

Into the Tomb
Recorded on October 30-31, 2011
By R.A. Blackpaws

"Meet me in Memphis, along the canyon wall," was all the note had said...

...and I was off, once again, chasing after my mentor, Professor Ethan Howard...professor of Archeology at the university.

I growled as I steered the battered Jeep along the sand-covered path.

"Every freaking time...man acts like I'm his personal "get out of jail free" card," I grouched, clenching the wheel so hard that my knuckles gleamed white under my black fur...

...then scowling at the global tracking unit, which I had cleverly purchased after one of the Professor's more recent "escapades".

"Says I'm getting close..." I grumbled to the empty cab...and sped on.

"The trials and tribulations of a research assistant," I grouched.

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I slowed the Jeep down, letting the accumulated sand help to slow the vehicle down...then peered out of the front window.

There was a very badly battered Jeep nearby...

...and then, I saw IT, jutting out from the canyon wall.

I stared, spellbound...

...at the intricately-detailed statues, stories high, seeming as if they were supporting the entire face of the cliff. Statues carved seemingly out of shadow...but actually very well-preserved onyx.

I forced my eyes down from the statues...and numbly made my way out of the Jeep, the wind tearing at my purple tank-top and denim shorts.

There, between two representations of an old Pharaoh..was a door-shaped opening, about ten feet tall...pitch black.

I looked at the ground...and saw faint impressions of footprints leading inside.

Figures...he finds the tomb, he wants to be the first one in, I thought...then reached for my pack.

Let's see...I got his note three days ago...was told I missed him by about 36 hours at Memphis...that means he must be inside. Probably about ten hours in.

I shouldered my pack and grabbed my flashlight.

"Suppose I should go find the old coot," I said...and shuffled toward the entrance.

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I looked around the outside of the entrance, examining the hieroglyphs there.

"These...don't seem to be Upper Kingdom," I said softly, studying the figures.

I ran a paw along the carving of a bird and the waves...and my eyes widened.

"This...this is Old Kingdom..." I breathed, awed. "That means..."

That means I'm about to set foot in a place that's over 3500 years old... I thought...

...then glanced at the far side of the doorway...and blinked.

I walked over to the hieroglyphs there...and traced a paw along them.

"To those who would enter this holy place...show due reverence to the Gods or face their wrath," I read...then nodded.

"Makes sense...looks like an old, possibly unknown Pharaoh.." I mused. "No wonder he sent for me."

I swallowed...then knelt down, bowing my head.

"Lord Anubis...Lady Bastet...I know I am a stranger in your lands...but I follow you as if I were one of your children," I prayed. "Please forgive me for intruding on the rest of this servant of yours. Please watch over my steps and keep me safe during my visit here."

I stayed on my knees for a few seconds longer, eyes closed...

...then I slowly stood up...turned on my flashlight...took a deep breath...

...and crossed the threshold, passing out of the sunlight...

...and into the tomb.

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I walked down the corridor, having taken the time to drop markers at every turn...and studied the walls, where my flashlight could reach.

"This is amazing...an Old Kingdom tomb...perfectly preserved..." I breathed softly. "Hopefully, it hasn't been looted..."

Or that the professor has already packed everything up, I added mentally...then sighed. *He always has to disturb everything. Just can't leave things alone and let them lie.*

I turned around the corner, dropping another red marker rod...
...then tripped and fell over, my pack driving into my back.
"Shit!" I cursed, rolling onto my back and shrugging off my pack...
...then staring near my feet.

Laying there...was a small strip of cloth, clinging to my toes.

"Where did you come from?" I asked the cloth, plucking it off of my toes.

It wavered briefly in a breeze...and I studied it in my flashlight's glare.

"This looks like..." I began...then felt a chill shoot through my body.

Funeral wrappings!

I swallowed, suddenly very nervous.

Okay...funeral wrappings...on the floor...means there's a mummy nearby, my rational mind said.

BANDAGES! MUMMY! RED ALERT! my horror-film geek screamed.

I took a moment to study the bandage...then slowly got up onto my feet and groped for my pack.

It wasn't where I had left it...so I turned to look...

...and stared, eyes very wide.

My pack was rolling down the hall...being drug along by several strips of cloth.

"Holy shit..." I breathed. "That...that can't be..."

Then, I saw the pack vanish into the darkness...

...and saw several strands of funeral bandages slide out of the darkness, toward me...

...and I ran, flashlight bouncing its light along the ceiling.

I turned corner after corner, making my way back along the path I had been on...

...until I tripped again, my legs simultaneously yanked out from under me.

I crashed chest first onto the cold floor of the corridor, grunting heavily...then rolled over...

...and stared horrified.

My shins were being wrapped together by funerary bandages coming from the darkness.

I grabbed at the bandages, tearing my legs somewhat free...and slid back up to my feet...

...only to feel more bandages affix themselves to my legs, replacing their brethren.

I hopped, turning around...and began to hop down the corridor, dragging my body along the wall.

I felt more bandages slide against my legs, pulling them close together...
...then I felt tugging on my tail.

I reached back and grabbed my tail with my left paw...and felt something land on my left paw.

I shook...then felt my arm get jerked backward.

I let out a soft hiss of pain, then looked.

The bandages were up to my thighs, working their way upward...and the majority of my tail was now a white, slender mass....and now my left arm, up almost to the elbow was being covered.

Growling, I swatted at the bandages with the Mag-Lite in my right paw, actually severing a few strands on my left paw...

...until the bandages actually grabbed onto the Mag-Lite.

I pulled, engaged in a sick form of tug-of-war with the bandages...

...until several strands shot onto my right arm...and pried the Mag-Lite out of my paw, dragging it into the darkness.

I tried to pull my arm free...but the bandages ignored my attempts, covering my right arm rapidly, almost to the shoulder.

I darted my muzzle forward, biting one section off...

...then got spun around, facing the entrance of the tomb...

...and then hauled roughly backwards.

I fell, trying to get my body around to brace my fall...

...only to land on the corridor floor, cracking my head against the hard stone.

My eyelids fluttered...and the last thing I saw were almost a dozen strands of funerary bandages approaching me from the depths...

...then I blacked out.

...

I slowly felt myself fade back into consciousness...and tried to move around.

My body didn't budge an inch...and it felt strangely compressed.

Slowly, I eased my eyes open...

...then they went completely wide of their own accord.

I was in a large golden room, lit by torches in the walls and at least two braziers that I could see. Several sarcophagi were leaning against the wall I could see, the detailing very intricate and inlaid with jewels.

I swallowed, glancing about.

This...this is...

Ah. You are awake. Good, a voice said in my head.

I blinked, very puzzled...then emitted a soft squeak.

A slender, black jackal appeared in front of me, clad in a simple white headband and a matching loincloth.

It looked me in the eyes, the green kohl around its eyes lending menace to that stare.

You...are different than the others, it said in my head as it reached out to caress my muzzle.

I shuddered on reflex...then I realized something.

Others? I thought. *What others?*

It looked at me.

Three others, it replied. ***One dressed like you...a male. The others were natives.***

It stepped away from me...and I saw a large sheath between its legs, the loincloth very sheer there.

They were already judged and have been prepared for their punishment, the jackal "said"...then looked at me.

You, however...you are not like those three, he went on.

I swallowed. *How so?*

The jackal smiled, his body relaxing a bit.

You offered up a prayer at the entrance to my tomb, he stated. ***You showed due reverence to the gods...unlike those three.***

I watched as he gestured toward the sarcophagi...and shuddered.

Yes, they are wrapped, as you are wrapped, he said, reading my thoughts. ***However, unlike you, they have been judged.***

Judged? I began...then stared...

...as the jackal held up a golden scale...with a large white feather on one plate.

I felt my heart rate triple, as I realized what was coming...

...then he placed a paw on my chest...

...and I shut my eyes, waiting for the pain to come.

Relax. It is done.

I slowly opened an eye...then both eyes.

Sitting in his paw, still beating...was a heart.

I felt the blood drain from my face as the heart continued to beat.

Is...is that...

The jackal nodded. ***It is. This is your heart.***

But, how am I...I'm not dead? I asked.

He chuckled.

No. The magic will keep you alive until the heart is returned, he said...then held the scale up in front of my face.

At present, the scale was perfectly balanced, with the feather on one plate.

Then, as I watched, he held my beating heart over the other plate.

I swallowed, remembering exactly what was to happen. My heart would be weighed against the feather. If the heart was lighter, I would be allowed into a positive afterlife. If it was heavier...I was damned.

I watched as several drops of blood fell off of the heart as it beat...then he gently set the heart onto the unoccupied plate...

...and I stared, stunned, as the feather sank to the base of the scale with an audible clatter.

Hmm...it appears that you are indeed as our Lord said, the jackal stated, plucking the heart off of the plate.

Our...our Lord? I asked, puzzled and still in shock.

He placed the heart against my chest...and I felt a fullness inside me...and was soothed by the sound of my own heartbeat.

Lord Anubis, he stated. ***You showed Him reverence at the entrance to my tomb...and I follow and serve Him.***

He held up a small, black-bladed knife...

...and I shut my eyes, my body trembling.

Then, I felt the knife cut into something...and get jerked along the length of my body...

...and I fell forward, landing against something solid.

"It is all right. You are free, now," a melodic voice stated.

I slowly eased my head up, panting, sweat coating my fur...

...and the jackal looked down at me, his arm holding me up.

Gently, he helped me into a standing position...and looked me over.

"You are very different from the others," he stated.

I blushed, feeling very embarrassed.

"You are...a scholar," he said. "Not a tomb-robber like those three."

"Three..." I began...then remembered everything. "You said...one was like me, right?"

"Correct," the jackal replied.

"Which one?"

He walked toward the far left sarcophagus...and I followed behind him, fearing the worst.

Effortlessly, he pulled the lid off of the sarcophagus, allowing me to look inside.

I looked inside...and shuddered.

Inside the sarcophagus was a tightly-wrapped form, roughly my height. Its eyes and nose were uncovered, but not by much...and those eyes were wide and very frightened.

"Pro...professor Howard?" I asked, my voice barely a whisper.

The figure inside grunted and seemed to squirm just slightly...and I turned to the jackal.

"This one, along with the other two, began removing artifacts from my tomb," he responded. "They have been judged and are awaiting our Lord's punishment."

I swallowed, my tail bristling...and looked at the Professor.

"Can...can I...talk to him?" I asked the jackal.

He nodded...and closed his eyes.

"Speak to him with your thoughts," he said.

I swallowed...then thought, *Professor?*

Tara? Tara is that you? the professor's dry voice asked.

It's me, Professor. I'm here.

Oh, thank goodness! Please...please, you have to get us out of here! This...this beast has us wrapped up like mummies!

I took a breath...counted to ten...then sighed.

Professor...did you try to remove artifacts from the tomb? I asked.

What? Why, of course we did! We have to study them. Determine when they were made...where they came from...

I felt a scowl form.

Don't you have ANY respect for the dead? I scolded him. *These things*

didn't belong to you and you felt you could just take them from here...

Oh, give the bleeding heart line a rest, Miss Bastille, he countered. The owner is D-E-A-D. They have no use for it. You would have us leave something like this...a find for the AGES...and just take pictures and video recordings. You would have us leave all of this behind for robbers and thieves.

"I've heard enough," I snapped, turning away.

I felt his presence leave my mind...and I hugged myself tightly.

"Gods...I think my soul needs a bath after listening to him," I said, shuddering.

I felt arms slide around me...and tensed, turning around.

The jackal smiled at me.

"As I said...you are different than the others," he said...then stepped back, bowing. "I am Orichanos, guardian of the tomb of the Pharaoh Imishaptu."

I blushed at the formal introduction.

"Ummm...Tara Bastille. Research assistant to Professor Ethan Howard, University of California, Berkeley."

He stood up, smiling.

"I am pleased to meet you, Tara Bastille," Orichanos said formally.

"Come. I shall prepare you a bath to cleanse your soul and your body."

Still blushing, I followed him toward a lit alcove...

...Professor Howard's muffled grunts and screams fading in the distance.

...

I followed Orichanos to a small antechamber...then blinked.

"Wait a second...you said a bath? But this region doesn't have water," I rambled.

The jackal nodded.

"Very true," he said. "This area has not had water in quite some time." He held up a pitcher. "Thus, we use oils and lotions for bathing. Please remove your garments."

I blushed, tail spasming.

"Ummm...Ori...Oricanos...I'm...I'm not a..." I stammered...

...then fell silent as he approached...and gently caressed my cheek.

"I know what you are," he said softly. "But your garments do not need

cleaning. You do."

I swallowed, still blushing...and slid the tank top over my head, revealing my slim abdomen...and the white bra holding my small breasts.

I dropped the tank top next to me...and undid the clasp on my bra, sliding that off as well...then blushed.

Oricanos said nothing. He merely smiled, a warm smile.

I shut my eyes...then tucked my thumbs under the waistband of my shorts...and slid both them and my panties off in a single mass.

I stood there, naked and silent for what seemed like ages...then slowly stepped out of the pile of clothing, taking a step toward the jackal.

"You look...beautiful," I heard.

My eyes slowly opened...and I knew I was still blushing.

He motioned me to a small bench...and I walked over to it, sitting down, the blush likely permanently burned into my skin.

I heard a sloshing sound...then felt something cascade along my fur.

I squeaked as the oil flowed over my fur, shutting my eyes...

...and I heard a soft chuckle...then felt paws gently rubbing along my fur.

I kept my eyes closed...and began to sway with the motions, chirring very softly.

I felt the jackal slide his arms around me and begin massaging the oil into my chest...and leaned back into his embrace, a smile crossing my muzzle.

Tenderly, he rubbed the oil into my fur, adding more oil when necessary...until his paws came to my groin.

I tensed, hearing his paws slosh around in the oil pitcher...

...then felt him caress my sheath, rubbing the oil along it.

I sat upright, tensing...then he moved away from my sheath, rubbing the oil on my inner thighs...

...and I leaned back, resuming my chirring...

...until he slid out from behind me...and knelt in front of me.

I blushed, as he had a full view of my body and the lingering aspect of my maleness...but he seemed to not notice as he rubbed the oil delicately into my legs.

Soon, he was lightly rubbing my feet, anointing them with the oil as well...then he looked up.

"Please wait here," he said, standing up.

I nodded...and watched him walk to a small table near us, picking up a small palette and a delicate brush.

He walked back over to me, and crouched down in front of me.

"Please, close your eyes," he requested.

I did so...and felt him lightly brush my eyelids with something...then he deftly ran the brush along my under-eye area.

"Thank you," he said softly.

I opened my eyes, and did not feel any different.

"Now, let me get you some clothing," the jackal said, standing up.

"Wait...what about my clothes?" I asked, standing as well.

"Those are not appropriate for one of your..." he began...then paused.

"The clothing I will pick out will be more appropriate for your...surroundings," he finished.

I looked back at my discarded clothing, suddenly nervous.

Appropriate for my surroundings? The only thing that would be appropriate would be bandages, I thought.

So I jumped when I felt soft cloth being placed into my paws.

"I believe these will be appropriate," Oricanos said.

I slowly set the bundle on the bench...then picked up the first piece.

It was a sheer white garment, with gold and silver threads woven into the fabric.

I looked at him, confused. "Ummm...where does it..."

He smiled, emitting a soft chuckle...then stepped close to me...

...and gently wrapped the garment around my chest, letting the fabric wind around my torso.

Then, he grabbed a second piece...and deftly slid that around my waist, the sheer fabric covering me from waist to mid-thigh...and leaving nothing at all to the imagination.

I blushed very deeply, noticing that I could see my breasts through the fabric on my chest...

...then I felt a small section of cloth rest on my head...and looked up.

"There...now you are properly attired," the jackal said...then took my paw in his, leading me over to a mirrored disc.

I stared into the disc...

...and saw a white band over my head, held up by my ears...

...my eyes, which were painted with a deep navy kohl...
...and a sheer white garment covering my chest, sparkling in the torchlight...

...and the white loincloth, sheer and sparkling as well.

I blushed...then turned to Oricanos...and bowed.

"Thank you...it's...umm...it's nice," I said softly.

He reached out to me...and gently caressed my cheek, causing me to chirr softly.

"I think you should get some rest," he said softly.

I nodded...then looked around.

"Umm...where should I...?" I began.

He took my paw in his...and escorted me toward a large golden couch with a deep indigo cushion.

"Here," he said softly. "This belonged to the great Queen Anshova."

I pulled back slightly...and he looked at me, smiling.

"She will not mind," Oricanos said softly. "She has already crossed the Nile."

I blinked, slightly puzzled...until my brain translated what he meant...

...then slowly eased myself down onto the cushion...and sank into the softness of the surface.

I mrrred loudly, slowly settling into a comfortable position on my side...and fell asleep.

...

Oricanos watched as the vixen fell asleep on the couch...and smiled.

She is...very beautiful. Much like the Queen was.

He slowly turned away, walking back to the bench and cleaning the supplies up.

You are not going to leave her alone, are you? a section of his brain chimed in.

The jackal paused. ***Explain.***

Well, she is a foreigner. Alone here, in this land, that section went on.

Yes? the jackal commented.

She is all alone, it went on. If she wanders away, she might get hurt by one of the many traps in the tomb...or worse.

Oricanos turned back to the couch...and the vixen laying on it.

As a guardian, it is your duty to safeguard the tomb and ALL of its

occupants, that part spoke up. *For now, that includes her.*

The jackal looked at the sleeping vixen, unsure.

Plus...there is the possibility that she might attempt to free the one she called Professor, that part went on.

Oricanos shook his head angrily.

No...she would not, he said. ***She was disgusted with him for removing the items from the tomb. It felt as if she had been disgusted with him for some time.***

But still, he is her mentor, that part went on. *She might attempt to...*

ENOUGH! Oricanos demanded...then sighed.

I will...watch over her, he thought. ***She is here in my tomb...as a guest.***

The jackal slowly walked over to the bed...

...then gently eased himself into a position behind the vixen, wrapping his arms around it.

It chirred and stirred at his touch...and glanced over its shoulder, an eye open.

"I am merely keeping an eye on you," the jackal said, a smile crossing his muzzle.

The vixen's head went back to the couch...but he heard a soft, "Thank you," as the vixen slowly settled against him.

He smiled...then rested his head above hers, holding her close.

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"Servant."

Oricanos stirred to wakefulness, climbing off the bed, looking to the left of the bed...

...then scrambling over to the lean black jackal in the room, kneeling before it.

"Lord Anubis...your servant is here," Oricanos said, bowing his head.

"Mmm...Ori? Wha's..." a feminine voice uttered.

He felt the other jackal turn...and he turned as well, looking.

The red vixen rubbed at its eyes, blinking several times...

...then it saw the larger jackal in the room...

...and its eyes went wide, its body scrambling off the bed and falling prostrate on the floor before the new arrival.

Oricanos turned back to his Lord, his body tensing on reflex, awaiting punishment and the will of his Lord.

"Oricanos...you may rise," Anubis told him...then stepped past him, toward the vixen.

Oricanos stood, and watched the vixen, who was visibly trembling...but remained prostrate before their Lord.

"Tara...you may rise," Anubis said softly.

The vixen emitted a soft squeak of surprise, drawing a smile from Oricanos...then it slowly stood, not raising its gaze from the floor.

"She is one of the intruders upon the tomb," Anubis said solemnly.

"Yes, my Lord," Oricanos said. "She is the lone one to pass the Judgment. The other three have been found wanting and await your punishment."

He watched as his Lord turned from him to the vixen...and studied her.

Then, Anubis slowly walked past her, toward the preparation chamber.

"Follow," the god said.

Silently, Oricanos fell into step behind the Preparer of the Dead, the vixen stepping next to him, still shaking.

Silently, they filed into the Preparation Chamber...and closed on the three sarcophagi.

"They are interred here," Anubis said.

"Yes Lord Anubis," Oricanos said, surprised that the vixen responded as he did.

Anubis turned to look at them, apparently surprised as well...

...then he approached the vixen.

"You knew one of them," the god said.

Tara nodded. "One of them is...was...my mentor," she replied.

Oricanos felt an ear twitch at the vixen's word usage.

She...she already knows he is leaving this world, he thought.

Anubis studied her, his golden eyes unblinking.

"Tell me of him," He asked.

"He was my teacher," the vixen replied. "Taught me about finding tombs and reading hieroglyphs. I learned much from him..."

Oricanos watched...as the vixen raised her head, to look at the face of the god.

"However, he would often remove items from the tombs we found...or disturb the remains of the dead," she went on.

Anubis studied her for an age.

"You did not approve of him doing this," He stated.

The vixen shook her head.

"And you would pray for forgiveness from the ones he disturbed, making apologies for his behavior," He went on.

Oricanos stared, stunned...and the vixen slowly nodded.

She shows that much respect to the dead? he thought...then saw the god step aside, granting her a view of the lone open sarcophagus.

The one...containing her mentor.

"What would you have me do with them?" He asked the vixen.

Oricanos stared, completely stunned.

He is making HER decide their fate?

The vixen looked squarely at her mentor, meeting the wrapped man's panicked and pleading gaze...

...then turned away from him...and walked over to Oricanos, kneeling down next to the jackal.

"He has desecrated the homes of the dead many times...removed their belongings...showed the dead no respect, nor the gods as well," she stated calmly...then she tensed.

"As much as it pains me to say this...he is yours to judge, not mine," she finished, closing her eyes.

Anubis looked from the vixen...to His servant.

"Oricanos...do you agree?" He asked.

The jackal knelt down next to the vixen...and slowly nodded.

"They entered the tomb...and began moving the sacred objects into sacks for transport away from their home," Oricanos said somberly. "They showed no respect for the Pharaoh, nor for yourself my Lord."

He watched...as the god considered their words...then slowly nodded.

"Then I shall pass My Judgment upon these desecrators," Anubis stated...then paused.

"Oricanos..."

The slender jackal looked up at his Lord.

"Take the girl away from this room," He said. "Her soul is pure...and she does not need to see this."

Oricanos stood up, bowing to his Lord.

"As you command, my Lord," he said...then helped the vixen to her feet...

...and standing there, stunned...as she stepped forward.

"Lord Anubis?" she asked.

The large jackal turned toward her, His golden eyes staring at her.

"I know that they do not deserve it," she said, "But...please...be merciful to them. Do not let them suffer."

Oricanos watched, in fear...as the god stepped over to the vixen...and gently cupped her muzzle in a paw, easing her head up...and staring deeply into her eyes, His gaze unblinking and unwavering.

He saw her tense at His touch...and her tail twitched uncontrollably...
...and then, He let her muzzle go...and turned away from her, leaving her shaking like the reeds.

"I shall be merciful to the one you called your mentor," He said. "Now go."

She bowed to Him...then slid next to Oricanos...and let herself be escorted out of the chamber.

...

Anubis glared at the small wrapped form that was in the sarcophagus.

It met his gaze, grunting and whimpering behind the layers of bandages.

"You, who have desecrated this resting place...shall now rest here for eternity," the god declared...then finished the wrapping.

The last thing Professor Ethan Horton saw...was the large black jackal's golden eyes...then white bandages...

...then blackness.

...

Oricanos set the vixen down on the couch...then held it close.

She was shaking like the reeds during the rains, her whole body trembling.

"Are you all right?" he asked her, gently petting her soft fur.

"She is a mortal...in the presence of a god."

Oricanos looked up...as Anubis approached.

The slender jackal rose from the couch...and felt the vixen rise as well...then both of them knelt down in front of the god.

He approached them...then placed His hand upon Oricanos's head.

"You have performed your duties well, my servant," He said.

Oricanos felt a surge of pride and pleasure, and bowed his head further.

"Thank you my Lord," he said proudly.

The hand left his head...and he glanced to his left, at the still shaking vixen.

Anubis gently placed a hand upon her head, causing her to squeak on reflex.

"Tara...you shall remain here for one cycle of the moon," Anubis said. "You shall learn from my servant of My ways."

The vixen tensed slightly...then relaxed, realizing it was not open for debate.

"Yes, my Lord," she said softly.

Anubis nodded...then seemed to fade into the shadows.

"I shall return...in one lunar cycle," He said...then was gone.

Oricanos exhaled deeply, relieved...

...then jumped up, catching the vixen before she collapsed onto the hard floor.

"Tara? Tara, are you all right?" he asked, cradling her close.

"Cold....so cold..." she said, shaking like the reeds.

He gently picked her up...and carried her to a nearby brazier, easing her into a sitting position...then sliding behind her to keep her upright.

"His touch....so cold..." she said, still shaking.

Oricanos nodded, and held the vixen close.

"Shhhh..." he said, petting her soft fur. "Let the fire warm you."

Slowly, she began to relax...and he felt her slip into slumber in his arms.

"Let the fire and my body warm and calm you," he said softly, continuing to pet her fur.

She emitted a very soft chirr...and wiggled a tiny bit in his arms...and he smiled, soothed by her presence.

...

(thirty days later)

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I slowly awoke, stretching out on the Queen's couch...

...then rolled over, resting against the other being in the room.

"It is morning," I heard Oricanos say softly.

I snuggled against him, not wanting to get up.

"Noooo...still sleepy...and clingy," I chirred, settling against him.

He chuckled...then patted my head.

"We have to prepare you for our Lord's return," he chided gently.

I sighed, that message jolting me from my cuddling needs.

Grunting, I slid upright and off of the couch, stretching.

"That is truly a comfortable bed," I said, feeling my back pop...

...then smiling at the slender arms that slid around my belly.

"I think having a second person in it helped make it more comfortable," the jackal said softly in my ear.

I giggled, and turned in his arms.

"It did," I said, rubbing my nose against his.

He smiled...then slid away from me.

"Now, get out of those clothes, so I can purify you," he said.

I removed the headband, tried to delicately wriggle out of the top...then slid the loincloth down and stepped out of the clothing.

He smiled...and escorted me to the bench.

"Go ahead and anoint yourself with the oil," he said, leaving me.

I nodded absently...then dipped my paw into the oil pitcher.

I know it refills by magic, I thought, rubbing the oil into my headfur, but it's still kinda creepy.

I dipped both of my paws into the pitcher...and began to rub the oil all over my chest.

...

Oricanos watched as the vixen rubbed the oil into its fur...and smiled.

She will make a good companion, he thought, gathering the discarded clothing.

...

I dabbed some oil on my back, trying to rub it into my fur...and getting frustrated.

"Here. Let me," I heard Oricanos say...

...then felt his paws gently caress my back, rubbing the oil into the fur there...

...and chirred loudly, soothed by his touch and the fragrance of the oil.

After a pleasant eternity, he stopped.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

I nodded...and stood up.

He walked around in front of me...and dabbed a cloth in the oil.

"Close your eyes," he said.

I did so...and felt him dab along and around my eyes, removing the kohl

from them.

He took a second cloth...and gently dabbed at those same areas...then I felt him brush my eyes with the applicator.

"Done," he said.

...

Oricanos watched...as the vixen slowly opened its eyes...and blinked a few times, the dark purple kohl giving it a very strong and seductive manner.

He felt himself swallow, a tad nervous at those eyes.

"Thank you," the vixen said softly...and he felt his body shudder a bit.

"You are welcome," he said, setting the palette back on the table. "Now, we must prepare you for our Lord's arrival."

He looked at the vixen...and saw it tense.

"That means...I have to be wrapped up again, doesn't it?" she asked.

He nodded. "It does, but this will be done in a different manner."

The vixen seemed puzzled...and he sat on the bench.

"The wrappings will allow you to move," he stated. "You will be required to move and respond to certain sayings, so you have to have some freedom of movement."

He looked at her. "You will still be restrained somewhat...but not as restricted as the honored dead. Understand?"

The vixen nodded...and blushed.

He got up...and cradled her in his arms.

"I know...that being wrapped does fill you with pleasure," the jackal said.

The vixen nodded, its face clouded and subdued.

"Normally, it does...but with everything that I have seen and been through...I can't help but feel a little scared," she admitted.

He eased her face up to look at him...and smiled.

"I will be very gentle...and take my time," he said.

She blinked slowly, the purple kohl around her eyes making him weak inside...then smiled.

"Not too long, I hope. Our Lord might be upset if things are not ready for His arrival," she chided.

"True," Oricanos stated...then led her toward the temple proper.

...

I lit the candles on the right side of the altar, still naked.

Then, I slid to the front of the altar...and shivered, nervously.

"Relax," I heard Oricanos say. "Our Lord is not here yet."

I wrapped my arms around myself...and felt him slide his arms over mine...

...and leaned back, soothed by his presence.

"It is time to begin the wrapping," he whispered into my ear.

I nodded, letting him lead me away from the altar...

...and over to a set of leather slings in the corner.

I looked at him...and he nodded.

Slowly, I eased two of the slings apart...then eased myself into one of them...and leaned back, letting my paws slide along the leather...

...and felt Oricanos guide my body into a laying position, held up off the ground by the leather slings.

He appeared in my field of vision, smiling.

"Please try to relax," he said, caressing my cheek.

I nodded, carefully. "I will try."

He vanished from my vision...and I sighed...

...then I felt him begin to wind the ceremonial bandages around my left calf...and flexed my toes on reflex.

Then I giggled...as he ran one of his claws along the bottom of my foot.

"Now, hold still," he chided gently.

I chuffed...but went still...

...and felt him gently wind the bandages around my calf, up to my knee...

...then up along my thigh, leaving my knee uncovered.

I felt him ease my rear up off the sling, which caused me to squeak a bit...

...then felt him slide the bandages over my rear and groin, wrapping that area very tightly.

I chirred at the softness on my groin...then felt him slowly wind the bandages back down my right leg, again leaving my knee unwrapped.

I heard him cut the wrapping at the bottom of my right calf...then felt him tuck it into the layer already on my calf.

"Now, for the next section," he said tenderly...

...and I felt him slowly wind bandages around my middle, these being drawn very taut.

I sucked my belly in, causing my bosom to be thrust out a tiny bit...and felt him wrap my belly even tighter...then begin to make his way up my chest.

I looked down my body at him...and saw him working delicately to make sure my chest was wrapped properly...

...then, he saw me looking at him...and smiled at me before resuming his task.

I smiled back, letting my gaze rest back on the ceiling above me...

...then felt him begin to wrap each of my arms, covering them in a layer of white...yet leaving my paws free, as well as my elbows.

I heard him cut more wrapping free...then felt him gently caress my groin...and felt my small maleness try to stir at his touch.

Angrily, I growled...and willed it to go still.

Reluctantly, it did...and Oricanos stopped his caressing.

"Now, I am going to wrap your head a bit," he said, leaning over me. "Your eyes and muzzle will be free, but everything else will be covered."

I nodded...and eased my head up, giving him access.

I shut my eyes, relishing the feeling of his gentle touch...and the softness of the wrappings as they were wound around my head...

...and I was not afraid.

He cut the wrapping free again, tucking it under the base of my head...then looked down at me.

I opened my eyes...and looked up at him, smiling.

"Am I ready?" I asked, still smiling.

"Not yet," he replied...then rubbed his nose against mine.

I chirred, my tail swishing...

...then he helped me up to a standing position...

...and I felt the bandages constrict around me, compressing my body.

I shut my eyes, relishing the sensation...

...and squeaking when something was applied to the bandages.

My eyes shot open...and I saw Oricanos rubbing some sort of thick liquid onto the bandages.

He caught my eyes...and eased himself up.

"This is ceremonial fluid," he said. "It will make the bandages tighter...but it will also cleanse and soothe your spirit." He took the opportunity to apply the substance to the bandages around my head...then slowly made his way down my body.

I felt the bandages on my head become a lot stronger, my head being squeezed slightly...

...then felt that sensation across my entire body, like I was being squeezed by a snake.

...

Oricanos watched as the fox chirred, feeling the honey mixture set into the bandages.

She seems to be enjoying this, he thought, smiling. ***As I knew she would.***

He set the vase down.

This next part...though...

He sighed...and looked at the vixen.

"Now...I have to place this mask over your face," he said softly, holding up a golden funerary mask.

...

I blinked...and studied the mask.

It was made of pure gold...and shaped...

I looked up at him.

"That...is that...?" I asked.

He nodded.

"It is a replica of your face, done in gold," he said. "With crushed garnet and ivory for your fur...and lapis lazuli for your eyes." He looked at me...and seemed to be blushing. "Do you approve?"

I looked from him...to the mask...and was blown away by the craftsmanship.

I nodded mutely...then held still.

...

Oricanos swallowed...then slid the funerary mask over the vixen's head, sliding it snugly onto her head.

There...she is now ready, he thought.

"Take my hand," he said, placing his paw in hers...

...and feeling comforted when she squeezed his paw.

He smiled...then turned and led her back to the altar room.

...

I felt myself being led back into the altar room, the smell of burning candles giving my location away.

Then, I was gingerly led up the steps to that altar...and helped into a laying position on top of it.

I felt Oricanos move away from me...and felt sad. And a little scared.

"Lord Anubis...this one has been a faithful servant of yours," he intoned. "Please bless her with your holy presence."

I tensed, unsure.

Then, I felt a chill. A large chill near me...and shivered.

"You have prepared her properly, my servant," I heard a deep voice say from near me.

"Thank you, my Lord," I heard Oricanos say...from what seemed like miles away.

I felt a cold touch on my belly...and fought the urge to flinch.

"She cannot move her limbs?" He asked.

Wait...he said I had to have some freedom of movement...

"She has been prepared according to your wishes, my Lord," I heard Oricanos say.

His wishes? What?

I felt a cold caress along my abdomen...and this time I did flinch.

"She has been prepared to enter my service," He said.

I felt my heart plummet...and began to cry, feeling betrayed.

...

Oricanos tensed, feeling a wave of sadness and pain from the wrapped vixen.

She...she thinks that I...

He closed his eyes.

I...I have to tell her...

...

Tara...

I sniffled behind the mask.

Oricanos?

Yes, it is me, I heard him reply. ***I did not betray you. This is part of the rite to enter our Lord's service.***

But....but... I thought, trying to find thoughts to convey what I felt.

Just relax. I have started the preparations...but Lord Anubis will finish them. Just do as He says. Please.

...

Oricanos tensed, feeling the vixen's uncertainty and fear...

...but eventually, she began to relax.

I will try, she said. *Please...stay with me.*

Oricanos felt a tear fall.

For all of my days, he said, hanging his head.

...

You have made quite an impression on my servant, a deep voice rumbled in my head.

My eyes shot wide open.

He has not showed any emotion since the day he was appointed guardian of this tomb, Anubis stated. ***And he must care for you, to tell you what is to happen.***

I swallowed, suddenly nervous...for Oricanos.

Please....please don't punish him, my Lord, I pleaded.

I felt a touch on my chest...and the touch was not cold.

I shall not. What he did was very noble, the god said. ***Now, relax as best you can.***

I gave a slight nod. *Yes, my Lord.*

...

Oricanos looked up...as Anubis began to delicately wrap the exposed fur of the vixen in ivory-colored bandages, making her red and black fur vanish under the bandages.

Are...are you? he asked.

I am all right, came Tara's reply. *A little nervous still, but all right.*

As he watched, the last bit of the vixen's fur vanished under the bandages...then the god stepped away from the altar.

"Now...she will be laid to rest for a day," He said. "Servant."

Oricanos stood and walked over to the altar...and gently picked up the wrapped form.

Slowly, he walked around the altar, and down the stairs, toward a slender gold sarcophagus.

He stared at the empty sarcophagus...then gently touched his nose to the wrapped form's mask.

"Until tomorrow", he said softly...and felt soothed when the form gave a slight wiggle against him.

Then, with reverence and gentleness, he set the wrapped form into the

sarcophagus...and moved the lid on top of it, sealing it inside.

He stepped away from the sarcophagus...and knelt before his Lord.

"She is interred, my Lord," he said softly.

He felt a gentle touch on his head...and felt very small.

"It has been a long time since you performed this ceremony, is it not?"
the god asked.

Oricanos nodded.

"You have dared much, to ask for this to be done," Anubis said.

The jackal tensed.

"She must be that important to you," the god went on.

Oricanos shut his eyes...and nodded.

He felt the god gently pet his head.

"So it shall be," the god said...

...and Oricanos felt His presence fade from the chamber.

Slowly, Oricanos unclenched his body, letting out a breath he never
knew he was holding.

Then, tears filled his eyes...and he fell forward.

"Thank you, my Lord," he cried. "Thank you."

...

I laid inside the sarcophagus, completely immobile.

*O-kay...got no idea how long I have been in here...no idea how much
time I have left...no idea how long a god's day is...*

I huffed, letting my eyes close.

I guess...I just have to have faith, I said softly...then did my best to
sleep.

...

Oricanos curled up next to the sarcophagus, tail twitching.

Time needs to move faster, he thought angrily. ***I need to know she is
safe.***

He huffed...then looked up at the head of the sarcophagus...and sighed.

I must have faith, he chided himself. ***Lord Anubis will not let her die.***

...

I felt a thump above me, jarring me from my slumber.

I eased my eyes open...then chuckled softly at the darkness.

Right...the mask. Forgot.

I heard a scraping sound, followed by a thump...

...then felt arms grab onto me, pulling me gently from the sarcophagus.
I felt strong arms holding me.

Is that you, Oricanos? I asked mentally.

It is, came the reply, followed by a gentle squeeze.

I smiled behind the mask, and sank against him as he carried me back up the stairs to the altar.

It's been a day? I asked.

Yes, it has, he said...then laid me on top of the altar. ***Now be quiet.***

I giggled mentally...and he chuckled...then I felt him move away.

...

Oricanos smiled as he knelt in front of the altar.

"Lord Anubis...a day has passed, as you have commanded," he intoned.
"This one is now prepared to enter your service."

He felt the flames near the altar flicker as a breeze wafted through the chamber...then felt a presence in front of him.

He looked up...and saw the god in front of him.

"She is ready...as are you," He stated...then turned around, standing before the altar.

...

I felt a touch on my abdomen. A touch that was cold at first...then warmed.

My Lord? I asked.

I felt that touch move around my abdomen.

Yes, my child...it is your Lord, He replied. ***You have felt the changes take place?***

I blinked. *Changes? Umm...no. I mostly just slept while in the sarcophagus. What changes?*

I felt the god chuckle...and was not soothed by the sound.

You will see, He said...then slowly began to remove the wrappings from my body.

...

Oricanos watched as his Lord slowly began to unwrap the bandages from the vixen's body, revealing her red, white and black-furred form...

...and exhaled, relieved, as he saw the vixen move slightly.

She is alive. She is well, he thought, relieved.

Gently, the god removed the last of the wrappings...and helped the

vixen stand...

...and Oricanos stared, mouth agape...at the lack of maleness on the vixen.

...

I felt puzzled, as I stood upright.

Strange...I feel...different, I thought...then felt the mask being removed from my face.

I blinked several times, fighting the sudden relief of pressure and the intrusion of light...

...then slowly, eased my eyes open...

...and saw Anubis, standing in front of me, holding the funerary mask.

I lowered my gaze, out of respect for my Lord...then He gently placed the mask into my paws.

"You are ready for my service," he said, his voice soft and soothing.

I felt myself blush...and nodded.

"What is your bidding, my Lord?" I asked, kneeling down.

He placed a paw on my head...and it felt warm to the touch.

"Much has changed in the world since I was last here," the god said. "I have seen what you have experienced and seen...and it has made me curious."

He withdrew His paw...and I felt saddened by the loss of contact with Him.

"Therefore...I have decided that you two shall go into the world...and record all that has changed since the days of Egypt and the gods," He declared.

I blinked, overwhelmed.

"My Lord...that is a very large task," I said. "Since the days of this tomb, at least 3500 years have passed. Such a task can be completed...but what of the events that unfold as we are compiling these records?"

"And what of my role as Guardian of this tomb?" Oricanos asked. "I have served as the Pharaoh's guardian for many years..."

Anubis held up a hand...and we both fell silent.

"A new guardian of this tomb has already been chosen and brought here," the god said, looking at Oricanos. "You will accompany Tara into the world...for it has been a very long time since you have seen it."

The god smiled.

"As you have taught her of my ways...now she will teach you of hers,"

Anubis continued...then turned to me.

I hung my head, feeling very small.

"As for your question, you and Oricanos shall not fear the ravages of time," He went on. "You are now like him. Eternal and immortal."

I felt the weight of those words hit me, as if a pyramid had collapsed on top of me.

"Imm...immortal?" I squeaked.

"Indeed. As for Oricanos, all of the world will view him as your mentor, the one you called Professor Howard," Anubis went on. "Therefore, no one will confine you or seek to do so."

I blushed...and felt a form move near me.

"She...and I..." I heard Oricanos say.

"You will be my Lorekeepers," He said. "Recording the events of the world...and informing the gods of old when we can return."

I felt His presence begin to fade...and reached out for Him...

...and was rewarded with a gentle touch on my paw before the presence faded away.

...

Oricanos watched, still in shock...as the vixen pulled her paw back toward her chest, head hanging slightly.

Lorekeepers...foretelling the return of the gods...

Oricanos was stunned.

To be worthy of such a task...thank you my Lord.

...

I stared at my paw...and the fading wisps of black smoke drifting from it...and nodded.

"We shall not fail you, my Lord," I said softly.

...

I dumped my pack into the back of the Jeep...then slid behind the wheel...

...and felt a paw gently rest on top of mine.

I turned...and smiled at Oricanos.

"Well, shall we leave...Professor Howard?" I asked, smiling.

The jackal chuckled.

"That will take some getting used to...at least from others," he said...then nodded.

I put the Jeep into gear...the lone Jeep outside the tomb...and turned the vehicle around.

Then, I stopped...and looked back at the tomb.

Oricanos looked back as well, giving a soft sigh.

"It was your home for so long," I said softly.

He nodded...then turned away.

"I shall miss it...but we have a task to complete," he said.

I nodded...and put the Jeep into gear...

...and watched as the tomb vanished into the rear-view, the darkness and the desert swallowing it back up.

...

Anubis turned from the departing vehicle...and walked back into the tomb.

He approached the preparation chamber...and smiled as a lithe form knelt in front of Him.

"You are now the guardian of this tomb," He told the form. "You will permit no intruders to remove anything from this holy site, nor allow those who do not show due reverence to the gods to leave should they enter."

Slowly, the form raised its head...

...and the former Professor Ethan Howard, now a gaunt, ebon shade, nodded.

"It shall be so, my Lord," the shade replied...then vanished.

...