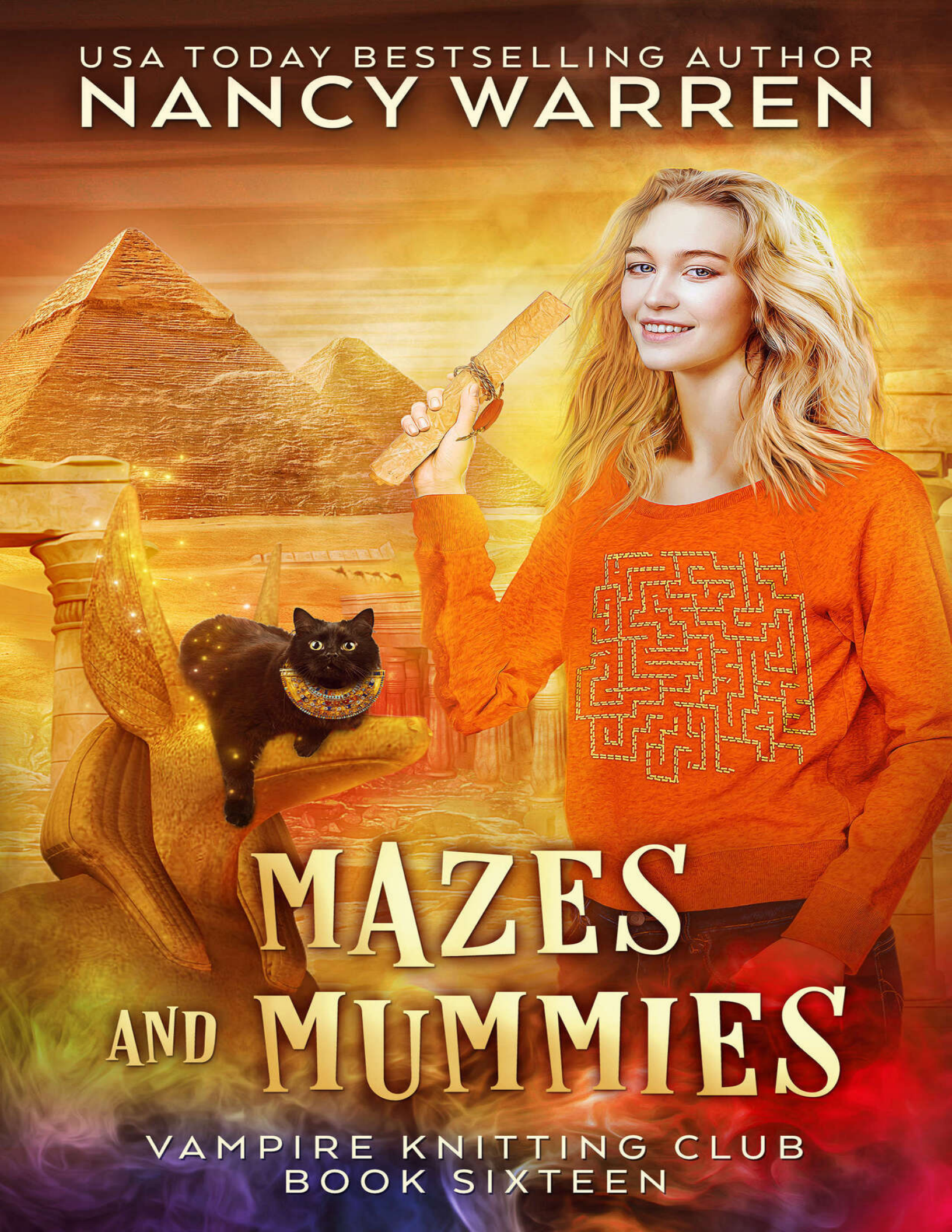
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

NANCY WARREN



# MAZES AND MUMMIES

VAMPIRE KNITTING CLUB
BOOK SIXTEEN

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# INTRODUCTION

A cryptic warning sends Lucy Swift and her vampire husband, Rafe Crosyer, to Egypt, where an ancient papyrus, a luxury Nile cruise and Lucy's archaeologist parents are about to collide.

What begins as a simple mission to authenticate a priceless manuscript soon turns deadly and someone aboard the ship seems determined to reunite the scattered pieces of a secret that has remained buried for three thousand years.

With suspicious Egyptologists, deadly "accidents," and an ancient evil stirring beneath the sands, Lucy and Rafe must unravel a mystery that stretches from the tombs of the pharaohs to the glittering decks of their floating hotel.

**Because in Egypt, some curses are real.**

**And some mysteries should stay wrapped up forever.**



Get the origin story of Rafe, the gorgeous, sexy vampire in *The Vampire Knitting Club* series, for free when you join Nancy's no-spam newsletter at NancyWarrenAuthor.com.

Come join Nancy in her private Facebook group where we talk about books, knitting, pets and life.
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## PRAISE FOR THE VAMPIRE KNITTING CLUB SERIES

"THE VAMPIRE KNITTING CLUB is a delightful paranormal cozy mystery perfectly set in a knitting shop in Oxford, England. With intrepid, late blooming, amateur sleuth, Lucy Swift, and a cast of truly unforgettable characters, this mystery delivers all the goods. It's clever and funny, with plot twists galore and one very savvy cat! I highly recommend this sparkling addition to the cozy mystery genre."

— JENN MCKINLAY, NYT BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“I’m a total addict to this series.” *****

“Fresh, smart and funny” *****

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# CHAPTER 1



It was a quiet Thursday morning in Cardinal Woolsey's Knitting Shop in Oxford, a shop I own and have come to love. It was just after ten on a beautiful September day. There were no customers in yet. My familiar, Nyx, a black cat who is small in stature but big in attitude, was busy with her morning routine, where she prowled the premises searching for any possible rodents that might have tried to party in the shop when she wasn't around to stop them. But her search was pretty desultory. She sniffed along the bottom of the old wood floor, scarred and stained from hundreds of years of footsteps walking over it. She padded past the baskets of wools and nudged her nose into the corner where the old walls didn't meet quite squarely.

Her morning rounds completed, she yawned and then jumped up onto the cash desk where I was tidying up the order book. I stroked her soft fur for a few minutes, then went back to work. It was nice to have this peace before the first customers arrived. I loved these first minutes, enjoying the colorful wools, all organized, as no hands had rummaged through them yet. I shifted the rack of hand-knitted garments that were crafted locally and with astonishing speed. My crew of late-night knitters were faster than machines.

I'd inherited the knitting shop when my beloved grandmother passed away and even though I still wasn't a very proficient knitter, I loved the feel and smell of wool, the gorgeous garments that could be crafted from it. I enjoyed helping customers choose patterns and wools or a kit they might like with everything required to make a designer cushion, a sweater or a scarf. My customers included Oxford residents and students, locals from the

outlying villages, tourists, and I had a growing online business. I'd taken to being a shopkeeper much more readily than I'd have imagined I would.

Today I'd chosen to wear a long cardigan in a deep red and gold maze stitch knitted by Dr. Christopher Weaver, who ran a private local blood bank and was a vampire.

In fact, there was a whole nest of vampires living in the tunnels beneath the shop. They'd become friends and valued customers as they knitted so quickly they were always coming back for more supplies. My cousin Violet, who worked full time at Cardinal Woolsey's, would be in soon but for now I savored the beginning of the day. Who would come in? What might they be working on? Would I be greeting mainly regular customers or might we have new clients show up? Oxford's such a tourist destination that I often found myself serving knitters from all over the globe. It was fascinating how a love of knitting or crochet bonded people who might have nothing else in common.

And then my musing was interrupted as Nyx suddenly jumped to her feet and arched her back. I turned, startled, as she made a strange sound. It wasn't a hiss. It wasn't a burp. It was sort of a meow that got strangled in the middle. Her eyes opened wide and her fur stood on end. I'll admit this strange action startled me. I glanced around wondering what was happening, but I couldn't see anything. Nyx didn't do more than flick her tail if a vampire came up from below the shop looking for a new pair of knitting needles; she merely eyed the many customers who came through the door, and was polite to the witches who sometimes dropped in. Which is to say she was a pretty even-tempered cat. So what had her so riled?

I stroked her and she settled down, but her eyes remained wide open. She was on full alert.

Relax, I told her. I wondered if she was just getting a bit bored because after a couple of years of huge excitement, things had settled down to a nice, comfortable, relaxed pace. I knew what I was doing in Cardinal Woolsey's. My knitting was improving and my cousin Violet was more or less running things while living upstairs in my old flat over the shop.

My best friend since forever, Jennifer, ran our sister shop in Cornwall and it was starting to do well. It was great fun having two of us in the business now because we could talk about shared expenses and joint projects and marketing, about new wools and new patterns. Our shops didn't make fortunes but they were doing okay.

Frankly, I didn’t need to make a fortune being married to one of the wealthiest undead creatures on the planet, but I liked to work and to think that I was continuing in my beloved grandmother's footsteps. And besides, if I hadn't taken the job seriously, my gran, who was now an undead member of the Vampire Knitting Club, would have had some strongly worded criticism. She might have passed on, but Agnes Bartlett hadn't stopped being a very present grandmother. Unlike my own parents who were off in Egypt on a dig. They'd been in Egypt as archeologists for a chunk of my lifetime and consequently I'd spent a lot of summers there and as many as I could with my grandmother here in Oxford.

I was happy that we'd fallen into a nice comfortable routine, but I wondered if Nyx was missing the excitement. I mean, in the last couple of years I'd been accidentally involved in murder investigations and some uncomfortable paranormal experiences that I hoped never to repeat. However, I felt like things were settled and it was nice. I was married to the love of my life and the love of his afterlife and while I admit I'd had some reservations going into the marriage, so far it was working. There were some big obstacles to overcome, with me destined to age while Rafe never would, but I'd never been happier. I think we were both taking each day as it came, which, as any mindfulness book will tell you, is the recipe for happiness anyway.

Perhaps I was feeling a little smug about my circumstances and that's why Fate decided to smack me upside the head. Because just as I was thinking I might go into the small kitchen at the back and put on some coffee, the door that connects the shop to a set of stairs leading to the flat upstairs flew open and my cousin Violet came rushing out of the door looking deranged.

It wasn't like she was hurrying to be on time because she was already ten minutes late for her shift and Violet never worried too much about punctuality. Presumably she thought that working for her cousin gave her a free pass on things like showing up for work on time and since I rarely bothered to say anything, I suppose she was right.

She burst into the shop, looking wild-eyed. Her long black hair, which she liked to streak with purple or pink depending on her mood, was flying all over the place where she hadn’t brushed it. One eye was fully made up, the other not so she looked a little lopsided. She was wearing a long white cotton night dress and socks. So, clearly, she hadn't come in to work.

“Lucy,” she cried, “There's somebody in the attic.” Her voice sounded panicky and rose with each word.

“What?” I was equally horrified. We stared at each other, both wide-eyed and neither of us was rushing upstairs to see what was going on. Nyx, however, had other ideas. With a growl, she streaked through the open door and up the stairs.

“Nyx, wait,” I called, thinking of all the bad things that could happen to a small over-brave cat if confronted with some kind of maniac burglar. Except how had said burglar even got in? You could enter the living quarters either through the front door, accessed by an alley behind Harrington Street, or through the shop. But we hardly ever used the front door and kept it locked. You needed a key code to get in. Could somebody have climbed in a window? All these thoughts were flying through my head as I ran after Nyx.

“Should I call the police?” Violet yelled from downstairs. She hadn't followed me but then it wasn't her cat throwing herself into possible danger. I paused to yell back, “Only if you hear me scream.”

As I got to the top of the stairs, I calmed down a bit. I’m a grown witch with some perfectly good skills. I maybe didn't need to be quite so scared. It was probably a squirrel or a bird in the attic, anyway. Above the shop is a living area, living room and kitchen basically, and then above that the bedrooms and above those the attic.

I stopped to listen, noticed that Violet had abandoned a piece of toast with marmalade, half-eaten. She had a makeup mirror set up and had been doing her makeup, eating toast and, based on her open laptop, checking emails when she’d heard the noise.

There was nobody in the kitchen or living area. I very slowly walked up the stairs to the upper level where the bedrooms were, being as quiet as I could. Nyx was ahead of me. She seemed to have lost a little of her bravery and glanced back at me from time to time. Or maybe she was just making sure I was in range so she could protect me. I stopped in the hallway. And listened. Sure enough, there was a noise coming from the attic.

Both Nyx and I turned our heads to one side, raising one ear in the direction of the attic. It was a strange noise. It didn't sound like a person moving around or like an animal either. It was more like a low hum.

I tried to convince myself it was a bird but it sounded like no bird I’d ever heard. I stood and looked at Nyx, and Nyx stood and looked at me. We

do communicate without words. I sometimes have thoughts in my head that I’m pretty sure are coming from her and I’m convinced she can read my mind. The thought in my head was, ‘this probably isn't a police matter.’ Her little head bobbed up and down, which I took as agreement.

I considered the options. I could call in reinforcements. There was a whole nest of vampires living down below the knitting shop. But it was mid-morning and a lot of them would be sleeping. Besides, I didn't really want to rush for backup just because I heard a funny noise in the attic. Violet was downstairs ready to call for help, Nyx was here to support if magic was required.

“I'm going up,” I said to Nyx. Unfortunately, there was no way to be quiet if I was going to access the attic. I had to pull down the extendable ladder and then, making sure the hinges were clicked in, which was a rickety rackety endeavor. First, I had to climb up, then lift the lid of the trapdoor leading into the attic. And then clamber onto the attic floor.

I pulled down the ladder, which made as much noise as I’d dreaded it would, then paused, listening. There was no reaction to the sudden noise. That soft hum continued exactly as before. I climbed up the stairs as quietly as I could. And then paused again. I glanced down at Nyx, who was looking a little bit worried on my behalf. The thing was, the minute I pushed open the trapdoor and started raising my head, I would be vulnerable. It would be very easy to knock me off the ladder or worse. I listened intently.

The humming seemed softer now. Maybe it was an old record player or something that had somehow got turned on. There was a lot of stuff in the attic. Some of it had been my grandmother’s and I hadn't been through every box.

Even then, I think I knew it wasn’t an old record playing. I gathered myself, pulling power in my right hand until I could feel it, warm and crackling like tiny electric shocks. I was ready to use it if I had to.

One deep breath and then I pushed up the trapdoor. But I didn't put my head up right away. I wasn’t that stupid. I waited a moment but no missiles came flying at me. Nothing untoward happened except the humming grew louder. I risked peeking up over the edge. Nothing.

The attic looked the same way it had looked when I’d last seen it, when I’d dug out my grandmother’s wedding dress on the lead-up to my own wedding. There was the same smell of dust and old wood, the boxes and trunks piled here and there, some old furniture.

There was an electric light, so I flicked the switch and a bare bulb lit the space. I could see at a glance there was no one there. Neither human nor animal nor any creature I would hesitate to meet.

Now I climbed all the way up into the attic. A second later, something soft hit my leg and I nearly screamed, before I saw Nyx had come to join me. If I stood in the middle of the attic, where the roof peaked, I could stand up straight. I did and both Nyx and I stood still, listening. I walked deeper into the attic and saw that something was glowing. Now both of my hands felt tingly and I held them up like a boxer ready to go a few rounds.

Nyx went straight toward the eerie glow and I followed, realizing that it was coming from a chest where I had stored things when I used to live here and hadn’t bothered to move them to my new home. I heaved a sigh of relief. No doubt I’d accidentally powered something up. My magic was strong, but still a little unpredictable. And in fairness, I didn't practice as often as I should. Maybe it was a forgotten magic tool letting me know I needed to bring it out and work with it. I imagined my athame glowering at me like a disappointed teacher as I bent over the chest. Except my athame was at Crosyer Manor, where I now lived. This chest was filled with bits and pieces I rarely used. Still, it was spellbound. I recited the incantation that would open the lid.

And when that opened, I gasped. My scrying mirror was glowing. I had thought it was at my current home, but I must have forgotten and left it here. A scrying mirror is used for divination mostly. As I’d worked with mine, it had given me glimpses of other places and portents of the future. It can also be used for communication between witches, but with modern social media it's pretty unproductive to try mirror-to-mirror contact when you can just open your computer or phone and with a few clicks you're talking to people halfway across the world.

I didn’t think my mirror was reminding me we hadn’t worked together for a while. I had a strong instinct that whatever was making that mirror glow and emit that unnerving hum, was something I’d be happier not to know about. For a second, I had the urge to slam the lid of the chest shut and pretend I'd never opened it.

Nyx put her front paws on the edge of the chest and reached her nose toward the glowing mirror. I couldn't be less brave than my cat. So, with an inward sigh, I reached down. As my hand grasped the handle, the glow

increased but the humming stopped as though, now it had my attention, it could pipe down.

Nothing like this had ever happened to me. Usually, the mirror minded its own business until I brought it into my practice, so I was both curious and apprehensive. I took a breath and cleared my mind. Then, as I'd been taught, I softened my gaze and let it settle on the reflective surface.

A scene came into view. At first, I couldn't make out what I was looking at. The background was both wavery and dark. But as I kept my gaze steady, the image came into focus. I was looking at a wall. It was clearly a very old wall and with scratched markings and tiny paintings in lines. I knew immediately what it was thanks to summer visits to my parents.

I was looking at hieroglyphics. That wall was most likely in Egypt.

Mirrors and painted walls reminded me of my parents out in Egypt on a dig, but also of a witch who'd once been trapped in a mirror. Very softly I said, "Hello."

I heard a rustle. And then in the mirror appeared the face of a beautiful young Egyptian woman with long dark hair, kohl-rimmed eyes and a look of deep worry on her face.

"Meri," I cried softly. Clearly, we needed to be secretive or she would simply have called me. Meritanum was a witch nearly 4000 years old. I first met her when I'd come into possession of an ancient Egyptian mirror that poor Meri had been trapped inside for millennia. I'd managed to free her and she was certainly making up for lost time, living the life she'd been frozen out of for so long. She had pretty quickly got herself up to speed on modern language and technology and formed a relationship with an Australian archeologist and wizard who worked with my parents. Pete had taken her back to Egypt with him. I could imagine how valuable she must be to the team since she'd been alive when the buried artifacts archeologists unearthed had been everyday items she would have used or at least recognized.

Obviously, she also had to be very careful not to give away too much information but I knew she made suggestions or ventured 'guesses' that helped point the team in the right direction when they were mystified. I knew she'd been happy back in modern Egypt, but the woman looking so troubled clearly wasn't. My first thought was that she and Pete had broken up.

But, again, there were easier ways to get in touch if she simply wanted girl talk. I whispered, “Is everything okay?”

She shook her head and then glanced around as though frightened of being overheard. When she spoke it was rapidly, in a low voice. “Lucy, my friend. There is great danger here. You must come to Egypt. But don't let anyone know you spoke to me.”

“What?” I said, completely stunned by her announcement. Then, “Why?”

She glanced around looking nervous. “I have very little time. I can't explain. Your father is in grave danger.”

Okay, nothing gets my attention like discovering someone I love could be in trouble. “Where are you?” I asked. “I’ll call Dad right away and warn him.”

“No!” she said. “We must act in secret. His safety depends upon it.”

This was all way too cloak-and-dagger for me. “Meri, you have to tell me what’s going on.”

She glanced to the side and moved, until she was in what looked like a small anteroom in an Egyptian temple. “Go to Cairo,” she said. “I will send you a message there.”

A message? “Can’t you come yourself?”

She shook her head and I could feel that she was tense, listening for danger. “I don’t know. I will try.”

Now I heard voices in the background. I whispered, “What's going on with my father? Please, Meri, I need—”

“Make it look like a holiday.” She was whispering now too.

“But can't I just decide to visit my parents?” I hadn’t visited them on a dig for a while and that seemed the most direct way to find out what was going on. But Meri was shaking her head. “No.” She was most firm. “The danger is not yet here; it is coming his way. Many people come to Egypt for holiday. Come as soon as you can. I will contact you in Cairo. I am so sorry, Lucy.”

Then the voices in the background grew louder. It sounded like archeologists chatting. Nothing sinister, but the mirror went dark.

Meri was gone.

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# CHAPTER 2



Now I wished for the glow back and even the annoying hum so I'd feel the channel was open, but she'd as good as hung up on me. I felt like I couldn't try to reach her without putting her in danger.

Like she said my father was in danger.

I sat down on the floor with a bump. Nyx crawled into my lap and pressed her head against my chest where my heart was still pounding. She always sensed when I needed comfort.

Meri first came into our lives when she was brought to Oxford by my mother, acting under enchantment, and Mom was nearly killed. Now Meri said my father was in danger. What was going on?

Everything had been going so well. I spoke to my parents regularly and the dig was progressing slowly and carefully as per usual. When pharaohs and high-ranking officials had prepared their great monuments for the afterlife, they'd tried to guard against looters and robbers so they'd put protective magic around their pyramids and tombs. Added curses to prevent the tools and treasures that they believed they needed for the afterlife being stolen. I wondered if that's where the danger had come from.

Had my dad somehow run into a curse?

But why would that involve me going to Cairo instead of simply going to see him on site? It didn't make sense. Besides, Meri was a powerful witch and Egyptian. She was probably better qualified than I to save my dad.

I felt more than a little worried. Meri would never contact me in such a secret way if she wasn't seriously frightened.

So much for the quiet morning I'd been enjoying. I was still holding the now still mirror. After hesitating, I slipped it into a muslin bag in case Meri messaged me again and carried it downstairs with me.

Violet was still standing at the bottom of the stairs where I'd left her.

In one hand she had her mobile phone in case this was a job for the police, but the other was clenched and ready with magic. When she saw me coming, she relaxed but her forehead creased.

"What are you doing with your scrying mirror?"

I liked Violet, even though she could be incredibly annoying. But she was family and had been a practicing witch a lot longer than I had, as well as being a more proficient knitter, so I tried to accept that I could learn a lot from her even if it did mean I had to put up with her superior comments. I could also trust her and right now I needed a witch I could trust.

I glanced around in case any customers might overhear us, but there were none. I said, "Put the kettle on while I hang up the 'Back in 10 Minutes' sign. I need to talk to you."

We rarely used the 'Back in 10 Minutes' sign because most people, if the shop wasn't open when they walked by, didn't come back. Violet's penciled eyebrow went up. She knew something serious was happening.

I opened the door and looked up and down to make sure there was no one headed for the shop, and when I saw the coast was clear, I put up the sign and closed and locked the door. My hands were shaking so badly the sign clattered against the door as I hung it up.

When I slipped through the curtain into the back room, Vi had the kettle plugged in. Maybe she looked a little strange with her nightgown and socks and the one made-up eye, but I didn't care. I was too glad to have someone I could trust to talk to. Nyx jumped up on my lap the second I sat down and once more offered me all the comfort she could. I stroked her absently.

"Don't speak until you've got your tea," Violet said, obviously seeing my distress.

I nodded and waited until she passed me a steaming cup of tea. Strong and dark with a little milk. I noticed she put extra sugar in it. Probably for the shock. I sipped it gratefully. I'd had to stop stroking Nyx to take the tea because I still had the mirror gripped in my hand. Violet reached for it.

"Why don't I take that?" she said gently. "I'll keep it safe."

I had trouble loosening my grip so she had to tug until I let go. She gave me a minute to sip some tea and then said, "Okay, why were you clinging to

your scrying mirror like it was the leg of a lover trying to run out on you?”

Maybe that wasn't the kindest analogy she could have come up with, but it did make me smile.

Then my smile faded and I told her as close to word for word as I could what Meri had told me.

Violet looked as puzzled as I had felt. “Meri warned you that your father's in terrible danger without giving you any details at all.”

“Yes.”

Vi sipped her own tea. “And just like that, you're supposed to drop everything and rush to Cairo for some mysterious message?”

“Yes,” I confirmed.

“And you don't know who you're meeting? You don't know where you're supposed to go? And you don't know why and you don't know what's going on?” After each of the increasingly pointed questions, I nodded my head.

Vi let out a breath. And then slipped the muslin bag off the mirror. She stared at it intently, but it was quiet. Just a mirror.

“And where was she when she got hold of you?”

I’d told Violet about the hieroglyphs and the small antechamber. I thought back, recapturing what I'd seen.

“I'm guessing it was a tomb or a temple. There were Egyptian hieroglyphs on the wall but I couldn’t see them clearly.”

Violet nodded briskly. “Well, that narrows it down. It could have been a temple or a tomb. Somewhere in Egypt.” She looked at me with pity. “I've never been to Egypt, but I understand there are quite a few temples and tombs. The words needle and haystack come to mind.”

“If only I had been able to read the hieroglyphs, maybe that would have helped. But they were too fuzzy.”

Violet paused and then said, “We have to remember that Meri was trapped in a mirror for thousands of years. Do you think she could be having some sort of delayed reaction? All this drama and secrecy sounds a bit like an old movie Humphrey Bogart might have starred in.”

“You think Meri could have made it up?” I was so shocked my voice rose and Nyx jerked in my lap.

“Not deliberately, but could she be having some kind of breakdown?”

“I don’t think so.” But how did I know? Maybe Violet was right and Meri was having some kind of PTSD which caused her to imagine danger.

Somehow, though, I didn’t think that was the answer to this strange puzzle. “No. I don’t think so,” I repeated.

We both drank tea and Nyx started to purr. “What are you going to do?” Violet asked at last.

I shrugged. “What can I do? If there’s any possibility that my dad’s in trouble and needs me, I have to go.” I took a breath then announced the decision I’d made. “I'm going to Cairo.”

“Alone?”

I’d barely had time to take in the magnitude of Meri’s message but I was already starting to make a plan. I shook my head. “I’m hoping Rafe will come with me. He’s always traveling around the world assessing manuscripts. I’m sure he could find a reason to go to Cairo on business, and why shouldn’t he take his wife with him and have a bit of a holiday at the same time?” I felt comforted at the thought of having Rafe with me as I ventured into whatever danger Meri had warned of.

At that point, there was a tap on the front door. Violet glanced at her watch, in irritation, but, in fact, we had been sitting here for more than ten minutes. “Don't worry,” she said, “I'll go and help the customer.”

I looked at her in her nightgown and socks, her one made-up eye, and said, “Why don't you go upstairs and finish getting dressed? I'll go.”

She looked down at herself and with a squeak of horror, Vi scampered through the door toward her suite and I went to open Cardinal Woolsey’s front door to admit our first customer of the day.

I put on a professional smile and tried to push my anxiety down while I helped a proud grandmother-to-be choose wool suitable for a baby blanket. I made suggestions, rang up the sale, listened to her recite how her daughter’s pregnancy was progressing and how much she was looking forward to being a granny and pretended that my calm, contented world hadn’t been turned upside down within the last hour.

Violet returned just as I was ushering the woman out, congratulating her again as she gripped her bulging bag.

“I’ll take over,” Vi said. “You do whatever you need to do.”

I touched her shoulder in gratitude. “Mind if I go upstairs to call Dad?”

“Of course.”

I slipped up to her flat, Nyx at my heels, and then sat down on the couch, took out my phone and called my dad. If Meri was right—if he really was in danger—I needed to hear his voice for myself. I needed to

reassure myself that, at this very second at least, he was all right. I hung onto a faint hope that this was all some elaborate misunderstanding, or as Vi had suggested, some trauma playing out, left over from Meri's long imprisonment.

The call connected after a few rings, and my father's face appeared on the screen, sunburned and smiling, wearing the same battered hat he'd owned for as long as I could remember. I felt so much relief that I couldn't say anything.

"Lucy! What a lovely surprise," he said. "Is everything all right?"

That question alone nearly undid me. If he was checking I was okay, he must not be in imminent danger. In fact, he looked relaxed. Happy. Dusty, yes, sweaty, yes, but that was normal. Behind him I could see pale stone and a slice of impossibly blue sky.

"I'm fine," I said quickly. "I just—well, I was thinking about you and I wanted to check in."

He laughed. "We've been a bit busy. Haven't we, Susan?"

My mother leaned into frame then, brushing hair out of her eyes. She was flushed, animated, and unmistakably in her element. If two people were born to be husband and wife archeologists, it was my folks.

"Lucy, darling," she said. "It's wonderful to hear from you. We've had an extraordinary week."

Extraordinary was not a word my parents used lightly.

"What's going on?" I asked, trying to keep my voice casual.

They exchanged a look. Not secretive exactly—but cautious.

"Well," my father said slowly, "we can't really go into details. Not yet."

My stomach tightened.

"But," he continued, brightening, "I can tell you we've uncovered something quite unusual."

My mother nodded. "It's the structure more than anything," she said. "We've never seen anything quite like it."

That caught my attention. They'd spend literally years uncovering a single wall. "Structure?"

"It was Susan who found it," Dad said, his voice full of pride in his wife's cleverness. "It was just a depression in the sand, really, but when we dug down we found, well, this." My father turned the phone, angling it away from his face. The image wobbled, then steadied, and suddenly I was looking at stone walls cut with deliberate precision. Even through a grainy

screen, I could tell this wasn't a typical burial chamber. I'd seen enough of them in my time to know that this was somehow different.

"It's a maze," he said, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

"A maze?" I echoed.

"Yes. Not metaphorically," he added quickly. "Literally. Corridors doubling back on themselves. False turns. Dead ends. It doesn't conform to any known funerary layout we're familiar with."

I leaned closer to the screen.

"Why would anyone do that?" I asked.

"That's exactly the question," my father said, sounding absolutely delighted. Dad loved a mystery, uncovering a bit of new knowledge about the ancient world. "It's not defensive in the usual sense. As you know, the pharaohs and officials guarded against intruders into their tombs." He had his lecturing voice on which filled me with affection. My father was first and foremost a scholar who loved to share knowledge with others.

"Let me show you." The phone flickered, the image blurring for a moment as my dad walked into the entrance of the tomb.

"Signal's not great down here," he said apologetically. "We can't go much farther in while I'm on the call."

I nodded, though unease was starting to coil in my chest. "Is everything safe?" I asked carefully. "I mean, have you had any trouble? Accidents? Anything strange?"

They both looked surprised.

"Nothing at all," my mother said. "Why?"

"I don't know." I thought rapidly. What would put my parents in danger? The word treasure popped into my mind. "Is it a great find?" I asked. "Gold and jewels and so on?" I pictured the King Tut treasures. He'd been a minor pharaoh and the amount of gold and jewels buried with him would have thieves salivating.

A bitter laugh shook my mother. "Of course not. Anything valuable was looted long ago. There are some unusual hieroglyphs in the burial chamber, and in the stone tomb where the mummy would have rested. When thieves looted these sites, little did they know they were depriving future generations of such a wealth of knowledge."

They might be sorry this tomb had been looted, but I wasn't. I could rule out newly-discovered treasure as a motive for my parents to be in danger.

“Even worse,” Mom went on, “it’s been vandalized. We can’t even tell who this tomb belonged to; every trace of their identity has been chiseled off the walls. Such a senseless act of violence.”

My father smiled. “Now, Susan, you don’t need to be so cautious with Lucy. While we haven’t found golden funeral masks or jewels, we’ve found some extremely old papyri that appear to be from the Book of the Dead. And some lovely and interesting items that we’re busy cataloging. You don’t need to worry about us, Lucy. We’re fine. Truly. This is one of those digs you dream about your entire career.”

The image froze for a second, then resumed, more pixelated now.

“We should go,” my mother said. “The team’s waiting.”

“All right,” I said, forcing a smile. “I’ll let you get back to it. Take care of yourselves,” I couldn’t help adding.

I sat there for a long moment, phone in my hand. I felt relieved, obviously, but worry still plagued me. Mom and Dad were fine, I told myself. They sounded fine. They looked fine. Their dig sounded honestly interesting rather than something that could put them in danger.

And yet Meri had been afraid.

That was the problem.

Meri had used a scrying mirror to warn me, which suggested something was very wrong—even if my parents couldn’t see it yet.

I thought about the maze my father had shown me. About deliberate dead ends. About paths designed not to stop you, but to delay you long enough for something else to happen. I touched the design on my sweater. How strange that today, of all days, I’d be wearing a maze design on my sweater.

I thought about Meri glancing over her shoulder. The voices that had made her so cautious. She wanted me to go to Cairo.

I picked up my phone again and this time, I called my husband. We had a vampire knitting club meeting that night, but I wanted to make sure he’d be home when I finished work so we could spend some time alone, just the two of us.

Being married to a vampire had its ups and downs, but there was no one I trusted more than Rafe. I couldn’t wait to share my fears with him and get his feedback and, more importantly, his support. If I was to undertake a journey to Egypt I definitely wanted him by my side.

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# CHAPTER 3



I wasn't a great help in Cardinal Woolsey's that day and Violet finally snapped at me. "Lucy, go home. You're driving me mad. You can't settle to a single task and you're giving off weird energy. I'd rather manage the shop on my own than have to keep checking on you all day."

Her manner wasn't exactly supportive but I knew she was right. I couldn't concentrate and when a customer came in to ask about classes, I nearly asked if she was an out-of-town vampire. Luckily, Vi smoothly stepped in and gave the poor woman a brochure of our classes for humans. I was seriously losing it. "Are you sure you'll be okay?"

"I can always call Gladys or Hester if I get desperate." They were both undead knitters who lived beneath the shop. Gladys loved helping in Cardinal Woolsey's and was very good with customers, even if her ideas were a little old-fashioned, while Hester would complain about being asked to help, but had a much more youthful vibe. I nodded, grateful to be able to escape. I needed to think. I needed some advice. I'd been thinking of Rafe but Violet, clearly reading my thoughts on my face, said, "Why don't you consult Margaret Twigg?"

"Margaret Twigg?" Nyx made a growling sound in the back of her throat at the mention of that witch's name. I felt like growling too. Margaret Twigg was a powerful witch and the head of our coven. She was also a pain in the butt and had once catnapped Nyx, though that didn't end well for her. She might be powerful, but it turned out that Nyx and I had more power than anyone, especially Margaret, had realized. Margaret and I had an uneasy relationship. Respect tinged with dislike might best describe it. Once more reading my expression, Vi said, "I know you don't like her, but

she’s been practicing a lot longer than you have. She might have some ideas. At least see if she can give you a strong protection spell.”

I appreciated that Violet was trying to be helpful but I also had the family grimoire that I could consult if I needed protection. And I had Rafe. Still, I nodded, telling her I’d keep her advice in mind. Then I scooped Nyx up and headed for home, taking the scrying mirror with me.

I parked in the gravel sweep at the front of Crosyer Manor and sat for a moment, looking up at the pale stone façade that had survived centuries of British weather, war and conflict. The manor house had been built by Rafe in Elizabethan times, on land gifted to him by the queen herself. The world was full of plots and treasons and everyone with a decent income was slightly paranoid. Rafe was mortal then, and had built the house intending to live his human-spanned life there with the woman he loved: Constance, a witch like me. However, fate had other plans and one of those treasonous plots had ensnared Rafe and he’d nearly been killed, being turned into a vampire just before he passed. He’d managed the next five hundred years with the help of a faithful retainer named William Thresher and succeeding generations of Threshers looking after him and his interests. He’d held onto the manor house thanks to various strategies. Crosyer Manor, like Rafe, had survived by adapting, with new wings added, changing garden design and even car parking. Now it was my home, too, and I’d come to love it.

My stomach still felt tight from Meri’s warning. I’d spoken to my parents and heard their voices and seen the sun on their faces, and if anything, that made me more unsettled, not less. It was like being handed a cup of tea and told everything was fine while smoke curled under the door from the next room.

I took a deep breath and got out of the car.

Henri appeared immediately, as if he had been waiting behind a shrub all morning for me to return. Which could have been true. When I’d first met Henri, he’d been a sad spectacle of a peacock, with skimpy tail feathers that dragged behind him, but his appearance had improved enormously and he’d developed, along with better tail feathers, a certain entitled attitude.

He emerged from behind a clipped yew hedge with the air of a creature who owned the grounds outright and merely permitted us to live here. His feathers were sleek, his head held high, and his dark eyes fixed on me with a look that I can only describe as demanding.

“Hello, Gorgeous,” I said, reaching into my bag.

I always had something for Henri. You don’t survive living on an estate with a bossy peacock if you don’t learn that lesson quickly. I produced a small bag of wild game pellets I bought at a specialty store and held a few out in my palm. Henri pecked at them with little enthusiasm, as if he’d been hoping for something more interesting. Henri really loved steak but it was a very rare treat.

I let myself in, listening to the familiar noises of the house. Somewhere a clock ticked. A draft sighed through an old corridor. And beneath it all there was the faint mouth-watering smell of food.

That meant William Thresher was in his kitchen cooking either for me, I hoped, or for his catering business. Probably both.

Rafe was home too. I could always tell. I wasn’t sure whether it was my witch senses or just the fact that my love for him was so strong, but I felt his presence.

I headed toward his study and as I grew closer, I heard his voice, precise and well-modulated. He was probably consulting with a client or another expert in rare manuscripts, his specialty. I’d bother him later.

Reversing course, I headed for the kitchen.

William was probably best described as the estate manager, though he also acted as butler and chef. He loved to cook, but working for a vampire didn’t give him much scope for his talents. That was one reason he’d been delighted when I entered the scene. He’d also recently started a catering business which was doing well. I loved it, since he often experimented on me when he was trying out new dishes.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, and always impeccably turned out, even when he was in the middle of cooking. He had a habit of looking as though he’d been ironed. He was both quietly deferential and entirely unflappable, as though nothing could possibly surprise him anymore.

That was understandable, given he worked for a vampire and his wife, who was a witch. “Lucy,” he said with a smile when I entered the kitchen. “You’re just in time for lunch.”

“But you weren’t expecting me until after work.”

He looked a bit offended though there was a twinkle in his eye. “In my line of work, one’s employers are always expected.”

“What’s for lunch?” There were a lot of very delicious-looking items on the marble countertop.

“Crostini with fresh figs, whipped goat’s cheese, and local honey, to start,” he told me. “Followed by poached turbot, champagne beurre blanc, samphire and trout roe and for dessert roasted Oxfordshire honey figs, mascarpone cream, pistachio praline and fig leaf syrup.”

“Wow,” I said. “And you whipped up all this hoping I’d be home for lunch?”

His lips twitched but he kept a straight face. “I may use some of these dishes in a small party for an Oxford don that I’m catering.”

“And they’re our own figs?” I asked, looking at the basket of fresh figs on the counter.

“Of course. Olivia’s particularly pleased with this year’s crop.” Olivia was William’s younger sister and while he was in command of the house, her domain was the garden. She was a talented gardener who was often knee-deep in rich earth. She grew the figs against the west-facing wall in the kitchen garden. She took pride in growing as much of what we ate as possible.

“I’ll eat in the conservatory,” I said, thinking how nice it would be to sit there and eat figs grown in our own garden. I’d have said I was too stressed to eat, but smelling the food stirred my appetite. “Everything smells so delicious, I can’t wait,” I said, realizing how true that was. A little normalcy would really help me get a grip. At least, I hoped so.

“You’re a pleasure to cook for,” he told me.

I knew this was true. Rafe didn’t eat the same things as I did, obviously, but William could use his cooking talent on me. He also used me as a menu tester which was a role I was happy to play.

William ran his catering business with the same precision he did everything else: menus planned, staff scheduled, every detail of presentation meticulously prepared. Violet worked for him sometimes, usually when she needed extra money or when she was trying to avoid doing something else she’d promised to do. She pretended she found the catering work dull, but she always came home with a little extra sparkle in her eyes and a hamper of gourmet leftovers.

“Is Violet helping you cater this one?”

Something in William’s face shifted, very slightly. “Yes, I believe so.”

By the time I got to the conservatory, Rafe was there. He looked up the moment I entered, as if he’d known I was there before my footsteps reached the threshold.

“You’re home early,” he said, and his expression softened in that way it always did when he looked at me. Rafe could be worldly and sophisticated to the point of intimidation, particularly when he was in public or dealing with people who bored him, but at home he was different. He was tall, dark and handsome with black hair, gray eyes and a firm mouth. When he smiled at me, my heart stirred in my chest.

I crossed the room and kissed him.

His lips were cool against mine, as they always were. It wasn’t unpleasant. It was simply Rafe. There had been a time when the coolness startled me, when it reminded me too sharply of what he was, but now it was as familiar as the sound of his voice. Love adjusts.

He held me away from him and studied my face. “Something’s upset you,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Tell me,” he said and we settled at a round table that gave a view of the garden without letting any sun in. Nyx was curled in her favorite chair, tail twitching gently in her sleep.

I took a breath and told him everything.

I told him about Nyx’s strange reaction, the humming in the attic, and the mirror glowing like a captured moon. I told him about Meri’s face appearing, frightened, and how she’d looked over her shoulder as if the air itself might be listening. I repeated Meri’s words as closely as I could, telling me my dad was in grave danger, that I should go to Cairo and make it look like a holiday and she’d send me a message once I was there.

As I spoke, I watched Rafe’s face for any sign of alarm, but he didn’t change expression. He listened the way he always did, calm and focused.

I paused when William entered bearing a tray with cutlery and my first course, beautifully prepared. Even though he was only serving me and we were home, he’d put his suit jacket back on. He really was the ideal servant.

“Anything for you, Rafe?” he asked. There was always a cool vacuum thermos at the ready for my husband, but he shook his head. He tended to take his nourishment in the morning and evening, skipping lunch.

After William left, I took a bite of the delicious crostini. Between bites I told Rafe about calling my parents and seeing their excitement as they’d shown me stone corridors that turned in unusual ways. I described the maze.

Rafe was quiet for a long moment. “That doesn’t sound like any Egyptian tomb I’ve ever heard of.”

“No. That’s why my folks are so thrilled.”

“Meri doesn’t frighten easily,” he said.

“No,” I agreed. I’d tried to convince myself she could be suffering from some kind of delayed PTSD, but deep down I’d known better and Rafe confirmed it. Meri had been through a long imprisonment but she’d emerged more determined to enjoy her life. And she’d been doing that, until now.

“And she wouldn’t use a scrying mirror to communicate with you unless she believed secrecy was vital,” he added, pretty much echoing what I’d said to Violet.

That word—secrecy—made my skin prickle. It had been the undercurrent of everything: Meri whispering, the call cutting off, even the isolation of a dig out in the desert.

“Mom and Dad are so excited. They told me about the maze like it was the most wonderful thing they’d ever seen.”

“That is what worries me,” Rafe said softly.

I looked at him.

“Your father is not cautious when he is excited.”

I let out a breath. “So you think I should take Meri’s warning seriously? You think I should go to Cairo?” I wasn’t asking his opinion so much as hearing for myself how the words sounded out loud. I’d been to Egypt enough times as a youngster and teenager that I felt little excitement at the prospect. To me, Egypt had meant heat, boredom, missing my friends, being an unpaid gofer on digs.

“I think we should go together. A married couple enjoying a holiday.”

Relief flooded through me so hard it made my eyes sting. “I was going to ask you,” I admitted. “But I didn’t want to drag you into this. Whatever this is. It’s going to be over a hundred degrees every day.” Desert sun and vampires weren’t a great combination.

Rafe’s expression was faintly amused. “Lucy, being dragged into your affairs is one of the joys of my life. As for the sun, I’ll manage.”

He reached across the table and took my hand. His fingers were cool, but his grip was steady, grounding. “We’ll go to Cairo and find out what has frightened Meri so much.”

When William arrived with my fish course, I told him truthfully that the starter had been perfect. “And those figs were the highlight.” I turned back to Rafe. “Did you know we can grow figs in the walled garden?”

He looked coolly superior. “My darling, we’ve been growing figs on this estate for four hundred years.”

I tucked into my turbot, reminding myself that all Rafe’s centuries of experience had to count for more than just growing figs. When we went to Egypt on this mysterious adventure, I would be very glad to have him by my side. “I don’t know what we’re supposed to do once we get to Cairo,” I suddenly blurted. What if Meri’s message didn’t reach us? I hadn’t been in Cairo for a long time but I remembered it as busy, crowded and chaotic. She didn’t know when or if we were even going. How could she possibly be certain her message would reach us?

Rafe studied me for a moment. “Meri and you are both powerful witches. I feel certain she will find a way to get a message to you, and you to receive it.”

The scrying mirror. Of course. I would take it with me. At least it gave me some way of reaching the Egyptian witch.

I felt calm enough to enjoy every bite of my dessert.

William brought me coffee and then, as though he’d waited for my meal to be over, Rafe said, “There’s something I want to show you.” The way he said it suggested that it was important, though with all the worry I was carrying about my parents, I wasn’t sure I’d be able to concentrate on anything else.

I know my face doesn’t hide my emotions the way Rafe’s does. I might as well have spoken my thoughts aloud. He said, “Strangely, I’ve been asked to go to Cairo to evaluate a manuscript. Come into my study and I’ll show you.”

“Wow,” I said, incredibly relieved I wasn’t dragging him off on a wild goose chase. At least he had work of his own taking him to Egypt. “What a coincidence.”

“Isn’t it?” he said. After a pause, he continued. “I never trust in coincidence.”

My eyes widened. “You think your manuscript could be connected to my father?”

“Let’s just say that I’m more interested in evaluating this manuscript now than I was this morning.” He held out his hand. “Come, I’ll show you.”

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# CHAPTER 4



"This was delivered yesterday," Rafe said when we reached his study. It's a wonderful room, scholarly and modern with ancient texts and high-tech microscopes. Some incredible books and manuscripts have come through here. First editions of famous novels, early bibles and, of course, plenty of fakes. Rafe authenticated what was real, gave the bad news to the owners of forgeries, and valued collections for insurance purposes or for sale. Of course, he had a fine collection of books in the library, many of which he'd purchased new and which were now rare and precious. He pulled up a second chair so I could sit beside him, then reached for a folder and opened it. He switched on a desk lamp so I could study the pages more clearly.

I flipped open the folder and on top was a formal letter on expensive paper. The letter was handwritten in a florid hand as though the letters themselves were showing off.

*My dear Mr. Crosyer,*

*I hope you won't mind my writing to you directly. I have taken the liberty of sending, by hand, a folder of photographic copies of several Egyptian papyrus fragments in my possession. I prefer not to circulate such material electronically at this stage.*

*They belonged to my late father and have been described to me as funerary texts from the Middle Kingdom. I would be grateful if you could advise on their significance and value.*

*I am considering donating the material to the Hennings Institute for Ancient Civilizations in Boston, with a view to it being loaned to the Grand Egyptian Museum near Cairo. As you will appreciate, a clear assessment will be important before I proceed. My father acquired the papyrus many decades ago through perfectly legitimate channels and I am confident of the provenance.*

*I am currently in Cairo with the originals. If the fragments are of interest, I would be pleased to arrange your travel to examine them in person.*

*I would be grateful if you would treat this in confidence.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Randall Whitaker*

I took the letter from the top of the pile and studied the photocopies.

"The papyrus looks in suspiciously good shape for its age," I said, leaning closer, automatically assessing, the way I'd watched my parents and other archeologists do over the years. They still make papyrus today so it's important to work out first of all whether the papyrus is old or not.

"I agree but that doesn't mean it's not authentic. It could have been carefully preserved." I was no expert in hieroglyphs but I understood the basics. "It looks like part of a Book of the Dead," I said.

“Technically these are more like coffin texts that would predate the Book of the Dead, but the spells are similar to what would come later.”

“Do you know this Whitaker?” I asked. Rafe tended to know people who dealt in ancient manuscripts. He had contacts all over the world. Alive and undead.

“No.” He paused. “I met his father once. A garrulous old bore. Very rich and very full of himself. Liked to collect expensive things simply to have them.” Rafe’s eyes flicked to mine. “But I never heard about this particular treasure. This Randall Whitaker says it belonged to his father, and that it was acquired decades ago through ‘perfectly legitimate channels.’ Which makes me wonder why Whitaker senior didn’t boast about it when I met him. He certainly boasted about everything else.”

I hid my smile. Rafe had an incredible collection of art and manuscripts but he never boasted, not even to me. He’d sometimes tell me the story of how he acquired one piece or another. Often, he’d bought the works straight from the artist when they were poor and needed the money. That’s where the Van Gogh came from and the Matisse. He often, and very quietly, loaned his works out to art galleries so regular people could enjoy them too.

“If his father was dealing in ancient Egyptian artifacts, shouldn’t some university or museum have been involved? Even if it was decades ago?”

Rafe’s expression suggested he agreed.

“And now the son wants to donate it?”

“You know the kind of thing, Lucy. There will be a brass plaque beside the treasure saying something like On Loan from the Private Collection of Randall Whitaker. Or, perhaps, The Whitaker Estate.”

“He sounds awful.”

“If he’s like his father he’s a blowhard with more money than taste.”

I felt my nose wrinkle. Not the sort of man Rafe usually wasted his time with. I didn’t like the sound of this Randall Whitaker either.

“Randall Whitaker inherited a substantial fortune and his father’s collection of antiquities. He seems very keen to make a name for himself by donating or loaning some of his father’s treasures.”

“But that’s good, right? If he can get important treasures out of his private collection and into museums where they can be enjoyed by everyone, that has to be good.”

Rafe leaned back in his chair. “In theory, of course you’re right,” he said. “But I do not believe that Randall Whitaker is a philanthropist so

much as a man who wants his family name on plaques in the great museums of the world." He turned to me. "He's very keen to get my opinion on the papyrus. He had the file delivered by hand, is offering to pay my expenses to Cairo."

"Of course he is," I said. "He wants to hire the best." I was immensely proud of my husband, one of the leading experts in the world in ancient manuscripts.

He gave me a slight smile. I think my pride sometimes amused him. But then a lot of things about me seemed to amuse him. He wasn't being unkind, I just think he'd never imagined being married to an American woman hundreds of years younger than he was. In fairness, marrying someone who once worked for the first Queen Elizabeth hadn't been on my dating profile either. But love is love and we were getting used to our life together.

"Is it a coincidence that he has asked me to meet him in Cairo with an ancient papyrus manuscript at the same moment an ancient witch is telling you your father is in danger?" I didn't think he expected an answer but I gave him one anyway.

"Coincidences do happen, Rafe." Still, I had a prickly feeling at the back of my neck. Deep down I didn't think this was a coincidence either. "But how could a manuscript some American collector's father bought years ago be connected to my dad?"

"I have no idea. Perhaps it isn't. And yet…"

And yet. Rafe didn't get witchy premonitions the way I did, but he had centuries of experience in everything from Elizabethan treachery to modern skulduggery. If he hadn't seen and experienced everything life had to offer, he'd come pretty close.

"Is it genuine?" I asked, glancing at the copies he'd laid out.

Rafe's gaze sharpened. "I don't know yet. That is why he wants me. I've only had a cursory glance at the images but it's interesting. How are you with hieroglyphics?" Naturally, Rafe had a solid understanding of the ancient Egyptian writing using drawings and symbols. I had a reasonable knowledge. I'd learned the rudiments when I'd spent summers with my parents on their digs, but I was no expert by any means.

"Have a look and see if you can make any sense of the meaning of the text fragments," he suggested. Rafe, unlike my parents, wasn't one to throw

pop quizzes at me to see if I was learning anything useful. He rarely made idle suggestions, so I studied the copies.

He didn’t leave my side so I assumed he wanted to take part in this exercise. I hoped I didn’t make a fool of myself in front of my brilliant husband while I attempted to decipher the text. Even with the bright light of a specialist lamp I needed the magnifying glass he handed me.

There were three pieces of papyrus that had been joined at some point, though the edges were ragged and there were obvious gaps. Altogether, the surviving section was perhaps eighteen inches long and not much more than half a foot high.

The papyrus itself was a yellowish brown, darker in some places than others. I could see the fibers running across and down, strips of plant that somebody had pressed together thousands of years ago.

Most of the writing was black, although there were occasional sections in red.

“It seems remarkably well preserved.”

“It is. The format is consistent with a funerary text. The materials appear correct. The pigments are what I'd expect, although naturally I'd need to study the original and have proper testing before authenticating it.”

“So Randall hasn’t inherited a very expensive fake?”

“I don't believe so.”

That was something. “Then what's wrong with it?”

Rafe was silent for a moment. “Do you remember what your parents taught you about the Egyptian Book of the Dead?”

“Mostly that there wasn't one.”

His eyes gleamed briefly. “Very good.”

I was ridiculously pleased. I'd grown up with two archeologists. Some information had stuck. “It wasn't a single book,” I continued, recalling my parents trying to get me as excited about their favorite subject as they were themselves. “The Book of the Dead was a collection of spells and instructions that were supposed to help a dead person get safely through the afterlife. And people didn't necessarily have all of them.”

“Precisely. There were many versions, copied over a very long period. They were adapted for particular individuals.”

I looked down at the fragment. “So this could be somebody's personalized version.” I could see the stick figure drawings of birds and

servants. I thought there might be a section depicting the weighing of the heart but there was a hole in that part so I wasn’t certain.

“Yes.”

“You don’t sound too sure.”

Rafe pointed to a line of hieroglyphs. “This passage concerns the preservation of the deceased's name. The ren.”

I’d heard the term but it had been a while. “The ren is the person’s identity, right?”

“Yes. And this is where the text becomes interesting. A conventional funerary text might express the desire that the deceased's name endure. The precise wording varies enormously, but the concept is common enough.”

“Because if your name survived, you survived.”

I thought of Randall Whitaker keeping his family name alive through an engraved plaque on a museum wall. Have people really changed so much?

Rafe indicated the line. “How would you read that?”

“My name shall live on?” It was a guess.

“I think it’s closer to ‘My name shall endure in the living.’ An unusual construction.”

He moved his finger carefully along the text, past three birds. “Here is another passage I found interesting. This section appears to concern the return of the soul.”

“That sounds normal.”

“It would be.”

There was that tone again.

“If that were what it said.”

I waited. “The expected meaning would be something along the lines of the soul returning to its body. Instead, the wording seems to indicate entering a body.”

“What body?”

“That's an excellent question.”

I could feel my forehead wrinkling as I tried to make sense of this. “Someone else's?”

“Possibly.”

I looked at the ancient fragment again. It seemed less like an old piece of history now. “Could the scribe simply have made a mistake?”

“Of course. Scribes made errors. They copied texts incorrectly, misunderstood older texts, modernized language, omitted passages. Some

were better educated than others.”

“But you don't think that's what happened.”

Rafe didn't answer immediately. We both studied the text until he said, “Once could be an error. Twice could be coincidence. But three times? That’s a deliberate pattern.”

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# CHAPTER 5

I wasn't as sophisticated at interpreting this ancient language as he was. A pattern of mistakes sounded ominous. "Show me."

He pointed to another line. "This is difficult because part of the passage is missing. But these words are clear."

He translated slowly. "'My ren shall not perish.'"

"Okay."

"'My ren shall not be forgotten.'"

"Still sounds like the Book of the Dead."

"Yes." He moved farther along. "Then we have something I would translate as, 'My ren shall pass…'" He stopped.

"Pass where?"

"That's the difficulty. The next section is damaged."

I looked at where he was pointing and he was right. There was a hole in the papyrus and the area around the hole was blackened so it was unreadable. "Maybe the original will be better," I said hopefully.

"Maybe, but the surviving word after the gap can mean vessel. Container. Receptacle."

I stared at him. "'My ren shall pass from vessel to vessel'?"

"Perhaps."

"Why would anyone give away their ren? I thought the whole point of this was to preserve the identity."

I looked at the fragment again. There was a small painted scene above part of the text. I'd assumed it was simply decorative, although I should have known better. Ancient Egyptians didn't seem to waste much space on decoration that didn't mean something.

A woman knelt before a larger figure I assumed was a god. Part of the scene had been lost where the papyrus was torn.

Farther along was another female figure. I looked from one to the other. “Is that the same woman?”

Rafe bent closer. “I believe so.”

“How can you tell?”

“The dress. The wig. The identifying symbols.”

I pointed. “But she's there.”

“Yes.”

“And she's also there.”

“Apparently.”

He picked up the magnifying glass again. “The second figure isn't merely a repetition.”

I squinted but even with the magnifying glass, I was looking at a photocopy of an ancient papyrus that was faded and damaged. “What is she doing?”

“That is what I'm trying to determine.”

I looked closer. The first woman seemed solid. The second was more stylized. There were markings between the two figures that I couldn't interpret. “It almost looks like she's walking out of herself.”

Rafe went still.

I turned to him. “What?”

“Say that again.”

I repeated my earlier words. “It looks like she's walking out of herself.”

He studied the figures for another few seconds. “Interesting.”

I looked at the next section. There was one hieroglyph I did recognize. Mouth. I'd seen it often enough. A simple shape representing an open mouth.

Rafe followed my gaze. “This may relate to the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.”

I knew that one too. “That's where they magically opened the dead person's mouth so they could breathe and speak and eat in the afterlife.”

“Among other things, yes.”

“See? I was paying attention when my parents dragged me around museums.”

“I never doubted it.” I definitely heard amusement. Then his expression became serious again. “This phrase is curious.” He translated. “‘When the

scattered words are made whole, the mouth shall speak.’”

I felt a little prickle at the back of my neck. I didn’t even know why. “And then?”

“The final section is damaged but I believe it says, ‘And the name shall be bound.’”

Neither of us spoke for a moment. Finally I said, “Bound where?”

“I don't know.”

I looked over the pieces of papyrus. “‘When the scattered words are made whole.’ Could that mean these pieces being put together?”

He glanced at me in surprise. “It’s an interesting interpretation. Yes. Possibly.”

I leaned back in my chair. “So Randall’s dad has part of a Book of the Dead that says someone's name will live on, their soul can go into another body, and if a bunch of scattered words are put together and somebody says them aloud, that name gets bound somewhere.”

“You’re stretching a bit, but that’s about right.” He looked back down at the papyrus again. “And look at the pronouns.”

I blinked. This was really starting to remind me of boring sessions with my parents studying the minutia of a society long gone. “The pronouns are bothering you?”

“Funerary texts were frequently written in the first person, so that in itself is not unusual. But look at the repetition here.”

He translated fragments as he went. “‘I shall return.’” He pointed to another section. “I translate this as ‘I shall enter.’” He pointed again. “I shall remain.” He sat back. “This doesn't feel like a text intended to guide a dead person through the afterlife.”

“What does it feel like?”

He was silent long enough that I turned to look at him. “I don't know.”

“Yet,” I said.

He glanced at me. Nodded. “Yet.”

I turned my attention back to the papyrus. There was something else I'd noticed. “Shouldn't the person’s name be on it?”

Rafe's gaze sharpened. “Yes. Normally.”

“So, where is it?”

“Missing.”

“Do you think it’s because this part's damaged?”

“Perhaps.” He pointed to a ragged section. “Here is where I would expect an identifying name or title.” The papyrus had been torn almost cleanly through that portion.

“So, somebody went to all this trouble to make sure their name survived forever, and now nobody knows what it was. That's kind of ironic. It’s a shame we don’t have the full document.”

“Even having this much is extraordinary. If it’s authentic.”

“You’re really looking forward to seeing the original, aren’t you?” I knew my husband. He was excited about studying the ancient papyrus, not for its commercial value but for its historic and cultural significance.

“I am,” he admitted.

“And when I spoke to Mom and Dad they said they’d uncovered parts of an ancient Book of the Dead.” I swallowed. “How can these two things not be related?”

Rafe’s eyes were cool and steady. “I would hazard a guess that they are.”

I was having trouble believing this wasn’t a genuine coincidence. “How is it possible that some guy from New York brings a papyrus to Egypt that’s been in his family for decades at the exact same time my parents uncover a related papyrus? It doesn’t make sense.”

He put a hand on my shoulder. “And how is it possible that I am nearly 500 years old and you aren’t even a tenth of that and yet we are married?” I opened my mouth and shut it. Okay, he had a point. Some things that seemed impossible made sense when you had all the facts.

“I will take this commission. I will take it because you need to go to Cairo and I will not let you go alone. I will take it because I don’t want you worrying. And I will take it because I’m intrigued.”

At that moment, the study door opened quietly and William Thresher stepped in, carrying a small silver tray as though he had been summoned. “I thought you might like some refreshment.”

He placed the tray on a side table. There was a lovely china tea pot for me, with a matching cup and a plate of home-made shortbread. For Rafe a silver insulated thermos cup.

I poured the tea and sipped it. It was strong and fragrant, and exactly what I needed to steady my nerves.

“William,” Rafe said, “we’ll be making a trip to Cairo.”

As though Rafe had said we'd be driving into Oxford, William merely nodded.

"How quickly can we leave?" I asked.

Rafe glanced at his computer screen, where an email thread was open. "Tomorrow," he said. "If you want." He glanced over at me, thoughtful now. "Randall Whitaker has just invited us to join him and his wife on a Nile cruise where we can get to know each other at leisure and I'll have more time with the papyrus."

"What?" I felt my eyes widen. "Why would he invite you on a holiday with him and his wife?"

Rafe's gaze remained on my face. "Not me, us," he said softly.

This felt altogether creepy. "He knows me?" I couldn't imagine how some collector would know of me.

He shook his head. "He doesn't mention you by name, merely suggests that I and my lovely wife might like to join him and his lovely wife."

"Doesn't sound like much of a holiday," I said. I'd have loved to do a Nile cruise with Rafe, but not like this, not with my father in danger, and with a historical manuscript in the picture.

Tomorrow. The word made my heart thud.

Part of me wanted to rush and pack. Part of me wanted to stay in Crosyer Manor and lock the doors and pretend that Egypt was a dream and Meri a figment and my parents safe forever in the bright heat of the desert.

But pretending had never saved anyone.

"I want to go as soon as possible," I said. "I can be ready to travel tomorrow."

Rafe nodded. "Then we will. William, can you have everything ready for tomorrow? A few days in Cairo, a week on the Nile and then, of course, we'll go to visit Lucy's parents at their dig near Aswan. It will be perfectly natural to do so."

William didn't so much as blink an eye at the request.

"I'll pack for myself," I blurted. I'd been horrified after we were first married when I discovered Rafe coolly telling William to pack for me when we were only going away for a few days. I'd insisted on doing my own packing, and still did.

Rafe looked faintly amused at my insistence. "We should hire a personal assistant for you." Really, he meant maid. Someone to keep my wardrobe and book my hair appointments and pack my clothes. I couldn't think of

anything worse. Besides, she'd either have to be undead, which I didn't want, or else I'd always worry that she'd discover Rafe's secret and that was a risk I wouldn't take. So I'd pack my own suitcase.

"I will begin preparations immediately," William said and left the room as quietly as he'd entered it.

"And Violet?" I asked, suddenly thinking of the shop, of the wools and customers and the small, ordinary life I loved. "Will she be okay? She was pretty freaked out when the scrying mirror started humming in her apartment."

"She can manage the shop for a few days," Rafe said. "She already does. Meri won't need to contact you and if she does, you've got the scrying mirror with you." This was true. "And if Violet needs extra help, you know Gladys will be only too happy to take over."

I set my cup down and leaned forward, resting my elbows on my knees. "Rafe," I said quietly. "What if someone really is coming for Dad?" I knew it was a question Rafe couldn't possibly answer but I desperately wanted reassurance that my scholarly but not very worldly father would be all right.

He reached for my hand again, cool fingers closing around mine. "Whoever is threatening your family doesn't know what they are up against. You and I are a formidable pair."

It was exactly the right thing to say. I was still deeply worried about my family in Egypt, but at least I wouldn't be facing danger alone.

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# CHAPTER 6



That night the vampire knitting club met in the back room of Cardinal Woolsey's. It was good to get away from Crosyer Manor for a few hours, leaving William to finish organizing everything and packing for Rafe and himself, as he'd travel with us.

I'd already packed, had my passport ready and the scrying mirror carefully hidden in my hand luggage.

There'd been a moment when I'd considered not attending the meeting tonight, since we were leaving in the morning, but I really wanted to go to the meeting. I wanted to sit knitting and talking over all that had happened since I'd gone to work that morning. There was a lot of experience and wisdom packed into that back room. Hundreds and hundreds of years of it.

Word had obviously reached the vampires that Rafe and I were headed to Egypt, for the group was busily working on garments for me and Rafe, which was so sweet of them I felt a lump form in my throat.

Clara held up a champagne-colored wrap so fine and pale I could see her face through it. "For the evenings," she said.

"It's beautiful," I said. It really was.

"Deserts get cold at night," she reminded me.

"I'm going on a luxury Nile cruise."

"Air conditioning," Christopher Weaver said darkly. "You'll need a proper jumper."

He was knitting a cardigan that was unbelievably soft, knitted in a pale blue so delicate it reminded me of the sky just before sunrise. "I love it."

Mabel was working on a cardigan in a gossamer-fine cream yarn. It had tiny mother-of-pearl buttons and was, surprisingly, lovely. I could slip it on

over the linen trousers I'd packed.

Knitting was how the vampires showed affection. They'd knitted me through murder investigations, romantic ups and downs, cold snaps, Christmases and my wedding. Naturally, they were now knitting me through a possible family crisis.

But, apart from wanting the company of the undead knitters, Rafe and I wanted to show them the copies of the pieces of papyrus and see if any of them had ideas. While none of them had Rafe's expertise in ancient manuscripts, most of them had been through Egypt at one time or another.

Rafe had enlarged the copies so we could see the writing and illustrations more clearly. The images had been passed around the group, although no one had come up with anything useful.

The papyrus was old. It appeared to be connected in some way to the Book of the Dead. It contained magic. And somehow my parents, who were archeologists and about as magical as a pair of desert boots, had got themselves mixed up in it. Or had they?

Rafe outlined Meri's call, my chat with my parents where Dad said they'd found pieces of a Book of the Dead and then the coincidental timing of him being sent pieces of a Book of the Dead and how we feared the two were somehow related.

I'd asked him to brief the knitters on what had transpired as it helped me to listen to him as though this was a puzzle to be solved rather than danger looming over people I loved.

"Oh, poor Meri," Clara said. "She's such a lovely young woman. I do hope she'll be all right."

Christopher Weaver spoke next. "Not that I wish to be pedantic," he said—sounding very much like he was about to be— "but connecting your new client with some unknown danger to Lucy's parents sounds tenuous at best. I suggest you treat these as two separate events until you have some sort of proof that they are connected."

"An excellent point," Rafe said. He sat beside me, calmly knitting a dark gray sweater as though we were discussing somebody else's family and not flying into potential danger in a country where the sun was his mortal enemy. "We cannot close our minds to other possibilities."

I was so worried that I was having trouble thinking at all. I wanted to go straight to the dig near Aswan but I had to respect Meri's insistence that we

go to Cairo instead. Meri was the one closest to whatever was going on and I trusted her.

“Once we’re in Egypt, it will be easier to ascertain what’s really going on,” Rafe said.

Silence Buggins stared at him. “You cannot possibly go to Egypt dressed like that.”

Rafe glanced down at himself. He was wearing black trousers and a fine navy sweater.

“I have no intention of traveling in this.”

“I should hope not.” Silence was knitting something white and lacy. Unlike most of the vampires, Silence made no effort to blend in with modern society. She dressed like the Victorian spinster she’d been, complete with whalebone corsets, long skirts and severe hairstyles. If she went out in the day, which was rare, she wore button-up boots, a hat, long gloves and carried a parasol. Luckily, since this was Oxford, she didn’t raise eyebrows. She could have been anything from an actress to an eccentric lecturer. “I’ll have this finished in plenty of time.”

“What are you making?” I had to ask.

“A parasol cover. For Rafe.”

There was a moment of complete silence.

Then Hester snorted. Unlike everyone else, she wasn’t knitting for me or Rafe. She was working on something black, as usual. For herself, as usual.

I turned to Rafe. His knitting needles had stopped moving. “A parasol,” he repeated.

Silence looked surprised that anyone should question her. “Naturally. A gentleman cannot expose himself to the Egyptian sun.”

“I am not carrying a parasol.”

“You may call it a sunshade if that makes you feel more masculine.”

Dr. Weaver coughed into his hand.

I had to look down at my knitting.

Silence continued. “And gloves, obviously. I have already begun a pair.”

She reached into her bag and pulled out a long white glove that would have reached well past Rafe’s elbow.

Christopher reached over and took the glove from Silence. He examined it with professional interest. “The principle is sound.”

Rafe stared at him. “You are not helping.”

“No, really. Silence is right. Your hands are particularly vulnerable. But you don't need opera gloves.” He handed the glove back. “There are excellent UV-protective fabrics now. Lightweight. Breathable. You can get gloves designed for people with extreme photosensitivity.”

“Thank you,” Rafe said. “I am aware of modern fabrics.”

“Then wear them.”

“I intend to.”

“And a hat,” Silence said.

“Yes.”

“With a very wide brim.”

“Yes.”

“And a parasol.”

“No.”

“You’re being foolish.”

“I have managed to survive for five hundred years without your assistance, Silence.”

She sniffed. “You have never before gone to Egypt with Lucy.”

That shut him up.

I looked at her in surprise. It was possibly the most sensible thing Silence Buggins had ever said.

Christopher leaned back in his chair. “She has a point. You’ll be distracted. You need to take more precautions than you normally would.”

“I have everything organized.”

“Such as?”

“UV protective shirts and trousers. Gloves. Hat. Sunscreen.”

“Parasol?” Silence asked.

“A proper UV-blocking umbrella,” Rafe admitted.

Theodore had been unusually quiet. He wasn’t knitting at all, which should have warned me that something was going on. He was a former policeman who had become a detective, though he still preferred old school methods. So the computer tablet propped against his knitting bag surprised me. He was tapping and scrolling with one finger.

“What are you doing?” I asked him.

“Research.”

Everyone stopped talking and shifted their attention to him. “About the papyrus?” I asked.

“About Egypt. I thought it might be useful to see if anything unusual has been happening there.”

“And has it?” I wanted to know.

“Mostly the usual. Politics, tourism, football. There was an interesting archeological discovery a few days ago.”

My attention sharpened immediately. “Where?”

“Near Luxor. A previously unknown burial chamber. Nothing particularly grand. Preliminary dating suggests the Middle Kingdom.”

Rafe put down his knitting. “Where exactly?”

Theodore read from the screen. “West bank. The authorities haven't released the precise location. It was discovered during conservation work.”

“Anything found inside?” I asked.

“Pottery. Funerary objects. Some fragments of painted wood. No papyrus mentioned.”

That didn't sound connected to my parents, who were nearer Aswan but lately the words Middle Kingdom were enough to make me pay attention. “Meri would be interested,” I said.

“She probably already knows,” Christopher said.

“A small collection of antiquities was recovered in Cairo. Apparently somebody tried to sell them to an undercover officer.”

“What kind of antiquities?”

“Nothing that sounds relevant. Amulets. Statuettes. Coins from a much later period.” He scrolled down. “Agricultural exports are up five percent this year.” Another flick of his finger. “Tourism numbers are up.” Then, “A waiter from one of the Nile cruise ships drowned.”

Something about that caught my attention. “When did this happen?”

“A few days ago. The ship was sailing between Luxor and Aswan. He was apparently last seen late in the evening. His body was recovered from the river the following day.”

“Did he fall overboard?” Clara asked.

“That's the assumption. The police say there are no suspicious circumstances.”

Theodore read a few more items. There was something about a political dispute that I didn’t really understand and a story about a footballer. Nothing that could affect my parents.

“No news is good news,” Clara said.

“I suppose.”

Rafe put his hand briefly over mine. “We'll be there soon.”

I nodded. That was the trouble. I wanted to be there immediately. I wanted to see Mom and Dad with my own eyes and just be there in case anything happened. But Meri had been very clear in her instructions and I trusted her enough to follow them.

Around us, needles began clicking again.

Mabel's cardigan grew beneath her flying fingers. Clara worked another delicate row of my shawl. I would have to repack to include the lovely garments that were being created in front of my eyes. I stood so Mabel could check the length and she nodded, pleased. “It’s perfect. I’ll have this finished for you in a jiff.”

Tomorrow, Rafe and I would be thousands of miles away. And somewhere in Egypt was an ancient papyrus that had reached across centuries and drawn us into its mystery.

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# CHAPTER 7

We left in the cool darkness of very early morning on a private jet from a private airfield and during the flight both Rafe and I studied copies of the papyrus fragments. He'd made me my own copy so I could study it at leisure, make notes if I wanted to. Rafe obviously didn't need my help from a scholarly point of view, but he knew how much I wanted to help, and I think he suspected my witch sensibilities might pick up clues he wouldn't spot. So I studied as hard as I've ever studied anything, but the two-dimensional figures, the scratchy writing, the cramped lines of it, started to feel like a dense jungle I couldn't penetrate.

We were met at the airfield and shown into a limousine, a courteous official taking care of all the formalities. This is pretty usual when I travel with my husband. His lifestyle is at a whole different level from what I'd been used to, let's face it.

As we drove into the city, I peered out in air-conditioned comfort through windows that I suspected were bulletproof. It's hard to describe Cairo. It's a city of contrasts that's both ancient and modern, rich and poor, progressive and regressive.

WE WERE STAYING in a beautiful hotel with Egyptian décor and all the modern comforts. From the floor-to-ceiling windows I was looking down on the Nile rolling past far below us. Tomorrow we'd fly to Luxor and join a Nile cruise with Randall Whitaker and his wife. Rafe had refused the

man’s offer to pay for our trip. Rafe made his own arrangements, but I suspected his fee would reflect that. Rafe likes to rest in the afternoon. Given the kind of creature he is, he's up a lot during the night. He's not exactly a big sleeper during the day, but he usually takes a few hours in the afternoon.

Before he went to sleep, Rafe said, “Call the driver if you want to go out and see anything.”

I didn’t want a driver. I wanted to feel the city.

So I took the elevator down. I made sure I had lots of sunscreen on, a big straw hat and sunglasses. I wore a linen dress with the fine shawl knitted by Mabel.

I stepped out of the soothing marble-floored, air-conditioned hotel into the heat and took a minute to breathe in Cairo. The light, the dust, the noise.

I headed away from the river and it was like I'd gone from one world to another.

The traffic was intense. The noise was intense. The heat was intense. Horns blared constantly. Men in galabiyas hurried along the pavements passing men in trousers and long shirts. Women in hijabs walked arm in arm. Tourists in shorts and baseball caps consulted maps on their phones. Tiny cars squeezed through impossible gaps while motorcycles dodged in and, out. I watched one nearly collide with a packed mini-bus.

It was crazy and wild and exciting. I strolled along, enjoying the sights, feeling absolutely foreign.

Have you ever been an outsider? Or just felt like one? Moving to a different school when you were a kid and everybody knew each other and you were the new one, perhaps. When the other kids looked at you askance and tried to figure out where you belonged, who your friends would be, what social circle you would belong to.

Maybe you've moved houses or cities and the same thing happened.

For me, when I moved from Boston to Oxford, my whole world changed, in good ways and in bad. I guess I had more than the usual shock of finding myself in a new environment because that's also when I discovered I'd been a witch my whole life and had passed off the strange experiences I'd been having as growing pains or something.

So that was a big one.

Finding out I was from a family of witches was another big shock when I moved to Oxford. And then discovering that I had vampires living in the

tunnels underneath the knitting shop I'd inherited, and that one of them was my grandmother?

Oh, that was quite a shock too.

But now it's been a couple of years and I've become accustomed to having an undead grandmother with definite opinions on how I should run the shop that was once hers. I've grown into my powers, though more senior witches might disagree. I've even learned to enjoy the late-night vampire knitting club that meets in Cardinal Woolsey's knitting shop. This is my life now and I've settled into it as my new normal.

I've become used to the rhythms of my life. The shop opening hours, the ebb and flow of customers, my evenings and weekends with my husband in our beautiful historic home. I'm surrounded by fine art and the treasures he's collected over hundreds of years and yet Crosyer Manor is still a home, a place where I can put my feet up and chill. Rafe told me when I first moved in to change anything I wanted to, but, apart from spaces where I practice my magic, I've changed very little. I didn't need to. Obviously, I added a painting of our wedding, one of the best days of my life. And I had photos of me and Jennifer, my best friend who now runs our sister knitting shop in Cornwall, and of me and my parents the last time I visited them in Egypt.

And now I was back, very much an outsider. I thought I might go for a walk, sample some local food, anything to stop myself from fretting. There was nothing I could do and I knew it. We'd come to Cairo. We'd be meeting Randall Whitaker the next day. Meri had left no message, not via the scrying mirror or by any other channel, so I could only trust she'd find me if she needed to.

And so I walked, past jewelry shops glittering with gold, past markets fragrant with spice and fresh fruit. I passed a tiny café where half a dozen men sat at tables on the pavement, drinking tea and smoking shisha from tall glass water pipes. The pipes bubbled as they drew on them, and the air smelled strangely sweet, something fruity mixed with strong coffee and the exhaust fumes from the traffic. I stopped to buy fresh sugarcane juice, pale green and delicious in the heat. And then I couldn't resist a basbousa, which is a semolina cake soaked in syrup. Sweet and addictive if you're not careful. I was licking the last of the syrup from my fingertips when a smiling man fell into step beside me.

"Madam, tour? Very good tour. Best price."

“No, thank you.”

“Pyramids? Museum? Nile dinner cruise?”

“No, thank you.”

He remained cheerfully unconvinced. As I continued walking, another man appeared as though summoned by magic.

“Scarf, lady? Beautiful Egyptian cotton.” Before I could answer, he was already unfolding brightly colored scarves in front of me.

“No, thank you.” I stepped around him firm but polite. I know these people have to make a living, but I wasn’t here to buy postcards or scarves or take dinner cruises.

“Special price.”

“No, thank you.”

A third person materialized and pushed a cheap plastic bracelet toward me.

“Gift,” he said, smiling broadly.

I knew this ‘gift’ would have a price. “No, thank you.”

“Gift!” he insisted.

Now a boy wanted me to buy a hat. I started to feel overwhelmed, not because any one of them seemed threatening, but because there were so many people, so much noise, so much movement. They were crowding around me until I felt there wasn’t enough air. I suddenly felt very much like a blonde Westerner who was a pretty obvious target.

But not to boast or anything, I have some skills. I knew if anyone got too persistent, I had power literally beneath my fingertips, but I didn’t want to resort to magic just to get rid of pushy salespeople.

They were all talking at once, pushing things at me, cheerful and loud and very much not taking no for an answer. Feeling slightly besieged, and making sure I kept a firm grip on my purse, I tried to keep walking.

A woman in traditional dress appeared from a side road and I wondered if she’d now try to sell me something, but instead she glanced at me and made eye contact. She held my gaze for a moment and I’d have sworn there was a warning in her eyes, then she dropped her gaze and began to walk in front of my increasingly large party of trinket sellers.

I hadn’t recognized the woman, in fact I was certain I’d never seen her before, but I’d felt a connection, a slight ping behind my breastbone, so I kept her in sight even as the sellers danced in front of me pushing coloring books, children’s toys, T-shirts and fridge magnets at me.

“No. Thank you!”

The woman, once she’d made eye contact with me, never turned around, but I felt that she was very aware of me as I was of her. After a few minutes, she stepped up to a shop door and opened it. Without any hesitation, I followed her, leaving my disappointed crew of vendors on the other side of the big glass door.

Cool air washed over me.

For the first time since leaving the hotel, I could actually hear myself think. It took me a moment to realize I had ducked into a papyrus shop. The kind of tourist trap I’d been determined to avoid. But, compared to being hounded by street vendors, this felt like heaven. And cool heaven at that.

I glanced around but didn’t see the woman who’d been walking ahead of me. Where had she gone?

Being anxious to spend a few moments in the air conditioning, and giving my persistent salespeople time to accept that I wasn't coming out anytime soon and hopefully move on, I stood at the back of a tour group who were being told all about the wonders of papyrus.

And it really is amazing.

Obviously, I know a little bit about it, and I've seen some of the greatest manuscripts in the world thanks to my two archeologist parents. I thought about the photographs of the papyrus that Randall Whitaker had acquired and how very different it was from what was being sold to the tourists.

Here's the thing about papyrus. It's made almost exactly the same way now as it ever was. The reeds are cut into strips, soaked, layered, pressed and dried. The natural sap acts almost like a glue. It's surprisingly simple.

Of course, nowadays most of it is made for tourists, but I suspected it wouldn’t be that difficult to fake an ancient papyrus manuscript.

I'd been carrying Meri's warning around with me ever since she'd given it to me. It sat in my heart like a tiny dagger that occasionally twisted just enough to wake me in the night.

I knew my parents were still okay because I was still managing to check in with them every couple of days. They were obviously blissfully unaware of whatever danger lurked around them.

But I had not been able to get hold of Meri. The scrying mirror was as dead as a mobile phone cut off for non-payment.

I hoped she was okay.

I had begun to wonder if the danger she referred to wasn't for my father at all, but for herself, and that she'd somehow misread the signs.

But who would want to hurt Meri? She'd been incredibly careful to keep her true identity secret. And she had Pete, the Australian archeologist, looking out for her.

I had to hope she was okay. But then if she was okay, did that mean my parents were still in danger? It was a conundrum.

I wandered around with the other tourists looking at the papyrus displays.

The shop was amazing. There were dozens of different designs and, of course, every tourist in the group received their own name written in hieroglyphics. Then they could sit at little tables and color the designs themselves if they wanted to.

There was a steady buzz of conversation and laughter as people decorated their names.

Others already had their wallets out and were buying larger, more elaborate pictures displayed throughout the gallery.

As I've said, I'm a little rusty, but I can read hieroglyphics.

And as I wandered around admiring the various offerings, one caught my eye simply because it was my own name.

I smiled a little.

Lucy.

The cartouche contained the familiar symbols that spelled out my name. A lion, a quail chick and two flowering reeds. At least, that was how I read them. My Egyptian wasn't perfect, but I could usually muddle through.

Then the smile dropped off my face. Beneath my name someone had added a second line of hieroglyphics. The ink was so fresh I could see where it had pooled slightly in one corner. I stared at the symbols.

A pair of walking legs.

A doorway.

Another set of hurried legs.

The message was simple enough that even I couldn't mistake it.

*Lucy. Run.*

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# CHAPTER 8



For a moment I simply stood there, my pulse thudding in my ears. I glanced around but everything still seemed exactly the same. The laughing tourists, the patient salespeople, the papyrus on the walls.

I had to get out of here. But which way to go?

If I went back out to the street, would I be in more danger? Could one of those street vendors have had more than a sale in mind?

I tried not to panic. Once again, I reminded myself that I was a fully-fledged witch and I could look after myself.

But even so, I so wished that Rafe was standing right beside me right now. Cool hand holding mine.

I hadn't even told him where I was going. I hadn't left him a note, not a voice message, not anything.

I grabbed my phone, thinking I could phone him, but then I'd wake him. And for what? To tell him I was in a papyrus shop?

Still I was tempted. Then I saw the woman I'd followed. I glanced up and our eyes connected once more. She was in traditional Egyptian dress. Her brown, kohl-rimmed eyes stared at me fixedly and then very deliberately her gaze flicked to the hieroglyphic picture that said, Lucy, run.

Then she turned and calmly began walking, not to the front of the shop where I had come in, but into the back.

In that split second I had to make a decision. Was she leading me into danger or was she leading me to safety? Since she had made that motion toward the hieroglyphic message, I had to trust my instincts and believe it was the latter.

As casually as I could, I turned and followed.

The back of the shop was clearly not a customer area. I glanced right and left and no one seemed to pay any attention so I casually walked that way. If anyone challenged me, I'd say I was looking for the bathroom.

I walked past workers at tables. They were packing up papyrus to send all over the world to the tourists who came in to buy them.

At a big table artists were drawing some fresh ones, their hands moving with fluid precision. No one seemed to pay me any mind at all as I followed the swish of her robes.

She opened a back door and slipped through it. Then, after a moment, I followed.

We left through the back entrance of the papyrus shop into a narrower street.

My guide didn't say a word, and I followed her, making sure not to get too close or to appear to be following her. I had a feeling she preferred it this way.

I had the eerie feeling, not that I was being followed, but that there was danger around me, and these are instincts I have learned to trust.

The woman walked with her head down, not moving quickly, but there was a definite purpose to her walk.

Looking around, I could see that she blended in with most of the people on the quiet street. Unlike me. I felt very much like I had strayed from the tourist area into a street where there was no logical reason for me to be. There were no shops or restaurants here.

Still, the good thing about this quiet road was that it was free of vendors. I hoped that remained the case.

But who was this woman and how had she found me? What did she want with me? I wasn't entirely sure I wasn't walking into danger.

I contemplated tapping out a quick message to Rafe, but it would be like him waking me up at three o'clock in the morning. He needed to sleep, and I wanted him fresh and sharp for whatever was ahead of us.

I was sure enough that the woman ahead of me did not represent danger, that I continued following her.

She turned into a narrow alleyway and once more, I followed.

Now there were only the two of us, and after the chaos and noise of the busier streets, it felt eerily quiet.

Then she opened a gate in the wall ahead of me and disappeared from sight.

I kept my pace exactly the same. Anyone looking down the alley would have just thought I was a tourist taking a stroll.

When I reached the gate she had pushed through, I noticed it was slightly open. I pushed through and found myself in a courtyard. The noise of the city seemed to vanish the moment the gate closed behind me.

Honey-colored walls surrounded a stone courtyard. Wooden lattice screens shaded the upper windows and climbing bougainvillea spilled vivid pink flowers over one wall. Large terracotta pots overflowed with herbs and glossy green plants. Somewhere nearby, jasmine scented the air.

There was no one there, but the front door stood ajar.

This was a moment of decision.

Did I follow a complete stranger who might have put a warning hieroglyphic picture up in a random papyrus shop with my name on it?

I stepped forward and opened the door.

I glanced around. The interior was cool and dim after the bright sunshine outside. Colorful tiles decorated the floor and a graceful staircase curved upward. I glanced around, wondering what to do, when I heard the patter of soft feet running downstairs.

I turned, preparing myself for attack. Then my worry turned to pure joy.

“Meri!” I cried, opening my arms to receive her.

She opened hers and ran down the last of the stairs to hug me. We clutched each other. I hadn't seen the Egyptian witch for months, and it was a pleasure to see her again, as much as I was worried about why she was here in Cairo.

“Lucy,” she said. “I am so glad you're here.”

I heard relief in her voice, but also worry.

I pulled back and looked at her face and saw lines of strain. Her beautiful dark eyes were blurred with worry. “What is it?” I asked.

“Come,” she said. “Sit with me and have tea.”

And so I followed her through to a lovely courtyard garden.

A small fountain splashed contentedly in the center. An orange tree grew nearby, its glossy leaves shining in the sunlight. Pots of mint and basil lined the walls, and jasmine climbed a trellis, filling the warm air with perfume.

She showed me to a seat in the shade of the orange tree and then the young woman I had followed came out, glancing at me shyly and offering a tray containing fresh mint tea.

My Arabic consisted of only a few words. “*Shukran*,” I said. Thank you.

We drank the tea from small glass cups. It was such a pleasant, ordinary, everyday ritual. Two women sitting in a courtyard drinking tea.

This was so peaceful and beautiful that some of my worries soaked away, but only a little.

I had more questions than there were leaves of mint in the tea.

I waited, letting the sharp mint flavor settle my nerves. Then I looked at her. “Meri,” I said. “What is going on?”

The expression on her face shifted. “It's Pete,” she said.

Not at all what I’d been expecting to hear. My parents were supposed to be in danger.

“Pete?” I said. “What’s happened to Pete? And what about my father? Tell me everything.”

I could feel her centering herself, just as I had done. Now that she'd blurted out the awful truth about Pete, she seemed better able to focus.

At least someone else understood what she was going through.

“It's my fault, Lucy,” she said in an anguished tone. “It's all my fault. I've been too clever, you see. Foolish and arrogant, and now I'm being punished. Most dreadfully punished.”

I sighed. Maybe it wasn't particularly kind to throw tough love at her right away, but I needed facts before guilt.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. Please start at the beginning of the story.”

She smiled. An anguished smile.

“This story, Lucy, begins nearly four thousand years ago.”

That seemed to me to have an ominous ring to it. A lot of bad stuff could happen in four millennia.

“As you know, when pharaohs and very powerful people in Egypt came to the end of their lives, their burial instructions were very specific. They were buried with their treasures and all the things they needed to get to the afterlife, including precious jewels and money and carriages.”

I nodded impatiently. “Yes, yes. Everyone knows this.”

“Part of my job was to help powerful people, especially powerful magicians, fool the tomb raiders who would come after them and try to grasp their treasures.

“A famous magician whose tomb has just been discovered by your parents, was someone I deeply distrusted. Their magic was too powerful. I

could see this magician feared death more than most, as though they had done the kind of deeds that would make their existence very difficult in the afterlife."

I nodded. I was well aware that in the religion of ancient Egypt, you might expect to meet people you had wronged in the afterlife, and they would not let bygones be bygones.

"But this is, quite literally, ancient history," I reminded her.

She glanced at me, truly troubled. "No. It isn't. This magician had a funerary text unlike any other." I heard her take a breath, almost a gasp, before saying, "It contained spells. Bad spells that would keep them from dying. Lucy, it was so dangerous. That is one of the reasons I helped make this tomb as difficult to find as possible. This book should not fall into the wrong hands."

Okay, I know I'm a witch and I have magic powers and so does Meri, but I was having a hard time thinking a Book of the Dead from thousands of years ago could possibly be very dangerous today.

And then I thought about my family grimoire, which was pretty small potatoes in the scheme of things, and how much trouble it had caused in our family.

I began to wonder what might happen if, instead of my family, I was looking at an entire Egyptian dynasty and the chaos a very powerful magical book could provoke.

"Why is it dangerous?" I asked. It seemed like the obvious question.

Instead of answering right away, Meri poured more tea. I didn't think she was thirsty. She was clearly buying time.

"I think if the full spell is recited, it could bring the magician back," she said and then shuddered as though the idea was too hideous to contemplate.

"Back from the dead?" My voice rose on the last word. I understand about the undead, and I've heard whispers about a spell to cheat death that's so dangerous no one ever performs it. But I could not imagine a spell strong enough to bring someone back who'd been dead for that long. "They'd be nothing but a blackened and fragile bag of bones."

Meri shook her head. "I do not think the magician has been dead, but waiting. Like I was all those years."

"You mean when you were in the mirror?"

She nodded. "I was alive but not. It is difficult to explain."

“Kind of like magical suspended animation?” I had never really thought about the process at the time I’d discovered a witch trapped in an ancient mirror.

“A kind of stasis, yes. It was the magician’s curse that put me there. Now I wonder if the magician used a similar spell to cheat death.”

If I was following along correctly, I understood why my dad might be in danger, “Are you suggesting that by my dad’s reading aloud from the papyrus he found, that he could spring the magician from wherever they’ve been hiding?”

“I do not know for certain, but it is what I fear.”

“Then why won’t you let me go right to my parents’ dig and stop them from reading any more?”

“Because what your parents found is only a part of the whole. I have heard of another part of the book that is traveling back toward us. Lucy, I feel that evil is on its way.”

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# CHAPTER 9



I had never really believed that Randall Whitaker having a chunk of a Book of the Dead was coincidence. “Is it coming from America?” I had to ask.

“I believe so, yes. It was safely in a private collection, though it would have been safer still if it had remained buried beneath the sand. We must stop the evil one from regaining power, Lucy.”

I had to agree, and suspected this was a task easier talked about than completed.

“I and several others managed to break up the spell book and hide the fragments. The papyrus could not be destroyed, you see, it was too powerfully spellbound. You and Rafe must help me stop this monster from coming back.”

I nodded, not sure what to say or how we were going to stop this terrifying-sounding magician.

“I tried to be too clever,” she said.

I knew she’d always worried that she would reveal things she couldn’t possibly have known if she hadn’t been alive during the Middle Kingdom, which made her about 3800 years old. She made Rafe look like a baby. I also knew she’d been incredibly careful. I wondered how she had slipped up.

“You see, I knew exactly where the maze tomb was. I grew quite concerned when your parents began to dig near it. Lucy, I had spent a great deal of effort encouraging them to dig farther down the valley where there are minor tombs still to be discovered. I even bound the entrance with a spell.” She shook her head.

“But your mother, Lucy. I know she doesn't embrace her powers the way you and I do, but she's a very powerful witch. I almost think my spell somehow attracted her, entirely against her conscious knowledge, of course. And she found the entrance to the tomb.”

I still was having trouble seeing my mother as a witch, even though I’d discovered it for myself. As Meri had said, she didn’t embrace her powers, in fact she barely acknowledged them, which had left her open to being used by dark forces. Could it be happening again? The thought made me shiver even in the warmth of a Cairo afternoon.

“The entrance was nothing but a dip in the sand. It could have been a camel track. And still she found it.”

Honestly, the whole back of my neck felt like caterpillars were crawling up it. My mother had been in denial her whole life about her magic. She'd recently had to accept it, but reluctantly, and I suspected that when she flew back to Egypt, she thought she'd left all that behind her.

So the fact that she had inadvertently used her magic to find this tomb felt almost scary. Like that book really wanted to be found.

Meri continued. “And so they dug into the tomb. As much as I tried to distract them, it was impossible. Your father is too good an archeologist not to know when he's discovered something extraordinary. I felt as though I had been carefully driving a chariot pulled by six horses, and suddenly they bolted and I could not control them.”

I could only imagine how frantically she must have tried to divert my mom and dad and I also knew how stubborn they could be when on the trail of a possibly major discovery.

“Every day they got deeper. Closer to that dreadful book and the magician who had created it. I had no way to stop them.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” I said, sensing her guilt.

“I know. But what they may unleash could be devastating.”

“So what exactly is it they could unleash and why would it be devastating?” I asked.

“They found fragments of a dangerous Book of the Dead. Not all of it. Only fragments.”

Of course, I was thinking of the pieces of papyrus Rafe had been asked to authenticate. I didn’t like to even think it, but I wondered if there could be a connection between Randall Whitaker’s treasure and this funerary text that Meri referred to.

“I cannot tell you more. Even speaking of it is dangerous.” She glanced around as though the jasmine might be eavesdropping. “But your father's excitement was unmatched.” Now she smiled and her troubled face lightened for a moment. “You know how he is, Lucy. He is like a child when he discovers something exciting.”

I felt my own lips curve. I knew exactly how my dad was when he discovered something exciting. He bubbled over and usually my mother had to encourage him to hold back from telling the world until the dig was further along, before other scholars, researchers and even news media became interested.

“He couldn't stop himself telling people about this find. I was powerless to prevent him. There were burial objects of historical interest, a funerary mask and household objects for the afterlife. But it was the fragments of papyrus that fascinated your father. I knew this book and how dangerous it is, even in pieces. Your father asked me to translate the text and all I could do was attempt to misinterpret the text.”

“My father and mother are both pretty good with hieroglyphics,” I reminded her.

“Yes, but they were so busy with the other objects that they left the papyrus with me. They trusted me.” She looked truly sad now that she’d betrayed their trust. “That’s why I say I was too clever and I made a grave mistake, for an expert in hieroglyphic languages arrived one day. Even your father seemed surprised that he had arrived, and so soon, but your father, as you know, Lucy, is a very trusting man.”

I had a bad feeling about this so-called expert. “Where was this person from?”

“He was employed by a well-respected private institute, the Hennings Institute for Ancient Civilizations.”

I blinked. I had heard of this institute before. It was in the letter from Randall Whitaker to Rafe. He’d mentioned he wanted to donate the papyrus to the Hennings Institute of Ancient Civilizations in Boston. I was certain I remembered correctly.

“Is it in Boston?” I asked Meri.

Her forehead wrinkled as she tried to remember. Please be in Poughkeepsie, I said silently, but then she nodded. “Yes. That’s right. They mentioned sending copies back to Boston for study.”

Oh, dear. I did not like how these connections kept forming patterns that seemed more like elaborate traps.

“This professor studied the fragments and then my interpretation. He questioned me most particularly, suggesting that I had made some fundamental mistakes. Your father, of course, insisted that I was one of his most trusted advisors, which made it worse because when your father studied the papyrus himself, he could tell I had not interpreted the symbols correctly. It was most awkward for him, and for me.”

“And the expert?”

“Lucy, he seemed like a harmless bureaucrat, but deep down I believe he is evil. It's a dramatic thing to say, I know, but it's true.”

I had discovered evil hiding in seemingly harmless people before too. I knew exactly what she meant.

“This professor took photographs and asked if we had found any further remnants of the original book. Your father assured him that we had not but that the dig was ongoing and he would alert him should we discover more. When the professor took his leave, the last thing he said to me was, “You're a very interesting young woman.” She shuddered.

“Then the professor said your father had made an extraordinary find and, looking at me most particularly, said, ‘I think it would be a good idea for him not to share this information any further.’”

She lifted her hands in a gesture of helplessness. “Somehow he talked your father into delaying the announcement of the discovery. He made all kinds of excuses about bringing down a professional team to authenticate it first and how we would have to improve security. Your father is working with the Egyptian government, after all.”

“Right, that makes sense, but then how did this guy know about the find?”

“There must be someone on the dig who is reporting to him, it’s all I can think of. I suspect he has spies all over Egypt sending information.”

“He’s well connected, then,” I said. “And probably not working for the Egyptian government.”

“That is my feeling also,” she agreed.

“So, Dad agreed to keep his findings under wraps,” I said, getting back to Meri’s story.

“Yes, but anyone could see that your father was beyond excited. He could no more stop himself talking to his colleagues than he could prevent

himself from breathing.”

I felt a knot tighten in my stomach. I remembered the conversation where my mother had tried to downplay the discovery and my dad had insisted I know all. If he was blabbing to me, who else was he sharing info with?

“That's when I realized your father was in danger. In fact, the evil man said, 'Make sure he keeps this discovery to himself, won't you?' and patted me on the shoulder.

“When he touched me, I felt as though a cold hand had gripped my heart.”

She stared into her tea. “That was when I did my best to get hold of you. I had to warn you but I knew there were spies watching. This professor had helpers who seemed to be everywhere, reading everything. I felt that if your father did not keep quiet about the find, he might be silenced.”

“You must have been so frightened,” I said, feeling for my fellow witch.

“I was. I still am. As you know, Lucy, my credentials are false. Thanks to your husband I have a modern identity but if someone was determined enough, they might discover that my documents are false. But that is a small danger compared to the horror that could be set free should the full book end up in evil hands. All I could think was that if I could get word to you somehow, perhaps you could help me stop this evil. However, I rarely had time alone without feeling I was being watched, just as your mother and father were being watched,” she continued.

“Blissfully unaware, of course.” I was feeling a cold chill in my heart now. The thought of danger surrounding my parents—and Meri and Pete and the people I cared about—was horrible.

“That’s why I used the mirror. I couldn’t call or email you. They were watching me too closely.”

I felt like I needed to jump up immediately and rush down to the dig.

As if she'd read my thoughts, she reached out and gripped my hand.

“Then one morning I came to our tent to find Pete gone. There was a note that said, 'I'm going to Cairo to check something.' The note was addressed to me, but it wasn't even written in Pete's handwriting.” Her hand went to her chest, over her heart. “As if Pete would leave without telling anyone, and ‘go to Cairo to check something?’ That is not something Pete would ever say.”

I had to agree, this was very un-Pete-like behavior. “But they probably don’t know he’s a wizard,” I reminded her. “Pete has ways of protecting himself.”

She nodded. “I keep telling myself the same thing. But he is more one who senses than one who practices magic. And so I worry. I fear they are more powerful than Pete. More powerful than any of us.”

I reached over and touched her hand and was reminded of what Rafe had said to me when I’d voiced my fears. “But we are not alone. We have each other, and Rafe, and we are a formidable team.”

She turned her hand over to clasp mine. “Yes. I must hold my courage. You are right, Lucy. I have faced much in my time. We will prevail.”

“Why would they kidnap Pete?” I asked.

“It was very clearly a warning. I know they have him. Naturally I told your parents the contents of the note, and they were surprised, but they really wanted to believe it.”

“Because it would never occur to Mom and Dad that some evil creature was taking one of their archeologists hostage.”

Her eyes were wide. “But while they are holding Pete hostage, I am very frightened.”

I was so tempted to skip the cruise and go see my parents, but Meri begged me not to. She said I could only make things worse.

“You see, your mother and father are completely oblivious to what's going on, and they're so happy in their work. The worst thing you could possibly do is go there. It’s why I suggested we meet in Cairo. I have sisters here. We can meet safely. Please don't do anything rash.”

I knew she was right even as anxiety gnawed at me.

“I have had to rely on my sister witches here in Egypt for help. They understand, as I do, the danger we are in.”

Then I told Meri about Rafe’s commission and this Randall Whitaker, and how we were about to embark on a cruise with the collector and his wife. “He wants to donate fragments of this particular Book of the Dead. They sound a lot like the fragments found on the dig. Could they be from the same book?”

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# CHAPTER 10



Meri and I stared at each other as the implications of what I'd just said sank in. If my mom and dad had discovered fragments of a dangerous book, and Rafe was being asked to authenticate other fragments from the same book, was it possible that whoever was pulling our strings was trying to get all the pieces to put together into one grand document? It was like a jigsaw puzzle of pure evil.

I drank a second cup of mint tea and the afternoon was far advanced when I set off back for the hotel.

I arrived to find my husband looking perfectly wide awake. I quietly entered our suite and he looked up and smiled at me. That smile he keeps just for me.

"Did you go exploring?" he asked me.

I really wished I could just say yes, that I'd wandered around Cairo and looked at the stores and the markets and the people in the streets as I'd intended to.

But, instead, I sat down on the colorful divan and told him everything, from the time I left to the warning on the papyrus to seeing Meri again.

He lifted one eyebrow. "A warning on papyrus? That was a rather dramatic way of getting your attention, wasn't it?"

"She thinks I'm being followed and she's convinced she is. She didn't know how else to let me know without being seen herself. She didn't want her sister witch to be seen speaking to me."

He nodded as though this unorthodox warning now made sense. "And you say Pete's missing?"

It was my turn to nod. “Meri's convinced he’s been kidnapped.” I’d told him all about the fragments from the early Book of the Dead, of course. “Meri didn’t have photographs or anything, she said it’s too dangerous even to copy. Do you think the fragments that Randall Whitaker has could be from the same book?”

“My darling, we are embarking on a Nile cruise to find out.”

I still couldn't imagine Rafe Crosyer on a cruise. My imagination boggled at the idea of Rafe at a buffet. Rafe on the sun deck. Rafe sitting through the evening's entertainment. “I’m sorry,” I said. “Of all the activities I could have imagined for you, I wouldn't have picked a cruise.” Even though it was Randall Whitaker who had suggested it, I knew Rafe was here for my sake.

Apart from the activities he would hate, Rafe and his kind always liked to know what their escape route was. On a boat, there weren't many options.

Once more, I appreciated how much his devotion to me made him do things he would not normally have attempted. And if possible, my love for him grew.

And grew even more when he said, “I have a surprise for you. I’ve booked us a private tour of the Grand Egyptian Museum.”

Normally I wouldn’t get too excited, but the GEM was still new and I’d heard my parents rave about it so I was pretty thrilled. The only downside was we’d be getting up very early. This ensured Rafe would get there before the sun got strong and also we’d have the museum virtually to ourselves. After my adventurous afternoon in Cairo I was more than happy to have a quiet evening in our suite.



WE HEADED out at dawn and the pyramids were triangles of darkness as we passed them on the highway. However many times I see the pyramids my heart always skips a beat at their simple magnificence. The sky was just lightening when our car pulled into the vast complex of the Grand Egyptian Museum.

I'd expected us to be sneaking through some staff entrance before opening hours, thanks to one of Rafe's mysterious acquaintances, but apparently sunrise tours were an actual thing. Most people had to book

them in advance. Rafe merely had to send a message to somebody important.

I was beginning to understand that after five centuries Rafe had collected contacts the way other people collected fridge magnets.

Even at this hour Rafe emerged from the car well-protected. Long trousers, lightweight shirt, jacket and hat all made from the highest quality UV protective fabric. He'd even worn the UV-protective gloves Christopher Weaver had insisted upon, though he had drawn the line at Silence Buggins's parasol.

I was wearing linen trousers and a loose cotton shirt and had a scarf in my bag for later. Even at this hour, the air was warm.

But I didn’t care. The museum was spectacular.

I'd seen pictures, of course. Mom had sent me articles as the seemingly endless construction progressed, and Dad had opinions about nearly every aspect of the project. But photographs didn't give you any sense of the scale.

The building seemed to rise out of the desert itself, all stone and glass and immense geometric planes. And beyond it, impossibly, were the pyramids.

The museum was huge and unapologetically modern, though it had been designed to complement the pyramids. We headed for the main door and our host was waiting for us inside.

Dr. Hisham El Masry was in his early sixties, silver-haired, elegant and possessed an air of quiet authority. Rafe had told me he was an archeologist and former university professor who advised museums, government departments and international archeological organizations.

He was an old acquaintance of Rafe's. How old, I hadn't asked.

He greeted Rafe warmly and me with both hands around mine.

“My dear Mrs. Crosyer, what a pleasure to meet you. I've heard so much about you.”

I liked him immediately. “Call me Lucy, please.” So few people ever called me Mrs. Crosyer that I always found it jarring.

“And you must call me Hisham.”

We entered the Grand Hall, and once again I stopped. “Ramesses II welcomes you,” Hisham said, obviously enjoying my head-back, mouth-gaping astonishment.

Ramesses II towered over us.

I'd seen enormous statues of Egyptian kings before. I'd grown up being dragged around archeological sites and museums while my parents enthused over broken bits of pottery. But there was something extraordinary about this immense ancient figure standing in the soaring modern space that had clearly been built to showcase the oversized statuary that rose level upon level before us.

For once even Rafe seemed impressed. “Magnificent,” he said. Coming from him, that was practically a standing ovation.

He'd told Dr. Hisham El Masry we wanted to see the museum before we left Cairo for Luxor later that day, which was perfectly true. What he hadn't said was that we also wanted to pick the man’s brain.

As we slowly climbed the Grand Stairs, the museum was still wonderfully quiet. There were a few staff, but none of the crowds that would arrive later. The scale of the place became even more apparent as we climbed past monumental statues and pieces of temples, moving through thousands of years of history.

Hisham knew everything.

I was used to this. I'd been raised by two archeologists. Put an ancient object in front of them and they couldn't simply say, “That's pretty.” There had to be a dynasty, provenance, religious significance and possibly a twenty-minute argument about whether the accepted dating was wrong.

Rafe waited until we'd been walking for a while before saying casually, “I’ve been asked to evaluate a papyrus that's privately owned. Book of the Dead, or part of one.”

Hisham glanced at him. “Recently discovered?”

That made my stomach clench. Had even Hisham already heard about my parents’ discovery? We’d decided we would say nothing about it and only ask about Randall Whitaker’s book, but I was obviously keyed up in case he had information on a find that Meri had been warned to keep secret.

“No. An American has it, Randall Whitaker. He inherited a number of antiquities from his late father.”

There was no flicker of recognition. “Should I know the name?”

“Probably not.”

Hisham’s eyes lit up. “A complete papyrus?”

“No. “

“Ah.” He spread his hands. “Then there could be hundreds of such fragments. Thousands. Egypt's history has not always been kind to its

antiquities.”

Rafe nodded. “A victim of the human urge to collect.”

We continued walking. Hisham said, “Egypt has been looted for thousands of years. Ancient Egyptians robbed ancient Egyptian tombs. Greeks took things. Romans took things. Later Europeans came and helped themselves with considerable enthusiasm. We would very much like to have your country return many of our historic treasures from the British Museum,” he said to Rafe.

Rafe nodded. “Among other places.”

I'd wandered through the British Museum admiring the statues and sarcophagi without giving enough thought to how they'd ended up in Bloomsbury.

“I'm American,” I said, rather feebly.

“They have their share, too,” he said.

“Including this papyrus that a collector has brought back to Egypt for me to authenticate,” Rafe said.

I decided to move the conversation away from colonial guilt. “My parents have spent their entire lives digging things up properly. They’re archeologists.”

“Jack and Susan Swift. Yes, of course. Rafe mentioned that.”

“Do you know them?” his tone had suggested familiarity.

“By reputation, certainly. I've met your father twice, I think. Your mother once.” He paused and his forehead creased. “Morocco?”

“Possibly. They've been everywhere.”

He nodded. “They're excellent archeologists.”

I felt absurdly pleased. “They're near Aswan now. At the Wadi Sabuq dig.”

Hisham stopped. “Wadi Sabuq?”

Something in his tone caught Rafe's attention as well as mine. “You know it?” I asked.

“I know of it. Interesting project. Your parents are leading it?”

“Yes.”

“Then they are fortunate.”

Something in his tone made me ask, “Why?”

Before he answered, we'd reached another monumental statue. Hisham slowed and gestured toward it. “Thutmose the Third.”

The king stood nearly six feet tall, carved in granite, wearing the striped nemes headdress and false beard I'd associated with pharaohs since childhood. Hisham pointed toward the belt.

“His name is there in the cartouche. But look carefully.”

I leaned closer without getting too close. There was something underneath. Faint traces around the carved name. Rafe didn’t move. I suspected he had no need of this extra tuition. “What is it?”

“Another name. The statue was probably made originally for Hatshepsut and later reinscribed for Thutmose.”

I looked at the stone king again and back at Hisham. “They stole her statue and turned her into a king?”

“Possibly. Or appropriated it. We don't know the precise circumstances.”

“That seems kind of harsh, not making a new statue but obliterating an older one. Couldn’t they have left both names?” That seemed more fair.

Hisham shook his head. “Names mattered. To an ancient Egyptian, your name wasn't merely a label. The Ren was part of you. Your identity. Erase a person’s Ren and you erase them for eternity.”

“Ren,” I repeated.

“Your name. Although translating it simply as 'name' doesn't quite convey the concept.” He pointed again to the overwritten cartouche. “To preserve a person's name was, in some sense, to preserve the person. This is why names appear again and again on tombs, statues, funerary objects. Conversely, if you wished to attack someone's continued existence, you could erase the name.”

“Kill them twice,” I said.

“In a manner of speaking. More erase them.”

I looked at Rafe. He was studying the cartouche. I thought about how Rafe Crosyer had survived so long, managing to hang on to his identity over centuries. As far as I knew he’d never changed his name.

We moved on. But the idea stayed with me. A name being more than a name. I was now Lucy Swift Crosyer, but I didn’t think I’d given up my identity, more enriched it.

We eventually reached the main galleries, moving from the great public statements of kings and gods into more intimate objects. Jewelry. Tools. Funerary goods. Things that had once belonged to actual people.

Hisham returned to my earlier question. “You asked why your parents are fortunate.”

I nodded, interested in what he had to say about my parents. If he could shed any light on why they might be in danger.

“Wadi Sabuq is an excellent concession, but expensive. Remote sites consume money.”

“Tell me about it. I grew up hearing about funding applications. But my parents have never stopped believing that the important work must continue and they’ll find the money somewhere.”

“And they have,” Hashim said. “The project recently received a significant grant.”

I stopped. “Really? I hadn’t heard that. Who’s the grant from?”

“The Hennings Institute.”

I looked at Rafe. He gave nothing away. As always

“I don't know it,” I said, hoping for more info.

“You wouldn't necessarily. It's American. Old, extremely respectable. It has funded archeological research for decades. Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Turkey. Conservation as well as excavation.”

“So there's nothing strange about them funding Mom and Dad?”

“Nothing whatsoever. Quite the opposite. If Hennings offered me funding, I would accept it with grateful thanks.”

“How much?” Tacky perhaps to ask, but I wondered how much we were talking and if it was enough to cause massive jealousy perhaps. Or some kind of theft.

“I don't know the figure but I heard it was substantial.”

Rafe spoke for the first time. “Who provided the funds?”

Hashim glanced at him. “Hennings.” He’d already told us this. Had Rafe not been paying attention? It was unlike him.

He shook his head with slight impatience. “The institute supplied the grant. Where did the institute get the money?”

Hisham's brows lifted. “I believe it was a private donation.”

“Any idea who the generous benefactor was?”

“No. But as you know, Rafe, wealthy patrons often prefer anonymity.”

Rafe nodded. “Was the grant specifically for Wadi Sabuq?”

Hisham thought about it. “I couldn't say with certainty. It was merely gossip among colleagues. Would you like me to make some discreet inquiries?”

Once more I was delighted that my husband had such great contacts. “Very much so.”

“Is that unusual?” I asked. “To want your donation to be sent to a specific dig?”

Hisham held his hands out. “Wealthy donors often have particular interests. A dynasty. A region. A particular type of archaeology. And many prefer anonymity.”

From there he took us toward the Middle Kingdom collections, which interested me more than they once would have because of Meri.

We stopped before the stela of a woman called Senetites. She had been dead for something like four thousand years, but there she was, receiving offerings, her existence recorded in stone.

Hisham translated enough of the inscription for us to understand what we were seeing.

“Senetites,” I said. “Four thousand years later, I know her name.”

“Exactly.”

“The ren again.”

He nodded.

I was trying to understand this concept better. “So, as long as somebody says your name, you aren't completely gone?”

“That's simplifying an extremely complex religious idea, but there's something rather beautiful in it, isn't there?”

I thought so. I looked at this woman whose family and friends and everyone who had ever known her had disappeared thousands of years ago. And yet this morning an American woman from Boston stood in Cairo and spoke her name. ‘*Senetites.*’ For some reason it gave me goosebumps.

Hisham announced that if we wanted to see Tutankhamun without crowds, this was our opportunity. “I can’t wait,” I said. And so, he led the way.

The Tutankhamun galleries were astonishing. I found myself gaping at one treasure after another, hardly able to take it all in, and so very grateful to have the exhibition almost to ourselves.

The King Tut galleries contained more than five thousand objects from one tomb, brought together in one place. Gold seemed to glow from every direction. There were things I'd seen countless times in photographs and documentaries, and others I'd never seen before. Ritual couches for the

afterlife, two life-sized figures who'd guarded the sealed entrance to the burial chamber, guarding the king's *ka*, or his soul.

And then there was the mask.

I'd known exactly what it looked like since childhood, but seeing it here before me was incredible.

I stood in front of Tutankhamun's golden face and felt the strange intimacy of looking at an image created so that one young man might continue to exist forever.

His name had survived. His face had survived in this mask. In a way no one who buried him could possibly have imagined, his identity had survived. "Ren," I murmured.

Hisham heard me. "Yes."

Rafe stood beside me, very still. A man who'd been born five hundred years ago and was still walking around in his original body.

I wondered what the ancient Egyptians would have made of him.

Then I remembered why we were here. The papyrus. My parents. The Wadi Sabuq dig and an anonymous donor who had decided to pour a great deal of money into their dig. Coincidence?

And suddenly I was thinking about names again and wondering about this anonymous donor who didn't want us to know theirs.

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# CHAPTER 11



Most of the passengers would fly together from Cairo to Luxor and then join the cruise to Aswan. We flew by private jet, of course, which meant no standing in line-ups in the sun for my husband, but a quick transfer from plane to limo to boat with William Thresher holding a large parasol — make that umbrella — over our heads. Of course, he'd made it look like I was the one worried about my complexion in the sun, and Rafe was shielded merely because he walked beside me.

Two crew members met us and immediately escorted us to our stateroom, while William oversaw the luggage.

The designers of the Nile Empress had done about as well as they could to accommodate a vampire aboard. Though I seriously doubted they'd had the undead in mind when they'd drawn up the blueprints.

Our cabin contained full sliding doors out to a balcony, but it was a large balcony and it looked like the sunshine didn't come directly into the room.

Then the master bedroom was at the back, so there was no reason for Rafe to be exposed to sun.

Our stateroom was beautiful, like a small, perfectly decorated Egyptian apartment, with dining room, living area and three bedrooms and bathrooms. There was even a small but serviceable kitchen. On the desk in the living room was a schedule of events for this evening and the following day. Tonight, before dinner, we were all invited to the Captain's Welcome Cocktail Party. "That should be fun," I said, showing Rafe the itinerary. "And tomorrow, we're having our first outing, to Edfu."

“Your enthusiasm for mingling with strangers never ceases to amaze me,” my husband said.

“They start out as strangers but who knows? One or two could become friends. Besides, the famous Randall Whitaker might be there.”

“Not if he has any sense,” Rafe replied.

“Don’t be a snob,” I said, kissing him. “I'm going up on deck.” I nearly asked him to come, but it might be tricky for him to stay out of the late afternoon sun. He had sun-protective clothing, hats, even gloves, but it was still easier for him if he stayed out of the sunshine.

“Enjoy yourself,” he said, kissing me back.

I left him with William, who was arranging things in our suite in the way only William could. We'd been aboard less than two hours and already it felt as though we'd been living there for a week.

The rest of the passengers had arrived and the top deck was busy.

Passengers lined the rails with glasses of wine and cameras while the crew quietly cast off the last ropes.

The captain sounded one long blast on the horn.

Our cruise ship eased gracefully away from the dock to take its slow cruise of the Nile. I felt the stirrings of excitement. We were now on the move. At the end of this cruise we’d be able to casually drop in on my parents’ dig and find out what was going on. At least that was my ardent hope.

Almost immediately shouting broke out below us. I looked over the rail to see half a dozen small boats that had appeared from seemingly nowhere. I shook my head, it seemed the sellers would follow me and the other tourists in whatever ingenious ways they could come up with.

Some of the vendors were in narrow wooden skiffs with little outboard motors. Others in rowboats. They darted alongside us with astonishing confidence, matching our speed as though they'd done it hundreds of times which, no doubt, they had.

Each boat was stocked with tourist merchandise. Very much like what I'd already seen on the streets of Cairo.

Bright scarves fluttered like flags. White galabiyas hung from bamboo poles. I spotted embroidered cushion covers, table runners, carved camels, brass ornaments and enough souvenirs to stock a gift shop.

One of the men looked up and shouted, “Beautiful lady! Beautiful scarf!”

Another pointed toward a passenger farther along the deck. “Special price! Only for you!”

The passengers laughed, enjoying the spectacle and no doubt getting ready to part with their cash.

A young boy standing in one of the boats picked up a tightly-wrapped bundle, swung it twice above his head and launched it.

Through the sailed, in a perfect arc until a woman on deck caught it and then pulled out a bright red scarf that unfolded in the evening breeze.

The vendor shouted a price. “For you, beautiful lady, twenty-five dollars.” It didn't matter that we were in Egypt, clearly, they were used to dealing in US currency.

She asked her husband who shook his head. “They were cheaper than that in the market on the corner. You have to bargain, hon.”

She glanced around, caught my eye and shrugged. “Ten dollars.”

The vendor looked as though she’d insulted his baby. “Beautiful lady, this is hand-made Egyptian silk. Fifteen dollars.”

“It's probably made in China,” a man said beside me.

She held up a banknote and another. Fifteen US dollars.

He shrugged, holding onto his disappointed expression. But up came a net that she put the money into. Then she wrapped the scarf around her shoulders. In the meantime, more scarves were being tossed up, T-shirts and something I thought might be a tablecloth.

A blue scarf shot through with silver threads landed at my feet, and a young man with liquid brown eyes grinned at me as though we were knowing partners in a game. I couldn’t resist, never mind that I had more scarves than I could ever wear thanks to the ever-busy hands of my undead knitting friends, I knelt down and retrieved the blue and silver scarf. “Fifteen dollars?” I called down to the boatman.

He looked shocked and hurt. “Beautiful lady, twenty dollars. Hand-made. For you.”

I laughed. “Fifteen!” I might be naïve, but I wasn’t that naïve. “It’s worth five,” the same cynical man said beside me.

“But the entertainment is worth an extra ten,” I replied, pulling money from my handbag and placing it in the net.

The little boats danced around each other with barely inches to spare.

I watched one of the boys skillfully turn his boat almost sideways to avoid another. He couldn't have been more than fourteen. An older man,

presumably his father, was bargaining with a male passenger. The boy handled the small craft like someone who'd been born on the river. Presumably he had.

I unwrapped my scarf and put it around my neck. I possessed exquisite hand-knitted scarves, but I liked this one, of Egyptian cotton, threaded with silver.

“Beautiful lady,” an Arabic-accented male voice said behind me.

I turned to find a waiter carrying a silver tray laden with glasses of iced hibiscus tea and glasses of wine.

I chose the tea. “Thank you.”

“I am Ahmed,” he said, with a bow of his head. “You must come to sit in my section for your meals. I will make sure you have everything you desire.”

“Thank you, though I will have some meals in our cabin.”

“I will look for you anyway.” He really had a very charming smile. He was probably a little younger than me and looked very dashing in his white jacket and black trousers. “Tomorrow morning, I shall look after you.”

I sipped the tea. “It’s very good.”

He leaned closer. “And your husband lets his beautiful wife out alone?”

Ahmed might be Egyptian but I did not appreciate the implication that I needed Rafe's permission to do anything. In a slightly sharp tone, I said, “My husband is resting.”

“He does not like sunsets?” It was such a strange comment that I glanced at him sharply but his dark brown eyes gave nothing away.

“He likes them perfectly well,” I said. “He's merely tired from traveling.”

Ahmed laughed. “A Nile cruise will be most relaxing for you both. Most relaxing.” Once more, I had the strangest notion that there was some kind of meaning behind the words. And yet, I didn't get any sense that Ahmed was magical or dangerous. Perhaps I was on edge and imagining trouble where none existed.

He moved away to charm another group of passengers.

I watched him stop beside an elderly German couple, who were already smiling before he'd even opened his mouth. He was very good at his job.

The little flotilla of vendors stayed with us another ten minutes or so and then they began to peel away one by one.

Ahead lay only darkness and the faint silver ribbon of the Nile stretching into Upper Egypt.

I rested my hands on the rail. My scarf fluttered in the breeze.

Somewhere farther south my parents were happily uncovering history. Meri was worried. Pete was missing. The river flowed on as though none of it mattered.

I stayed on deck until the last of the little boats disappeared into the darkness behind us.

Then I headed back below to find my husband. It was nearly time for the welcome cocktail reception.

“Do you think Randall Whitaker will be there?” I asked Rafe as we left our suite to go downstairs.

“I don't know,” he answered honestly, “but I think we'd do well to be on our guard.”

He turned to me and looked earnestly into my face. “Lucy, you have a tendency to be as friendly as any American I've ever met, but do try to curb the urge to give out more information than absolutely necessary.”

I nodded, feeling slightly embarrassed that he was essentially calling me a blabbermouth, but I suppose I was. I’m friendly, I like people. And since I run a shop, it's my job to talk to strangers.

Still, I took his warning seriously. During the cruise I would have to be careful to keep my friendly tendencies to a minimum, do more listening than speaking and definitely to keep my witchy senses on full alert.

I would be vigilant and watch my tongue. But I still wanted to be friendly. The more I could find out about our fellow passengers, the more I might be able to figure out who we could trust and who we couldn't.

We were on a small, high-end cruise ship with only one hundred and twenty passengers. It seemed both too many people and too few. I thought of Agatha Christie’s Death on the Nile, one of my favorite mystery novels. There had only seemed to be about a dozen people on board the ship, so it was much easier to eliminate suspects. With ten times that number, I’d have to be extra vigilant. However, I was pleased we weren’t on one of the big cruise ships with hundreds of passengers on board.

We already knew that Randall Whitaker intended to contact my husband. What I really wanted to know was whether there were other people on board who might be connected to whatever danger seemed to lurk.

Even though I wasn’t advertising for my shop all the way out here in Cairo, I always enjoyed wearing the various shawls, wraps, dresses and sweaters that my vampire friends liked to fashion for me. For tonight, I wore a midnight blue silk trouser suit and a lightweight crocheted wrap as gauzy as a spider’s web. It made me feel that I was wrapped in friendship, and also, I hoped I would be able to trap whoever might be plotting evil against my family the way a spider would trap a fat fly.

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# CHAPTER 12



Before we entered the double doors that would take us into the combination bar and lounge, Rafe pulled me to him and kissed me.

His touch immediately centered me and made me feel calmer. He smiled down at me. “Ready?”

I returned the smile. “Ready.”

He opened the doors and we walked in together. There were seating areas by the windows, and dotted around the center were tables for gathering around with drinks and snacks. About twenty people were already there and as we walked deeper into the room, the door opened and more people began arriving.

I looked around the room and let myself sense.

Could I feel evil?

No.

Could I see it?

No.

As far as I could tell I was facing a harmless-looking bunch of tourists. Mostly middle-aged and older. I suspected we’d meet a number of retired professionals.

Tarek Hassan, the cruise director and lead Egyptologist, made sure to greet us as we came through the door. He was about fifty and had a quick way of speaking and an air of importance about him. “Ah, you must be Mr. and Mrs. Crosyer. May I call you Rafe and Lucy?”

We agreed that he could and he apologized for not being there to welcome us on board but he’d flown in with the other guests and arrived later. He explained that there were three Egyptologists and we’d be split

into three groups, each with their own bus for excursions. He explained it would mean we were never crowded, which sounded good to me.

He then introduced us to the Egyptologist who would lead our group. Her name was Nadia Farouk and she was gorgeous in a tight-fitting red dress and gold heels. She was probably in her mid-forties with long black hair that curled down her back, big dark eyes and a wide smile. When she shook our hands, gold bracelets tinkled on her wrists. She also had ornate hoop earrings and several gold necklaces layered around her neck. “I’m so happy to meet you,” she said, and she had a way of looking right at us that made it feel true.

A waiter offered us a choice of drinks on a tray. I chose sparkling white wine. Rafe took a glass of red wine that he would wander around with and barely sip before quietly depositing it somewhere.

After a short welcome speech by Tarek Hassan, we were free to mingle.

I saw two couples introducing themselves. The accent was North American, but nothing like my Boston one.

“I think they're Canadians,” I said to Rafe.

There was a twinkle in his eye. Sometimes it's easy to forget that vampires have super-acute hearing. “The couple on the left is from Sault Ste. Marie and the couple on the right live in Toronto,” he told me.

Okay then.

I'm not saying Canadians can't be as evil as the next person, but they just looked like thoroughly nice people. The four were already sitting down and getting to know each other. For a second I longed to join them, simply to be another couple on holiday. Except we were far from that.

Rafe said, “I'll go and see what else I can hear. I think we'll find out more if we split up. Mingle.” Then he leaned over and whispered in my ear. “But don't give away too much.”

Well, there was a tall order. I was supposed to chat away but not actually tell people anything. I suppose that was the definition of small talk but it would be so small it would have no substance at all.

There was a uniformed waiter walking around with trays of sparkling wine and canapés. It reminded me to take a sip of the sparkling wine in my hand, partly for something to do and partly to quell my nerves.

Then I walked farther into the room, trying to find a likely person to start talking to. There weren't many people in my age group.

They tended to be mostly couples in their fifties and sixties, maybe older.

And as I wandered aimlessly, a man came toward me. He was thick-set, with grizzled grey hair, the kind of tan that you only get when you follow the sun around the globe, thick eyeglasses, and a slight limp.

“Hello, young lady,” he said, his gravelly voice revealing a real New Yorker accent.

And when I looked through the glasses, I swear his eyes were leering at me. A magnified leer is worse than a regular one, if you ask me.

There's a saying in the UK: He gives me the ick. And I had never experienced it so completely as I did at that moment.

“Hello,” I replied, trying to hide my revulsion.

“I'm delighted that someone as young and beautiful as you will be sailing with us. Usually these things are full of old people. Like me.” He laughed heartily. “I’ll be eighty next year.”

A blonde woman who looked as though she were permanently worried came up and stood beside him.

“This is my wife, Sharon,” he said, a bit like he would have said, ‘and this is my dog, Fido.’ She nodded, looking me up and down. She didn’t appear jealous that her husband was making time with a much younger woman, more resigned as though she were used to it.

Then he stuck out his hand. “I'm Randall Whitaker.”

Honestly, I never had much of a poker face and I must have shown my shock because he looked delighted. “Don't tell me you've heard of me.”

I gave an embarrassed chuckle. I couldn’t explain why I knew the name, not when I’d promised Rafe not to divulge too much information. “No, it's just...” I scrambled to think of a good excuse. Came up with the age old, “I knew a family named Whitaker in New York. I wondered if you're related.”

It was such a pathetic excuse I was embarrassed, but it turned out to be a good one because it allowed Randall Whitaker to pontificate about his family.

“While there are several branches of my family in New York, my branch is the most successful. My grandfather, Cyrus Whitaker, made a fortune in Pennsylvania. Steel and railroads, mostly. Shortly after my father took over the company America entered the war in 1941. Our firm won some lucrative defense contracts in World War 2—aircraft components, military vehicles, munitions casings, even shipbuilding.”

“My goodness. I must have known one of the other branches of the family.”

But now that he was launched on his family history he happily kept going. “My father had always enjoyed collecting, but after the war he had the money to really indulge his passion. He moved us into investments, banking and real estate. He sent me to Harvard with my first gold credit card and all the girls wanted to date me. Didn’t they, Sharon?”

“So I’ve heard,” she said.

“My father always loved Egypt. He collected some extraordinary things and since I’ll be turning 80 next year I thought I should see the country he admired so much.”

“How nice.” I really had no idea what to say.

He rubbed his hip. “Had a hip replacement a few months ago. And I said to Sharon, ‘we’d better get traveling while we can. We’re not getting any younger.’”

“That’s a great attitude,” I agreed. “Do you need to sit down or anything?”

“No, no. It’s important to keep moving. I need space to walk around. My wife and I have the biggest stateroom. But then I always insist on the best.”

I had to hide my smile. My husband could have bought this boat, probably the whole company if he’d chosen to. Instead we found ourselves in what was probably the second-best stateroom.

“What would you have done if the best cabin was already booked?” I asked, genuinely curious.

He shook his head as though I wasn’t very bright. “My travel agent would shift the dates if necessary. She knows how particular I am. I always book the best tables in restaurants, the best hotel rooms. For me, second-best simply isn’t good enough. Now, if you’d like to see what money and influence can buy, we’d love you to come and have a drink with us later.” He leaned in closer. “Since you're all on your own.”

Never in my life had I been so happy to say, “Thank you, but I'm traveling with my husband.”

He looked mildly disappointed but quickly recovered and said, “Well, if you find yourself feeling lonely, come and find us. We're in stateroom one.”

I noticed he didn’t include my husband in the invitation. I thanked him but made it clear I never felt lonely when my husband was near, which was

true.

Then I moved on.

Not only because I didn't want to stand there talking to Randall Whitaker any longer but also because I couldn't believe I'd already bumped into him.

I had to tell Rafe that the first person I'd spoken to was Randall Whitaker. What were the chances?

I didn't think I'd given away any information at all, mostly because Randall Whitaker was not interested in anybody else's voice but his own.

The thing I had noted was the way he'd talked about his father, who was clearly deceased, yet seemed to be the most important force in Randall's life.

I wondered if he'd come up with the idea of donating that Book of the Dead to a museum just to please his dad. It made me feel slightly more sympathetic to him. But not very.

What was a man his age doing inviting a woman in her thirties to his stateroom? It wasn't something I wanted to think about.

I found Rafe had also been making a new acquaintance. When I came up beside him, he was talking to an Egyptian man in French.

He smoothly changed to English when he saw me and then introduced me to Professor Karim Nassar, who was probably in his fifties with curly dark hair streaked with gray. His eyes were dark and expressive and when he smiled, I was reminded of one of Gran's favorite movie stars, the Egyptian actor Omar Sharif. We'd watched Dr. Zhivago together more than once. It was a happy memory of simpler times when I was young and she was still fully alive. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Madame Crosyer," he said when Rafe introduced us.

"Doctor Nassar is a professor of Egyptology at the University of Cairo and a consultant to the Grand Egyptian Museum," Rafe explained.

Before I could say anything, the Omar Sharif look-alike raised a hand. "Please, call me Karim. And I am here, not for the pleasure of the cruise as you are, though it is most pleasant, but to sing for my supper. I am to give several lectures over the course of our cruise."

I admit I was impressed that we were being treated to someone with such good credentials.

After chatting a few more minutes, Karim moved on to talk to some other passengers. Now we were alone, I told Rafe everything I remembered

from Randall Whitaker.

And I screwed up my face in disgust. “And he invited me to his stateroom with his wife, after looking at me like he was taking my clothes off. Gross.”

But Rafe, rather than jumping to his feet and putting his dukes up as though he was going to punch the guy, instead looked thoughtful.

“You know, this could be a real opportunity to get into the man’s stateroom.”

My jaw literally dropped. “You are not suggesting that I should go to his stateroom, are you? I mean, I'm willing to do a lot of the amateur sleuth thing, but I have my limits.”

He gave a low chuckle. “Of course not. I'm suggesting that you say, 'My husband and I would love to come and have a drink in your stateroom.' He invited you in front of his wife. What's he going to say?”

Oh.

That actually did make a lot of sense.

He smiled at me in a rather disturbing way. “I was wondering how I’d get inside Whitaker’s stateroom. Having a young and beautiful wife definitely has its advantages.”

No one looking at us would ever know that Rafe was not the four or five years older than he looked, but hundreds of years older.

I had been tempted to let Randall Whitaker know who my husband was, since that was basically the reason we were on this cruise. But Rafe had been pretty clear that he didn't want me giving away any extra information.

Now, however, when I subtly indicated and said, “They’re over there,” Rafe said, “Why don’t you introduce me?”

As I led the way, I anticipated Randall Whitaker’s embarrassment of knowing he'd basically hit on the wife of the man whose services he needed to authenticate his manuscript.

When I introduced the men, however, Randall Whitaker didn’t seem to feel any embarrassment. He stuck out his beefy hand and said how happy he was to make Rafe’s acquaintance.

There was a big honking diamond signet ring that practically blinded me when the lights from the chandelier caught it and his short-sleeved shirt revealed a curious-looking watch that I’d bet was extremely expensive.

He also wore a thick gold chain with another big diamond around his neck. Subtle he wasn’t: not in his jewelry, not his cologne, which was pretty

much making my eyes water, and certainly not his come-on lines. “I was just making the acquaintance of your beautiful wife here,” he said.

Rafe shook his hand briefly and then withdrew it. I knew my husband well enough that I felt certain he longed for soap and water and a towel to wash his hands after touching the repulsive man.

Rafe nodded and then raised his eyebrows toward Sharon.

Before she could speak, Randall said, “Oh, and this is my wife, Sharon.” Kind of like he'd forgotten she was standing there. Maybe he had.

Rafe shook her hand and very politely asked her how she was enjoying Egypt. It was so nice to be married to someone who had good manners. By contrast, I couldn't imagine how many times in a day Randall Whitaker must embarrass his wife.

She had that look about her, as though she'd just become so used to his rudeness that it was second nature to pretend not to notice. “It's very hot, isn't it?” Sharon said.

Rafe nodded and smiled slightly. “It is indeed.”

Then Randall Whitaker broke into their pleasantries. “Rafe, you’re the very man I've been hoping to see.” Randall Whitaker gestured to me. “I invited your beautiful young wife here to join us in our stateroom for a drink. Why don't you both come?” I was so pleased I hadn’t had to force the invitation. In fact, Whitaker seemed delighted to have Rafe join them in their stateroom. Then he glanced around and lowered his voice. “You can take a look at that manuscript I wrote to you about.”

Rafe kept a courteous expression, but I could tell he was shocked. “You've brought the pieces of the papyrus manuscript on board this cruise?”

Whitaker shrugged. “Sure. What do you think is going to happen to it? If the ship goes down, we've got other problems than a bit of old paper getting wet.”

“I’d be more concerned about carrying something so valuable on a cruise ship,” Rafe replied.

Whitaker glanced contemptuously around the room. “These tourists wouldn't know a piece of Egyptian history if it smacked them in the ass.” He said, “Besides, I always travel with a safe. The wife’s jewelry alone could fund a small country.” Then he lifted his arm so we could see his watch. “And I have a few nice pieces myself.” He turned his wrist so his watch caught the light. “I saw you looking at my watch, Lucy. You have good taste.” Then he grinned at Rafe, man to man. “Expensive, like my

wife.” I felt like hitting Randall Whitaker but kept my expression pleasant with a lot of effort.

“My father gave me this for my twenty-first birthday,” he said, clearly oblivious to how offensive he’d been. “One of the first of its kind. You couldn't buy this particular model for love or money now.”

“Patek Philippe,” Rafe murmured.

“You’ve got a good eye. Patek Philippe Golden Ellipse. Almost sixty years I’ve been wearing this watch.” Then he undid the catch and removed it to show us the inscription on the back.

*To Randall. The world is yours.*

“I think about my father’s message often. He wanted me to have everything.”

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# CHAPTER 13



Rafe kept his feelings to himself. He was very good at that. Much better than I was. “I look forward to seeing the papyrus,” was all he said.

Whitaker rubbed his hands together. “Well, no time like the present. Why don't you join us for dinner and then we'll take you back to the stateroom afterwards?”

There was an awkward moment. At least it was awkward for me. But Rafe had been handling moments like this for centuries.

“Thank you very much for the invitation,” he said, “but my wife and I brought our own chef. I have a few food allergies. I find it easier simply to have my own meals prepared by someone who understands them thoroughly. You do understand.”

I thought, if anything, the mention of a private chef only endeared Rafe more to Whitaker.

“Your own chef, huh? I hadn't thought of that. Sharon, we should have brought our own chef.”

She looked surprised. “But you always say you enjoy meeting people on these cruises. Besides, we've hired a butler. Isn't that good enough?”

He looked a bit disappointed as though Rafe had one-upped him in the servant department. “I suppose so,” Whitaker said, but I’d bet money that the next cruise he went on there’d be a private chef along. Then he seemed to perk up as he said, “I hope you don't mind that we have the biggest stateroom.”

Rafe kept his courteous expression. “My wife and I are very happy where we are.”

“Okay then. Why don't you come by about ten o'clock tonight? Like I said, the wives can get to know each other and you and I can do some business.”

“I look forward to it,” Rafe said.

And I, who knew him intimately, could tell that he'd rarely looked forward to anything less. But at least he’d get to see the manuscript and be able to study it.

Naturally, I'd like to have a gander at the papyrus too. I might not be the expert Rafe was, but I'd seen a papyrus document or two. And sometimes two pairs of eyes really are better than one, even if one of them happens to belong to Rafe Crosyer.

Of the two of us, he was the better qualified, but I knew he’d make sure I got a peek at it.

Then Whitaker looked over our shoulders. “Honey, there's the captain. We should go and say hello.”

I don't think I've ever been so glad to see the back of anybody as he walked away.

Rafe and I shared a glance. Nothing more. There was no need as our mutual dislike of that man was more than clear. We'd have plenty of time to talk when we were on our own in our stateroom.

Though he did manage to say, in a voice only I could hear, “You do manage to attract the most unsavory characters.”

I opened my eyes wide. “I know. It's a talent.”

Then he drifted off one way and I drifted off another. That way we could work the whole room and compare notes later.

Soon I found myself chatting to a lovely Canadian couple, Ruth and Ernest. I recognized Ernest as the man who’d made the cynical comments when we’d been standing at the rail earlier. They were retired now but he'd been an airline pilot and she'd been a schoolteacher. Ernest had flown all over the world and now admitted he was perfectly happy to travel by water or rail.

“It's funny,” he said. “I just got tired of jetting through the skies. Getting on a plane feels too much like going to work. There's something about a cruise that's so relaxing, don't you think?”

I'm sure under the right circumstances, a cruise would be nothing but relaxing. But unfortunately, this wasn't one of them. I was already keyed up and nervous.

What would we find when we got to Randall Whitaker's suite at ten o'clock that evening? Would the papyrus somehow reveal whatever danger appeared to face my parents?

I pulled my attention back to the present and agreed with the Canadian couple that I was looking forward to the cruise.

“We're going to see antiquities that we've been reading about for years,” Ruth said. The schoolteacher hadn't lost the knack of lecturing.

“We’re sailing south to Aswan so we’ll go through the Esna Lock. After that there’s Edfu, which has one of the best-preserved temples in Egypt. It’s dedicated to Horus. Then we’ll see a site few cruise ships do, Gebel el-Silsila. We’ll have to get tenders to that one as there’s nowhere for a large ship to dock. Then Kom Ombo—that’s the unusual double temple, dedicated to two gods. Sobek, the crocodile god, and Horus.”

“It’s going to be so interesting,” I said. As though I didn’t have two archeologists for parents who’d taught me this stuff when I was in diapers.

In truth, I just wanted to get through this cruise unscathed.

There wasn't an ancient monument in the world right now that could get me as excited as making sure the people I loved were safe.

There were waiters circulating with glasses of wine, sparkling water and canapés. One approached us and gave me a big smile.

“Most beautiful lady. I will serve you well for all your meals.”

“Thank you very much, Ahmed,” I said.

He smiled again. “And you even know how to pronounce my name properly, like an Egyptian. You will make a very fine wife.”

It was hard not to be charmed. I wondered how many tourists he assumed were single had heard that line. It probably meant he got good tips.

I was about to tell the enterprising waiter that I was already married when Ernest asked him whether breakfast would be Western style or Egyptian.

“Oh, you will find a selection of everything,” he said. “Our chef is most excellent, and there is a vast array of both Egyptian and Western delicacies to choose from. And if you ever have a special request, you have only to ask me.”

Ernest nodded.

“My name is Ahmed. I look forward to serving you.” Then, offering us one more tiny pinwheel pastry stuffed with spinach and pine nuts, he moved away.

Ruth leaned toward me and tittered. “Well, he's certainly taken with you. If you're looking for a husband, you don't have to look much farther. You know, everybody on the ship is in couples. So if you'd care to join us and our friends, you're always welcome.”

I let the slightly snarky comment go and embraced the true generosity of her offer. “Thank you very much. I’m here with my husband, though he eats a special diet, so he doesn't join me in the dining room all that often. I'd be happy to join you. Thank you.”

Feeling pleased that I'd made some new friends, I took my leave and continued circulating.

I met a large group of musicians, all of whom had been born in India but now lived all over the world and shared a love of music.

One of the men gestured toward a piano that I hadn't even noticed in the lounge. “I'll be playing most evenings,” he said. “We always enjoy a sing-song. I hope you'll join us, Lucy.”

I smiled. I don't know what I'd expected from this cruise, but it was nothing like I'd imagined.

Sing-songs and marriage proposals from Egyptian waiters and I hadn't even got through the first evening yet.

At about eight o'clock, Rafe and I retired to our stateroom.

He'd encouraged me to go and join the group for dinner if I wanted to, but just for this first night I really wanted to have dinner with my husband.

Besides, I wanted to share my impressions and hear his.

I'd be a lot more relaxed with Rafe and William Thresher than I would with a bunch of people who liked cruising and were a lot older than I was.

While we’d attended the cocktail reception, William had made the stateroom feel like home. He'd brought one of the smaller sketches from our wedding and put it beside the bed.

My favorite toiletries were in the bathroom, my clothes hanging in the closet, and the cookies I liked in a tin.

And, of course, everything Rafe needed was fully stocked in the refrigerator. I'd had a bit of anxiety about this, but both Rafe and William had assured me there were plenty of sources.

I was surprised. “Are there vampires here? I mean, it's so hot and sunny.”

“There are also many places that are cool and quiet and dark,” Rafe assured me. “You don't find as many here as in the cooler northern climates,

but I have some good friends here. If we get time, I hope to introduce you to some of them."

I thought that was so cool. When I thought about introducing Rafe to my friends, it was people I went to high school with.

And for him...I guess friends are friends, whatever form they take.

He looked at me with one eyebrow raised. "I believe there's a thriving community of witches and magicians here too."

I nodded. "Meri's staying in a house that is clearly full of witches. They seem very nice, though. I feel like I'm not as alone as I thought I would be."

He was silent as he took my hand. "I never want you to feel alone. You know that. Wherever I am, if you call me, I'll come to you." The beautiful thing was, it was true.

I squeezed his hand back. "I wish Randall Whitaker hadn't chosen to meet on a cruise ship in the middle of the Nile."

"It will be fine," he promised me. "I'm pleased that Whitaker has already made contact. It speeds things up enormously."

I still felt fretful. "But the cruise is seven days long. My parents are in danger right now."

"And we will work out why and remove the danger." He sounded so certain.

"Do you think whoever found out that my parents discovered pieces of the Book of the Dead also knew that Randall Whitaker has pieces of the same book? And somehow they want to put the pieces together?"

His expression was somber. "That seems the most logical explanation."

I pushed the beautiful food William had prepared around on my plate. "Because in its entirety, the manuscript could cause trouble. It feels like ancient evil stirring."

"I'd say exactly right," Rafe said, "except that someone here and now is trying to pull those pieces together. And whoever or whatever that creature might be, with that kind of power, they could be extremely dangerous."

"And we've got to find them."

"Yes. Somehow, we have to stop them without even knowing if we're on the right track. It's certainly a puzzle."

Then he smiled at me. "But you and I are rather good at solving puzzles, Lucy."

He was right, but this puzzle was a particularly important one.

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# CHAPTER 14



There was a lecture at 9 p.m. which Rafe, William and I attended together. William had always been more of a general manager for Rafe than a servant and there was a real bond between them.

We found seats in the main lounge and, as I looked around, I thought most of the passengers had shown up for this first talk. “We are very pleased to have a guest lecturer with us this evening,” the cruise director announced. “Professor Karim Nassar, Professor of Egyptology at Cairo University, consultant to the Grand Egyptian Museum and one of Egypt's foremost experts on funerary texts.”

Professor Karim Nassar soon had us all eating out of the palm of his hand. He was clearly proud of both his country and its remarkable history.

He spoke perfect English with only the faintest Egyptian accent, and had just enough silver threaded through his curly black hair to make him look distinguished rather than old. His dark brown eyes sparkled with humor, and his smile was warm enough that I could immediately see why he'd been asked to entertain a boatload of tourists.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “welcome to Egypt. On this cruise of the Nile you will see magnificent tombs and monuments from the Valley of the Kings to Abu Simbel. You may begin to think, as you contemplate our great history, that ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death.” Here, he shook his head slowly at us. “We have learned most of what we know about ancient Egypt from tombs, but I want to assure you that ancient Egyptians did not spend their lives preparing for death. They spent their lives preparing for eternity.”

He paused here so we could take that in. Even though I knew this stuff, he was easy to listen to. “They believed this life was only the beginning. If your body survived, if your name was remembered, and if the proper rituals were observed, then you could continue living forever.”

His eyes twinkled as he regarded the mainly senior audience. “So you might say they were the world's first retirement planners.”

Even Rafe smiled at that.

Professor Nassar talked for about thirty minutes about Egypt’s history but he kept it light and entertaining. I could see Randall and Sharon sitting at the back looking bored. Even in the short time we’d been aboard I got the feeling they weren’t well liked. There were empty seats on either side of them.

Then I returned my attention to the talk. By the time the professor finished, I felt as though I'd learned something without ever once feeling I was in a classroom. I leaned over to Rafe.

“My mother and grandmother would completely fall for him. They’d say he reminded them of Omar Sharif.”

Rafe looked back at me blankly. “Who?”

“Never mind,” I whispered. “I'll add Doctor Zhivago to the list of popular movies we need to watch sometime.” I’d made it my mission to get Rafe up to speed on modern movies.

Ernest and Ruth, the retired pilot and school teacher were nearby, so I introduced them to Rafe.

Ruth, looking from one to the other of us, said, “And let me guess. You are on your honeymoon.”

Rafe and I glanced at each other, and I'm pretty sure I blushed slightly, whereupon Ruth laughed softly. “It's easy to tell when two people are deeply in love.”

Neither of us bothered to disabuse her of that notion. We might not be honeymooners, but we were definitely still deeply in love, and I suspected we always would be.

“Apart from honeymooning, what do you do?” Ruth asked me.

“I run a knitting shop,” I said. “In Oxford.”

“Although the pharaohs themselves weren't knitters, Egypt has a surprisingly good claim to the history of knitting. The oldest surviving knitted garments in the world were discovered here. Beautiful cotton socks,

over a thousand years old, knitted with separate toes so they could be worn with sandals.” She smiled. “I’m a knitter myself.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes. Most people think knitting is a northern European invention. It probably isn't. It most likely traveled from this part of the world into Europe many centuries later,” Ruth assured me.

“I’ll have to put something about that in my newsletter,” I said, vowing to learn more about the crafting world I found myself in.

“If we ever get to Oxford I’ll have to come to your shop. Do you ship to Canada?”

“We ship everywhere. I have customers all over the world,” I said, not without pride. “I think with the advent of social media, and our world being so digital, there's a real allure in beautiful handcrafted objects.”

“Have you always been a knitter?” Ruth asked me.

I laughed at that. “Even though I run a knitting shop, I'm still not as good a knitter as I want to be. But I do enjoy it.” And amazingly this was true. I'd come to knitting and crochet with both a bad attitude and a pretty inept pair of hands.

But since I’d taken over Cardinal Woolsey’s and started knitting with the Vampire Knitting Club, I'd improved enormously and I now looked forward to sitting down with my knitting.

I'd never be the knitter that the vampires were, who’d had hundreds of years to practise their techniques. Or even some of the human knitters who bought supplies from my shop. But I was improving.

I think people are born with different talents. My natural talents were more in the magical realm.

However, I was more and more beginning to enjoy the soothing, meditative aspects of knitting and crochet —at least when the project was going well.

When I dropped stitches, knitted when I should have purled, sewed a collar on backward, and all the various things I'd done wrong, I was ready to scream and throw the whole thing in the fire.

But all in all, I was definitely improving.

“And you, Rafe? What is your profession?” Ernest asked.

“I deal in rare manuscripts,” Rafe said. He was so modest. I wanted to pipe up and tell Ruth and Ernest that Rafe also taught at a very prestigious

university in Oxford. But, well aware that my husband had pretty much told me to keep a lid on my blabbing, I kept quiet.

I'd noticed Professor Nassar hover at the edge of our conversation. Now he said, "Do you have a special time period?"

That was an interesting question and one people rarely asked Rafe.

He answered honestly. "The Elizabethan era is my specialty."

It made sense since he'd actually been alive during that time, this would naturally be the era he knew the best. And probably the manuscripts he enjoyed the most.

He was so far removed from the life he'd known. I suppose it would be like me living on for another five hundred years and then choosing the early 2000s as my specialty subject.

"And do you know anything about Egyptian manuscripts?" Something in the way Professor Nassar asked the question made me glance a little more sharply at him. Rafe, as always, remained completely unperturbed. "I have a reasonable grounding, yes."

The professor nodded. "I'm sure you can imagine papyrus manuscripts are very easy to fake. I spend a lot of my time helping distinguish the originals from the forgeries."

"I do the same with Shakespeare," Rafe said. "You'd be amazed how many first editions of Julius Caesar I come across." He put air quotes around "first editions." I'm pretty sure he'd picked that up from me.

I didn't really want to get into a big and boring discussion about forgeries, which I could see these two were getting poised to do.

So I asked the professor, "Are you only here for this evening? Or will we see you again?"

He smiled at me. "Lucy, I am a hard-working man. I have been invited to give several lectures on this cruise, after which I've been asked to evaluate and authenticate some newly discovered manuscripts near Aswan."

I must have given a little gasp, although I didn't even notice it. Then I felt Rafe squeeze my shoulder in a way that suggested he did not want me asking any more questions.

But it just seemed too coincidental. Was it possible that Professor Nassar was on his way to my parents' dig in Wadi Sabuq? That was near Aswan and they had recently discovered papyrus fragments. They were also supposed to keep the find quiet for now.

Behind us, the musical group had launched into Fly Me to the Moon and a few of my fellow passengers were joining in the song.

I didn't feel like joining them, but I did tap my toes along with the music. I wished I wasn't so worried about Meri and Pete and my parents, otherwise I feel like I would have enjoyed my cruise a lot more.

We got back to our stateroom with a few minutes until we were due in Randall and Sharon’s suite, and found tomorrow's itinerary had been slipped under our door.

We’d be going to Edfu the next day, a grand temple dedicated to Horus the falcon god. The thing is, I'd been on a lot of dusty digs with my parents, but I rarely got to see the big tourist attractions.

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# CHAPTER 15



At ten o'clock exactly, Rafe and I made our way along the corridor to Randall and Sharon Whitaker's stateroom.

Rafe wore a lightweight dark jacket over a pale shirt, and somehow managed to look as though he had not merely boarded a Nile cruise ship, but might secretly own it. I still wore my trouser suit but had wrapped the scarf more tightly around my neck since I was entering the private stateroom of a man who'd looked at me like he might buy me at auction.

"Remember," Rafe said quietly as we walked the short distance.

"Don't give away too much?" I guessed.

"Exactly."

"I do listen, you know."

His mouth curved slightly. "Yes. Eventually."

Before I could think of a suitable reply, we reached the door marked Stateroom One. Rafe knocked.

There was a pause, and then the door opened to reveal a uniformed butler. Not one of the ship's crew, I realized. This man had the smooth, discreet air of someone who had been hired privately and paid well enough to ignore almost anything.

"Mr. and Mrs. Crosyer," he said. "Please come in."

Randall and Sharon's stateroom was, I had to admit, spectacular.

Our own suite was lovely. Beautiful, in fact. Large master bedroom, pretty generous second and third bedrooms, separate sitting area, private balcony. As in our suite, the wood was polished, the sheets Egyptian cotton, and the bathrooms gleamed.

This was not a stateroom so much as a luxury apartment that happened to float.

The living room was furnished with curved cream sofas, brass lamps, low tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl and wide sliding glass doors leading out to the private balcony.

The Nile was beyond the glass, dark and mysterious, with tiny lights glimmering along the shore.

There was a dining table set for four, though only with glasses and small plates. A silver tray held canapés. Another held bottles of wine, champagne and something amber in a crystal decanter.

Randall Whitaker had clearly never met a surface he didn't want to cover with expensive things.

Sharon sat on one of the sofas, looking elegant and pale in a silk dress the color of champagne. She had a glass in her hand, though I noticed she didn't seem to be drinking from it.

Randall stood in the middle of the room with his legs planted apart, as though the suite, the ship and possibly the entire Nile belonged to him.

"Here they are," he said. "The famous Mr. Crosyer and his lovely wife."

I smiled. It was that or bare my teeth. "Thank you for inviting us," Rafe said.

"Delighted. Delighted." He waved a hand. "Sharon, look after Lucy. You girls can get to know each other while Rafe and I talk business."

*Girls?* I was more than thirty and Sharon had to be in her mid-seventies. I tried to remind myself that Randall Whitaker was old, but I knew vampires a lot older than he was and they managed to keep up with the times. Well, most of them.

Rafe said, "I'd like Lucy to study the papyrus too."

Randall turned to me, as though astonished.

"My parents are archeologists," I said. "I've been studying papyrus since I was a child." I didn't think it counted as giving too much away, but Randall's eyes sharpened. "Is that so?"

"Yes."

Rafe put his hand lightly at my back. "Lucy has an excellent eye."

I tried very hard not to look pleased but it was ridiculous how much a compliment from my husband could warm me, even while we were standing in the floating lair of a creep with a stolen, cursed or possibly world-threatening papyrus manuscript.

“Well then,” Randall said. “Why not? Sharon, pour Lucy something.”

“Just some water, thank you,” I said.

Rafe shook his head, declining a drink. Then he said, “Randall, did you know that we have an expert on board the ship? Professor Karim Nassar, who gave the lecture tonight, also evaluates and authenticates papyrus manuscripts. He may have more relevant experience than I do.”

I kind of wanted to smack my husband. What was he doing? We needed to study Randall Whitaker’s papyrus to see if it would give us any clues about what was putting my parents in danger.

Sharon was the one who answered, louder than I’d heard her speak before. “I don't trust that guy.”

I raised my eyebrows in surprise. For a woman who seemed quite content in her husband's shadow, it was surprising to hear her give such a firm opinion. “I get a feeling about people sometimes, and I just didn't get a good one from him. He's too slick for words and he looks like Omar Sharif.”

She turned to me. “Did you ever see Omar Sharif in Funny Girl? That's who this guy reminds me of. He can be very charming but you wouldn't trust him with your life savings.”

I’d always thought of Omar Sharif as the title character in Dr. Zhivago where he was noble and brave. Of course, Dr. Nassar was no more like one of Sharif’s characters than Sharif himself had been.

Randall nodded. “I'll be satisfied with what you tell us, Rafe.”

Here he tapped the side of his nose. “Sharon’s good with people. She has good instincts so let's not be telling Professor Nassar about this document.”

I was secretly pretty relieved as it seemed to me the fewer people who knew about the ancient papyrus on our ship, the better.

It felt like we were all sailing toward the day when two linked pieces of that papyrus manuscript were going to come together and I wondered if I’d end up using my magic to stop the union. But I knew I had to be very careful. Magic has rules and I didn’t know whose rules I was playing by.

I could only hope that somewhere between here and Wadi Sabuq we could figure out exactly what was going on.

“Of course,” Rafe said. “It’s entirely your decision.”

Randall had already turned away. “Come on then. It’s in the bedroom.”

We followed Randall through a set of double doors into the bedroom.

The bed was enormous, draped in white linen with carved wooden panels behind it. There was another balcony, smaller than the first, and a sitting area with two chairs upholstered in blue and gold.

On the far wall was a fitted wardrobe. Randall opened it. Either the butler or Sharon had unpacked and he pushed aside several shirts and a linen jacket, then crouched down with a grunt.

There, on the floor of the wardrobe, was a black portable safe.

Not the kind you get in hotel rooms, where you punch in four digits and hope for the best. This looked serious. Matte black, heavy, with reinforced edges, a keypad and a small square that I guessed was for a fingerprint.

Randall glanced back at us. “Can’t be too careful.”

“No,” Rafe said. “Indeed.”

Randall pressed his thumb to the scanner and it beeped.

He tapped in a code, shielding it with his body, so there was a second layer of security. There was a heavy click and then Randall opened the safe and drew out a flat archival case.

For the first time since we’d met him, he handled something with care.

He might be vulgar. He might be obnoxious. He might wear enough jewelry to make a pirate feel underdressed. But he valued this.

He carried the case to a low table near the window.

“Sharon,” he called. “Bring the good light.”

A moment later Sharon appeared in the doorway, carrying a small lamp which she set down without speaking. I wondered how many times she had been summoned that way.

We all watched Randall open the case.

Inside, resting on acid-free paper, were several pieces of papyrus. We’d seen the copies but seeing the real thing sent a tiny shiver through me, part recognition and part fear.

One was about the size of my hand. Another longer and narrower. A third was ragged at the edges, as though it had been torn or damaged long ago. The colors were faded, but not gone. I saw black ink, red ink and traces of blue and green.

My breath caught. It was one thing to talk about an ancient magical manuscript and to study photocopies of it. It was another thing entirely to see it lying in front of me. For a moment I felt something stir in the air.

Rafe’s hand brushed mine. Once. Lightly. A warning to be careful what I said? Or perhaps simply reassurance.

“Well?” Randall said. “What do you think?”

Rafe leaned over the fragments, careful not to touch them.

“May I?” He pulled a pair of cotton gloves from his pocket, waiting until Randall nodded before touching the old papyrus.

Rafe examined the first fragment, slowly, carefully.

“Is it authentic?” Randall asked.

“It appears to be ancient,” Rafe said, “But obviously I would need more time and proper conditions to make any definitive assessment.”

Randall waved this away. “Of course, of course. But between us. What am I looking at?”

Rafe studied the papyrus again. He beckoned me over and I peeked over his shoulder. The ancient page seemed to whisper with secret magic. “This section appears to be funerary in nature,” Rafe said.

Randall laughed. “Well, yeah. It’s from a Book of the Dead. I knew that much.”

“A precursor to the Book of the Dead, yes. Do you know what it says?”

Randall rocked back on his heels. “I have a general idea. Instructions for the afterlife. Protection. Passage through gates. The usual sort of thing.”

He pointed to a particular line. “Like this one. That’s the deceased being protected by the gods.”

It was plausible. It was even the sort of thing I might have believed if I hadn’t been standing close enough to see the symbols for myself.

But I could read just enough.

Not fluently. Not like Rafe or my parents. But enough. There was a figure with arms raised. A knife. A mouth. A sealed door. A little cluster of signs I recognised as something to do with binding, or closing, or perhaps commanding silence.

That wasn’t protection by the gods.

I glanced at Rafe. His face gave nothing away. But his eyes flicked to mine for the briefest second.

He had seen it too. Randall was lying, or more likely he had been lied to.

“This is an unusual text,” Rafe said.

Randall looked pleased by the cool comment. “That’s why I wanted you to see it.”

“Where did your father acquire it?”

Randall's expression shifted very slightly. "My father collected antiquities for years. It's hard to keep them all straight."

"And yet, I believe you mentioned in your letter that you're certain of the provenance."

There was a little silence. Sharon, standing near the doorway, lifted her glass and took the smallest sip.

"Let's just say it came from a private collection. I have the documents of sale at home in New York. Easy enough to get you copies. My father employed excellent agents. They would never sell him a fake."

Rafe looked back at the papyrus again. "And you believe these are the only fragments of this particular book still in existence?"

"They're the only fragments I have. I figure my father's agents would have let him know if they'd found any more. Now with this new museum opening, I want to give a piece of its history back to Egypt. Sharon and I have no kids so it's not like there's an inheritance to worry about. This is where it belongs. Back in Egypt." He spread his hands. "You can feel it, can't you? That it belongs here?"

Unfortunately, I could, and not in the way he meant. The papyrus was browned with age but still beautiful and its messages were fairly clear.

But underneath that, I felt something else. Like a very quiet hum.

"I will need to examine these properly, of course, with better equipment than my eyes and a magnifying glass."

Randall nodded. "Of course. When we're back in Cairo."

"Yes. In the meantime, can you provide me copies of the supporting documents of sale? It will help to prove these fragments are genuine."

"Not a problem," Randall assured him. Then he turned to Sharon. "Honey? Get copies made and sent over from New York." He glanced at his watch and I suspected was calculating time differences. "Yes. We can have them for you tomorrow."

Perhaps we appeared surprised at the way he gave instructions to his wife as though she was his personal assistant. He said, "Sharon's been dealing with all the administration for this little project of mine as I've been laid up with a hip replacement. She's dealt with all the correspondence and the Hennings Institute even sent an expert to take a look at the papyrus before they agreed to inspect it further. They're very particular." I wondered how often he used Sharon as his PA when he wasn't having a hip replaced and suspected it was often.

“Tomorrow, then. We stop at some temple. I never can remember the order of these things. Sharon keeps track.”

“We’ll be back from the tour tomorrow afternoon,” Sharon said quietly.

“That’s right. Tomorrow afternoon. You can come then,” Randall said. He began putting the fragments back into the archival case.

I wanted to protest. I wanted more time to listen to that hum and try to make out if it was benign or dangerous. Part of me wanted to snatch them up and run, though that seemed both illegal and unlikely to end well.

Instead I stood there, smiling politely as Randall locked the case back in the safe.

Rafe turned to Sharon. “Do you enjoy cruising?”

“Oh yes,” she said. “It’s very comfortable.” Which sounded like an answer she had given many times.

Randall shut the wardrobe door and clapped his hands together. “Well, that’s enough dusty scholarship for one night. Drink?”

As we walked back into the main living area, Rafe said, “Thank you but it’s been a long day. Another time.”

Randall poured himself a large measure of amber liquid. “Suit yourself. I’ll have those provenance documents for you tomorrow.”

Sharon walked us to the door while Randall remained by the drinks tray, already pouring himself another.

“It was nice to meet you properly,” I said to her.

“You too.” For a moment I thought she might say something else. Her lips parted, but then Randall called, “Sharon? Where did you hide the nuts?”

“Goodnight,” she said. The butler opened the door and Rafe and I stepped back into the corridor.

Only when we were back in our own stateroom did I finally turn to Rafe. “Well?” I asked.

Rafe said, “I’d be very surprised if that papyrus isn’t genuine. What was your feeling?”

“You used the right verb. I could actually feel it.” I didn’t need fancy machinery to make a judgment about the authenticity of that document. No matter how old it was, its magic was still alive. Still powerful. “I’d say it’s the real deal.”

My stomach tightened. “What did it really say?”

“Part of it was a passage of binding. Not a prayer for protection. A command.”

“A command to do what?”

“To seal a mouth. To close a door. Perhaps to keep the dead from speaking.”

I shivered. Personally, I’d very much prefer to keep the dead from speaking. The undead were bad enough!

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# CHAPTER 16



The night flowed as softly as the Nile that I could just sense moving beneath me as our ship slid toward our first stop at Edfu.

I should have been soothed by the slowly rocking motion but there were a lot of worries crowding my mind. Obviously, I was worried about the people I cared about who were facing some unspecified danger. The papyrus text that Randall Whitaker had shown us was disturbing not only in its spells but in the way it seemed to hum with powerful magic.

Needless to say, I wasn't entirely refreshed when I woke up in the morning.

I found Rafe sitting reading. “How did you sleep?” he asked, looking up.

“I've slept better,” I admitted, gratefully accepting a cup of coffee from William exactly the way I like it.

“Will you be wanting breakfast here, Lucy?” William asked me.

Even though I'd not requested that he provide me breakfast, I knew that if I said yes, he'd have whatever I wanted in front of me within half an hour, forty-five minutes tops, even if it meant he had to raid the ship's kitchen to provide me with what I wanted.

There are a lot of things about William Thresher that I liked, and his unflappable confidence and efficiency were right up there.

“No,” I said, giving him a smile. “I feel like I should get to know our fellow passengers.”

We’d be leaving for Edfu after breakfast so I made sure to dress in linen trousers and a loose cotton top for the heat and sturdy shoes for the uneven ground. I’d make sure to put lots of sunscreen on before heading out.

Rafe offered to come with me for breakfast but I told him I’d be fine. I felt I would mingle better without my husband beside me and it would save playing the game where he pushed food around on his plate and I ended up eating it.

Even though I didn’t love walking into the restaurant on my own, I knew that a person on their own is much more likely to talk to people and be invited into a group.

I paused at the entrance and could see about half the tables were already filled. I recognized a fair number of the faces from the evening before but many I hadn't seen before. There were tables of two and four and a few larger round tables. At the far end was a large buffet section. I began to walk forward.

Then I felt an odd jolt. I felt as though someone were looking at me, and not in a generous, friendly way.

I looked around.

The only person I could see looking my way was the waiter, Ahmed, who was beckoning me.

I could see now that the dining room was divided into three sections, with one waiter assigned to each.

Ahmed's section, he'd told me the night before, was on my right-hand side beside the windows. I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't sit in his section so I headed over that way.

I was looking for a table where I could sit by myself when I saw Ruth, the Canadian, waving. She and her husband were at a table for four so there was clearly room for me.

I started to move toward them when a familiar gravelly voice said, “Hello, beautiful lady.”

How had I not noticed that Randall Whitaker and wife Sharon were there?

They also occupied a table for four and there were only two of them. Randall said, “Why don't you sit with us, Lucy?”

I'd never been so happy to be able to say, “Thank you, but the Canadians are calling me over.”

Randall turned his head, eyed the two of them, and turned back to me. “I had a Canadian girlfriend once,” he said. Before he could launch into a story that I was pretty sure I wouldn't enjoy, I said, “I'm sure you did. I'll see you later.”

Then I walked quickly over to Ruth and her husband. Ernest looked quite puzzled. “Are you friends with those two?”

I shook my head vehemently. “No.” Obviously I couldn't explain about the manuscript, so I just said, “I made their acquaintance last night. They're from New York.”

That seemed like plenty. “Yes,” Ernest said. “We met them too. He's a bit of a blowhard.”

Ahmed arrived at my side. “Miss Lucy! Tell me what you would like to drink and I'll make sure to have it for you every morning.”

“That's so nice of you, Ahmed,” I said. “Well, I will have a cup of coffee, please.”

“Of course. And would you like fresh orange juice?”

“Yes, I would.”

Then he explained that it was buffet style, and that there was an Egyptian section, a Western section, and a cooked-to-order section where you could order things like omelettes or pancakes.

It sounded like a great system to me.

When Ahmed went to fetch my coffee, I said, “I'm excited about our agenda today. It's going to be amazing seeing Edfu.”

That, of course, allowed Ruth, the teacher, to give us a short lecture about what we were seeing. “Edfu is one of the best-preserved temples in Egypt,” Ruth informed me. “It was buried under sand for centuries. That's why it's so well preserved. People actually built houses over it.” She paused for a sip of coffee.

“It’s Ptolemaic, that’s Cleopatra’s family. They started building it around 237 BC.”

My coffee arrived by the time she got to Cleopatra. After a few sips I excused myself and went to visit the buffet.

Nadia Farouk the Egyptologist came beside me. “Good morning,” she said. She was much less glamorous today in her uniform of black trousers and white shirt branded with the tour company’s logo. She still wore her jewelry though. Hanging from one of her gold chains was the Eye of Horus in gold and semi-precious stones. You see the eye of Horus everywhere in Egypt. It’s a symbol meant to ward off evil. I wondered if she’d chosen it deliberately today as we were going to visit Horus’s temple.

She called me Lucy, which surprised me because she had about thirty names to learn.

As we both reached for cucumbers, tomatoes and cheese, I said, “I love that we can have both an Egyptian breakfast and an American one.”

She nodded. “The food is very good here. And of course, if you want bacon and eggs or an omelet the chefs will be only too happy to cook it for you.”

“That’s good to know,” I said, wondering if I should go for an omelet.

Then, just as I would have moved on, she leaned over with the tongs, reaching for a pickled artichoke. As she did, her mouth narrowly missed my ear. She whispered, “Be very careful, Lucy. You are being watched.”

I nearly dropped my plate. I'm pretty sure anybody watching me would have seen me look startled. I did my best to recover, saying, “Oh, they have smoked salmon. I love smoked salmon.”

Then, without so much as a glance her way, I moved on.

Now, of course, I had to take some smoked salmon, though the thought of eating it made my guts curl. It seemed like everywhere I turned, I was being warned.

Was the Egyptologist friend or foe? I wasn’t sure.

Who was watching me? And why?

As I sat back down, forgetting the omelet, I tried to chat with Ernest and Ruth though mostly was happy to listen to Ruth talk more about the site we’d be visiting. I glanced over at Nadia, sitting with Tarek the chief Egyptologist and Karim the guest lecturer all chatting in Arabic. I wondered, if I found myself in danger, would she help to protect me, or would she be part of the problem I was facing?

My trouble was I had no idea.

The thing I'd discovered was that it's very hard to fight a foe if you don't know who they are or what shape they take. I'd been in tough spots before, but I had a feeling I'd never faced anything quite like this.

I discovered I’d put a sweet pastry on my plate and ate it because, frankly, I needed the comfort. “More coffee, Miss Lucy?” Ahmed paused to ask.

I shook my head. I just wanted to get out of here. All I could think of was eyes watching me.

“If you need anything, Miss Lucy, you have only to call me. You lift a finger and I will be there.”

“Thank you,” I said again.

When he left, and before he was even out of earshot, Ruth leaned forward, her eyes twinkling from behind her glasses. “He was so cute. I could see him watching you. I think he has a big crush on you.”

I forced a smile. She'd said this the other night. I'm sure she meant well, but it wasn't anything I cared to hear. But wait, had he been watching me for some darker reason?

Ernest, with the cynical view of the world I’d already come to expect said, “Ahmed is very likely fishing for tips. I don't know what kind of money they make on these ships. Certainly, this cruise didn’t come cheap but the money doesn’t all filter down to the people who do all the work. He probably angles for good tips.”

I hoped he was right and that’s why Ahmed seemed to take such an interest in me. I also knew that Rafe and I would take good care to leave generous tips for the staff.

Ruth tittered and said, “Well, he certainly doesn't treat me that way.”

Ernest said, “Ruth, if you want more coffee, I will get you some.”

I thought that was as sweet a way of saying, “I love you,” as any I'd ever heard.

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# CHAPTER 17



At nine we gathered to head to the buses. There was a buzz of excited chatter as people checked they had everything they would need for a day out. Hats, sunscreen, phones, cameras, walking sticks.

We were divided into three sections and mine was Red. Tarek was Blue and a third Egyptologist, a young man named Mohamed, was in charge of team Yellow.

As we made our way out of the boat, over a short bridge to a parking area that led to the buses, I discovered that Ernest and Ruth were in my group, which was great news. Randall and Sharon were in the same group too which wasn’t so great.

There was plenty of room on the bus so I had two seats to myself. As we drove, Nadia spoke for a short time. She only told us, I think, as much as she thought we could handle or wanted to hear.

And it's interesting how difficult it is to take too much information in when you're riding on a bus looking out at the scenery. She told us that Edfu was remarkably well preserved as it had been covered in sand for hundreds of years. It was built after the Greeks conquered Egypt, so nearly 2000 years after the pyramids were built.

Edfu is an impressive temple. I was awed by its scale. Our three groups gathered, each in a different area so it felt more intimate. As we stood outside the huge entrance, twin statues of Horus as falcon stared at us. The eye of Horus, like the one Nadia was wearing and that you could buy in any tourist shop in Egypt, was depicted all over the walls. It was a sign for protection but to me it just reminded me of the warning Nadia had given me. Be careful, you’re being watched. But why? And by whom?

I tried to focus on what she was saying but in truth I was hypervigilant. If anyone so much as glanced my way I tried to determine if they were some kind of threat. Someone sent to quite literally keep an eye on me.

The only possible connection could be with my parents. I tried to concentrate on the hieroglyphs. There'd been trouble and strife here in Egypt four thousand years ago and two thousand years ago. It made sense that it was also here now.

We filed through the great pylon entrance, which made me feel minuscule and into the forecourt. Each area took worshipers deeper into the richly-decorated temple. We'd managed to avoid the crowds so there were times when I felt completely alone. It was wonderful.

Through the forecourt was the pillared hall which led finally to the inner sanctuary where only the priests and pharaoh had access in the old days. Now every tourist with a camera could go inside. I took my time, reading the stories, noting the blackened sections above from the smoke of all the candles over the years.

I noticed a small anteroom and slipped into it enjoying being completely alone in here. I studied the hieroglyphs carved into the wall, graphics of birds and animals combined with writing, almost like comic strips, though the intent hadn't been humorous. There were alcoves, empty now, which once would have held statues.

I was trying to read a strip of images when I felt a movement behind me.

I turned, and saw a shadow retreating, as though someone had crossed the open doorway.

Where a moment ago I'd been thrilled to be alone in this antechamber, I now felt how foolish I was being.

I quickly left the antechamber and glanced around, but I couldn't see anyone. I continued walking around, trying not to get too far from the rest of the group, but also trying to take in this beautiful temple that I might never see again.

After spending a few moments in the inner sanctuary which still echoed with ancient magic, I headed through a doorway I'd glimpsed, curious as to where it led. Outside the main temple was a partially restored section. This was more what I was used to, archaeology in progress. Scaffolding and dusty buckets, ladders and temporary wooden platforms surrounded the

ancient walls and pillars, visible signs of the ongoing restoration to help preserve the temple for future tourists, I supposed.

Here the pillars weren't as high and many were broken or worn. Sharon and Randall were standing together in intense conversation. Possibly arguing. I wanted no part of that so I made to move away.

As I've said, I was hypervigilant and maybe that's what gave me the sixth sense to glance up as I turned.

And I suffered a moment of utter horror. Everything in my body went suddenly cold. It couldn't be true. My eyes must be playing tricks on me.

But sure enough, right above where Sharon and Randall were standing an architectural block on top of one of the columns was wobbling.

I blinked and stared again, unable to believe my eyes. "Look out," I cried, but I'm not sure they even heard me. It was clear now that they were bickering. He had his finger out and was jabbing it at her.

I pointed both hands toward the massive stone. No time for a fancy spell. I put all my energy into pushing back. "*Hold*," I cried out. I felt the force coming out of my hands. Watched the stone settle and then, almost as though a second force were pushing back, the stone came forward again and began to tip.

Randall and Sharon were completely oblivious to what was going on.

"Look out!" I yelled again, watching in horror-film slow motion as the massive stone began to topple. And I caught just a flash of movement behind the stone, what I thought might be a white sleeve.

I had seconds before one or both of them was crushed to smithereens. I sprinted toward them. "Move!" I yelled.

But Randall was nearly eighty and had a bad hip and Sharon looked like she'd frozen into place.

I ran as hard and fast as I could and then threw myself at them in a bad version of a running tackle. I slammed into Sharon first, who fell against her husband, knocking him over. I felt the air shudder and then a terrific crash as the sandstone block landed inches from me.

Bits of gravel and chips of stone flew up into the air, and a couple dug into my skin along with a cloud of dust and dirt. But otherwise I was unharmed.

"Are you okay?" I managed to say to the couple sprawled beneath me. I got to my knees and winced, then rose slowly to my feet.

Sharon nodded and Randall groaned. Then suddenly we weren’t alone anymore. My yells and the crashing stone had brought Nadia and half the tour group as well as a few random tourists and a temple guard running toward us.

Sharon turned to her husband. “Randy, honey, are you all right?”

“What happened?” he said in that horrible growly voice, for the first time sounding less sure of himself.

I pointed upward and noticed a trickle of blood on my arm. Neither my hand nor my voice was quite steady. “An architectural block fell off the top of that column.” It sounded impossible as I said it.

By now a small crowd had gathered. “Lucy, Sharon, Randall, are you all right?” Nadia cried, kneeling beside Randall, whose glasses had fallen off. “Did you hit your head?”

“No,” he said, “but my hip’s throbbing like the devil.” The guard and Ernest and a couple of others came forward. I got out of the way so they could help the older couple to their feet.

By now the cruise director had joined us, along with Karim and some of the blue group. “What happened here?” Tarek asked and Nadia quickly filled him in.

“Come on, Sharon,” Randall said. “We're getting back on the bus.”

Then Nadia mumbled something in Arabic and cast her hands and eyes up to the sky. That was the first time I realized she was probably an Egyptian witch. I'd been so busy categorizing her as an Egyptologist that I hadn't thought she might be both Egyptologist and magical.

Her eyes locked with mine. I think we were both wondering the same thing. Had the falling stone been an accident or deliberate?

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# CHAPTER 18



She took one of Randall’s arms and Ernest the other. Ruth was helping Sharon. As Randall began to limp slowly away, he said, his voice gaining strength, “You'd better get me the best doctor in Egypt. I want a full medical examination for me and my wife. And the first thing I do when we get back to the boat is get my lawyer on the phone.”

I try not to be too full of myself, but as I stood there picking chips of stone out of my upper arm—and yes, it hurt—I thought, “Thank you, Lucy, for saving my life,” might have come before “I’m calling my lawyer.”

My knees were scraped where I'd fallen to the ground and slid, thus ruining my trousers, I had dust and grit in my hair, and the trickle of blood on my upper arm where a chip that had gone quite deep.

Sharon wiped blood from her cheek, then turned back. “Thank you, Lucy. I don't know what we would have done without you.”

I simply nodded. I could have told her what would have happened without me. One or both of them would have been dead.

I looked around again. Most of the Red group had come running. Seventeen of us.

An older woman with white hair pulled back in a bun, wearing a tweed skirt and stout shoes, walked slowly toward me.

“Are you all right, my dear?” she asked. “That is the bravest act I've ever witnessed. You should get some kind of medal.”

I shook my head. The last thing I wanted was publicity. “No, please,” I said. “Anybody would have done it. I just happened to see that stone tottering.”

“I'm not sure anybody would,” she said. “Do you think Randall Whitaker would have raced forward to save you from certain death?”

I couldn't answer that and preferred not to try.

Tarek asked Karim to take care of the Blue group and then went running after Randall. After nodding his agreement, Karim walked over to the shattered stone and then looked up. “That is very strange that such a large piece should fall like that,” he said at last.

I heartily agreed. He turned to the guard and said, “Surely you will see that this area is closed to visitors until it can be made safe again.”

“Yes, of course,” the guard said.

To me, he said, “I think our tour is over for today. I suggest we head back to the ship, where I'm sure they will be only too happy to serve tea and cool drinks to anyone who wants them.”

“Yes,” I said, “I just need a minute to pull myself together.”

He nodded and said, “I must collect the Blue group or I would remain with you.”

“I’m fine,” I assured him, though I really wasn’t. I was starting to tremble from reaction, and if I knew my husband, Rafe would be horrified to hear what had happened and I couldn't wait to get back and tell him.

I know I'm a strong and independent woman, but sometimes I just want the arms of the man I love wrapped around me. And frankly, he's a very old-fashioned man. He came of an age when his job was to protect women. In his case, it was to protect Queen Elizabeth I.

He'd given his mortal life to save her. I knew he'd give up his entire existence for me. I knew it the way I knew the sun rose in the east and set in the west.

And the way I knew that that falling stone had not been an accident. I’d only had a glimpse but I was certain there’d been someone up there pushing that stone.

From the way Randall had been limping I knew I had a few minutes before I needed to follow and I’d still be at the bus in plenty of time. I got my phone camera out and took photos of the broken stone, the column, the general area.

If I was right and someone had been on top of that massive column, they’d had to reach it somehow.

Unless we had someone in our midst like a rock climber with ropes, which obviously we didn't, there had to be another way onto that column.

It didn’t take much investigation to discover a wooden staircase built presumably as a temporary ladder for the restoration workers. It let out onto a ledge.

From there it would have been a not very complicated jump to get to the top of the column.

I suspected even I could have done it.

In fact, while the Egyptologists were shepherding everyone out and back to the buses, I made sure no one was watching, ducked out of sight and ran up the stairway.

I took a second to wonder whether the would-be killer was still there, but was far more certain they’d be long gone by now.

They hadn't roped off the area or put any “No Admittance” signs up, but it was pretty clear this was not part of the tourist route. It was a way for workers to gain access to the columns.

There was a gap, maybe two feet, between the ledge and the top of the column, which was probably three feet square.

I wouldn't have loved to do it.

I'd probably have got it wrong on my first attempt.

But if I'd been determined enough, I was pretty sure I could have made the short jump from there.

It was a matter of either having the strength to push a pretty big chunk of Egyptian stone off the top of the column or...

And here I went back to my knowledge of how the pyramids were made.

So much of moving heavy stone isn't brute strength at all. It's having some very simple equipment and knowing how to use it.

There, on top of the column, lay a stout wooden beam. A lever.

Beside it was a smaller block of stone that could have served as a fulcrum.

It wouldn't have taken tremendous strength. Whoever had done this only needed to slide the beam beneath the edge of the capstone, rest it on the fulcrum and put their weight on the far end.

Once that enormous stone shifted past its balance point, gravity would have done the rest.

I didn’t even attempt to jump over hoping to leave whatever clues there were untampered with.

Let the authorities figure this one out.

Even from here I could see the stone, now smashed, exactly where Randall and his wife had been standing not so very long ago.

Below someone emerged out of the shadow. I saw a flash of white sleeve and felt my breath catch. It was the young Egyptologist, Mohamed, calling to his Yellow group that it was time to go.

I came down the staircase as fast as I dared and made my way back down, blending in once more with the tour group.

On the bus on the way back, everybody was exclaiming and conjecturing.

Randall Whitaker had moved from his fury and threats of suing and was now, I could see, quite enjoying all the attention and playing the victim.

“I know Lucy didn't mean to hurt me,” he said, “but I've definitely bruised my hip. I'm seventy-nine years old. Soon I'll be eighty. I can't take that kind of fall. Not at my age.”

Nadia made soothing noises and I pretended I didn’t hear him.

“And I'm particularly fit for my age. I work out in the gym every day. Don't I, Sharon?”

Sharon nodded. “Yes, you do.”

“Sharon does too. I make her. It's very important to stay fit as you get older. But falls...” He shook his head. “That's another thing. I know you meant well, Lucy.”

I didn't even know what to say. “Would you rather have a bruised hip or been crushed to death?” seemed a little harsh. I reminded myself that he was nearly eighty and he’d suffered a shock. For a second I wondered if he’d try to sue me, then realized I had more important things to worry about. Like who had tried to kill Randall and Sharon. And why?

Nadia had fetched the bus’s first aid kit and was tending to Randall and Sharon while he was busy complaining. I felt they needed not only the antiseptic wipes and bandages, but probably the fuss and attention too. For, incredibly, in spite of Randall’s complaints, they’d got away with minor cuts and scrapes.

And I have to say Nadia was very good at her job. She soothed and listened.

“I can't understand how such a thing could have happened,” Sharon said, finally voicing what seemed to me the most pertinent issue here.

“Of course, the police will be called and everything will be thoroughly investigated,” Nadia assured her. “I should think the entire site will be

closed until further notice.”

“I don't suppose you have any brandy in there?” Randall asked as she closed up the first aid kit.

She twinkled at him and then patted his knee, where she'd used an antiseptic wipe to clean the grit off before putting a Band-Aid on it. “Now, Randall, you know brandy is not what you need right now. After the doctor has had a look at you, I'm going to make sure you get a nice cup of tea with lots of sugar in it. That's what you need for shock.”

He cracked one of his leering grins at her. Oh, he was definitely feeling better. “Well, I'll let you make me some tea. But I'm telling you right now, young lady, I have a bottle of very fine brandy in my stateroom.”

He looked her up and down. “You're more than welcome to come and share a glass. You've had a shock too.” She made a very vague response that was neither a yes nor a no, then moved with her first aid kit to me.

I, of course, as a single traveller, had two seats to myself and had been sitting in the window seat. So it was very easy for her to sit beside me.

Since there were so few of us on the big air-conditioned bus, the rows in front of and behind me were empty. In a low voice she asked, “Did you see how it happened?”

I shook my head. I wasn't going to get dragged into this conversation. For all I knew, she'd been the one who'd done it. It would have been easy for anyone, even a tour guide, to sneak up, jump across that space and knock that stone down. And, like all the staff, she wore a white long-sleeved shirt.

In fact, a tour guide who was familiar with the site might have been the best person to set up the trap. She'd have known about the restoration work. She'd have had the time, the access and the knowledge.

So, while she wiped my grazed knees with antiseptic, working around the holes in my ruined trousers, I asked in a low voice, “Who exactly are you?”

She patted my knee, a bit like she’d patted Randall’s. “I think you know, Lucy. I'm one of your sisters.” She glanced around but no one was paying us any attention.

I had hoped this was the case but felt I couldn’t be too careful. “You said I'm being watched. Who's watching?”

She shook her head. “I don't know, but I feel it. Don't you?”

I'd certainly felt something that morning when I'd walked into breakfast. Then, again, when I'd been alone in that empty chamber. But it was a vague warning at best.

Then I remembered the papyrus warning that Meri had sent me through another witch.

*Run, Lucy. Run.*

Those were very specific warnings for explanations that then sounded quite vague, so I leapt to the pretty obvious conclusion. “Do you know more than you're telling me?”

“Now,” she said, “let me take care of this wound on your cheek.”

I didn't think I had a wound on my cheek, but wiping an antiseptic pad at my hairline was a very good excuse for her to get close to my ear.

“We would not put you in more danger.”

I felt like not knowing what was going on was putting me in danger, but I didn't argue.

She laid her palm on my grazed knee very softly. I could hear her whisper under her breath. The words were in Arabic, lilting and beautiful.

Even if I hadn’t suspected it was a healing spell, I’d have known when I felt a sudden glowing warmth from her fingertips. I had a feeling my knees would heal up very quickly.

“Blessed be,” I whispered.

“Blessed be,” she whispered back.

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# CHAPTER 19

When she'd replaced the first aid kit, she returned to the front of the bus and took her microphone. "Well," she said in her normally cheerfully calm voice, "that was more excitement than we wanted, but while we drive back, let me talk to you about the ancient and modern agriculture practices."

I'm afraid I zoned out and didn't listen to her lesson about agriculture. Because of the accident and needing to get Randall and Sharon seen to before the bus started moving, we were quite far behind the other two buses. I just wanted to get back to my stateroom and talk to Rafe about what had happened.

I stared out of the window, watching, thinking. A man in traditional dress walked beside a cart pulled by donkeys, the back heaped with fruit on its way into the market.

We passed a small grocery store and a café with three men sitting outside smoking. One of them watched the bus as it drove by.

It must seem so very out of place here, a modern, air-conditioned bus in a place that still clung to traditional ways. And yet inside the grocery store I could see bags of potato chips.

When we got back to the boat, very kindly, the rest of the people on the bus made sure that Randall, Sharon and I were the first people to board the ship.

There was a new solidarity among the Red group. We had faced up to and survived this terrifying catastrophe. And, in some small way, the three of us who had been most affected had become minor celebrities on the bus,

along with Nadia, who had both patched us up and taken care of us, and shepherded us back.

Once on board, Tarek was waiting with a wheelchair.

“You can take me to my stateroom,” Randall said as Tarek helped ease the older man into it. He was already complaining about his hip as Sharon led the way.

I was a lot quicker than the Whitakers and, not wishing to crowd into the elevator with them, took the stairs. Before I even got to our stateroom, the door opened and Rafe was striding out, a look of concern on his face.

“Lucy,” he said. Before he did anything else, he wrapped me in his arms. Tight.

I clung onto him for dear life.

“You're trembling,” he said into my ear. “What happened?”

The sensible William said, in his very clipped voice, “Perhaps come inside, Lucy. Let me make you a cup of tea.”

Then Rafe noticed he'd been clutching me in the middle of the hallway. “Yes, of course. I don't know what got into me,” he said, stepping back.

I was so happy to be back with Rafe and William in the relative safety of our suite that I collapsed on the couch.

Rafe looked down at me. “You're hurt.”

“It's okay. Minor scratches.” I blew out a breath. “But something really scary happened. You won't believe it.”

But he'd seen a lot worse things than what I'd experienced. Of course, he'd believe it. He'd believe anything I told him.



I WAS ABOUT to start telling him when the silence was shattered by a scream.

Rafe and I stared at each other. “Wait here,” he said.

He strode to the stateroom door and opened it. William Thresher was right behind him.

As if I was going to be left in the stateroom by myself when a blood-curdling scream was still echoing in the air. Naturally, I followed them.

Once in the corridor, I didn’t have far to go.

The door to Sharon and Randall Whitaker's stateroom was wide open and Sharon was screaming. Loud, hoarse cries that seemed ripped from her throat.

They have fireproof doors on these boats but she'd obviously walked in, not taken another step, and simply stood there screaming, propping the fire door open.

Not that I particularly blamed her. She was facing a pretty horrific sight. Tarek had obviously pushed Randall's wheelchair into the room, then abandoned him to go to the man who lay sprawled in the middle of the stateroom.

It was clear to me and probably everyone present, that there wasn't anything he could do for the man. I could feel the heavy darkness of recent death. He was face down, surrounded by a pool of blood.

I saw the uniform of one of the ship's waiters. The black trousers, polished shoes, the white shirt, now stained with his life's blood. The black curly hair.

"The man's throat had been slit," Rafe said, almost to himself.

Sharon seemed unable to stop screaming, while Randall sat in his wheelchair looking down, saying, "What the hell?" Over and over, as though he were trying out for a part in a play or a movie and wasn't sure how to say it so he kept practicing. "What the hell?" Then... "What the absolute hell?"

Then Tarek rose from his knees and I saw the face of the dead man. His head was turned to one side and I felt a stab of recognition and then sadness. I knew who it was.

Ahmed.

The over-friendly waiter who'd promised to bring my coffee and orange juice every morning of the cruise. My throat closed. I'd barely known him, but he'd been so full of life. I felt a lump of sadness in my chest.

Had he surprised a burglar?

Was *he* the burglar? For now I noticed what I'd been too shocked to see before. There was a glow of gold emerging from his trouser pocket. It looked like part of a thick gold chain.

What had happened here?

While Tarek made a call, Rafe approached Randall Whitaker.

To me he said, "See if you can stop her screaming."

Right. I went to Sharon and took her by the shoulders. “Sharon, it's okay. It's okay. Come and sit down. Let me get you a glass of water.”

She was so used to being told what to do, I think, that she just nodded dumbly and followed me. I made a wide berth around the dead man and took her into the bedroom and sat her down on the bed. I was about to fetch her a glass of water but she grabbed my arm with a shaking hand. “Don't leave me.”

So I sat down beside her.

“I don't understand what's going on,” she said. Then she buried her face in her hands and started to cry. I patted her shoulder and let her cry. I thought it might do her good to get rid of some of that excess emotion and horror. It had been quite a day.

Now Randall and Rafe followed.

“That fellow was nothing but a common thief,” Randall said, sounding as though such a thing could hardly exist.

“Sharon didn’t want to lock her jewelry up last night. She planned to wear it again tonight so she left it on the dressing table. It should have been safe, but then we gave the butler the day off. And look what happened. If you can’t trust the staff on a cruise that costs this much, who can you trust?” Randall had abandoned the wheelchair and was striding up and down, his limp much less pronounced now.

“Do you think the waiter came in specifically to steal your wife’s jewelry?” Rafe didn’t sound too sure.

Randall snorted. “Are you kidding me? That's chicken feed compared to what was in that safe.” Then he opened the wardrobe to confirm the safe was still in place. It was.

Rafe answered in a cool voice, “Perhaps you should confirm the papyrus is still there.”

Randall shook his head impatiently. “You think I'm a fool? Leaving something so valuable here for any two-bit thief to find?” He stabbed a finger into his own chest. “I carry the treasure on me anytime I leave the safe behind.”

I couldn't have been more horrified.

Even Rafe, whose emotions were generally a lot more controlled than mine, looked shocked. “You carry the ancient papyrus with you? On your person?”

Randall nodded. “That way I know it's safe.”

“And yet you were almost killed today,” I couldn't help reminding him. Beside me, Sharon moaned.

He looked at me, stunned. “It's got nothing to do with this,” he blustered. “It was those lousy Egyptian safety regulations leaving old stones unattached on top of other old stones. Of course they're going to fall off.”

I wasn't at all sure that was what had happened, but I didn't feel like arguing.

On the one hand, I was relieved that Randall Whitaker still had the papyrus. On the other hand, I was pretty horrified at how easy it would be for someone who knew what it was to take it from him.

I wondered if whoever had attempted to kill him today had known exactly where it was and had planned the commotion of a terrible accident to slip the precious papyrus from around his neck.

He'd pointed to his chest, and now I could see the leather strap hanging around his neck.

It would have been so easy to open his shirt as though you were checking his injuries and slip the thing out.

It wasn't long before there was a crowd of people in the stateroom.

Nadia Farouk was the first. She said she’d come to check on Randall and Sharon and was as shocked as anyone to find the dead man, but I suspected she'd picked up both the darkness of death and my distress.

Shortly after that, the captain arrived accompanied by Karim, who’d been updating him on today’s events when Tarek called him. Rafe sent me a glance and I rose, letting Nadia take my place comforting Sharon.

It was pretty clear the police would soon arrive and I didn’t think Rafe wanted to be interviewed by them unless strictly necessary. I felt the same so we said our goodbyes and slipped back to our cabin. Finally, I got that cup of tea.

Once I’d convinced Rafe that I didn’t need to see a doctor, I sat there drinking it while I told Rafe and William everything that had happened on our excursion.

“Lucy, you could have been killed,” William said as though he couldn’t help himself when I described the way I’d tackled Randall and Sharon and thrown them out of the way. I didn’t tell the two men staring at me how very close that stone had come. I could still feel the brush of air against me as the stone smashed to the ground. I was very lucky to have escaped with a couple of scrapes.

Rafe didn’t say anything, probably because he knew there was no point, but I could feel his concern. To divert their attention, I said, “Nadia Farouk, the Egyptologist for the Red group, is a witch. I think she’s watching out for me.”

Once I’d finished my tea, I needed to shower and change. When I took the bandages off my knees, they were nearly healed, which didn't surprise me a bit.

When I emerged, freshly showered and wearing a loose-fitting linen dress, with Mabel’s scarf again, this time for comfort, I found Tarek waiting for me. He explained he was the ship’s first aid officer. I suspected my husband had insisted he check me over, which he did. When I confirmed I hadn’t hit my head he carefully checked my various scrapes and cuts.

He gave me some antibiotic cream to put on them and said I’d had a very lucky escape.

“Much luckier than that poor waiter,” I said.

Naturally, I was fishing for information. He shook his head. “Very sad business.”

“It looked like a throat slash,” I said.

“Yes,” he agreed with me. Then, “Do not worry, Lucy. He would barely have felt the thing. Death would have been almost instantaneous.”

Still, a lively young man had had his throat cut.

“You are not to worry,” he said, patting me on the knee, obviously misunderstanding why I was asking these nosy questions. “His body has been removed, and Mr. and Mrs. Whitaker have been moved to a new cabin. Any damaged flooring will be replaced today. Very soon no more unpleasantness will remain.”

I nodded. No doubt they were very efficient. But still... “Surely the police have been called?” I asked.

“Oh yes.”

“This Ahmed was only newly hired. This was his first voyage with the company and no doubt his credentials were not properly checked. The man was a thief. An unfortunate, luckless thief.”

“When was Ahmed last seen?” I asked him.

He shook his head. “He worked the breakfast shift and had the day off until the dinner service. I believed he had left the boat. He had family in the area.” He shrugged. “Now, it seems, he may have hidden on the ship and attempted to steal Mrs. Whitaker’s jewelry. We believe there was an

accomplice. Another man who would have sneaked onto the ship to take the jewelry away, because, of course, the first thing we would do if a passenger was robbed would be to search the staff and all of their belongings."

Rafe and William were listening as intently as I was. Rafe said, "And you think the thieves fell out?"

"Yes. The accomplice killed his partner, Ahmed, and slipped away before he could be discovered."

"Leaving the jewels behind?" I asked.

Tarek smiled slightly. "Once he'd killed a man, those jewels would mark him as a murderer. I suspect he panicked and ran away."

Obviously, this explanation was the most palatable to a bunch of nervous cruise ship passengers. Two thieves got into a fight. One killed the other and ran away. Now, they were both gone. Even the floors in the suite were being replaced.

It was all so neat and tidy.

Once the cruise director had left, the three of us discussed what he'd told us. Like me, they both considered the explanation too neat. Rafe said, "If Randall Whitaker did not have a priceless papyrus hidden in his suite, I might also believe this story of two thieves falling out, but Sharon Whitaker's jewels were nothing compared to the papyrus. It's too much of a coincidence."

"And yet he was found with a pocket stuffed with the lady's jewelry," William reminded him.

"Easy enough to plant after he was dead, thus providing this very convenient explanation."

"Maybe Ahmed was the one who discovered the burglar and was killed to stop him from reporting it," I said.

"Possibly," But I could tell Rafe doubted my version. I didn't know whether Ahmed had been friend or foe, but I was sorry that someone who had seemed so bright and friendly should have had his life cut short so tragically.

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# CHAPTER 20



The next morning I sat out on deck knitting.

I had got into the habit of taking a project with me wherever I went. Clearly, I was becoming more of a knitter, both in my mind and in reality. I had gone from finding it the most irritating, stressful activity in my life, where I would literally get a pain between my shoulder blades and make so many mistakes that I would quietly pass my work off to whichever vampire was sitting closest to me and was kind enough to quickly fix my work and unobtrusively pass it back.

I didn't think for a minute that all the others didn't notice, but it was an accepted practice and one I really appreciated.

However, you can't run a knitting shop and knitting circles, both day and night, and not improve.

Maybe I was never going to be the knitter that my grandmother had been during her life—and, of course, she was even more proficient now—but I thought I could become good enough that I wouldn't embarrass myself when customers came in.

I might even be able to teach a beginner's course in knitting.

And so, slowly and unobtrusively, knitting had become not the painful chore that it had been, but a pastime I quite enjoyed.

More than anything, I found it meditative, and when my hands were busy wrapping wool around needles and creating garments, my mind was free to roam.

And right now, I really needed some time to think.

Rafe was back in our cabin, and I quite enjoyed this bit of time to myself. I needed to think.

I'd found a quiet corner in the shade where no one was bothering me, and I gazed out on the Nile. We had stopped near our next port of call. The cruise hadn’t been delayed more than a few hours. The police had spent some time in Sharon and Randall’s suite. They must have waited until we were all at dinner to move the body for I never even noticed it happen and by nightfall whatever repairs or cleaning needed to happen was done and Randall and Sharon were back in their cabin. I was surprised they’d want to sleep there, but Rafe reminded me that Randall had to have the best stateroom. “He’d have been miserable in whatever cabin they were able to give him at short notice.”

I suspected Rafe was right.

As I looked out, I saw a small boat lazy curl of the wake behind our ship. A bird called—I didn't even know what kind of bird it was.

Reeds and grasses grew on the edges of the Nile, and I recognized a banana plant.

Somewhere, a fish jumped and the concentric ripples spread out.

All of them made patterns.

My knitting followed a pattern, albeit with some idiosyncrasies, since no matter how hard I tried, I never exactly managed to follow the pattern I was meant to be following.

I'd become used to this and accepted that patterns aren't perfect.

And I was almost certain that all these different pieces of the puzzle of this frightening situation I found myself in were also part of a pattern.

A pattern that I couldn't yet see.

How did Pete's disappearance, and Meri's warning, and the discovery my parents had made, and this bit of papyrus that had been in Randall's family—even the death of Ahmed—how did they all fit into one recognizable shape?

Because I was increasingly certain they did.

I felt as though I had in front of me bundles of yarn and different-sized needles and maybe a few buttons. And without a pattern, I had no idea how it all fit together.

I was convinced there was a pattern, but I didn't know what it was. I was on a journey without a map.

I took a deep breath and stopped trying to force my thoughts. Instead, I gazed out at the slow-moving river.

People had been sailing the Nile for millennia. People had been born and died and been buried here.

And then I wondered if Randall's papyrus was a kind of map. Those spells of instructions for the dead had been changed. If I didn't spend time every day with vampires, I would have thought it was ludicrous, but instead it seemed likely that someone or something was interested in the complete Book of the Dead.

I had a dreadful feeling that something was trying to come back.

I didn't understand much, but if I took a step in the right direction, maybe the next step would be illuminated. Just thinking that way really helped me. I didn't have to understand the whole journey. I only had to know what the next destination was.

Yesterday, Randall and Sharon had nearly been killed. That was part of the pattern. But who would want to kill them, and why? The obvious answer was that Randall was carrying the papyrus on his body. But who would have known that? He was a braggart but he'd been very insistent he didn't want anyone on board knowing about the papyrus. And yet, I suspected he hadn't been able to help himself. Who had he told about the papyrus that he shouldn't have?

I knitted a couple more rows. As though I'd summoned Randall by thinking of him, I heard his unmistakable voice, loud in the quiet morning. Just the echo of it but I shrank back in my seat hoping he wasn't coming to the upper deck.

A few minutes later I heard a voice say, "Good morning. A fellow knitter, I see. May I join you?"

I'd been so lost in my own thoughts that I startled and turned to find the older woman from the day before. Her serene smile was somehow calming.

"Of course," I said and she sat down beside me. As she pulled a panel of pale blue from her knitting bag, I suspected from the size and shape it was a sweater for a grandson. When she lifted a pair of glasses on a chain and perched them on her nose I was so reminded of Gran in life, back when she'd still worn glasses on a gold chain, that I felt a pang.

"Good morning, ladies. You are very industrious this morning." We both glanced up to see Dr. Karim Nassar striding past.

"Good morning," we said in unison. He held a briefcase and Mary gestured to it with her knitting needle. "Will there be homework, Doctor?"

He laughed. “No. Sadly, I will not be joining you today. I have a meeting about one of my projects. But you will very much enjoy today’s excursion and I shall be back in time for dinner to answer any questions.” Then he continued on his way.

“That’s a shame. I do feel he knows more than the other Egyptologists. And he so reminds me of that lovely actor, Omar Shariff. But, never mind, we shall enjoy ourselves.”

I hoped she was right. I was trying to clear my mind of unpleasant memories.

“How are you feeling after yesterday’s adventure?” my new friend asked me.

“I’m a bit sore in places, but just happy no one died,” I said honestly.

“Except that poor waiter,” she reminded me, knitting with the kind of speed and assurance that suggested she’d been doing this for decades.

Whoever or whatever had put my parents in danger, frightened Meri, kidnapped Pete, and possibly attempted to murder two of my fellow cruise passengers—they were very dangerous, and they weren't acting alone.

They had to have people helping them. But surely not this sweet old lady?

“It’s been a pretty dramatic twenty-four hours,” I agreed.

She nodded, looking troubled. “I do not understand what the young waiter Ahmed was doing in Randall Whitaker's stateroom.” She sighed. “They say he was a thief, and killed by an accomplice.” She flipped her work and began another row. “But he’s not the first waiter to die this year.”

I stopped knitting to stare at her, suddenly remembering the news item that Theodore had read out at the vampire knitting club before we left. A waiter had fallen overboard from a Nile cruise ship and drowned.

Still, I didn’t want to jump to conclusions and this lady was obviously up on all the ship gossip. “Really?” I asked.

“Oh, yes. Ahmed was newly hired by the shipping company. He replaced a young man who seems to have fallen from this very boat and drowned.” She shook her head. “Most extraordinary. But Ahmed seemed very pleasant. He was a good waiter.” She smiled softly. “And he did like to flatter the ladies.”

I smiled too, feeling a pang of sadness for the man who had died so suddenly and violently.

“I’m Mary, by the way,” she said.

“Lucy. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Likewise.” She paused and said, “I’m much older than you, my dear, so I hope you’ll accept a little well-meant advice.” Exactly the kind of thing my grandmother would have said.

“Of course.”

“Don’t let your impulsive good nature lead you into danger.” She turned to me, her pale blue eyes large behind the magnifying lenses. “One mysterious death on board a cruise ship is unfortunate. Two begins to make one wonder. Be careful.” Then she smiled at me. “No doubt I’m a silly old fool who reads too many murder mysteries, but if I would give the same advice to my granddaughter if she were here.”

Even though her words had chilled me, I had to chuckle. “And it’s exactly what my grandmother would have said if she were here.” And how I wished she were.

“Randall Whitaker and his wife were very lucky you were there to save them,” she continued.

“Though he wasn’t very happy that I pushed him over onto his new hip,” I reminded her.

“He was likely in shock. I just passed him down below. He’s being taken to shore to visit a medical clinic, I understand. To have his hip checked.”

I felt strangely guilty that poor Randall was in pain, but really, I hadn’t had a lot of time to think of a way to get him out of harm’s way without toppling him and Sharon to the ground. “Is he limping very badly?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, but I’m not sure how much of that is for dramatic effect. He strikes me as a man who enjoys being the center of attention.”

I bit back a smile but of course she was right. “Is Sharon going?” I hoped she wasn’t injured too.

“No. She’s staying behind.” Noting my look of surprise she nodded. “I got the feeling they’d had an argument. He insisted he’d prefer to go alone.”

“Wow, it must have been quite an argument.” Normally they seemed inseparable.

“I don’t imagine he’s an easy man to live with and I suspect she’s spent so many years giving in to him that it’s too late to change now.” Then she paused to check her knitting, holding it up. “It’s for my youngest grandson. But they grow so quickly it’s difficult to get the size right.” I’d heard this

complaint many a time in my shop and gave the same advice I always did. “It’s better to make it a little on the bigger side and let them grow into it.”

She nodded. “Yes. You’re right.” And went back to her work. “Will you go on the excursion today to Gebel el-Silsila?” I’d really been looking forward to this stop. We’d leave the ship in small tenders to reach the site where thirty-two New Kingdom shrines had been cut into the sandstone cliff face and faced out to the Nile. Even though I was a little sore and bruised from yesterday, I intended to go. “Yes,” I said to Mary. “Will you?”

“Oh, yes. It’s one of the reasons I chose this cruise. Not many ships stop here. I would like to see a site that isn’t quite so easily accessible to tourists.”

Naturally, Rafe didn’t want me to go but when I explained that Randall would be miles away he seemed resigned. “I only wish I could accompany you,” he said, staring from our stateroom out at the relentless sun sparkling on the Nile. “With the proper clothing and umbrella I could—”

“No.” I said in the tone he knows is final. “I’m not putting you at risk so I can see a few old tombs. I’ll stay behind.” Then of course because I was about to give up something I wanted to do, he put all his efforts into insisting I should go. “You’ll enjoy it, Lucy. And I’m looking forward to hearing your thoughts when you return.”

About half the passengers had signed up for the excursion and, as there was no place large enough to dock, we set off in two tenders. The Nile narrowed at this point and the green banks transitioned to the butterscotch color of sandstone. The morning had moved from warm to hot and was heading rapidly toward unbearable.

There was no shade. Nothing but cliffs rising from the Nile banks, sandy paths and a sky so intensely blue it looked painted. The heat bounced off the rock and came at me from every direction. Even the breeze felt as though it had passed through an oven before reaching us.

Tarek had warned us to bring water, hats and sensible shoes, but there were always people who ignored good advice. I saw one woman tottering over the uneven ground in sandals with jeweled straps, and a man whose face was already turning an alarming shade of purple beneath a baseball cap.

With so many fewer passengers, my Red group only had ten of us following Nadia.

Gebel el-Silsila felt completely different from the grand temples we'd visited. Here, the desert seemed to come right down to the water. Our group followed the path along the rocky bank, the sun beating down on pale golden stone, while Tarek pointed out shrines and chapels cut directly into the cliff face. There were carvings and hieroglyphics everywhere once you started looking for them, some surprisingly crisp, others worn almost smooth by thousands of years of wind and sand. Across the river I could see the ancient quarries where enormous blocks of sandstone had once been cut for temples all over Egypt. There weren't nearly as many tourists here, and when our group spread out I could hear the lap of the Nile and the crunch of my own shoes on the dusty ground. It felt less like visiting a monument and more like wandering into a place the ancient Egyptians had simply walked away from.

A small, weathered sign identified each tomb by a number and named its owner, usually a senior official who had served in the royal household. He hadn't been a pharaoh, but he had evidently been important enough to be granted a burial place close to the kings he had served.

I always enjoyed straying from the group, not too far, but as one of the youngest people on the tour I moved more quickly and had more energy than a lot of my fellow cruise passengers. There was one tomb that looked as though it was currently being excavated. I was curious to see a work in progress and so, while most of my group was in another tomb, I stepped inside.

The entrance passage was already cooler. Wooden boards had been laid over the rough floor, and low electric lights ran along the base of the walls, illuminating the hieroglyphs without flooding the tomb with brightness.

It wasn't as elaborate as the royal tombs. There were no enormous chambers or soaring ceilings. The colors weren't as vivid, and some sections of plaster had crumbled away entirely, leaving exposed stone. But there was something intimate about it. The images showed the tomb's owner presenting offerings, receiving gifts and standing before various gods. In one scene he sat at a table piled with bread, fruit and flowers while his wife sat beside him.

Perhaps he had wanted to remember an ordinary meal.

Perhaps eternal life, when you got right down to it, wasn't about gold or power. Perhaps it was about sitting beside someone you loved with more food than you could possibly eat.

The thought made me wish Rafe could have come with me. I walked deeper until the voices outside faded until all I could hear was the faint hum of the lights and the soft scuff of my shoes against the boards. The solitude was soothing after the crowds. I stopped to examine a row of figures painted along one wall. Each carried something different: jars, baskets, folded cloth and what looked like bundles of reeds.

The official had expected to be well supplied in the afterlife. I wondered whether he'd received any of it.

As was common in these tombs, there was a ledge at the back with a stone figure carved, presumably the official whose spot this was. The figure wasn’t in the best repair sitting beneath a damaged ceiling. A crack ran through one corner, and several blocks of stone had been stacked neatly against the wall, presumably during restoration work.

There was also a sarcophagus beneath the figure. This was quite unusual from what I’d seen. I moved closer. The heavy lid was propped against a wall so it looked as though whatever, or whoever, had been inside had been studied and perhaps moved.

I headed closer feeling almost compelled. I wasn’t conscious of a desire to glance inside the sarcophagus but a great pull of dark energy seemed to propel me forward.

I hesitated.

Something had changed. The air seemed heavier. Even under the dim lights, the atmosphere was darker.

Until then, I'd felt the lingering traces of old magic that seemed to exist in almost every tomb we'd visited. Most of it was faint and worn, like writing on paper that had been folded and unfolded until the ink began to disappear.

This was different.

This magic wasn't fading.

It was gathering.

A prickling sensation traveled over my scalp and down the back of my neck. I stopped. Glanced back at the opening that would lead me back to sunshine and a very ordinary tour group.

My sensible voice told me to turn around. Rafe had warned me. Meri had warned me. Nearly everything that had happened since I arrived in Egypt ought to have warned me.

Going alone into a partially excavated tomb suddenly seemed less like a pleasant escape from the crowds and more like the opening scene in a cautionary tale about stupid tourists.

I took one step back. I needed to head back into the sunshine and rejoin my group. But as I turned a flash caught my eye—a glint of gold on the ground against the golden-brown stone. I stared into the darkness, then moved closer. No doubt one of the workers had dropped a new coin or something.

I told myself I only wanted a better look. One glance, and then I would go back outside and join everyone.

The magic pressed against me as I moved closer to the sarcophagus. I looked down to see a wristwatch. The narrow gold case had caught the light. It wasn't round or square but an elegant shape somewhere between the two. Its deep blue dial caught the electric light.

I had seen that watch before. Randall had shown it to us over drinks, turning his wrist so the gold gleamed beneath the lights. He'd been so proud of that watch.

"My father gave me this for my twenty-first birthday," he'd said. "One of the first. You couldn't buy this particular model for love or money now."

He'd told us it was a Patek Philippe Golden Ellipse. He had explained the design, the proportions and the extraordinary value at some length. I'd stopped listening before he finished, but I remembered the pride in his voice.

Oddly, I even remembered the inscription on the back. To Randall. The world is yours.

My mind whirled. How could Randall Whitaker's watch be lying in a tomb when he was miles away having his hip checked by a doctor?

For several seconds my mind refused to make sense of what I was seeing. I took a step forward and peered into the sarcophagus. Inside was a mummy.

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# CHAPTER 21

I stopped breathing.

The mummy lay stiff and straight on the stone, its arms crossed over its chest. Linen covered it from the top of its head to the ends of its feet, wound around and around until it no longer resembled a person so much as a long white parcel.

My first thought was that the mummy had recently been discovered and hadn't yet been removed.

My second was that no archeologist would leave an unprotected mummy lying in an open tomb where any wandering tourist could walk up to it. I felt the heavy dark pull of death even as I noted that the linen was all wrong. It wasn't ancient, brown, fragile or stained with age.

It was white, the clean, clinical white of bandages wrapped around a modern wound.

Once more, I glanced down at the watch. Even though I was pretty sure who it belonged to, I had to be certain. Using the cotton scarf I carried in my bag and careful to touch only the very edges, in case of fingerprints, I turned the watch over.

*To Randall*, the inscription read. *The world is yours*.

I thought of ancient Egyptians who'd wanted to be buried with all their treasures, household goods and chariots. I bet if Randall could have chosen one thing to take into the afterlife with him, it would have been that timepiece.

Even as grief and shock came over me in waves, I knew I had to have a closer look. Randall had told us that he'd been keeping the papyrus close to his heart. Whoever had killed him and wrapped his body hadn't cared about

the valuable watch. Was it possible they also hadn’t known about the papyrus tucked against his heart?

I didn't want to look at the wrapped body again but I knew I had to.

One of the hands rested slightly apart from the torso. I moved forward feeling like a grave robber.

I hadn't liked the man. He'd been arrogant, rude and entirely too pleased with himself. He treated his wife like an accessory and seemed to consider anyone who wasn’t rich to be beneath him.

But he hadn’t deserved to die like this. He had been frightened when the stone fell and tried to pretend he wasn't. I really think he had believed his money could protect him from anything.

Now he lay wrapped like a grotesque imitation of the ancient dead, abandoned in a tomb that wasn't his, his precious watch on the ground no doubt ticking away the minutes.

I went closer, though every part of me wanted to run.

I couldn't tell how he'd died, and I didn't want to unwrap him to find out. In truth, I couldn’t know for sure it was Randall Whitaker under those bandages. It was possible someone had staged this body with his watch but that seemed incredibly far-fetched. Anyway, the police would be able to find out who was inside these bandages. I wasn’t going to start unwrapping a dead body.

Whoever had done this had brought Randall here, wrapped his body and hidden him in a partly renovated tomb.

But why?

Randall’s watch had been precious but more valuable still was that papyrus. He'd carried it in the pouch beneath his clothes. Even after the attempt on his life, he had refused to let it out of his possession. He hadn't trusted the ship's safe or the security staff. He’d barely trusted Rafe.

I reached out with a trembling hand and ran my fingertips over the chest of the mummy. There was no bulge where the pouch containing the papyrus had been but on closer inspection I noticed a discoloring of the bandaging around the throat.

My stomach clenched and I jumped back, my mind flashing back to Ahmed lying with his throat slit. Someone had killed Randall in the same way and taken the papyrus, I was certain of it.

Now, I really needed to get out of this tomb. I needed Rafe. I needed the police, a guard, Tarek—anyone.

I turned around, moving a lot faster than when I'd arrived but as I hurried forward, the lights went out.

Darkness swallowed the tomb so completely that for one terrible second I no longer knew which way I was facing. I mustn't panic, I told myself. This wasn't a deep tomb and all I had to do was walk toward the bright light of the opening.

Except that I couldn't see the opening anymore. It was as though the sun had gone out.

Don't panic, I told myself again. But it was really hard not to when I was trapped in total darkness with a dead body wrapped up like a mummy.

I fumbled for my phone and nearly dropped it. My fingers had gone clumsy with fear. When I finally switched on the torch, the thin beam cut across the chamber and landed on Randall's white-wrapped body.

His head appeared to turn toward me. I cried out and jerked the light away. It hadn't moved. My imagination was playing tricks on me.

I was almost certain it hadn't moved.

The phone light flickered. "No, no, no."

The battery had been more than half full when I came in. Now the screen flashed once and went black.

The darkness returned.

This time it brought a whisper with it. At first the murmur was so faint I thought I was hearing the distant tourists outside. Then I realized the sound wasn't coming from inside this tomb. It came from inside my own head.

*Lucy.*

I pressed my palms over my ears. This could not be happening. The whisper continued.

*Lucy Swift. Witch. I know you. I've been watching you.*

"Stop it." I said. Loud, pretending I wasn't as scared as I'd ever been in my life.

*Power.* The word slid through my mind like a wayward thought.

*I can give you power beyond anything you have imagined. Join me. You could be the most powerful witch in the world.*

I closed my eyes, which was ridiculous when the darkness was already absolute, and tried to steady my breathing. I knew for absolute certain that something was messing with my head and this darkness made me feel vulnerable, which the creature must know.

I needed light, then I’d feel better. I'd practised illumination spells from the very beginning when sparks had shot out of my fingers. Since then I’d learned to control that power, to light candles and I could produce a beautiful, steady golden glow that hovered above my palm like a miniature sun if I really concentrated,

The first time I'd tried, I'd singed my eyebrows.

But I'd improved. I held out my hand and concentrated. Tried to control the tremble. A spark jumped from my fingers and vanished.

The whisper laughed.

I tried again, drawing on the magic inside me and pushing it outward. This time a small ball of pale light appeared above my palm. It trembled, then steadied.

The burial chamber emerged around me.

Randall remained exactly where he had been.

I took the witchlight with me and hurried toward where the entrance should be.

*You could have everything*. The words were clearer now.

Not exactly a voice. Not male or female. The words seemed to form directly inside my thoughts.

“I don't want anything from you,” I said aloud.

*Your power is barely begun*.

The light above my hand flickered but I kept walking.

*I can teach you, give you everything you desire.*

Now, images flashed through my mind like the trailer of a movie.

I saw myself standing in the center of Cardinal Woolsey's, magic pouring from my hands in bright, perfect streams. Spells that had once taken hours came as easily as breathing. I opened ancient books and understood every word. Other witches looked at me with awe.

I pushed the images away. “No.” In truth, I wasn’t even tempted. I didn’t care about showing off in front of my sister witches. I had all the magic I could handle as it was.

As though it had read my mind, the voice changed tack. *You fear time.*

The air had grown colder, but sweat ran down my back. *You fear losing him.*

Rafe stood before me. Not as he was now, but centuries from now, unchanged and beautiful. I stood beside him, my face as smooth as it was today, my hair still thick and blond.

My steps slowed and the thing in the tomb felt my hesitation. *He will never watch you grow old.*

The promise sank straight into the most vulnerable part of me. I had tried not to think about it and Rafe and I didn't talk about it, but that slight shadow on our happiness was always present.

He had already lived for hundreds of years. Unless something killed him, he might live for hundreds more.

I wouldn't. I would age while he remained as he was. My hands would wrinkle. My body would weaken. One day he would sit beside my bed and hold my hand while I died.

The thought was unbearable.

Then I gave a gasp. I forced myself to move. “It's not real.”

*It can be*.

The image changed.

My parents stood before a newly opened tomb while journalists crowded around them. Their names appeared in newspapers, books and documentaries. They had made the greatest archeological discovery of the century.

They were safe, happy.

*Your parents will be revered. Their names will live forever.*

Behind them stood Pete, alive and unharmed. He grinned at me.

*You may have all you desire. All I require is that you serve me.*

“I won’t do it. You're a liar.”

The whisper deepened. *I can give you everything you desire. I can also take away everything you care for.*

I thought of Pete, wherever he was. My parents at their dig, unaware of the danger moving toward them. Meri, frightened enough to send me away. Randall lying behind me. Ahmed bleeding to death in a luxury stateroom.

“You’re a monster.”

Silence.

The witchlight led me toward where the daylight should have been, a brilliant rectangle at the top of the corridor.

The entrance was gone.

A solid wall of stone blocked the corridor from floor to ceiling.

I stopped so abruptly that the witchlight shot ahead of me and bobbed against the stone.

“No.”

I touched the wall.

The surface was rough, but there were no seams, no door, no opening. It looked as though it had been there for thousands of years.

I pounded on it.

“Help!” My voice crashed back at me. “Can anyone hear me?”

I shouted again and again until my throat hurt.

There was no response.

The tour groups were outside. Someone should have heard me. Unless this wall existed only for me.

Not one voice now, but hundreds.

My light began to dim.

I pressed both hands against the stone and summoned every bit of magic I could reach.

“Open.”

Nothing happened.

I tried a stronger spell.

The stone trembled faintly beneath my palms, then went still.

Behind me, something scraped along the floor.

I froze.

It came from the burial chamber.

A slow, dry sound like linen dragging over stone.

I didn't turn around. There was no possible way the dead mummy was coming toward me, I told myself even as horror-movie terror welled up inside me. This disembodied voice, whatever it was, was playing with my senses, I was certain of it. Almost.

*Serve me or die.*

The voice was no longer a whisper. It filled the tomb and vibrated through my bones.

The wall beneath my hands became warm.

*Have everything you desire.*

Rafe appeared in my mind again. My parents. Pete and Meri. Nyx.

Safety. Life without age or loss.

For one treacherous instant, I wanted it. Not the power or the fame. But Rafe and a lifetime that matched his. No final goodbye, no leaving him alone.

The darkness seemed to lean closer, waiting.

Then I thought of Randall. *The world is yours*, his father had written and Randall had believed that. But promises weren't gifts.

“No.”

The tomb shook and dust trickled from the ceiling.

My witchlight flickered violently, throwing shadows across the walls.

I stood alone in the sealed passage, fighting the urge to run when there was nowhere to go.

The voice spoke one final time. *Serve me and have everything*. The light above my hand shrank to a pinprick. *Or die here*.

Then the light went out.

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# CHAPTER 22



Don't panic, I said to myself. I leaned both hands against it, pushing as though my body weight might accomplish what magic hadn't.

Nothing.

The surface was cool beneath my palms, rough with centuries of wear. There wasn't the slightest hint that it was a door at all. It felt as though it belonged exactly where it was and had done since the tomb was first sealed.

I stood perfectly still, listening for something on the other side of that stone wall but there was no sound except my own ragged breathing.

The darkness felt absolute now that my witchlight had been extinguished.

I wasn't alone.

Whoever — whatever — had trapped me was standing back, watching, seeing what I would do next.

I turned slowly. “Who are you?”

Silence.

Then, somewhere close enough that I instinctively looked over my shoulder, I heard a soft chuckle of amusement.

I really needed to get out of here.

I'd opened doors before, but this was clearly not a real door but magic.

I rested my palm against the stone. It felt like a real barrier but I reminded myself that it had been an open entrance when I walked in. I would have to fight this magic with my own. I took a breath, centered myself as best I could and pictured this barrier dissolving.

*Stone and shadow, lose your hold,*

*Break the spell both dark and old.*
*By my power, set me free,*
*As I will, so mote it be.*

Magic flowed from me into the rock and for one glorious second I felt it catch. The stone seemed to soften beneath my hand.

Then another force touched my spell and seemed to push back. Nothing happened. The stone barrier remained between me and the outside world.

The rest of my tour would assume I'd stopped to admire another tomb, which I had done. Maybe they'd think I'd gone back to the boat. Hours could pass before anyone noticed I was missing.

Then another thought arrived.

Rafe. He was uncannily attuned to me and if I called for him, he'd come. But I stopped myself before I could put him in that kind of peril.

He wouldn't stop to think if he felt I was in trouble and he certainly wouldn't wrap himself in protective cloth or grab a parasol.

A laugh echoed around the chamber. "He'll burn for you."

It seemed to speak directly into my thoughts and the voice was right. Which was exactly why I wouldn't call him.

Leaning my forehead against the stone, I thought, there had to be another way. If magic wouldn't work, maybe old-fashioned human behavior would.

I bent and picked up a fist-sized piece of fallen stone, then I hit the wall with it. The crack rang through the tomb and I kept striking the stone until my hand stung.

I shouted as well for good measure. "Help! Help! I'm trapped!"

My arm ached and my voice was getting hoarse when a faint voice called out—"Lucy?"

It definitely came from the other side of the wall. "Lucy!"

I'd never been so happy to hear someone calling my name. "I'm in here!" I yelled.

"Put your hand against the stone," the voice belonged to Nadia and I suspected she knew the barrier wasn't real.

Relief almost made my knees give way. Two of us working together had a chance. I put my hand against the stone and felt a current travel through. Once more, I muttered my spell, putting all my concentration on this barrier dissolving. On the other side I knew Nadia was doing the same. It didn't

matter if her words were different from mine, our joint intent would strengthen our magic enormously. I closed my eyes and repeated my earlier spell, slowly and with intent.

I lost my balance when the stone disappeared as though it had never been. The heat struck me like a physical thing as I tumbled forward into Nadia, who caught hold of both my arms.

“I was so worried about you. Are you hurt?” she asked, looking worried. “I could feel very dark magic on the other side of that stone.”

I shook my head, then looked back into the darkness. “A stone that wasn’t even real, but I couldn’t dissolve it by myself. My magic wasn’t strong enough. I only wanted to explore, I had no idea I’d end up trapped like that.”

“I’m just so grateful you weren’t hurt.”

“No, but Randall Whitaker wasn’t so lucky.” I lowered my voice but fortunately all the passengers were gathered together and Tarek was giving a talk. A few laughed so I imagined he’d been entertaining them while Nadia looked for me.

“What do you mean? Randall Whitaker went to have his hip checked at a local clinic.” She obviously thought my recent entrapment had made me loopy. I shook my head, wishing Randall were safe in a doctor’s clinic. “I think Randall is dead and inside that tomb.” I swallowed, it was so horrible it was hard to say the words. “Wrapped like a mummy.”

She blinked.

“How can you possibly know it’s Randall Whitaker if he’s wrapped? Surely, it could be human remains from the recent excavations, they are still finding human remains—”

“No.” I interrupted. “The bandages are fresh and his watch was lying on the ground.” My voice was husky as I said, “He was so proud of that watch.”

“You’ve had a shock, Lucy. Let’s get you back to the ship and I will make some calls. We’ll have it investigated.”

I nodded, only too happy to head back to the Nile Empress. I didn’t care if she didn’t believe me so long as she called the authorities. I looked back once more toward the darkness inside the tomb.

Whatever had spoken to me had fallen silent.



“WHY WOULD ANYONE DO THAT?” I asked Rafe later, when I was back in our cabin on the Nile Empress, finally feeling safe again.

I had my feet up. William had made me a cup of nice, strong tea, and my favorite shortbread biscuits appeared like magic. Some people might like brandy for shock, but for me, give me a cup of William’s tea and one of his biscuits any day and I’ll feel better.

Unlike me, Rafe couldn’t sit still. He was pacing back and forth. His agitation was worry, but it was still hardly restful when I’d already been through quite an ordeal.

His tone bit with self-blame. “I never should have let you go unaccompanied. I knew you were in danger. What kind of fool am I?”

I shook my head at him. “No. It was my own fault. Theoretically, I should have been perfectly safe as part of a tour group. I take responsibility for my own actions. I should have paid more attention. When I walked into that tomb, I saw there was no one else in it. Instead of feeling pleased that I’d somehow stumbled on a tomb that other people had overlooked, I should have gone back to the group. I know how much you worry about me and I’m sorry.”

He came toward me then and squatted on his haunches before me. He took my face in his hands and kissed me. “Lucy, I could not bear it if anything happened to you.”

I felt the same way about him. “I know.”

And then my thoughts went to poor Sharon. I hadn't liked Randall Whitaker but he'd been her husband for many years. Her grief must be terrible. The authorities had taken her husband’s body away and asked her to remain reachable. It seemed she had no family, so she had decided to continue the cruise.

Who knew how long it would be until they released the remains of her husband to take back home and bury? I could imagine that she was so beside herself with grief that continuing on the cruise at least gave her something to do while she waited.

Rafe finally stopped pacing and sat beside me, but still he held my hand, which I found very reassuring.

“Going back to your question, Lucy, why would anyone do that? It’s been puzzling me too. Someone went to a great deal of effort. Not simply to kill Randall Whitaker, but to wrap him up like a mummy and place him in a tomb. For what purpose?”

“Maybe they thought that a mummy in an Egyptian tomb would be assumed to be ancient?”

I voiced the thing that had frightened me the most. “But I wasn't alone in that tomb. I could sense a magical creature, but I couldn’t see it. I felt like they were toying with me. It was like they had an idea of what I might want the most.” I shuddered, remembering that horrible voice. “*I could make you immortal*.”

I turned to face him and he must have read the consternation in my face. He gripped my hand tighter. “What is it?”

“It was this voice. It was promising me things. It was saying I could stay with you for as long as I wanted. I’d never age. I’d become more powerful than I’d ever dreamed possible.”

Even for someone who’d been alive for five hundred years, Rafe was pretty surprised by this. “Do you have any idea who it was?”

“I have no idea. It was just a voice. I couldn’t hear an accent. I couldn’t tell if it was male or female. It was hard to explain, but sort of somewhere between an outside voice and something I was thinking.” Nyx and I sometimes communicate wordlessly, but this had been very different. It was like something that was on the outside trying to get in.

And I could feel how very seductive those promises had been. How I knew, deep down, my greatest fear was aging while Rafe didn’t, dying and leaving him.

Mostly, I tried not to think about it, but the voice had offered me a chance to be like him without becoming a vampire. I’d been offered that possibility once before and I hadn’t taken it. Perhaps that had helped steel my resolve. Besides, that creature who had so cruelly murdered and mummified an American tourist wasn’t someone I particularly wanted to trust.

“Were you tempted?” Rafe asked me.

He must have read the tumult of emotions on my face. I let him see the truth in my eyes. “Tempted for a moment, of course, but I think the price would be too high.”

He nodded. “I fear you’re correct. A devil’s bargain indeed. I’m very glad you didn’t say yes.”

“I feel so confused. We’re battling an enemy that appears to have no identity and yet knows all about us.”

He smiled at that. “Everyone and everything has an identity.”

I thought about that for a moment. How Rafe himself had moved countries and continents when he'd stayed suspiciously young, but always kept his name. How important that was to him.

"And what of this creature who has no name? We must be able to figure out who this is. That has to be the first step to defeating them. Let's start with why did the creature want Randall Whitaker dead? Did they want him dead or did they just want something he had?"

Before he could answer, there was a knock on the stateroom door.

I jerked so the teacup rattled on the saucer.

William looked at Rafe, who nodded. He could answer the door, but Rafe let go of my hand and stood up to stand between me and William and the door.

There were no peepholes in the ship's doors, so William took the precaution of putting the chain on before opening the door a crack. Then I saw his shoulders relax. Even from the back of his head, I could somehow tell he was smiling.

He unlocked the door and opened it.

To my great surprise, my grandmother and her dear friend Sylvia rushed forward. Gran had eyes for no one but me. She ran over and hugged me.

"Lucy, I've been so worried. I had a vision and I had to come."

Gran had been a witch before she'd become a vampire, and although her witch talents had lessened in favor of her vampire powers, she was still obviously enough of a witch, and we were closely enough connected, that she had felt that I was in trouble.

"How did you get here so fast?" It was the first question I could think of. I was so happy to see her and Sylvia. I reached out a hand for Sylvia and she gripped my outstretched hand hard.

"We came by private jet," Gran said. "It was terribly exciting."

"I've been telling Agnes the entire way that you would be fine. You're a strong young woman with excellent powers, and you had Rafe looking after you, but would she listen?" Sylvia shook her head, answering her own question.

I laughed, feeling my eyes mist with tears. "I've never been so happy to see anyone in my life."

"Alfred arranged it all," Sylvia said.

Gran sat in the chair Rafe had vacated and just patted my hand. It was very soothing.

“Would you like some refreshment, ladies?” William, ever the perfect butler, asked them as though they’d simply dropped by for a social visit.

“Oh, that would be lovely. A positive if you have it,” Sylvia said.

“And just some O for me,” my grandmother said.

William disappeared into the kitchen and soon returned with two of the thermal mugs.

“I had no idea a private jet would be so comfortable,” Gran said. “It’s so lovely being rich.”

Sylvia had probably been on more private jets than regular planes in her life.

“It was really very comfortable. Of course, one has to be so careful with one’s complexion in this country. But these modern fabrics make life so much easier than it used to be. You’ve no idea, Agnes.”

My grandmother agreed that she had no idea. She’d only been a vampire a couple of years. In that time she’d managed with UV protective hats and clothing and umbrellas.

It felt good, too, to tell them exactly what had been going on.

Gran said, “Naturally, I’ve been worried about your mother, but if I’m honest, Lucy, I’ve been more worried about you. I could feel that you were being pulled toward something very dark.”

I couldn’t believe she’d sensed this. “You’re right.” Then I described what had happened in the tomb. She shuddered. I shuddered again.

Sylvia said, “That reminds me of the film I once did, *The Sheikh and the Bedouin*, I think it was called.” I couldn’t imagine how an old black and white movie could be relevant to my recent horror but Sylvia was off on one of her famous actress stories.

“I was a beautiful young teacher kidnapped by this Bedouin who’d fallen violently in love with me,” she began, obviously replaying the part in her imagination. She wore a dreamy expression at odds with her usual prickly personality. “He kept me prisoner in a gorgeous tent and insisted I teach him English.”

“But the Sheik rescued you?” Agnes guessed. She always enjoyed Sylvia’s trips down memory lane.

“Darling, he *was* the Sheik. It turned out they were one and the same. He was frightfully rich as well as good-looking and in the end, of course, we were married and lived happily ever after.”

“So, the two people were one,” I said, feeling something brush the edges of my consciousness. An idea I couldn’t quite grasp.

Suddenly, I knew I needed to see Meri.

“William,” I said. “Will you do me a favor?”

I described to him how to get to the place in Cairo where Meri was staying and asked him to go and fetch her.

He didn’t turn a perfectly coiffed hair. “Certainly, Lucy,” he said. “It would be a pleasure.”

“I doubt the helicopter has even left yet,” Sylvia said. “It will take you to Aswan where the private jet is. You’ll have Meri back here in less than three hours.”

He nodded. “Is there anything I can get you ladies before I leave? Rafe?”

We all shook our heads.

And so William left to fetch Meri. As he was leaving, I said, “And William?”

He turned back. “Can you make sure no one sees her getting on board?”

“Of course,” the perfect servant said. Like flying around Egypt and then sneaking an Egyptian witch aboard a cruise ship in secret was all part of a day’s work. In William’s case, it was.

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# CHAPTER 23



It was less than three hours later that William ushered Meri into our suite. In the time he'd been gone, Rafe had discovered from his contacts that the wrapped mummy did indeed contain Randall Whitaker's remains. He had died, as we'd surmised, by having his throat slit. Exactly the way Ahmed had died. "Was there a leather bag hanging around his neck?" Rafe asked. I wasn't at all surprised that the answer came back, No.

Now Meri blinked at all the people there, then smiled when she recognized Gran and Sylvia. She embraced them both and Sylvia looked her over and said, "Being back in Egypt suits you, my dear. You seem much more robust than last time I saw you."

I wanted to remind Sylvia that Meri had just been released from a magic mirror where she'd been imprisoned for millennia. It would make anyone appear frail, but I held my tongue. Meri barely seemed to take in Sylvia's words anyway. She had other things on her mind.

"Lucy," she said, coming forward and giving me a hug.

I could see the strain that the past few days had put on her. Her eyes were blue-shadowed as though she hadn't been sleeping well. I hated to add to her emotional burden but I knew I had to. "I need to ask you something, Meri."

"Of course, Lucy. Anything."

"Who put you in that mirror when you were first trapped?"

She took a sudden step back, stumbled, and for a moment I thought she was going to faint.

William obviously thought the same, for he put an arm up, ready to catch her. But she pulled herself together, although she'd grown even paler. Her eyes were wide. "It is not something I like to talk about or even remember. It was such a terrible time."

"I know. That's why I've never asked you." I doubted a woman who'd been alive nearly 4000 years ago understood about PTSD but I was pretty sure Meri had it and so had been careful not to ask too many questions. Now, however, I had to press her. "Please, it's important."

"You think it could be relevant to what's going on now?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I'm not sure, but maybe."

She let out a great sigh and sank to a chair as though her legs had lost their ability to keep her upright.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" William asked her.

"I would," she said, gratefully. William really was the best. He moved to the small kitchen to make it, and she sat, frowning down at her linked hands. And then she began to speak.

"I must take you back and show you what my life was like when I was first alive."

She described her life as a young magician, one who'd been born with gifts and trained to use them. The Egyptians revered magic and magicians, and so she had held a place of honor. "I was tutored by a much more powerful magician." Here she swallowed and hugged her arms tight around herself.

Gran went over and put her arm around the quivering woman. "Take your time, dear."

Meri nodded. Took a moment. I wanted to scream at her to hurry up and spill the goods, but I knew Gran was right. Meri needed to tell this story in her own time and her own way.

"Some people who have power want more. And even more. And it can turn them from using it for good to becoming a path to self-aggrandizement and enrichment. They accumulate the kind of power that is too much for one creature. And then they begin to subjugate others."

She paused for a long time and I said, "And this was happening?"

At this moment, William brought out a cup of tea and she nodded thanks and then sipped gratefully from it.

"Yes," she said. "As I said, there was a powerful magician who took an interest in me. Began to train me. But their work turned increasingly to

obtaining immortality. Not through the normal channels, but by cheating death."

"Meri, I need you to tell me who it was. I feel like we're trying to battle an enemy without knowing who we're up against."

But she shook her head. Almost violently. "No. You don't understand the power of the Ren. I will not speak the name. I have obliterated it everywhere I could. It must not be seen or written down or spoken aloud. That gives the creature power. And already I can feel that it's somehow gaining power."

Rafe spoke up now. "But surely you can see Lucy's point. It's very difficult to know what to do next if we have no idea who or what the enemy is."

"Our only chance is to prevent the pieces of that papyrus coming back together. That is why you must stay on this ship with the papyrus. We must prevent the book from becoming whole and to keep the name from being spoken or seen. I don't know what else to do."

I couldn't tell her. I just couldn't tell her that Randall was dead and the papyrus missing, and yet she had to know. I glanced at Rafe, sending him a silent appeal. He understood immediately what my message was. He came forward and spoke to Meri gently.

"I'm sorry, Meri, but I have some bad news. The man we came to meet, who had what I believe is another part of the Book of the Dead that Lucy's parents found. That man was killed today. He had been carrying the papyrus in a special bag around his neck. It was taken. We believe he was murdered for it."

Meri's slim hands gripped the arms of the chair she was in. She didn't say anything for a moment. None of us did. The atmosphere was awful. Gran patted her rigid shoulder but it was poor comfort.

Then she looked at me. "Lucy, I am very frightened. It is clear this creature has other people working for them. Powerful people."

"What can we do?"

Sylvia, in her driest tone, said, "Instead of acting more dramatic than I did at the height of my acting career, I suggest you work out a way to stop this evil magician."

Meri gazed at Sylvia with big, pleading eyes. "How?"

Sylvia said, "I remember when you first came out of that mirror, you were lost in this current world. You certainly didn't have the life force you

have now. Presumably, if this creature has hidden themselves in something similar, and reading aloud their name releases them, they'll be weak enough that we'll be able to overpower them. Perhaps send them back to where they came from."

"But how will we know where they are?" Gran wanted to know.

"I believe we're all headed for the same spot," Sylvia said. "The ship is traveling to Aswan and the dig where Lucy's parents are is nearby. I suggest that Agnes and I await you in Aswan. I have some very old friends I'd like you to meet, Agnes."

"But can't I go with Lucy?" Gran asked, looking anxious.

"No, dear. Your daughter and son-in-law still believe you are quietly resting in a cemetery in Oxford."

"Don't worry, Gran," I said, feeling her worry. "I'll have Rafe and Meri with me. We'll be fine."

"At least promise you'll call if you need us," Gran said.

"I will."

Sylvia said, "I imagine whoever has the other part of the Book of the Dead will be on their way to the dig, too. And whether you wish to or not, my dear Lucy, I suspect you will find out the identity of this magician."

A shiver went over me at her words, but I thought she had to be right. I jumped up. "But we should go now. Why wait till the morning when the ship docks in Aswan?"

"No, Lucy, you mustn't." Meri cried.

I looked at Rafe, wanting his opinion. And he said, "I have to agree with Meri. We don't want to appear to know more than we do. We've been very careful to act like a couple enjoying a lovely cruise. A second honeymoon, if you like. The boat docks in Aswan. It makes sense that we would make a side trip to see Lucy's parents. But if we leave the boat now and rush down there, it will simply alert whoever has Pete, and whoever is trying to put these pieces of the papyrus together, that we are on their trail."

"But that voice," I reminded Rafe. "That voice I heard taunting me. It knows perfectly well who I am."

"What is this about?" Meri asked me. "What voice?"

So I was forced to relive the horrible experience of walking into that tomb, finding the mummy, which had turned out to be Randall Whitaker, and then that chilling voice taunting me, offering me immortality if I would agree to help them.

“Oh, Lucy. I do fear it is the same magician. What did they look like?”

“There was just a voice. I didn’t see anyone or anything. It didn’t touch me or do anything, but it turned out the lights and slammed the door.”

“The evil one doesn’t have a physical body, yet,” Meri said. “Just a presence.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “I suppose that’s possible.”

“You must be very careful, Lucy. Don’t go off alone again. Now the evil one knows that you’re a witch. I feel you are vulnerable.”

I hated feeling like I was being targeted. And as much as I wanted to tell Meri and all of them that I could take care of myself, I knew what she was saying was sensible. And so I agreed. I wouldn’t go anywhere alone.

So many questions and no answers, though I suspected we were headed toward a place that held the answers. “Wadi Sabuq. I wonder what we’ll find when we get there.”

“Wadi Sabuq,” Sylvia repeated. “Valley of the hidden one.”

Meri shuddered.

And I stared at Sylvia. “You can speak Arabic?”

She shrugged. “I spent several months here when we filmed *The Sheik and the Bedouin*. I learned a little of the language then and I’ve had plenty of time since to improve my fluency.”

Valley of the Hidden One. It seemed an appropriate name for a place that had once contained a magician so powerful Meri would not even speak its name.

Even as we’d been talking, I’d heard the engine start up. We were already on our way. We’d be in Aswan by the morning.

We had three bedrooms in our suite and for the first time actually needed the space. Rafe and I had the master bedroom. William had the second and I suggested that Meri take the third room.

William gallantly offered to give up his room to Sylvia and Gran, but they laughed at him. “We napped earlier,” Sylvia told him. “We’ll sit up and keep watch. We’ll be fine. We’ve brought our knitting.”

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# CHAPTER 24



The Nile Empress docked in Aswan, and I don't think any of us had slept very well. I knew that we were going to have to face a formidable opponent, and somehow not having a name or any kind of identity just made it worse.

Who was this creature? Would Meri recognize them? Would they even show up, or would we just keep waiting for this awful thing to happen?

I'm not the most patient person and I've never been good at waiting. I just wanted to get to my parents' dig and put a protective spell around them and stand there as long as it took until the danger was gone.

And if the danger was coming right to us, I wanted to face it.

And yet, of course, at the same time, I really wanted to snatch my parents and run back to Oxford or to Boston, as far away as we could get from whatever evil lurked in the sands of the desert.

"You slept poorly," Rafe said beside me.

"I did."

And yet he'd stayed beside me, holding my hand when I needed it, stroking my hair gently, encouraging me to fall back asleep. I don't think he'd slept either, but then he didn't need as much sleep as I did, and he often dozed or napped during the day.

I suspected he'd have been quite happy to sit out in the front room with Sylvia and Gran, but he'd stayed here for me.

In the early hours of the morning I turned and put my arms around him. "Whatever happens…" I said. I couldn't finish the sentence. He seemed to understand what was in my heart, and he hugged me back. "Whatever happens, we'll be there together."

And if there was one thing that gave me heart, it was knowing that was true. I not only had my husband beside me, but my mother and father. And Meri, who was like a sister to me. And Gran and Sylvia would be close by, though I hoped all that was needed from them was moral support.

Whatever happened, we had each other.

The boat docked without any drama very early in the morning. We managed to get Gran, Sylvia and Meri quietly off the boat before anyone noticed. William escorted them and would drop Sylvia and Gran off with Sylvia's friends and arrange transport for us to my parents' dig, the driver to pick us up after breakfast so William could pack up our suite. All going well, we'd fly home this evening.

Breakfast would be served as usual in the ship's dining room and then we'd be free to disembark. It turned out that we weren't the only ones leaving the cruise. After the murder, many of the passengers had decided to end their voyage here rather than returning to Luxor, so it wouldn't even be remarkable for us not to continue the cruise. I understand how my fellow passengers felt. It's hard to get excited about ancient tombs when a man has just been found murdered inside one of them.

The last thing I wanted was breakfast. My nerves were so jumpy I felt like if anyone startled me, I'd leap out of my seat ready to do battle, but Rafe encouraged me to go. "Not only is William not here to make you your coffee, but person or persons on this boat are somehow involved in two murders. The best thing we can do is act perfectly normally and keep our eyes and ears open."

He was right, of course. "You said 'we.' Does that mean you're coming for breakfast?" I felt like I couldn't cope with making small talk. At least if I had Rafe with me, I wouldn't be trapped into joining well-meaning passengers at their tables.

"Of course I will," he said. Not only would he be my support, he'd also be a second pair of very good eyes and very good ears.

I dressed in a pair of white linen trousers and, overnight, Gran had fashioned a beautiful red shawl for me to wear. I felt the love that she had put into it when I touched it. And knowing Gran, she would have imbued it with a protection spell.

Plus, red. It was the color of aggression. It was the color of war. And I was very much feeling like whatever was coming, I needed to be ready.

We held hands as we went down for breakfast. Rafe isn't always the most demonstrative of husbands, but I think he understood that I really needed the extra support.

I could hear the buzz of voices before we even got to the dining room. There must have been relief at getting off a ship that had seen not one, but two violent deaths.

The Canadian couple, Ernest and Ruth, were deep in conversation with each other when I walked past their table.

"Good morning," I said.

They suddenly fell silent and looked at me guiltily. Had they been gossiping about me? What had they been talking about that they didn't want me to hear? "We've decided to leave the cruise today. We must exchange information," Ruth said, suddenly over-friendly. "We'd love to stay in touch with you."

"Yes," I said, pinning on a smile and matching her false friendliness. "And if you're ever in Oxford, do let us know."

"And if you're ever in Sault Ste. Marie, we'd love to show you around."

"But first, coffee," I said. And that part wasn't fake. I needed coffee like I needed my next breath.

We sat down, and I couldn't help but remember Ahmed. The minute I'd reached my seat, he would have been standing there ready to give me my coffee.

This waiter, whose name I didn't know, came over and asked, "Would you like coffee or tea, madam, sir?"

We both ordered coffee. I took mine the way I liked it, and Rafe ordered his the way I liked it too.

"What were they talking about?" I asked Rafe in a low voice once the waiter had gone to fetch my coffee.

I knew he'd had his ears open too, listening to whatever conversations were going on as we passed, including whatever Ruth and Ernest had been saying.

"They said something very curious." He kept his voice low. "They are hiring a car and planning to tour the local area around Aswan." He paused. "One would think they'd see the tourist sites first."

At a table not far from us, Tarek, Nadia and Karim were chatting away in Arabic. "Anything interesting there?" I asked Rafe.

He put his head to one side, not looking at them so he could listen without seeming to. “They’re wondering if this tour will even continue, there are so many passengers jumping ship.”

Of course, this was just a job to them, not a holiday. I wondered if they were pleased to be done with this group and all the horrors. I’m sure we’d been an unusual group on an Egyptian cruise.

Then they fell silent, as did everyone in the dining room seemingly at once. I glanced toward the entrance and Sharon stood there, uncertainly, as though not knowing whether to walk forward or turn back to her stateroom. She was pale and it was clear she’d been crying.

Sharon needed someone to come forward and help her get through breakfast somehow. As I was about to go to her, I noticed Ruth was already walking forward. The former schoolteacher put her arm around Sharon and then led her forward to their table. I think everyone sighed with a bit of relief to see Sharon sitting with a nice couple. The waiter brought her coffee and her hands shook as she took a first sip. Then, as suddenly as it had stopped, conversation resumed.

I’m sure everyone was talking about the same thing. Including us. “It must be so hard for her to come to breakfast without him,” I began. “With everyone knowing.”

Rafe nodded. “I imagine it’s worse still if she remains in her stateroom.”

“When do you think they’ll release Randall’s body?” I asked Rafe. It wasn’t an idle question. He had such a network of contacts, both alive and undead, that he usually knew what was going on.

“It will take some time. They will conduct a postmortem, of course, to discover cause of death. Then there’s the bureaucracy.”

“And now I guess the Grand Egyptian Museum will never get the papyrus Randall was going to loan it.”

“I wonder if it ever would have reached the museum,” Rafe said, almost to himself. I don’t do well with enigmatic statements, especially when I haven’t finished my first cup of coffee, haven’t slept well, and am worried sick about people I love.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I may have snapped a little.

He glanced at me in surprise. “Only that there would be a rigorous testing to confirm it was genuine.”

“You don’t seriously think it could be a fake, do you? And Randall was killed for an imitation document?”

“If that’s why he was killed.” Again with being Mr. Enigmatic.

“I need food,” I announced and made my way to the buffet.

“Good morning, Lucy,” Nadia said as I reached the buffet. She had a plate and was reaching for a slice of melon. “I understand you are leaving us today.”

“Yes. After Randall’s murder, it seems wrong to carry on.”

“I have done my best to protect you,” she said. “Be careful, my sister, and go in peace.”

“Blessed be,” I said, giving her a hug.



When William pulled up in a large four-wheel drive vehicle with tinted windows, he was out of the driver’s side and opening the door before we’d even left the boat. It took us no time at all to get in and then William shut the door and climbed back into the driver’s seat.

“Wait,” Rafe said, command in his tone. “I told you to hire a car and driver. Where’s the driver?”

“I will drive us to the site,” he said in his calm way.

“You are needed to pack our bags and take everything off the Nile Empress,” Rafe said. Usually, he spoke to William as he would to a friend. It was odd to hear him take this stern tone.

I glanced at William, mostly seeing his reflection in the rear-view mirror. He looked pale but determined. “Sir, members of my family have been protecting you for half a millennium. I will not be the first Thresher to abandon you in conflict.”

I rarely heard William call Rafe sir and wanted to jump in and smooth over the conflict, but this was clearly between Rafe and William.

There was a moment of tension then Rafe’s stern countenance eased a little. “You’re a fool, William. I can well take care of myself.”

“Nevertheless, sir, I will not leave you. The oath my many times great-grandfather swore lives on in me.”

“And what about our bags?” Rafe asked in a milder tone, which is when I knew William had won his point. He knew it too for he eased the SUV into motion. “I have made arrangements,” he said with dignity, neatly putting Rafe in his place.

I reached for Rafe's hand, taking strength as we navigated through Aswan. After the relative quiet of the Nile, Aswan was noisy, dusty and the roads crowded with mini-buses, cars, motorcycles, and at the side of the road the odd donkey and cart. We passed the usual houses that seemed half finished, shops, markets, cafes.

We picked Meri up at a discreet villa surrounded by stone walls and continued on our way.

And then we left the city and traffic grew sparse and the view was of greenery that slowly faded to desert. I'd have enjoyed the drive so much more if I hadn't been keyed up with tension. Were Mom and Dad okay? What had happened to Pete? Would that terrifying voice I'd heard take some kind of physical form?

Meri was obviously on edge too.

After what felt like days to my nervous mind but was about ninety minutes, we turned down a dusty track that was more rubble than road. Dust rose behind and around us as we bumped along. "Look, you can see the tents," Rafe said. I strained to see but vampire vision is a lot sharper than human and it was several minutes before I made out the tumble of tents that made up the dig site.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary as we drew closer. I could see the trenches, with lines of rope set up, the biggest tent where the finds would be cataloged, the tents that would serve for office and refreshment area. I imagined at least one would have sleeping quarters.

As we drew up and parked beside a couple of dusty Jeeps and an old truck, heads bobbed up out of the trenches where young archeologists and students were working. They all wore hats against the sun. My father emerged from the office tent and when I got out and ran toward him, he opened his arms and cried, "Lucy, my girl. How wonderful to see you." I hugged him so hard he laughed and protested I'd break a rib. He was warm and solid and so familiar.

"I'll call your mother," he said, but I was so conscious of needing to get the vampires out of the sun that I said, "Let's go inside and surprise her." And so we did. I glanced back to see Rafe holding a sun umbrella and fully clothed against the sun. Meri followed, looking around nervously.

I saw the opening to the newly-discovered tomb, the dining tent and beside it the cooking tent with a propane canister outside for safety reasons,

and a hose leading inside where it would fuel a camp stove. How many times had I helped cook on one of those camp stoves?

Soon we were all crowded in the biggest tent, where the finds were labeled. It was Pete's job to log them and to my surprise and delight he was there, working away. "Pete," Meri cried when she entered the tent, running up to hug him.

"G'day," he said to us in general then hugged her back. "All right?" he asked Meri, who was clinging to him a little the way I'd been clinging to my dad.

"Where were you?" she asked, "When you went away."

He scratched his head at that. "It's the strangest thing, but I haven't got a Scooby," he answered.

"A what?" Meri asked.

He laughed. "Scooby-Doo. Clue."

"We think he had sunstroke," Mom said, "that's why we're keeping him out of the sun for a few days. You can't be too careful. We found him wandering around the site looking dazed."

"When was this?" I asked, feeling like, as happy as I was to see Pete, there was a reason he'd been released. What could it be?

Pete looked as though he wasn't certain and Mom said, "Last night. About six, as we were packing up for the day. We insisted he go to a doctor to be checked out, but the doctor agreed with me. Sunstroke leading to dehydration and confusion."

"And you have no idea where you were for the past few days?"

He shook his head. "None at all. Your mum tells me I left a note saying I was headed for Cairo, so I must have been there. Got a lift back and then my brain short-circuited."

It was a vaguely plausible explanation but I exchanged a glance with Meri that told me she didn't believe the sunstroke theory any more than I did. Someone or something had taken Pete, and then returned him unharmed. I was pretty sure it wasn't for a prank, but to keep him from the site for a few days.

Mom and Dad were always happy to show off their finds to anyone who had the time to listen, and soon we were hearing about the prize finds. "Rafe, you'll find this interesting," my dad said. "We found papyri in really excellent condition. Come and have a look."

He led Rafe to a leather folder, my mother hovering over them as they opened it. William remained vigilant, standing by the entrance to the tent, very much like a security expert guarding a celebrity. I wasn't sure he'd be much use against a dark witch, but I loved him for his loyalty. He'd fight to the death for Rafe, and, I suspected, for me.

I found I couldn't even bear to look at the papyrus. Pete took Meri's hand and said, "Have a look at some of the new bits we've found. Perhaps you can identify some of the mysterious ones. You have a knack for it."

She smiled. "It's because I'm Egyptian," a line I was certain she'd used many times.

In an archeological dig, they catalog the most minute bits of pottery, bone shards, ancient bits of stuff that could be anything or nothing. If you don't have a passion for it, the whole endeavor can seem a bit boring. It's one thing to see the best of the finds in a museum, quite another to see plastic trays full of bits. That's what I was looking at now. Pete showed us an item labelled Object PF19 "It looks like a bit of necklace," he said. Meri studied the misshapen chunk of metal that could be gold and nodded. "Or perhaps it's from a headpiece or even an earring."

I was only half listening to the pair of them going over the finds. I wandered on ahead to see if there was anything I found more interesting than a tiny shard of pottery that could have been a drinking vessel, a plate, or a bit of decoration.

Mom rescued me whether she meant to or not. "Lucy, come and see my prize find." I loved the excitement in her voice. She led me to the corner of the room where a funerary mask lay on a table. She'd been brushing the dust off it before passing it to Pete to label. The mask was truly lovely, even covered in dust. It was a young woman's face with dark hair and kohl-rimmed eyes, high cheekbones, full lips and an arrogant expression. "She's beautiful," I said. "Any idea who she was?"

"None at all." My mother sounded irritated. "She could have been the wife or daughter of an official, perhaps even an official in her own right. We just don't know. All identifying marks were destroyed in this tomb. It's so annoying." As though she couldn't help herself, Mom picked up the brush and continued lightly dusting off the dirt of thousands of years. As I watched I thought the mask looked somehow familiar. As though she'd read my thoughts, Mom said, "She's amazing, isn't she? She's got the pride of

Nefertiti, the mysterious smile of the Mona Lisa and the bold stare of the latest runway model."

I wondered if Mom was right and the mask was a kind of everywoman, though a sense of recognition tugged at me.

I was watching her when Pete said, "Oh, here's an interesting thing. What do you make of it? It's got lovely hieroglyphics carved into it. Looks like it came from some kind of seal. At first it looks like petrified wood, but I had a close look and I think it's made of beeswax, so old it's hardened and darkened."

Meri made a choking sound which caught my attention. She put her hand out as though she could push the item away.

I was both curious and worried as I joined them. The item on Pete's hand was about the size of a walnut, very dark, and he was right, it did look like wood of some kind. The carvings were beautiful, the hieroglyphics carved deep as though ensuring they wouldn't easily rub off. Object PF395 the tag read.

"No," she said, in a trembling voice. "We must destroy it immediately. I thought I had removed all traces of the Ren."

She reached for it but Pete pulled his hand back. "You must be joking. You don't destroy something like this. It's a perfect bit of history preserved for millennia."

"No," Meri cried. "It is death."

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# CHAPTER 25

Meri tried to grab the item from Pete's hand, pleading that he didn't understand. I didn't know what to do.

William spoke from his position at the doorway. "Someone's coming," he said.

I went to stand beside him and sure enough, a single Jeep was bumping its way up the track. "Are you expecting anyone?" he asked my parents.

"No," my dad said. "I don't think so, are we, Susan?"

She shook her head.

Now I could hear the vehicle approaching. I glanced at Rafe who, while my parents were coming toward the door, quietly took the papyrus and slipped it back in the leather folder, hiding it under a pile of reports.

The jeep door opened and Dr. Karim Nassar got out. It was a shock to see the expert who'd given us a few lectures on board the Nile Empress here at my parents' dig in the desert.

Then I recalled that he had said he was consulting on some newly-discovered texts near Aswan. I'd hoped it wasn't this dig, but it seemed it was.

Then he walked around the vehicle and opened the passenger door, and Sharon Whitaker stepped out. *What?*

"Professor Nassar," Dad said, when he recognized the man. He walked forward, hand held out in warm friendship. I was still trying to guess what Sharon Whitaker could be doing here when I watched her meet my father and then the three of them came into the tent.

Sharon was dressed in cream linen trousers and a loose blue blouse, with a silk scarf tied around her hair. Her sunglasses were enormous, and

she looked exactly like the wealthy widow she now was.

She saw me at almost exactly the same moment. “Lucy? What are you doing here?”

For a second, Sharon looked genuinely disconcerted. Then her expression resumed the slightly lost, grieving look I'd seen this morning. She pulled the scarf from her hair and looped it around her neck, tying a bow at her throat.

“This is Professor Karim Nassar from Cairo University,” my dad said. “He’s consulting with the Hennings Institute in Boston. They’ve really been supportive of our work.”

“My goodness,” Karim said with a smile. “Mr. and Mrs. Crosyer. How nice to see you again. I thought Mrs. Whitaker might benefit from leaving the ship for a few hours. I felt a distraction might help.” His hand went briefly to the small of her back.

It wasn't exactly an intimate gesture. A concerned friend might have done the same thing. But something about it caught my attention.

“How are you?” I asked Sharon.

“How do you think I am?” She sounded genuinely irritated by the question, and for some reason that made her grief more authentic than the mournful expression had.

“I'm sorry. That was a stupid thing to ask,” I said.

“I couldn't stand being on that ship another minute. Everywhere I looked, I saw Randall.” She removed the sunglasses to wipe her eyes.

“I can imagine.”

Still, she seemed really uncomfortable to see me here and I felt as though something wasn’t adding up. I recalled her saying she didn’t trust Karim Nassar, hadn’t wanted him to know anything about Randall’s papyrus, and yet here she was accompanying him on a field trip? No, something definitely wasn’t adding up.

Karim said something to my father about wanting to see the latest finds.

Beside me, Meri had gone very still. I glanced at her.

She was staring at Karim with fear.

I stepped over to where the Egyptian witch stood frozen. “Do you know him?” I asked under my breath.

She nodded, turning away so he wouldn’t see her face. “He was the one.”

“What one?”

“The man who told me I had read the words wrongly on papyrus pages.”

Karim laughed at something my father said.

Meri moved closer to me. Her voice was so soft I could barely hear it. “He knew what they were. He knew the words I said were prayers were actually instructions.”

Dad led Karim to the table where my father had laid out some of the newest finds. “Pete will tell you about what we’ve found since we last saw you.”

“Sure,” Pete said, with his usual good humor. He passed behind me and Meri as he walked forward and I felt the movement as he touched Meri’s hand, so I was prepared when she slipped the round object into my hand.

“He already suspects me,” she said just above a whisper. “You must destroy this Ren seal, Lucy, before he knows you have it.” Then she moved away from me, going to stand as far from Karim as she could get, and ending up in the corner of the tent where some of the spare dig equipment was kept.

A Ren seal. So this small bit of ancient beeswax contained the identity of the dark witch whose tomb this was. I now understood why Meri wanted to destroy the seal she’d passed to me, and I would do that as soon as I could, but for now my attention was caught by something more immediate.

Sharon and Karim. She'd supposedly come here because Karim thought an outing would do her good, but they weren't behaving like two virtual strangers who'd happened to meet on a cruise.

They moved together, not obviously, but like two people who know each other intimately. Once I started watching, I couldn't stop seeing it. He knew when she wanted to move past him without looking.

When he leaned over the table, she put her hand briefly against his back. It was a tiny gesture, but an intimate one. I was certain they knew each other very well.

I thought about Randall inviting me to his stateroom, talking over his wife, flirting with any woman who came within range.

Sharon sitting beside him with that permanent look of weary embarrassment.

And something else came back to me. When Randall told us about his hip replacement, he mentioned that Sharon had handled the Hennings Institute while he was in hospital and recovering.

He’d clearly treated her like a personal assistant, so she would have dealt with correspondence, made the arrangements. Randall had not known who Karim was when they’d met on board the ship, and all Sharon had said was that she didn’t trust him, but she certainly seemed to have changed her feelings. Or had she?

Sharon’s posture was sort of strange. She stayed close to Karim, bending over with her shoulders hunched forward. If she hadn’t acted so odd I probably wouldn’t have studied her so closely. But I did. And as she moved, I caught a glimpse of a leather strap hanging around her neck. Why would Sharon have a leather strap around her neck? A gold chain, string of pearls, sure. I’d seen money belts worn this way, but why would she have a money belt when she had a top quality safe on board the Nile Empress?

I made a decision then. I might be about to make a fool of myself but the risk was worth it if my hunch was right. I walked up and said, breezily, “What a beautiful scarf, Sharon. Is it a designer one?” As I spoke, I reached out and tugged the end of the bow so it came undone. She shrieked and grabbed at the thing, holding it against her chest like a naked woman with a towel. But I was ahead of her and twitched it out of her hold.

“What are you doing?” she screamed.

I held the scarf behind my back. Everyone was staring at me now and I felt Rafe move closer but I didn’t take my eyes off Sharon’s blue gaze. “You’re wearing a leather pouch around your neck,” I said, gesturing to the lump that bulged beneath her silk blouse. When she’d dressed this morning, I was ready to bet she hadn’t dreamed she’d bump into me.

“It’s none of your business. Give me back my scarf.” It was like a children’s fight, her reaching around me trying to grab the scarf, but all it did was get that pouch swinging.

“That’s the leather pouch containing the Papyrus that Randall was wearing when he died,” Rafe said. I loved him for it. Neither of us had actually seen the holder but he’d jumped to the same conclusion I had.

I saw Sharon begin to form words of denial, but Karim pressed her hand and she stopped herself. She glanced at him and I wished I could keep them apart, the way they keep criminal partners apart in the police station and interview them separately. A long moment passed and then she said, “Yes. You’re right, Lucy. It is. But Randall wasn’t wearing it when he went to the medical clinic. He left it with me for safekeeping.”

I knew she was lying. But she’d made the best move she could. If she denied carrying the papyrus, she’d incriminate herself. This story was plausible if you hadn’t known Randall and how completely obsessed he was with that portion of the Book of the Dead. He would never have left it with his wife for safekeeping. Never.

Karim stepped forward. “Lucy, I really don't think this is the time to interrogate a grieving widow. Let’s be glad the papyrus survived.”

“No. You're right.” I smiled at him. My heart was pounding but I tried to act cool. “Let's talk about murder instead.”

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# CHAPTER 26



When I said the word ‘murder,’ my mother gasped.

Rafe didn't move but I felt him ready himself beside me. Pete was still beside Karim but I saw him turn, ready to join in whatever this was.

Sharon's face went white and even the unflappably charming Karim thinned his lips in an ugly expression. “Really, Lucy. I think the sun has got to you. Perhaps it is time for you to go back to your little knitting shop in England.”

Now it was my turn to gasp. How dare he insult Cardinal Woolsey’s? But I couldn’t let him distract me. Instead, I began to speak, feeling my way as I went, testing my hunch. The picture was emerging. So many elements that hadn’t fit together suddenly did.

“Ahmed wasn't robbing you,” I said to Sharon, the image of the dead waiter rising up in front of me. “No, wait, I have to go back, to the beginning of the story.”

Sharon snapped. “Karim’s right, you’ve been out in the sun too long.”

“No. Ahmed was working for you.” I glanced between her and the Egyptian scholar. “Both of you.”

“This is nonsense,” Karim said. He turned to my dad. “I suggest you give your daughter somewhere to lie down. Perhaps in the cooking and eating tent over there,” he said, indicating a tent between here and the tomb’s opening where the dig team sometimes shared meals.

I looked to my father, appeal in my eyes, but he barely glanced my way. He came closer. “It’s a story I’d like to hear, Lucy.” I’ve always loved my

dad but right then I wanted to give him the biggest hug and make sure he was in for a very extravagant Father's Day gift.

"Randall Whitaker had a very valuable and rare section of an ancient Book of the Dead," I began. "But he was getting older and wanted to leave a legacy behind honoring not only his name but his father's. He seems to have been in awe of his father and still trying to get his approval even as he approached eighty."

Sharon snorted and I thought she'd speak but she stopped herself.

"So, he came up with the idea of loaning or donating the papyrus to the Hennings Institute so they could in turn offer it, hopefully to the Grand Egyptian Museum. He pictured a discreet brass plaque with his and his father's names on it, giving them a kind of immortality."

"And why shouldn't he? It was very generous and we in Egypt are eager to have our own historical objects returned to us," Karim said, speaking more to my father than to me.

"He had every right, but this is where it gets interesting. Randall was having a hip replacement so Sharon took care of all the arrangements. I remember Randall telling us that the Hennings Institute even sent someone to New York for a meeting." I turned to Karim. "It was you who met with Sharon when her husband was laid up. You and she got to know each other, bonded." I paused for dramatic effect and to swallow the nausea my next statement was causing me. "Fell in love."

"This is a fairy tale," Karim exclaimed.

Mom said, "I thought you two were a couple when you walked in. Aren't you?" Trust my mom to say this.

"No. We most assuredly are not. Sharon is a recent widow. What you suggest is monstrous."

"It will be very easy to find out who met with Sharon in New York," Rafe said, almost meditatively. "I have connections at the Hennings Institute."

"It's not a question of who met with Mrs. Whitaker, it's the insinuation I object to," Karim blustered. He'd all but admitted they had met, so my theory was holding up.

I continued. "I suspect there were plenty more meetings and at some point, you decided to steal the papyrus. Did you always intend to kill Randall or did that part of the plan materialize later?"

“How dare you accuse me of killing my own husband,” Sharon cried, putting her hands over her eyes. She might actually be crying but I doubted it.

“You did kill a waiter on the Nile Empress, though,” I said.

Rafe nodded. “Of course,” he said softly. I was pleased but not at all surprised that he was keeping up.

“I’m kind of confused, Lucy,” my dad said. “You keep talking about murdered waiters.”

I nodded. “Yes. There were two. The first was classified as an accident. A waiter apparently fell overboard from the Nile Empress and drowned. This created an opening for a man named Ahmed to take his place. Ahmed began working for the Nile Empress right before we boarded. But he wasn’t only working for the Nile Empress. He was primarily working for you,” I said, and I pointed to Karim.

“Wait,” Dad said. “You’re saying this Ahmed killed another waiter just to get his job?”

“No. He was part of the plot to get rid of Randall and steal the papyrus.”

“Utter nonsense,” Karim muttered, throwing up his hands but no one was listening to him. I had their attention.

“When we went to Edfu, there was an accident,” I told my parents. “A large sandstone block was pushed off the top of a column while Randall was underneath it. He was nearly killed.” I didn’t tell my parents that I’d thrown myself into the path of danger as I didn’t want them to worry.

Sharon jeered. “I was nearly killed too, remember? How does that fit with your so-called story?”

“Easily. You knew exactly what was happening. All you had to do was jump out of the way. With his newly replaced hip, Randall could never have moved fast enough. He’d have been dead before he even knew he was in danger. And then all you had to do was slip the leather bag from around his neck while you bent over him playing the shocked, grieving widow. No one would have noticed.”

“My goodness,” Mom said. “That poor man.”

“But he wasn’t killed.” I didn’t mention my intervention and neither did Sharon, probably because it underlined that my tale was plausible. “I caught a glimpse of someone on top of that column, someone wearing a shirt with long white sleeves, like the waiters on the ship wore.”

Karim made a jeering sound. “Like half the men in Egypt wear.”

Now I was really going out on a limb, but this part fit the pattern too. “Ahmed had been hired to kill Randall, told exactly what to do, and he’d failed. He would have to try again. In the time it took our bus, with the injured Randall on it, to return to the Nile Empress, you’d already returned. Ahmed demanded to meet and you suggested Randall and Sharon’s stateroom, knowing you’d be undisturbed there. No doubt you gave him instructions on completing his task and he asked for more money, didn’t he? He already knew too much, now he was insisting he wanted a bigger paycheck. It was too dangerous to leave him alive, so you killed him.”

“Goodness,” my mother said. “How?”

“Ahmed was found with his throat slit.”

“In my stateroom, with my jewelry in his pocket,” Sharon reminded me furiously. “Why would I want someone murdered in my own stateroom?”

I shook my head. “You didn’t know it was going to happen. I heard you scream and saw your shock. It was genuine. You had no idea Karim would murder Ahmed or that he’d do it in Stateroom One. But it was the best place to kill Ahmed as it was so easy to create the story of a robbery gone wrong. The waiter thief and his accomplice who came onto the ship. The thieves argued and one killed the other. It made such a neat and tidy story.”

“Because it was true,” Sharon argued. She had her arms folded across her chest but I could feel that she was trembling.

“You must have been furious that the murder plot went wrong because it was so carefully planned. Whoever masterminded it needed easy access to the site and an intimate knowledge of it including the current renovation work. Like a working Egyptologist for instance.”

“That describes dozens of people.”

“Maybe. But the plan also required Randall to be standing exactly in the right spot. Only Sharon could arrange to get Randall into the exact position where he’d be killed by that stone.”

“This is crazy,” she said.

“No. You'd paid Ahmed to kill Randall. Karim had staged a ‘tragic accident’ perfectly, and I ruined it.”

Her eyes flicked to mine. *There.* It was gone almost instantly but I'd seen that moment of fury.

“Ahmed had taken the risk. He'd climbed up there, moved that stone, nearly killed three people—and Randall was still alive. He wanted more money.” I licked my lips, all this talking in the dry heat was making me

thirsty. “You couldn't have Ahmed threatening Sharon. Maybe he wanted more money. Maybe he threatened to tell Randall. Maybe he threatened both of you.”

“You have quite an imagination,” Karim said.

“Thank you.”

“Unfortunately, imagination isn't evidence.”

He had me and he knew it. Then Rafe spoke up. “No. But the papyrus is.” He gave the pair his coldest look and no one does colder than a vampire who is annoyed. And anyone who caused me trouble, who nearly got me killed, would make Rafe very annoyed indeed.

“I spoke to Randall the morning he left the ship to go to the medical center. He showed me the leather pouch around his neck and reminded me that he always kept it with him.” He focused on Sharon, cold and lethal. “You did not accompany your husband to the medical check, and once he left the Nile Empress, Randall Whitaker was never again seen alive by anyone but his killers. The only way you could be now wearing it around your neck is if you are one of those killers.”

“No,” she said, her eyes going wide. “It’s not true. How could I kill Randall? Like you just said, I stayed behind on the ship.”

“He was planning to go home once he’d been cleared by a doctor for travel,” Rafe continued. “Randall Whitaker had been badly frightened and he decided to go home taking the papyrus with him.”

“And you couldn’t have that,” I said.

“No, it’s not true,” she gasped.

It all made perfect sense. “Randall had had enough. The stone nearly killed him. Ahmed had been murdered in his stateroom. He was frightened.” I was looking at Sharon and I nearly felt sorry for her. “You'd waited years, hadn't you, to get away from him? Finally, you found a man you loved who would help you steal a papyrus worth millions. Because I’m guessing his father would never have let Randall marry anyone without an iron clad prenup.” I was so winging it but it made sense based on everything Randall had said about his father.

Something in her face crumpled. “You saw how he treated me.”

“I know.”

“No, you don't know. You saw him for a few days. Try forty years. Forty years of living with that bombastic cretin.” Her voice shook. “And the women.”

I didn't say anything.

“He humiliated me. Again and again. And what could I do about it? Randall was rich but he always reminded me it was his family’s money. It was all tied up in trusts. I’d even secretly consulted a divorce attorney but it was hopeless. Randall could do whatever he liked and I had to smile and pretend I didn’t care.”

“I'm sorry he treated you that way, but you conspired to murder your husband.”

She recoiled. “I didn't—”

“Yes, you did.” I glanced from Sharon to Karim. “You made it very clear you were resting in your stateroom while Randall went to the clinic. But, Karim, you left the ship early as you said you had a meeting. You greeted me and another passenger while you were on your way that morning.” I turned to the Egyptian scholar. “Randall was going to the medical clinic. Except he never made it there. At some point, you crossed paths and took the opportunity to murder him. It would be easy enough as he trusted you. You slit his throat, then you wrapped him up like a mummy and deposited his body at the closest archeological site.”

“Why would I do anything so preposterous?” Karim blustered, his hands held out to my father, one scholar to another.

My dad always loved a challenge. He half closed his eyes for a moment and then said, “I would hazard a guess that you hoped to delay the discovery. Not for long, clearly, but a site in mid-excavation is always chaotic and plenty of students would have been working. They wouldn’t have the experience you and I do. They’d see a wrapped mummy and likely believe they’d discovered ancient human remains. There’s a protocol for that, as you know. It would take probably several days until the wrapped body would be removed for study and then the truth of the recent murder would come out.”

“Exactly!” I wanted to high five my dad, but this was too serious. “Again, I got in the way of your plan. I stumbled into the tomb and discovered Randall’s body.” I turned to my father. “He had this watch he was so proud of and it had fallen to the ground beside the sarcophagus where Randall’s wrapped body had been hidden.” Then I turned back to Sharon. “You had to know all about what was coming and that’s why you made sure you were seen on board the Nile Empress that morning.”

“I don’t feel well,” Sharon said, “I want to go back to the ship.”

I went on. “Why did you do it, Sharon? For revenge? Or for love?”

And suddenly, she laughed. Her head came up and I saw the vibrant woman she must once have been. “Oh, for love.”

Karim said sharply, “Sharon.”

“Why should I be ashamed of loving a wonderful man who actually saw me, who listened to me, who loved me?” She went to him. Actually went to him and took his hand. “I'm not ashamed. I love him.”

That was perhaps the saddest part. “We were going to have a life together,” she said. “A real life. Do you have any idea what that means to me?”

“With Randall's money,” I reminded her.

Her eyes hardened. “I earned that money, every time I laughed at his terrible jokes or ran around after him, or turned a blind eye when he made a fool of himself over yet another pretty young girl. After forty years of humiliation I was owed a chance at happiness.”

I thought of Randall wrapped up like a mummy. He might have been a terrible husband but no one deserved that end. “Why did you wrap him like a mummy?” It was so macabre.

“Of course we didn’t,” Karim said.

But Rafe answered. “I imagine it was to disguise the identity. Perhaps you even hoped that a few days would go by during which the human remains were classified as ancient. You only needed a few days and you’d be gone. But Lucy foiled your plan for a second time.”

That made perfect sense.

“Interfering little monster!” The words rang around the little building.

Rafe said quietly, “I think we've heard enough.”

Karim moved.

He was fast but Rafe was faster. Of course, Karim couldn’t have known he was dealing with the undead when he reached inside his shirt. Rafe caught his wrist before his hand came out again and twisted his arm behind his back.

A knife dropped onto the floor. Rafe kicked it away. “No one touch it. A forensic investigation will, I suspect, reveal traces of Ahmed’s blood on it as well as Randall Whitaker’s, along with Karim’s fingerprints.”

The professor snarled.

My father was already wearing gloves so all he had to do was grab one of the bags used for delicate finds and slip the knife inside.

While William and Rafe found some rope and tied Karim up, Sharon suddenly launched herself at me.

I wish I could say I responded with an elegant defensive move learned during years of magical training but she caught me by surprise as I'd been watching Rafe and William.

Sharon was a lot older and her attack was motivated more by rage than reason but still, she knocked the wind out of me as I fell on my back and then she grabbed my neck as though to choke me. I'd have rolled her off but she was heavy and fury lent her strength.

Then I heard Meri's voice, clear and precise. Even though she chanted in Egyptian I could hear that it was a spell. Sharon cried out and her hands flew away from me as though she'd touched a hot stove.

I scrambled backward. Meri stood there with one hand raised, ready to take Sharon down but the older woman seemed to lose all her fight. She put her hands over her eyes and this time I thought her storm of weeping was real.

Pete hauled Sharon to her feet while Rafe and William finished tying Karim up. As he did, the leather pouch slipped from beneath Sharon's blouse and landed on the ground. The papyrus that she and Karim had killed for was in that pouch.

All that wrestling must have knocked it loose. Pete picked it up, shook his head and put the leather holder in one of the trays then escorted Sharon to where Rafe and William were ready to tie up a second prisoner. I contemplated telling them that Sharon and Karim should be separated but really what was the point?

Once the two were trussed like turkeys ready for Thanksgiving, Rafe met my gaze, and some of the terrible tension I'd been carrying for days finally began to loosen.

Randall Whitaker wouldn't get another chance at life, but depending on who inherited his estate perhaps he'd still get his chance at immortality with a brass plaque on a museum somewhere and a piece of Egyptian history would be displayed for anyone to see.

My father was already on the sat phone calling the police when Rafe's head rose. "Are you expecting someone?"

Mom looked around at the mayhem in the tent. "Absolutely not," she said.

And then I heard what Rafe had picked up earlier. A vehicle was approaching.

Dad got off the phone and said, “That can’t be the police as I just finished the call. They promise to have someone here within the hour, though.”

William returned to his post by the open tent door. I stood behind his shoulder to see who it could be. A jeep pulled up and Nadia Farouk got out of it and walked toward us.

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# CHAPTER 27



I couldn’t imagine what the Egyptologist and witch was doing here but for a moment, all I felt was relief.

Of the three Egyptologists on our cruise, Nadia had been the one I liked best. She was knowledgeable without making you feel stupid for not knowing as much as she did. She'd warned me I was being watched. She'd tended my scraped knees after the falling stone and even used a little healing magic when no one was looking.

She was one of my sister witches. I felt like she was exactly the person we needed right now.

Then she took off her sunglasses. And I stopped breathing. I'd seen those eyes before.

Not simply on the ship but minutes ago.

Now I understood why the funerary mask my mother was cleaning up seemed familiar. The same dark, almond-shaped eyes, the same straight nose, the same full mouth that seemed almost ready to smile. But more than that, it was the expression that seemed familiar.

But that was impossible since the mask had been buried for thousands of years and Nadia was about forty years old.

Behind me, Meri made a terrible sound.

It wasn't quite a cry. It sounded as though all the air had been forced from her body at once.

Nadia's gaze moved past me.

She saw Meri and smiled, a cold, triumphant smile.

“Meritamun,” she said, her voice almost a caress. “My favorite servant lives, after all.”

I turned and saw that Meri had gone white. “How is it possible that you are here?”

Nadia laughed. “Dear Meritamun. While you slept like Sleeping Beauty, waiting for someone to awaken you, I learned.”

She took a step forward. “And grew. And became more powerful than you could ever have imagined.”

Meri shook her head. “But how?”

“I found a better way.”

Her gaze traveled over Meri, and for the first time I saw something ugly beneath the beauty. “I was going to release you, you know, from that mirror. When the time came. When I needed you.”

Her voice hardened. “You would have served me once more, when I came to collect you.”

Then she turned her head and looked at my mother. “Until someone interfered.”

I moved so I was directly in front of her. “It wasn't her.”

Nadia's eyes settled on me.

I swallowed. She really did have the most terrifying expression in her eyes. “It was me. I freed Meri.”

Something ugly flickered across her face and she looked me up and down. “You.”

“Me.”

“Then perhaps it is you who should pay. But why should I destroy such power? You are a powerful witch, though you lack discipline. You will serve me too.”

Ha, like she could snap her fingers and we’d all do her bidding. “No thanks. I'm pretty busy.”

The smile vanished and she turned her attention to our two prisoners.

Sharon was being watched over by Pete now. Rafe still had Karim under control, though I noticed Karim was no longer struggling. In fact, he was staring at Nadia with something close to worship.

Ignoring him, Nadia went straight to the table where Mom had been working on the funerary mask.

As she walked past, I felt like I’d accidentally stuffed a live coal in my pocket and realized the Ren seal was giving off serious energy.

Nadia touched the mask and for one strange moment, I had the feeling she was touching her own face.

Meri stood beside me. “How did you do it?” she whispered again.

Nadia glanced over her shoulder. “You really haven't worked it out? I used to think you were clever.”

She sounded disappointed in her protégée. “I learned how to move.”

Meri stared at her, horror dawning. I felt a similar horror growing inside me.

“From vessel to vessel. Body to body,” Nadia explained.

I felt sick. “You mean...”

“Young women are so plentiful.”

The casual way she said it was worse than if she'd cackled. “I chose carefully. Healthy women. Beautiful women. Women whose lives offered me advantages. When one vessel began to fail...” She shrugged. “I found another.”

I looked at Nadia Farouk's face and realized it was a mask this creature was wearing.

“How many?” Meri asked.

The creature I thought of as Nadia looked amused. “Do you count every garment you have ever worn?”

Meri flinched.

I thought of all those women.

Had they known?

Had they fought?

Had they simply gone to sleep one night and never woken again?

“I have borrowed many identities,” she said, her hand resting on the mask as though it was a precious child. “But this is me. My face. My identity. Part of my ren.”

She glared at Meri with hatred. “You tried to destroy me.”

Meri nodded slowly.

“You nearly did, you tore my book apart and scattered the pieces because they could not be destroyed. You scraped my name off my tomb and believed that without my name I would eventually fade.”

“But you didn't,” I reminded her.

“No.” She smiled. “I survived.” Her hand caressed the mask. “But survival is not enough.”

Something about her was changing. I couldn't have said exactly what.

Nadia Farouk was already a beautiful woman, but now she seemed taller. Her posture altered. Her shoulders went back. Her dark eyes became

brighter.

She seemed to fill the room.

Magnificent was the word that came to mind. Magnificent and terrible. “Now I have everything I need.”

“No,” Meri whispered.

Nadia turned. “Almost everything.”

Her gaze went to Sharon and held out her hand. “Give me the papyrus.”

Karim said, “They took it. It is in one of the plastic trays, blessed one.” There was something in his voice I'd never heard before. Obedience. Subservience. I recalled the promises that voice had made me in the tomb. Had she somehow got to Karim? I wondered what she’d promised him.

Pete ran toward the plastic bins, obviously trying to reach the pouch before the creature did, but she lifted a hand without even looking his way, and he was thrown back against the wall of the tent.

She picked up the leather pouch and removed the pieces of papyrus. Perusing them she looked delighted, like someone rereading a favorite novel. Then she moved along the tables, searching through the fragments my parents had discovered.

Karim managed to roll to his knees, head bowed. “My lady, please release me so I may continue to serve you.”

Nadia looked down at him. “Karim, my dear. You have disappointed me.”

His head bowed further. “I found the pages you had searched for. I had them brought to you.”

“You lost control of the servant.”

“Ahmed became greedy.”

“You allowed yourself to be distracted.” Her gaze moved to Sharon and the expression was not pleasant.

Sharon Whitaker looked genuinely frightened.

Karim said, “She was useful.”

“Was she?”

“She helped me obtain the manuscript,” Karim said.

“And in return you murdered her husband.”

“Yes.”

“What are you talking about?” Sharon cried out. “You love me. You promised we would be together forever.”

The evil witch laughed. “Perhaps you will be. I do not keep servants who cannot be trusted.”

Karim looked up eagerly. “We can be useful. Let her serve you too.”

“Karim.” Sharon stared at him. “Who are you? Oh, what have I done?”

Nadia laughed. “Oh, my dear. If you serve me well, I may spare you.”

I almost felt sorry for Sharon. Almost.

She'd helped murder her husband for freedom and money and a man she believed loved her.

And she'd ended up with a new master.

Nadia laid the pieces of papyrus across the table. Then she gazed around the room. Rafe had slipped the folder with the papyrus my parents had found beneath a pile of papers but she moved unerringly to the hiding place and pulled the papyrus free.

Then she began to piece the thing together. She had other pages with her, so she must have collected all the parts that Meri had separated and hidden. They didn't fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. There were gaps, ragged edges and places where the writing had been lost.

But somehow they belonged together.

I could feel it.

The magic in the room thickened. Nadia picked up her mask. With a snap of the fingers she broke the bonds that held Karim and Sharon and Karim rose and came toward her.

“Read,” Nadia ordered him.

He approached the table, bowed to her. His hands trembled as he touched the first piece.

“Don't do it,” Meri cried. He ignored her so she cried again, “Karim, you don't understand what you're doing.”

Nadia turned to Meri. “Silence.”

Meri gasped. Her hands flew to her throat.

She couldn't speak, couldn't move.

Karim began to read.

I didn't understand the words. They were ancient, the syllables sounding harsh and strange. But after one particular passage, the mask moved, then I saw the mouth open and the painted lips parted.

Mom gasped.

Karim kept reading while Nadia stood perfectly still, as though listening to her favorite story in the world. The face of the mask began to change.

The gold seemed to soften, the cheeks filled and the eyes gleamed.

And at the same time Nadia's face changed too until the woman standing beside the table and the woman represented by the funerary mask were identical.

“Stop!” Meri managed to croak.

Nadia laughed. “Too late.” She lifted the mask and the eyes blinked.

Karim finished the passage and the silence that followed seemed to pulse with danger.

Nadia closed her eyes and when she opened them again, I knew I wasn't looking at Nadia Farouk.

I was looking at someone who had been born thousands of years ago.

“Now,” she said, turning toward the trays of artifacts, “for the key that will lock my Ren forever.”

She began searching through the trays.

In a temper, Nadia overturned a tray so pottery fragments scattered across the table.

“Where is it?”

The seal was throbbing now inside my pocket. The insignificant little object was the key that would lock her identity into place.

I looked at Meri. Her lips formed words. “Destroy it,” she whispered.

My fingers closed around the seal. It was pulsing with magic. How could I destroy something I didn’t even understand?

Nadia turned then to me. She must have felt its magic calling to her. “Give it to me.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.” I was buying time, trying to come up with some way to destroy an ancient wax seal.

She smiled. “Oh, Lucy. Give me my name.”

“No.”

The force hit me so hard I flew backward, but the seal remained in my hand. Luckily, she hadn’t aimed very well and I was sprawled just at the entrance to the tent. I jumped to my feet and ran.

“Lucy!”

There was only one place to go where I could hide. Into the tomb.

I heard shouting behind me. Rafe was calling my name. He sounded anguished.

Then Meri's voice. “The name, Lucy! Destroy the name.”

I ran until the passage swallowed me.

Temporary electric lights had been strung along the excavated sections, throwing pale pools of light over ancient walls.

I had no idea where I was going, but of course the magician did. Behind me came footsteps, slow and unhurried. The creature I still thought of as Nadia wasn't running.

She didn't think she needed to. “You cannot hide my name from me.” Her voice echoed through the passages.

I reached a junction. Left or right?

I chose left.

The passage narrowed.

Hieroglyphs covered one wall. I rushed past gods and boats and offerings, ancient figures staring at me with enormous painted eyes.

Another junction.

I turned right. Then stopped. I'd been here before, hadn't I? I thought I recognized a broken section of plaster, three painted birds, a crack shaped like lightning.

“Lucy.” Nadia sounded amused. “You are lost.”

I looked down at the seal. Her name. Her identity. I had to destroy it, but how?

As long as your name survived, some part of you survived. I turned the seal over. The hieroglyphs were deeply carved. This was her name.

Nadia appeared at the far end of the passage. “Give it to me.”

I picked up a loose piece of stone and smashed it down on the seal. Pain shot through my hand but the seal didn't even chip.

“Foolish child. It has survived for thousands of years.”

Think, I told myself, think.

I tried a spell and nothing happened. “Your magic is nothing compared to mine.” She wasn’t even bothering to chase me now, just watching me fail.

So I stopped trying to break the seal. It wasn’t important, the writing was. The name. I pushed my thumb against the ancient wax.

Not a spell.

Just me using my anger, which was hot. This creature had imprisoned Meri for thousands of years, had taken over bodies, incited Karim and Sharon to murder. I felt the heat pour out of my thumb. I had absolute certainty that this creature did not deserve another life.

The carved line beneath my thumb softened.

Nadia screamed. “Stop it now or I will kill you,” but she sounded less in control.

I looked down.

Part of the hieroglyph was gone. I kept my anger alive and hot by thinking how she’d threatened me in that tomb, put my parents in danger, probably kidnapped Pete.

Another line disappeared.

Nadia rushed at me so fast I barely saw her move.

She struck me, and the seal flew from my hand.

It skittered across the stone floor.

We both went for it.

Someone else got there first.

Sharon.

She stood at the end of the passage holding the seal.

Nadia straightened and held out her hand. “Give it to me.”

Sharon stared at her. Then at Karim, who had come up behind her. “Is this what you promised me?”

“Sharon,” Karim commanded. “Give her the seal.”

“You promised we'd be together.” In all the life and death and afterlife drama, this was the one thing she focused on.

“We will be,” Karim promised her, holding out his hand and smiling at her. “Give it to me.”

Sharon all but snarled, “So we can both serve her?”

“It will be our honor to serve,” Karim said, looking not at Sharon but at Nadia, the woman who clearly owned every part of him, including his heart. Oh, that was the wrong thing to say.

I think that was the moment Sharon realized what a terrible mistake she’d made.

Nadia's voice cracked through the passage. “Enough. Give me the seal.”

Sharon looked at her.

And threw the seal to me. I caught it and ran, not caring where I went, ducking down corridors rubbing my hot thumb against the wax. That was the thing. Her magic was strong, but when heat meets wax there’s a reaction that is difficult to stop.

“I will kill you,” the creature cried. I knew I wouldn’t have long so I sprinted out, past Sharon and Karim and into the desert sun. I had one simple idea.

I ran for the cooking tent. The camp stove inside was exactly the kind I'd boiled water for spaghetti on, cooked scrambled eggs on. I turned the gas on *click, click, click* and then *whump* as the flame lit up the burner. I grabbed one of the saucepans, put it on the burner and dropped in the Ren seal. *Please let this work.*

I had known when I ran that I had little time, but already I could hear footsteps running toward me. I hoped the creature I called Nadia would run past, but of course she sensed me or perhaps her Ren seal drew her.

I'd heard the expression 'a watched pot never boils' from Gran plenty of times but never experienced the sensation quite like this. Come on, I urged. But, instead of melting into a golden puddle, the ancient wax still kept its form, still held the carved hieroglyphics. My only hope was that the dull brown surface had developed a shine. It was melting, but more slowly than an ice age glacier and I didn't have time.

With a cry of pure rage, the magician swept in and stormed toward me. I turned to face her but before she could get through me to the stove, Meri appeared behind her. As the magician lifted her hand to annihilate me and douse the flame behind me, Meri raised her hands and shot a beam of energy at the creature, knocking her off balance.

With a cry she jumped and turned. "I will destroy you," she screamed at Meri.

"That is a sacrifice I will gladly make if you are also destroyed," Meri panted.

I wanted to help Meri but I knew the only thing that mattered was destroying the Ren seal. The edges were getting soft. A couple of minutes and the wax would melt.

"I will save you, my lady," Karim yelled from outside. And then the flame of my stove went out. In horror I realized that Karim, who'd spent more time than I had in archeological dig sites, had simply turned off the propane.

The battle between the two Egyptian witches was like something out of an ancient myth. They stood, both tall, proud and beautiful, focused entirely on each other. I could see Meritamun as she must have appeared 3800 years ago, and the creature she faced now looked more like her funerary mask than Nadia. "You are my servant. You will kneel before me," the creature demanded, sending a beam of energy that had Meri staggering backward, but she did not fall.

“I am not your servant. And I am much stronger than I was,” she said, then, as the creature sent another stream of energy, Meri put up her two hands, said something in Egyptian and the blast hit her hands and then reversed, striking the creature so she, too, staggered back.

Karim ran toward me but I grabbed the warm wax out of the pan. And I rubbed the surface with all my might as I ran out of the tent.

*Name that bound you, name that stayed,*
*By my will, now start to fade.*
*Mark by mark and line by line,*
*Lose your power, your claim, your sign.*
*As I will, so mote it be.*

One symbol. Gone.

Nadia screamed, chasing behind me. I ran into the main tent where I’d have Rafe as backup. He looked frantic. “Lucy!”

“It was everything I could do to keep him here,” William said. “She took his umbrella and sun hat. To follow you would have meant death, and still he tried to go after you.”

I now had one more reason to feel hot fury against the witch and I rubbed at the wax with all my might.

Nadia ran in behind me. “I will kill you!”

Meri was right behind her. “You will not,” she replied. Karim came last, panting from the run.

The wax was softening now and the symbols rubbing off more easily.

Nadia’s face changed. For a few seconds she was another woman. Dark-skinned, with braided hair and terrified eyes.

I kept rubbing. Another symbol melted beneath my thumb and a woman with Roman curls appeared.

The magician jerked and convulsed as each identity consumed her. Meri stood back and watched with fascination and horror.

A face framed by a medieval veil appeared. She was replaced by a woman wearing an Ottoman headdress.

Faces flickered across hers faster and faster. Young, beautiful women. I felt like I was watching thousands of years of stolen lives.

Then Nadia appeared again. “Stop!” The ancient magician's voice came out cracked and pleading. “You don't understand what you are destroying.”

“Yes. I do.”

Another symbol vanished. She fell to her knees and the magnificent ancient face returned. For the first time she looked truly frightened.

“Lucy.” She held out her hands to me. No command now, but a plea. “I can give you what you want.”

I thought of Rafe.

Forever.

That was what she'd offered me in the tomb. No aging. No death. No final goodbye.

For one terrible second, I hesitated.

Rafe was watching me. He didn't say anything. He didn't have to.

I looked at the man I loved. I could feel that there was one final symbol left on the seal. “I already have what I want,” I said as I rubbed my thumb across it and felt the name disappear.

The magician’s final scream wasn't loud but I felt it deep inside myself. Her body arched and twisted as faces flashed across hers so quickly, I could no longer distinguish them.

Hundreds of women.

Thousands of years.

Then as though she’d suffered some kind of a fit and it had passed, the woman who once again looked like Nadia Farouk collapsed onto the floor of the tent, senseless.

Meri went to her immediately and checked her pulse. “She's alive.”

The woman opened her eyes. They were Nadia Farouk's eyes. Her own eyes. She looked around in terror. “Where am I?”

“You are safe,” Meri said to her very gently. Of all of us, Meri was the one who most understood what had happened to Nadia Farouk. She knelt beside her on the floor. “You are safe now.”

A tiny sound came from behind us. The sound of wood cracking. I turned to see my mother holding the funerary mask, a look of dismay on her face. A thin fracture had appeared across its forehead.

As I watched, the mask began to age before our eyes. “Like the Picture of Dorian Gray,” Rafe murmured, “If Dorian Gray had been thousands of years old.”

The mask had waited for the magician to return. Now it was aging the way painted plaster and ancient linen would have aged naturally. A

representation but not the real woman. Never again. The mask was still incredibly beautiful, but it was a piece of antiquity, not a face in waiting.

As Meri regarded the mask, she let out a long, shaking breath. “It is over. She has finally gone.”

I looked down at the remains of the Ren Seal. Now it was a blob of wax in my hand. Blank. It held no name, no power, nothing but old wax probably mixed with resin and pigment.

Pete looked sadly at the remains of the seal. “I’m sorry I had to destroy a piece of history,” I said to him. “How did you know to pass it on when Nadia arrived?”

He shook his head, “I felt the evil coming off her. I’m not much for spells like you, but I sense magic. What you destroyed was evil. It might have been a lovely bit of history, but it was still evil.”

“What about the papyri?” I turned to Meri as the only expert on that evil nameless magician. “Must we destroy those too?” I hated to get rid of more historical treasures, but we couldn’t have a recipe for the evil taking over of other bodies out there in the world either. Meri looked sad and nodded. “I am afraid we must.”

Rafe went to where the papyrus pieces were still laid out and said, “Lucy, Meri, come and look at this.”

As we joined him, I could see pictures changing, the papyrus itself subtly altering. “What on earth?” My dad of course had come forward to see what was going on.

“The papyri were spellbound,” I said, watching in amazement as the spell lost its power now the witch who’d created it was gone.

“It’s remarkable,” Rafe said. “Remember, I spent hours studying this. Before, this line said something equivalent to, ‘My ren shall pass from vessel to vessel.’”

I shuddered remembering that parade of women, those vessels the magician had taken over.

Rafe pointed to where that line had been. “Now it says something perfectly conventional about the deceased's name enduring.”

He pointed to another line. “Her spell, ‘I shall enter the prepared body,’ has reverted to the expected funerary meaning, ‘My ba shall return to my body.’”

“That means my spirit shall return, right?” I asked.

“Essentially,” Rafe said. Then he continued, “And the really frightening passage—'When the scattered words are made whole, the mouth shall speak and the name shall be bound,’ is simply gone.”

“So, it’s safe then,” I said and even Meri nodded. “She is truly gone.”

I felt the relief coming off Meri. I turned to her. “Will you ever tell us her name? I can’t go on calling her the evil witch.”

Meri shook her head. “I never shall speak that name.”

“Fair enough. Evil witch it is.”

While Rafe carefully placed all the papyri together in the folder, I heard the sound of vehicles approaching again. “What now?” I cried.

“Ah,” said my father, pretty unfazed considering all that had happened. “That will be the police. They did say they’d be here in about an hour.”

“I don’t know about the rest of you,” my mother said, “but I could really use a cup of tea.”

William immediately stepped forward. “Mrs. Swift, please allow me.” And as we waited for the police, William headed for the cooking tent.

“I don’t understand anything,” Nadia said, holding her head as though it ached. “I feel like I’ve been living my life but sometimes hours would go by and I had no idea what I’d been doing. I thought I was going mad.”

“Come, let us go and have tea and I will try to explain it to you,” Meri said to her, leading her out of the tent.

“Someday, I hope someone can explain it all to me,” my father said, “but for now we’d better keep things simple for the police.”

“Yes. All they need to know is that Karim and Sharon conspired to murder Sharon’s husband. Karim did the actual murdering, presumably with the knife you bagged. He also murdered a waiter on board the Nile Empress and, I suspect, another waiter who mysteriously drowned leaving a vacancy for Karim’s henchman to fill.”

“My goodness,” said my father. “What a lot of murder. It sounds rather like an Egyptian tragedy.”

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# CHAPTER 28



The air back in Oxford was blessedly cool and fresh. I looked up into the dark sky, and there was a perfect full moon shining down on Crosyer Manor. I whispered thanks to the moon. I was so happy to be home.

I felt movement behind me, and Rafe wrapped his arms around me and pulled me against him as we both looked up at the full moon.

"Shouldn't you be out at some coven event?" he asked me.

"I could, and I should. But honestly, I'm just happy to be home and safe again."

After the magician had been vanquished, everything seemed pretty mundane. The police came and escorted Sharon and her lover away.

There was a lot that the police would never find out, obviously, but Karim had murdered three people, with Sharon conspiring to help him, and they would have to face the consequences.

My mom and dad had seemed stunned by what had happened.

After Sharon and her lover were led away, my mother looked at me and said, "Life is never boring when you're around, Lucy."

I don't think she meant it as a compliment.

Meri fired up in my defense. "We owe Lucy a great debt of gratitude. She has helped to vanquish a very evil creature."

But my mother looked at her as though she was telling a bedtime story.

I suppose that was my mother's great gift, her defense against her own powers, that she seemed able to rewrite history as though anything that was unpalatable or she didn't understand hadn't actually happened.

I wished I could do that.

The best thing that happened was Rafe called in his friend Hisham El Masry, who had come to Wadi Sabuq to look at some of the finds.

“Hisham has now been awarded the role that Karim Nassar formerly held, advising the Hennings Institute. After all the drama, they are hoping to gift that extraordinary funerary mask to the Grand Egyptian Museum.”

This seemed like a wonderful idea to me. “How will they refer to it? Middle Kingdom funerary mask of a really evil witch?” I suggested.

He chuckled. “I expect it will be even worse. Middle Kingdom funerary mask of unknown woman.”

How very fitting that the woman who’d spent millennia trying to regain her identity forever should be referred to as the unknown woman.

At the dig site, business had pretty much returned to normal. Meri was much more comfortable helping catalog and explain how some of the items had been used. And Pete was happily cataloging the finds.

Nadia Farouk had decided to take a holiday of her own before resuming her duties as an Egyptologist on board the Nile Empress. Fortunately, she had no memory of the things the evil witch had done so I felt her recovery would be swift.

I felt like Meri and I were the two who were the most scarred by the whole experience. Perhaps only we two, and Rafe, understood how truly harrowing that experience had been.

But by the time we left, my mom and dad were happily back at work, and I could leave knowing they were doing what they loved.

And as for me, I was doing what I loved.

I had a husband I was truly devoted to and who I knew would always be there for me. I had work I enjoyed and the best cat in the world, who had barely left my side since we’d returned. I think Nyx had sensed the danger I was in, and it must have been very hard for her to be so far away. I knew I’d really missed her during those dark times.

It had been hard leaving Meri, and we’d clung as we said goodbye. But there was great relief there too. Now that the shadow of that awful creature who had imprisoned her was gone, Meri could go forward and live her life happily. And I could do the same.

“I’m so glad to be home,” I said for about the twentieth time.

“So am I,” my husband agreed.

“Rafe,” I said, “thank you for coming with me to Egypt and putting up with hot sun and dangerous creatures. I really appreciate it.”

He chuckled, soft and low behind me. I felt the rumble against my back. “There isn’t much I wouldn’t do for you, Lucy.”

I turned to put my arms around his neck. “The next time we go on holiday, I promise it’s going to be somewhere cold and dark. How do you feel about Iceland in the winter?”

He hugged me tighter. “I like the sound of that very much.”



Thanks for reading *Mazes and Mummies*. I hope you’ll consider leaving a review, it really helps.

What comes after the *Vampire Knitting Club* series? Check out this excerpt from a fun spin-off series I’ve set in Cornwall.



“JENNIFER, are you sure you’re all right, dear?” Agnes Bartlett said to me. I was driving down one of the most beautiful coastlines I’d ever been on, in a chauffeured Bentley, with a vacation in front of me. Okay, I’d barely escaped the clutches of a deranged killer, but now that the fear and rage were behind me, and I’d slept off the effects of whatever drug Tina had fed me, I was feeling surprisingly good. Escaping from death will do that to you.

“I’m fine,” I assured her. In fact, I was more than fine. I was excited about the future. I had agreed to be the manager of a knitting shop in Cornwall. Not what I’d imagined when I arrived in England for Lucy’s wedding, but I felt like I belonged in her crazy world. Maybe I needed a little crazy in my life.

While Alfred drove us to Tregrebi, a Cornish fishing village that was popular with tourists, Agnes and Sylvia and I happily knitted in the back seat. It was a great way to pass the time. We kept dreaming up ideas for names for the new shop as we drove. “Purl Harbor,” Alfred threw out from the front seat.

“Oh, that’s nice,” Gran said. “And very appropriate for you, dear, seeing as you’re an American.”

I loved it but wasn't sure it was quite right for a Cornish knitting shop. We kept knitting and thinking until the car slowed and Sylvia looked out of the window. "We're here," she said, putting away her work.

Here was a Cornish manor house owned by Rafe that had been rented out to people who ran it as a B&B, but they'd recently retired, and he'd decided to take it over. I got out of the car and stretched. A quick glance at my watch showed it was five in the morning. The moon was setting, the stars still bright. I could smell the ocean in the air.

I looked up and saw the outline of a house on a hill. Behind it, the ocean pounded. I could make out a peaked roof, mullion windows, and a winding path leading to the door. There were few outdoor lights but enough to welcome us.

I had the strangest feeling. There are places that just call to you, and as I looked at the shadowy house, something seemed to rise inside me and said, *Yes*.

It had been a sudden decision to agree to run a knitting shop in Cornwall, even just on a trial basis for three months, but as I stood here and looked out, I had this incredible feeling that I was meant to be here.

After the adventures of Lucy's wedding and helping solve a murder mystery and recover a priceless painting, I was happy to be somewhere quiet and sleepy. Cornwall was a place of fishing boats and tourism, and it had a history of magic I was eager to explore.

No doubt it would be too quiet for me, but for now, getting a knitting shop up and running, enjoying the beautiful scenery, and staying in a very nice manor house seemed like exactly what I needed.

I couldn't wait to get started.



Join Jennifer in Cornwall as she opens a new knitting shop, meets some interesting characters and solves crime in *The Vampire Knitting Club: Cornwall*, my new (but related) series of vampire knitting mysteries set on the beautiful Cornish coast.

To be the first to hear about all of my releases, sign up for my newsletter at NancyWarrenAuthor.com

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## A Note from Nancy

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the Vampire Knitting Club series. I am so grateful for all the enthusiasm this series has received.

I hope you'll consider leaving a review and please tell your friends who like cozy mysteries.

Review on my website, Amazon, Goodreads or BookBub.

Your support is the wool that helps me knit up these yarns.

Join my newsletter for a free prequel, *Tangles and Treason*, the exciting tale of how the gorgeous Rafe Crosyer was turned into a vampire.

I hope to see you in my private Facebook Group. It's a lot of fun.
www.facebook.com/groups/NancyWarrenKnitwits

Until next time,
Happy Reading,

Nancy

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# ALSO BY NANCY WARREN

The best way to keep up with new releases, plus enjoy bonus content and prizes is to join Nancy's newsletter at NancyWarrenAuthor.com or join her in her private FaceBook group Nancy Warren's Knitwits.



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Lucy Swift inherits an Oxford knitting shop and the late-night knitting club of vampires who live downstairs.

Tangles and Treason - A free ebook for newsletter subscribers. A paperback version is available for sale. NancyWarrenAuthor.com

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Take a Chance Boxed Set: Prequel and Books 1-3



For a complete list of books, check out Nancy’s website at NancyWarrenAuthor.com

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nancy Warren is the USA Today Bestselling author of more than 100 novels. She's originally from Vancouver, Canada, though she tends to wander and has lived in England, Italy, and California at various times. While living in Oxford she dreamed up The Vampire Knitting Club. Favorite moments include being the answer to a crossword puzzle clue in Canada's National Post newspaper, being featured on the front page of the New York Times when her book *Speed Dating* launched Harlequin's NASCAR series, and being nominated three times for Romance Writers of America's RITA award. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University. She's an avid hiker, loves chocolate, and most of all, loves to hear from readers!

The best way to stay in touch is to sign up for Nancy's newsletter at NancyWarrenAuthor.com or www.facebook.com/groups/NancyWarrenKnitwits

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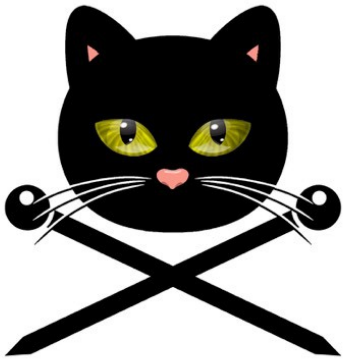
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