

Chapter Eight

DaringTare.com

Hunter leaned back in his chair, his fuzzy arms stretched high over his head as he let out a groan of exhaustion. He felt something crack pleasantly in his upper back, and he sighed as he relaxed once more.

He had been at it for almost four hours, and was beginning to feel his stomach get squirmy from the lack of breakfast.

And he had little to show for it, after having familiarized himself with the basics of Egypt mythology he had moved on to the modern study of Egyptology. After understanding Isis's role in the resurrection of Osirus, he soon grew bored as he usually did during historical studies and turned his attention to recent archaeological discoveries.

After scrolling through endless articles recounting the historical significance of the dead sea scrolls, he could find little else available online discussing anything other than the uncovered tomb of Tutankhamun. No brooches, no weird opal-encrusted ornaments, and certainly nothing related to suddenly having and vividly experiencing infantilizing fantasies.

He had scoured the surface level of information available which had yielded the information he had expected: little.

I need to look closer to home...

Ignoring his rumbling stomach, the fennec fox's tail swept from side to side methodically, keeping a pace that kept him feeling steady as he looked up his aunt's web page.

Clearly she needed to hire somebody who knows a thing or two about web design...

Awkward, and colored a ghastly purple and orange that was an assault on the eyes, Hunter was barely able to figure out how to navigate his way around until something caught his eye.

Amidst the menagerie of articles discussing the many activities and run-ins with the local authorities his aunt had had to contend with, one tab had stood out. One could send a message directly to his aunt if they made an account on her website.

This might actually be it!

The website had been utilized by his aunt's associates as well, meaning that there was a distinct chance that one of the site moderators would see his message and perhaps share some insight on the origin of his inheritance.

After quickly scratching down his log-in information in his notebook, Hunter logged in and clicked on the direct message button.

A blank template with a subject appeared before him, causing him to hesitate for a moment.

How do I ask this? That is, how much of the truth can I say?

Deciding that adopting the personality of an inquisitive historical buff, as that would be the easiest lie to follow knowing Malissa's mannerisms, he started to draft the message.

To whom it may concern,

Hi there, I'm writing to you today to inquire about a piece of Egyptian history that I received as part of my inheritance from Auntie Tare. I am her nephew, and from what research I have been able to look into regarding it I have been able to find almost nothing. Would you happen to have any information on a copper and gold brooch, encrusted with opals with a singular, large, and slightly cracked opal in its center? If you reach out to me with further contact details, I would be able to pass along an

attachment of a photo of it at a later date. Please, any insight into knowing more about this artifact would greatly help me achieve a sense of closure.

Best,

Hunter

Hunter felt a pang of guilt twist around in his gut as he wrote the last sentence, thinking about how he really did not miss Auntie Tare at all having only met her a pawful of times as a kit. Still, desperate times require desperate measures, and he hoped that by adding a line mentioning that he was distraught over the situation might spur whoever was on the other end into hastier action.

If he was going to get to the bottom of whatever was happening to him, he would have to find a way to connect with the people that knew his aunt. As he gathered his personal items and logged off the computer, he mulled over other ways of reaching out to them. He'd have to check Furbook, and sending out a few emails from his .edu email address to the university she worked for would not be a bad idea either.

Hunter was just considering whether he should ask Malissa about how to go about talking to history professors when his phone buzzed.

Lunch?

Speak of the devil.

It was Malissa, his thoughts racing; he recalled that they had planned on grabbing a bite around 1 P.M. that day. Glancing at his phone, his eyes widened as he saw that it was 2 minutes to one.

Shoot.

I'm 5 min away

With a kick in his step, Hunter pushed his way past the heavy library doors and half walked half ran to the local student pub.



Hunter sipped at his beer, the foam frothing his upper lip as he listened intently on Jack's latest anecdote. Having spent his Saturday morning intently watching the latest Esports match, Malissa was patiently waiting for an opportunity to change the subject while she tolerated the boys' fascination with virtual sports.

"So he's barreling down mid, and he's been getting progressively fatter and fatter the whole game."

Hunter nodded, pleased at having a little bit of social lubricant inside of him accompanied by a conversation he was enjoying listening to. A minute later, Jack noticed too late that Malissa was appearing visibly bored.

"Hey sorry, you're not getting much out of this are you?"

Malissa coyly picked up a fry from their basket, deposited it into her muzzle, and after chewing for a moment she shook her head and responded.

"No no, I am. I'm learning a lot."

"Really?"

Looking perplexed, Jack tilted his head at her inquisitively. Malissa continued.

"Yes. I'm learning why you don't have a girlfriend."

Hunter snickered, but did not laugh too loudly at his friend. After all, he was single as well.

"Aaanyway."

Malissa said, drawing out the word while smiling at her own joke.

“What were you doing in the library this morning?”

Hunter swallowed, a prickle of sweat beginning to form at the back of his neck as he did his best not to choke in surprise. Raising an eyebrow, he did his best attempt at reciprocating her coyness.

“Oh? How’d you know I was at the library this morning?”

“I had a study group for Poly-Sci, I saw you pretty engrossed in whatever it was you were researching.”

So she doesn’t know what I was looking for.

Hunter sighed, deciding that a half truth would probably be the best course of action. He did not want to lie, but at the moment the little fennec did not know how to explain his dilemma to them; let alone whether he was ready to even tell them he was pretty sure that he was under an ancient Egyptian curse.

“Calc. I’m still gunning for that A. I was doing practice problems all morning, which is why this beer and a conversation about digital heroes duking it out is a welcome respite.”

“Fair enough, fair enough.”

Malissa nodded, and Hunter thought he saw a begrudging respect in her eyes at the fact that he spent a day off of classes hitting the books.

The reminder of what he had been doing that morning brought back a sense of anxious excitement when he thought about the message he had sent. He still wanted to do some googling to see if he could reach out to any of Auntie Tare’s colleagues, but the website would likely be his best bet. Deciding that now would be a better time than ever, he decided to breach the question he had to Malissa.

“Speaking of classes...”

Jack groaned, placing his forehead on the surface of their table as he appeared to be visibly in pain. He grumbled under his breath as his two friends looked at him.

“Can we please not talk about college classes during our lunchtime merry-making? I'm trying to get day-drunk here...”

Ignoring him, Malissa turned her attention back to Hunter.

“What's up?”

Hunter hesitated, then decided that his cards were in order.

“So, I kind of want to do Egypt for my final history project. I know it's easy but it's not exactly a class I'm trying to excel in. Would you be willing to pull a string and send a few emails to some professors if I send you a memo?”

Malissa looked at him for a moment, and for a second Hunter thought his ruse was up. But then she nodded and turned her attention back to Jack.

“So did you ever play any real sports when you were a pup or were you perpetually glued to the screen like my little brothers?”

Hunter allowed the two to quip, silently celebrating the progress that that day had accomplished towards figuring out what he was up against. He relaxed, continuing to sip at his beverage and smiling as he listened to the increasingly petulant banter Malissa and Jack so enjoyed.

The fennec took another drink, and then almost choked. He stared at the mug in front of them, the liquid having adopted a stark difference. His two friends did not notice him at first, and Hunter's thoughts whirled as he felt himself sober up within an instant.

“Guys.”

Jack and Malissa turned towards him, Hunter continued.

“Try this.”

He pushed his mug forward, and both Jack and Malissa glanced between him and the offered mug.

“Not your brand?”

Jack asked, but Hunter was adamant.

“Try. This.”

Silently they obeyed, Jack taking a hesitant sip and then frowning profusely. He handed it over to Malissa, who also tried it and appeared as dumbfounded as the weasel next to her.

“It’s... Apple juice?”

Malissa asked, looking at Hunter and tilted her head to the side. Hunter noted that her ears were splayed back against her head.

“It is. But a second ago, it was beer. You saw its froth right? The bubbles? It looked like beer, it was beer.”

Hunter’s jaw was set, even as Jack and Malissa glanced at each in confusion. Jack spoke up, hesitantly.

“Are you... Are you sure you didn’t-”

“Absolutely.”

For a few seconds, the three sat there at an utter loss for words. Hunter, however, found that he felt a sense of relief mixed in with his trepidation. At last, somebody else was seeing events happening that had absolutely no logical reason to be.

He would have felt fully justified, were it not for one internal realization that prevented him from feeling fully gratified.

The apple juice had tasted much more agreeably to his palette than the beer had, and he wanted to finish it.