

Chapter Twenty-Four

Winter Break

Hunter allowed himself a large sigh as he set his suitcase down in the front hall of his apartment, pulling his backpack straps off of his shoulders and allowing that to softly fall next to it. The two weeks he had spent at home during winter break had been somewhat uneventful when it came to the antics caused by the trinket, a fact he attributed to the only reasonable notion which was that with the increased distance its magical effects were somewhat diluted. He had still wore diapers to bed, a fact that he had several close calls with when it came to concealing the matter from his parents. Only a couple times had he woken up wet, which had been the better alternative to having to wash his bedsheets several times throughout his stay in secret.

The topic of the mysterious brooch had been on his mind throughout the stay at home, and he had asked several questions about Auntie Tare to his mother. He had tried to be sparing with his inquisitiveness, as he could tell that the grief from having lost the relative was still something that his Mom was grappling with. Still, she seemed too happy to discuss his late aunt, mentioning how she was always rather distanced from her family life once she had started upon her career, spending most of her time in far off countries, the most prominent of course being Egypt. Despite Hunter's high hopes, the most he was able to glean was just how close his mother and Auntie Tare were. If there was anyone that his Aunt would want to reach out to if she was even still alive, it would have been his Mom.

Radio silence remained on his DaringTare.com account, even after Hunter had sent another message to the badger asking whether there had been any progress to figuring out what had happened to his aunt. The lack of information from his side of the search had been frustrating, and only after having joined a group call with Malissa and Jack had he stumbled upon anything relatively interesting.

Both Hunter and Malissa had scolded Jack for going out on his own to find information about the brooch, being both a risk to himself and to Hunter who was the owner of what was apparently quite a pretty piece of Egyptian treasure. Jack had

assured them that nothing would come of it, eagerly sharing the fact that he had learned about Pharoah's blood being required to utilize any of the magic possessed within the items.

This had puzzled Hunter, as his species technically hailed from the deserts of the Western hemisphere, far away from any of the native species that might have the ability to channel this "blood of the pharaoh" business. Malissa had stated that since Aunt Tare was a cheetah and had been adopted, it could be possible that she might have been descendent from a line of Egyptian royalty. Hunter accepted this as feasible, but it still did not explain why a genetically unrelated individual such as himself had the ability to activate the charm's mystical influence. Jack posited that maybe the way the Egyptian magic worked was through familial bonds more so than actual blood, and neither Hunter nor Malissa had argued with this statement. They had little else to go off of, after all.

Hunter had thought about this fact while he was eating dinner on Christmas Eve, unsure of what to make of the idea that he and his surrounding family were technically of the ruling Egyptian class. While they lived comfortably, they were not particularly wealthy or prestigious. The fact that he was somehow special enough to activate ancient powers of an Egyptian relic seemed somewhat absurd to him, but so was that fact that he had been given a diaper change by his Calculus professor only a few weeks prior in front of his entire class.

Now, back in his apartment, the fennec looked suspiciously towards the wooden crate stationed on top of the mantle piece in his living room, a sense of foreboding entering his lower gut as he thought about what trouble it would undoubtedly cause him this semester. He shook his head, deciding to keep himself focused on the mundane task of moving back into his apartment as he picked up his travel bags and moved them into his bedroom. He would unpack, check the syllabi waiting in his inbox to be perused, and organize whatever new stuffed animals had spontaneously materialized in his bedroom.

Opening the door to his room, his mouth dropped open at the sight that was in front of him.

The talisman had kept itself busy while he was aware, as where his bed, desk, and chair had previously been they were now replaced by a completely different set of furniture. The walls of his bedroom had been painted, featuring a desert landscape filled with many creatures that befitted the Egyptian, dusty wastes. Over by where his bed had been, which was now replaced by a robust, ornately decorated crib large enough to hold him comfortably, the wallpaper's desert bloomed into the lush environment surrounding the river Nile. Toothy crocodiles, chubby hippos, and delicately legged gazelles gathered by the Nile's waters, a deep blue sky looking over the entire scene with a peaceful serenity.

The crib, made of a dark oak wood carved into intricate patterned swirls, appeared rather intimidating, as Hunter noticed that its bars reached all the way to the ceiling. At its foot, a large toy chest stood open, with the fennec's growing collection of stuffed animals spilling out of it and onto the surrounding floor. The floor too had received an upgrade, now fitted with a lush, soft carpet that the fox's footpaws sank gently into. His desk, which had previously been a rather sparse wooden table on which he would rest his laptop and textbooks, had been replaced by a changing table. Egyptian hieroglyphs dotted the wooden legs, with several open shelves hosting a collection of necessary changing materials.

At least that'll save my wallet a bit of use...

Hunter thought grimly to himself, turning to note whether there had been any other additions to his bedroom. A rocking chair stood next to the crib, currently hosting a large, stuffed lion who appeared to be wearing a cloth diaper around its waist. Its arms were open invitingly, as if it were beckoning Hunter to take a seat in its soft lap for a cozy hug. The rest of the space was occupied by a playpen, a harness and leash lay simply in its center, attached to a stalwart spoke in the center of the mesh-walled play area. Hunter eyed it suspiciously, wondering at the purpose of such a set of straps and why it was placed forebodingly in the center of the playpen.

The fennec half expected the nursery to somehow come to life, pulling him into the infantile lifestyle that it imposed on him to embrace. The fennec felt a twinge in his

nethers, and realized that the tantalizing offer in front of him was indeed one that he wanted to accept the invitation to. He shook his head, refocusing on the task at hand as he lugged his suitcase over to his closet, opening its door. What he saw hardly came at a surprise, as he noted that his wardrobe had been replaced by a large collection of baby clothes. Onesies, sleepers, overalls, and several choice kigus hung neatly on their coat hangers, organized by color and size. Most notable, he saw that one of the sleepers appeared to feature a lion's mane, equipped with a tufted tail that would loop over and cover his own. He grimaced, feeling his cheeks burn as he imagined how he would look wearing his thick, crinkly underwear outlined by the snugly fitting waistline of the sleeper.

The nursery remained inert for the time being, but Hunter could feel the artifact's magic at work. While he was gone, it had painstakingly tailored his bedroom to become reminiscent of a nursery belonging to a prince of Egypt. Hunter saw that there was little to no room to house the few clothes he had brought back home with him, and decided that it would be best to keep them in the closet space by the front door. After lugging them inside, trying not to think too hard on what he would do with his now limited wardrobe for showing up to class, he padded back to his nursery for further inspection.

The diapers stacked neatly in the shelves of the changing table appeared all to be in his size, as he presumed they would be, and featured not only his favorite padded cartoon characters but several choice Egyptian themed styles. Hunter picked one up that featured several ash-colored kittens, romping about with one another while others napped comfortably on ornate pillows. On the tape landing zone, he noted a particular hieroglyph in golden ink directly in the center.



At first glance, it appeared to be a large cat, though whether it was a lioness or some other sizable feline he was as yet unsure. He figured that it must be a panther, although his limited knowledge of indigenous feral species of Egypt caused him to doubt himself for a moment. He took out his phone, and ignoring the hot sensation that

bloomed in his cheeks, snapped a picture of the diaper and sent it over to Malissa for analysis. He noted that several other diapers appeared to have similar animalistic designs, featuring a notable animal hieroglyph in their center. Hunter knew that there had to be some kind of purpose to these symbols, and given the fact that the brooch was anything except prolific with its designs he had a needling suspicion that there was purpose behind the hieroglyph.

At that moment, Hunter felt something damp between his legs. He glanced down, and cursed under his breath as he realized that he had just wet himself without noticing. Panicked, he hobbled over to the bathroom to strip himself of his wet travel clothes before he started to leak onto the carpet. He sighed once more, this time from frustration than the exhaustion of traveling. Of course this was the welcoming gift he received when coming home for the second semester of that school year. He grimaced, peeling his sodden underwear off of himself before depositing it down into a neat, soggy pile on his bathroom tiles.

Resigning himself to the fact that he was now under the full influence of the cursed brooch once more, he exited his bathroom fully in the nude and over to the changing table. He hesitated for a moment, then mentally shrugged and hopped up onto the plastic surface. Hunter was about to reach down between his legs for a choice piece of padding when a sudden wave of lethargy washed over him. He swayed for a moment, his eyelids growing heavy before he toppled backwards, landing gently on his back with his arms above his head.

His limbs felt heavy, as if after a long day of working out, a comfortable numbness settled over his body while his eye remained half open, staring at the constellation filled night painted on the ceiling above him.

From thin air, wispy paws materialized in a uniform formation around the changing table, fingers hanging limply from their detached wrists. They glowed a soft, pale blue, semi-transparent as fingers stretched and flexed as though waking from a long period of rest. The ends of their fingers ended in claws, reminiscent of the paws of a jackal. On several of their fingers, jeweled rings adorned their paws which gleamed in a sourceless light, glowing distinctly as if filled with a magical aura of their own

concealed inside of their shiny surfaces. Six of these paws closed in on Hunter, two of them neatly tucking the fennec's forepaws above his head, one tickling him gently underneath the chin with the tip of a claw, whilst another slowly rubbed his belly. The final two busied themselves with picking out a choice diaper, Hunter's favorite decorated with several padded babyfurs, unfolding it and working together to properly fluff it out.

Hunter's mind was bathed in a lush, fluffy cloud. The delicate attention that was being paid to his body relaxed him even further, a hushed, uncharacteristically childish giggle escaping his muzzle as his hind legs kicked gently in response to the tickling. One of the paws that had been working on fluffing out the diaper parted from the other, gently gathering up the fox's ankles and lifting his soft bottom up into the air. Expertly, the other claw placed the unfolded diaper in front of the fennec's lifted tush, placing itself palm down on the absorbent interior and sliding it underneath him.

Slowly, Hunter's ankles were lowered down and his bottom landed gently onto the waiting diaper. Floating through the air, the two paws responsible for padding him up moved together in synchrony as they neatly grasped the front of the diaper with the tips of their fingers. Ceremoniously, they lifted it up and over Hunter's diaper area, patting it down firmly. As one hand remained fixedly down on the landing zone, the other began to deftly maneuver around and place the tapes onto their landing zone. With calculated symmetry, the paw aligned the tapes and pressed down upon them, rubbing gently so as to activate their adhesive.

All the while, Hunter gurgled helplessly, one of his paws now batting gently at one of the ghost paws, who was entertaining the oversized kit by deftly bobbing and weaving. It dodged the fennec's bapping paws, wiggling its fingers teasingly at him every time it evaded him, causing Hunter to giggle giddily in response. Unaware of the diapering sequence complete, the two paws that had padded him up shook one another as if to congratulate themselves on a job well done, before one of them floated forward and patted Hunter affectionately on the padded bottom.

Two of the paws gently scooped Hunter underneath his armpits, pulling him up until he was in a sitting position. Then, with surprising strength and dexterity, they

lifted him up and deposited him softly on his footpaws. While one of them continued to affectionately pat him on the bottom, eliciting muffled crinkles from the plastic now snugly covering his behind and looping around his tail, another booped him lazily on the nose. Hunter closed his eyes, giggling once more in response to the teasing. He opened his eyes, his sense of self returning once more only to find that the mysterious paws had vanished once more. He blinked, processing what had just happened before looking down at the diaper hugging his waist.

“Oh...”

He said out loud, to no one in particular. The symbols decorating the changing table now made more sense to the fennec as he looked behind him once more, realizing that not only did it come with its own store of diapers but they were also equipped with a magically infused changing system. Hunter thought about just how much he had enjoyed the process, lulled into a simple mindset as he was, and spoiled rotten with affection and attention throughout the entire changing process. He had enjoyed it immensely, as despite his resolute intention on stopping the curse somehow, he now almost wished to repeat the entire process once more.

He glanced down at his padding once more, noting that the tape job and conformation to his body had been executed in a manner superior to his own diapering process. The ghost paws knew what they were doing, clearly, and the underwear around his waist now felt almost like a natural part of his wardrobe. Hunter eyed the crib to his right, noting that it also had its fair share of hieroglyphic symbols engraved into its wood. If the changing table had such enchantments, his new bed would no doubt follow suit with similar arcane magic.

With only a few hours until bedtime, Hunter knew that he would likely be discovering its magical influence all too soon.