

The Vizier's Wife

Brotherhood of Set Series Book 1

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Chapter 1

Ahmore woke to the sound of Bekhir's growling, surprised that he could have slept at all, after his audience with the King. Blinking in the dark, he groped for the dog's head to reassure her. "What is it Beki?" he asked, his voice husky with phlegm. Finding her smooth head with its pointed ears he stroked it. "Hush Beki, it's all right," he murmured.

The djesm hound whined and then growled again, jumping off the bed, her nails clacking on the tiled floor. He sighed and pushed back the light sheet and swung his legs over the side of the bed, rising stiffly. His old body did not move with the agility it once did. Groping for a robe he pulled it on and followed the dog to the door of his chamber, where she was scratching at the door and whining.

"What is it Bek? A rat?" he asked, amused by her agitated pawing. "Or do you need to go out?" that must be it, a call of nature and an urgent one at that. He reached out to open the door and Beki raced through the opening, whuffing and growling, her warning sounds. The Djesm Hound didn't bark like other canines. He followed her into the private sitting room of his palace suite and the outer door opened.

"What's to do, my Lord?" it was his personal bodyguard, Ametu.

"I don't know. Something has upset Beki."

The dog was capering about the room sniffing and growling, her ears twitching, her curly tail in contradiction, wagging. These mixed signals made Ahmore think it was some sort of game.

"Maybe a rat, or a snake has wandered in from the garden," said Ahmore watching the dogs antics.

Ametu drew his sword at the mention of a snake. "Best if you step back my Lord. I'll check it out." There wasn't much light in the room, merely a streak of moonlight from the clerestory windows near the ceiling. Beki's attention fixed on the curtained alcove that gave onto Ahmore private courtyard.

The curtain moved, Beki leaped, and a dark figure launched itself from the alcove. Ametu stepped forward, his sword raised, something sharp flashed upwards in the moonlight, and Ametu buckled with a cry, his body collapsing with a solid, thud at Ahmore feet. Beki snarled savagely, leaping at the intruder who blocked and flung her with a sickening yelp against the wall. Pivoting, the figure raised something large and heavy and brought it down on Ahmore head.

Pain exploded with white heat behind his eyes and his old knees gave out, he pitched forward over Ametu's body and his Ba dislodged, shocked and disoriented. Momentarily he was staring down at the two fallen bodies, the next...nothing.

The moonlight fell across the polished tiles in the Queen's chamber, only the glitter of a pair of eyes gave away the figure that lurked in the shadows from the garden. The Queen sat up in her bed and spoke to the room at large.

“Is it done?”

The shadows spoke low and quiet. “Yes.”

“Good. Convey our thanks to the Sareku.” The Queen lay back.

“I will.” The shadow hesitated.

“There is something wrong?”

“The bodyguard took a fatal blow.”

“Hm. Unfortunate.” The Queen turned her head, searching the shadows, the eyes had disappeared.

“The Sashat will investigate.” The voice came out of the dark, from a different place.

“Of course. They will find nothing. Will they?”

“They will find what they are supposed to find.”

“Exactly. Good night, Shai.” The Queen rolled over her dark hair spread out on the pillow.

The figure in the shadows stood a moment motionless and then withdrew on silent feet.

After a few moments, the Queen rose and crossed the room to a table by the opening onto the garden on which rested a goblet and wine jar. She poured wine into the goblet and drained it in several long swallows. She set it down on the table and stared out into the courtyard. Finally, she turned and went back to bed.

Ametu spun around, disoriented. He looked down and saw two bodies lying on the floor of the Vizier’s sitting room. The old man lay sprawled atop his own body, both were face down. A bloody contusion showed on the back of the old man’s head. A pool of scarlet blood spread out from beneath his own body. A smashed vase lay in pieces on the tiled floor. The dog lay inert against the wall, the curtain covering the doorway to the courtyard flapped in a stray breeze.

What was happening? He floated above the bodies but couldn’t seem to get any closer than a couple of cubits. Panic engulfed him, and he dove towards his body bleeding out on the floor and bounced off, ending up near the ceiling. Repeated attempts produced the same result.

The door to the corridor opened and men poured into the room, the Vizier’s staff, shouting for help and moving to lift the old man’s body and roll it off Ametu’s. The Vizier’s face was white and smooth, relaxed, and lifeless. The figure of his steward bent over him and confirmed what Ametu already knew, the old man was dead.

Two men rushed into the room, guards who turned Ametu’s body over and revealed a gaping wound in his chest from which blood still ran. Ametu dived at the body again as one of the men said, “He’s alive. But only just.”

“Fetch the physician,” said the Steward, staring down at the dead Vizier. “What happened here?”

Ametu tried to reach into his body as it was picked up and carried by the two guards from the room, but he couldn't get purchase, as if his body was repelling him. He followed it helplessly from the room.

“Yezi!” called Ta-Ami looking up from her sewing. *Where was he?* She shook out the gown she had finished hemming. The material was of high quality, the finest, sheerest linen and it had cost a small fortune. But hopefully the made-up gown would earn her twice as much as the raw material. Ametu certainly hadn't been happy with her last week for buying the cloth. She winced remembering his anger.

“We can't afford this kind of extravagance on a guards' salary Ami!” he yelled at her. His handsome face red with rage. He had been at the beer house and was drunk when he came in and found the cloth. Her attempts to explain that she hadn't bought it for herself but to make a gown to sell, had fallen on deaf ears that night. But in the morning with a sore but sober head he listened and grudgingly agreed that her idea might work.

“But you would be better to make items on commission rather than on spec,” he said.

She stifled a sigh and said gently, “Yes I agree, but I need some examples to demonstrate what I can do before I can get commissions.”

He grunted and finished his plate of bread drizzled with honey.

“Kay says she may be able to get me some clients,” she added placatingly.

“Good,” he got up and kissed her before heading to the door.

“Remember it's Yezi's name day, you will be home for the party tonight?”

He looked back and smiled sardonically, “If the old man lets me out, yes.”

“Oh, surely he won't keep you if you explain why you want to leave on time?”

“I wouldn't put anything past that horrible old man, remember what he did to Djed.”

She shuddered, blinking back tears at the memory. She would not think about that now. She looked around the small sitting room of her little mud brick house, *where was Yezi?*

“Yezi!” she called going to the rear door that led out to the courtyard and the kitchens.

“Mama, look what I found!” her son barrelled back into the house from the courtyard. He was five, his big brown eyes and white smile lit up his round, dear face. He held his hands out and a small lizard escaped from his palms and ran up his arm. She flinched and tried to smile.

“How lovely.”

“His name is Geb and I'm going to keep him,” he said a shade belligerently.

“What will you feed him?” she asked practically, refusing to be drawn into an argument. It was best to pick your battles with Yezi.

Before her enterprising son could answer, a thundering knock at the front door made her start. Moving to the door she opened it cautiously to find two Palace Guards standing on her doorstep. Ametu was working nights at the Palace this week, so he wasn't home yet. “Though he should be home soon,” she added, thinking that they must be looking for him. She didn't recognise the men, they weren't from Ametu's troop.

“Nebet,” giving her, her title of mistress of the house, the elder of the two guards cleared his throat and a shiver of apprehension skated over her skin.

“W-what is it?” she asked. Feeling Yezi roll into her, she put an arm round him, pulling him into her side.

“There has been an - incident up at the Palace. Can you come with us?”

“W-“ she stopped, meeting his gaze and swallowed. “Give me a moment, I'll get my neighbour to mind Yezi.”

Yezi looked up at her and her hammering heart turned over. “Yezi I have to go out for a little while, so I need you to go next door and play with Den.”

He nodded. “I can show him Geb.” He was still juggling the lizard.

Taking his hand, she moved up the street and knocked on her neighbour's door. “Rua!” she said with a falsely bright smile. “Can you take Yezi for me, for - for a while. I have to - to go up to the Palace.”

Rua, had two toddlers hanging off her skirts, a baby in her arms and the sounds of boys playing loudly in the background nodded tiredly. “Sure, what's one more?” she smiled down at Yezi. “Come in, the more the merrier.”

“Thank you. So much. I'll take the twins for you later, I promise.”

Rua waved her off and shut the door.

Ami ran back to her house where the guards were standing, shut the door, and followed them up the narrow earth packed street. It was still early, her worn sandals, puffed dust as she walked and her stomach rumbled, she hadn't had breakfast yet, waiting for Ametu to get home, so they could eat together...

She glanced over at the two guards and her stomach fluttered. Something was wrong, but what? What had Ametu done? Had that monster he worked for arrested him for some - some minor trespass, some failure to - to...she skipped to keep up with the men as they reached the main thoroughfare and headed towards the palace.

“What has happened?” she asked.

The younger guard looked at her sympathetically and the older man said, “Best to wait until we get there, Nebet,” he said. He avoided her eyes when he said it and her stomach turned over, her heart rate went up and a wave of nausea gripped her. *Whatever Ametu had done it must be bad.* Tears of fear and frustration stung her eyes. *Just as they were getting ahead...* She wiped her face and strode on, stiffening her spine. Trying to block her mother's I told you so's from running round her head.

They reached the palace and the guards shepherded her through the pylon gate into the vast outer courtyard. Ahead loomed the great gates of the *per now*, the palace itself. They

passed through them and into the vast open chamber of the receiving room. Pillars held up the roof, marble tiles covered the floor and well-dressed men stood about in clusters. Doors lined the walls on all three sides, the largest in the centre directly ahead. In front of that door and to the left stood a flagpole. But the guards directed her to the far-left wall.

“The office of the Vizier is this way Nebet,” said the older guard. She nodded and followed, trying not to stare too much. She had never been in the palace before. The large door and the flagpole, that was the main entrance to the Kings suite and the audience hall. She knew that from Ametu’s description.

Skipping to catch up, she followed her escort towards a door in the centre of the left wall. It was the largest after the one to the audience hall. Hieroglyphs above the lintel announced what it was. She couldn't read the glyphs, but she knew what it said. The Office of the Vizier. They passed through the door and into another smaller chamber. This was the waiting room. Another double leaved door ahead marked the Vizier’s Audience Hall, where he gave judgement. To the right, from Ametu’s description, lay the Vizier’s office itself and on the left, the entrance to the Vizier’s private suite. She expected the guards to lead her either to the judgement hall or the office, instead they turned to the left and held the door for her.

With a nod they indicated she should go in. She stepped over the threshold into a luxuriously appointed sitting room. Couches lined the walls and plants in pots alternated with statues of the King. Gold and colour assailed her senses. A man in a long robe approached her. He was in his thirties, his features were regular, but there was no warmth in his eyes when he looked at her. She swallowed, the shiver of apprehension she had been struggling to hold at bay, broke over her in a wave. *This was bad, very bad.*

“Nebet Ta-Amethiu?” He asked formally.

She nodded, clenching her jaw to stop her teeth from chattering.

“I am sorry to inform you that an intruder broke into the Palace last night and your husband suffered an injury as a result.”

“How-how bad is it?” She stammered, her pulse racing.

“He was stabbed in the chest Nebet. He is not expected to survive.”

She covered her mouth to stifle a sob and swallowed. “May-may I see him?”

He nodded, “This way.” He led her through another sitting room and into a bed chamber. He paused in the doorway. “The physicians are surprised he has survived this long, with such a wound. The Wab Priest says he has a strong Ka.”

She hardly heard his words, surging past him to the elegant lion footed bed on which Ametu lay stretched out on his back. His muscular chest was bare, blood stained his skin and the sheets, an ugly gash in the centre of his chest oozed blood, the metallic smell of it hit the back of her throat and made her gag. The wound had been stitched closed and smeared with honey, but not covered with a dressing. His chest barely moved. But he was still breathing, just. His face was pale and still. She barely recognised him, with all the animation wiped from his face, his expression blank, his skin waxy. She dropped to her knees by the bed and took his hand in both of hers.

“Meti,” she whispered, kissing his hand. It was cold and sweaty. “Please, don't die. What will Yezi and I do without you?” He didn't respond, his shallow laboured breathing continued.

She looked around for the man who had brought her into the room, but he had been replaced by another, a physician by his robe. He came to the other side of the bed and nodded at her sympathetically.

“Please, can you do anything?”

“We have done all we can. It is up to his Ka now, to fight. He lost a lot of blood. It is a miracle he has survived this long, Nebet.”

“Can-can I stay?”

“Of course. There is a chair,” he nodded to the chair against the wall, an elaborately carved and cushioned thing, with lions feet to match the bed.“ Make yourself comfortable. Someone will bring you food and drink.”

She nodded. “Thank you. You are most kind.”

“Your husband was brave Nebet, he put himself between the threat and the Vizier, Neb Ahmose.”

She rose dragging the chair to the bedside. Typical that Ametu would be hurt defending that horrible old man. “How is he, the Vizier?” She asked out of politeness.

“He died from a severe blow to the head.”

“Oh!” She looked up startled. “I'm sorry...”

“Yes it is most unfortunate. Do not worry, the Palace Sashat are turning the place upside down to find the murderer.”

She nodded and settled herself to wait. Wait for Ametu to wake up, or not. She supposed his parents should be told, but by the time they got here from Abu, it might be too late... she couldn't afford a courier anyway. She looked around, but the physician was gone. Next time someone came she would ask. She looked back at Ametu's waxy face, his shallow, barely there breathing. *Could he survive this or would he slip away and leave her a widow at twenty-one with a five-year-old son?* She swallowed the lump in her throat, tears stinging her eyelids. She was luckier than most, she had a family who would care for her. But the thought of going back to the family home to live, the thought of losing Ametu, made her heart crack. She put her head down and sobbed quietly into his hand.

Chapter 2

There was pain and darkness. Noise and movement. Hands on him... Pain. Nothing.

“Meti.” The voice was soft but persistent. It was female, and distressed. His body was heavy, so heavy he couldn't move it. His eyelids were leaden, too heavy to lift.

“Meti, it's Ami, the Physician said I should talk to you. You're doing really well he said. It's a miracle, but you have a strong Ka, so fight Meti. We need you, Yezi needs you. I need you.”

Who is Meti? Who is this woman? The puzzle was too much, and he slipped into the darkness.

She was still talking. Something about dresses and cloth and her sister. Her hand squeezed his. She was holding his hand in both of hers. Her voice went on, and he drifted on the sound of it. It was comforting. The pain was still there but it was dull, a throbbing ache in his chest. He faded out.

There was something heavy on his arm. There was a noise and voices. The weight lifted off his arm. Muffled conversation he couldn't follow. Hands on him. Something cool and soothing on his chest.

She was talking again, her voice sounded tired. It washed over him and he let it. Then it changed, became more urgent. Desperate. “Meti you have to wake up. It's been three days. We can't feed you if you don't wake up and if you don't drink and eat, you'll die!” The voice cracked and sobbed. “Please Meti, you've come so far. Don't die. You can't die. I need you. I love you. Please...” her voice broke into sobs. Her hand was gripping his so tightly...

He wanted to obey her and wake up, but his eyelids wouldn't budge. *I love you.* Her words wrapped themselves around the pain in his chest and warmth unfurled in their wake. *I love you. Yes. I love you.* He willed his eyes to open, but they wouldn't, he willed something to move, anything. And his hand squeezed faintly. More a twitch than a real squeeze.

“Meti...” her voice faltered, then picked up. “Meti!” Her hand squeezed his. And with a great effort he squeezed back.

“Oh Meti!” Her lips brushed his cheek. Kissed his hand, squeezed it hard. She was crying again.

His heart was beating sluggishly, he could feel it. Warmth and pain pulsed in his chest. This woman *loved him!* Whoever she was. And he had to open his eyes so he could see her face. He tried. He really tried.

A stab of pain lanced his chest and hot agony gushed through him. Darkness. Nothing.

Moisture trickled into his mouth and ran out the side. His head was propped up on a pillow. Someone pulled his chin down and inserted a wet cloth into his mouth. The moisture was wonderful. His mouth was so dry and sticky. He sucked, swallowed, and blinked. Light

seared his eyes and he closed them. He sucked again on the cloth, like an infant on a teat. Noises of encouragement around him.

The cloth was removed and replaced with a wetter one. He sucked it greedily. Hands on his hand, lips on his hand, an excited babble. Then he was lying down again and the darkness took him.

He opened his eyes. The room was dim. His hand was loosely clasped and a woman's head lay beside it, pillowed on her arm. Her hair was dark and curly. He couldn't see her face from this angle. He opened his mouth but no sound came out, just an exhalation. She jerked and sat up, blinking.

"Meti!" It was a croak, almost a squeak. He stared at her, this woman who loved him. She was beautiful. Young and lovely. Her eyes were tired, puffed, and red with weeping and lack of sleep, but her smile of joy was delightful and infectious. The stiff muscles of his face creased in an attempt to smile back at her. His vision was blurry. He blinked, trying to focus as she leaned forward, cupping his face in her hands and kissed him. On the mouth. He hadn't been kissed on the mouth in years, decades... he closed his eyes to savour it. Her lips were soft and left a tingle. Her thumbs stroked his cheeks. Tears rolled down her cheeks but she was still smiling. Warmth crept through his chest, drawing out the dull throbbing pain.

"Here," she took up a cup and held his head up offering him water. He sipped and swallowed. His tongue felt swollen, his mouth sticky and dry, the water was cool and delicious. He drank, drained the cup. She lowered his head back to the pillow, and he winced at the pain in his chest.

"Thank you," he whispered. His voice sounded strange and hoarse.

She raised his hand to her lips and kissed it. Her hand was small, his was big and brown and smooth skinned. Not mottled with sunspots and knotted with veins and knobby joints. He stared at it. He must be dreaming. This must be an hallucination. Or he was dead.

"Do you want something to eat?" She asked.

He nodded. He was hungry. Famished in fact.

She grinned and rose. "I'll be back in a moment. Just, just stay right there."

He watched her back towards the door as if she were afraid, he would vanish if she took her eyes off him. Where was he going to go? He was too weak to move without assistance. She ducked through the door, and he lay looking around the room. He was in one of the guest chambers of his Palace suite. He recognised the decor. *Why was he here instead of in his bedchamber?*

A wave of tiredness washed through him. It was all too much. His eyes closed and he slept.

It was still dark when he woke again and the room was empty. A tray of food sat on a side table against the wall, out of reach even if he'd had the strength to move. But not so far away he couldn't smell the fresh bread. His mouth watered. *Where was she?*

He sighed and his eyes strayed down his body reminding him that things felt very different. Apart from the pain in his chest, nothing else hurt for example. No sore joints, back or hips. His chest was partially shaven where they had dressed the wound and the skin was firm, muscular and sleek. His forearms were well-defined and muscular with a generous dusting of hair. He raised his hands to his face and ran them over his features. Several day's growth of beard scratched beneath his fingers, but his jaw line was firm, no sagging skin, or jowls beneath his chin. No pointy, bumpy nose either or thin pursed lips. His tongue explored his mouth, he had all his teeth! His heart raced, *this was not his younger self, it was another body altogether. But whose? What had she called him? Meti...*

Ametu...his bodyguard? He let out a breath. *How was this possible? What happened? How did...*

A memory flashed before his inner sight. Of Ametu's body at his feet, face down. *What...*

The door curtain moved and the woman entered. "You're awake," she moved towards the bed and seizing his face, kissed him, on the mouth, again. He held his breath, plunged into sensations he hadn't experienced for decades. She released him, too soon, and said, "Food?"

"Please," he said, nodding slightly. His head was swimming with weakness and shock, trying to process all that was going on, trying to make sense of it.

She reached for pillows and lifted his head, moving made his chest hurt, but he suppressed the groan that rose, not wanting her to be concerned. She chattered as she settled him against the pillows. "Does that hurt? We have to be careful not to break your stitches open. You're so lucky the wound hasn't become infected. The physician was most afraid of that, but he is a miracle worker. We are so fortunate to have the Kings own physician to treat you. There, are you comfortable?"

"Yes," he grabbed her hand as she turned away. "What happened? I don't remember..."

She smiled and patted his hand. "I'll tell you what they told me, when you've eaten, you need your strength." She leaned forward and kissed him again, as if she couldn't help herself. "I'm so grateful you're alive. We need to get you well enough to come home. Yezi is missing you."

Yezi? She turned to get the tray of food, set it on his knees and sat on the side of the bed to feed him. Which was perhaps the most wonderful experience he could recall for a very long time. Food had never tasted so good, even if chewing was exhausting. She fed him bread drizzled in honey and soaked in milk, and some dates. It wasn't a lot, but all he could manage right now.

His awareness of her was growing as his senses expanded and his initial impression that she was beautiful and young solidified and deepened, as he took in little details, like her scent, sandalwood and lotus, the curve of her cheek, the line of her plump lips, the definition of her ear, revealed when she pushed her long brown curly hair behind it. But it was her eyes that held him spell bound. A rich dark colour with long, long lashes, beneath perfectly arched eyebrows.

As she leaned over him, he became conscious of the warmth of her thigh pressed against his on the bed, and the full, heavy curve of her breasts in her plain gown. The cloth was not of the best grade, and she wore no ornaments or makeup. He wished that he could see her

beautifully attired like a lady of the court. But if she was married to his bodyguard, of course she couldn't afford such luxuries.

But that didn't seem to matter because she loved Ametu. Except he wasn't Ametu.

He chewed and swallowed the last date, and she tidied away the tray, wiped his face and hands with a wet cloth, gave him another drink and eased him back down flat in the bed again. His chest throbbed and the stitches pulled a bit. She checked the dressing. "It seems to be all right. Does it hurt?"

"Only a little," he said with a smile. He couldn't stop smiling. He couldn't remember being this happy. Ever. An inventory of his body told him that he had another need that was becoming urgent however, and he wondered how he was going to manage when he couldn't rise without assistance.

As if she read his mind, she reached for a narrow-necked jar and said, "Do you need to piss?"

He laughed with gratitude and embarrassment, which hurt his chest. "Yes, I do."

She went to lift the sheet covering him, and he realised with a shock that of course this was nothing unusual. She was his wife. He lay still as he watched her reach for his member. No one had touched him down there for a long time. His pulse raced and his breathing kicked up as her slender fingers grasped him gently but firmly. He gasped at the contact, feeling his body react with a surge of heat and sensation. His cock stiffened, and she giggled, stroking him with her thumb.

"Meti, are you that much better, already?"

"Sorry," he muttered, embarrassed, and aroused all at once.

She smiled, her eyes dancing with wicked delight. "Don't be, it's wonderful to see you're recovering so quickly."

She manoeuvred the jar over the head of his cock and said, "You had best think sobering thoughts or you'll not be able to piss."

"I can't help it when you touch me," he said. He reached out a hand to her. "You're so beautiful. It's a very fortunate man who has a wife like you."

She squeezed his hand and blushed, her eyes tearing up. "Oh Meti, that is so sweet!"

His cock had subsided sufficiently to let him piss, and he let go with relief. When his bladder was empty, she took the jar away, replaced the sheet and sat on the bed to hold his hand. He lay there looking at her as lassitude took him to the edge of sleep and over.

Ametu hovered over the body on the bed, watching with impotent rage as his wife attended to it and its cuckoo occupant. Somehow in the melee he had been evicted from his own body and the old man had taken up residence in it and no matter what he did he couldn't displace him.

His fury when Ami took the old man's cock in her hand made him danced about shouting at them, but they were oblivious to his antics.

His body resisted every attempt he made to take it back. The old man's Ba was strong and in the trauma it had somehow bonded with Ametu's Ka, his life-force, and the combination was too powerful to allow Ametu's Ba to overcome it.

When Ahmose woke again, it was daylight and his head was clearer, marginally less weak and fuddled, thirsty and hungry. Ami offered him more food and drink, and he took it, this young body responding quickly to the healing agency of nourishment. When she brought out the piss bottle again, he tried to control his body's reaction, but it was a losing battle when, after he had finished, she took him and squeezed gently.

He groaned involuntarily and she looked up at him, her eyes darkening, her tongue skirting her lower lip. His cock lengthened in her grip and went hard as hot stone. Her eyes on him, she leaned forward and licked the eye.

"Goddess!" He muttered, clutching at the sheets, his whole body reacting. His chest hurt, but he ignored it as pleasure he'd not experience in years flooded his body. He began to pant as she engulfed the head in her mouth, warm, moist heat. The sensation of her tongue caressing the sensitive head...He groaned again and his hips thrust upwards into her mouth involuntarily, as pleasure spiked through the pain in his chest. He drove up into her mouth as she held him and stroked him rapidly. He couldn't contain it.

He groaned, panting. "I can't - " his voice cracked as pleasure spiked and in moments he came with abrupt explosive pleasure. It washed through his body like a flood, masking pain and weariness, washing away everything. He subsided into the bed, his heartbeat heavy, his breath gasping, his head swimming. He felt her swallow down every last deposit and lick him clean before letting him go gently.

"Ah," he said. He didn't have words. She leaned over and kissed him. This time it was more than a pressure of lips. Her mouth nuzzled at his until he kissed her back, his lips parting to let her tongue in. He tasted himself on her tongue. The sensation overload was making his head spin. She sat back and whispered, "Better?"

"I - incredible," he murmured, his eyes drifting shut.

"Good, I can't wait for you to be better," she said softly.

"Neither can I," he murmured. He was so tired...

Ametu flew at Ami shouting in her ear, but she didn't hear him. He wanted to shake the old man out of his body, but he could do nothing, nothing! He shouted and flew about, bouncing off the walls and sometimes through them. All this dispersal of emotion made no difference to the two figures below him, but he noticed that his own form was fading, its silvery outline growing less distinct. Panic seized him, and he retreated to the ceiling where he lay staring down helplessly at his body. What was he going to do? Stay here until he faded away to nothing? He needed nourishment, but where to get it?

Ahmose woke in the late afternoon for another meal and this time he was able to stay awake long enough to talk.

"What do you remember" she asked.

He shook his head, "Nothing." Not entirely true, but what he did remember made no sense, no more sense than the apparent fact that he was somehow translated into her husband's body.

"The physician told me that they found you face down on the floor of the Viziers sitting room with this wound," she touched his chest lightly. "The Vizier was lying sprawled over you, with a massive contusion to his head. He was dead," his hand clenched at her words, and he forced his face to remain expressionless. She didn't appear to notice his reaction.

He swallowed, his heart hammering. How was this possible? He forced himself to concentrate on the rest of her words.

"You had lost a lot of blood, and they didn't think you would survive either. In fact, they thought you were dead, but when moved your body you seemed to rally." She gripped his hand fiercely and said softly. "I am so glad. I couldn't have born it if he'd survived and I lost you. I would have wanted to kill him myself. Do you have any idea who the murderer is? I suppose it could have been anyone. So many people hated him. You were so brave to put yourself in danger for him, especially after the way he treated us."

Ahmoose swallowed. Trying to digest all this. His face must have given something away because she leaned forward with concern. "You're tired with my chattering. Does it help you to remember?"

He shook his head, he couldn't speak, his throat felt tight. In fact, images, flashes of things were coming back to him, but it was a jumble.

Suddenly an image burst behind his eyes. Bekhir hitting the wall and yelping. He clutched at her hand and said, "The dog, what happened to her?"

"The old man's dog?" She asked. "I don't know, no one mentioned her. Was she there?"

He nodded.

"I suppose that's not surprising. The dog was the only thing he cared for. The only creature that cared for him, huh?"

He nodded again. She was right, his heart thumped in his chest. It ached, and it wasn't the wound. Beki, how could he have forgotten about Beki. Tears stung his eyes, and he tried to swallow the lump in his throat. "Can you find out? What happened to the dog?"

"I suppose. She will miss him. Dogs are very loyal."

"Yes," his voice came out husky.

"I've tired you out," she said, leaning forward to kiss him. He touched her face, returning her kiss instinctively. He had no business kissing this woman. She didn't know who he was, and if she did, she would be horrified, repulsed. Yet resisting her was beyond him. She was water in the desert, a meal to a starving man. As irresistible as gold to a thief. A delicious forbidden pleasure. He shuddered recalling the raw pleasure she had given him that morning. How could he give that up? It was intoxicating. Her kisses were temptation personified.

She smiled, stroking a hand down his arm. "You found the dog for him when it went missing didn't you? I'd forgotten that." She kissed him again. "I'll find out about the dog for you. Rest. I hope you'll be able to come home soon." She trailed her fingers down his neck to his chest and bit her lower lip. Her thoughts were so transparent his body stirred in

response. She wanted him, well this body anyway. His pulse kicked up, and his hands reached for her. She leaned over him, gave him her mouth, and for the first time he took some control, he kissed her, thoroughly, deeply. Revelling in the flood of sensations, the softness of her lips, the tingling desire her mouth evoked in his body, the blissful sense of her response to him. He wanted this, wanted it so much. Wanted her.

When she lifted her head, they were both breathing quickly. He stroked her cheek. "You are so beautiful," he said softly.

She blushed. "Meti..."

The curtain stirred as the physician came in, and Ami sat back flustered to be caught in intimacies with her husband. The physician smiled at her and at Ametu.

"Well, how is the patient today?" He approached the bed as she rose and Ametu turned his head to look at him. "Good to see you awake, young man. Has your wife told you how lucky you are?"

Ametu nodded. "Yes, she has, and that I have you to thank for my survival." He held out his arm to the physician who took it. They clasped elbows in the fashion of men greeting each other, and she settled into her seat to watch. The physician bent over Ametu and removed the dressing.

"It's beginning to heal and still no signs of significant infection. That's good." He reapplied more of the honey and herb mixture he had been using to treat the wound and redressed the wound with a linen patch that adhered to the honey. Ametu, lying prone in the bed watched him.

It was so wonderful to have him back. He seemed a little different, more subdued and - she groped for the right word to explain the difference in him - grateful, that was it. But that wasn't surprising really given what he had been through. No doubt he would be back to his old self soon enough. She rather liked him like this, appreciative and sweet. He said such nice things to her. He was definitely getting better rapidly, that last kiss had been-

"There, all done," the physician cut across her thoughts. "I think in another day or so you'll be ready to go home. We'll get you on your feet tomorrow and see how you go, what do you think of that?"

"That will be welcome," said Ametu with a smile. He was so handsome when he smiled, her heart flip-flopped in her chest. This attack had been a terrible thing, but it had one positive side effect, she had started to fall in love with her husband all over again. She had been perilously close to falling *out* of love with him a few days ago, in fact for months she had been struggling with her regret in following her heart against her parents' advice. But sitting here, watching him mend in front of her eyes, knowing how brave and selfless he had been to take on the murderer and try to save that old man's life... she leaned forward and squeezed his hand in gratitude.

"That will be wonderful, thank you so much," she said addressing the physician. "I can't wait to get him home and spoil him. Our son is missing him." She looked at Ametu. "Yezi is staying with my parents while I'm here with you. Word has been sent to your parents in Abu."

He nodded and swallowed. He looked tired again. The physician went on, "The King's Investigator will want to speak to you before you leave. I've been keeping him at bay until you were well enough to talk to him, but I think you can stand a visit from him tomorrow. How much pain are you in?"

"It's tolerable, if I don't move," admitted Ametu.

"I'll give you something you can take home with you for that," he said. "Well, I'll leave you with your lovely wife. She has taken very good care of you."

"Yes, she has," said Ametu with a smile and a squeeze of her hand. Yes, there it was, that grateful look he had been giving her, like a dog grateful for a pat. Which reminded her.

"Do you know what happened to the Viziers dog?" She asked.

"Bekhir?" Said the physician turning back. She felt Ametu's hand tighten in hers, and she glanced at him, his face was blank and pale and tense as if he were holding his breath.

"She's uninjured. Very sad though. She is mourning her master. She spends her time sleeping on his bed and the staff haven't been able to get her to eat much."

"May I see her" asked Ametu.

"I suppose so. You knew her, didn't you?" Said the physician.

Ametu nodded.

"Getting her to leave her masters room might be a challenge."

"I'll go to her," said Ametu quickly.

The physician pursed his lips. "We'll see how you go getting up. I don't want you overexerting yourself on your first day out of bed. If those stitches break open it will be very bad, and you lost a lot of blood. You're going to be quite weak for some time yet."

Ametu nodded. "I'll be careful."

Chapter 3

Ahmore entered his old bedchamber on shaky legs, leaning heavily on Ami, which given the relative differences in size was just plain wrong. But there wasn't much he could do about that right now because he was as weak as a kitten. He'd almost keeled over when he stood up. But he was determined to see Beki, and Ami, bless her, was as determined to help him, despite not really understanding why he was so set on seeing someone else's dog.

He stood in the doorway, hanging onto the door jamb and watched Beki. She was curled up on the bed, her smooth golden head tucked in, her pointy ears down, her curly tail still. He swallowed the lump in his throat and spoke softly.

"Beki. Beki girl."

She didn't respond at first, but he tried again, and this time she lifted her head and looked over at him. Her eyes, big and sad, regarded him for a moment or two, then she put her head down on her paws with a sigh. His heart cracked.

He let go of the door jamb and staggered towards the bed. Sinking down on it beside her, he put out a hand towards her. She sniffed the hand and dropped her head again. He eased down beside her and whispered, "It's me, Bek." He stroked her head gently and she let him.

Finally, she raised her head and licked his hand. Then she whimpered and her tail twitched. Sitting up she leaned over him and licked his face, then she put her head down and nuzzled into him. Did she know it was him? She rubbed against his chest which made him grunt with pain. She recognised him, he was sure of it, even though he must smell and sound wrong, somehow, she knew!

He sat up, and she raised her head and let out her trilling yodel sound and crawled into his lap. No mean feat since she was too big to be a lapdog. He cuddled her, resting his face in her fur and wept. He felt Ami wrap her arms round him, and he lifted an arm to wrap it round her hips pulling her close and let the pain in his chest out. Beki had been the only love in his life for a very long time, to be without her was unthinkable.

Wiping his face, he sat up and looked at his body servant Bak standing by the door. "Bring her some food."

"She won't eat," he said.

"She will now."

Bak threw him an odd look and shrugged. He came back shortly with a clay bowl that he set on the floor.

"Come on Bek," said Ahmore, rising and sliding down onto the floor beside the bowl. Beki followed, and he offered her a piece of meat from the bowl. She licked his fingers and looked at him as if seeking permission. He nodded, and she took the piece of meat chewed and swallowed. He scratched her ears and praised her, and she began to eat. In moments the bowl was empty.

"Good girl!" He patted her and hugged her, and she nuzzled into him again. Ami helped him up and he said to Bak, "Bring her things." And they headed back to the guest room,

with Bak trailing them with Beki's food and water bowls and the cushion she sat on in his office.

Back in the guest room, Ahmose lay down gratefully, exhausted, and Beki got up on the bed and curled up on his feet. Ami fussed over him, telling him to rest, he was scheduled for a visit from the Inspector that afternoon.

She woke him to feed him before the inspector was due, and he was sitting up in bed when the man came in.

Ahmose recognised him. The man was one of his staff, Pepi by name. Pepi nodded at him but did not offer to clasp his arm in greeting.

Pepi was accompanied by a scribe with a wax tablet and stylus to record the interview. The scribe sat cross-legged on the floor and prepared to take notes. Ami settled herself in the chair by the bed and Pepi stood on the other side, his legs spread, his hands behind his back.

"So tell me what you remember of the attack," he said.

"Not a great deal," said Ahmose, trying to think what the sequence of events and the scene would look like from Ametu's point of view. "I heard Bekhir, his dog, whining and growling in the sitting room, so I opened the door to see what the matter was. Neb Ahmose said he thought she might have scented a rat or a snake come in from the garden. She was scrabbling at the curtain across the alcove to the garden, but it was fixed down. I said if it was a snake, I'd take care of it and for him to stay back, or something like that. I drew my sword and moved in front of him."

He stopped and Pepi nodded. "What happened then?"

"I'm not sure, it all happened very quickly and there wasn't much light. The curtain ripped open and a dark figure lunged towards me. Before I could react, I felt a stabbing pain in my chest and then, I think, I passed out because I don't remember anything else."

"Nothing else at all?"

Ahmose shook his head. It was a lie. He remembered Ametu falling at his feet and the dark figure lunging at him with something large and heavy in his hands and the worst pain exploding in his head when the thing hit his skull. He remembered seeing both bodies lying one atop the other on the floor. His Ba had left his body.

"Not until I woke up here, three?" He looked at Ami for confirmation and she nodded, "Day's later."

"What about the dog?" Asked Pepi.

"I think she tried to attack him, I seem to recall her warning growls turning to savage snarls, but nothing after that."

"He?" Pepi pounced on the pronoun. "You're convinced your attacker was male?"

"Yes," said Ahmose surprised. "I hadn't considered any alternative."

"Why? What makes you so certain? Can you describe him?"

"I couldn't see much, it was dark, but by the silhouette he was tall and broad shouldered and from the force of his attack he was strong. Definitely a man. But I couldn't see his face."

Pepi nodded, glancing at the scribe to see if he was keeping up. His stylus was working at full speed, working in hieratic, the shorthand form of hieroglyphs used for situations like this when dictation and transcription were necessary.

"Did you hear anything? Did he speak?"

"No." Ahmose shook his head.

"Smell? Body odour, bad breath, scented oils?"

Ahmose frowned trying to recall. "He was clean, perhaps a whiff of sandalwood."

Pepi nodded again. "Good. Anything else, at all. Any little detail, even if you don't think it is important..."

"No, I can't think of anything."

"Well, we will leave you in peace then Iry Aa Ametu," he said giving him his title of Door-Keeper. Rather a demotion from Iry Hatia, First Minister, the most powerful man in the government, after the King. "You are free to go home when the physician deems you fit. If you recall anything at all please come to the Viziers Office and ask for me, Inspector Pepi."

"I will," Ahmose nodded and this time Pepi offered him an arm, and they clasped elbows.

"You're a lucky man Ametu," he said with an appreciative glance at Ami.

Ahmose nodded and took Ami's hand with a small smile of pride. "I know."

Ahmose was going 'home' today, which was exciting and terrifying at the same time. It was peculiar to associate home with anywhere but the palace. He had lived in these rooms for twenty years since his inauguration as Vizier under King Ahmose. He had served Ahmose for the last four years of his rule and been lucky enough to survive the change of King when the throne passed to his son Amenhotep. He had been reinaugurated and served Amenhotep and his mother the Queen and Gods Wife, Ahmose Nefeteri, for sixteen years.

He had been a privileged person for so long, his every need attended to by a bevy of servants, his every word treated with the respect his office was due. He knew he hadn't been popular, but that was the price of high office. You had to make decisions that people didn't like. How was he going to adjust to life on a guards' salary?

The one thing that reconciled him to this fate was Ami. Powerful men attract women like bees to honey. In his younger years he'd had his pick of women anxious to secure power and prestige and influence for their families and luxury and advantage for themselves. When his wife died, he flinched at the memory, still, when she died, he'd taken advantage of the choices offered, but he had never chosen to marry again. He'd been married to Taya for twenty-two years. Losing her had broken something he couldn't seem to fix.

Especially when his son blamed him for her death and refused to have anything further to do with him. He couldn't dwell on the past, on memories so painful they made his chest ache. He had a chance at a new future here, a chance to do things over again, better, with a

beautiful woman who wanted him and a young son, an unknown quantity. Could he love this boy who was not his son, but would think he was his father?

He was more nervous about meeting the boy than going home or making love to Ami. The latter was something he'd been fantasising about for days. He wanted her so much his body ached with it. He'd been too weak to make the attempt so far, but that hadn't stopped her pleasuring him. He couldn't wait to return the favour. When he was strong enough to perform, he planned a smorgasbord of delights for her. He would spoil her rotten after the joy and pleasure she had given him. He was so impatient of his body's slow recovery.

Yet it was a miracle to have a young, healthy, strong body again. He'd forgotten how powerful it could make him feel. He was recalling the years of his youth, and impatient now to have them back. Combined with his confidence, knowledge, and experience, dare he say wisdom? It was a powerful mix. What could he now achieve with his abilities? More than a guard, more than a doorkeeper that was for sure. But how to go about it?

His churning thoughts were interrupted by Ami saying, "Everything is packed and the carrying chair is here for you, come."

He had been sitting in the chair, dressed in a coarse weave, loose robe, a pair of worn sandals on his feet, while his thoughts whirled nervously through his head. She helped him to rise, and together they walked out of the guest room and out of the Viziers' suite for the last time, Beki at his heels. He felt a pang and looked back; his old life was over. What lay ahead?

The carrying chair was wide enough to accommodate them both, carried by four strong bare chested young men. Beki would follow the chair.

Ametu followed them out of the palace and perched invisible to all on the top of the carrying chair. He had found a method of replenishing his heka to sustain his Ba. It was simple, he visited those who slept and sucked the heka out of them, like a mosquito sucking blood from its victim. It wasn't fatal to the victim, they barely noticed it, but it sustained him, stopped him from fading.

Squashed into the chair, Ami's thigh pressed against his, her hand locked in his, her head on his shoulder, the swaying gate of the chair, and the privacy of the cloth curtain surrounding them, offered an opportunity for intimacy too good to pass up. Putting an arm round her waist, Ahmose pulled her against him and kissed her. She tilted her head and parted her lips a willing and enthusiastic respondent. Her arms went round his neck and his spare hand found one of her breasts, he had been dying to touch them, feel them, fondle them. They were a perfect size, slightly bigger than pomegranates, and soft and wonderful to touch and hold, especially when she moaned as he squeezed them.

He released her mouth briefly, panting, to watch her face as he squeezed and fondled her nipple through the cloth of her gown. She had her eyes closed, and she bit her lip, tilting her head back, arching her back towards him, and moaned again. His cock already uncomfortably hard, stiffened even further.

“Ami, love,” he murmured, leaning forward to kiss her neck and nibble on her earlobe. “I want you so much, it’s all I’ve been able to think about.”

She opened her eyes and touched his face, “You can have me, I’ll ride you, so you don’t have to move too much.”

His heart thudded at the suggestion, a wonderful picture blooming behind his eyes. “Goddess, Ami, you’re a treasure, I am the most fortunate man alive.”

She smiled and blushed, as she always did when he paid her even the smallest compliment. “I wanted to do that since you were injured. But I was afraid it would hurt you.”

He groaned, pulling her closer, “My sweet, delicious Ami, I love you, so much.” She smiled, her eyes going misty, “I love you too, Meti.” And she kissed him. He lost himself in the kiss momentarily, shutting out the voice in his head that was shouting, *she loves Ametu, not you. If she knew it was you, she would recoil in horror. She hates you.*