

CHAPTER SIX

Ancient Egypt, Dynasty Six, Saqqara,

Inside the Pyramid of Queen Iput

The queen and her companion entered the tomb. The torches illuminated the rooms where the queen would one day live for all eternity. It was a small pyramid, for it was not for a king. The niches glowed with golden statues, adding splendor to the already magnificent walls, which were painted and carved with pictures of the queen, amongst the gods and goddesses. The corridor had carvings of long-stemmed lotuses along the Nile. The blue in the lotus flowers was the same color as the sky at sunrise. And the blue of the Nile was as dark as dusk. If she inhaled, she could almost smell the hyacinth scent of the flower.

“How lovely. The lotus flower is my rebirth.”

They reached a narrow opening leading to the burial chamber. She looked on as he inhaled deeply, taking in the fresh smell of cedar. Her companion asked, “Do you see your cedar coffin?”

“Yes! And a sarcophagus made out of limestone. You truly do love me.”

Her companion spoke. “Nothing but the best for you.”

Queen Iput touched the canopic vessels, which would one day hold her organs, with the same gentleness she used to use when touching his sidelock of hair. She stopped to exam the headrest.

“Have you seen the red pottery pieces that you so do love?”

She gasped. “Look how brightly polished they are. Oh, and my rock crystal cup.” She placed her hand upon her heart.

“Layers upon layers of the finest treasures. Just for you. It’s all for you. Let’s sit.” He pointed to the two chairs with a small table placed between them. “Along with your favorite pottery and statues, I had the servants also bring in your favorite wine.” He smiled. “But first I have one last thing to show you.” He handed her a small basket.

She opened it and pulled out the statue of the miniature cosset. It was the statue her *abi* had given her when she was a small child. It had the markings *Sefekhu Shenet* on its belly. Next she pulled out a shard—a small piece of engraved pottery, also from her *abi*. She placed the items into one of the niches.

“How did you get... oh, it doesn’t matter.” She wiped the corner of her eyes with her hands. This love she felt absolved the choices she made before the gods throughout her life. “I also brought something to place in my tomb.” She pulled from her bosom a small gold bracelet and placed it next to the other items, muttering a prayer to the gods under her breath.

“What did you say?” he asked.

“Nothing, I just asked the gods to never let you forget the sacrifices made for you. That’s all.” She sat down.

“Please take a sip. It is your favorite.” He handed her the wine in her rock crystal cup.

“Are you still haunted by night terrors?” She took a sip of wine.

Her companion grinned. “No, I haven’t had any since I finished your tomb. The gods must be pleased with what I did for you. Did you see the images of the goddess

Maat? The goddess of truth and justice. Remember, life is short, but death is long. You want to be judged fairly, don't you? I had her statue placed and her image carved in your tomb, because your *abi* also had her in his tomb. I thought it would please you."

She took another sip of wine. "It does please me, very much. You have made it so I will long be remembered in the afterlife." She placed her hand upon her stomach, her head tilted back, then, suddenly but slowly, she slid off of her chair, falling upon the tomb's floor. He picked her up and laid her upon the slab of rock in the burial chamber. "I feel... ill... maybe the wine has gone bad."

He placed the headrest on the slab and gingerly lifted her head onto it. "Just rest as the goddess Maat judges you for truth and justice. For you see, I only finished what you started. What you did to secure your future and lineage! So now your wine has been poisoned with opium and hemlock, and mixed with the sweetness of *shedeh*, to secure my future and lineage, for no one can know the tale you have weaved.

"And with your death I have secured the dynasty. There is no enemy I cannot defeat, for I am my own worst enemy. My poor little cosset. It is time for your secret to be buried along with you. You are my sacrificial lamb."

The queen whispered, "For the betterment of Egypt?" She tried to lift her head.

"Don't try to get up. You know one taste of the poison makes you ill. It is time for you to make your final supplication to the gods and goddesses." Her eyes began moving rapidly from left to right. "You look pale and tired, so I will do it for you as Maat takes you into the afterlife. 'You do not fear the darkness that is rising to claim you, in fact you welcome it...'" She watched him until all the images in the room intertwined, too close to death to be able to do anything, and then closed her eyes.

She heard him breathe deeply before speaking. “May the curse of Maat, daughter of Ra, follow you into the underworld. Your public and ritual life was not in harmony with the cosmic rhythms of the universe. Since you have disturbed the harmony, you must suffer the consequences. Your indestructible nature will follow you out of this natural world. Your life in the underworld will be chaotic and violent, for you opposed the right order expressed by Maat. Should you ask for forgiveness and accept Ra’s judgment of the wider order of the universe, only then will your *ka* and *ba* be forgiven. And with the help of your *akhu*, your descent from the underworld will cease and your ascent to the afterlife will begin. Accepting Ra’s judgment is the only way to cosmic harmony.” He leaned in closer. “Hurry, the god of death, Anubis is near. Do you ask for forgiveness?”

Queen Iput nodded, and then her body went limp. Her *akhu* drifted skyward toward the gods, her rebirth now complete. She had already departed when he picked up the jug of poisoned wine and the rock crystal cup, placing them into the basket he carried before leaving the tomb.