

Chapter Twenty-Two

Tools of the Ruling Pharaoh

The exam ended prematurely that morning, as the professor ended up excusing himself after having all of the students deposit their unfinished exams on his desk before he departed with haste to his office. This left Hunter to pick his jeans off of the polar bear's desk and awkwardly loop his legs through it as he felt more than a dozen pairs of curious eyes on him. He had refused to look back at them, as he was in fight or flight mode and simply wished to depart as quickly as he could. Malissa had been by his side after he had finished buckling them onto himself, holding his backpack which she had placed his items into with her own pack on her opposite shoulder.

"Hey, let's get you out of here."

She had whispered in his large ear, and the poor fennec had only been able to nod silently in response. Raising his gaze up to the front door, he tried not to think about the distinct waddle he must have been exhibiting as he made his own exit, Jack jogging up to the two of them as he did so. Hunter could feel his chest heaving, almost painfully, as he tried to catch his breath and calm himself down. He felt as if he were having an out of body experience, the world around him seemed fabricated and surreal as he passed a bench standing outside of an office as he made his way down the hall.

Thoughts of what would happen to his exam grade and the final results of his class were now in the far reaches of his mind as his brain replayed what had just occurred to him over and over again. Despite the sense of panic and utter humiliation he was currently experiencing, a cool sense of rationale bubbled to the surface of his consciousness. The broach's influence had since expanded, and was now clearly influencing the behavior of people around him. He sensed that despite Malissa's naturally kind and generous disposition, it had affected her just as it had taken over the mind of his calculus professor.

The powers at play were growing in intensity, not only warping his own mind and reality at his proximity but the thoughts and behaviors of others. He had not

expected this development at all, as he had been fixated on himself and his own problems for the past several months to begin with.

Could something like this have happened to Auntie Tare? Had she not known that giving him this item would cause this particular sequence of events? Questions that had been fermenting inside of him for weeks now bubbled to the surface once more, pestering him and frustrating him with their unanswerability. Malissa spoke up, sounding far away despite being right next to him. It pulled him back into the moment, as the fennec glanced over to her talking to Jack.

"I think this was the act of God you were looking for to save your grade during that exam."

Jack grimaced, nodding without looking at her as he continued to trudge forward, a distracted look on his face. His canines showing as he grinned, he shook his head as he replied in a sheepish tone.

"Yeah... I only got through about half of that exam... I think I got most of them right though, if you'll believe it."

Malissa shook her head, a disapproving if amused expression on her muzzle as the three of them made their way hastily down a flight of stairs.

The atmosphere between the three of them seemingly becoming more casual, she turned to Hunter. She wore a determined expression, and something told Hunter that the otter had finally come to the conclusion that more factors were at play than he had originally expressed to her. In a firm, no-nonsense tone she nodded at him while she spoke.

"You have some explaining to do."

Hunter sighed, an odd sense of relief coming over him as he came to the conclusion that the nightmare scenario he had just experienced reached its conclusion anyway. He nodded back, swallowing hard before speaking in a tone that commanded more authority than he had expected it to.

“You’re right. Come to my place, the both of you, if you’re done with exams for the day that is.”

The two of them nodded, and as they reached the front entrance to the building, they turned their path towards the direction of Hunter’s apartment. They walked in relative silence, though Hunter could feel Jack’s eyes occasionally wandering down to the seat of the fox’s pants. The fennec spent the silence mulling over how he would breach the topic of the broach, figuring that he might as well take what he could get from finally telling someone he was close to the trials had been suffering through since that semester began.



Jack and Malissa were staring at the wooden box sitting on the mantle fear with mixed expressions on their muzzles. Hunter saw awe, disbelief, a note of fear, disbelief, and a touch of terror written across their faces. He had just delved into the history of his experiences over the past few months, describing to them in detail the occurrences that had happened to him as well as his thoughts and strategies on how to approach the problem.

The weasel had laughed more than once, only to receive a pointy elbow in the side from the otter as she appeared keenly interested in hearing the entirety of what Hunter had to say to them. While Hunter had appreciated the sentiment, he had appreciated his friend’s attempt at levity as he described the burden that had been trying not only to keep his curse a secret but do his best to outsmart and work against its influence. He had been worried that something supernatural would happen as the two had sat so near the Egyptian relic, but after warning them not to touch it it had appeared that the magic was taking a respite after such a potent spell.

As Hunter ended on the exam they had experienced that morning, an awkward silence settled over the three furs sitting bolt upright on the living room couches. His friends had hung onto every word he had described, never once interrupting him with questions or prompts beyond the laughter that inevitably escaped the weasel’s muzzle.

Malissa shook her head slowly, trying to take everything that her friend had just told her in as Jack continued to stare in fascination at the wooden box above them. Slowly, she opened her muzzle, visibly appearing to gather her thoughts as she posed a single question.

“Are you sure your Aunt is gone?”

The corner of Hunter’s drooped downwards in a tight-lipped grimace, as he shook his head slowly while maintaining eye contact. He had suspected that given his aunt’s reputation, she was likely fending off something or someone for a prolonged period of time. The honey badger’s conviction to get to the bottom of what was happening had given him enough hope that not everything was as what it seemed when it came to her, but the lack of communication from both his aunt and the badger gave him little to work off of.

Jack added his own opinion, breaking the silence once more.

“This explains why you’ve been so introverted this semester. I was beginning to worry that you were hanging out with other people that were more fun than us or something.”

Hunter barked shortly, an awkward laugh that sounded mirthless and dry. He shook his head, replying.

“Not at all, you guys are great. I just did not want to get you involved is all. This thing seems to be focused entirely on my life. I guess I was kind of scared that you guys wouldn’t want to associate given the... Uhhh... Weirdness of it all...”

Malissa placed a paw on Hunter’s, squeezing it as she continued to stare at the box on the mantelpiece while she spoke.

“That’s not something you need to worry about. This... *thing*... I think I’ve read about artifacts like this before. They were written about, described before, but the ones that were found were always really busted up. The gemstones were usually pried off by

grave robbers leaving the rest of the item theoretically useless. But you said the middle one had a crack of some sort?"

"Yeah..."

Hunter replied simply, his gaze now fixated on Malissa's muzzle, keenly awake. Seeing for the first time that somebody might know something that he had not concluded himself when it came to the item, his sense of hope rose substantially before he could tell himself to calm down. Malissa continued, shaking her head as her small ears pinned against her head in what appeared to be a concerned expression.

"Putting aside the fact that magic... Exists... We can deal with that earth-shattering realization later before I go crazy... That thing might be a talisman of eternal youth. Apparently, they were created for Pharaohs in order for them to rule for decades without aging and... Well, theoretically they were designed for immortality. That never worked out according to history, because many of the Pharaohs ended up having their broaches destroyed, stolen, or they themselves were simply poisoned or murdered by their impatient descendents."

"Do you know anything about, like, how they work or how you can get them to work?"

Malissa shook her head, a grim expression on her muzzle as she continued to look at the box. Hunter was feeling unnerved by how much attention she was paying to the box, and found that her enraptured expression was coming across as a little disturbing to him. He was about to ask further, when Malissa suddenly shifted her attention to his pants. Before he was able to react, she reached over and placed a paw on his belt buckle as she spoke in a soft tone.

"Hey, how's that diaper doing little guy? We should probably check if you're soggy by now..."

Hunter glanced momentarily at Jack, who appeared to be nodding in agreement, a hazy expression in his eyes as he watched the two of them. The fennec jolted, placing a paw hastily on top of Malissa's to stop her as he cried.

"Malissa! Stop!"

She looked up at him, confused and glassy eyed. She blinked, appearing as though she had just woken up. She recoiled, her chest heaving as she glanced from him to the box in quick succession.

"Holy shit it is real."

Jack said, sounding aghast and awestruck. Malissa ran a paw through her headfur, appearing embarrassed as she looked away from Hunter stuttering out an apology.

"Suh-sorry... I uh... Yeah... The talisman..."

Hunter took in a deep breath, deciding to move on so as to not further trigger the magic's gathering strengths.

"Do you know how to get it to stop?"

Malissa considered for a moment, biting her bottom lip before continuing.

"No, but I think I know why it's doing this. You said it was broken, and allegedly the 'magic' was stored in the gemstones and directed by the hieroglyphs etched into the metal. What did you say they were?"

Hunter replied promptly.

"Eye of Horus, a crane, and these crossing tools that looked kind of like weapons..."

“Did they look like a flail and a hook?”

“Yeah...”

“Yeah, those are symbols of royalty, protection, longevity, and... Wait, you said a crane?”

Hunter nodded silently, his heartbeat in his throat as he took in every single word that Malissa uttered. This was more information he had been able to glean about the broach than in all of his research, the fact that the otter seemed to know these things was exceptionally exciting to him. He felt as if he should feel regret in not confiding in her, anyone, sooner, but the honey badger had been particularly closed when it came to telling him anything other than to wait. Malissa continued, her voice soft as if she was speaking in a way so as to not disturb something in the room.

“That’s not meant for ruling Pharaohs. I think... Okay, this might be a stretch but I think that talisman was made for a child, like an actual baby. Maybe to keep them eternally young and, well, unable to rule. And now that it’s broken, it’s not only affecting its owner but the world around him. It’s just a guess, but it totally fits with everything you’ve described Hunter.”

Hunter leaned back on his couch, feeling surprised at the fact he now felt more stressed than relieved at coming to this conclusion. Malissa could still be wrong, of course, but it all just made too much sense. If Aunt Tare had tried to give him this as a gift to keep him eternally young, she had done too good a job of it. Whether or not she was aware that this talisman would actually slowly turn him back into the mental state of a baby instead of keeping him perpetually in his early twenties he did not know. There was still much he did not know, but now that the cat was out of the bag and he and his friends knew what the intentions of the magic were, spoken out loud as they were, it offered a modicum of clarity to his situation.

“Well, what are we going to do about it?”

Jack spoke up unexpectedly, causing his other two friends to turn their friends towards his direction in surprise. The weasel wore a calm expression, looking back and forth from the two of them as he assessed their apparent confused expression. He added, sounding a little impatient with a note of giddy excitement in his voice.

“We need to figure out a battle plan, try and stop the flow of magic or whatever. We can’t just leave Hunter like this, he can’t join in on game night if he’s going to be drooling on his keyboard.”

“Wow Jack, sometimes I wish my priorities were as simple as yours, really.”

Malissa replied in a dry tone, casting an exasperated look at the weasel. Jack grinned, appearing to take no offense at the remarks towards his immaturity. He looked at Hunter, beaming at him before nodding at the box containing the broach.

“We’ll get to the bottom of this, don’t worry dude.”

Hunter felt an odd sense of warmth fill his mind, a feeling not so dissimilar to the front of his padding swelling up after an impromptu accident. He greatly appreciated his friend’s bravado, ignorant and simple as it was, to join in aiding him to stop the curse. The fennec took a deep breath, nodding and turning to Malissa expectantly.

Malissa glanced between the two of them, disbelief on her muzzle before she finally smiled and laughed, shaking her head as she placed her paws primly in her lap.

“You guys are dorks, really, in the face of Egyptian magic that isn’t supposed to exist you want to Dungeons and Dragons your way out of this?”

Hunter shrugged, and Malissa seemed to take further stock of the situation. Sighing, she looked down at her paws before continuing.

“I guess Hunter doesn’t really have much of a choice does he?”

Jack moved, placing a paw forwards in between the three of them before speaking excitedly.

“Come on, paws in, ‘Curse-Breakers’ on three!”

Hunter put his paw in without thinking, even as Malissa continued to giggle uncontrollably. After a moment, she put her paw on top of theirs, commenting sarcastically as she did so.

“You guys are huge dorks for this, just so you know.”