

Award Winning Series

Sands of Time

Fate of the True Vampires

CHRISTINE CHURCH

Sands of Time

Fate of the True Vampires series

Book One

Expanded and Updated

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Grey Horse Press



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About this book (from the author)

Dear Reader:

Thank you for reading! You will find that this book—this series—is not like any other you have read before. This book and the others in the series are not written in the stereotypical “novel” format.

Before reading on, please open your mind to a unique design and innovative conceptual series that has yet to be done before. Instead of a straight-forward tale, this series is made up of documents found by archaeologists, translated to English, and archived as the most unique discovery in archaeological history.

The *Introduction* of this book tells you a bit about the archaeologists who had the biggest role in finding and preserving the scrolls, and other texts, as well as how they came together to form the tale you are about to read.

This first book, in what will be an epic series, tells the story of Kesi, a hybrid human whose family derives from the stars and was worshipped as gods in ancient Egypt. However, as time moves forward, the world changes, as it is inclined to do, and Kesi’s family must move on to survive. Kesi, however, remains on earth—for love!

Her tale from here forward is one of mayhem, mystery, bloodshed, and broken bonds, in her forever quest to find a way to share her bloodline before it dies.

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Christine Church
January 2017

Introduction

In 1946, British archaeologist Dr. Jonathon Brumble, on a dig in Giza, Egypt, discovered a page of papyrus, deeply buried, preserved within a limestone box not far from Khufu's great pyramid. In years to come, Jonathon would find several more papyrus pages and scrolls.

All of these pages were carbon dated, preserved and translated throughout the years. They appeared to be a journal of sorts. Though it was unusual for ancient Egyptians to record much beyond the state of government, religion and historical data, some personal documents were kept, particularly among the wealthy.

In a paper Dr. Brumble wrote: "Curiously, most of the writings are in an ancient form of Sumerian, Hieroglyphs and a language of unknown origin that has taken myself and all the best experts to reproduce."

Though no one has yet to decipher or determine the origin of this foreign language, its relation to the other languages written in these journals has allowed translators to give it a form fairly understood.

Dr. Brumble wrote briefly of these findings, but little more came of them. However, in 1988, a small privately funded archaeological dig within Hunan Province, China, uncovered more documents, on hemp, yet written in the same language form and hand as the previous. Having heard of Dr. Brumble's findings, the unnamed archaeological students brought these new texts to his attention. After Dr. Brumble's death in 1991, all texts were sent on to the Smithsonian, where they were kept in archives.

As more related texts were discovered, in various locations around the world and in the hands of different societies and experts, they were all archived together. Though most were written in the same form of Sumerian and Hieroglyphs, some were also written strictly in the alien language discovered in the first texts. Nothing, beyond the fact they were all proof of life in the ancients, albeit a strange and unique life, was determined.

It wasn't until the early years of the 21st century that Dr. Jeff Honesby flew in from Australia to see the documents. As an expert in handwriting analytics

at the Ancient Preservation of Culture and History Institute (APCHI), Dr. Honesby positively verified that all of the documents were written by the same person—a blood drinker—over the course of thousands of years!

Since then, more of these documents have been discovered. Most needed to be reconstructed as they had crumbled whether by age, weather or disaster. Others were well preserved before being carbon dated and translated by the finest anthropological experts and linguists from the Smithsonian in Washington DC and other organizations dedicated to the preservation of culture and history.

It has taken many years and collaborations, but under the care and scrutiny of Dr. Honesby, all of these writings have been linked to one another by using handwriting, names, dates and locales to determine their relationships.

As Dr. Honesby put these accounts in order, a story began to unravel. This first book is only part of the story (as more are discovered and translated, future publications will reveal gaps within this documented life). But still more, written by others linked to Kesi (later known as Kesi Akhede) have been unearthed and are being prepared for presentation to the public.

Some of the entries within this book are incomplete, as the original documents were long compromised. However, Dr. Honesby's team have done their best to bring you this most fascinating tale embroidered together by the pieces of history.

NOTE: Pet Mer is translated as Sky Friends, Hieroglyphic translation.



(PT) (MR)

Queen of the Nile

The following was a short page of papyrus found by Dr. Jonathon Brumble on a dig in Giza in 1946. This page was found sealed within a small limestone box deep underground not far from the Giza pyramids. Circa 20th Dynasty (see Introduction above for more on Dr. Jonathon Brumble's findings). Entries one and two were found nearby.

Preface

Wind over the desert creates a sandstorm that has left all in ruin. The days of old. Eras long past. Will he believe that I existed long ago and was dubbed "The Nile's Graceful Queen" by pharaohs and kings? Will he believe that, to Amenhotep I in the eighteenth dynasty, I was viewed as an "exquisite work of art?"

I pray now. Not to the gods the desert people bow to, but to my ancestors and my family. I pray that he will understand what it is I must tell him. Who I am. Where I come from. And where I must go.

I think about the time that has passed so quickly. My heart swells with love for my family, for the desert so cruel yet forgiving, the people, and most of all for Jabari.

Life was once simple yet elegant and my people worshiped. When I was young, I heard say that all of the gods had blessed me with a part of themselves. The grace of Bast, the eyes of Horus, the wisdom of Thoth, and even the cruelties of Seth made me who I am. Perhaps this is true still. And yet I remain

as I always have and life around me continues to weave its gradual yet inevitable web anew.

Now, the sands of the Sahara have drifted, propelling the destiny of the *Pet Mer* in a new direction, forcing me to choose, to make the most difficult decision of my life. A decision on which I have procrastinated for too long. A decision, I know, I must make on this night. And so, I prepare my journey with a questionable destination.



Entry One

Tonight the desert was cruel and armed with its own weapons as the sharp winds howled, whistling past Khufu's grand pyramid and whipping sand into my face, making concentration difficult. I could smell it in the air—even the fresh scent of evening was not the same.

Shomu had only begun, the inundation waned, harvest well on its way, when the news had come to me and the decision set uncomfortably upon my shoulders. Father and our people would leave this place forever, removing all family and connection to blood ties. The land and desert would be empty, cold and desolate; as it had been thousands of years before when my relatives had first arrived. Without the winsomeness, grace and eccentricities my people laid here, there will be only dust and wind, and life for the desert people will go on as fate meant it.

But what did it matter? For the gods that had once taken physical form were no longer revered. A new era had dawned, a fearful era, and mankind now shunned those they once worshiped. Fleeing is the only way to avoid persecution and eventual starvation.

But for me it is not so simple, the decision to run not as easily made. For me there is a divide in the road ahead, and I am chained to a chariot that races down each one.

Tethered by honor and family is the desire to leave and start anew, yet I am bound to this place by way of tradition and birth. And by way of heart in the form of a sweet and wonderful man.

I hugged my linen shawl more tightly around my shoulders and moved to the eastern wall of the pyramid where the massive triangular structure could form a better shield against the harsh wind. I leaned against the smooth limestone that, even after all the withering years, still shone like silver in the light of the full moon as if the power of Ra kept the sun harnessed within its rocks. Ah, to witness the miracle of the sun, just once to walk beneath its great rays, to feel its warmth on my flesh.

Humans, how they complain so of the heat. And all I do is wish. Perhaps, I ponder, elsewhere there exists a sun, a light, that will not kill. But not here. Never here. And so, within that hand I hold my desire to leave, to be with my father and the others of my family, to travel to a fresh land and start anew, to erase mistakes of the past.

But within the other—

I sighed and followed the pyramid's eye to the stars. One of them, somewhere out there...How could I leave?

Even on the harshest, coldest evenings when the fierce winds lift the sands and storms ravage the villages, threatening to reclaim them to the desert. Even when my people remain hidden in the bowels of the pyramids to avoid persecution. And when the inundations are poor and famine common, do I still love this place. The only home I have ever known.

And Jabari, my love, my future husband, how could I even imagine leaving him behind? But, I wonder, will he understand my explanation?

I chose this night to reveal the complete truth to him, inform him of my decision. But I worry once he knows the truth, will he then bless my departure?

So many questions ravage my mind. I am consumed by them. *Should I stay? Is it right to leave? Were they all in such turmoil, those who were indigenous to this place?*

I did not hear his approach.

"You are deep in thought." The voice startled me. So lost in reverie, I had not sensed a presence. I straightened quickly and turned.

He emerged from the darkest shadows, argent moonlight dancing upon shoulder-length blond hair braided with silver strands. Like a deluge in the driest desert, he stood out amongst these dark-haired people, his green eyes gleaming like that of a majestic feline. From him I received only the pale complexion.

"Father!" I smiled. "Your ability to startle me has not waned in five-hundred years. One would think in all this time I would learn to sense you." I leaned to him, kissed his cheek.

His face felt cool; he had recently awakened and bathed. The scent of lotus petals, however subtle, clung to his flesh and the loose white robes that fell to his feet.

"Your mind is preoccupied," he said with his usual stoic grace. "This decision is more than you can bear at times, I know. And I am truly sorry to have placed the weight of it upon your shoulders. But you know well why we must leave."

"Yes."

"You worry about Jabari, and the effect of this on him."

How precisely he knew my every thought.

"Whether or not my decision keeps me at his side or sends me into the stars," I explained, "I must tell him from whom I descend, from whence my people came. But how does one bring up such an unbelievable truth?" I paused for a moment, a thought on my mind. "How did Mother accept it?"

My father's thin, pale lips curled into a small smile. "In the days when I met your mother," he began, "life was very different here. We were protected by Pharaoh and our existence was revered by those who knew of us, kept secret from those who did not. The rumors your mother had heard of us were in admiration, not in fear as the rumors of today."

"And if he fears me? Father, I love him so very much. I know not what I would do should he shun me."

My father, whom the locals call Sefu, took my hand. "His love for you shall overwhelm doubt and beget acceptance. Just as your mother's did for me so long ago." He sighed then, and looked at me thoughtfully. "And if it does not, then you have your answer."

"I wish it were as simple as you make it seem, Father. I could not bear his ill will, even if my decision is to leave with you. And what of loving a mortal—watching them grow old...die. If I stay, how long

shall we have to share life together? And then what do I do? You shall be gone. I shall be alone."

"Love never offers easy answers. But it guides our heart and the decisions we make and there is no way of knowing if that decision is right or wrong. With your mother I knew it was right. I shared fifty wonderful years with her that I would not trade for the sun. And though by human rights, time was a mere grain of sand from the vast Sahara, yes it was all worthwhile."

I gave his hand a light squeeze. "I hope you are correct," I said, though I knew this was truth. My father was the wisest of the *Pet Mer*. "This is all so much to think on."

Note scrawled alongside page: *My situation with Jabari is a special one, of that I do not doubt. When so many are forced to wed those they do not love or many times even know, Jabari and I are truly bound by heart. I cannot imagine life without him. Would I find such happiness in another place?*

Yet again did a sigh escape my lips, an act all too common these days, straightened and squared my shoulders. "Is my appearance pleasing?" I had taken great pains to be sure all was perfect.

"As always your beauty radiates...but yes, your attire is suitable for such an occasion."

I had had my servants weave golden ribbons into my long black hair and braid it tightly as a measure against the strong wind. The clothing I chose was casual yet at the same time elegant; wrapping my tall stature was a black linen dress and a golden belt hugged my slender waist, complimenting the gold bands that snaked around my upper arms. My feet remained unbound.

"I must be on my way, Father. I have an...appointment waiting before I meet Jabari. I want to be well satiated for this," I stated.

"Please take your meal indoors tonight, Daughter."

I shook my head. "I am not like you, Father. I cannot enjoy repast holed in the guts of a tomb."

"It is becoming increasingly dangerous—"

"I know, do not worry. I will show discretion. I promise."

He shook his head. "I am going to spend the rest of my life worrying over you, am I not?"

"No, you are not. Trust me." I kissed his cheek and was gone.

Entry Two

The journey was a familiar one. The mud-brick estate stood on the edge of the village, far enough from the Nile that few had business in that direction, yet close enough to Jabari's estate to place little travel time between the two. My thoughts had already run too far and I needed to make haste.

I saw her before she saw me, for I was as the wind when silent.

Her head was bowed, ebony hair flowed over her shoulders. Though they were lowered, I knew her russet eyes. My heart pounded, loins ached, each time I saw her. She stood half hidden behind a copse of rose bushes, palm and myrrh trees, nestled within the vast gardens, just as we had arranged. I approached, letting my presence be known at last.

She raised her head. "Mistress. No one saw me come but I have little time this night, as my chores are vast."

I nodded. This one I had known for over a year. One of few humans remaining who, through family ties, still revered Father's people. One of few raised to recall a time when my people were seen as *Gods from the Sky*. When offering their blood to us was an honor.

Yet still I did not know her name. Usually, it mattered little. She was merely a servant, though a generous one with the sweetest scent in all of Giza, Saqqara, and the Nile Delta. Even as far as Abydos. So many I had tasted none of their names known. But tonight it mattered. Tonight everything mattered. This could be my last eve here.

"I know the time has been long," said I, "but please, tell me your name. I need to know it now."

The girl raised an enigmatic brow. "Zahrah."

I smiled. "Zahrah." Though the dim light exaggerated her high cheekbones and ruby lips, her beauty was real. I pulled her toward me, one arm snaking around her slight waist. Our lips met then, and the lust of Seth came to greet me. Zahrah, her taste. Her scent. Her beauty. Everything about this human tantalized me. Almond and olive oils.

"Sweet," I whispered. "Sweetest in the Valley." With more care than usual, I pierced the thin human flesh of her lips with my teeth. No hesitation. No pain. Zahrah parted her lips against mine.

And then the smooth satin that I treasured above all others flowed over my tongue. Youthful innocence. Power. And within it I was lost.

The surrounding world shrank away and all that existed was that sensuous taste. Exuberance. Tensions of the past week released. A cocoon of calm wrapped me in its warmth and I reveled in it.

But it was not to last.

All at once, coldness settled over me like a cruel wind. A shiver ran through me. Someone approached. In the distant fog of my mind I heard my name on the breeze.

"Kesi! What are you doing?"

A man's voice, deep, confused, angry. Zahrah was forced from my arms. Painful. The hunger had not been satiated. Frigid desert air flogged at my flesh. My eyes blinked open. At first the whole scene was as a surreal dream.

I heard my own voice. "Jabari?"

He was there. He had taken my hand, pulled me from Zahrah. Away from my meal. I was disoriented, having been interrupted, too bewildered to respond.

He was speaking to me.

"What were you doing!? Wha—There is blood!"

I realized then I still tasted the bliss, licking it from my lips, feeling its trickle on my chin.

"What are you?" I had never heard him so angry.

Indeed, what am I? Tell him. You need to reveal who you are, where you may go.

"What has happened, Kesi? Answer me!" He grasped my shoulders with firm masculine hands. He shook me. A blast of wind and sand—a gritty slap in the face—helped to awaken my mind.

"Kesi!"

He took my hand, hauled me away, farther and farther from the delicious meal, the sensuous blood. I could have easily defeated him, gone back to finish my repast. But, no. I loved him. I could never harm him.

My mind had begun to clear, to return from the stupor of that intoxicating meal. Those sweet lips. I glanced behind and saw Zahrah running toward Jhafi's manor, in which she served.

"What is wrong with you, Kesi?" I turned back to look into Jabari's face, the shadows of confusion cast over him. "Y-You were *kissing* her! And the blood...She is a servant...a slave!"

He moved away, dragging me along. I followed in an obedient manner, too lost to resist.

You were going to inform him anyway, I told myself. There was no getting out now.

Not like this. The time is not yet right.

No one spoke and we did not stop until we reached the portico of his home. Only then did he release my hand. The scent of human food wafted from within. The combined scents of cumin and onion assaulted me, and spices the names of which I had never learned. My stomach churned. Jabari sat on the stone bench, I paced to the rail. I squeezed trembling hands into fists at my sides.

"Kesi?"

I kept my eyes averted.

"How long have we been together? *Please!* What is your explanation for what I saw?"

Time was not right.

Hunger persisted and made me weak. I could not think. Perhaps I should fib, leave things as they were. For almost a year our life together was near perfection. Why alter it with a truth that might well push him away? Or leave him sour?

It is too late. He saw. He knows. What lie would amend what his eyes witnessed? I battled with myself.

"I have always held the knowledge that you are different, Kesi. You have never taken a meal with me. I have never seen you in daylight hours."

A sea of stars spread out beyond like a blanket in the sky. I concentrated on them. Soon I would join them. My decision had been made for me.

"I have heard rumor," continued Jabari. "That thousands of years ago gods in human form emerged from the night desert, that they were, and gave birth to, a new race—blood drinkers. Night stalkers with superb strength and a lethal demeanor. Killers who fed on others." His voice was cold, as if he did not believe himself, his own words, or what he suspected in his heart.

I placed my hands unsteadily on the marble rail. In the distance the tip of Khufu's great pyramid was a silhouette against the night horizon and the dim light of civilization along the Nile.

"It looked to me, Kesi, as if you were...as if you were drinking from that girl. As if...no, it is too horrible a concept to imagine that you, my future wife, could be one with the killers of rumor. Being a man of reason, I never believed these tales, and I certainly would never define you as having a lethal demeanor. But I cannot ignore what I witnessed this night." I heard the rustle of his clothing as he stood. "Will you please speak to me?"

And here it is. Time has come.

"I have meant to tell you the truth," I started. "I should have told you before now."

"Truth?" His voice quivered. "What truth?"

Still I did not turn, did not look at him. "The truth about what I am."

"Tell me."

"I have not been honest with you, Jabari. I am," I swallowed hard the lump that cut off my words. "I am not what I seem."

Finally I turned, slow and careful. Jabari's dark brows were furrowed as he stared at me, his lips parted as if his next words were frozen on them. His hands wrung the linen material of his robe.

I continued. "In the guise of the woman you love stands a monster." I backed against the rail, clasping my hands in front of me. "The rumor you have heard is true and I am a part of that truth."

"That was almost two thousand years ago—"

"It is for the most part the truth."

His features stiffened. "You are not going to tell me that you were there!"

"No. I was not."

He nodded, lips taut. He ran a hand through his ebony hair, causing it to stick out this way and that, making me want to run into his arms, forget telling him all of this. But it was too late. He stared at me in expectation of an apex to my story.

My heart seized. It was over. He would not accept it. Would not accept me. If only I had had the chance to tell him on my own terms, my own time—

"My father," I started, "was one of whom the tale recites."

"Your father is a god?" His lips pursed in an expression of disbelief.

"No, he was merely one of many mistaken as such."

"Perhaps you should start from the beginning." His tone was less angry, touched more by skepticism.

"This has been very difficult, Jabari. Knowing I had to relay the truth one day. I was going to come to you with this tonight."

"You were late. You are never late. Someone said they saw you heading towards Jhafi's manor."

I stepped towards him, a mere step, wanting to stand beside him, hold his hand, look into his soft eyes. But he flinched as if flame had touched his flesh. And with that move, I knew I had lost him forever. Even before the explanation was born, his heart had turned away.

I would tell him the story, so he would know. He deserved the truth. But then I would be gone. I would travel into the stars with my father and his people and those like myself, and Jabari would live out his mortal life without fear.

The pain in my chest cut my breath short. I turned, slipped back to the rail, and stared once again out into the desert. A sandstorm danced on the horizon. No human eye could detect it from this distance. Slowly I drew a breath and began.

"My father is of a race that came here from very, very far away—"

"How far?" His voice was like daggers that could slice me in two.

I tried to think, to concentrate through the clenching agony in my heart, the lump in my throat. I could no longer swallow. My mouth had gone dry. I motioned to the sky, to a cluster of stars directly in line with the tip of the Giza pyramid. "You see those stars?"

"Yes," he said shortly.

"Far beyond that cluster is where my father and the others of his race come from."

"He comes from," Jabari gazed toward the sky, "out there?"

I nodded. He thought me insane. I did not have to possess the power to read minds in order to know.

"How did he get here?"

"How would I... I cannot describe it in terms you would comprehend. Perhaps one day humans will understand the concept of journeying beyond the stars, but for now it is too far a reality to grasp."

"Humans. You speak as if you are not..." he paused, brows narrowing. "You are not human?"

"I am half human. My mother was human. She died many centuries ago by this planet's calendar."

"So you are...quite old as well?" His words were careful, deliberate. And yet the skepticism remained, almost mocking.

I held my composure. "Yes."

"Please tell me how this is possible."

How would I explain to him a civilization more advanced than any he had ever encountered or imagined? A civilization that had existed among his people for thousands of years, were once revered as gods, had aided in erecting massive structures of death and worship bearing labyrinthine tunnels in which to slumber and feed, had bred with humans to create yet another race? My race. Children of the *Pet Mer*. Jabari was no fool, I would not have chosen him if he were, but the explanation of my existence was beyond the grasp of human comprehension. My words would have to be selected carefully.

I turned to look at him, once more leaning against the rail. Its support aided in my comfort.

"My father and his people. They hunted for food—in the dark. There was little sun there, not like here. The animals of their planet. My father's people took what they needed of the blood, but never killed."

"Drinking the blood—as the rumors I have heard?"

I lowered my eyes to avoid the dubiety of his expression. "Yes—very gentle people, the *Pet Mer*. They existed in harmony with all others on their planet. But then something went terribly wrong. I am not clear on the details and I am sure you would not understand should I try to explain. An explosion...a star. It caused the planet to careen towards their sun...become uninhabitable. They had to leave."

"And so they came here?"

"It was the only inhabited planet with beings similar in appearance to themselves. Except... the sun here is much closer and stronger. They have had to live only at night, just as I must. My father told me that, in the beginning, they fed only upon the animals of this world, which most resembled the plant eaters from their own home, but soon another flaw plagued their plans—the blood did not contain

the proper agents to sustain them and soon they suffered much discomfort and illness."

"So they drank from humans?"

"Yes."

"And they kill?"

I hugged my shawl close, his words chilled me so. "No, they refuse to, which is why they must leave."

I wanted him to understand. No, I *needed* him to understand. We are not killers.

"You see, at that time, the peoples of Egypt looked upon my father and his kind with reverence and respect, often willingly offering small doses of their blood. Human blood combined with theirs strengthened them and they never got sick, never developed the diseases that plague man.

"They did not wish to interfere in the natural course of human progression; therefore they kept much to themselves, only trusting mortal friends and the great earth to watch over them in the day. By night they aided humans in erecting the tombs and structures you see beyond." I motioned toward the pyramids, no longer visible as the distant sandstorm grew ever nearer and consumed the desert. "By day, they took repast and slumbered in the dark underground chambers.

"As time passed, many moved on, away from Egypt, to Europe and Asia. Most paired with human mates, as my father did, and bore children. But, alas, we are of a mixed heritage, and we...we cannot have heirs of our own. Such as myself, Jabari...I am... I cannot bear children from my own body."

He merely nodded, but I was not sure if in acceptance or dismissal of the tale I wove. All of it as I had heard, passed to me from my father and many others of our race. Jabari, however, was mortal and born so. Whether or not he believed me at that moment was unclear. And so, I continued.

"Soon, the children discovered they could indeed bring offspring and heir into their lives. The discovery came quite by accident, I assure you," I explained carefully. "One of us, a child of the *Pet Mer*— He did not understand. He was hungry. He was feeding and he went too far. He panicked. And so in his mind he felt he needed to replace the blood he had taken, so he cut his own wrist and *fed* the dying human." I paused, waiting for a reaction from Jabari.

He nodded his head once. "Go on," he said with indifference.

I drew a breath. "A change occurred. No one is sure how, but our blood combined with that of a human's will create a...well, a—" I stuttered, trying to find the words.

But there was no word for what we could create, no way to easily describe them without fear of more persecution. Maltreatment of my father's race was now sending him away. Those left behind, the heirs created, faced a new threat to their existence by remaining. "Um, another race," I said. "I suppose you could call them such. A mixed breed. Human, but displaying certain characteristics of my race. Better vision. Better physical capabilities. Long dense hair."

At that I saw the corner of Jabari's lips curl in a small smile, but it was gone too quickly.

I continued. "And the teeth." I parted my lips, displaying the small fangs he had seen so many times yet had never commented on—"Like mine."

"So, this new race..." His words came as a sigh, soft and to himself. He stared at his own hands before him. At this time I could see he truly was trying to understand, attempting to believe me. Hope was drawn back into my heart. "They need blood to survive as well?" he asked.

I nodded. "Mostly. Some can still take repast in your food, but it has not the properties nor the necessary agents to sustain them for long periods. Others cannot tolerate human food at all."

For a long while he said nothing. I could not read his stoic expression and it unnerved me. He seemed to come to some conclusion within his own mind then, and said outright, "Your kiss was always so enchanting to me." His eyes rose slowly to meet mine and in them I saw his next question, even before he spoke. "What power have you held over me?"

He feared me. He worried. He no longer trusted me. Yet, I would never lie to him. "I admit I do possess a certain...*ability* to manipulate human minds if I so wish. But I assure you with all the love I hold in my heart that I have never done so to you."

"And they are all like you, these...mix breeds?"

"To a varying degree, yes. Though rare, some can walk in sunlight."

"And of the sun—"

"Would kill me if I were to be exposed to it for too long."

"Have you ever...drunk my blood?"

I had hoped to avoid that question, but what matter did it make now? "Yes, once. I-I did not do this on purpose, Jabari, I assure you! We had only just met. I was so lost in you—"

"Were you going to make me...like you?"

"No. *No*. I would never risk you in that way. I love you too much. I love you as you are—human!"

"And this is the only way you may bear children? By making a human into...like yourself? Have you created such a being yourself—a blood drinker?"

I had never in my long life partaken of a conversation so difficult. I am strong, not only of body but of mind. Or at least I thought such until tonight. As this conversation progressed, I began to feel weak, like that of a child. Helpless. Exposed.

"I have tried," I replied honestly. "But I have not been successful."

Jabari cocked a brow in my direction. An indication for more information.

"The *Pet Mer*. They feel that because the blood from their lineage is omnipotent and mighty, that when mixed with that of...a half breed if you will, such as myself, all attempts are met with disastrous results. I have tried three times to bring a 'child' into my life and have failed each time. They, eh...went insane and fatally harmed themselves. Or became vicious and had to be—"

"Killed?"

I nodded, hating this conversation more with every word. Each death was like the bite of a viper to my heart. How I wanted a family, even if I could not bear and raise children conventionally.

"Did you...kill them?" It was a small move, as he pressed himself closer to the solid wall behind him, but I noticed it—as if he were backing away from me. As if he feared I would take his life next. As if he could melt into the wall away from me.

"I did not take their lives. I could not. I do not even spill one drop of blood when I feed."

Visibly, he relaxed a bit.

"If I ever was successful in bringing even one human into my world...creating them in a sense, then I would be able to have a full family with many children."

"How is that?"

"I suppose because the blood is not as strong in consecutive generations, a child of mine could then create others with much better results. I have seen it done many times. If I could create but one that did not go amiss, I could have the family I always wished for."

"You have done this to children?"

The misunderstanding became clear then. I used the word "children," as my parents and all others before me had done. To human ears, the word was literal.

"No," I spoke quickly. "Not the young. It has been done, but once the transformation is complete, they no longer age as a human. They would remain the same age for too long. And they would need to be fed, unable to fend for or feed themselves."

"And so if not the young, with whom would you choose this risk?"

"Do not fear. I would not try with you...I could never harm you or risk harm to you. If that is what you dread."

Did he believe me? His eyes were still wide—whether with fright or disbelief I could not be sure—and his knuckles had grown white from the tight grip on the folds of his robe. I wanted nothing more than to hear him say he understood, that despite all I had told him he would still love me, still want me there to share a life with him. But his expression remained as stoic and somber as a funerary mask.

"You shall not have to worry any longer about me," I said. "My father and the others—this night is our last here."

Finally, a response. His head cocked, brows furrowed and his lips drew thin.

"The *Pet Mer* have chosen to leave this planet and find a new home somewhere within the stars."

"Why?"

The question was a simple one, yet so much doubt and confusion was borne within its context.

I grew more apprehensive.

"As the years have passed, humans have developed a growing awareness, and fear, of us. We are forced to take sustenance only from

those willing and able to keep our secret, but the numbers of such humans dwindle each year and soon there shan't be enough food to provide for our growing numbers. If I remain, one day I might have to kill to survive or to protect myself or my family."

"And could you do this—kill a human?" He said the words with apathetic grace, a hint of compunction behind them.

No sense in lying. "If it were a matter of kill or risk the persecution that plagued the *Pet Mer*, then I would have no choice."

"Would that not be viewed as murder? You are after all half human."

"And half of me is not. Jabari," I said in my softest, most loving voice. "I never said I preferred things this way. But if I remain here, this is life as it has to be." I looked down at my bare feet, shuffled some sand beneath my toes. "I do not wish to lose you for who I am," I whispered.

Stay with me and have a family. You shan't have to kill, we shall work something out.

The words I wished to hear spiraled like a whirlwind through my mind. A gust of wind and sand stung my eyes. The storm grew closer. Jabari only stared at me, his head shaking slightly. Back and forth. Back and forth.

Say something!

"Please, my love, do not stare at me as if I were a cobra ready to strike."

"I am not sure what to say, Kesi. It is an awful lot to take in at once. And you give me so little time in which to digest it all. Everything...the woman I thought I knew and loved—" he shook his head again. "It was all a lie." His gaze dropped as if he were ashamed of his own words. But no one could feel the same extent of shame that stung my heart at that moment.

Slowly, I nodded, understanding what I must now do.

I looked back to him. His deep brown eyes were so full of ambiguity.

"I have never regretted what I am," said I. "Who I am, or what I must do to survive. Until now."

I stepped from the portico, out of Jabari's life, and disappeared into the angry, swirling sands of the Sahara.



Rejoice

On this night does my heart rejoice, and yet I weep. I sit here writing on scrolls I thought would be lost forever to a human world.

Leaving Jabari, I hurried off into the sandstorm, ignoring its gritty sting and the particles that clung to my tears. Straight home I ran until the dank and musty odor of the inner tombs greeted my senses.

The hallways and chambers were empty. All had left and I made haste in packing so I would not be left behind, despondent and alone forever.

As I readied for departure, my heart ached with longing. I had not had time to inform Father I would be joining him and the other *Pet Mer*, the half-breeds like myself that chose to travel on, and a few humans, lovers, children and even friends of our people. I had said my good-byes to them all.

But Jabari I had not; I had merely rushed off into the swirling mists of dust, certain we would have no closure.

However, as I slunk from the bowels of the chambers I would see no more, the echoes of past years, eras, generations, happy memories of family and love, worship and even tears, pain and abuse, dissipated into a future unknown.

I wasted small time in my reveries. I grabbed what little material possessions held true value to me: a few pieces of jewelry, including a Lapis and shell bracelet Jabari had once given me as a gift, some clothing, and drawings I had done on papyrus, and moved swiftly back through the aisles, carved forever in Hieroglyphs with the musings and tales of my family and the desert people. Our lives in this place reduced to mere scribbles within the stones. And as well these writings, personal only to myself, which I have kept since only a child. They have remained silent but for my voice alone. And they shall, like the others, be hidden away in a safe location, as proof one day of our

existence here; a great race of gods chased off by the greed and fear of humans.

We almost ran into one another, and when I stepped into the night I thought at first he was merely a dream before my eyes. Dirty and disheveled, Jabari did not stop until his arms were wrapped around me tightly.

"I do not care what it is you are," he said breathlessly, "or whether the truth is a lie or the lie is truth. All I know is that without you in my life I cannot go on."

From there, we held one another and never let go. And I gazed over my love's shoulder as I held him, at all the tiny lights within the vast universe, some mere shooting stars, some unmoved, and yet several others moved together upwards to disappear and become as one with the emptiness of space. My heart at watching them wept, and I whispered so low Jabari could not hear, "Good bye, my father. Perhaps one day we shall meet again."

Yet inwardly I rejoiced.

That night Jabari and I spent together in my chamber beneath the Giza pyramid. As his human eyes could not see in darkness as mine could, I lit many candles, then placed a fur on the floor for he required comforts I did not. We lay together making love and staring into one another's eyes, barely needing to speak a word, merely reveling in the company of one another.

Naked beneath the red and yellow shutter of candlelight, I pulled a second fur up over Jabari's shoulders, for he shivered in the chill of the tomb, yet would never admit to his human weakness.

He ran the back of his fingers over my cheek as he kissed me so tenderly my eyes burned with tears.

"You miss them," He said at long last.

I smiled. "They only just left."

"You saw them?" The question was simple. I wondered then, had he heard my good-bye after all?

"I saw the lights disappear into the night sky, well into the stars."

He shook his head slowly, eyes closing only briefly, then once again his magnificent gaze fell on me. "I will never pretend to understand, Kesi, but I promise from this day forth to accept who you are and to aid you in all ways necessary."

My smile grew wide. Jabari's hand, which had touched my cheek so tenderly, then moved to my mouth, and his finger pressed against one sharp fang.

I pulled back when he flinched. A drop of his blood welled from the small puncture. He held it up and looked to me as if in expectation. Of what I did not understand.

He touched my lips then, spreading the small droplet on them. At first I did nothing. What was it he hoped to achieve from this act?

"It is alright," he said quietly. "I do not fear you."

I licked at my lips then, and the taste of his human blood enticed me to want more. But my senses were intact and I refused what instinct told me to do.

"Do you wish to drink from me?" he then asked.

"No! Of course not. Why would you ask such a thing of me?" Anger and confusion both took hold of my emotions.

"Do not be angry, my love," said Jabari. "'Tis my fault you hunger. I drew you from the slave girl."

I understood then. Guilt at interrupting my earlier meal weighed on him and he wished to appease both my physical needs and his own conscience.

"I would not drink from you unless you were truly willing."

"I am willing."

Before I could speak, he pressed his lips to mine, kissed me deeply. I allowed his tongue to probe mine, and for a long while we merely kissed, nothing more. His intention became clear as his kiss deepened and he pressed his tongue to my fangs. The sweet blood of my lover flowed into my mouth and I was lost in it.

He moaned then and moved his body close to mine. His hands took to my breasts, fingers encircled my nipples, bringing me to arousal. Never had I made love while drinking from a human, as repast and love, to my mind, were not one and the same.

I could not, however, deny my hunger, nor my sexual need. As his body pressed me down into the furs and his own arousal pushed for entrance, I simultaneously opened to him and pierced his tongue for more.

Every drop of his blood that entered my mouth, every moan he issued against my lips, every thrust of his power and manhood against my feminine heat, brought me higher into a world away from the tomb

in which we lay. Into the stars we traveled together, and so exuberant I was that he had come to me, that I had not joined the others.

Together, our bodies shuddered in the most powerful climax I had experienced in my long life and a sense of peace came upon me like floating forever on a calm water and I knew no worry would ever plague me so long as Jabari remained at my side.

Entry Three

Time passes quickly for me. I find the last eleven years of my life to be but a single grain of sand on the wind. Yet in the years I see Jabari age, even if only a mote. He is still the man I married, still beautiful to my eyes, but I do notice the slight inevitability of age on his human face. A few wrinkles mar the flesh of his face and grey strands have sprung into his hair.

None of it matters to me.

Our lives thus far have not been perfect, yet still I find more joy with him than I ever would have alone.

A year ago we moved away from the growing bustle of Giza towards Abydos. We remain now outside the city, in a large estate built for us by Pharaoh.

The reason for our move was complicated, but inevitable. As Jabari grew older and I did not, some began to question my secret in remaining so youthful in appearance. To this I held no answer.

We knew then we would need to move on, away from those who knew us so well. To avoid the questions and whispers I heard clearly pertaining to my night time activities. Why did they never see me in the day, they would enquire.

Pharaoh and others within the royal line knew of my past, knew of the *Pet Mer*. The knowledge would continue to be passed to those who would hold my secret. I would never be persecuted as long as I never killed.

The deciding factor in our move, however, came shortly after we had discussed the possibility. I cannot even to this day be sure who was responsible for the death of a human, found drained of blood with punctures on the throat. Pharaoh believed me when I explained I was

not at fault. However, someone of my ilk was, he had said, and this pushed our need to move on.

Others like myself remained behind after the *Pet Mer* took to the skies, and one of them was to blame. However, none but me resided anywhere near Giza. If this guilty blood drinker killed again, I am far enough away that any doubt by other humans as to my guilt would be assuaged.

Continuation...

Today, I received a letter. The inundation has come upon the Nile since my last entry and Jabari and I have settled well within a home constructed to fit my nocturnal lifestyle, keeping me safe from the desert sun in day. Far more glorious than the estate we shared in Giza. The servants, employed by Pharaoh, offer their blood when I hunger. And when I need more than they can give and the closeness of the house, regardless of its size, weighs on me I have many to escort me as I seek others within the city, taking them carefully, using my powers over the mind. They are left to sleep off the effects of blood loss in their home or a safe location, never the wiser of what I took from them.

It was on such a night that the letter came to me. My servant removed my shawl as I entered the house and Jabari met me.

His face told of concern as he handed me the letter, unopened, adorned with the seal of the king's family.

I took the letter and made my way into the garden to read alone. Jabari left me to it, but as I closed the letter he came to my side.

I turned to him. "There has been another body found near Giza."

A small smile played on his lips. "Then no one shall ever accuse you. We are free to attend Pharaoh's celebration in Giza."

He was right, of course. As the wife of wealth and favor, we were invited to many such celebrations, but since the killing I dared not return to Giza or be seen in the city region. Though my innocence was well declared, some who held knowledge of my life still looked at me with suspicion.

"Does the letter say who carried out these murders?" Jabari asked.

“Only that he is being held in the palace dungeon and if I wish to see him, to speak to him, I am welcome to do so on the night of celebration.”

Jabari crossed his arms over his chest as a night wind rustled through the garden. “Is this your wish?”

I sighed and looked to the lotus petals floating peacefully on the pond. “Life has been so relaxed here.”

“We cannot ignore the invitation forever, Kesi,” Jabari stated with his usual stoic truth. “In our position, we must be seen lest other accusations become rumor.”

“Yes, you are right of course.” I placed my arms around his neck, kissed him gently. “We shall go.”

Celebration...

Last week Jabari and I packed some belongings and made our way on the slow journey to Giza. So long it had been since my eyes fell on the great city, I was in awe at how thoroughly it had grown.

Jabarai and I were warmly greeted at the palace and I must admit my stomach fluttered in apprehension, for many in that city knew me many years before. Surely, they would comment on the youth I still held in my appearance.

And so, as the celebration commenced, I overheard one or two conversations to this effect yet I ignored them. Let them speculate, I thought. My pressing concern lay below the palace in the dungeon.

It was well after most guests had journeyed home into the late night that I was escorted down to the bowels of the palace to confront he who had committed an act taught to my kind as a grave proscription.

I was escorted by two guards, but I asked them to wait in the hallway outside the entrance to the cell chambers so I may speak to this murderer alone. They complied with no argument, opening the heavy wooden door, which offers only slight creak of protest, then closing it again behind me.

My nerves jittered, my heart raced as I walked down a narrow aisle lined with many torches and lanterns, some lit, others dark. Who

is this mysterious murderer? And why would one of my kind commit such an atrocious act, so clearly prohibited by all of the *Pet Mer*?

Whoever was held within this rat-infested stank of a prison held the answer. I halted before turning the corner where, I was told, the man was detained. I needed to compose myself before confronting him.

It was then I heard a voice echo up to me.

"I know you are there," he said in the ancient language of my father's people, though broken and mixed with both Egyptian and Chinese. At first, it was difficult to decipher his words as I knew no Chinese, but from the language of the *Pet Mer* and the Egyptian he roughly used, I put together his words.

"No need to hide," he said. "I am quite aware of your presence."

I stepped around the corner and approached a deep pit, covered only by a heavy grate. There was no light below. At the edge, I peered downward, through the grate, and barely saw him in the darkness. What I saw in the deep shadows was a simple-looking man with long lush black hair. He was dressed only in a dirt-stained tunic that fell to his knees and a pair of loose white pants. His feet, like mine, were devoid of footwear.

He looked up at me and leaned against the smooth stone wall that kept him from escape. So deep was the pit, even one of my people could not climb nor jump out. Surely if he held the ability to do so, he would have.

He paused a moment before speaking. "You are not human." His voice echoed up to me. "But not like me, either."

"And who are you?" I asked, using the *Pet Mer*'s unique tongue, and attempting to keep emotion from my voice.

"My name is Lei. And what is yours?"

So, he was not a native to Egypt. "I am Kesi of Giza. From where do you hail?"

He tilted his head as he continued to gaze up to me. "I have come here from China. I have heard of your kind. A daughter of the Originals?"

The Originals. This moniker for my father's people I had not previously heard.

"My father was *Pet Mer*... Originals, as you term them. My mother was human. You were human once?" I dared ask the question.

Never before had I met one who had effectively shared the blood of the *Children of the Sky Friends*. Until now, they had been but hearsay to my ears.

Lei paused before speaking, turning away from me, head lowered. He spoke so softly, if I had been human, I would not have heard. "I was human. Now I am monster." He gazed back up to me. "He turned me into what you see now."

"Who did this to you?" So deep was my curiosity, I needed to be closer to him. I sat at the edge of the pit, placed my hands on the grate and looked through the bars.

"His name is Yin. He lives in my homeland. He took me from my home, turned me into... this. He wanted more, but I escaped."

"More? What more?" I asked.

"I cannot be sure. He wished to harm me in some way, cut me open. I heard him speak. The walls were paper. His intentions were evil, dark. First chance I got, I ran. He had told me of the fathers of which you speak. Taught me some of the language. But I could not wait around to see what he had planned."

"Did he not teach you killing humans is forbidden to our kind?"

"No. I am not of your kind. This I know. By the time I reached Egypt I was famished. I killed out of necessity... Unable to stop. He taught me nothing. I was merely a means to his evil plan—whatever it may have been."

At that moment I felt for him. He had been human, a man with a life, taken and created into a blood-drinker, yet not allowed to learn our laws. None to guide him, as I would have had he been created by me.

But, I had tried—so long ago—and each attempt failed. Whomever created him had succeeded, however, and I needed to know the secret, where I had failed, this other hybrid had not.

"How did he do it?" I asked, choosing my words carefully. "How did he create you?"

A dolorous titter echoed up to me, but his words were somber. "I cannot recall. It all happened so quickly, I had no time to ponder technique."

I remained silent as disappointment turned hope to fear. Would I ever attain that which my heart desired?

I turned my attentions back to the poor soul in the pit. Hunger had driven him and he knew no better. Now he was fated to execution.

I wished to save him, but I doubted even my influence with Pharaoh could do so.

“Listen,” I stated. “I have the ear of Pharaoh. “I will speak on your behalf.”

A pause. “Y-You would do that for a stranger?”

“I shall try, though I can guarantee nothing.”

“Thank you, Kesi of Giza.”

Since my conversation with Lei, I spoke to Pharaoh in private. As he was aware of my kind, explaining Lei’s position was not difficult. However, quite fruitless. He explained quite clearly that, even through my influence, the law remained. Lei had murdered two and there was naught he could do—Lei needed to be punished for his crimes.

However, as Lei was not human and possessed abilities far beyond, no punishment fit such a being as he. I learned, long after Jabari and I returned home, that Lei would be set in the sun to roast as a pig on a pyre. By the time I received this news, the deed had been done. Lei was long dead and no more could be learnt from him.

I wept over the letter received from the palace weeks after Lei’s death, for his existence gave me hope that I could indeed prevail in sharing my bloodline, thus allowing me children of my very own.



The next two scrolls, also findings by Dr. Brumble, have been determined to date from the 20th Dynasty, though later than previous entries. Date approximates to about 1080 B.C. And references within the entry itself prove this to be true. This papyrus was found in what was later discovered to be the grave of Jabari of Giza (though this document was found far from Giza in a small village cemetery outside of Abydos near the Abydos Temple). The man within the grave, mummified in a naturally preserved state, was determined to be approximately 72 years of age at the time of death. This mummy is believed to be the remains of Kesi’s husband. To

date, no remains proving to be that of Kesi of Giza have been found, but subsequent discoveries may offer an explanation.

Entry Four

My heart is heavy and my soul lonely. This night I lost my beloved Jabari to a mortal death. And yet I live on and look no different than the day we met. So long ago.

In the fifty years we remained bonded in love and marriage, Jabari and I saw our trials, dealt with our adversities.

Jabari and I did not live without means, for my family had left me plenty in which to exist well. Pharaohs knew my name and celebrations existed in which myself and Jabari were invited. I became as the other wives of wealth and favor.

Few remembered from whence I came. They knew of the tales, the *Pet Mer* who had once graced the lands, but as all things that fall from sight, the truth became rumor, which then became myth. And I just another lady of Egypt, albeit only seen under the watchful eye of Nebt-het.

Much to my dismay, I never met another like Lei. No children of my kind crossed my path after that fateful night. To this day, I have not forgotten Lei, the successful heir to a hybrid like myself.

As Jabari aged and I did not, we relocated to yet another village to start anew, bringing with us only those servants who kept my secret.

After so many generations, my kind had fallen into disfavor, just as my father had long predicted. No longer was I able to feed from willing humans, as none existed who remembered the reverence my family once held. The servants we kept grew old, died, and the new servants knew nothing of my life and past.

Jabari aided in finding me adequate sustenance, in keeping others from learning my secret. His request was that I never ask the source of the human blood he acquired. I complied, grateful, but my suspicions never waned. As a revered artist, Jabari held the favor of many pharaohs and this position allowed certain privileges, many of which I was not privy. And so, I asked no questions.

But, now he is gone. With my heightened senses, I saw the sickness greying his dark skin, day after day, and I smelled the inevitability of death on him. Yet still I lived the lie that he would exist with me forever.

Forever.

As we were never able to bear heir of our own, and I was unsuccessful in my attempts to bring us children, it has remained the two of us all these years. But still, Jabari never complained. We filled our lives with duty and work, and many majestic felines shared our estate.

But what do I do now? Jabari's body remains within the house as I write this. I am to mourn, but to sling mud upon myself and prance about in a state of half undress is not a manner in which my people mourned. I am of the Egyptian folk, yes, but I am also of the *Pet Mer* first and foremost.

And so I hired mourners to perform the rituals known to this land, to dance about the streets in funerary states of undress, the earth covering their bodies, while I remain at Jabari's side until such time he will be off to be prepared for an Egyptian death rite.

He was of this land and so I honor his wishes for traditional funerary ritual. But I cannot be there. Long ago, his family asked of my whereabouts, wanted to see us together. But, he had grown older and I still as they remembered. My secret he could not reveal, and so he informed them I was stricken by illness that prevented my travel. Only several years on did he inform them I had passed of my illness. And so to humans I was dead, yet I remained very much alive.

Journal Entry 4

The Funeral

This has been the most difficult day of my existence, even adding to the departure of my family into the stars. The funerary procession reminded me of what I have lost and what will never again be in my life. From my hiding place away from the sun, I watched the oxen-

drawn carriage/hearse. All around the somber sounds of the musicians who preceded the procession reached me.

The aroma of earth and of myrrh, ointments and the Juniper oils of mummification reminded me of my loss. I placed my head on my knee. Humans would not catch such subtle scents, but to me the overpowering odor made it all too obvious that a new chapter in my life had begun.

One that came all too quickly.

It is time to move on now, away from Egypt, the only home I have ever known. I will no longer have my husband's influence and wisdom to keep me fed. Will the leaders of this new age understand my plight? Of this I hold doubt. Jabari never revealed his secrets from within the chambers of the Pharaohs. I cannot go to him, hoping for a resolution. And I cannot trust the pharaohs any longer, not with the bickering that has clashed within the royal families, and when the tomb raiders abound, punishment is swift and I would surely be exposed. I can no longer hide with the crumbling structures that once held safety.

Within the week, I shall pack what belongings I hold of value and travel on, to where I do not yet know.



The Seductress

Kesi and Cleopatra

In the 20th century, in the year 1982, archaeologists from Finland discovered several scrolls dated approximately 50 BC. These scrolls were found within an obscure tomb in the once great city of Ephesus, in what is now modern day Turkey, located not far from the skeleton of a petite young woman, identity unknown, but by the texts, believed to be the remains of Arsinoë (pronounced AHR-SIN-OH-WAY), Cleopatra VII's sister, who was banished by the Queen herself. These scrolls are the most detailed information on Cleopatra ever discovered. Why they were buried with the (alleged) remains of Arsinoë is unknown.

Alexandria. A city of great power, and yet last I was home, it did not exist. I have kept my link to Egypt through news, learning of changes in political and spiritual affairs. Tonight, however, I look upon a city unfamiliar, a land both memorable and new.

The grand columns of Roman and Greek inspired buildings shine silver under the moon and orange from the flicker of a lighthouse by the bay, the Lighthouse of Pharos. From its luminance, all ships coming in and out of the harbor can be identified.

Though I have traveled the world ten times in the thousand or more human years of my existence, seeing such a sight in my own Egypt is stunning. The Nile still offers life to the desert peoples, but now provides so much more. A life—many lives, both of wealth and of poverty. The latter of which I saw earlier on this night as I walked streets lined of sandstone, limestone and marble.

From the window of my room here, a home in which I was able to buy services, I can easily partake of the local scenery.

Now a great port, ships sail in and out of the harbor to trade and buy wares. The Nile has proven itself more than a way to harvest means for those who reside here, as had been the truth in the days of my youth.

I came into Egypt just last night, having heard word of a quarrel amongst the siblings, Prince and Princesses, Ptolemy, Arsinoë, and

Cleopatra. I am not yet sure what this sibling rivalry entails, but after so long away, I am determined to play a part in its outcome. The King is quite old and, hearsay, shan't live much longer.

On the morrow, just before dawn, I shall find my way into the palace and insert myself into the lives of the royals. This shan't be a difficult task.



A most interesting night. As promised, I made my way into the palace with aid from my own powers, and of course my feminine wiles. I was in no way obscure. Two guards stood by the heavily built doors and as I approached, they readied their staffs. But, I was of no threat in my long black dress, sheer in the places which needed to be shown.

I approached the guard to the right. He stiffened as if frightened by my approach. But this was not such a dilemma. I peered into his tan eyes and placed my hand on the tough brown skin of his arm.

Entering his mind proved a simple task.

I am no enemy, but a friend to the Ptolemy's. I wish only well for the palace recipients.

His gaze barely moved from my breasts, inappropriately visible beneath the attire I had donned deliberately. The guard glanced to his friend and before I could say another word, the massive doors opened for my entry.

The slam behind me, the door's weight causing the floor beneath to shake, elicited in me a slight startle. Where the elder princess, Cleopatra, resided in this strange and substantial palace was foreign to me. I held no connection to her and so I could not sense her. Not even her human blood would lead me where I wished to go, as all within were human and the plethora of scents confused the mind.

I slunk from one vast room to the next, sensing the sparse human guards in well enough time to disappear and avoid detection. How would I know where or even whom was the one known as the future Queen of the Nile, a term once bestowed upon myself; daughter of a true god.

Powerful.

Surely, I could overtake this mortal Cleopatra, defeat her, or at the least control the kingdom *through* her. And that was my intention,

although how I might accomplish this feat was still developing in my mind.

The palace was deathly silent, the shadows of night stretched endlessly from elongated pillars of marble, of statues and images of every god I could recall from my youth. And yet, the artistic touches of Greek and Roman hands reminded me I was no longer in *my* Egypt, but a new Egypt, where foreign rulers and policies held the law. It all seemed so contradictory.

I kept my perceptions open, and when an unfamiliar smell struck me, I halted and melted into the shadow. But whomever I sensed remained close, and by the growing perfume, I knew it neared my location. The bouquet was not familiar and yet it was—something I had not sensed in so long I lost familiarity with the blood I detected.

I tensed. I was invisible to humans, but not to my own kind, nor their offspring, and I stood ready to defend or to use my powers.

This was no mortal, nor one of my own, and I admit most ashamedly, that my heart pounded in rhythm to my apprehension.

But then, around the corner toward me came, of all creatures, a silver and grey feline.

I relaxed the hold I held upon myself and allowed a deep sigh to escape my lungs. It had been a long time since I smelled anything other than human blood and so feline blood was unfamiliar.

I bent to pet its small head and scritch it behind the ears. Cats were worshipped in Egypt more so in the day and age of Bastet than in my youth. But, still kept close to humans as mousers for the granaries, and as companions. I had, and still do, hold a special connection to the feline species, and reprimanded myself for not recognizing this cat's unique signature.

At last I came upon a chamber different and yet the same from all the others. This one, however, was much larger and boasted many massive columns, and rows of netting against the insects of Egyptian sand hung like ghosts, swaying in a light breeze.

There were humans there and more than one by the various scents of their blood. Most were slaves, though dressed in a higher fashion than the slaves of my era.

Women. Attired in elegant silks. They slept upon rolls laid out on the floor and it did not escape my attention that they seemed to be surrounding the one area of the vast chamber hidden from view by

multiple silks and woven linens. I need not make any assumption that within lie the slumbering form of the famed Cleopatra.

As the feline I had previously come upon, I slunk on deft unbound feet towards the sleeping figure, still hidden behind so many layers of waving cloth.

As I stepped down into the room, one of the slumbering forms near me stirred and I halted, breath drawn, and moved not one muscle. Sometimes humans can sense me, but cannot see me if I wish to remain out of their sight.

The slave girl peered with sleeping eyes and gazed about. I was invisible to her and so she laid her head back down upon the silken pillow and I continued.

At last, I eased aside the last of the curtains and I was sure the woman in the large bed, clothed in the finest silks, was Cleopatra herself.

She had been born seventeen years previous. The young girl slept in silence, long dark hair splayed around her. She was clearly not born of Egypt, with her olive complexion so smooth it looked as if it had never seen the harsh desert sun.

As a cat on the prowl, I lowered myself beside her. The bed barely moved beneath my weight as I leaned over and gently brushed the hair from her face. Rumors of her beauty had reached the far corners of the globe, and so how taken into shock I was when I saw her at last.

Youth gave her a smooth complexion, and her young body was slender and sinewy. As she moaned and turned in her sleep, her bare breasts were pert and perfect, but otherwise her appearance struck me as average and no more.

What was it, I thought, about this girl that strikes others as the beautiful Queen of the Nile?

I reached to her and brushed the backs of my fingers along her cheek until she stirred once more. A sigh, and then her eyes began to open—brown eyes beneath long black lashes—and I began to see a beauty in her, sense the wiles of a young woman who was human only and yet able to bring a man to his knees with the mere wave of a hand and a simple word. She needed no power over the mind as I possessed.

I stood intrigued.

As she awoke and realized she was not alone in her bed her body tensed, but my reaction was swift.

I gazed deep into her eyes and placed a slender finger to my lips. “Shhhh.”

That was all I needed and she relaxed, her gaze locked to my power, taking control of her, and thus of Egypt. She could walk in day. She had the ear of the people. But, now, it was my voice she would hear.

She uttered one word then. Her mind was strong to allow a voice of her own through my command. Most remained mute. “Who...?”

I smiled. *Yes, you would want to know who I am, would you not?*

I did not respond, but instead sealed my power by placing my lips upon hers. As I had done so often that I cannot recall each incident, I would pierce her lip and drink of her blood, creating a bond unbreakable between us. But, then she did something that took me completely unaware. As her mouth opened, her tongue reached between my own lips and the succulence of her kiss drew into me a pleasure that rippled throughout my body.

No mortal had ever taken me in such a manner and of such surprise! Lost in her kiss, I almost forgot what I had gone there to achieve. Now I understood her allure. If she could possess me so, imagine how her own powers could persuade any human.

By the time my hands found the pert breasts and hers had tangled into my thigh-length hair, a tingle of pain clawed up my spine. The sun was near about to rise and I heard Cleopatra’s maid servants stirring; to rise and care for their queen.

I was not able to take her blood on this night without risk of detection. Most disappointing.

I placed both hands upon her cheeks and pulled back to gaze once more into her eyes. She groaned in discontent at my absence. “I was never here,” I whispered.

She opened her mouth to protest, but I cut off any words that might have escaped the ruby lips that tasted of strawberries and royalty. “Shhh. I will return on the morrow evening. Remember me only as a dream.”

She nodded mutely and I knew I had succeeded in reaching through the dense façade of a powerful mortal queen.



Two Queens

The next night I arrived as I had before. However, this time, Cleopatra awaited me. As I slipped past her guards and her slaves, just as the night before, I found her awake, on her bed, naked. I admit I was taken aback. This was most unexpected.

“Please,” she said in the softest of whispers, so as not to wake her slaves. “I knew you were more than a mere dream.”

I sighed and paused only a moment before dropping my robes and slipping into bed beside her. I wondered at that moment who was teaching whom? But with all of her charms, still there was much she had to learn.

I had not yet taken her blood, and I used none of my power of persuasion. But, thus far I did not need to...not yet.

When I was young, my tutor would often use his hands in gesture to elaborate the point he was trying to make, and so I did the same, although in a manner much altered.

As my hand snaked down the queen’s flat belly, I whispered what a man expects from a woman. “You must tell them what your desire,” I explained, “for men are unaware of any desire beyond their own.” With this she giggled and before I could even cast a gaze into her deep Greek eyes, she had my mouth upon hers. And yet once more she drew me in.

I might be able to control the mind, but she possesses a power far greater. It shall be a difficult time, teaching Cleopatra what it is I wish her to know. Her mind is strong and she is powerful and intelligent.



Death of a King

***NOTE:** Due to the information in the following scrolls, archaeologists were able to put a date to many of these writings. As*

it is well known, Cleopatra VII's father passed in 51BC and Cleopatra VII along with her younger brother, known to historians as Ptolemy XIII, took the throne together.

Tonight I learned news that Cleopatra's father has fallen ill. There is talk throughout Alexandria that he will soon die and leave his kingdom to Cleopatra and her younger siblings. This is when my plan will come into action.

It has occurred—The king passed not one hour ago. The night was quite late, and I was with Cleopatra, as I am every evening, when the doors to her chamber opened abruptly, a guard calling out to wake the queen. Within a mere moment I was hidden in the shadows. Cleopatra, apparently confused at my rapidity, drew the bedcovers over her bared breasts all the while looking about for me. Her attention moved at last to the guard as he parted the curtains to find her sitting, alone, barely covered.

“How dare you!” she snapped in Greek. “I am—”

But her words never found the air as the guard spoke quickly above her. “Pardon, my Queen, but your father has gone on to the Nether-World.”

After a gasp of grief, Cleopatra took a moment to gather herself. “I shall meet you forthwith,” she told the guard, “when I am attired properly.”

He bowed respectfully and exited.

By this time, all of the slaves had awoken and were hustling to dress their new queen. I was unseen by any mortal eyes. And as such I remained as Cleopatra hustled out of the chamber to greet her new subjects as Queen of Egypt.

I was not needed and I returned here to my rented room overlooking the lighthouse. I could easily have followed, for despite the numbers of humans swarming the palace, remaining unseen in the night was easily accomplished. But I knew the queen needed to be with her subjects sans distraction. Before she departed she had cast a glance about the chamber, seeking my whereabouts. She could not see me, even with all of her exceptional mortal abilities.

I did not need to keep a watch on the royal gathering. I would soon enough know the state of affairs in Egypt, and then I would also be aware of what action I must take in order to assure my place beside the Queen.

With Cleopatra and her brother ruling together, I must admit I am not pleased with the news coming my way. Economic turmoil and floods plague the land. Cleopatra and her brother are at odds over the state of the land they jointly rule. I am not at all surprised. Greeks, Romans. They were never meant to rule my land. Egypt is its own world, just as my father and others of his family shaped it so many thousands of human years ago.

My writings have been scarce, the mayhem within the palace grows ever more persistent.

One ear hears they fight over the need to have Rome as an ally, and yet another wants them as enemy. Regardless of their opposition, Egypt is in turmoil. Ptolemy and Arsinoë have exiled their older sister from Alexandria.

How could I possibly believe Greeks could rule my land? Or that I could break the mind of the most powerful of them all and make her bide to my will?

With Cleopatra gone from Alexandria, and with having never had the opportunity to take her blood, I have no sense of her whereabouts.

There is but one recourse for me now. Rome has more control than anyone dare admit. Caesar—Julius Caesar—the Roman leader, will need to visit Egypt. The king had been wisely neutral in foreseeing turmoil between his children. And so, as a compatriot of Caesar, he left the General in charge of any quarrel between the siblings. I would be sure he had Cleopatra's ear—in any fashion I could arrange.



Several days have passed. I bide my time now in Rome, hunting for a way in to seek counsel with the General. My exceptional hearing picks

up news from mortals on the streets below. I need more information, and so I choose to visit a brothel, for Caesar's men are just that—men! Brothels fill with them each night and they trust the whores with military secrets.

As a woman, permission into brothels is not needed. One merely needs to walk in. Men and whores alike stared my way as I found a quiet table where I could see the room and hear the conversations. I sipped a bit of red wine, wishing it were the blood of every mortal who passed by my table, when I overheard a conversation that required my attention.

As I gazed over, I saw one of Caesar's soldier's, attired in the usual leather and maile and acting most cocky in his demeanor. One would have thought he was the preferred mate of Isis the way he carried on—as well as the way he spoke of Cleopatra.

“Oh yes,” he said, “the queen and I have been very close behind her curtains.” I rolled my eyes at the obvious lies, but the two whores who accompanied him seemed most intrigued. One was seated upon his lap, the other placed her chin upon her palm, rested on the table and eyed him.

“So, you know her whereabouts?” she asked, boldly.

“Of course I do,” stated the soldier, bringing up his shoulders in narcissistic display.

At this, I perked. He may have been lying, yet the truth perhaps could spill from his lips after all.

He leaned in to whisper, so no other could hear. But, though several tables away, and despite the surrounding banter, I heard his words plainly.

“Cleopatra hides within Syria.”

That was all I needed to hear. I had a destination now. I left my wine untouched and disappeared from the establishment so quickly that if any human had been watching me it would appear I had simply vanished into the air.



Caesar and Cleopatra

I arrived in Syria only 2 days later. Politically, much turmoil abounded within Caesar's life and I wondered if he was the correct choice to aid in re-throning Cleopatra once more. But then luck fell my way. The civil war between Caesar and Pompey consumed Rome and Pompey fled to Egypt. Julius Caesar followed, of course. This was my chance!

By the time I arrived back in Egypt, Ptolemy had already assassinated Pompey. And with Caesar's rival out of the way, I was free to win his ear for Cleopatra. But first I had to get Cleopatra back into Egypt, into Alexandria.

The night was warm and many people gathered for a temple celebration. Within shadows of the buildings I hid, sliding from one to the other until I reached the Temple. And, once within, I waited.

As the shadows of sunset claimed the city, I wasted no time. I had seen Cleopatra, though she had donned a disguise of sorts, to watch the celebrations without being recognized.

But, once the parade celebrations passed by for the night, she was gone, and so I made my way throughout the temple to her. Just as she had in Egypt, she hid behind servants and layers of cloth.

I was in her bed before she was aware of my presence. She gasped. "I must know how you do this," she spoke in Greek whispers.

I ran a hand through the straight black locks, shorter cut than my own, but thick and luxurious. This night she had scented herself with Lotus blossoms and the fragrance reminded me of home. "How do I do what?" I asked.

"You find me no matter where I flee. You disappear into shadow, even when no shadow exists, and you lure me with sexuality, though I have never before taken to another woman."

I could waste no more time in connecting with her. In the stead of answering her questions, I drew her to me and covered her lips with my own. She did not resist. But before her kiss could deepen, drawing me in with it, I pierced the soft lips easily, gently, with one fang.

Oh, what I tasted was unlike anything before. I think of it now, as I write this, and I am lost within its caress. Like a rose prepared from

the most expensive of silks, her blood softened my palate, warmed my tongue and empowered my senses.

I did not wish to stop. No human tasted of such supremacy. It was no wonder Cleopatra's name was known so well throughout the world—so much so that I had heard it as far away as Japan. But, if I did not cease my drinking of her, she could die. Though her powers were impressive, she was after all still human. Painfully, regretfully, I pulled away.

Her eyes were closed and her breath shallow. For a moment, I considered taking her as a child, of making her a blood drinker like myself. What a family we could have together.

As queens, she and I could rule the entire world.

As a human, she already possessed such power—as the child of a Pet Mer that power could be limitless. But then unwanted images plagued my memory.

Sabu. How he had wished to join me. He was to be my first successful heir, though not my first attempt. So beautiful was he. I recalled his death with utmost clarity and it frightened me.

I allowed her to sleep as I ventured out to feed on an unwilling and unknown Roman soldier. Male minds were so much easier to manipulate than females. I needed naught more than a meal, and so I took my fill before returning to Cleopatra's side.

In an hour, her eyes fluttered open and she gazed upon me. Before she could speak even one word, I said, “We are bringing you back to Egypt, and you will take the throne once more. I have a plan and if you wish to remain in exile forever, you may not listen.”

From then onward, she listened to my every word.



In Pursuit

Once Caesar's enemy was defeated by Ptolemy, I arranged to get Cleopatra back into Egypt without her brother's knowledge. It was a simple plan, really, and yet complex in its execution.

Julius Caesar was, after all, a mere mortal man.

I was able to procure a boat down the Nile to Alexandria. The night was dark and my stealth, prowess and speed allowed me to procure a boat for my intended purpose. Having gone to the local bazaar to purchase an expensive bedroll, I then had Cleopatra strip naked and hide within.

I assured her, this would be the most effective plan. Her brother would never suspect the gift to Caesar to be any more than just an elaborate covering for Caesar's bed.

Hiring servants from the Palace, I had the unusually heavy package delivered straight to the chamber of Julius Caesar. As instructed, it was placed as a gift on his bed. A most unique giving, but this was Egypt after all, and high-quality linens were frequent contributions to royalty.

Thinking this naught more than what its intention, Caesar, once alone—or so he thought, for I was once again within range—readied himself for slumber. His surprise thrilled me when he unrolled the bed clothes only to find within a naked beautiful queen ready to do his bidding—but for a price.

Cleopatra did all that I had instructed and by morning, when I readied to slumber for the day, I held no concern that she had charmed Caesar with her wiles. He would reinstate her to the throne and do all he could to discredit her brother.

Last eve, as I awoke in my room, there came rap on the door. I thought at first maids were bringing me linens and tea, but then a sense came over me. Cleopatra herself awaited at my bedchamber door. I opened to her. She was well hidden beneath linen that covered her hair and face, allowing me to see only her eyes. But I knew her. Not only the bond that I had taken from her blood, but her essence, her scent and her femininity.

Before I could invite her in, she rushed by me, all the while unwrapping the cloth from her face as I closed the door. I turned and she was talking before I could ask how she knew where I was...

“Kesi!” she exclaimed. “I did it. Caesar plans to up-rise an army against my brother! I shall be queen once again.”

I had her where I wanted her, though I still wished to know how she found me. Her excitement was such that I never was able to ask.



Defeat

It did not take long before the sounds of war raged in the city. One would have thought I would worry that my residence would be compromised, but I feared not.

Unexpectedly, Caesar himself had come upon a most ingenious plan to get his army into Alexandria. The lighthouse.

His men overtook it quietly, taking out one guard after another with a stealth I did not think possible of humans. Once they had control of the lighthouse, they controlled the city, for none came nor went without Caesar’s men knowing friend from foe.

All of Ptolemy’s army was defeated quickly. I remained with Cleopatra in the evenings when I was able. We watched from Caesar’s private quarters—the same chambers offered to him by Ptolemy, who he now defeated in order to restore back to the throne the sister he had banished.

However, there was one order of business we needed to care for—Ptolemy himself.

By the moon, Cleopatra and I ran, hand in hand, toward the bay and my rented room. There, we could watch the show of war without hindrance. I thought sure I would need to care for Ptolemy myself—though my kind were taught that taking any life was wrong, I had since

learnt the lives of those who harm others over ego and a need to take over for reasons known only to themselves and for their own gain, were worthy of death. I was prepared to drain Ptolemy of his life.

Cleopatra watched little of the fighting below, the bloodshed and the carnage as Roman soldiers rid Ptolemy's army of their heads, limbs and lives. For the most part, she remained within the chamber, hidden under bedclothes that gave her a false sense of security. For such a strong and noble woman, I was finding her actions to be most contradictory. But it could not have been easy, for though these were men who had for the most part betrayed her, she knew them personally, as they had worked for her family many years. Now they were naught but slaughtered animals on the streets, their ships picked off in the harbor the moment they sailed in.

I, however, was accustomed to bloodshed and I had to be honest the scent of it all caused a grumble in my stomach that was becoming more and more difficult to resist.

All that delicious nectar spilled out onto the street. What a waste, particularly as I have experienced drastic hunger in the past and would surely have killed for such a gift. Though blood, once spilled from the body tastes a bit rancid, it still possesses the necessary agents to provide life. A fresh kill can last up to ten counts, however.

My stomach rumbled its displeasure. I needed to feed. But what and whom I eventually fed upon was not my intended target, and most unexpected.

With Cleopatra asleep in my bed, safe in the knowledge no one would ever find her, I slipped out of the room, sprinted to the beach where I would surely find a fresh kill to stave my need for a snack.

As has been my habit for much of my lifetime, I hid within the chaos of war, finding a soldier within little time. He suffered most greatly. He was Roman, and though he had been run through with a sword, his heart fluttered on. I could hear it, an erratic sound, like a drummer who forgot the beat. Soon, it would stop, but not before his suffering carried on for too long a time.

I knelt beside him, crimson soaking into the hem of my long silk dress. His scent—that of sweat, death and of course blood—warmed my inner senses.

"Please," he spoke in Roman through a gurgle of red liquid that spewed from his lips. "End my suffering..." I was more than happy to

oblige. Except, when I lifted a bloody wrist and prepared to bite, his other hand stayed my motion. “Promise me...” he sputtered. “My family will be compensated for my service.”

“I have the ear of the Queen,” I said. “And I make my vow.”

With that, he uttered his name in a sigh and closed his eyes. Yet still I could sense his pain, his life not willing to let go. My teeth sank into the soft flesh on his wrist, all the while I relayed subliminal messages of his family, which I was able to obtain from a dying mind, and drank what little was left of his blood. He died in peace and acceptance, and I had every intention of carrying out his final wish.

But, as I drew his eyes closed with my hand, a figure ran past me—one that drew in my breath and made me shiver and cringe.

Ptolemy!

Defeated, he fled toward the Nile. I could not let him escape, for he thwarted my plans.

He splashed into the waters, more than likely thinking a ship of his own would take him in and rescue him. Or else wishing to swim across. Though the Romans held the port, I took no chances. As Ptolemy’s feet disappeared beneath the Nile water, I caught up to him. Sensing a presence nearby, he spun and halted.

“You!” he spat. “This is all your—”

I held no desire to hear the remainder of his accusation!

I pounced upon him and held him beneath the retched water of the Nile. Through slime, brown debris and all the filth of the river, I saw panic in his features. He struggled, kicking up so much waste I could see his face no more. And when his efforts toward freedom grew weak, and finally ceased altogether, I released him. Ptolemy, brother to Cleopatra, would hold her back no more, and history would believe he drowned. That was all.

And this was as it had been reported and believed. His body was found floating amongst so many others in the red and brown grime of the Nile River. Once again, Cleopatra took her place as the Queen of Egypt.



Caesarion

I have resided in Egypt now for now over a year. Cleopatra has proven herself an excellent queen, however for the life growing inside her. Soon she will give birth to a child, Caesar's child. He returned to Rome months ago, taking with him those of his victories, including Cleopatra's own sister, Arsinoë. He does not know he is to be a father to the queen.

Cleopatra talks of sailing to Rome once the child is born, to inform Caesar of his heir between Egypt and Rome, a link she hopes will benefit both. I have told her this would be an unwise decision, as Caesar is wed, has children, and would not take well to such news. For once she actually refuses to listen to me and even manipulating her mind will not work, for she comes out of the spell quickly.

Cleopatra bore a son this day. She has named him Ptolemy Caesar, or Caesarion, as if another reason to prove to the great leader he is indeed the son of the Roman General. Her plan to visit Rome still exists and she plans to leave within the week. I decided the best option would be to travel with her. We plan her journey.

As the boat journeys through the Mediterranean Sea towards Rome, I remain mostly at Cleopatra's side. Disguised as one of her maiden slaves, I watch over her and the child in the night and slumber below deck by day. But, on this night I sat upon the deck, the child cradled in my arms to allow his mother sleep. He had fussed for over an hour and I could sense Cleopatra's angst, so I took him up, swaddled him in linens and brought him with me above.

And as I looked upon his deep eyes, the smooth tan skin of his Greek mother and Roman father, and the hair; Dark, thick and full of soft curls, something stirred within me. That need once more plagued my existence. The need for a family of my own, an heir, a carrier of my blood.

Caesarion wrapped a tiny fist around my finger, his skin so pale against the blood red of my manicured finger nails, and I thought I saw a smile on those infant lips. *In my mind, I perceive small sharp teeth protrude from the pink gums and I am drawn to bring his hand to my lips.*

I kissed the smooth flesh, drawing in the scent of a new human born to my land, yet not of its blood. I wondered, if such a young child were turned, would he remain the same age forever? Or would he grow as a human? So many unanswered questions that drove my mind to madness. I was born to a human mother and a blood-drinking father. I and all I knew like myself needed blood to survive, we grew so slowly it was almost as if we were immortal. So, how long would such a child take to mature?

It mattered not, for I would care for and feed such an infant just as any mother would. Others of my kind took humans, sharing their blood, giving them the life of the night, and a blood drinker. But in this ritual past I had failed.

I wanted it so desperately. My own child to raise. My child to teach and watch grow.

The cry brought me to my senses. I pulled my mouth from Caesarion's fingers. A single drop of fresh human blood fell to the deck and I felt at that moment an emptiness like none before. I needed to drink from him, to turn him as others had with their adult "children." I desired this infant fiercely. I placed my lips on the flesh my tooth had recently pierced. The taste held in it the strength of two leaders.

I could do this—take this child as my own, allow the transformation to catch, then take him away the next day when we landed in Rome. I would disappear with my child and we would live a happy life together.

Sabu!

His beauty, life and then death at my hands brushed my mind like the painting of a deranged artist. My last failed attempt. My heart dropped and my tear dampened Caesarion's linen wrap.

I pulled away and allowed the tiny fang mark to heal on its own. I could not risk such an experiment on this innocent infant.

We arrived in Rome in the evening and I was able to disembark with all the others, including Ptolemy, Cleopatra's younger brother, and husband.

The Villa was beautiful, and so very typically Roman. Tall white columns clothed with flowering vines of which I did not know the name. There was an abundance of room for all, including of course, separate chambers for Cleopatra and her husband; as her brother, the marriage was purely political. However, I bore a strong inner feeling that Ptolemy would not live to see adulthood. By now, I have learned Cleopatra is adamant her rule be singular and she would stop at nothing to see that through.

I made myself comfortable away from where the daylight could harm me, although my absence always caused questions. Cleopatra, sensitive to my words, explained as I was the night nanny, I preferred to slumber where no human nor act of nature could disturb me. Much of this, of course, was true.

Several nights later, I followed Cleopatra as she ventured to visit Caesar. I knew what was to come. She cradled the child and entered Caesar's palace as if she owned it; typical for her behavior, I have learnt. Guards moved aside as if she were a poison to avoid.

She opened the door to Caesar's Meeting Chamber without a knock. All eyes turned to us! And one pair of those eyes, I recognized, was Caesar's wife. This would not go well, but my attempts again and again to convince Cleopatra to leave this alone had gone ignored.

Cleopatra held the room at her attention. This she was not only accustomed to, but expected and demanded. All eyes fell to her—including Caesar's wife, who was in the room with the others. It became apparent they were in a meeting of great import, but this mattered not to Cleopatra. She took the babe from my arms and approached Caesar.

Until this time, no one spoke. Mouths had dropped open at the brazen queen; not to mention questions unanswered that surely whirled through all minds. No worries, these questions were about to be answered.

"What is this?" asked Julius.

I looked upon his wife, an average looking woman with hair of dark brown who stood behind her husband with a look of grave curiosity marring her features.

Cleopatra took a step forward and held the infant in outstretched arms. "Your son," she said boldly, "Caesarion."

Caesar's betrothed looked at him with fire in her eyes, and I worried for a moment Cleopatra had started another war.

Caesar snickered. No hesitation, simply a mere deride as if Cleopatra were mad. "I have no son with you," he said candidly, and if I had not known better, I would have thought this statement true.

Cleopatra's face turned a ghostly white, yet her cheeks a bright red. She was both astonished and hurt at the same time.

"He *IS* your son!" echoed her voice throughout.

At this moment, Cornelia stepped forward. "I have heard of your exploits, Queen Cleopatra. How dare you try and trap my husband with your tales! Be gone with you or I shall have my husband ban you from this land!"

At her words, guards from Caesar's army stepped forth, more in intimidation than threat. Cleopatra handed the babe to me, and I followed her out and back to the villa.

I must admit I was proud to see her back away. This was a rare occurrence for her.

Once returned to her villa, she screamed orders for all to leave her alone. Her furiousness knew no bounds. She shoved Caesarion into my arms and ordered me away as well.



Caesar's End

So much time has passed, and on this night the death of Caesar haunts me, as well as what he spoke in my ear before his heart stopped beating.

Cleopatra, worried over him and rightly so. She has mentioned more than once to me in the past that Caesar was living on the edge, declaring himself a god. Politically, many whispered the word “dictator” along with his name. This I have seen before—the reason my father and so many of my kind left this place for the stars.

Though it was not their choice to be dubbed gods, they were nonetheless. However, when such accusations cost human lives, as well as those of the *Pet Mer* (accused of murders they never would commit), they made the only choice available: leave this planet for another. But Caesar had no such choice. And so, on this night, I alone witnessed the last words of the great Julius Caesar.

I was in search of repast, wandering toward the northeast corner of Caesar’s grand palace when my sensitive hearing picked up a quarrel. This was nothing unusual, but as I recognized one of the voices as Caesar himself, I rushed off to see what lie in wait.

I arrived, however unfortunate, a moment too late. Caesar lay in bloodied toga on the steps leading to the outer eastern portico of his palace. I could easily hear the footfalls of those who had done the deed, fleeing in the opposite direction.

I rushed to Caesar and took his hand as I lowered myself onto the steps. “Who did this?” I demanded. But from his lips came only bloodied gurgles.

I began to rise, to head off the murderers, but Caesar’s hand grasped mine a bit tighter. He so desperately needed to speak to me. I lowered myself back to the steps and placed my ear close to him as he attempted speech.

“The...the...Cleop-pat-ra...the babe...is...mine.” His head fell lapse and death clouded over his eyes.

I sat for a moment in stunned silence. Rather than use his last breath to expose his killers, he wanted Cleopatra to know Caesarion was indeed his child and he accepted this fact.

Distantly, I heard voices near. I wanted nothing of this tangled mess, and so I departed Caesar’s side where he lay and disappeared to change myself into clean clothing and think on how I would inform Cleopatra of his words to me.



Back to Egypt

Many a month has passed since we left Rome to return to Egypt. I have yet to inform Cleopatra of Caesar's last words. I have done much thinking on the idea of ruling beside Cleopatra. This was my goal upon coming back here, as I felt I belonged by her side, being at least half Egyptian. I thought I knew what Egypt needed, but this is not the land to which I was born.

This is an Egypt taken by foreigners who have forgotten and do not care for the roots from whence my people originated. I wondered on this night if they had even heard of my father's people. I would ask Cleopatra. But, only recently had I gone to her chamber to visit and upon entering found her otherwise occupied with a man the identity of which I knew not.

At one time I thought her flirtatious nature an asset to her rule; she could after all, in a world ruled by men, convince any to do her bidding. But despite my mind manipulations, she has gone on to accomplish only as *she* pleases.

I have watched her diligently. She plays with the emotions of servants and slaves as well as guards and guardians alike. Perhaps she may fool weak-minded humans, but I am at the least dismayed by her behaviors.

Perhaps, I should leave her to rule without my advice, and of this I have thought on heavily. But, an incident only recent has changed my mind. A terrible tragedy to many. A blessing to others.

"The king is dead," echoed throughout the palace. It was still dark, but I could feel the early sun readying to climb over the sands.

I followed the voices, and like the others around me, found Cleopatra's brother/husband Ptolemy in his chamber, sprawled on the Asian carpet. I could hear no heartbeat. About a cubit from his hand I spotted a goblet, half its contents spilled on the ground. I carefully went to it, moving at a speed undetected by humans. I did not have to lift it to smell the poison that filled its original contents.

I was sure this was the doing of a queen whose mind held the grand illusion of too much power. Cleopatra was determined to rule Egypt alone and with no competition and she was beyond my manipulations.

At this point, I played with the notion of informing Cleopatra Caesar's last words to me. Not yet, said my inner voice.

Not yet.

The very next day, I caught ear of a summons for the people of Alexandria to meet Cleopatra outside the palace. Though daylight kept me from attending the meeting, I could hear it all from where I hid.

"I have sad news," she stated, though her voice held little emotion and no conviction. She continued. "My brother, King Ptolemy, has passed on to the Nether-World just last night. This is sad news indeed." She lowered her head and, hidden by her hair and head dress, no tears escaped her eyes. Cleopatra, the seventh in her line bearing such a name, had murdered her own family in order to assure the ruling position.

Even I could not boast such audacity. Yes, I took the life of her brother, Ptolemy Theos Philopater, but I was positive at the time that this would assure my position at the queen's side, a place to once again see my peoples from a ruling vantage.

But, I know now I have been merely fooling myself. In all my many human years on this earth, I have yet to come upon one as manipulative and powerful as Cleopatra.

I sigh now as I write this. And I despise the words I must scribble on this page. But here it is:

Cleopatra must die!

It took no time to make her child with Caesar the Regent beside her! I would never have the influence I had hoped. My Egypt was dead, a thing of the past. Now, to find the correct time in which to end Cleopatra's reign.

With or without her, Egypt will never be the same but I will see her go down with it.



Marcus Antonius

Cleopatra's human patience is beyond anything I have imagined any mortal could possess. She came to me tonight after a message was delivered to her.

"Kesi," she stated with enthusiastic exuberance. "Mark Antony has summoned me to discuss the events of Caesar's death."

My heart jumped a beat for I was at his side in the end. But, this no one knows. "And what do you plan to tell him?" I asked innocently.

She hoisted her nose up into the air like a spoilt child who received the toy all the others wished to have. "I refuse to be summoned like a slave. I shan't go!"

For a moment, relief touched me, but quickly dissipated. What could she say if she did go? I had told her nothing. Her mind holds no knowledge that I had even seen his death much less heard his last words.

But for now, she was merely playing with the general and politician. How she loved to use her power, to play with others like a cat with a mouse.

A month later, yet another message came from the general. He wished for her to join him yet again. He had received two silences to his summons for her to come to Rome and answer questions of Caesar. Now, however, he was heading to Tarsus in a campaign against the Parthian Empire and he needed her power and wealth to aid him.

"And you are going to accept this meeting, correct?" I asked. I stared her direct in the eye.

Cleopatra gave me a sideways glance. "Ummm, I think you shall go in my stead."

I arrived in Tarsus only yesterday and was ushered to Mark Antony's tent. I must admit I was not prepared for the intelligent and handsome man who awaited me within.

“Pardon, General,” I said. “I come in the stead of Cleopatra.”

“Oh, is that so?” He stated with a hint of sarcasm. “And did Her Majesty give a reason for her absence this time, as she has now denied me thrice?”

“No, Sir,” I bowed. “Only that I was to come in her stead and see what it is you wished her to know.”

Antony’s brows furrowed in dismay. “Hmmp. Well, then will you join me for dinner and we shall discuss Her Majesty’s wishes?”

I nodded and he rose, leading me to the tent where many meats, vegetables and exotic dishes awaited. The aroma of the food overwhelmed, however, through the generations I have grown accustomed. I did not dine, of course, and distracted by conversation, Mark Antony hardly noticed.

All during the courses, we talked and laughed, at times I admit at the queen’s expense. As it turned out, the General wished to work at taking over the Parthian Kingdom and needed Cleopatra’s power, army and wealth to aid him.

Once dinner ended, Antony invited me to his private tent in order to “discuss business affairs in private.”

I sensed of course this to be a ruse and there existed more to his intentions. He was after all, a man.

The moment we were alone and he had dismissed his guards, he approached me. So close he was I could easily smell the beer and spirits on his breath. He reached out and fingered a small braid Cleopatra’s servants had placed in my hair the morning of my departure.

“So soft,” he whispered, and took another step closer.

For a moment I considered denying his advances. However, being this close to Mark Antony would give me yet another advantage over the Queen. Besides, it was not as I held no attraction to this man. Quite the contrary, and when his lips met mine, I melted into his arms and allowed him to lift me up and carry me to his bed.

But he would not find me there come morning, for I needed to find a safe place by daybreak.

The next night I found Mark Antony conferring with his troops and essential personnel. He popped a grape into his mouth, then saw my approach and spit the seeds onto the dust.

“Ah, Kesi,” he said. “Where have you been, my dear? Would you like something to eat?”

“I had a bit of business to attend. And no thank you.”

I knew my answer would be too obscure for his liking. “What sort of business could you possess here in Tarsus?” he asked through a mouthful of grapes. “Something for your queen perhaps?”

“Oh n-no,” I stuttered. I had not thought my answer through. So unlike me. “I have never visited this world, and so I arose early... to... look around.”

Mark Antony giggled and tossed aside the grape stems. He approached and smelled my neck, which I found most odd. “Mmm, you always smell of lotus petals, even when there are none to be found.”

I relaxed. I was sure he would smell where I had slumbered, beneath the sands. I had bathed quite thoroughly to be sure any hint of the Tarsus soil had been removed. He took my hand and saw me once again to his bed.

We were awoken several hours later by a beckon of the night guard. At first, the words he bellowed were blurry from my sleep, but as I came awake they became painfully clear.

“The Queen has arrived in Tarsus. Summon General Antonius at once.”

The queen? Cleopatra? She had arrived!

Before either of us could rise and dress, the entrance to the tent parted. Through mosquito netting and silk drapes a silhouette emerged.

Cleopatra!

I made a move to flee, but was stayed by Mark Antony, who then whispered, “You will be in no trouble. I will speak with her.”

Of course. He saw me as a servant to the Queen. He was concerned for my welfare. He worried I would be severely punished for sleeping with the soldier and Roman General with whom I had visited in the queen’s behalf.

The final curtain parted and Cleopatra stepped into the darkened chamber, still no more than an elegant silhouette. I saw Antony lean

to light a lamp. He held no fear he was bedding the aid to the most powerful queen in the world.

Once she stepped toward the bed and the room was alit with flickering lamp light, Cleopatra, dressed of course in the finest silks that revealed the top of pert breasts and a slender waist, stood tall and confident.

At first, she appeared almost startled. But her facial deformities when revealing extreme expression never lasted more than a second. Only one such as I could catch it. She was jealous!

Her words, however, belied her deep inner emotion—and betrayed me.

“Kesi, what a good job. Better than I would have thought, in doing what is necessary to obtain information for me.”

Antony looked at me harshly, deceived. Angry.

I shook my head. “No, I did not—”

“Remove yourself from my bed please.” Antony stated harshly. “Guards!” he called and within moments, two of his guards broke through the entrance.

“Take her away,” was his only statement as he nodded towards me. I robed myself quickly before harsh human arms grabbed me and drew me away from the queen and the man I had made love to only hours before. I could easily have fought them away, but I saw no need. They placed me in a tent that was guarded heavily on all sides. This, of course, concerned me not. Before the sun rose, I was able to find complete darkness within a large chest stocked with treasures, obviously taken not given. I emptied the large and solid wooden chest, easily breaking the heavy chains that held its secrets and hid myself within, away from the wrath of Ra.

No one came into the tent all the day; I know, for if they had, they surely would have gone searching for me. The treasures from the chest wept all over the hot sand, and I had taken their place.

I felt night fall upon the land as I opened the trunk lid and stepped out. I had not even bothered to dress, so I was still clothed in the same attire; a mere linen robe fashioned with gems along the front.

It was not long before a guard, positioned outside, entered the tent. He stopped short and gazed about the floor at the treasures I had never bothered to replace. I expected questioning, but he merely shook

his head and said to me, “You may go now. General Antonius has provided a ship for your departure back to Alexandria.”

Though I said nothing, merely brushed past this guard on my way out, I was enraged. Instead of making my way to the dock as was expected of me, I moved to Mark Antony’s tent. I knew I would be stopped if any were to see me, so I used my speed to arrive within a mere second. Candlelight wavered against the wall of the tent.

He was not alone, for it was two voices I heard coming from within. Through the smallest of openings, I was able to slither within, remaining unseen.

As was my fear, he and Cleopatra lie together naked in his bed. He ran the back of his fingers along the smooth flesh of her cheeks. Just as he had done with me. Anger roiled within me. But it was something I had long ago learned to keep suppressed until I needed it. Why was I surprised? He, a mere man. She, a spoilt, exploitive and narcissistic queen.

I remained within the shadows and listened as Cleopatra spoke.

“I want her dead.”

At first, my thoughts convinced me it was I of which they spoke. Until I heard Antony’s reply.

“She is imprisoned and will never again see the light, my love. Why the worry?”

Cleopatra placed both palms on his cheeks. “Because, my sweet, she has those who still support her and could use them in a bid to dethrone me if she gets word out. I can take no chances.”

Mark nodded then. “Anything you wish.” And then they were once again embraced in each other’s arms.

I thought for a moment before it came to me. *Arsinoë*! Cleopatra wanted her baby sister killed ‘just in case,’ from her prison in Rome.

Inwardly, I smiled, for an ingenious plot, if only to upset Cleopatra, came into my mind.



Arsinoë

Ephesus, Turkey
Approximately 40 BC

As I write this, I sit in the dark, within a dreary and humid cave, beside the body of Cleopatra's younger sister, Arsinoë, with tears in my eyes, and a failed plan to destroy Cleopatra.

I will leave these scrolls within the dark sanctuary of this cave, for I will take no chance of anyone finding them and discovering my secrets. I have been most careless, I now realize.

Though finding my scrolls, which told of Caesar's death, would have joyed Cleopatra rather than enraged her, what I am about to write would surely have a detrimental effect on my plans if they were discovered at the palace. Here, however, they will not. No one shall ever know of Arsinoë's whereabouts or the truth to her demise.

Instead of returning to Alexandria after seeing Cleopatra and Antony together, I left immediately for Turkey. Finding Arsinoë's prison was certainly a simple task. I easily hypnotized the guard and entered the dwelling, which was more like a palace than a prison. She had all she could want in that Roman building, except freedom.

"Who are you?" she asked, startled at my sudden presence in her chamber. She had been asleep, but a single candle burned on the table beside her bed and as she opened her eyes, I was there.

"So like your sister, you look," I said.

"You know my sister?" she sat up quickly. "Has she sent you to free me?"

"No," I said simply. I sat upon the bed beside her. "She wishes you dead."

She gasped and moved to escape me, but with nowhere to flee, and my hand suddenly on her arm, she could not leave her bed.

She looked at me with wide brown eyes. "Are you going to kill me?"

"I hope not," said I. "Your sister needs a lesson in humility."

There was naught she could do as I lifted her into my arms and dashed away from her prison, and the confused guards who saw but a blur, felt but a brush of air on their cheeks. I knew to where I headed.

The caves were far away from the city, away from people. No one saw me in the night and no one frequented this locale.

I set Arsinoë down on a wide ledge and it was not until that moment that I paused. She swayed with dizziness from finding herself in one place and then another so rapidly. Rarely do I allow humans to witness the powers I possess, but she would not live to tell anyone, so it mattered not.

“What are you?” she asked exhaustedly. “Are you a god?”

“I am the daughter of a god,” I answered honestly. “A god that existed many thousands of years ago when Egypt was young. He came from the stars and he was perfect. But humans chased him and the others into myth. Only a few of their children remain. I am one.”

Surprisingly, she seemed to easily accept my query. “My sister is evil. She wishes me dead because I am not.”

“Your sister,” I countered, “is greedy. She wishes the throne and all kingdoms to herself. I have a plan to stop her. But I require your aid.”

“I will do as you wish.” She bowed to me then and I knew I had found a worthy ally. “I would rather die by a god than be executed by my own sister.”

And so on that eve I explained it all. From the moment I met Cleopatra to the night I overheard her plot to have Arsinoë executed. Interested ears listened intently, Greek eyes watched carefully. Once in awhile a question issued from her lips, if only to clarify or to understand motive. And when I had finished telling her all, I revealed my plan to take her sister down once and for all.

Outside, the sun’s presence made itself known to me as it rose into the sky. I would spend the day here. But I worried not, for Arsinoë’s words put me at ease.

She smiled then and slowly nodded. “I will help you—despite the risks.”

I returned to Alexandria before Cleopatra could miss my presence. I had already been gone quite some time, but news of Arsinoë’s disappearance whispered throughout the city.

“Where have you been?” asked Cleopatra, and then quickly added, “Nevermind, I do not care.” She spoke as if the entire affair

over a month previous between myself and Mark Antony had never happened. To her it had not. She had received what she wished—a powerful ally in Rome.

“Did you hear?” Cleopatra spoke to me as if it was my life’s obligation to be there whenever it suited her needs. “My sister has disappeared from her prison. Just like that! As if...” she halted abruptly and looked at me with furrowed brows. “As if she was taken by someone with... Kesi, where *have* you been?”

I hate using powers on anyone, but sometimes it is most necessary. And this was one of those times.

I stepped close to her, making sure my gaze and hers were firmly locked. “Why, I have been here with you, my queen. Do you not recall?”

For more than a moment she looked confused. “Oh... yes. Yes I remember now.”

I sighed. “So, tell me your news. You had something of great import to inform me!”

“I did? Oh yes... I am with child... Antony’s child. It is most exciting, is it not?”

“Very exciting.”

One night in the next week, Cleopatra came to me in quite the tizzy when we met for our evening chat and wine.

Mark Antony had gone to meet with Octavian, Caesar’s nephew and legally adopted son, about affairs to the effect of Caesar’s wishes, wills and military documents.

“I do not trust him,” said Cleopatra of Octavian. “He is the one who convinced Caesar that Caesarion is not his...”

This reminded me of Caesar’s last words to me. Should I tell her and oblige Caesar of his death wish? Or keep it to myself, for knowing this information would surely please Cleopatra. I chose to say nothing as I recalled her betrayal of me to Mark Antony.

We sat on the portico of the palace watching the stars, and my mind wandered away from the present, back to a time when I was reminded from whence my father and his people had come. I wished I could see Khufu’s pyramid from where I sat, but the distance was too great. This

place, this Alexandria, might have belonged in another country altogether. With its marble Roman columns and Greek architecture, there was little to remind me of my Egypt. Only the occasional painting, carving or statue of Ra or Bast, even Isis, and other gods from my past existed as a souvenir to my home.

“Do you understand of what I speak?” Cleopatra drew me from my reverie.

Now, what was it she had been saying?

“Of course, my Queen,” I said, though I had not heard a word. I did not have to, however, for so long as Cleopatra received recognition and admonition, she was easily appeased. She turned to me abruptly. “*Kesi!* I need you to do me the biggest of favors!”

“What is it my queen?” My heart skipped a beat, I admit, for not only could I not venture a guess as to the nature of this favor, I was still waiting on my own surprise for the queen, a surprise which should by now have arrived.

“I need you to follow Antony. Be my eyes, for I know how easily you can be invisible. Then tell me everything, where he goes and what he does.”

This was not something I wanted to do, but the excuse would allow me to check up on Arsinoë’s whereabouts.

I found myself back in Rome and watching over Antony. I admit seeing him made my heart flutter. I thought watching him would be a futile and fruitless mission, but the information I learned will aid me later on.

Due to their rival for command of the Roman army, Antony and Octavian came to a most unusual conclusion; Antony is to wed Octavia, Octavian’s sister. Antony agreed in order to keep the peace. This alone shall unsettle Cleopatra. From there, my hold on her should strengthen. But first...

I could find no hint that Arsinoë had left the caves and my hands shook, my chest clenched, for I knew what I would find upon my arrival. I rushed to the cave entrance.

“Arsinoë?” My word echoed in the emptiness.

Pain never disappoints. Arsinoë had never left the caves. The night I had last spoken to her and made our plans, I chose one last attempt to make myself a child. And the sister of the Queen of Egypt would have been perfect.

However, what I found was the last thing I wished to see. In the damp dark the earth was upturned and the walls of the cave scratched and bloodied. Her body lay in the center of the chamber, face up, eyes wide, flesh wrinkled, pale and most dead. I had seen it before, but it never ceased to hurt me deeply. I dropped down to her and wept. Would I ever be able to have a child of my own? So many times in the past I had tried...and always failed. And yet others of my kind succeeded. What was this secret?

I placed Arsinoë's body within a large crevice inside the wall and these scrolls will accompany her throughout time. I have done my best to mummify her, but without all the proper herbs, I cannot do a thorough job. I can only hope I have done her the justice she deserves, in the Egyptian way.

As for these records, the stone box I kept in Alexandria will make a nice sarcophagus to keep my past and knowledge, in the event they are one day discovered, long after Cleopatra is but a memory.



To Kill a Queen

Alexandria, Egypt

I returned to Alexandria, to find a new surprise awaited me. The months I was gone, Cleopatra gave birth to twins, one boy and one girl. Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene. The children of Mark Antony.

"Kesi!" she hailed as I approached the night of my return. "Are you not thrilled? Are they not the most magnificent of children? They

shall rule all of Rome and Egypt one day. My legacy will live on forever.”

Though her words were filled with exuberance, I felt anything but... And I knew, unlike she, that these children would never be rulers of either land. How this woman could call for the execution of her own sister all the while filling the world with children that *she* finds fit to rule, infuriates me.

My loathing of her grows. I want her dead, but I know it is not the correct time, nor the proper circumstances. If she were to turn up dead now, her throne would surely pass on to Mark Antony and I cannot see Egypt fall to him any more than I can see Cleopatra remain at its helm. I am long-lived and I am patient. When the moment has come, I shall know.

But, for now, I appease her appetites. She sat on her bed with one babe in her arms and it was suckling noisily on her breast. The other child was held by a servant.

“Give the child to Kesi!” she snapped.

“No—” I started, but Cleopatra insisted and before I could protest further, the tiny swaddling was shoved into my arms. I sat in a large chair near the bed, holding this tiny female called Selene, not knowing what to do with her. When I glanced to the queen, she was gaping at me with a sparkling smile.

I had never seen her so happy, and for that moment, I felt for her, liked her, and even envied her.

“Cleopatra, my Queen,” I started.

“Yes, what is it, Kesi? You look alarmed.” Now she stared at me with one brow arched inquisitively. “Is everything all right?”

“Caesar. He admitted to being the father of Caesarion.”

The time had come to honor Caesar’s dying breath.

“H-How do you know this?” Cleopatra sat up straight in the bed, causing the baby to lose his grip on her nipple and begin wailing. One of the servants took him immediately and rushed him from the room to quiet him.

I had to lie! It was not a tragedy that she know of Caesar’s admission, but I could not let her know I had been there and allowed this much time to pass before telling her.

The best lie is one not far from the truth. “I only just heard myself...” I said, “when I was in Rome. One of the general’s guards

had been there upon his death. He told me what Caesar said...with his dying breath.”

“How do you know he told you the truth?” she asked, cocking a brow as she does often in that arrogant manner of hers.

I frowned, tilting my head to one side. She knew my expression as I knew hers—that it was I who had spoken to the guard, and as she is aware, I can get any information I wish.

“Yes, of course,” she stated simply. “My apologies.” And then her smile grew wide. “Oh, this is such exciting news, Kesi. Whatever would I do without you?”

I offered a smug grin, but she was too elated to catch it.

It was then that I realized I still held the tiny Selene in my arms. I couldn’t see her face, as she was swaddled well so no light nor noise would disturb her slumber.

“Is she awake?” asked Cleopatra. “She needs to eat.”

Carefully, I pulled away the linen that covered her face. Atop her head a shock of black hair was thick as honey, and when she opened her eyes I saw Arsinoë in them. I gasped and handed her quickly to Cleopatra.

Taking the babe, she gazed at me curiously. “What is wrong, Kesi?” She looked at her baby, now crying due to how quickly I had handed her over to her mother.

“It is nothing,” I lied. “I am tired and would like to retire now.

“You? Retire in the early evening?” Cleopatra caught my fib easily.

I feigned a grin for her benefit. “I do apologize my queen. I shall see you tomorrow evening.”

I spun to leave, but she hailed me back. “Kesi... Why do I never see you in daylight? Do you not enjoy the sun?”

Only if I wish to die! “I am...overly sensitive to the sun and to the heat,” I said in a half truth before rushing from the palace.



Archaeologists note: Along with the scrolls were found short notes from Cleopatra to Kesi.

From Antioch

My Dearest Kesi:

The most wondrous news. Mark Antony and I have decided to wed. Octavian is quite in a rage, as Antony is still married to his sister, but we plan to resolve that issue soon. The quarrel between them rages on and I fear my own forces shall have to interfere soon.

Please give the children my love and keep them safe until we return to Alexandria.

*Your Queen,
Cleopatra*

Dearest Kesi:

My apologies for taking so long to send word. There has been much turmoil between my husband and his rival, Octavian. I know how you hate the details of politics, so I will not bore you with them. However, I do wish you were here in Rome, for I have great news. Marcus and I have another child, a son. I have named him Ptolemy Philadelphus. He has his father's grand looks and spirit. One day he shall be a great

ruler, I can see it in his eyes. I wait with bated breath for you to meet him.

I shall see you soon, as we shall be returning to Alexandria within the month.

*Your Queen,
Cleopatra*



Cleopatra and Mark Antony have ventured from Alexandria to Rome often, but I see change on the horizon. Due to Antony's devotion to Cleopatra, he has backed her in almost every aspect of her reign. Thus, I am seeking a way to get through. I need to remove her from the throne before she causes more damage. She and Antony have become a mighty force together, but I hear news from Rome that citizens and army alike are angry with Antony. War has always given me an excuse and I can almost see a plan to take down both Antony and Cleopatra.

Most unexpected. I write this from Greece. Due to the conflict between Marcus Antonius and Rome, he and Cleopatra have chosen to take all of the children to Greece.

When did I become a nanny? Yet now, in order to watch over Cleopatra, and due to my nocturnal lifestyle, I have been called upon to follow along and watch over the children. Fortunately, as they are human, they sleep most of the time and I am free to visit the city, feed,

and plot revenge upon Cleopatra for what she has done—to my land, to my life, to my ego...and to Egypt. Although, I admit, she is doing herself in quite well, with or without my aid.

Cleopatra and those around her know my deep hatred for politics, but they do not know my love for squabble and war. Always can one such as I hide easily within chaos and so I find myself at an advantage. Octavian has sent his naval forces to attack those of both Marcus and Cleopatra. Cleopatra has backed away, calling her ships in. She informs me she fears she will end up a slave to Rome as her sister had—and disappear in the same manner. Antony is angry. More chaos ensues. More advantage for me. A plan forms in my mind.

This day, Cleopatra came to me as I awoke. Due to my ‘sensitivity’ to the sun, she had built a chamber within the home in which no sun will enter. I am able to sleep upon an actual bed for one of the few times in my long life. Her kindness to me sometimes makes me feel guilty for my plans to dethrone her. But, then I remember...

“Kesi!” I heard the voice before I was fully awake. The sun had not yet fully disappeared and I still felt its sting outside my sealed room.

I blinked my eyes open painfully. Cleopatra climbed into bed beside me. It had been many years since I had cared enough for the queen to share a bed with her. I was not quite awake enough to move.

“Kesi, we are moving back to Alexandria. *Home!*”

I rubbed at my eyes. “But, what of Octavian and his army? Do you not fear his wrath should you return?”

“Greece is beautiful, but it is not home.”

I groaned and rolled to face her. “Will you be leaving Antony then?” Suddenly, I was awake...and very curious.

“Oh, no, of course not. Though he plans to return to Rome to care for matters there.”

“So, you have made up then?”

Cleopatra grinned wide. “Of course. He is my true love and I his. We cannot stay angry with one another over a simple matter of politics. He understands why I pulled my ships from his squabble.”

Squabble! Hmm Hundreds of humans lost their lives in that ‘squabble!’

“I believe you wise to pull back your ships.”

“Yes I do agree... Now please awaken. I shall await you on the portico. The sun is gone, you can come and visit now. Take tea with me. We are going *home!*”

We have been in Alexandria for a month now. Cleopatra has been in better spirits since we returned to Egypt. Sometimes I wish I could inform her that Egypt has been my home for thousands of years and as I was born to an Egyptian mother, it is more my home than hers. She does not know what it truly means to be Egyptian. Nor to care for those less fortunate.

Since arriving back in Alexandria, I have been listening carefully to conversations all around the city. Many Egyptian citizens are quite angry with Cleopatra. They feel she has sold out to Roman rule. Many wish her ill will, or pray for her death. They want new rule... rule that will aid the people.

To-night I walked to the Pharos Lighthouse. I spotted him sitting within a doorway, his body in shadow and only his outstretched arm flickering in the light of lamps. A beggar.

“Please,” he pleaded, “even a deben. I am so hungry.”

I stopped and sat beside him. His stench nauseated, but I needed to know. “How did you come to be in this state?” I asked.

He swallowed hard and glanced down at his hands, which he wrung together. Bony fingers then motioned toward Cleopatra’s palace. “I do not mean to speak ill of the Queen, but she cares too much for Rome and the affairs of her husband, while her citizens grow more hungry by the day.”

Before departing, I visited the local bakery before it could close. I secured bread, wine and cheese. These I gave to each beggar I came across on the streets, even the man I had spoken with, and their gratitude was obvious, as was the dealings of ordinary people—outside the palace. In her blind love and greed, Cleopatra was allowing her own citizens—Egyptian citizens—to go hungry. This can be no longer!

If this had not convinced me of the selfish doings of a queen undeserving, that which came about later that evening certainly made my mind up.

I entered the chamber in which Cleopatra often holds her meetings. No one was in attendance, however, sprawled upon the

table many scrolls, parchments and letters rested. Quickly I scanned them until one in particular caught my eye. A letter, simple in its execution, its wax seal broken, it had been left upon the table as trash or dropped in a rush to see to its resolve. I lifted this letter and read its contents. I dropped it back to the table as if it burned to touch.

The letter was from Octavian to Cleopatra. He wished Mark Antony dead, but he wanted the queen herself—Antony's wife—to see to this deed. His claim was to ally with Cleopatra and her army if carried on with his wish.

I saw my plan come to fruition!

"Send word to Antony that you are dead," I suggested to Cleopatra.

"And how would this save Antony and remove him from Octavian's line of fire?"

She sat in the milky bath with only me for company; to 'counsel' her in this most delicate of manners.

"If you are gone, Antony will be free and Octavian will not only cease his campaign against your husband, but will realize he cannot have your aid. Once the mark is off of you, we can then inform Antony you have not passed on and his relief will be so that he will not be angry at the ruse."

The sparkling brown eyes gazed down and Cleopatra wrung her hands together. "I am not sure. It will break Antony's heart."

Inwardly, I smiled. "Only for a short time, and once he sees you again... Well, think on how intensely blissful he shall be."

Her head nodded slowly. "Yes. Yes, this could be most beneficial. If Octavian thinks me dead, I can then make moves against him that will bring him down, as well as his army and his foolish campaigns against my husband."

On this night, I spoke to Cleopatra's messenger. She had written a letter she entrusted only to me to hand to him, a letter to be delivered into the hands of Mark Antony only, and no one else.

But, this letter would never make it to Rome. Of this I was sure, for I burned it, and visited her messenger myself.

"Tell Mark Antony his wife wishes to take her own life," I said, using my power of persuasion all too easily on his small mind. "Go

straight away and talk to no one else. Tell Antony she cannot bear to be involved in the plot against him by Octavian and so she will deliberately allow an asp to bite her. Her death shall be swift and she shall be gone before he can return to Alexandria.”

He was on his way that same hour. Antony, I knew, would come at once, in an attempt to try and stop her or save her, despite my words that she will be dead before he arrives. I have seen and sensed Mark Antony’s devotion to her. He may even take his own life, which plays into my plan. Once he arrives, her death will be imminent.

And so tomorrow night, I shall share a milk bath with the queen alone, insisting on our privacy to discuss delicate matters. My meal will be swift and satisfying. And, as I write this, a basket rests by my feet. The deadly asp inside a pawn to change the reign of Egypt forever.



“The Alchemist”

Entry One entered on hemp yet written in the hand of ancient Egypt. Student findings believed these texts to correlate with others previously discovered by Dr. Jonathon Brumble and thus sent them on. Found deep within an excavated waterfall cave in Hunan Province, China, near the Yangtze River. Circa approximately 10 B.C.

He speaks as if we are a blight. Yet, what we are is no disease. Nor is it a gift. His name is Yin. I found him one cold night when the Chinese New Year festival had begun.

Above me the night sky was lit with colors streaming down and returning to earth as sparks and ash, coalesced with the cheers and screams of the thousands of humans that surrounded me. Red dragons and colored lanterns floated by, flickering in an eerie glow of candlelight. I was accustomed to being around people, as from the time I left Egypt, I had traveled to many densely populated places.

Yet that night I felt crowded, my mind whirled and a curious sensation overcame me. I pulled myself from the scent of smoke and swarm of human bodies and melted into the shadow of an empty doorway. As my body came against the door, it creaked, a slight sound barely heard. I had not the intention of entering, but once again I was drawn—a pull that goes beyond explanation found my hand pushing the door open.

"Nihao?" I called out, the only variation of the Chinese greeting that I knew.

My mangled attempt at a foreign language was met with silence.

I lurked deeper into the dwelling, which was quite large by the standards of most houses in the city region. As my sight is quite good in the night, I was able easily to see the intricate detail of wood and stone, and the murals and paintings sprawled throughout the home as I padded through vast hallways and into a center courtyard. The yard itself, situated as the home's centre, as most in this country are, was fairly deplete of life. Several small trees planted in juxtaposition to one another lined the mid section and around the perimeter stood various bushes and small flowering plants meticulously tended despite the chilly air.

I moved toward the southern portion of the home. Most doors within the dwelling stood open, their nearly bare rooms making me wonder if anyone resided here at all, and why everything inside me lured me deeper.

I followed the instinct, slinking along to wherever it strengthened, moving away from its weakest points, until I came to a large set of double doors, painted red and boasted with elaborate carvings of

symbols and animals. Whatever, or whomever, had lured me there was beyond this door. This I knew with utmost certainty.

I placed a palm against the smooth wood of the raised carving of a tiger ready to strike. The door opened mutely.

I smelled it before I could see where it originated—the scent of human blood. A pang of hunger nearly halted me with its intensity. It had been a week since I had fed, as humans willing to feed blood drinkers had by this time become quite rare.

Movement, ever so slight, stirred within the darkest corner of the room, empty but for a wood bed that dwelt within that same corner. A moan issued, and I moved closer to the source of the delicious aroma. Someone lay on the bed and, though the deepest dark I had ever experienced surrounded me, I easily found her by the delectable aroma spilled from flesh, and the diminutive moan uttered from her throat.

She wore a simple blue silk dress that rode up on slender thighs, hands and bare feet bound to the posts of the wooden platform on which she lay. Her head moved from one side to the other as if she dreamt the most terrible of dreams, but her eyes were open and she gaped at me as I neared.

Her lips parted. She seemed to want to speak, to tell me what had happened to her. But her voice was mute. I needed to find the source of the blood I smelled. I was so very famished and in need of sustenance.

I lowered myself to sit beside the bound woman and bent close to her, to listen. It was then I noticed the small punctures that marred the perfect flesh of her throat. Startled, I leapt to my feet. Someone had fed on her and recently. And that someone was still here, that was what my mind sensed, what lured me into this home.

One of my own kind.

So long ago my people left this earth for a new life amongst the stars. Where they are now, where they went, I do not know. After Jabari passed, I traveled this large place. So many lands, so many faces and events, I cannot keep them all within my mind. But of my own race, I have seen none. Until now.

He was here, somewhere. And I was uninvited in his home with this girl on his bed, a meal or an attempt at creating a child of his own? I should have left well enough alone. But, I needed to know.

Within the last several centuries, I heard of others that met with success in creating the 'children' I wanted so desperately yet so often failed in my attempts. And so, I have been seeking them, either those left behind or their children, I cared not. Now, it appeared I may have found both. I heard a name once. Yin. And this name brought me here to China.

Throughout the years, I have discovered I have the ability to manipulate certain minds into telling me what I wish to know. I am not sure how, and I have met no other with such an ability, but I rarely use it. This was, however, such an occasion that I felt it necessary. Perhaps I could extend my reach into her mind, give this mute girl a voice with my power. I required light, however, so this human may see me.

I lowered myself once again beside her, and when I did she began once more to moan. In her silent way she pleaded me not to leave her there. I assured her I was going nowhere, though once again my Chinese was anything other than mediocre at best. She must have understood for she nodded then fell silent.

It did not take long to find several small lanterns, ready for lighting in lieu of the Chinese New Year. I lit one with available flint and carried it to the bed. Setting it on the slab by the human's head, I proceeded to look into her face, flickering a pale red and orange in the slight lamplight. The whites of her eyes were clear around the dark brown orbs, making her fear apparent. Black hair like silk splayed on the small pillow beneath her head. I could not help my awe. What an heir she would make; beautiful with the eyes of innocence only a child could possess. I wanted right there to make her my own. But, I reminded myself, I had failed for centuries, and to waste such a beauty would be a shame indeed.

And so, to keep my mind from the aroma of her blood and the need to bring her in as my own child, I peered longingly into those orbs of depth and sorrow.

"What happened to you, please tell me?" I said, in broken Chinese.

Again, her lips parted, but no words came forth, merely the same whimper as I had heard previous. I looked deeper, extending my mental grasp into her mind. "Who did this to you?"

As her mouth opened, I waited, coaxing her to speak.

"Leave her be!" The voice came from behind me. I rose and spun.

Though little light from the small lamps could reach across the room, I saw him clearly. And I knew what he was. His waist-length black hair draped over his shoulders and down his back, and shone as if he stood in moonlight, his dark eyes curious as he stared with crossed arms waiting for an answer. This was Yin. I was sure of it now. The long silk Chinese dragon robe whispered as he moved a mere step toward me.

"You are Yin?" I asked.

"Step forward," he requested without answering my question.

I did as he asked, taking one step into the diffused light.

Yin drew a deep breath, dropping his arms to his sides. "I know who you are. Kesi of Giza. Am I correct?" He spoke this time in the old language of our fathers.

I nodded once. "You know me? I do not know you." It was much more comfortable speaking in my native tongue.

"Apparently you do as you are in my home and you speak my name."

"I heard your name spoken once, nothing more. I have searched the world seeking more of us who remained behind—and for sustenance."

Yin sighed contritely. "There are few who allow us to feed willingly any longer."

I glanced to the girl on the bed before speaking. "And her? She does not look willing to me."

He paused and appeared to have a thought before speaking once more. "Kesi, come with me."

At that he turned and walked from the room. I was not accustomed to being treated as a subservient, following obediently when one simply commands it. But, my curiosity won and I pushed ego aside to follow.

He led me down a long hall of paper and bamboo, and stopped at a locked room. From around his neck he pulled a silk cord on which dangled a key he used to unlock the door. He pushed the heavy wood-carved door open and moved to light a lantern. I did not take my eyes from him, he moved like a sigh on a light breeze. Surely, I thought, he was more *Pet Mer* than human.

And then the lantern illuminated the room and I took a step back from what I saw. The room was bathed in white, but in its centre stood a table of teak, shining sleek in the lamplight. Atop the table a tray of the most sinister tools I had ever seen, and beside that bottles that were filled with various liquids and dry herbs.

"Are you an alchemist?" I asked. "Or a healer?" I hoped he would admit to one or the other, as whatever else came to mind was too unpleasant a thought.

"Both I would suppose," he said. "I think I have found the cure!" His voice rose with exhilaration.

"Cure for what?" My curiosity was surely peaked. His answer, however, took me by surprise.

"For us," he said simply.

Confusion trampled my mind. "I do not understand."

"For what we are. Or more simply, what we can create." He spoke as if I should understand his words. My confused expression and the slight shake of my head urged him to give more information. "You have no problem with this...this existence? Do you not wish there was a treatment of sorts? A way to be completely human?"

"*What?*" I was for once at a loss for words. I had never thought who I am, or what I am, as a dilemma to be resolved. Quite the contrary, I have always been proud of my lineage.

"Think about it, Kesi. We are starving to death very slowly. So, we either feed off the unwilling or we die. And then many go on to create others, humans, aberrations, who need blood to survive as well! We teach them the ways of our fathers, not to kill, but how is this possible now? We are bestowing our unfortunate circumstance onto innocent others!"

Blight. He spoke of the 'children' I wished to have in my life. The family I wanted to create. But this I knew now I could not tell him.

"I did not give it much thought," I lied.

"Kesi," he said enthusiastically. "If I could cure humans of this plague our kind has bestowed upon them, I could save so many lives. So many are being born now, being made. They are hungry, they are murdering. They make it more difficult for us to find humans who are willing. *They soil our lineage!*"

His enthusiasm had turned to rage with such velocity it startled me. In defense and without thought, my words came unaltered. "I have

been quite hungry and I admit to taking an unwilling human here and there, but I simply manipulated them into enjoying it!"

Yin's tirade halted abruptly. "Manipulate? How?"

"Apparently, I have the ability, though somewhat small, to enter a human's mind and suggest what I wish. It is not something I do often, and it is not a practiced ability."

"That is extraordinary. I have never heard of this endowment. To my knowledge I possess no *gifts* of any kind. I am simply a drinker of blood who happens to be half human, son of the *Pet Mer* from Egypt and a Chinese born human mother."

"I have used it on occasion to aid in feeding from humans, but rarely as I do not wish to feed on the unwilling."

"Unfortunately, Kesi, I possess no powers. Nor does any other that I have met. Although, I did once meet a child of the *Pet Mer* who could walk in sunlight. Perhaps, some fortuitous gifts were bestowed upon a few of us and not others? I myself have found no such abilities within my grasp. Alchemy and medicine, however, have always been a passion. And so, I use them to create a cure for...for the aberrations."

He spoke as if there were so many humans who had been altered, and yet I had not met even one. Matter of fact, Yin was the only one of my own kind I had met since I left Egypt. So, where were all of these 'aberrations' as he called them? I needed to hear more, though I knew I would never agree to his experimentation.

"And the human in the bed chamber?" I nodded in the direction of the room where the poor girl lay bound.

Yin nodded and let out a soft chortle. "She is not human—well, she will not be much longer."

Was he saying what I thought? This man had the gift—although he saw it as a curse—to create the children I had always desired, and he used that gift instead to destroy them! He wished to 'cure' a miracle. "You have succeeded in creating children of your own?"

He stared at me pensively. "Children." He lowered himself onto the only wooden chair, which sat by the table of equipment I now knew was used to torture humans in the name of science, of a cure.

His expression grew distant, as if a long past memory had just appeared in his mind. "I once had what you refer to as a child." He looked up at me and I saw a single tear glisten in one eye.

My heart seized with emotion and I stepped to him, placed a loving hand on his shoulder. He reached up and covered my hand with his own. His head bowed, then he spoke once again. "I admit he was like a son to me, so your assessment is quite accurate. We traveled together, but soon he had grown very hungry. He could not go without repast for as long as I.

"One night, our quarrels, which had become quite regular, exploded. 'I can no longer live in hunger,' he screamed. I tried to calm him, but his accusations squeezed me with their power. 'Why did you do this to me?' he asked. 'Why?' After that, he disappeared into the night. I could sense him. I could sense his pain. I went after him several times, but he always ran. He started to kill indiscriminately. He traveled. He killed. And so I killed him."

I removed my hand from his shoulder. The ice within his last words chilled me, so I had to step away. He knew the secret and yet he killed with what appeared unconscionable detachment. I needed to know his secrets. If only I could find a way—perhaps, I thought, I had been erring in some manner.

Carefully, I spoke. "If you are so intent on 'curing' humans of our kind, then why create more as you have done with that girl?"

He looked back up at me. His eyes were once again dry, emotion passed. "I needed subjects on which to perform my experiments, did I not?" He imparted a flagitious grin. "You and the others that are directly related to the *Pet Mer* do not understand what a plague on this earth it is to possess the ability to engender these killers."

But you killed, I wanted to say, but remained quiet. I would need more information, to meet others who had bore children in this manner. I refused to believe all humans created by our kind were killers.

I pleaded with him to impart his knowledge, everything he had done, everything he knew. And, fortunate for my quizzical nature, he was more than happy to oblige. He saw me as no threat to his research, and really I was not. What could I do, aside from killing him, to stop his experiments? I needed his information before I could make a choice.

And so, on that night I learned the secret to creating my own family. Taught to me by an alchemist who wanted nothing more than to destroy them all.



Entry Two

My mind spun as I woke. Yin lay sprawled naked on his stomach in bed beside me, his face obscured by long black hair of silk.

Night's shadows had not yet overtaken the world, but I was safe in this house, its bamboo shutters keeping the deadly light of day outside where it belonged.

What had I stepped into? After a long discussion the previous night, which lasted well close to daylight, of how he succeeded in making an heir for himself, we had made love and fallen asleep wrapped in the comfort of two beings rare in this world, taking consolation in the knowledge we existed still. Finding a mate, someone like myself to share eternity with was foremost on my mind, and having 'children' was a possibility with Yin of which I'd only dreamt, however cruel his desires. I could easily have convinced myself that I could change his desires to 'cure' any heir we might choose to bring into this world. But, I knew better. And I knew what I must do.

As I slipped from the bed and into my clothing, the girl bound to the bed down the hall came into my mind. Yin had revealed to me the secret, if one could call it such, of creating an immortal heir. This he had inflicted upon the girl and, according to his information, she should be half way to her transformation by now.

I needed to know. I needed to see. I slunk in silence down the hallway, avoiding any rays of the deadly sun that peered through paper partitions, wooden walls and bamboo screens.

Though the room was bathed in shadow, daylight continued to provide enough light to see by, yet she on the bed was saved from it by the curtains that protected her.

She slept soundly, not moving, when I emerged and approached the bed. Just as the night before, I sat beside her. She must have been deep into whatever process was taking place in her physical body at that moment for she did not stir. Yet I could clearly see the slight rise and fall of her chest as she took and released breath.

From Yin, I had learned her name was Lihua. He had met her in a house of ill repute. She served man as a prostitute, and the thought of any man doing as they pleased to her young body made me angry, protective. I needed to take her away from this place, to save her. According to Yin, she belonged to him, but I have not believed in the possession of other humans for many centuries now. She was a person, human still by the scent of her blood, and I was taught by my father to respect freedom, and that despite my birthplace and certain customs of humankind, the truth remained that women held no less privilege than men. It was then I made my decision.

I unbound her wrists and ankles. Reaching my arms beneath her slender figure, I lifted her off the bed and carried her toward the door.

Fortunately, Yin had not yet arisen, and I was able to slip from his home undetected.

Twilight was upon China and I felt the sting of the setting sun as I carried Lihua to the dwelling I called home.

I placed her on the soft bedroll where I slept on the floor within a room with no window. She was so still, if it had not been for her soft breath, I would have thought her dead.

I smoothed her silky hair beneath her and placed her hands upon her chest over the silk of her dress. She would be comfortable there, I thought. And then I waited.

As the sun set completely, I heard her moan, saw her stir. Her breath became deeper and when she opened her mouth as if to speak, I saw them—the small sharp teeth just as my kind had inherited from our fathers.

Yin had explained to me that a blood transfer was necessary to give the human an adequate dose in which to transform them into an immortal blood drinker like us—a child. An heir. I knew this, of course, but my attempts in the past had met with such profound failure, I wondered what he had done differently in order to succeed. He had explained the process step by step, and one day I hoped to try on my own progeny, but at this time I had only Lihua, and she had been made by Yin. In essence, I had stolen his child.



Caractacus and Rome

Though much of this entry takes place in Rome and nearby, the documents found were located during excavation in northern England in 1956. Carbon dating, Approximately 43 A.D.

We move around quite a bit. Lihua and I tried to stay ahead of Yin's watchful eye.

Once he discovered I had stolen his "experiment," he began a search to find me. I admit I had taken on more than I had anticipated, but I could not leave Lihua to his savage designs. He had chosen after her alteration was complete, to then use her "blood and flesh as a medium for creating a serum that would kill off the agents responsible for the transformation from human to blood drinker."

For over 50 years now we have avoided him, moving around continuously. I forever keep a vigilant ear out for any hint of his whereabouts, though this has become increasingly difficult as my connections to Egypt and other lands have grown cold. I am no longer the offspring of the revered *Pet Mer*, but a fugitive traveling from one strange land to the next, keeping my name hidden, and in essence estranging myself from all I have ever known. Even my own father, if he were to return to earth, could not find me.

For a long while Lihua and I holed up in a small village outside of Rome. Our cottage was miniscule, just three rooms, but we were happy there. We dwelt deep within a wooded area that was very difficult to see or find unless looking for it. A few kilometers to the south was a tiny village. It was there that I met an alluring man by the name of Caractacus. A British Chieftain who had inherited lands split between himself and his brother.

I overheard him one night when I had passed by a private residence. I paused, listening. I was in search of human blood to feed myself and my daughter. He was in need of manpower in a planned invasion against the Roman armies in Britannia. How brazen, I thought, to be seeking forces against Rome while only several days' outside the residence of the Emperor.

The night was sultry, and a mist arose from the Rubicon river nearby, sprawling across the land like ghosts ready to devour any who dared venture out. I needed to know this leader.

I waited until the time was right, when Caractacus exited the dwelling to relieve himself of too many spirits. As he stumbled, laughing, from the establishment, I waited until he had finished what he'd exited for, and then I approached him.

He looked at me in grave curiosity. My dress revealed just enough to keep his eyes occupied as I spoke.

"I was wondering if you could aid me, good kind sir," I said, knowing the language which men needed to hear. They preferred the weak female who required their aid. And so I assumed a false persona.

He bowed his head briefly, long dark curly locks that had been tied back once neatly now falling from their binding to frame his face. "And what is it I can do for you?"

"My daughter and I—we are so very hungry." I looked up through long dark lashes, and when his eyes caught mine finally, I made my move. "We would love for you to find us human blood on which to survive for several weeks."

When I was able, I often used my gift of persuasion to procure meals, but on many it either did not work at all, or they came out of the trance too soon and fought for release. This put Lihua and I at great risk of discovery. And so I learned which minds would take my suggestions the most readily. Caractacus was a leader, honor bound. He would understand the suggestion of starvation and his inner nature would require he fulfill the need.

His dark eyes sparkled in their trance-like state. "I am at your service, Miss. Whatever I have is yours."

He followed me home without incidence or question. I set him on the stuffed chair by the fire and handed him a glass of wine. Still under my influence, he sipped happily as Lihua and I took our fill, without harming him, without killing him.

Once done, I sent my daughter off to bed. I took Caractacus's hand and lifted him from the chair. He was none the wiser that we had taken his blood. The colour I could feel return to my cheeks, and I knew Lihua would sleep well this night.

"Thank you," I said to him with a bow. But I did not want him to depart. Not just yet. I knew he had a wife waiting for him at home, but

the sanctity of marriage meant nothing to me any longer. After Jabari passed, love in the traditional sense had begun to flow from my soul. Life became about need and need alone. And that night I needed to spend with a man of honor.

Whatever his loyalties faded with my suggestions as I unbound his beautiful waves and let his hair flow free over broad shoulders. Once rid of the restriction of clothing, we lay together, naked and close, the heat of our bodies radiating like the sun I had never seen for myself. This man held me as spellbound as I him. And when he entered me it was as if Heaven had come down to earth to join us.

His kiss was fire that burned across my flesh and left a trail of ecstasy I had not felt in a thousand years. He left me spent and exhausted, yet wanting more. But I needed to not be greedy. I had taken enough from this man, although I knew this would not be the last time we would have dealings.

My name was obscure, my whereabouts unknown. Even an influential man such as Caractacus would not find me once I had chosen to hide, to leave him dazed and confused outside the dwelling where I had taken him, where he would return unaware of what had transpired this night.

Later in the month, I followed Caractacus back to a south-eastern portion of Britannia, occupied by his own tribe, Catuvellauni. They were busy expanding territory and I knew my daughter and I would be safe there. Britannia, I had also heard, was a place of influence towards female domination. Lihua and I had all too often been captive of and subject to male rule throughout the years. It was time for women to show their strength. I heard of Britannia as island and female personification. I needed to remain close to Caractacus's passion, his blood. He enthralled me.

As most lands were occupied by Rome, this made it essentially simple for Lihua and me to hide. The constant invasions by Roman armies kept chaos among lands from my old homeland of Egypt to the far reaches of Armenia. In Britannia we were well able to remain completely invisible.

But, even in this far away land, Yin haunted our dreams.

One cold eve of the winter solstice, Lihua and I sat bathed in the flickering firelight of our small cottage fireplace. I with a rare book,

as Lihua sat quietly in contemplation. It was then she spoke of him, which was a rare occasion as she never felt easy bringing up the name of the man who made her.

“Mother,” she said to me. “How long must we run?”

I looked up from the book. Her pale flesh, which had once held the yellowish tint of her birth lineage was long gone, her ebony hair now long enough that she kept it braided and tossed over one shoulder. She called me Mother, though I had not had any part in her creation. She knew the truth, of course. All of it. She was well aware of Yin’s intentions for her. I held nothing from the only child I had ever known and loved, even if she had not been born of my own ability. Yet, I was the only mother she had ever known, even as a mortal, she often reminded me how alone she had been.

“I do not know,” I replied. “As long as Yin seeks us and wishes ill will on me for taking you from him we shall move and run.”

“We are strong. Why can we not take him if he comes for us? We have heard nothing more of his experiments. Do you not think if he had bore more blood drinkers for his research, we would have heard? Your spies have kept you abreast of every news from within China and Yin’s life. He has not followed us, correct? Not in at least 25 years. Perhaps he has given up? I am sure in all this time he has found others to take my place as his experiments.”

I truly loved Lihua for her positive outlook. But reality had never become part of her youthful gifts.

“Oh, my daughter, my sweet Lihua.” I set down my book and went to her, knelt before her and took her face in my hands. “Even after all these years you are so young still. So I. Your sire, Yin, he made you specifically for a task that meant all to him. He shan’t give up. I felt his determination the one night we spent together. We must either remain a step ahead of him—or we fight until he is dead. His anger is toward me for taking you, not toward you for being taken. He is patient, as all of my kind are, and he will wait an eternity if he must, for that right moment.”

Lihua’s eyes met mine and I saw in them a determination I had never before seen cross her smooth features of innocence. Her words astounded me. “Then we fight!”



Entry Two

For quite some time, Lihua and I existed well under the care of Caractacus in Britannia. Even from the battlefield, he made sure we were well care for, and though I knew he remembered only what suggestions I implanted in his mind, there is an inner spirit within him that recalls the nights of passion we had shared. The blood he offered. Such sweet nectar.

Unfortunately, his last attempts at defeat met with failure and Caractacus moved north, into the territory of Queen Cartimandua. Though we remained within Caractacus's territory, unknown, our communication with the great chieftain continued. For a short while anyway.

One night, very recently, a messenger who was under my influence to tell no one of our whereabouts, brought ghastly news. Queen Cartimandua had betrayed my beloved! Caractacus had been taken prisoner and returned to Rome to stand trial before Emperor Claudius. Whispers abounded that he was to be put to death. My heart seized in terror at the thought.

If there was anything I could do to save him, I had to try. And so, against my better judgment, I returned to Rome.

I left Lihua behind, so she may remain safe and out of the reach of Roman occupation. The cottage we had procured within Britannia was so far within the wooden lands no one would dare venture there. Besides the area had been reported as "haunted by the spirits of vengeful Roman soldiers," a rumour I myself had begun and manipulated into the minds of locals. This kept all away. And thus I held confidence that Lihua was safe in my absence.

There was very little I could do in aid of freeing the man who provided mine and my daughter's sustenance, the man who had been my lover. Most trials were held during daylight hours. Though indoors, I could only watch from helpless shadows as Caractacus was paraded before the Roman rulers in judgment of his actions.

The procession marched forth. First the king's dependents and retinue, and then Caractacus's wife and daughter, his brother

Togodumnus as well—who had been reported dead yet was apparently very much alive.

When at last Caractacus himself was marched out, I had to lower my gaze. I felt the dishonour Rome had tried to bestow on this proud man; naked and painted with characters and symbols of beasts. He was bound by chains around his middle as well as his neck. His silky hair hung in tangled waves along his shoulders and back. His face had begun to stubble with human hair. He stood proud before Emperor Claudius.

So easily could I have overpowered them, taken Caractacus from this shame, away from his wife even and his daughter. Taken him for my own. But one day, my spell would no longer hold him and I could not be sure what action he would take. Would he be frightened? Would he run back to his wife? Would he bear me ill will? No, I could not do this to him. I held him in the highest regard. In my own way I loved him. I could do naught anyhow, as the sun within the sky would take me before I could reach him.

As it turned out Caractacus needed none of my aid. His power of speech freed him, and his family, from the death that would surely have awaited others.

"Had I made that prudent use of my prosperity, which my rank and fortune would have enabled me to make, I had come hither rather as a friend than as a prisoner; nor would you have disdained the alliance of one descended from illustrious ancestors, and sovereign over many nations. My present condition, disgraceful as it is to myself, reflects glory on you. Possessed as I once was of horses, men, arms and wealth, what wonder is it if I parted from them with reluctance. Had I sooner been betrayed, I had neither been distinguished by misfortune nor you by glory. But if you now save my life I shall be an eternal monument of your clemency."

And so my time with Caractacus was over. He would return to his family and my influence will have wiped any memory of blood and sex from his mortal mind. Whatever role he played in human history would be noble; that of his conquer and bravery. Nothing more.

And so I returned to Britannia. To my daughter and our simple life. I took what little blood I could get away with from locals in the village, using manipulation to erase me from their memories.

I heard no more of Caractacus.



Yin's Experiment

*This short "note" was found in a location similar to the previous, but
dates well into the 4th century*

Entry One

It has been a very long time since life has offered more than a fleeting glimpse of danger or chaos. For the most part, the past century has gone off without a hitch. Or has it been two? It is so hard to tell, as each day passes into the next with such ease, they melt like ice in the hot desert.

Lihua and I lived an obscure life hidden within the woods and wilds of the countryside, but I grew bored. Each night passed like most. I would find my way into the village, take a man who fell easily into my manipulation, bring him home for my daughter and I to feast upon, then leave him before his home, dazed and with no recollection of his whereabouts, blaming lack of memory on too much indulgence. If he was to my physical liking, I would please him with a night of passion.

To make our lives a bit more interesting, on occasion I procured a ride into London to spend a few days, drinking in the local gluttony. There, we would rent a room with as much privacy as could be afforded given our circumstance. By day we would remain within, but once night fell upon the city, it belonged to us. Ah, what a time could be had...

London.

I sit now, wine untouched in my hand, its earthy elegance greeting me with no pleasure. I stare out at the fog of a grey sunset that washes the dank streets, filled with waste and decay. Life goes on for people, but mine has ended. I am dead. Not a literal death, as humans experience, but the most fervid death of heart and inner being. More profound even than when I lost Jabari. I breathe still, yet I merely exist. I am un-dead. I do not think. I try not to feel. I am an empty shell. I have not taken sustenance in over a week. I have not left my home, this seat by the window. I wait now. I wait to sense him, he who ended my life. And when I do, I shall end him!

No other writings had been found until the discovery of this next entry. Carbon dating confirms the year mentioned in the entry. Mid 13th century. Written on paper in ink, it was located by a civilian doing renovations, inside the wall of an old townhouse outside London in 1995.

Entry Two

The year is now 1279 by the Julian calendar. Nearly a thousand human years and yet to me a day. Time, pain. We experience it so differently than other beings. We are eternal. Time does not exist, but pain and suffering are forever. Even now, I can well recall the details.

How do I begin? How do I relay in words the day I died? I shall begin from the start. That is the best place, is it not?

London in the 4th century shielded Lihua, my daughter, and myself well from Yin. We spent a mote of time there, Lihua and I. In a public house with heating under the floor and hot tubs, bath houses and more. The place was amazing, even with all I had seen. It was Roman built and so columns stretched floor to ceiling, gorgeous marble tile all around. Unlike most Roman bath houses, this one

boasted some measure of privacy. And privacy was something I treasured.

One night, after all humans had gone off to bed for the night, I enjoyed the baths to myself. It was a typical London eve, fog rolled over the city and the chill of the air was visible in the mist of my breath. Naked, I lowered myself into the warm bath, my muscles relaxing on contact.

Lihua had remained in the room as she wished to catch up on studies and reading. I kissed her forehead, expressed my love, and said I would return shortly. That was the last I saw of her for awhile.

I returned to an empty room. "Lihua?" I called out.

Her manuscripts remained on the table, as if she had been interrupted in midst of a thought. I searched our small room, but she was not in sight. Perhaps she had gone for a meal, I thought. But, she never went out without me. Heart pounding, I ventured out of doors. Terror pounded within my breast. Well without, I searched, and close to the Saint Paul's Cross, I found what I had been seeking.

I sensed his presence long before I saw him; that familiar quiver within my mind that I felt so rarely, only when near one of my own kind. Yin. He bore his own energy, and I felt his particular presence long before I laid eyes upon him. He detected me as I did him.

"I knew you would find me," echoed a voice from the shadows of the Cathedral. He stepped out and as the minuscule light struck the sparkling black hair my heart jumped. Time had done well by him, and I wanted to leap into his arms. But I knew better. This man was a monster.

"Where is she?" I asked, my attempt to remain calm betrayed by the rattle in my voice.

Yin stepped forward, his steps confident, his smile vicious. "Lihua is safe I assure you."

"Where is she?" I repeated, fighting to keep my voice steady.

"Now Kesi," he stated calmly. "Why would I ever tell you where she is—she is mine, after all. You took her from me." His tone was cool yet composed.

"To save her from the *tortures* you planned." I could feel my patience waning.

"Torture. Such a harsh word, don't you think?" He was playing with me.

"No games, Yin. Please, give her back to me. Your fight is with me for taking her. She is innocent." I could hear the desperation in my own voice and I was sure he could as well.

"That is where you are wrong, Kesi, my darling. I know well the reason you took her, but you see, she was *my* experiment. And I need her back."

"In all these years, surely you have found many to take her place," I pleaded.

"Oh yes, I have continued my experiment, of course, and to some measure of success. But you see, I chose Lihua due to the very rare nature of her blood. I have found none other like her and I believe she is the key." His confidence unnerved me.

"Key to what?" I asked.

"To my complete success of course... Oh, Kesi, I am so very close to finally curing this plague. Time is of the utmost now. So many humans have been turned into night stalking monsters, I must stop this immediately. Only you and I and others from the *Pet Mer* deserve to share the gifts our fathers bestowed upon us. These humans do not need this gift, they are not true to our race. They are merely – copies. Quite flawed copies at that, for they do not share our nobility. They are but monsters, you see." He took another step closer until I could smell the blood on his breath, Lihua's blood!

"You *fed* from her?" Rage built deep within and surfaced quickly. I was on him in a second, grasping his throat in one hand, lifting him easily from the ground. "Tell me where she is *now* or I shall end you!"

Yin gasped, taken by surprise, but his strength matched my own. He pried away my hands until he'd dropped back to the ground. Rubbing his throat, he rasped, "Of course I did. I had to be sure you had not corrupted her blood in all this time. You do not understand, Kesi, she *is* the key! *She* is the cure!"

"I do not believe they need to be cured."

"Then you need to open your eyes, my darling. Come with me."

He knew I could not overpower him any more than he could me. And so, in resignation and with hope to see Lihua again, I followed. He led me down several back roads and allies.

The building where we stopped was a dark obscure place nestled into a chasm between larger and more obvious public places. Together, we disappeared into the shadows.

When I saw Lihua at last, my heart seized and I thought sure it would stop altogether. He had her bound hands and feet to a vertical slab, such as an upright table. Her mouth was gagged and blood was still fresh from the wounds on her throat, wrists and even her thigh. Anger roiled within my gut and I wanted Yin dead directly. Instead I rushed to my daughter's side.

But, as I attempted to loosen the bindings on her wrists, a cold hard hand stayed my actions. I looked up into Yin's glacial eyes.

"Please!" I begged. "Let me take her home."

"She *is* home." He released me with a shove. "Do you not understand, Kesi? Lihua belongs to me. I have taken her blood, her flesh, her essence. I am on the verge of a cure, and *you* cannot stop me!" He went to Lihua and touched her arm tenderly with the back of his fingers. "If you try, I shall be sure she dies now."

I knew his words were in earnest. As I had with so many humans, I looked him in the eyes, my words concentrated on his mind. "You will let her go and I shall take her home."

He nodded. "Yes, Kesi." But, then he began to laugh. "Do you think your power of persuasion will work on one of your own kind?"

My gaze darted to Lihua and the fear in her eyes pleaded with me. "Please," I whispered, speaking to him yet looking at her. "I love her."

Yin's mocking laugh continued, but I couldn't draw my gaze from hers. My heart thrashed within my breast and fear I had never before experienced surged within. If I lost her...No, I couldn't.

I wouldn't.

"Get away from her," said Yin. He had stopped laughing yet a hint of jape remained. "I do not have eternal patience, my love."

Something fractured within me. I turned on him.

"*I am not your love!*" I bared my fangs, a wild animal ready to kill for its offspring. I stepped slowly toward him. I had always known I had the power to manipulate minds to an extent, but that night I discovered a new power stemmed from emotion and inner turmoil that I never knew possible.

As Yin moved toward Lihua, all enmity within me focused on him. I so desperately wanted him away from her. He stepped back suddenly, bending as if a blow had landed him in the gut. But he had not been touched.

He looked up then, his brown eyes burning anger and fire at me. "How did you do that?" he asked through bared fangs.

I dared not reveal my own ignorance of my powers. Better to use them in my favor.

"Stay away from her!"

But he did not heed my advice. As his hand grasped her arm, anger ripped through my soul, lashed out; his arm bent backwards at a most awkward angle. He cried out in pain and I heard the bone snap. Somehow I had fractured his arm without ever touching him. This was my moment.

I rushed to Lihua and unbound her as quickly as I could move. Yin had already begun to heal as I took her hand and rushed towards the door. But, as I found, he had a gift as well. One he had hidden. His movements were incredible and he was in front of me before I could exit. His hand on my chest sent me sprawling backwards, my grip on my daughter's arm released.

I saw her slide across the floor, flung by Yin's strength, stopping only when the wall came into her way. Her back hit it with incredible force and I saw her go limp, rendered unconscious by the force. I thought for sure Yin would run to retrieve her and I was determined to get there before him.

Once again, however, he arrived first. He had her in his arms. I wanted to use this new power I discovered, to send him flying away from her, to free her of his grasp. But suddenly it was as if I was rendered mute. I could not lash out at him. And then I realized the reason was because he held my daughter in his arms and somewhere deep within I feared harming her. My protective nature towards my daughter may just have caused her demise.

Yin was immediately aware of my disability. I had scarce moved when I saw Lihua on the floor then all was black.

When next I opened my eyes, I was back in my room. My head pounded with each beat of my heart and I found it hard to focus. The room was a fog. But slowly, it cleared and I was in my own bed. All too quickly, everything crashed back on me. *Lihua!*

I sat up quickly. The room was bathed in dark but I could see her. In a chair in the corner she sat, alone, and still.

"Lihua! You are safe! By Ra I am so happy!" I rushed to her side.

The horror hit me before I arrived at her side, but I let it go because I could not accept it. I smelled death, I sensed death. But a mouse or even a cat had passed recently. I ignored the strong scent that could not issue from a being so so small. I reached Lihua in mere seconds.

I refused to accept the truth. She was safe, she was with me now. "Lihua, please..." I shook her shoulders but the moment I touched her the truth became all too obvious. My vision recalled the truth, but my mind rejected it. The fang marks in her throat, the slices of flesh missing from her neck and chest. Her body naked, only draped in a blanket that I removed to find more fang marks, more flesh missing. Her blank eyes stared out at nothing. He had done it. He had taken all her blood and what flesh he needed and killed her in the name of what he called a cure for a disease that did not exist.

My scream must have been heard by all of London that night. I collapsed to the ground, vowing with every labored breath that I would one day find Yin and kill him.

In the dead mist I buried the only child I had ever known. And that was the night I died, not to reawaken for almost a thousand years.



The Ghost Witch of Paisley Wood

Well into the late 20th century in Scotland, the following entries were discovered not far from Paisley. Once again, these documents were found by civilians during routine renovations. They were turned in to preservation societies and eventually found their way to the Smithsonian to join the others.

I have written nothing in over three hundred years. But what I have recently discovered cannot go without documentation. I do believe Yin has somehow come up with his version of a 'cure' for what he considers a disease—the disease of our kind, of allowing us to reproduce the only way possible.

The year is now 1697. I have not found Yin himself and have heard nothing of him for all this time, but I met a man who had been 'turned,' for lack of a better term, into what Yin always referred to as an 'aberration.' This man, however, is anything but so.

For so long I have lived in secret, moving from place to place in order to escape my past, to keep out of sight, preventing my whereabouts from detection. Yes, I needed Yin dead, but in my emotionally compromised state I could not have won against him. However, our kind is long lived and patient. One day, I knew, the opportunity would present itself.

In the meantime, I moved from England to France, then to Romania, and other areas within my range. In the late 15th century, I voyaged to a new world. The Italian, Cristoforo Colombo, was on mission to find a new trade route to Japan through the Indies. As it turns out, he was sadly dreadful at navigation and we landed within a different place altogether.

I remained in that world for quite some time, as it was so well hidden from everything I had ever known. Yin would not find me in such an untamed locale. I would return to find him later, when I was ready.

I chose to avoid the natives of that place, as they seemed less than pleased to accept strangers on their land. I remained well hidden within sunless shelter during the day, having watched how these peoples made their pointed dwellings, which reminded me a bit of the pyramids from home, which kept us safe during the scorching daylight hours.

Eventually, however, I was ready to return to the old world. I charmed the Captain of a ship and was off towards my home once more. I returned to England, but nothing there brought me anything but heartache, so I headed north to Scotland.

At one time, being a guest in the homes of nobility was commonplace for me. And if I had still held position I would have invited myself into the world of Mary Stuart. But, high society no longer intrigued me. I remained as a shadow for over 150 years.

I finally settled outside a small village called Paisley in Renfrewshire away from political influences and the conflicts of Scotland, England and France.

I moved into a diminutive cottage long abandoned, not much different but slightly smaller than the place where Lihua and I had resided so long ago in England. I kept to myself, but on occasion was plagued by villagers coming to call, to appease their curiosity of this strange woman who dwelt alone in the deep woodlands over the glen, and was never seen marketing, visiting, attending services, or doing any other activity during the daylight hours.

In this way, news from the town did find its way to me. It was not long that the word 'witch' flitted through town and into the forest. Just the year before, in 1696 a small child of the name Christian Shaw, daughter of the Laird of Bargarran, was rumored to have fallen victim to demonic possession. From there, many close to the lass were accused and imprisoned. I took this turn of events as fortunate to my predicament. I did not, of course, wish to be executed. Would hanging end my eternal existence? Of that I could not be sure. However, fire would surely see me to my end. And daylight execution would surely hasten their plans! Those that had supposedly possessed the poor child were strangled by hanging, their bodies later burned.

I admit I took close liberties on this. I wanted none to come to my cabin. I wanted to exist in peace. A well-placed word here, suggestion and whisper there and word arrived that I had been the next accused.

They came during a dark night of the waning moon, light of torches against the trees around my cabin flickered in a deathly glow. I opened the door before they could knock and a damp breeze brought to me the scent of my doom.

They dragged me out, I feigned a fight, screaming profanities in my ancient language, which they mistook for the devil's babble, and threw me atop a horse.

They had a rope noosed and ready over the bough of a tree only a short distance away. I admit nerves nearly overcame me. I could easily have overpowered these humans, but I held my breath as they

placed the noose around my neck, rough strands of hemp scratching at my flesh. Your own death is an experience you never forget. And each detail stands clear within your mind. I could not be sure if this might kill me; I could not be sure what, if anything, would kill me, other than fire and the sun.

For precaution sake, I loosened easily the bindings that held my hands by tugging on the ropes, enough to slacken yet not allow them to fall and give away my strength nor my eventual freedom. So were my hopes. Still, my heart pummeled within my breast and a thin sheen of sweat covered my body beneath the loose grey dress I had chosen to wear that night.

I closed my eyes. I heard the whip snap, the horse's back brush across the cloth between my legs as the animal took off. Simultaneously, I heard the snap, felt excruciating pain from the back of neck up into my head.

I opened my eyes. At first, all was dark, but then I saw them. Stars, everywhere stars. The wide open sky spread out above. I was lying on the cold ground. Scanning with my eyes, I saw two men standing in the fog near a tree; the same tree in which I met my death. I was in the field adjacent the forest. My neck had snapped. I had heard it. I had felt it. But I was alive still. Since no one was looking at me, I turned my head. No pain and every limb moved just fine. My body had healed, not allowed my death. A stack of wood had been thrown less than a rod from where I lay. This was where they planned to burn my body. As they steadied the horse and pulled the rope from the bough, I stood, slouched to avoid detection, and disappeared into the black forest. But I did not run. Instead, I stood within a copse of brush and watched.

I could not help the grin as they turned and found my body gone. Ah, what sweet deception to watch them searching, then arguing amongst themselves as to where my body had gone. I was surely dead, they conceded. I had no breath, no heartbeat. They thought me dead, and so dead I should remain. I returned to my home. I would make sure no one bothered me again.

And so, the rumor spread. According to the townsfolk, the devil had chosen to take my body away, however my demonic ghost haunted the woods in and around the cabin. Being that I was not actually Scottish added to their belief in this fabricated tale.

Foreigners were never to be trusted, and I was 'of foreign tongue, and dressed most peculiarly.' Not to mention my nighttime habits and lack of ever taking a meal or attending services. From then on I was known as *'the Ghost Witch of Paisley Wood.'*

I remained in this place and here I would stay, until I heard some news of Yin, or even a tale as to where I might locate him. Only finding Yin and ending his 'cure' mattered to me then.

Now, however, my quest has led me in a completely different direction and what I have found has taken me off guard.

One night, not long ago, I sat by the fireplace reading when I felt a presence nearby. I stilled, placed down my book and concentrated. This was not a familiar sensation. Not human. Not Yin. Not a child of the *Pet Mer*. But, something—something that tickled my senses. Something—familiar. A 'blood drinking aberration,' as Yin had termed them.

I had come across them a few times in the many lifetimes of my existence and I knew the feel of them. And I always tried to make myself known to them, get to know them. I needed to know more about them. Were they worth destroying? Were they dangerous, as Yin had described? Lihua was not.

I was not sure if they could sense me as I could them, and so I needed to be cautious. I sneaked quietly from the cabin. There was but a quarter moon, shadows cast from the trees so dim no human eyes could see. But, this was not the presence of humans. How well they could see through the mud of night I could not be sure. Lihua's vision had been very similar to my own in the night. Whether or not that applied to all blood drinkers who stalk the night was beyond my comprehension at the time. Within the shadows of the night trees, I watched. He was not alone, yet I sensed only one. The two of them were dressed in different clan tartans, and none from this area.

They strode casually along the narrow path from town, not at all guarded, stepping perfectly even though I had never seen them in this region, as if they too could see easily without sunlight. I assumed they must both be 'children' made by others. Vampyres as we who walked the night in search of blood had long been stereotyped. Except, according to the legends I heard, vampyres were cursed, dead beings come to life. Perhaps this myth came about because the humans who

were altered by one of our kind, in a sense, ended their human life to begin a new life, needing blood to survive and existing only by night. But, very much alive they are, just—different. Our hearts beat just as theirs, we have souls, if such thing exists, for we are not demons from hell. Yet that is how we were seen.

What I saw on that night confirmed my suspicions that these were not beings to be feared, not beings to be 'cured,' but humans who had been altered into something else, whether or not they had wished it.

As the *Pet Mer* were over-sensitive to the sun on this planet, as are most of these 'Vampyres.' Even the *Half-Bred* such as myself—born from a *Pet Mer* and human pairing. This trait passed along in the blood from the *Pet Mer*. A rare few, I had heard, could walk in sunshine, a trait given by the human in their lineage.

Perhaps one day I will learn more about the science behind my blood line, but thus far Yin is the only *Half-Bred* Alchemist I have come across.

As I watched them, curiosity within me grew near overwhelming. Why could I sense only one? If the other was human, I could not smell his blood. Something was not quite right. And I could not sense which was vampyre...?

Both halted suddenly as if run into a wall that did not exist. The shorter of the two, dark hair that waved over his shoulders, wore the hunting tartan of the clan Stewart. Though to call him short was a grave misconception and relative only to the other. In reality, the Stewart man stood quite tall and slender.

As they both stopped in unison, Stewart spoke.

"I am nae sure," he said as if the other had spoken, but he had not.

And what can I say about the other man? He was huge, not just in height but with an overly muscular build, scraggly red hair that touched his broad shoulders, piercing blue eyes, and attired in MacGregor tartan, but he spoke not one word. As Stewart spoke MacGregor nodded once in awhile, but said nothing.

Stewart cocked his head like a curious puppy. The other looked at him enigmatically. Stewart shook his head as if in answer to a question never asked. Both began then to search the trees and brush.

I played with my thoughts, wondering if I should make my presence known. In the end curiosity won over caution. I stepped from the shadows, allowing the silver moon to embrace my presence.

Both men stopped quickly about 100 yards from where I stood, scanning my attire, the long dress loose at the wrists and waist, that swept the forest floor. I admit I had not kept up on my appearance and my hair hung in loose tangles to the ground as well.

Perhaps, I thought, they had come to see if the *Ghost Witch of Paisley Wood* existed, or remained myth. It was the Stewart who spoke.

"Ye're no ghost, nor witch. Are ye vampyre?"

Bold. I was impressed. Should I tell him the truth or a lie? For lies had become my usual topic as of late. But, I could certainly see and smell by now, he was indeed a child created to be a blood drinker—a vampyre.

"No," I said simply and honestly. "I am no vampyre. Not as you are." Both tilted their heads in inquisition. So I explained. "I am a child of the *Pet Mer*, the original race. Those who came here first, thousands of years ago. My mother was human."

Stewart acknowledged, glanced to MacGregor, who nodded in turn. A silent language between them. I was intrigued, fascinated, excited.

I needed to know so much more. And so I took a chance. "Would the two of you wish to come in? My cabin is close by."

With their nod, I led them to my home, the first time I had had wanted company inside in over 200 years.

I motioned for them to be seated by the fireplace. Stewart took the chair where I had sat only moments before with my book. But MacGregor, who stood slightly hunched, for his height was too much for my small cottage, chose a sturdy solid oak chair from the kitchen area, which was rarely used.

I sat in the wicker chair by the fireplace, opposite Stewart. First order of business—names.

The Stewart introduced himself as Wolfe Amus MacDonald Stewart. And then he nodded to the big man. "Fergus MacGregor."

"Wolfe," I said. "Quite a unique name. Not Scottish."

"Nae," he replied easily. "Me mum, she sed the wolves hooled loudly the nicht o' ma beerth."

I admit his accent tripped me up a bit, for it was quite strong. A child of a Highland upbringing for sure, though whereabouts was not

clear to me. My confusion must have registered in my expression. Wolfe's next words were a bit more discernible.

"Ye're nae from Scotland," he said. "Ye said ye're a child of the originals?"

I nodded. But I had not invited them in to discuss *my* lineage. I decided the best approach would be a straight one. "Your friend, Fergus?" Wolfe nodded and I continued. "Is he a mute? I have never met a mute vampyre."

And that was where Yin's whereabouts came upon me so long after I had last seen him.

As Wolfe spoke, I listened intently. "Fergus was a victim of a cruel experiment."

"Please," I nearly begged. "Tell me of this experiment. Who conducted it, do you know?" I was sure excitement was apparent in my voice.

Wolfe glanced to Fergus before looking back to me with a grave expression. "We are neither of us sure what the man wished of us... the man who did this. I was... taken. Fergus, as describes the incident, ran from the soldiers. They had massacred many in our family. He was able to get away due to his size. But another monster, more formidable than the English, or those against the Jacobites, could ever be..." Wolfe glanced to Fergus then and I saw a single tear drip from the larger man's eye. "He was captured by a man more powerful. A man who turned us both into what we are today."

My curiosity got the best of me. "And he experimented on you both?"

Wolfe shook his head, his thick mop of long black hair flopping about. "Only on Fergus..."

"What did he look like... this man?" I interrupted.

Wolfe glanced at Fergus then turned back to me. I'm sure I appeared quite mad. "He was an Asian man—"

My gasp interrupted the conversation. I stood quickly and moved to Fergus. His blue eyes grew wide and he stared at me as if I would eat him. I felt Wolfe readying to leap from his chair. I raised a hand and halted his progression.

"Fergus," I said. "Was this man's name Yin?"

Slowly, Fergus's massive head nodded, wavy red hair bobbing with the motion.

Before I knew I had moved, I was back sunk within my chair by a dying fire.

A few silent moments passed before Wolfe finally addressed this rather odd exchange. "You know this man, the one who tortured Fergus?"

Tortured. Yes. Yin had tortured my beloved Lihua as well. This was what he did—find a vampyre who fit his needs, torture and kill them. But Fergus had lived. I decided to explain everything about Yin to Wolfe and Fergus. They needed to know.

I began from the day I had met Yin, a Half-Bred child just as myself, and felt I had finally found someone with which I could spend an eternity of happiness. Until I discovered his torturous schemes.

I continued to explicate on the times we spent in China, Lihua and our travels, avoiding Yin and then eventually to Lihua's death at his hands, his plan to find a 'cure' as well as the torturous methods he used in the name of 'advanced medicine.'

"This is the man, I am sure o' it," said Wolfe. "Fergus was running, in hiding, after the massacre at Culloden where many of our own families were killed. We are both of MacDonald blood, ye ken. I was captured by a vampyre of Campbell blood, altered, turned to vampyre in revenge. Fergus, however, was captured by your Yin fella. He was altered in attempt to find this 'cure' ye speak of—instead it rendered 'im mute. But I can hear 'im. I'm the only one can hear 'im, and we dinna ken why."

For what seemed a lifetime, I sat in awe as well as disgust. What I was hearing, what I had discovered here. Yin lived, he continued on with his experiments and he was still harming others. Why, I wondered, why did this beast have the power to create children of his own, only to torture them, when I could not? At that moment, life seemed more unfair than it ever had in my lengthy existence.

If I didn't want to revenge the wrongs of Yin's tortures before, I certainly did now! This menace did not deserve the gift life offered. He would continue his tortures, the same ones he had rendered on my Lihua, until he had succeeded or was stopped.

It became clear to me on that night that his 'cure' was not moving along as he planned. He failed time and again, leaving behind a wake of bodies and disabled. This Fergus was now mute, unable to be who

he once was, due to Yin and his quest to find an end to what I saw as a gift.



France's Children

The following entries are dated and marked with the name of Kesi Akhede. This is the name historians have found consistent throughout these entries. The following entries were located during early excavation of the French catacombs in the 19th century, preserved and finally dated and translated in the late 20th century. Each entry was written on parchment and carefully sealed to prevent moisture and decay.

Journal of Kesi Akhede

France, July 1789

The time has come to start a family of my own. This fact has been clear, the need vibrant and alive within me ever since the night I met Wolfe Stewart and Fergus MacGregor in Scotland near almost a century ago now. I have penned few documents to attest to my whereabouts, for I have been on a diligent quest to locate Yin, with no luck thus far.

I cannot believe I have made my way back to France after so much time has passed. Particularly in the midst of a Revolution. However, I have seen many wars and through them learned to avoid

their chaos or use it to my advantage. Though I cannot say the same is true for every human and vampyre I have met.

I heard of the American Revolution and changes to the American colonies since my visit there in the 15th century. Back in that day, the noble warriors who occupied the lands have been beaten down in a most slanted manner. Such a noble race of peoples I found amongst those now referred to as 'Indians.' I personally prefer to view them as native to the colonies. They are no more 'Indian' than myself. I am Egyptian. Those born to the continent of India are the true Indians.

But I digress.

When I returned to France a year ago, I followed clues of an 'Asian man of great power, whose mind had turned sour with the greed of finding a cure to an obscure disease.' This, I am sure is Yin. So, from rumor, I have concluded that he has gone quite mad in his search for a non-existent 'cure.' Why, then does he insist on causing suffering and pain wherever he travels?

I feel I am closing in on him at last. But, a detour in my quest has arisen. However, there is strength in numbers. If only I can build a family, as has been my wish for many thousands of years, we will have numbers against Yin. We shall be strong. And we shall remove him of this planet and put a stop to his torturous endeavor.

Once again, I hide within the chaos of war. As this French Revolution rages on, I move about the city of Paris undetected and unaffected. And it was on such a misty night my senses caught on human suffering. A mental and physical anguish, the sweet bouquet of blood.

I followed it into a narrow path that ran to an subterranean tomb so large as to overwhelm. Paris' Montrouge stone quarries, now a grave for millions.

Beneath the Parisian streets I followed his scent. An easy meal. No one to detect us. The skeletons of those long and recently passed stared out at me from the crevices in the walls that served forever their embedded tombs. Like macabre art work, they were placed in pattern, an eternal grave of bones. I found it quite beautiful. The pathways were long and labyrinthine. But I had a map; the human who inadvertently drew me towards him. And, when I could no longer bear the engaging aroma, deep within a narrow crypt of remains, darkness engulfed the figure of a man, crouched against a wall, forehead on

drawn knees, soiled hair tangled over slender arms wrapped around his legs. One hand grasped a bottle of *elixir d'absynthe*, a new concoction said to have medicinal properties. Perhaps he was trying to cure some ailment?

So easily I could have taken him. But something gave me pause. I am not sure if it was the internal pain radiating from his soul like a pyre, or the way he sat, dispossessed of the world around him, amongst walls of death.

Why, I asked myself, would a human choose to hide his sorrow in this place of ruination? Mere skeletal remains. His rue reached into my heart and, though I cared little of human suffering, curiosity took me over.

I moved to him in silence. He was not aware of my presence until I placed a hand on his shoulder. He started, sky-blue eyes shooting up through filthy tangles of blond locks that reached well past his shoulders.

"Quel est votre nom?" I asked, barely able to speak the language, though I'd picked up just enough to get along.

He blinked several times and ran a dirty hand through the mass of tangles, brushing them off his face. Beneath the layers of battle dirt and blood, beneath the blond stubble of facial hair, I could see a man quite attractive.

He assessed me. He believed me an hallucination, or perhaps a dream. "Mon nom est André la Chandler," he responded, his voice so soft I almost did not catch his words.

"Pourquoi êtes-vous ici?" I needed to know.

Instead of speaking, he answered my question by placing the bottle on the grubby ground beside a well used and bloodied musket. The scent of fresh blood almost caused a swoon, and then I saw its source as he opened his uniform waistcoat, once a noble and proud white was now reduced to brown rags caked with the mud of crawling through explosive battlefields, and black from the blood of those he'd killed. Beneath, an expanding crimson stain marred his left side.

"I am dying," he stated in broken English.

What was it about this soldier, wounded in battle, who chose to die alone amongst those dead hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years before his birth? I lowered myself beside him.

"And the Absynthe? A cure?"

"Un poison," he said in finality.

"You choose to die here?" I asked.

"Many de ancêtres...eh, ancestors rest here." He gazed about in contemplation, though if he could see anything within the black I could not know. "A la mort de montage." *A fitting death.*

How could he think dying a slow agony fitting for a soldier who had been mortally wounded fighting for his morals, his country?

"But you are a soldier, fighting for what is right," I said. "You would rather die, lost among the dead than be honored by **the living**?"

He merely shrugged and in his eyes I saw the reflections of pain, loneliness and defeat. I had seen much war in my thousands of years, I had seen the damage it can cause not only on a physical level, but a spiritual one as well. André had given up. The guilt of killing men like himself who wished only to survive and make life better for their country, their families. Seeing friends and colleagues slaughtered, dying painful deaths, or mutilated beyond repair. It had become too much. He wished only to join them.

I knew right then I should aid this young man in his quest. I could most easily drain him, filling my need for a meal, filling his for an end.

But, there was another solution, for us both. "I can help you," I said. "You need not suffer." At his enigmatic glance, I elaborated. "I can take away your pain—in death. Or give you a new life."

He snorted. "I have lived, and lost, already. Enough."

"So, death it is!" Before he could react, I had him in my grasp, my arms wrapped around his skeletal waist, my mouth to his throat. He released a mere moan before my teeth penetrated flesh, my lips wrapped tightly around the wound so as not to spill even a drop.

And then—he fought me!

Weak as he was, his fists pounded on my back and I felt life in him, a need to fight. A soldier not yet ready to relinquish his existence.

I backed away and released him. His limp body dropped to the ground, mists of dust rising up around him. Wide blue orbs stared up at me, the whites of his eyes indicating his surprise and fear at what I had just brought upon him. He lay there, gasping, his last breaths coming hard.

"You wished to die," I whispered into his ear. "I can give you that wish rapidly."

His head moved one side to another. He opened his mouth to speak. I placed my ear to his face. "What...are...you?"

I smiled, deliberately revealing my fangs. "I am your salvation—the end of your suffering. 'Tis your choice."

I recalled all the failed attempts long past of making children of my own. But André was different. If he died, he received his wish. If he lived and went mad, I would kill him. Again, his wish is fulfilled. But if he survived—I would have my family, the beginning of an army to defeat Yin. I lifted André easily from the ground, removing him from his macabre and dusty tomb. I had done as instructed by Yin; took in his blood until the heart registered only 40 beats within a minute. From there, I fed him my own blood until he was rendered unconscious and unable to drink more. However, once he awoke, I knew it would aid and ease his mind to see comfort, life and light. I had heard long ago that so many 'vampyres' had gone insane or become murderers due to the harsh conditions in which they had risen. Many were killed, or rendered insane. None survived. I myself had seen too many. This time I would prevail.

I was determined to start a family, and though I believed in no gods beyond those that had already exited from the planet to find a place where they would be more accepted, I truly believed this union with André was meant for success.

And so I carried him to my flat at Rue Hérold, careful to avoid detection, a mere 200 meters from the Louvre. I was determined that if my first 'child' survived, he would be raised with only the best, as I had been. Culture. Cuisine. Language. And so much more. I had chosen Paris for this reason. The best in the world!

I placed him in a lightless room. Though I knew not what to expect once he awoke (would he be wild with insanity, or calm in acceptance?), I wanted no sunlight that may harm him in any way.

I set his benumbed form in the large guest bed of the flat I called home for now. I removed his odoriferous clothing and tossed them aside. He would need to be bathed.

I scanned his naked body. Slender to the point of emaciation, yet boasting muscles firm with work. Though the hair that draped the pillow was smirched with soil and blood, I could see that once cleaned it would be a sparkling golden blond. His cheekbones were raised

above a perfectly chiseled chin. He was absolutely magnificent. I loved him already.

I boasted no servants, as I had been privy to so very long ago, in another life as Jabari's wife. I could not afford to bring such attention to my presence. One day I would hold the power of my youth, but for now I cared only for myself, and now this poor soldier fallen from a position of grace.

I fetched a bucket of water and rags. Carefully, I washed the sensitive human flesh, being sure to clean off every last bit of the past, the pain and the battle he had fought.

An ablution.

When I had finished, I dressed his limp figure in a nightdress and placed him comfortably beneath the bedclothes. I lit a few candles in the room and then left my handsome new progeny to wake come night, to realize now life would be worth living.



A Family is Born

Entry two

The moan woke me easily, for the bedside chair I had fallen asleep in was far from comfortable. I opened my eyes to see my new child waking slowly, long blond lashes fluttering. I admit anticipation held me tight in its grasp. I sat forward, staring at him, wondering what he would become.

He turned his head to me, sinuous golden locks, previously tangled and thin from stress, cascading over the pillow and bed, now immaculate and long. It had worked! Those successfully 'altered,' I had heard, displayed the long dense hair of the *Pet Mer*, the ones whose blood ran within them, even if in small amounts.

A symbol of my lineage, I saw it as a necessity in the success of bearing my own family. My father had cut his, keeping it shoulder length, common in the times he resided within Egypt. But I had never

restricted the growth of my own hair. It brushed the ground now, though I kept it mostly bound within one long braid and rolled atop my head. This was the lineage of the great and noble race, who had found this planet when their own was destroyed by greed and over-processing. I would do nothing to dishonour my father. My family.

For a long time, André said nothing. He simply stared at me as if he knew not who I was, or where he had awoken.

Worry overcame me then. What if I had erred yet again. If he had gone mad—

But then he spoke. "Qu'est-il arrivé ?"

What happened?

"Do you recall nothing?" I asked in English, hoping he would understand.

He sighed with a near pained expression. When he spoke, his words came slow, English not being his first nor chosen language. "I was... wounded. Dying." I nodded for him to continue. He paused, though, drawing the coverlet from his torso. No scar marred the pale flesh. Any indication of his battle had been healed by my blood.

He stared. "How—?"

"I healed you," I stated.

After marveling for a moment at his consummate flesh, his eyes raised up at me. "Are you...um...doctor? Alchemist, a...witch?"

I laughed aloud. "I am none, or perhaps all, of the above. I am a child of the *Pet Mer*—from Egypt."

His blank stare told me he knew nothing of what I spoke.

"A lineage of the greatest, most powerful beings that ever graced this planet."

He shook his head. No comprehension.

"My family," I elaborated. This would be a slow and delicate process. I needed to bring him in gently, so as not to shock his system into over-stressing. I could not explain to him the entire truth. Not yet anyway. "I have a secret—a healing secret. And I have allowed you into this world, this surreptitious existence because you deserve a second chance at a better life."

His face tensed with concentration. "A...second chance?" He tried to recall the first chance, I was sure. "Did I die?" he asked finally.

"In a fashion," I answered. I needed my words to be delicate. Humans often fear that which they do not understand. Instead of

looking more deeply into it, instead of embracing what knowledge they can glean from it, they balk at it. Though André was human no more, this he did not know. Not yet. "Your old life has passed, but has given birth to a new one."

André sat up then and when he bowed his head forward, his face was hidden and draped by the luxurious hair. One masculine hand reached up from under the coverlet to comb through the locks. Slowly, he lifted his head, fingers webbed through the strands, staring at them as if his eyes lied. "*Qu'est-il arrivé ? Mes cheveux...*"

"Does not look as it did?" I finished for him. "It is better now. You are healthy once again, and will be forever."

He flipped the abundant mane away from his face. Blue eyes deeper than the vast space from whence my people came met my deep brown orbs with such question, he needed not speak a word.

"I have given you my blood. It has healing properties that also made you healthy—" My hands swept the air in reference to his muscular and healed torso. "—everywhere. Made you better. You shall live longer as well. Much longer."

So thrilled was I that I had successfully created my first child, who had survived and was not insane, I had forgotten the most important order of business. I was lost in his beauty. Curious what power he may possess, but quickly reminded of my mistake.

"Je ai besoin de manger!"

I am hungry.

Before I could grab him, my André was up and out the door, the Paris wind blowing the shutters open and closed with a bang in his wake. Apparently, André possessed speed beyond comprehension. A newly formed child, I had heard, could ravish an entire town so quickly it might never recover. That kind of attention we did not need.

A certain amount of speed is inherited in all of my kind and in those with whom they choose to share the Legacy, as it has been called, so we may have an advantage over those on whom we require sustenance. I rushed out. I needed to find him.

I halted quickly just outside the townhouse on Île Saint-Louis, my temporary home, into the chill night. As I watched my own breath on the air, a sensation overcame my mind. I can only describe it as a tingle deep within my brain, but it smelled of André. It makes little

sense to me even as I write this entry, but there it is. I followed this sense south over to the main land and beyond as it grew ever stronger.

Deep within an obscure shadow down the small dank alley of Val-de-Grâce, behind an underground brothel, lay a man, his throat torn out in such a manner that his head was barely attached any longer. Yet hardly any blood. André was famished, and he would not stop until he had drained every human ill-fated enough to be out this night.

I followed this strange sensation, finding three more bodies, two within Montparnasse, and all left where they had met their unfortunate demise. None disposed of properly. The Parisian authorities could link this to André and I if anyone survived to see his 'newborn' hunger. We could easily escape, but news of such an event would surely raise a red flag to all children existing anywhere in Europe and if Yin happened to be near, as is generally the case, he would find me before I could be aware and ready.

I had begun to think I would not find André, as he always seemed to stay one step ahead of me. I searched through every area of decadent Paris, finding body after body, but no André.

Each death spoke to me as my own child's blood—my blood—grew stronger within him through the sustenance he took in from these strangers.

My flesh tingled and stung like a thousand stinging bees as my search grew desperate. It was an hour before sunrise, though the city continued to be blanketed by the grey mist of night. André, I was sure, could feel it as well. Instinct should lead him to safety, somewhere. But where?

For the first time, sunrise came in welcome to me, even through its pang, for I knew André would cease his tirade to seek the dark of shelter and slumber. I had no time to dispose of his massacre, hoping in some manner the war would take blame. Nettles pierced my exposed flesh, my head ached, as the signal I had been receiving all evening from André faded and disappeared. I needed to get back to the townhouse, to the dark, to slumber.

I had taken not two steps when it came to me. I knew where André would be hiding. Quickly, before the sun could claim me, I made my way to the underground grave of Paris.



No God

Entry three

I rushed deep into the soothing damp dark of the tunnels below Paris. Night to me was a mix of shadows, both dark and light, with discernible outlines. I could see movement before it had actually occurred. I easily followed the track of bones to the exact place where I had first located André, wounded soldier prepared to die, and move onto the next world. But there was no next world. Only decay, and worms. This I could not bear for André. I had saved his life for a reason. He was beautiful, and a soldier, thus valuable in my war against Yin.

“André?” My voice echoed through the decadent chambers. “I know you are here. I sense you!”

From the clammy stone walls echoed a voice, not discernible in its location. “Leave me be, Kesi!”

He was now experiencing the second phase of a newborn’s existence; Guilt for lives taken.

I had been through this all; we had all experienced it. Though I had never been an adult human turned ‘newborn,’ at that moment I recalled my youth and the hunger pangs for blood I suffered. My father talked me through it, he gave me guidance until I was able to control the urges and even redirect them, until I was old enough that they no longer controlled my mind and body. Like the sexual drive of a young adult human, the need for blood can be overwhelming. And I was not an easy nipper to deal with, as memory serves. Fortunately, however, in that era humans were willing to offer up their blood as servitude. We were the Children of the Gods; the *Pet Mer*, who had saved the desert and given them strength to thrive and succeed as a nation.

Now, I had my own ‘child’ to raise and nurture and teach. I maneuvered the tunnels as if I had been born there; I could feel André so deeply within, flowing through my veins like a drug given in injection.

I followed the narrow labyrinth of this knowledge, zigzagging tunnels that passed by the ever staring and watchful eyes of those long dead, their empty sockets seeing all that trespassed. And toward my child I moved swiftly. As if time had turned backwards, he sat just as the night I had found him, a huddled shadow in the dark.

“André,” I said softly. “Do not chase me off.”

I moved in close, careful not to spook him. I now understood his exceptional speed. He could lose me in an instant. Yet, he needed me, though this he did not yet know. I heard his sigh.

I lowered myself beside him. He stared incessantly at his hands, which were brown with the dried blood of his victims. Meals, not expecting what lie in wait for them within the night. I took one of his hands in my own; a gesture of soothing comfort. I said nothing. I merely sat with him. He would speak when he was ready.

An hour passed. I knew the sunlight shown full in the sky above ground. Even deep within the darkest and safest tunnels, protected by layers of earth, I felt the heat, the burn, of the sun’s rays on the earth. I wondered if André felt it as well. Finally, he spoke.

“What did you do to me?” he asked in broken English.

I gave his hand a light squeeze. “I gave you immortality.”

“But I *wished* to die.” He pulled his hand away.

“A second chance at life,” I replied, mimicking some of the first words I had spoken to him.

Burning blue eyes turned to me. “Second chance,” he snorted, turning from me. “*Ce ne est pas la vie*. You have transformed me into a blood-thirsty murderer!”

How, I wondered, would I explain to him that I had given him a great gift, an honor to be amongst the children of the *Pet Mer*...Not a murderer, but a god.

“André,” I spoke in a whisper. Calm. “You are no murderer. You are merely—hungry. This...thirst. It can be controlled.”

Finally, he looked to me once again.

And so I continued, my words careful as humanity had still, in thousands of years, not caught up to what I was, to what my family had been and from whence they had come.

“A very long time ago my family arrived in Egypt and made a home there. They aided society and building great structures, growing

into a magnificent and powerful race. My people—we were seen as flesh and blood gods.”

“Are you to tell me God bore life through your people?”

“Not exactly.” I would have to approach this topic with great delicacy. “My people came from a location very far away from Egypt. Far away from here. This place was algid in climate. To compensate, though they grew little hair on their faces and bodies, the hair on their head grew at great lengths and was worn as a shield of sorts. This and the clothing they wove, protected them. So, when they came here they needed to exist in the darkness as this sun is bright and hot and close.”

“Where is this place?” André asked.

“It no longer exists,” I explained sadly.

“Where did it go then?”

My thoughts turned to Jabari. He seemed a slight memory now, though our love was eternal and would forever remain within my heart. Yet, how little humans had come to understand in thousands of years. Once again, I was faced with the dilemma of explaining to a mortal of this era that my family had come from a far off planet, not earth. Even in Egypt so long ago, it was scarce accepted. Only those who had seen the arrival of the original *Pet Mer* had believed, and thus dubbed them gods. Flesh and blood Gods. Placed among Ra and Seth and Bastet among many more.

My father and the others who had come in a great sky ship, as termed by the humans of the time, had insisted they were not to be transcribed in any writings or worshiped as the gods that existed in those times. They had wished only for a place to live, and to fit in, not to conquer or draw to themselves unwanted attentions.

To André I said, “The place where my family had lived before my birth was destroyed. And so they came to this...this place. To Egypt.”

André nodded. “And your family, they drank blood to survive?”

“Yes, but they did not kill! I can teach you this skill, André. I can teach you to appease your hunger without death, without bloodshed.”

“And you have never killed?”

His question took me aback. I drew a deep breath and sat back against the crenulated wall. “I cannot claim to have lived a perfect life. Yes, I have had to kill to protect who I am, to survive.”

“Then you sin as well and we are both damned.”

Religion. God. Hell. Sin. Heaven. All of it I had skipped around for thousands of years. So many variations existed and most all of them befuddled my brain. I was raised with the Egyptian gods of long ago, however, taught by my father to understand that we, too, were seen as gods yet were not gods. Everything within our existence was as it was, and we did not question it. But years of exploring this planet since my father's departure taught me to eradicate my judgment from the affairs of religion. This was a personal matter for each, and too convoluted to make any rational decision. So, I wondered, as André waited for an explanation—how would I explain to a devout Catholic soldier that I existed before his god, before his Jesus? Or that many gods, many religions, made similar claims, thus rendering them all myth? Most of all, that my own people were once deified?

I decided to take a direct yet dangerous approach. “How old would you say I am, André?”

Through his confusion, he stared at my face. And then I saw what I had hoped for—a relaxation of his expression. “*Mon Dieu!* I can see you!”

I merely nodded.

“I can SEE you,” he repeated. “It is dark. There is nary a sliver of light and I can see your face. How is this possible?”

Progress. “The same way it is possible that you now require blood to survive. That you are André LaChandler, yet you are no longer human.”

His willowy fingers ran through long flaxen locks, and he stared at the strands as if they belonged to another.

“You have inherited,” I explained, “One of many gifts from my ancestors and family.”

He looked ahead then, staring at nothing, or perhaps at something only he could see. And when he spoke it was not to me, but to himself, or perhaps this God he had put his faith and trust into for a lifetime.

“*Dieu a créé la vie.* He created humans in His image. Is this his image?” André raised up his hands before his face and gazed at them. “I am still myself. My memories, my thoughts, my beliefs. And yet I hunger for blood. I have taken life in battle, yet now I take life for sustenance.” Tenderly, he touched a finger to one sharp tooth, also an inheritance of necessity.

He was working it out in his own mind, trying to elucidate information almost impossible to comprehend. I remained silent at that point, allowing him freedom to understand at his own pace.

After half an hour of blathering, half in English and half in French, making it difficult for me to keep up with his commentary, finally André looked once more at me in question. “Is there no God?” he asked.

This was a question I was ill equipped to answer. I could give him only what experience had taught me. “I will not tell you God does not exist. I have yet to encounter substantiation that supports or refutes the existence of your God.”

“I have prayed,” said André, taking the conversation to an entirely different track. “Ma mere, she was dying of le peste—the plague, suffering. I prayed to God that he take her quickly. She lingered on, the pain I could feel for myself. I felt my prayer was not heard. My mother was a good woman, God fearing Catholic who sinned not a day in her life. For a long time I was angry at God for allowing this torture into my home, onto such a good woman. Why, I asked. *Pourquoi?*”

“For quite some time I had forsaken God. However, a local *prêtre* spoke to me. He explained God often took those who were virtuous, as my mother, so they might become angels to watch over others.”

I sighed. This I had heard all too often. “If this belief comforts you, André, then hold onto it.”

“Ma mere still suffered, I said to *le prêtre*. If God wanted her, why not take her quickly?” He closed his eyes, slowly shaking his head.

I felt a sort of empathy for his pain at the loss of his mother. But, having lost my mother so long ago, a human mother whom I would have outlived anyway, I could not completely comprehend. Perhaps it was not the loss with which I held empathy, but simply seeing the slight tear that bubbled up in the corner of this beautiful man’s eye.

“I am no longer sure,” said André. “Just short a week ago, if one had told me there existed, eh... *personnes...* people who survive by consuming blood, I would have thought them mad.”

“I could delve deep into theology with you, André, but then we would exist in these tunnels for many years.” I smiled, hoping to sedate the atmosphere.

What happened next astonished me so that I did not immediately react.

Using his newly acquired swiftness, André rose and sped toward the entrance to the tunnels.

Something I had said must have spoken to his need to get out into the world once again, to feed, to hunt, to be what he was... But... the sun! I rushed behind, hoping to catch him before he reached the death that awaited him above.



The Deadly

Entry four

I feared I would not reach André in time. I moved as fast as my power would allow. Speed was not my gift. And when I finally began to feel the scorch of the rays that streamed in through the tunnel's narrow opening, my heart was near stopped with fear. My only successful progeny, I was sure, would parish a painful death of boils and pus simply because I had neglected to inform him of the damage the sun will reek on those of our ilk.

By the time my vision caught sight of his hunched figure, my mind was in turmoil and panic. Thought and reasoning were not mine as I reached for him. Red, painful welts bubbled onto my flesh. My arms were on fire. My face flamed with pain. But he was my son and I needed to save him from himself. If he perished, then I did as well.

“André! Take my hand. Come with me!” I cried in desperation.

The flames of the sun obscured my vision. I could no longer see him. I reached a hand as far as the scorching heat would allow. All my strength I expelled in order to pull André from the fires of a metaphorical hell humans called daylight. This was a concept with which I had always been familiar.

When I felt a hand in mine I jerked inward and started back towards the darkness. I still could not see and had not a notion of what I would find once my vision returned. I did not stop, and blind as I was, I stumbled. The shaft of tunnel fell deep from there and my body tumbled into the cool and relieving dark where the sun could not reach even one deadly tendril. I sat against the stone wall, heaving for breath until my sight returned. I looked beside me and what I saw nearly put my mind into panic.

What could I do to help him? This was all so new to me, turning a human into one of our kind. I knew the sun could harm them as it did us, but—

“André?” I scrambled to where I could see a trembling mass of scorched flesh, his once elegant blond hair now black with billowing tendrils of smoke rising up to dissipate at the cave roof. I had suffered but nothing compared to my child. A few boils and red scorch marks on my arms and face. But I had already begun to heal.

I moved to touch him, to comfort him if I could, but stayed my hand just over the blackened flesh. His clothing had all but burned away and he shivered as if cold. Small moaning sounds were all that issued from his throat.

I felt helpless, wracked with guilt, and dire. If André died—

Yet another aspect of the transformation I had neglected to inform him—he would live virtually forever. But the sun!

Even we can perish from too much damage to the external regions of our bodies, if the harm went beyond the outer flesh. I hoped that would not be the case with André.

As had become my habit, though I knew it a fruitless act, I prayed to my father, the only “god” to my vast knowledge that actually existed outside translated books and tales of fancy. I knew of course he could not hear me, wherever he had gone, but it soothed the ache in my heart. And so, silently, I asked my father’s aid in healing my child.



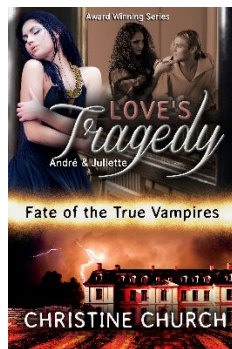
Entry Five to the France journals was not found in the same location as the others, but within a tomb of the cemetery known as Montparnasse. Only one short page. Since, more entries have been found, and are being dated and translated.

Several days have passed. I sit now within Montparnasse, amongst the stones memorializing the dead, yet not deep within the quarries that house the bones of millions. I have not returned there since I pulled André from the fire once night had fallen.

The damage to his newborn flesh was such that healing was not a quick process, as it is once one has aged. The welts I suffered in pulling André to safety had long healed, leaving no trace of their existence. I had lifted André over my shoulder once the dark penetrated the mines. I brought him to my townhouse and settled his charred body into the spare bed. He needed blood, I knew, but not just any blood. He needed human blood, and quite a bit of it. I could offer him my own, but as a half human, it would not have the same healing properties for him as the sweet nectar that flows within each person on this vast earth.

But where would I find it? This was my dilemma. Even I was having much difficulty in locating any human willing to give a donation and keep my secret. I feared my greatest anxiety; that I would have to kill in order to save my progeny, as well as myself.

Continued....



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“The Early Scrolls: Fate of the True Vampires, Book Two”

“Blood Moon: Diary of a Highland Massacre: Fate of the True Vampires Book Three”

“Love’s Tragedy: Andre and Juliette: Fate of the True Vampires Book Four”

“Children of Blood: Fate of the True Vampires Book Five”