a smile. “To take a life is to usurp the power of God. It is evil.”

They fell silent again, as Chanyeol digested that.

_Thou shalt not kill._ It was right there in the Commandments, and even though they hadn’t been written yet, it was in the teachings of the Shasu tribe. And it wasn’t _thou shalt not kill, unless there are extenuating circumstances._ It wasn’t _thou shalt not kill, unless killing is the lesser of two evils._

Moreover, what Yixing was saying wasn’t _if you kill, you will go to Hell._ The Shasu didn’t even have a concept of Hell - it must have been added in later in the development of the religion. What Yixing was saying was _if you kill, you are making a choice that only Yahweh has the right to make._

What Yixing was saying was _if you kill, you pretend to be God._

It was a completely different way of looking at it, and it made Chanyeol wonder suddenly, for the first time, if maybe the incredible coincidence that had landed him back in time wasn’t a coincidence at all. It had been many years since Chanyeol genuinely believed in a divine plan, but...

Was this meant to happen? Was he _meant_ to save Joonmyun?

Caught up in thought, it didn’t register to Chanyeol that there was no light inside the house until he stepped over the threshold. Too late, he realized the house was dark, silent, empty.

Panic laced through him. There should be a dozen men here, or at the very least, the man who owned the house. Did something happen?

One step behind him, Yixing froze. “What...?”

Chanyeol called out the name of the owner of the house, and then the name of the high priest, and then others. When there was no answer, he stepped inside, commanding Yixing to stay put with a gesture.

Not for the first time, Chanyeol missed having a pistol on his hip, or at least a flashlight. It didn’t seem like there was anyone home, though, and the mud-daub house was small enough that it took a bare moment to search. No bodies, no signs of struggle. Was the owner just not home? Had there been a change of plans, did he just miss a message somehow? Chanyeol turned to call Yixing into the house, and heard the footstep one moment too late.

Pain exploded across the back of his head. Chanyeol went down.

Chapter End Notes

you’ve got questions? _i’ve got answers_.


With his heart in his throat, Jongdae walked back to the palace alone.

It was an hour past moonrise and Chanyeol hadn’t appeared. Jongdae was frantically trying to think if he could have misinterpreted Chanyeol’s cryptic message, but honestly, *where we slept our last night before our journey* could only mean Hatshepsut’s temple.

Jongdae liked to think he knew Chanyeol well enough by now to know that he wouldn’t do something like this on purpose, to make a point or to get Jongdae out of the way at a specific time. Sehun would do that, in certain cases. Baekhyun, he would definitely do something like that.

But not Chanyeol.

So why hadn’t he appeared?

Half angry and half fearful, Jongdae picked up his pace, jogging as he approached the city proper. He was dressed commonly to avoid a commotion, and the people in the outer districts paid little attention to a young man racing past.

A hand grabbed his wrist, and Jongdae whipped around, the heart in his throat leaping so high that he choked on it.

Familiar, dark eyes met his.

“I thought that was you,” Sehun said. “Chanyeol said you’d be out this way. Have you gone mad? Why are you travelling alone at night?” Jongdae opened his mouth to protest, to ask where Chanyeol was, to ask why Sehun was looking for him, but Sehun tugged on his wrist. “Come on, you have to get back to the palace. Chanyeol was attacked.”

Jongdae froze. “What?!”

“Come on,” Sehun countered, yanking on his wrist.

“Sehun!” Sehun turned to look at him, and Jongdae made an expressive gesture. “Is Chanyeol alright?!”

“Oh.” Sehun had the good grace to look sheepish, at least. “Yes, he’s fine, my father is tending to him.”

All of Jongdae’s air leaked out of him. “Thank you, Hathor, for watching over your son,” he muttered. “Come on.” He started forward, and Sehun hurried to catch up.

The trip back felt like it took an eternity; the ferry ride across the river never seemed so long. By the time Jongdae was racing up the stairs of the palace, his mind had gone through every possibility of what could have happened, some of them twice.
They burst into Chanyeol’s suite. To Jongdae’s immense relief, Chanyeol was sitting up on his bed, Senenmut standing behind him in the process of applying a poultice to his head.

Jongdae immediately sank to his knees in front of Chanyeol, reaching up to cup Chanyeol’s jaw in his hand, heedless of the fact that they had barely spoken for a month. “Are you alright?” he asked softly.

Chanyeol cupped Jongdae’s hand with his own and leaned into his touch, his eyes fluttering shut and his spine relaxing. “Yes,” he said. “I think they expected me to be alone, but I wasn’t. Yixing yelled for the city guard.” His eyes slit open. “He saved me.”

Heart thumping, Jongdae rubbed his free hand over Chanyeol’s knee reassuringly. “He will be rewarded,” he promised. “Where were you when this happened? Was the culprit caught?”

“They were in the slave quarter,” Senenmut answered, “and no. The attacker escaped. Jongin is overseeing the investigation himself, as we speak.”

Chanyeol glanced up at Senenmut as the older man patted the finished wrappings and moved away. “Yixing is quietly asking questions of the slaves, as well,” he said, as if to point out that it wasn’t just the nobility doing the work. Jongdae bit back his smile - Chanyeol’s attitude towards the class divide would probably never change.

“We know the owner of the home we were visiting; he will find out why the man was not there.”

“I am certain that between all our resources, we will discover the culprit and bring them to justice,” Senenmut said. “Tonight, though, you will rest. I do not believe there is internal damage but just to be safe, you may not be alone for at least a day. Understand?”

“I’ll stay with him,” Jongdae immediately volunteered.

Senenmut nodded. “Good. I will return to check on you in the morning. Rest now.” He patted Chanyeol’s shoulder and left the room, slinging an arm around Sehun’s back to guide him out as well.

Chanyeol’s hand slid down to wrap around Jongdae’s wrist, absently rubbing his fingertips along Jongdae’s bangles. “So a head injury will bring you back to me,” he murmured. “I’ll remember that.”

Jongdae punched his shoulder. “Be quiet, you ungrateful louse. I waited! You never appeared.” He guided Chanyeol’s hand down between them and cupped it between his own. “When Sehun told me you had been attacked - Gods, what a fright. I'm so grateful you are alright.”

His eyes dropping, Chanyeol took a deep breath. “Jongdae,” he said, “I owe you an apology.” Jongdae stilled, waiting. “It has taken me much longer than it should have to accept all that has happened. Eight months, I have lived here, and more than a month since Joonmyun was saved, and only tonight did it really hit me.”

“Figuratively, and literally.”

Chuckling, Jongdae leaned forward and butted his head into Chanyeol’s shoulder playfully. With a long exhale, Chanyeol gathered him close and held him.

“This is my home now,” Chanyeol mumbled. “Your family is my family. Your country is my country. Your future is my future, and maybe is no longer the future I know, but I have to trust that it could be a good future.”

Jongdae didn’t have words to express his relief, so he only burrowed deeper into Chanyeol’s embrace. “What made you change your mind?” he asked.
“Something Tao said,” Chanyeol told him, “and then something Yixing said. Two completely different religions, but faith is faith, and I had lost mine. Faith is trusting that things happen for a reason, and I ceased to trust long ago.” He pressed his forehead to Jongdae’s. “It’s terrifying, trusting in something you can’t see. But it’s freeing, too.” He exhaled. “It isn’t my responsibility to ensure history does not change.”

Leaning up, Jongdae pressed a kiss to his right cheek, then his left, then his forehead, then his nose. “I knew you wouldn’t do it,” he whispered. “I was just waiting for you to realize it, too.”

“I love you,” Chanyeol said abruptly. “You know that, right? I’m sorry. I love you.”

“Of course I know that,” Jongdae assured him. “And I love you. I always have.” He stood, and gave Chanyeol a little push, encouraging him to scoot back and lay down as he crawled up on top of him. “You are injured. Let me take care of you tonight.”

Chanyeol’s furrowed brow was sweet, and Jongdae didn’t resist the urge to kiss it. “You don’t have to - I didn’t mean - ”

“Shhh.” Rolling to Chanyeol’s side, Jongdae walked his fingers down Chanyeol’s thigh and pulled up the hem of his kilt. “Rest, my love. We will face the world in the morning.”

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11 Epiphi, 1460 BC
The Royal Palace
Waset, Egypt

When the sound of footsteps roused him from slumber, Chanyeol groaned and rolled over. “Kris?” he asked groggily.

“Mrow?” was his answer.

Chanyeol slid his eyes open, and found himself staring at a sleepy and very content-looking Jongdae, petting an equally sleepy and content-looking Kris-the-kitten, who was curled up on his chest. Smiling at him, Jongdae motioned with his chin down the bed. “It’s only Yixing,” he murmured.

Right. Yixing. Because he was in Egypt, not New York. Chanyeol sat up.

Yixing offered him a shawl. “Visitors,” he whispered, and in the next moment, the beaded curtain rustled and voices approached. Chanyeol took the shawl and wrapped it quickly twice around his waist, pinning it at his hip with the bronze pin Yixing handed him.

“He knows you well,” Jongdae observed. Chanyeol didn’t have time to answer before Joonmyun, Jongin and Sehun came around the corner, along with a pair of servants bearing a large basket of food and drink.

“Oh! We were not swift enough,” Sehun declared, as Joonmyun dismissed the servants and Jongin hid a giggle behind his hand. “Someday, we will catch him naked.”
Jongdae started laughing, and Chanyeol frowned. “Not bloody likely,” he muttered in English, and shot a thankful glance at Yixing. Then, back in Egyptian, “To what do we owe the pleasure of this visit?”

“To your head wound,” Sehun said, plumping down on the bed next to Chanyeol. “Which I promised my father I would check, so hold still.”

As Sehun began unwrapping the bandage around Chanyeol’s head, Jongin and Joonmyun also climbed onto the bed, and Yixing began laying out the food, a hearty breakfast, rich, but typical of what Chanyeol had come to expect. “Jongin and Yixing are to share the results of their investigation last night,” Joonmyun said, as he settled in with his back to the wall. Jongdae scooted around until his head was resting on Joonmyun’s thigh, keeping ahold of Kris so she didn’t bolt and cooing at her until she calmed again.

“Yixing, speak,” Jongin said, gesturing.

Halfway through setting out the bread, Yixing hesitated. He glanced around swiftly, clearly gauging the room. Chanyeol gave him an encouraging nod. “I found the owner of the home at his brother’s fruit stall in the market,” Yixing said softly. “I asked only why the prayer meeting had been moved, and why he had not sent word to me. He tried to evade, but eventually he told me he was paid to do it.” Keeping his eyes down, Yixing busied himself pouring - water for Chanyeol, beer for the rest, because Chanyeol was still not entirely used to the whole beer-at-all-hours thing. “He only had to tell the priest his home was not available, and then offer to handle the messages to the congregation saying so.”

Sehun, who was now mostly done re-dressing and re-wrapping Chanyeol’s head, said, “Did the man not question why someone would pay him to lead a noble into an empty home?”

“They don’t know who I am,” Chanyeol said. “I keep my hair covered when I go, and have given them an alias. Yixing cautioned me that it would not be prudent for my religious leanings to become common knowledge, especially if I am to become the tutor of the next King.” He bowed his head slightly to Joonmyun.

“Wise,” Joonmyun agreed. “And we will have words about that, by the way. I will not have you teaching my children the slaves’ religion.” Chanyeol nodded. He’d already guessed that; it was why he’d spent so much time studying with Tao. “But that conversation is for another time. If this man does not know who Chanyeol is, why did he allow this?”

“He said he assumed the man who paid him was a debt collector,” Yixing said. “He agreed to do it to avoid bringing trouble upon himself. I do not think he had any notion of what would happen.”

Sehun made an exasperated noise. “Of course not,” he mumbled. His work on Chanyeol’s head done, Sehun got comfortable on the bed and began to eat. “Jongin, what did the soldiers find?”

“The would-be assassin got away,” Jongin said. “He was chased through the market, but the guard lost track of him at the edge of the district. The interior of the house was mostly unremarkable, but for this.” He held up a pottery shard scrawled with hieroglyphs. “It’s a bill of sale. The owner of the house was paid quite a significant amount of grain.”

Jongdae took the shard from him, and his eyebrows raised. “This would feed a single man for a month.” He looked up. “Who is the payor? This seal… I have seen it somewhere, but I cannot remember where.”

Chanyeol leaned over to look at it. The seal showed a graceful gazelle, lying on the ground with its
legs tucked under itself. Chanyeol had never seen that particular design before.

“I did not recognize it, and so I went to the grain bank to ask,” Jongin told them. “The family represented by that seal does not exist. It appears to be a nameless account.”

Joonmyun hummed into his beer. “It costs quite a bit in bribes to set up one of those,” he said.

“You would know,” Jongdae replied with a grin. “You are right, though. Likely a noble, then.”

“Baekhyun?” Sehun guessed. “I would absolutely believe he has a nameless account.”

“I know for a fact he does,” Jongin said. “And though he is a top suspect, this was not his account. He has paid me from his nameless account before.”

Giving him a look, Joonmyun said, “For what reason would Baekhyun pay you secretly?”

“He needed the services of a scribe he could trust, in a matter that he did not want to bring to his father’s attention,” Jongin explained, waving a hand dismissively. “That is not his seal. Unless he created a second nameless account, which is possible, but not terribly likely.”

“But if he knows you know his seal…” Sehun argued.

Chanyeol frowned. “Is Baekhyun really so likely a suspect?”

Sehun blinked at him. Jongdae gestured. “That’s right, you don’t know!” He told Chanyeol what they had learned the day before.

Sitting back, Chanyeol munched thoughtfully on a date cake. “Baekhyun and Satiah,” he murmured. “I suppose I should have guessed? He does act…” Chanyeol didn’t have the words to say like her knight in shining armor in Egyptian, so he settled on, “Protective.”

“He has more reason than anyone to plot this,” Sehun said.

“Oh, I’m not so sure about that,” Chanyeol replied. “I learned something yesterday as well.” He told them all about the conversation he’d overheard from the Greek servants.

“Well.” Joonmyun folded his hands in front of his mouth, tapping his fingers against his lips. “My half-brother is accepting gifts from Greeks.”

Chanyeol almost made a crack about you know what they say about Greeks bearing gifts, and then realized that the Trojan War hadn’t happened yet and Virgil wouldn’t write the Aeneid for a millenia and a half. Frustrated, he blew out a breath. How was he supposed to be witty if he had no culture to reference?

Jongdae slid a hand over his knee reassuringly. “Perhaps they are innocent gifts,” he said to the group, “or perhaps they are bribes. It is worth looking into.”

“What worries me about that,” Sehun said, “is that there could be collusion, or not. The Greeks could well be plotting to put Minseok on the throne because he is more easily influenced than Joonmyun, but whether or not Minseok himself is involved…” He trailed off.

“Well, any way you look at it, we need to know who owns that nameless account,” Jongdae said.

Jongin held out his cup for Yixing to refill. “I have agents already working on it,” he said. “We should have that answer before the sun reaches zenith.”
They continued to speculate, to toss around theories, until a servant came to remind Joonmyun that he had to meet with representatives from Punt. The Pharaoh left to attend to business, with Jongin following, and deprived of his pillow, Jongdae rolled onto Chanyeol’s lap instead.

Sehun stretched out next to them. “So,” he said. “I see whatever your quarrel was, it has been resolved.”

Chanyeol carded his fingers through Jongdae’s short hair. It was getting shaggy again; he needed a shave. “My fault,” Chanyeol murmured. “I was being stubborn.”

“He came around,” Jongdae assured Sehun. “I knew he would.”

Pursing his lips, Sehun rolled over onto his stomach, rested his hand on his chin, and regarded them both with a raised eyebrow. “Are you ever going to tell me the truth?” he asked. Jongdae and Chanyeol exchanged a look, and Sehun rolled his eyes. “Not everyone was taken in by your fantastic story, you know. I assumed you would tell me the truth someday, but it’s closing in on a year and I am losing patience.” He reached out as Kris padded across the bed and tugged her under his chin, snuggling her until she curled up and tucked her face into his chest. “Well?”

Jongdae tilted his head back. “I would like to tell him,” he said in Greek.

“Is that wise?” Chanyeol asked, in the same language.

“We will need his help to set up the tombs, will we not?” Jongdae retorted. “After all, the lapis tablet must be in his handwriting.”

Chanyeol stared. Jongdae waited.

“Very well,” Chanyeol said, and turned to Yixing. “Please return in two hours.”

Bowing, Yixing left. Jongdae grinned and launched into the real story.

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Two hours, as it turned out, was not nearly long enough to answer all of Sehun’s questions, but that was alright. Sehun would have years to interrogate Chanyeol, and Chanyeol would have years of dodging his questions and agonizing over how much he could say. It made Jongdae smile to think on it.

The feeling did not last, however, because before their two hours were up, Jongin returned, his naturally soft features in a grim set.

“My agents have discovered who that account belongs to,” he said, his volume soft and tone tight. “It’s… It’s Minseok.”

Sehun closed his eyes in horror. “Gods of sea and sand,” he murmured.

“Could it be true?” Chanyeol asked. “Could he really have fooled everyone so thoroughly? Even - Even the historical record? Could he be such a man that would commit double fratricide and then trick all of history into thinking he was innocent?”

Jongin blinked. “What?”
“It’s a long story, we will tell you later,” Jongdae murmured. “I cannot believe this.”

“Neither can I,” Chanyeol said, his volume rising, sounding personally insulted for having been tricked across centuries. “How dare he!”

Jongdae got up off the bed and started pacing. “I have known Minseok literally all my life. He has always stayed away from politics, as much as the son of a Pharaoh ever may. Why would he do this? It makes no sense.”

“He has seemed awfully interested in politics lately,” Sehun pointed out.

Jongdae shook his head. “An interest in trade functions and in the Greek ambassadorship does not a throne-lust make, and you know it. He has not challenged Joonmyun on anything else. Not on the military, or on internal policy, or on any of his other rulings. He’s rarely even in the Palace! If Minseok coveted the throne, don’t you think he would spend more time near it?”

“But if it was not him who killed you and ordered the attack on Joonmyun, what reason would he have to order an attack on Chanyeol?” Sehun asked. “There is no other reason.”

Jongdae dragged his hand down his face. “I do not want to believe that Minseok did this,” he whispered plaintively. “Please, tell me it’s not true.”

Chanyeol pursed his lips. “Is it possible someone else may have used his account purposely, to misdirect the investigation?” he asked. Jongin and Sehun both looked at him questioningly, and Chanyeol got to his feet as well. “Luhan, for example. If he were to somehow use Minseok’s account without his knowledge… Think about it. If he is caught, Minseok seems to an outside perspective to have the simplest, most obvious motive, why would anyone look deeper? And if he is not caught, if it works, then a man who is sympathetic to the Greeks would be on the throne. Either way, Luhan wins.”

“You could be right,” Sehun said thoughtfully. “And to complicate things, that could be true for Baekhyun, as well. If the evidence is discovered, there would no reason to look to Baekhyun when Minseok is right there. But if it is not, then Satiah’s husband-to-be is dead, leaving her free to be with Baekhyun.”

“More than that,” Jongin added, “Baekhyun knows Minseok does not want the throne. If Joon and Jongdae are dead, Minseok might be easily convinced to abdicate. Leaving Satiah the next most obvious choice.”

Jongdae exhaled. “So we have a lead, but that lead could have been planted,” he said. “It could have been Minseok, though I hope it is not. It could have been Luhan or any of the other Greek ambassadors, or all of them. It could have been Baekhyun, or Satiah, or both of them plotting together. Or perhaps we are missing something, and it is someone else entirely.” He met Chanyeol’s eyes. “We need more evidence. We need proof, or a confession, or something. I will not accuse my own brother without absolute certainty. This is the greatest crime possible within our laws, we must be certain.”

Chanyeol reached for his hand. “Then we take this to Minseok, and ask him who knows about his account,” he said. “We won’t tell him why, we will just see what he says.”

“I must return to Joonmyun and tell him what I have found,” Jongin said. “Please, if you go to Meketaten’s villa, please take soldiers with you. Just to be safe.”

“We will,” Jongdae promised. “Come, we have already delayed enough.”
Half an hour later, after dressing and making preparations, they set out. Chanyeol and Sehun had matching long strides that ate up the ground as they moved; Jongdae, Yixing, and the two soldiers they had brought had to trot to keep up. Jongdae didn’t complain because he was so eager for all this to be over.

The walk across the city took far less time than normal, and Jongdae was a bit winded when they arrived, but he was glad they had hurried, because Minseok was outside, overseeing the loading of trunks into an oxen-pulled cart. Chanyeol and Jongdae exchanged a glance, and Jongdae immediately moved forward to stop him.

“Brother!” he called. “Where might you be going, with such a load?”

Minseok looked up and blinked. He looked surprised, but not particularly alarmed, and Jongdae relaxed just a little. If Minseok had bolted right then, well, that would have been their answer. “I am not the one leaving,” Minseok said, gesturing at his household overseer to finish up as he came over. “My mother goes to Abydos, to visit yours.” He glanced at their little party. “To what do we owe this visit?”

“Ah.” How awkward. Jongdae smiled as pleasantly as he knew how. “Can we speak inside? It’s a matter of importance.”

“Of course,” Minseok said quickly, and Jongdae saw in his eyes that he realized something was going on. “My servants will finish this. Come, the terrace is private.”

He led them through the house and out to the terraced courtyard in the center. As they passed through, Chanyeol nudged Jongdae and tilted his chin at a table in a corner, where a beautiful Greek silver amphora was proudly displayed.

Jongdae was careful not to stare at it, but his heart was thunking. He did not want Minseok to be the culprit. The betrayal, if it was true, would be impossible to bear.

At the doorway to the courtyard, Minseok stopped. “Your guards may wait in there?” he suggested, gesturing to a small side room. The guards looked to Jongdae, who nodded; Chanyeol gestured for Yixing to stay with them.

Chanyeol, Jongdae, Sehun and Minseok settled on cushions around a low table, and Minseok folded up his legs and settled his hands lightly on his thighs. “What has happened?” he asked, the public formality gone from his tone.

“Can you tell us anything about this?” Jongdae asked. He glanced at Sehun, nodded, and Sehun produced the pottery shard with the bill of sale scrawled upon it.

Jongdae could clearly see the moment when Minseok spotted the seal. He hesitated, he swallowed, he set the shard down on the table with hands shaking slightly. “Why do you bring this to me?” he asked.

“You know why,” Jongdae said. Minseok widened his eyes innocently, but Jongdae shook his head. “Don’t. That seal represents a house that does not exist. We know it’s your nameless account.”

Immediatley, Minseok’s eyes shuttered, the emotion draining from his face. “If you know it is,” he said, “what do you want to know?”

“What did you buy with this?” Chanyeol asked. His tone was calm, not accusing at all, and Jongdae loved him for it. Minseok’s guardedness was starting to make him wonder if his belief in Minseok’s innocence was too hasty.
Minseok glanced back down at the tablet. “I do not believe that is any of your…” He stopped, and trailed off, his brow furrowing.

“Minseok?” Jongdae asked.

“I did not… This purchase was not made by me.” He turned the shard over, but the back side was blank. He turned it back again. “It’s dated 3 Epiphi. I was not in the Capital, I was returning from making offerings to Horus in Nehken.”

Relief spread through Jongdae’s body. Minseok revered Horus the way Jongdae did Hathor; he travelled south to the temple at Nekhen at least once each season to make offerings.

“Ah yes,” Jongin said, and Jongdae could see his relief as well. “I recall when you left.”

“Did you not order this purchase made during your absence?” Sehun asked.

“No, I did not.” Minseok studied the shard. “This is a very large sum to go missing, it should have been reported to me.” He looked up curiously. “What did this purchase?”

They all exchanged looks. Jongdae nodded.

“It bought an attempt on Chanyeol’s life,” Sehun said bluntly.

Jongdae watched carefully, but Minseok’s surprise seemed genuine enough. “What? When?”

“Last night,” Chanyeol murmured, “when I was somewhere no one should have known I would be. We discovered the owner of the house was paid, to ensure the house would be empty when I arrived.”

“But who would wish to attack you?” Minseok asked.

Jongdae sighed. “The obvious reason is that Chanyeol saved Joonmyun from assassination,” he said. “And that he is responsible for bringing me back to life. We have strong reason to believe there is a plot to remove us from the line of succession.”

Minseok was silent for a moment. “Are you accusing me?” he asked, his voice low and tight.

Sehun snorted. “If we came here to accuse,” he said, “you would already be in chains. We don’t believe it was you.” Minseok’s brow furrowed, but his shoulders loosened just a little. “Min, who else knows about this account?”

Now Minseok’s eyebrows raised. “You think someone wishes to make me seem the perpetrator,” he guessed. “I see. Well… My household knows about it? My highest-ranking servants. And the grain bank, of course, several of the accountants there might know, if they recognized me.”

“Not Luhan?” Sehun asked shrewdly.

Minseok shot him a look. “No, not Luhan. The man has been very… friendly with me, but I am not a dimwit.”

Jongdae hummed and dropped his chin onto his hand. “That is still a lot of people who might have talked,” he said. “Can you not narrow down the suspicion?”

“The grain accountants are sworn to maintain the confidence of all customers,” Minseok said, “and my personal servants know all too well the consequences for loose tongues. I have no reason to suspect any one of them in particular.”
“Do they now?” Chanyeol asked innocently. “If they are so circumspect, how is it there are rumors of anti-throne sentiment coming from this house?”

Minseok froze. “Your pardon?” he asked, as if he had misheard.

“I overheard it in the market,” Chanyeol said calmly, as if he wasn’t implying Minseok was guilty of treason. “Rumors that the household of the brother of the Pharaoh spoke ill of the throne. You are Joonmyun’s only brother who maintains a household outside of the palace. You would not happen to know what this refers to, would you?”

Minseok lurched to his feet. Alarmed, Jongdae hurried to his, as well. “I will not sit here and suffer these accusations!” Minseok snapped.

“No one is accusing you, Min,” Jongdae said soothingly. “But the evidence is stacking against you. If you are not the perpetrator of this plot, you must help us to find out who is.” He reached out and took Minseok’s elbow, rubbing his thumb over Minseok’s skin to calm him.

Cocking his head, Minseok studied him for a moment. “You really believe I am innocent,” he said softly. “They do not, but you do.”

Jongdae quirked a smile at him. “You’re my brother,” he said simply.

Nodding, Minseok took a deep breath. “My overseer is in charge of making the purchases for the household,” he said, as Chanyeol and Sehun stood. “We store purchasing records for a year. If this purchase truly came from someone who resides in this house, it should be recorded there.”

“Unless the record was purposely destroyed,” Sehun muttered, “to hide evidence.”

“If so,” Minseok said, “we can request an audit of the account from the grain bank, and find out how much is missing.”

“We will start with what is recorded, and go from there,” Jongdae said. “Will you take us to the records room?”

They went. As they passed through the doorway and back into the house itself, Yixing ducked out of the servant’s waiting room and went to Chanyeol, holding him back and whispering something in his ear. Chanyeol whispered back, and then shooed him back towards the guards, before jogging to catch up with the rest of them.

Sehun began questioning Minseok on how purchases were made, who wrote out the purchasing orders, etc. He was obviously distracting Minseok, and so Jongdae took advantage and dropped back a pace. “What was that about?” he asked, very quietly and in Greek.

“He told me he recognized the house’s overseer,” Chanyeol said, his voice barely audible. “He said he’s seen the man in the Palace… speaking with Liyin.” Jongdae’s blood ran cold, and Chanyeol raised his eyebrows meaningfully. “I told him to have the guards quietly detain the man. We will question him when we finish with the records.”

As they caught back up with Sehun and Minseok, Jongdae’s mind was racing. A servant? Could it really have been a servant who orchestrated all of this? Why?

Or was the servant just an instrument of his master? Was Minseok really the perpetrator, after all? Or was someone from outside paying the overseer to do this, knowing that it would lead to the evidence pointing to Minseok’s house?
The web was getting more tangled, and Jongdae could barely stand it any more. He had to know. Who had done this? Who had attacked Chanyeol, attacked Joonmyun?

Who was responsible for Jongdae’s own murder?

The records room was a bit dusty, shards of pottery and limestone stacked along all four walls. Papyrus was expensive and could only be reliably used once on each side; as a result most day-to-day records were kept on scraps like this which could be scraped off or painted over and reused.

Sehun sighed. “This is going to take a while.”

They got to work.

The records from the nameless account were relatively easy to find by simply scanning each tablet for the gazelle seal, but there were quite a number of them and reading through them was more than a bit boring. Still, Jongdae made certain he perused each one carefully, not wanting to miss any clue, no matter how small. It took quite a bit of time and Jongdae was nearing the end of his section with nothing to show for it before anyone found something.

“Look at this,” Chanyeol said, holding out a tablet shard.

Jongdae looked. “Chanyeol, that’s not even from the correct account.”

“No, not the top record. The one it’s written over, the one underneath.” Chanyeol pointed, and Jongdae looked closer, and finally, he saw it. Partially scraped off, but still visible under the newer record, was the gazelle seal.

Sehun cocked his head. “So this one is more than a year old, then?”

“See, here, the date.” Chanyeol pointed to some half-destroyed characters. “The second day of Mesori, in the 18th year of Hatshepsut.” He raised his eyebrows. “That’s not quite a year old yet, but the record on top is from several months ago.”

“It was overwritten early,” Minseok said thoughtfully. “My servants know better than that.”

“How can you even read the numbers?” Sehun grumbled. “They’re all but destroyed.”

“I have a lot of practice reading destroyed hieroglyphs,” Chanyeol murmured. “2 Mesori. That was… Sehun, when was Jongdae killed?”

They all stilled. “17 Mesori,” Sehun said. “Half a month later.”

Chanyeol took a deep breath. “Yes, I was afraid of that.” He pointed again, to a line of characters half-overwritten. “This is what caught my eye, because of the determinative.” He grabbed a stick of charcoal from the cup in the corner and traced over the symbol, clarifying it. The shape of a man’s body, lying prone and unarranged.

“Death,” Jongdae said. “What item could be purchased that would use death as a determinative?”

“An ungraceful death, specifically,” Chanyeol agreed. “I didn’t recognize the word. Here.” He sketched it out, completing the symbols that were half-hidden under other, newer symbols.

Jongdae frowned. “I don’t recognize it, either.”

“I do,” Sehun said. “It’s a poison, a very strong poison. A silvery metal that is ground into powder. I think the Greeks call it arsenikon.”
Chanyeol froze, his eyes wide. “Arsenic,” he said, in his language. “Oh my God, of course.” He kept scratching at the tablet, picking out the symbols that had been covered over, reading the rest of the purchase. “This amount of arsenic could kill five men.” He looked up. “Sehun, could Jongdae’s death have been caused by arsenikon poisoning?”

Sehun was pale. “Yes, that is very likely. It was on my father’s short list of possible poisons.”

“And the boy, Liyin’s son, who died within an hour. Could it have…?”

“The signs were similar. It is possible.”

Chanyeol looked at Minseok. “How do I determine who made this purchase order?”

Jongdae was the one who answered, because he had a sick, sick feeling in his stomach that they had missed something vital and so, so stupidly obvious. “The handwriting,” he said. “Minseok and I studied next to each other for years. His human figures always have heads that are a little too big.”

Jongdae took the tablet and examined it. “This is not his writing.”

Sehun exhaled. “So if not Minseok’s, whose is it?”

Minseok took the tablet from Jongdae, and studied it. The room held their breath.

Minseok’s eyes widened. “It’s my mother’s,” he said quietly.

With a nearly audible click, all the pieces fell into place, and Jongdae inhaled sharply. “Oh no,” he whispered. “Oh, I am such an idiot.”

“Jongdae?” Chanyeol asked, alarmed.

“I knew I had seen this seal before, I knew it. And now I remember. It’s on the jar of skin cream Hatshepsut uses.” Jongdae looked up, and met Minseok’s eyes. “The one Meketaten gave her at her coronation.”

A big hand gripped Jongdae’s arm. “Say that to me again,” Chanyeol said urgently.

Blinking, Jongdae refocused on him. “This seal, it’s a historical one, isn’t it? Meketaten’s grandmother’s family, right?” Minseok nodded, his lips pressed together into a white line. “At Hatshepsut’s coronation feast, Meketaten presented Hatshepsut with a ceramic jar of fine skin cream with this seal embossed in gold, and promised that as long as Hatshepsut was Pharaoh, the jar would never go empty. She refills it every year, as a gift to her Queen.”

Chanyeol covered his mouth with his hand, his eyes wide and horrified. “Could - No.” His fingers clenched into a fist in front of his mouth. “No, that would be too horrible to - ”

“For the love of all the Gods, man, just speak,” Minseok snapped. “If my own mother has committed treason, I must know.”

“Arsenic is a carcinogen,” Chanyeol said in a rush. The last word was in his own language, one that Jongdae didn’t recognize. “It - it is a skin poison, not just an internal poison. Hatshepsut, she uses her hands to put on the cream, yes? She wears it on her face and neck. Yes?”

A pit opened in Jongdae’s stomach.

“No,” Sehun whispered. “I mean, yes, yes she does, but - You don’t think - ”

“If there is arsenic in the cream,” Chanyeol said, “then Meketaten has been slowly poisoning her
Queen for the last eighteen years."

Jongdae met Minseok’s eyes. “Tell me this is impossible,” he said. “Tell me your mother would never do this.”

Minseok’s brow compressed, his eyes falling shut in horror.


“I’m sorry, I never thought - ” Minseok stopped. Closed his mouth, covered his face with his hands. “Thoth and Ma’at, give me strength to see the truth.”

“You think she’s capable of this,” Sehun breathed.

Minseok shook his head. “I wish I didn’t,” he said. “She is not always well in the mind, she is -” He exhaled. “She will be the picture of gentility in the court, then turn around and scream obscenities behind her own walls.” He raised his eyes. “She always told me I would make a better Pharaoh, no matter how many times I told her I didn’t want it. She’s always been… Adamant. It just never crossed my mind that she would...”

Chanyeol reached out and squeezed his shoulder. “If my suspicions are true,” he said, “then she may have been planning to put you on the throne since your father died.”

“She must have been the one giving orders to your overseer,” Jongdae said. He could see it, now, see exactly how all this had come to pass. “She has a cadre of servants in the palace; it would be easy enough for one of them to observe Chanyeol’s patterns, or to approach Liyin. Hatshepsut loves her, everyone in the Palace trusts her. No one would have any reason to suspect her.”

Minseok wiped away the wetness in his eyes and squared his shoulders. “She’s supposed to leave within the hour,” he said, his voice hardening. “We have to stop her.”

Chanyeol had taken barely two steps from the records room when he heard it. No matter what the time or the place, the sounds of a fistfight were unmistakeable, and without a second’s thought Chanyeol hightailed it down the hall.

He screeched around a corner and immediately was knocked back by a body thrown into his own. Reflexively, he caught Yixing, widening his stance and steadying the smaller man as Yixing scrambled to get his feet back under him. They’d only barely gotten stable again when someone shoved past them both, running down the hall.

Minseok caught his mother with a motion so practiced, Chanyeol suddenly wondered if she was prone to unexpected sprinting. From the way she yelled and beat her fists against his chest only twice before he expertly pinned her arms, it seemed really possible.

Was this why she lived separate from the Palace?

Was this why Minseok rarely let her travel alone?

“What Mother, Mother, calm down,” Minseok said softly. As Yixing untangled himself from Chanyeol’s
robes, Chanyeol looked back the way Meketaten had come. The two guards they had brought were holding the house overseer and two other servants at spearpoint, and one of the guards had a bloody lip.

“What happened?” Jongdae asked sharply.

“Your slaves are attacking us!” Meketaten cried, jerking against her son’s grasp. “Treason! They should be beheaded!”

Chanyeol looked down. “Yixing?”

“She ordered the guards to let the overseer go,” Yixing said, quiet and hurried. “They would not, so she ordered her servants to attack.”

Glancing at Meketaten, Sehun said, “You must be desperate to send unarmed servants against armed guards.”

“I have done nothing wrong! Nothing!” Meketaten was positively screeching by this point. Her fear was all over her face, and Chanyeol could see it. She knew that they knew.

“Mother.” Minseok kept Meketaten wrapped in his arms, but he looked down at her face. “Tell me the truth. Did you plot to put me on the throne?”

“I...” She stuttered, hesitated. “I would never betray the rightful Pharaoh!”

Minseok closed his eyes. “Mother.”

“The throne should be ours! It was meant for you! I did this for our family!”

“I cannot listen to this,” Minseok muttered, pained.

Jongdae put a hand on his shoulder. “You do not have to,” he said. He looked up at Chanyeol. “We all heard her. That was a confession, yes?”

Meketaten started to yell something, but Minseok covered her mouth with his hand. “Please don’t,” he whispered. “Just stop, Mother, just stop.”

“Yes,” Chanyeol said, “I believe it was.” The guards were busy, and Chanyeol was by far the biggest person in the room anyway. “Minseok. I’ll take her.”

Minseok hesitated, and Meketaten fought, but they got her transferred into Chanyeol’s grip. She was such a frail woman, but her struggles were desperate. Chanyeol wanted to be angry at her, or to feel sorry for her, or something, but it was hard to feel anything but vaguely sick.

She’d killed Jongdae. Maybe in her skewed mind she thought it was somehow the right thing to do, but all of this - everything that had happened to the family, to Jongdae, to Chanyeol himself, all of it was her fault.

So Chanyeol walked her out of her home to face her fate, and ignored her screams.

xXxxXxxXxxXxxXxxXx
In October of 1927, if you had asked Chanyeol where he would be in a year’s time, he would likely have said something like *I’ll probably still be studying Hatshepsut’s temple, or there are some unexplored ridges in the Valley of the Kings that might have hidden tombs, or I’d really like to study the tomb of Queen Nefertari, if the Egyptian government will let me.* Whatever he would have said, it probably would have boiled down to *right where I am now, doing exactly what I always do.*

Never, in even his wildest dreams, would he have conceived that he would be standing at the right hand of an actual Egyptian Pharaoh as he was coronated. Reciting praises to the ancient gods, leading the crowd through gestures of adoration, presenting the actual, literal Scepter to the newly crowned Pharaoh while a freshly inked tattoo proclaiming his devotion to Yahweh burned under his jeweled armband.

But it had been almost a year, and this was his life now. This was normal. And Chanyeol was so nervous about his performance, so determined not to mess anything up, that he didn’t even stop to think about what an incredible experience the entire thing was until it was over, and they were sitting down to the most massive feast Chanyeol had yet seen.

At his side, Jongdae wound his fingers through Chanyeol’s and squeezed. “It’s over,” he breathed.

“I was so nervous,” Chanyeol admitted. “I have eaten nothing all day, I was so sure I was going to be sick.”

Jongdae glanced at him. “Not the coronation,” he said. “Well, yes, of course I mean the coronation, but not just the coronation. I mean… All of it.” He looked around. “This is it. Joonmyun rules alone, from this day forward, as the third Pharaoh Thutmose. History has officially changed; there’s no getting out of it now.”

Ah. Yes, Chanyeol had had some thoughts to a similar effect the night before.

Meketaten’s trial, and resultant execution, had been… brutal. Brutal to watch, brutal to listen to, brutal to experience alongside so many people who had trusted her, so many people she had betrayed. The trial had been private and undocumented at Chanyeol’s urging; he was still trying to control how much of the historical record would be altered. Somehow, that made it worse, because knowing that her words would not live on in history made Meketaten spit bile at her family that Chanyeol wished he had not witnessed.

Once she knew there was no escape from her fate, Meketaten told them everything. Her jealousy at being the third choice queen, her hatred of the heirs to the throne, her desire to get them all out of the way and place her own son there instead. Her elaborate plot, even more elaborate than anyone could have known, beginning with Hatshepsut’s slow poisoning but encompassing more members of the royal household than anyone had ever realized - trusted servants, nobles who were close to the royal family, interlopers who discovered too much.

Even - and this was what had shocked them all to the core - even the Crown Princess, Nefurere, who had died as a teenager. Meketaten had screamed in Hatshepsut’s face about releasing plague-ridden rats into the young princess’s rooms while she slept. Meketaten had nearly been murdered on the spot; if Sehun hadn’t held his father back, she would have been.
The law was absolutely clear-cut on this; there was no leeway given, no second chance. Meketaten was burned at the stake. Jongdae forced himself to watch, and Chanyeol had stood with him, even if he had to close his eyes halfway through.

The entire ordeal was particularly hard on Hatshepsut, who had locked herself in her rooms immediately following the trial and never re-emerged again. She had passed away in the middle of the last month of the year, on 17 Mesori, one year to the day from Jongdae’s murder and several months earlier than she had in the history Chanyeol knew. The country, plunged into mourning for their Queen, rushed to prepare for Joonmyun’s sole coronation.

Now, all that was over. There was still work to do, of course - the entire royal household would be traveling around the kingdom to celebrate with as many of the people as they could reach, and there was still Hatshepsut’s burial to attend to and Joonmyun’s upcoming wedding to Satiah to plan.

But Jongdae was right. History had been forever changed. There was a different Pharaoh in power, and Chanyeol could only pray and trust that any changes that resulted were for the better. More personally, now that his murderer had been found and the ordeal was behind them, Jongdae seemed to have a weight lifted off him. He was smiling more, laughing more, joking around with his brothers. Healing. It made Chanyeol happy.

On the whole, Chanyeol was happy. The only thing that was missing… was his own family.

Yura, the kids, Chanyeol’s dopey brother-in-law. Kris. If they were here with him, everything would be perfect. And it had crossed Chanyeol’s mind that there might be a way to make that happen, if he could figure out how to replicate Sehun’s spells from the original timeline. But he’d dismissed the thought, because even if he thought he could do it, he wouldn’t want to uproot them like that, drag them into a place they didn’t understand.

In the midst of this thought, Jongdae leaned over and murmured, “There’s only one thing left to take care of, isn’t there?” Chanyeol looked at him, and Jongdae smiled. “Setting up the tombs. We have to make certain you can resurrect me.”

“Young, of course,” Chanyeol said. “Wouldn’t want you to miss your ticket to the future.”

Yixing brought the next course, and Chanyeol turned to receive it from him, and as he did, his own words echoed in his head.

*Your ticket to the future.*

Chanyeol’s motions stuttered.

Could he… go back home?

Moving on autopilot, Chanyeol accepted the food and let that thought sink into his head. Jongdae had moved forward in time - why couldn’t he? If he could figure out how original-Sehun had done it, if he could set up his own tomb just the right way, could he go back to his own time, his own life, possibly before anyone other than Kris and Kyungsoo realized he was gone?

No. That was preposterous! Right? There was no way he could take that kind of risk. He would have to literally die, and trust that everything was right and that he would wake up again in his own time. He would have to make absolutely certain his own tomb wouldn’t be touched for three and a half millennia. If he didn’t want to have to explain why he’d aged decades in a few weeks, he’d have to do all this relatively soon. And most importantly, he’d have to tell Kris where to find him and how to resurrect him, and he had no way to do that.
Unless he did.

Unless he *already had.*

*A sealed scroll case on the floor behind the golden chair in the northeast corner of Jongdae’s tomb,* Kris had written to him. *You told me not to open it until you were gone, so I haven’t touched it. I guess I’ll find out what’s in it tomorrow.*

Why would Chanyeol have left Kris a sealed scroll, *and specifically instructed him not to open it,* unless that was exactly what it was? Directions to Chanyeol’s own tomb, instructions on how to bring him back to life?

Instructions to bring him back into the future, where he belonged?

Jongdae nudged him, and when Chanyeol looked up, Jongdae smiled at him, that bright, blinding, sunrise-over-the-Pyramids smile that Chanyeol had fallen in love with. “What runs through your mind?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Chanyeol said. “I love you.”

His smile brightening impossibly more, Jongdae kissed his own fingertips and then dropped them under the table, transferring the kiss to the back of Chanyeol’s hand with a touch. “I love you too,” he murmured. “Come, let’s enjoy the celebration.”

Chanyeol turned and set to the food with gusto, but his mind was still racing.

Going back to his own time meant leaving Jongdae behind.

Could Chanyeol do that?

Chapter End Notes

i’ve decided to post the epilogue as a separate chapter instead of at the end of this chapter as originally planned. stay tuned.
Some invisible force threw them both back, and Kris hit the ground on his ass with a mighty thud. Kyungsoo landed half on top of him, driving the air out of his lungs. A piercing, screeching noise rang out across the desert, like steel beams scraping together, and the world shifted, as if someone had pulled a rug out from under them.

Then, it was done. The noise stopped, the light stopped, the crackle of flames stopped. The temple was as quiet as ancient temples usually were.

Kyungsoo scrambled to his feet and stumbled through the doorway, back into the tomb. “Chanyeol?!“ he yelled, desperate. “Jongdae! Chanyeol!”

Wrapping his arms around his upbent knees, Kris dropped his head. “They’re gone, Soo,” he murmured, his eyes squeezing shut against the burn of tears. “Jesus save me. They’re gone.”

“How the - What the - “ Kyungsoo was whipping around wildly in the center of the room, staring at everything in turn. “What just happened?”

Kris burst into sobs.

For long moments, he just cried, his mind struggling with the realization that he would never see his best friend again, his tears turning the dust on the stone floor to mud. After a bit, he felt a tentative touch to his back.

“Kris?” Kyungsoo asked. “Hey, look at me.” With a deep, shuddering breath, Kris wiped his face on his sleeve and looked up, meeting Kyungsoo’s concerned, confused eyes. “What just… Can you tell me what just happened?”

With shaking fingers, Kris reached into his bag and pulled out a cardboard tube. Inside was the rolled-up papyrus that Chanyeol had left for him in Senenmut’s tomb. Kris pulled it out and handed it over.

“Be careful with that,” he said softly. “It’s ancient.”

Kyungsoo opened it and started to read, his eyes wide.

Unwilling to re-live all the emotions he’d felt the first time he’d found that damned scroll, Kris pushed himself to his feet and made himself walk into the tomb. Everything was the way they’d left it, except Chanyeol and Jongdae were gone.

Well, no. Not everything was the same. Sehun’s body was gone, and so was the blood inside the
The sunlight that pierced into the tomb was golden, not red. As Kris looked around, he thought he spotted some movement, something odd on the walls.

The date of Sehun’s death was wrong.

No. Wait. No it wasn’t. It was the same as the date he’d recorded in his sketchbook, the sketchbook that was, if Kris believed Chanyeol’s note, now three and a half millennia in the past.

Wait. Yes it was. That wasn’t the right date, the year was different. Sehun had died in the eighth year of the reign of Ahmose III. The carving on the wall said he died in the ninth year of the reign of Amenhotep II.

There was no Amenhotep II.

Except there was. Amenhotep II was Thutmose III’s son, and his son was Thutmose IV, who had lead the first attempt in written record to unbury the Sphinx -

But Thutmose III had died before he had a son -

No, Thutmose III had lived to be 57 before dying in battle -

Kris shouted, pressing his palms to his temples as a mass of conflicting knowledge poured into his mind.

Some time later, he became aware of Kyungsoo shaking him and calling his name. “Kris, shit, hey, Kris, are you with me? What’s wrong?” Kris groaned and lifted his head, and Kyungsoo’s eyes widened. “Jeeze, you look punch-drunk. What happened?”

Struggling to pull his brain back into the right order, Kris sat up. There was something wet on his lip - blood? Was his nose bleeding? “Soo,” he muttered, “who is the room next to the Hatshepsut Room dedicated to?”


“Just answer me.”

“Uh, most of the room is dedicated to Ahmose II,” he said. Then, he frowned. “Hang on... No it isn’t, it’s dedicated to Thutmose III.” He made a face like he’d just licked a lemon. “I can’t - Which is it?”

So it wasn’t just Kris, then. “We have two sets of memories,” he said, as he struggled to get his feet underneath him. Kyungsoo gripped his arm and helped pull him up to standing. “Chanyeol must have changed history.”

“So it’s true?” Kyungsoo asked. “That ancient scroll, that really was Chanyeol writing to you?”

“Yes.” Kris stumbled a little, his head aching, and Kyungsoo steadied him, pulling Kris’s arm over his shoulders. “I found it years ago, but I didn’t really believe it until Jongdae started to breathe. When he came back to life, I knew it had to be true.”

Kyungsoo stared up at him. “You did everything he asked you to, even though you knew it meant he’d leave you forever.” He shook his head. “Damn, Kris.”

“What was I going to do?” Kris mumbled. “Change history?”
“In his note, Chanyeol said he left you something in Jongdae’s tomb,” Kyungsoo said. “Did he? Is that true?”

Oh, right! “Yeah, he did. It was right behind the chair in the corner, where he said it would be.” He’d been worried he wouldn’t get to it before Chanyeol saw it, but it’d turned out not to be an issue; Chanyeol was so entranced with the sarcophagus that he hadn’t even noticed Kris pocketing the scroll in the corner. Kris pulled it out now - a ceramic scroll case, unusually simple for the tomb of royalty but carefully sealed and made to last. He broke the wax seal with a twist and opened it. Kyungsoo came and read over his shoulder.

I can’t believe you knew all this time, Chanyeol wrote. You went all that time acting like you didn’t know from nothing. You ever consider Hollywood?

Anyways. I’ve been here a year now and we just finished setting it all up. Your notes were swell, we had everything we needed. Unwrapping JD’s head to put the tablet in it gave me the heebie-jeebies but it’s done now. Time loop closed.

I ain’t gonna put too much in this just in case it falls into the wrong hands somehow but listen, JD and I just picked out our burial site. I know you’re probably still in the temple when you read this - impatient bastard - so go walk outside and find the thing that’s different. That’s where I’ll be, and you’ll find me by thinking what JD would do.

I miss you.

CY

“The thing that’s different,” Kyungsoo muttered. “Outside?”

They exchanged a glance, then booked for the exit.

Kris came to a halt just through the pylon at the top of the ramp and looked around. He half-expected to see a brand-new doorway cut into the cliff wall to his left, but the rock was sheer and solid as always.

“Hey,” Kyungsoo said, “wasn’t there a temple there before?”

Kris looked to the right. On the other side of the chapel to Hathor, up on the high ledge where the temple to Ahmose II was supposed to be, there was nothing but rubble. The entire temple was gone.

“Jongdae said that was the location where his brother had planned to put his mortuary temple,” Kris thought out loud. “But I’ve only got one memory about that spot. Egyptologists knew about it in the original history, but now… no one has made any discoveries there.”

“Wasn’t there a rock slide?” Kyungsoo asked. “Didn’t Chanyeol say that if the temple had been set further forward, it would have been completely buried?”

Kris stared at him. “You think he convinced the Pharaoh to move his temple,” he said.

Kyungsoo shrugged. “I mean, if he wanted to be absolutely certain that no one would find him before we did…?”

The moment Kyungsoo said it, Kris knew that was exactly what had happened. It was just the way Chanyeol would think. “But if the tomb is buried under a rock slide, how can we get to it? We’d have to hire a dig crew and I don’t want anyone else to know about this.”
“You’ll find me by thinking what Jongdae would do,” Kyungsoo muttered. “What would Jongdae do? If he was here, if he was trying to find a hidden tomb…”

Kris’s eyes slid to the side, and the answer became so obvious, he actually laughed aloud. “He’d pray.”

They went down to the chapel to Hathor.

The back part of the sanctuary was structured very similarly to the sanctuary of Ra, and Kyungsoo put his hands on the very back wall, which was a full-body image of the goddess herself. “I don’t see anything in particular,” he said.

Kris went for the first alcove on the right, the one that mirrored where they’d found the entrance to Sehun’s tomb. Holding up his lantern, he studied the carving on the wall, dragging up both sets of memories about this temple. “This figure is unidentified,” he muttered, pulling the light back so it illuminated more of the carving. It was a man, kneeling to offer a sistrum to Hathor, dressed in royal finery but without the crown or the beard associated with the Pharaoh. “There’s no cartouche and historians haven’t been able to place who it might be.”

Kyungsoo came over and looked. “It’s Jongdae,” he said.

Yeah, the eyeliner style was pretty much a giveaway. “I think this is where we’re supposed to be,” Kris said. “These stone bricks, they’re smaller than the rest of the walls. Like someone wanted to make it easy to take apart.” He set his lantern down, quickly took a couple of photos of the wall, and then pulled out a crowbar. “Here goes nothing.”

It took the two of them a good hour to knock a hole in the wall big enough to crawl through, but in the grand scheme of things, that was nothing. The wall very obviously had been made to be broken through.

Behind it was a long, empty tunnel. Kris kept track of their direction as they made their way down and guessed that they were walking right into the mountainside, down between the temples of Hatshepsut and where Thutmose III’s would have been. They were probably right underneath the cache tomb.

Wait.

Kris stopped right in the middle of the tunnel, startling Kyungsoo into bumping into him. “What?” Kyungsoo said, looking around. “What is it?”

“I just registered a new memory,” Kris murmured. He looked up, not that the flat stone ceiling of the tunnel was much help. “The Deir el-Bahri cache.”

“Come again?” Kyungsoo asked.

Kris’s heart was pounding. “In the original timeline, the only mummies from the 18th dynasty that survived were Jongdae and Joonmyun,” he said. “But I’ve got new memories now. There was a tomb discovered in 1881, just near here. We think it originally belonged to a High Priest of Amun-Ra from the 21st dynasty, but there were literally more than fifty mummies in it.” He took a deep breath as the implications sank in. “Kings, queens, nobles, officials, priests. Jongdae’s entire family, going back four generations and forward at least three, plus kings from three dynasties following. Nearly seven hundred years of Egyptian royalty. The carvings said they had been moved there to protect them from robbers.”

“You think Chanyeol did that?”
“I sure as heck do,” Kris said, as he started forward again. “Who else would? Jesus, there’s so much more in my head now. We know so much more than we did before.” He shook his head. “Chanyeol made certain history would be preserved.”

He stopped, because they were at the end of the tunnel. There was a door, with a line of carvings down the center.

“Turn away,” Kris read, and had to laugh. “Unreal. Come on, Soo, gimme a hand.”

They pushed. This stone was much less stuck than the one that had blocked Jongdae’s tomb, and it didn’t take much to turn it. Then, they were inside.

Sweeping his flashlight over the contents of the tomb, Kyungsoo whistled admiringly. Kris stepped forward with his heart in his throat.

“Two sarcophagi,” he murmured. “They were buried together.”

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Kyungsoo said.

“That’s ‘cause you don’t know how stupidly rare it is,” Kris retorted. “Tombs are almost always for one person alone.” He turned a slow circle. “This is the life they lived together,” he whispered. “It’s all here, spelled out on the walls.”

Kyungsoo flashed his light over to the corner. “Are those cats?”

Kris looked where he was looking. “Yeah.” He came over to examine them. “Mummified cats. There’s gotta be a dozen here.”

Scrubbing a hand over his face, Kyungsoo muttered, “Leave it to Chanyeol to be buried with his damn cats.”

Pretending he didn’t see the tears in the corners of Kyungsoo’s eyes, Kris went up to the sarcophagi. “Royal Prince Jongdae,” he read. “Beloved Brother of the God, Royal Vizier, Ambassador to Greece. Laid to rest in the seventh year of the reign of Amenhotep II.” Calling on his new memories to figure out regnal timelines, Kris did some math. “He lived to be sixty-one.”

Kyungsoo’s hand trailed over the other sarcophagus. “And Yeol?”

Kris went to look. “High Counselor Chanyeol,” he read, and Christ, but seeing Chanyeol’s name spelled out in ancient hieroglyphs brought this home in a way nothing else had. “The Copper Lord. Tutor of the Gods. Shit, they made him tutor? To multiple kings?” Again, he did the math. “Laid to rest in the tenth year of the reign of Amenhotep II. So he would have been…” Kris covered his mouth. “Seventy-three. Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

“Kris,” Kyungsoo said. “This has your name on it.”

He was pointing at a huge, lacquered wood chest on wheels. And sure enough, the word KRIS was carved right into the lid, inlaid with gold. His heart in his throat, Kris smashed the clay seal with the back of his flashlight, broke through the old beeswax that kept the lid airtight, and opened it.

Scrolls. Dozens, possibly hundreds of scrolls, each sealed individually in a scroll case. They were all numbered, in English.

The scroll case labeled “Zero” was sitting right on top. Kris opened it.
Heya, buddy.

If you’re reading this, I guess it worked, right? You found me. At least, I hope it’s you and not some nosy Frenchman or something.

Anyways. This is for you. I’ve been writing to you since I landed back in this crazy country and here it all is. You get a running account of everything that’s gone through my head in my entire life. I’m sure you’re ever so pleased with this.

So in exchange, I gotta ask you a favor.

See, I thought for a really long time about trying to cheat my way out of this. About trying to find a way to bring you here to me, or for me to go to you. And I mean, I thought about it for years.

But in the end, I realized that I’m not God. Mortals shouldn’t play with time. What’s done is done, and I’m here now, and I’m happy.

You gotta know that. I’m happy. I lived a good life, Kris.

So here’s what I’m asking. Take your photos, do your sketches. Wheel this chest on out of here, that’s why I gave it wheels. This chest and everything in it is yours.

But then you gotta destroy the rest, okay? This tomb, and Sehun’s tomb, and Jongdae’s first tomb. Burn them, bury them, bloody blow them up if you have to. No one else can ever learn how to travel through time, it’s far too dangerous.

I know this goes against everything you are, believe me. I get it. But I’m begging you, please do this for me. You said you’d do anything for me, that all I gotta do is ask. Well, I’m asking.

My will is in my apartment, in the drawer beside my bed. I wrote it ages ago. Everything I own has been split between you and Yura. I’ll leave it up to you what you tell her; sorry about that. She’s gonna be frosty. I promised her I’d be home for Christmas.

Thank you, Kris, you’re the best brother a man could have. I’ll see you on the other side.

Chanyeol

For a long moment, Kris just breathed. Looked around, at the amazing tomb around him, perfectly preserved, completely untouched. At the sarcophagus that held his best friend’s body.

“Kyungsoo,” he said softly. “We have work to do.”

Chapter End Notes

I can’t thank my test readers and betas enough, especially Line and Cata, who stuck with me from beginning to end through like five revisions and a whole lot of crying. You guys are all awesome.
To everyone who read this, commented, came to my ask or my twitter to talk about it, and was so patient with me, thank you. You are the reason I write.

I will likely be posting another part, but it won't be story, it'll be my research links, some notes on things that didn't make it into the fic, a timeline, and possibly a deleted scene. Keep your eyes open for that in the next day or so.

In the meantime, if you have questions, my ask is always open.

Until next time! ~bee
Chapter Summary

Notes, research, deleted scenes and other goodies.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Research and Notes on the Historical Context:
It was requested that I put together a list of my research sources, and hoo boy that’s a heck of a list. This is all from my research and my extremely limited understanding of the topic. I’m not an expert, but in my understanding…

The history that exists before Chanyeol and Jongdae go back in time, where Queen Hatshepsut was succeeded by a pharaoh named Ahmose II, did not exist. Instead, Chanyeol and Jongdae’s actions changed history to match what we know today, and there wouldn’t be another pharaoh named Ahmose for almost a thousand years.

Thutmose III was a real person. So were Hatshepsut, Iset, Satiah, Senenmut, Useramun, and Ahmose Pen-Nekhbet. So was Anebni, though I don’t think there’s any evidence Anebni was related to Thutmose III.

Meketaten, however, did not exist. I borrowed her name from a royal princess later in Egypt’s history. As far as we know, Thutmose II only had two royal wives, Hatshepsut and Iset.

Hatshepsut was one of a handful of female Pharaohs, and probably the most famous/powerful of them after Cleopatra. This is a documentary on a few of the famous female leaders of Egypt, and the part about Hatshepsut begins at 12:40.

There was at least one plot by a secondary wife to put her son on the throne instead of the Crown Prince, but this didn’t happen to Thutmose III as far as we know. It did, however, happen to Ramesses IV, whose father Ramesses III was assassinated by the agent of a secondary wife.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art really did finance expeditions to Egypt for historical artifacts in the 1910’s and 20’s, and really does have an entire room dedicated to Hatshepsut, and some of the artifacts displayed in the Hatshepsut Room really were found by employees of the Met in the 20’s. Senenmut’s tomb and its astrological ceiling actually was discovered by an employee of the Met in the mid-late 20’s.

The statue of Thutmose III that Jongdae finds at the end of Chapter 3 is based on this one, though in that timeline the statue was larger, found in a different place at a different time, and had a different inscription.

The book Easy Lessons in Egyptian Hieroglyphics by W. A. Budge is a real thing, and it really would have been used by Egyptologists in the 20’s. However, modern Egyptologists widely agree that Budge’s work is terribly outdated and pretty much completely wrong. You can read it here.

The "Egyptian" that I have them speaking early in the story is complete nonsense. I did my best to
make it look/sound somewhat similar to what we think it might have sounded like, but it is my understanding that we don’t actually have a good idea of how the words were pronounced. So I made it up.

There is no evidence that Greek was spoken in Egypt during Jongdae’s time. In fact, the language Chanyeol would know as "Ancient Greek" didn’t even exist that far back. So that's a bit of artistic license on my part.

1927 was late in Prohibition in the United States. Speakeasies were a common thing in New York, and Chanyeol would have been dancing either the Charleston, which was at the height of its popularity, or the Lindy Hop, which was just developing around that time in New York. And yes, I know Chanyeol is not a natural dancer, but I liked the idea of him doing flaily 20’s dances too much not to include it, okay.

All of the archeological sites visited in the fic are real places, and I did my best to describe them as accurately as possible, considering I've never been to see them. The New Kingdom temple outside the Sphinx really was commissioned by Thutmose II, the Temple of Hathor at Dendera really does have a mini shrine on top, and the Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple really does line up with the sun on the winter solstice (you can see the light-box cut into the outside wall at the link.)

Deir el-Bahri, which housed both Hatshepsut’s and Thutmose III’s Mortuary Temples, is thought to have looked like this when it was new. Today, it looks like this. You can see that Thutmose III’s temple - the little one in the middle - was completely buried by a rock slide. Here is a website with a simple explanation of everything we’ve found at the site, and here is a map of the entire area with my notes as to where scenes take place within the fic (original image I used taken from here.)

Silver was more valuable to the Ancient Egyptians than gold, mostly because gold could be mined domestically but silver had to be imported, generally from Greece. In later years, Queen Nefertari would be depicted wearing silver Greek-style earrings as a way of showing her close relationship with Greece. Luhan’s gifts to Minseok are made of silver from the Laurium mines.

In doing research for this, I was utterly SHOCKED at how many things we currently take for granted didn’t even exist in Jongdae’s time - like eating utensils, or clear glass, or domesticated horses, or steel, or pants. (It’s worth noting that glassmaking actually got a big boost during Thutmose III’s reign, but it was still colored, not clear.)

The idea of the "birth name" and "Pharaonic name" is close, but false. As I understand it, Pharaohs became king under their own names, and then took a prenomen that became, I don’t know, like a descriptor for them? In any case, Hatshepsut was named Hatshepsut before she was named Ramaatka, but that didn’t work with the narrative I wanted to write so I fudged it.

There is no archeological proof that I could find that the Israelites were ever in Egypt, let alone that the whole Exodus storyline ever took place. The Shasu people were a Semitic tribe that some scholars believe may have been one of several tribes who eventually contributed to the population of the Israelites, but they were polytheistic, and Yahweh was only one of several gods they worshipped. There’s no proof that I could find that monotheism existed that far back in any form, but for the sake of the story, I fudged it.

Similarly, it is not known which Pharaoh featured in the Book of Exodus. There are theories that name Ahmose I, Satiah’s great-great-grandfather, or Thutmose II, Jongdae’s father, as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and there are other theories as well. I chose to go with Ramesses II as the Pharaoh of Exodus for the purposes of this story, which is the same choice many Hollywood adaptations made. Thus, this takes place a little over two hundred years before the Exodus.
There is some debate in the Egyptological community as to exactly what kind of relationship Thutmose III and Hatshepsut had - were they close? Were they rivals? It isn’t known, so I provided my own interpretation.

It is also not known for sure that Hatshepsut and Senenmut were lovers, though there are some indications that the populace believed they were lovers. As far as anyone knows, Senenmut never married or had children, and Hatshepsut never re-married after Thutmose II died and her only child was Nefurere.

**Exodus Timeline:**
This includes both what was in the story, and what was not shown, including the effect on history that Chanyeol actually had. I’m only including the BC part of the timeline here, since the AD part is pretty straightforward.

The [Egyptian calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_calendar) was 12 months of exactly 30 days, each month divided into 3 decans of 10 days which was their equivalent of a week. They had 5 extra days at the end of the year. There were 3 seasons of 4 months each - Akhet (Flood), Peret (Growth), and Shemu (Harvest). The Egyptian New Year was marked by the flooding of the Nile and was not always consistent (bc the Egyptian calendar was ¼ day short of exact) but would begin around late September/early October.

1484 BC - Crown Princess Nefurere is born.
1482 BC - Joonmyun is born.
1480 BC - Jongdae is born.
1479 BC - Thutmose II dies, leaving behind a newborn Jongdae and 3-year-old Joonmyun. Because Joonmyun is just a child, Hatshepsut declares herself Regent.
1477 BC - Hatshepsut drops the Regent thing and just names herself Pharaoh. Her sister-wife, Meketaten, gives her an expensive skin cream as a regnal gift.
1470 BC - Nefurere, 14, is betrothed to Joonmyun, 12, with the understanding that they will wed immediately after Joonmyun takes the throne.
1468 BC - An epidemic of a plague sweeps Egypt. Most of the palace is able to keep themselves segregated from the commoners and thus safe, but Nefurere, 16, somehow catches it and dies.
1463 BC - After ruling alone for 16 years, Hatshepsut’s health begins to decline. Joonmyun, 19, is officially named co-regent, and immediately takes the role of Great General, commanding the army in Hatshepsut’s name. Later that same year, he is betrothed to Satiah.
17 Mesori, 1461 BC - Jongdae is murdered.
1 Hathor, 1460 BC - Jongdae’s mummy is buried 78 days after death.
20 Hathor - The 20-day period of mourning ends and Jongdae's tomb is closed.
22 Hathor - Jongdae and Chanyeol go back in time, meaning it appears that Jongdae rises 3 days after his tomb is closed. He has been dead exactly 100 days.
1 Pachon - Joonmyun's murder is prevented on the night of the harvest festival.

(1.5 months elapse)

10 Epiphi - An attempt is made on Chanyeol’s life.

11 Epiphi - They figure out Meketaten is behind the plot.

28 Epiphi - Meketaten is executed.

17 Mesori - The shock of learning that her sister-wife and close friend was behind her family’s murder speeds up Hatshepsut’s deterioration. She dies, a year to the day from Jongdae’s death and several months earlier than she did in the original timeline.

1 Festival - Joonmyun ascends the throne.

~*~ end of story here ~*~

1459 BC - Almost immediately after Hatshepsut dies, the ruler of Kadesh (which is in modern Syria), thinking that the young king would be unprepared, tries to invade Egypt. Joonmyun musters the army, advances to meet them, and wins decisively. This not only cements him as Pharaoh in the eyes of the international community, it makes a chunk of Canaan/Syria a part of the Egyptian Empire, expanding the borders of the kingdom a good thirty years before they had been in the original timeline.

1458 BC - Joonmyun's first son, Amenemhat, is born, to his first wife Satiah. Chanyeol (30) is assigned to be the child's tutor.

1452 BC - Baekhyun’s father Useramun dies, and Jongdae, 28, is named Royal Vizier in his place.

1448 BC - Satiah and Amenemhat are killed in an accident. The Royal Family, including Chanyeol, are devastated.

1446 BC - Joonmyun’s second son, Amenophis II, is born to his second wife, Merytre-Hatshepsut. Chanyeol (42) is again assigned to be the child’s tutor.

1443 BC - Senenmut dies. During the burial process, Chanyeol hides the scroll for Kris under a loose flagstone, just before the tomb is sealed.

1441 BC - Tao (38) is promoted to High Priest of Amun-Ra. Recalling Chanyeol’s words about the robbers that would someday desecrate the tombs of the kings, he writes a "prophecy" which instructs his successors to move their bodies to a safe location.

1440 BC - Joonmyun’s mortuary temple is completed, set further forward than initially planned due to Chanyeol’s influence. Jongdae (40) and Chanyeol (48) commission their joint tomb underneath the temple, and construction begins.

1434 BC - Jongin (44) is killed in battle during a military campaign in what is now Syria. His body is damaged beyond recovery, so Joonmyun instead only takes his heart, which he has embalmed and interred in his own tomb in order to preserve Jongin’s chance at the afterlife.
1427 BC - Joonmyun's second son, who will become Amenhotep II, is crowned co-regent.

1425 BC - Joonmyun dies in battle at 57, and Amenhotep II becomes sole ruler of Egypt at 21.

1420 BC - Joonmyun's grandson, who will become Thutmose IV, is born. Chanyeol (69) is assigned to be the boy's tutor. He tells the boy stories, including a story about the huge stone monument buried under the sand in front of the Pyramids.

1418 BC - Jongdae dies at the age of 61, taken by a heart attack. Chanyeol (70) and Sehun (60) oversee his burial.

1417 BC - Chanyeol uses his influence to remove himself, Jongdae, Sehun and Jongin from historical record as much as he possibly can. By the end of the year, the only remaining indications that any of them ever existed were either in their tombs, or recorded in ways that have little chance of surviving the coming centuries.

1416 BC - Sehun has multiple strokes in the same year, leading to his death at the age of 62. Chanyeol is the last survivor of his age, one of the eldest men in Egypt at the age of 72, and well aware that he is dying. He makes certain Sehun’s tomb is set up exactly the way Kris’s notes showed - and then burns Kris’s journal.

1415 BC - Chanyeol dies of cancer at the age of 73, having lived in Egypt for 45 years. Pharaoh Amenhotep II, already 31, oversees his beloved tutor’s burial himself, following his burial instructions exactly and hiding the tomb.

1401 BC - Joonmyun’s grandson, Thutmose IV, is crowned Pharaoh. One of his first acts is to order the unburial of the Sphinx, and he erects the Dream Stele, which claims that the knowledge that there was more to the statue under the sand came to him in a dream. In reality, of course, he was remembering the stories Chanyeol told him as a young boy.

1400 BC - Thutmose IV begins construction of Luxor Temple, which did not exist in the original timeline. This leads to the city that is built on top of the ancient capital being called Luxor in modern times instead of Karnak, as it was in the original timeline.

1350 BC - Joonmyun’s great-great-grandson, Akhenaten, founds the first government-backed monotheistic religion and builds the city that will become Amarna. This religion would go on to have influence on all monotheistic religions thereafter, subtly changing Christianity.

1332 BC - Joonmyun’s great-great-great-grandson, Tutankhamun, takes the throne. Tutankhamun is the first Pharaoh after Joonmyun who existed in both the previous and the altered timelines, as he had different fathers but the same mother and was thus similar enough that history begins to re-align.

1306 BC - Pharaoh Horemheb takes the throne, the first Pharaoh who is not related directly to Joonmyun and thus the first time that history actually clicks back into place, after 150 years of changed time.

1246 BC - The Exodus from Egypt takes place, under the rule of Ramesses II.

993 BC - Pinedjem II, recently named the High Priest of Amun-Ra in Thebes, uncovers Tao’s prophecy and decides to act on it. He unburies and moves more than 50 ancient kings, queens, and nobility from their tombs to a safe cache near Hatshepsut and Thutmose III’s temples, thus protecting them from the grave robbers that will raid the tombs less than a hundred years later. Among the mummies saved are Joonmyun, Joonmyun’s mother and father, Joonmyun’s grandfather, great grandfather, and great-great grandfather, Hatshepsut, and Senenmut, as well as dozens of others from
Joonmyun’s line.

~50 BC - The Temple of Hathor at Dendera is completed during the reign of Cleopatra VII, right as the Egyptian Kingdom is finally beginning to decline.

Headcanons and Notes on Time Travel:
Chanyeol and Jongdae are trapped in a time loop, but each time history repeats itself, it comes out a little different. The notes Chanyeol and Kris write to each other don’t always come out the same, all of their actions have the potential to come out differently, and a single changed decision could alter the entire circumstance.

Thus, there are iterations of this timeline where Chanyeol does not save Joonmyun. There are iterations where he does, but then he decides to reverse his own actions and kill Joonmyun himself. There are iterations where the plot to assassinate Chanyeol succeeds, or where they never figure out Meketaten is behind everything.

There are timelines where Chanyeol kills himself early and sets himself up to be resurrected, leaving Jongdae behind and rejoining Kris in the future. There are timelines where Jongdae chooses to go with him.

There are timelines where Kris holds Chanyeol back, and Jongdae is sucked back into the past without him. There are even timelines in which they don’t make it to Sehun’s tomb in time at all, and Jongdae lives out the rest of his life beginning in 1927, never knowing what could have happened.

Basically, the ending of this story is infinite, because every time someone’s actions breaks the loop - whether it’s Kris purposely keeping Jongdae from going back, or Chanyeol deciding not to leave the note for Kris, or Sehun refusing to help them set up his tomb to finish the spell - time resets back to the original, and original-flavor Sehun, driven by grief and shock, delves into the study of resurrection and time travel and starts the whole damn thing over again.

One more thing to note: Kris and Kyungsoo have two sets of memories only because they were so close to the magic when it occurred. Their memories from the first timeline will begin to fade within a few days, and after a few months the only record they will have of the history they once knew will be whatever Chanyeol may have mentioned in his notes.

Kris will make certain that Chanyeol’s notes are destroyed before he dies, and the previous timeline will be erased forever.

The Original Midpoint:
When I first was writing the story, Sehun’s note to Jongdae at the end of Chapter 4 made it clear that he intended to bring Jongdae back into the past. Thus, originally, Chanyeol and Jongdae went all of chapters 5, 6, and 7 thinking that they would be separated.

However, this created a really big plot hole in the story. Namely, that Chanyeol, being so afraid to change history, would never have allowed Jongdae to complete the spell. Jongdae’s sole purpose for wanting to go back was to save Joonmyun’s life, and that would change history, and Chanyeol would feel obligated to stop him. I couldn’t break Chanyeol’s character like that.
So I changed it. This made the twist at the end of Chapter 7 WAY more shocking, but it also made the build-up to said twist much less dramatic.

**Here’s the original end of Chapter 7.**

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Jongdae ended up going to the chapel dedicated to Hathor to pray.

Chanyeol couldn’t blame him. He had a huge decision to make, and not a lot of time to make it. They’d sat and talked about it over dinner, talked over everything they could think of. The consequences of Jongdae going, the consequences of him staying. The likelihood - or lack thereof - that they could get Jongdae a ticket back here, if he chose to wait for another winter solstice.

There was a lot to consider, but in the end, Chanyeol wasn’t the one who had to consider it. This was Jongdae’s choice. And Chanyeol didn’t envy him having to make it.

If he was in that position, he honestly had no clue what he would do.

So Jongdae was praying on it, and Kyungsoo was standing outside the chapel, silently keeping watch. That left Kris and Chanyeol setting up the campsite for the night.

With so much rattling around in his head, Chanyeol couldn’t stop talking. "I can’t get past knowing that he might be gone by this time tomorrow," he was saying, as he unrolled one of their two remaining bedrolls. "Either he’s gone tomorrow, or he’s never going. Those are two very different outcomes. How the heck am I supposed to prepare myself for both?"

Kris snorted. "How are you supposed to prepare yourself for **either**?"

"If he stays, we need to get him vaccinated," Chanyeol murmured. "He’s already going to be vulnerable to diseases that didn’t exist in his time. And he’ll have to learn English. And get a job. Maybe we can get him a position in the museum? He’d make a great curator."

"Yeol," Kris murmured. "Do you **really** think he’s going to stay?"

Chanyeol stopped mid-movement and sat heavily on the bedroll. "No," he said. "No, I don’t. And I don’t think he **should** stay." He dropped his head into his hands. "He’s not happy here."

Familiar heat plopped down next to him. "He’s happy to be with you," Kris said gently.

"It’s not enough. He’s only been here a few weeks. Whatever this is, whatever we have, it isn’t strong enough to override his desire to go home." Chanyeol shook his head. "I can’t ask him to leave everything he knows and everyone he loves behind, just for me."

Kris didn’t answer that, but he did slide his arm around Chanyeol’s shoulders. Sighing, Chanyeol dropped his head on his partner’s shoulder.

"Listen," Kris finally said. His voice was low, uncharacteristically rough. "Whatever happens tomorrow, I’ve got your back, okay?" Chanyeol looked up at him, surprised. Kris was staring unseeingly out across the temple’s terrace. "You’re the best friend I’ve ever had, you’re practically a brother. If you need anything, **anything**, all you gotta do is ask."
Glancing to the side, Kris flashed him a crooked smile. Chanyeol felt a smile of his own creeping over his face, and he nudged Kris’s side with his elbow.

Kris wrapped his arm around Chanyeol’s neck and gave him a Dutch rub, digging his knuckles into Chanyeol’s hair. Chanyeol squawked and shoved him, which devolved into an extremely childish little slap-fight.

Eventually, Kris just yanked Chanyeol in and wrapped him in a bear hug. "You’ll be okay," he muttered. "You always make the best out of any hand you’re dealt, you’ll be fine."

"Ah, lay off," Chanyeol mumbled, but he hid his face in Kris’s collar for a long moment anyway. It’d been an age since Kris held him like this.

Kris held on for a beat too long. Chanyeol was just about to poke him and ask what cat had gotten his tongue when he finally pulled back. "Hey," Kris said, "what say we all get ourselves ossified tonight?"

Chanyeol sat back just in time to see Kris scrubbing the back of his hand over his eyes. When it dropped, his eyes were reddened. "You alright?"

"Yeah. Sand." Kris pulled his thumb across his eye. "So? You, me, that bottle of panther sweat I picked up while you were necking with Jongdae?"

"Oh no. You’re not gonna catch me drinking that coffin varnish you like again. I nearly went blind last time."

"Oh ye of little faith." Kris leaned over and dug in one of their remaining packs. He pulled out a green bottle and handed it to Chanyeol.

Before he even took it in hand, Chanyeol knew what it was. "Jameson? Where the hell did you get a bottle of Jameson? And how much did it cost you?!"

"Ran into a harp on the George Washington, and don’t you worry ‘bout the dough, Yeol," Kris said, a smile twitching around his mouth. "It’s your favorite, yeah?"

It was, and Chanyeol hadn’t had a drop in ages. Seven years into Prohibition, and it seemed every remaining bottle of Jameson in the entire US had long since been consumed. He ran his thumb over the familiar label. "I should save this for a special occasion," he said.

Kris shrugged. "Suit yourself," he said. "I’d think this was occasion enough, but either way, it’s yours."

Chanyeol resisted the urge to hug the bottle. "Thanks, Kris," he said. Kris flashed him another crooked smile.

Then, his eyes slid up over Chanyeol’s head, and his smile fell away. Chanyeol turned around to see Jongdae and Kyungsoo approaching the camp. The sun was setting now, low and deep orange on the horizon behind Jongdae’s form, and Chanyeol was struck by the picture it made. He wondered what it would have looked like when the temple was new, when Jongdae visited in his official capacity and the man walking at his side was not a stranger, but his brother, the young Pharaoh.

"Have you made your decision?" Kris asked in Greek as they approached.

"I have." Jongdae folded himself down onto the cooling sand in front of them, simple and graceful. "I cannot let Sehun’s sacrifice go to waste." He took a deep breath. "If we are right, then tomorrow, I
return to my own time."

Kris leaned over and rummaged through his bag again. This time, he pulled out a bottle of red wine, wrapped in woven reeds to protect it for travel. "Then tonight, we will celebrate your time with us," he said. His eyes flicked to Chanyeol, and he switched to English. "And you can keep that Jameson for a special occasion."

Right. Like consoling himself on the voyage home, when his bunk was too empty. "Crack it open," Chanyeol said. Kris saluted and reached into his bag for a corkscrew; Chanyeol reached out and pulled Jongdae over to his side.

He saw Kyungsoo look away from them, and didn’t care. His time was running out.

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December 21, 1927
The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut
Deir el-Bahri, Egypt

One bottle of wine between four full-grown men - all of them well-accustomed to drinking, and all of them bigger than Jongdae - was not enough to warrant even a headache the next morning. Jongdae came awake at dawn, wide awake, the knowledge of the day ahead pulling him too early from his cozy slumber in Chanyeol’s warm embrace.

Carefully, Jongdae slid out from the bedroll. As he’d lost one of their camels the day before, they’d been forced to share, two to a bedroll, a situation which Kyungsoo had been plainly uncomfortable with the night before. Now, though, Kyungsoo’s dark head was cozily pillowed on Kris’s arm, snoring away without a thought to his discomfort. Behind Kyungsoo, Kris’s eyes slit open, dark grey reflecting the flickering light of their dying fire.

Jongdae pointed at himself, and then to the north, to the chapel of Hathor. Kris tilted his head to look where he was pointing, then nodded, acknowledging him. Flashing him a smile, Jongdae went to visit his Goddess once more, and gather his strength for the day ahead.

He meant to pray, but instead he found himself thinking about Chanyeol, about hot hands wrapped around his hips and hot breath ghosting down his neck and solemn emotions whispered quietly in his ear in three languages. Chanyeol had been just drunk enough last night to be willing to express things he normally would never say, and Jongdae had been just drunk enough to feel Chanyeol’s words like flint in his gut.

He could still change his mind, he told himself. All he had to do was not put the gemstone in the furthest wall of Ra’s shrine. He could simply not do it, and he would remain here, at Chanyeol’s side.

In a world he might never understand, in a society that would never allow him to express the intense love in his heart, dependant upon a man who could easily come to resent him as a burden.

And Sehun’s immortal soul would never know peace, tormented with his life’s work left undone.
It wasn’t a choice, honestly. If he didn’t try, he’d never sleep again. Then he and Sehun both would be eternally tormented, and probably Jongin and Joonmyun too, and he’d go to the afterlife with a heart too heavy and be cast out and they’d probably all four haunt the Earth - and each other - for eternity. A fate he alone could prevent, for all four of them.

He had to try. He just wished the price wasn’t so high.

A touch on the shoulder startled him out of contemplation. It was Chanyeol, looking tired and too-solemn, his red hair wild and dark under-eye circles standing out on too-pale cheeks. Jongdae took his hand, and let Chanyeol pull him onto his feet and into Chanyeol’s arms.

They stood like that for a long moment, unmoving and silent. There was nothing to say. They both knew it was likely to be the last time they could hold each other.

Chanyeol nosed along the side of Jongdae’s head, and Jongdae turned his face up and received his kiss as a priest receives their god’s blessing. "I will miss you," Jongdae said, when they finally parted. "I will remember you forever, and hold you in my heart."

Chanyeol took a deep, shuddering breath. "Maybe you can write to me," he murmured. "When you go back, you will someday need to be buried again, yes? Tell me where your tomb will be."

Jongdae looked automatically to the west, where his half-brother’s mortuary temple stood. "If I succeed," he said, "then that temple will be dedicated to Joonmyun, not to Minseok. I will ask to be buried there. Behind the furthest wall, deep into the cliffside, where the rockslide will not harm it. After I go, after… after history has been changed, look for me there. I may never know what happens to you, but at least you can find out what happened to me."

Large hands balled tightly in Jongdae’s shirt. "I will," Chanyeol said. "I'll find you there, and read all the stories of your life. I'll never forget you, I promise."

Pressing his face into Chanyeol’s chest, Jongdae tried to force back his tears. "This should not be so hard," he complained.

Chanyeol laughed, half a sob. "Life is hard," he said simply. "But we do what we must."

"Yes. I learned that young." Jongdae reached up and pulled Chanyeol’s face down to his, kissing him one last time, hard. "The sun climbs. We must go."

They walked out of the shrine hand-in-hand. Back at their little camp, Kris was just pulling some kind of meat off the fire - bacon, it smelled like, which was possibly Jongdae’s favorite thing about this future world that wasn’t Chanyeol himself. Kyungsoo was helping to serve it, and Jongdae was struck with the thought that he was going to miss them, too. He would miss Kris quietly taking care of everyone and everything around him, he would miss Kyungsoo constantly watching and protecting, he would miss their incomprehensible jokes and their incomprehensible voices and their laughter.

Jongdae quickly wiped his eyes and sat down to eat.

"I have a few things for you," Kris said as they tore through the food. He held up a plain canvas bag he’d been carrying over his shoulder for the entire trip. "My drawings in here show every detail of your tomb, your first tomb, I mean. You’ll need to make sure everything in there is exactly the same, or we will never bring you back to life and none of this will have ever happened."

Oh. It took Jongdae a moment to wrap his brain around that. "I understand," he said, and took the bag. As the weight of it fell into his hands, he raised an eyebrow. "This is too heavy to contain only
Kris flashed a smile. "I packed you a few surprises," he said. "Don’t open it until… until after, okay?"

Grateful, Jongdae smiled back, and nodded.

Kyungsoo looked at the sky and said something. Chanyeol responded back in their language, incomprehensible. Nodding, Kyungsoo reached forward and doused the fire.

"We need to go get ready," Chanyeol murmured. "Can’t risk missing your opportunity."

They went. Inside, the ancient temple was cool and dim, light coming in through vents high in the walls. The sun’s rays were only just beginning to penetrate into the furthest chamber, a square of light hitting the wall just to the left of the carved face of Ra.

Looking at it from this angle, Jongdae could hardly believe he hadn’t noticed that the depiction of his brother held literal nothingness in his hands, a clearly carved empty space. Coming closer, he reached up to touch it, and realized there were traces of wax in the hole.

"This must have been plugged up at one time," he said, running his finger around the inside of the hole. "This is beeswax."

Light appeared on the other side of the hole. "That explains how the tomb remained sealed," Chanyeol said, somewhat muffled by the wall between them. "The only reason we have so much from your culture and so little from the cultures that existed at the same time is because your people purposely sealed the dead in air-tight tombs." Though the hole was too high for Jongdae to see through, he did spot the tip of a finger prodding the sides. "I suppose Jongin must have sealed it, to ensure the sunlight wouldn’t touch Sehun’s body?"

"And then those robbers broke the seal."

"Likely, yes."

Jongdae brushed his fingers over the carving of his brother’s face, and then went past it and down the side passage, around the back of the temple and into Sehun’s hidden tomb.

He entered just in time to see Chanyeol pick something up off the floor. "Here’s the seal. They just pushed it out - maybe that’s how they figured out there was something to find back here?"

Jongdae huffed. "I suppose I must thank the gods that they didn’t just break through the carved wall."

The light in the tomb was dim, coming from a single lamp Kris had set up near the middle of the room, but it was enough for Jongdae to see the look Chanyeol was giving him.

"Are you alright?" Chanyeol asked.

"Not in the slightest," Jongdae immediately replied. "The jewel, we should… We don’t really know how much time we have."

So, they set up the room. Jongdae was tasked with fitting the blood-filled crystal into its hole - the traces of wax were quite helpful, actually, and the gem fit snugly in place once he figured out how to orient it. Meanwhile, Kris and Chanyeol carefully lifted the top of Sehun’s sarcophagus off and set it gently to the side, and Kyungsoo, who had not yet been inside the tomb, stared in wonder at the
carvings and conspicuously refused to touch anything.

With Sehun’s body completely exposed and the gem securely in place, all they had to do was wait. Jongdae busied himself studying those last two scenes, trying to determine if there was anything they had missed, if there was a spell to chant or if he needed to stand anywhere in particular. But as far as he could tell, all that was needed was the gem, the sun, and Sehun’s body.

"It’s noon," Kris said, breaking the silence. "The sun passes Ra’s face now."

"How do we know when it will pass over the gem?" Chanyeol asked.

Kris shrugged helplessly. "We don’t. But judging by how close together they are, I would be surprised if there was an hour left." He came forward. "Jongdae… I think it’s time we said goodbye."

Jongdae reached forward, expecting to shake Kris’s hand, the greeting he’d become accustomed to over the past month. Instead, Kris pulled him into a surprisingly tight hug.

"Please take care of yourself," Kris muttered. "And take care of… Well. Take care."

"I will," Jongdae promised. "Thank you for everything."

Kris’s smile was barely more than a flash of teeth in the dark. "Here," he said. "The bag." He helped get the bag settled over Jongdae’s shoulder, and then patted Jongdae’s back. "Good luck."

Kyungsoo had nothing to say to Jongdae - not that they had a language to use, anyway - but he clasped Jongdae’s wrist firmly, and thumped him heartily on the shoulder. Jongdae nodded, taking the sentiment without needing the words. "My senet set," he said suddenly. "There’s no use in me taking it back, is there?"

Shaking his head, Kris put a steadying hand behind Chanyeol’s shoulder. "If you did, it would still be ancient, out of time. Perhaps you should just get a new one made."

Jongdae bit his lip. "Will you think of me when you play?"

Chanyeol’s eyes squeezed shut. Rubbing a hand over his back, Kris said, "Yes, of course we will. We will play in your honor."

Nodding, Jongdae accepted that. "You’ll want to get a box for it," he said, inane and helpless. What else could he say?

Kyungsoo backed away from Jongdae, and Kris squeezed Chanyeol’s shoulder, giving him a little nudge. He said something in their language.

Chanyeol nodded, and started forward. Vaguely, Jongdae saw Kris pick up the lantern and guide Kyungsoo out of the room, passing through the doorway of the tomb and leaving the two of them in near-complete darkness, only the ambient light filtered from the doorway and through the gem.

Reaching forward, Jongdae found Chanyeol’s hands, warm and huge. "Chanyeol…"

In the corner of his eye, Jongdae saw a beam of light suddenly appear. It was just barely to the left of Sehun’s sarcophagus, so thin it was barely there, tinged red.

"We’re almost out of time," Chanyeol said helplessly, and pulled Jongdae into his arms and onto his
Jongdae clung, pouring everything he had into the kiss, tears leaking from his eyes. They stood there for long moments that felt like no time at all.

"Chanyeol," Kyungsoo called, breaking them apart. He said something else, something Jongdae didn’t need to understand. He could hear the urging in Kyungsoo’s voice.

Chanyeol heaved a sigh like a sob, and pressed a hard kiss to Jongdae’s forehead. "I should go," he said. "Jongdae, I -" He stopped. Choked.

"Don’t leave me," Jongdae gasped. "Chanyeol, I’m scared. Don’t leave me yet." He clung to Chanyeol’s hands, unable to muster the strength to let go until he absolutely had to.

In the dark, he saw Chanyeol turn to look over at the light. The beam was stronger, now, and falling across the very corner of the sarcophagus. They had minutes left, maybe less. "Alright," Chanyeol said. "I won’t leave you. Not yet."

Kyungsoo called Chanyeol’s name again, even more urgent. Jongdae heard Kris hushing him, and out of the corner of his eye, saw Kris holding him back. Knowing he was being selfish but unable to bring himself to give up what might be his last moments with this incredible man, Jongdae hid his face in Chanyeol’s shoulder so he wouldn’t have to look.

"You’re going to be alright," Chanyeol whispered, holding him close. "It’ll be over soon, and everything will be alright. You’ll be with your family again, in your world again."

"But I won’t have you," Jongdae sobbed.

Chanyeol didn’t answer him, but he squeezed Jongdae tightly.

Jongdae wasn’t looking, but he knew immediately when the sunlight hit Sehun’s body, because light and heat flooded the room and the crackling roar of flames filled his ears. "I love you," he gasped out, pulling back enough to kiss Chanyeol one last time, with all his strength. "Run, run!"

Cupping Jongdae’s face in his hands, Chanyeol returned the kiss. "I love you too," he breathed. "Good luck, my Prince."

He pulled away, and Jongdae turned to face the sarcophagus, not wanting to look as Chanyeol was ripped away from him. The body was consumed in flames, and the sight froze Jongdae in place with horror. For a moment, all thoughts were replaced by What have I done?

Then he heard Kyungsoo screaming Chanyeol’s name, and turned.

Chanyeol was at the doorway of the tomb, but his hands were up in front of him as if pressed against something invisible, some barrier holding him back. On the other side, Kyungsoo beat his fists against that same invisible barrier, only to be yanked away by Kris.

Kris’s face was twisted into a mass of agony, tears streaming down his cheeks. He called something out, something Jongdae didn’t understand, but Chanyeol obviously did.

Chanyeol screamed. Kris sank to his knees, sobbing, still holding Kyungsoo back as the smaller man stared in wide-eyed horror.

Suddenly, the tomb was moving. Treasures appeared, one after another after another; lights that weren’t coming from the fire closed. Jongdae caught a glimpse of himself, a flash like a spirit
walking around the perimeter of the room, walking *backwards*.

The door of the tomb suddenly sealed, separating them from Kris and Kyungsoo.

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**Fanart:**

Check out [this gorgeous sketch of Jongdae](https://twitter.com/zanyizzy) by the very lovely @zanyizzy on Twitter!

If I get any more fanart, I will link it here!

Chapter End Notes

_As always, if you have any questions, you can find me on ask.fm._

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://archive.org) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!