

BLUE GOLD – Excerpt

Lindsay Townsend

Hunting bored Ahhotpe, but since Zoser—the Pyramid, as she'd nicknamed him—had been commanded to attend Sekenenre, she had been obliged to inveigle an invitation for herself. It would be entirely predictable of Zoser to try to advance his position and fix himself firmly in his father's favor. That she was determined to prevent. She would discredit the Pyramid and his fat cow of a mother forever.

Ahhotpe glanced at the wax manikin before smoothing down the papyrus sheet with her gold burnisher and reaching for her palette. As a pastime she enjoyed writing. The hieratic script, precise and beautiful, flowed from her pen.

“Ahhotpe to her father's mother, Tetisheri, in life, prosperity and health.” Formal greetings over, Ahhotpe indulged a little gossip. “The Pyramid's mother is here, of course, waddling into Sekenenre's tent with a lotus flower stuck behind one ear, like a great white duck in a reed bed. She looks quite a meal for a crocodile.”

Leaving it at that, Ahhotpe passed onto other matters, details concerning the state of her clothes in these humid marshes, and lavish praise of her father's hunting prowess. She was fond of grandmother, and tried to show the old lady her gentlest side, the side she kept for dependents and servants.

Ahhotpe shot a second glance at the wax figure posted just inside the doorway of her tent. Noon was not the most propitious time for magic, but the midday heat ensured that her people were resting and that consequently she would be unobserved. When she saw the shaft of sun chink through the closed tent flaps and strike the figure, the young woman laid aside her letter.

She had fashioned it well, rolling and mashing the wax between her fingers, infecting it with her hatred, until a startling likeness formed. That same narrow forehead and wide jaw, the bull neck and broad chest, the wider hips and massive legs: the Pyramid in miniature, three fingers high. Ahhotpe smiled as she settled cross-legged before the model. It was, she thought, the closest she might ever come willingly to Zoser. Invoking the proper forms, she thrust the first small copper pin deep into the manikin's heart.

“What are you doing?” A gray eye disappeared from the tent opening and was replaced by hands, deftly untying the tent-strings. Kamose stepped over the threshold and knelt beside her. She heard him catch his breath. “By Amun—the Pyramid!”

“Sssh. You'll spoil the spell.” Ahhotpe put in more pins until the model bristled like a pig. She placed an incense burner at its foot and coaxed the flame to eat into the wax. “That must be allowed to burn down.” For the first time she looked properly at Kamose. How handsome he was! “You may kiss me, brother, in greeting.”