

In Khonsu's Orbit

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“Now that Ahkmenrah is free to move about the museum, it's discovered that he's affected by moon phases. More specifically full moons, and the effects change every month. At first it's alarming, and some are negative, but most are enjoyable in one way or another.”

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Chapter One – Lunar Eclipse

“Everyone make sure you have your eclipse shades, they—no Dexter, that's not how you—Ook, *that's not for eating!*” Larry sprinted over to the youngest Neanderthal, knocking over the box of paper glasses he had taken from the Astronomy closet. Dexter chittered at the sight before resuming the careful shredding of the shades he was given.

“Do you think we should help him?” Nicky asked. He was leaning against one of the utility boxes that Ahkmenrah was sitting on.

Ahk shrugged. “I don't believe our help is needed. I've already ordered the more unruly exhibits not to jump over the railing so there's no real cause for concern. They're merely agitated.”

Tonight was the first lunar eclipse since Larry had become their new night guard. In an effort to keep everyone from going stir-crazy, Larry decided that occasional “field trips” were in order. Anyone who could make it up the stairs to the roof was allowed to come. However, if they strayed too far they would be banished from future field trips.

Nicky frowned. “Well, I guess you're right.” Or at least he hoped so, anyway. Truthfully, he wanted to help his father but he felt a more pressing matter required his attention. Nicky arched his back into a stretch, throwing his hands behind his head. As he yawned, he snuck a glance up at his newest friend.

Ahk seemed ... off. Now, Nicky understood that he'd only known Ahk for about a month, (and not even a full month since he wasn't allowed to visit every night) but they'd become fast friends. Nicky also understood that teenagers could get moody, but Ahk just didn't seem that type. He was too cheerful and grown-up for that.

No, there had to be something else bothering Ahk. Nicky was determined to figure out what it was and help his friend out.

Ahk watched over the mingling exhibits before him, eyes glazed and unaware he was under observation. He couldn't explain just how or why exactly, but this evening he woke up feeling strange. Normally he awoke full of energy and excitement, forever grateful the gods had deemed it fit to allow him freedom once more.

All that energy was absent. Instead, Ahk felt sluggish and weak, wanting nothing more than to curl up into a ball and wait for tomorrow night. It bore a faint memory to when he was sick back in Egypt, but that couldn't be the case.

I'm quite dead, after all, he thought with a dark chuckle. He subconsciously brushed his fingers against his throat. *The dead can't get sick.*

Ahk turned his gaze toward the moon. Since it was impossible for him to be sick, it most likely had to do with *that*. Nights the moon disappeared from sight were a bad omen back in his time. Larry had explained to everyone that this phenomenon was called a *lunar eclipse* and was caused by the earth blocking the sun's rays from reaching the moon, which apparently was the reason there is moonlight at all. According to Larry, the moon doesn't give off its own light. Ahk supposed it made some sense, but it was hard to believe.

It wasn't that he was against science, not in the least. He appreciated all the advancements mankind had made since he was alive, but there were moments he struggled to believe everything. After all, why should his people's explanation with their gods be considered make-believe when he *himself* was proof to the contrary? If he were brought back to life by the power of the Tablet then surely his gods were real. Yet there were so many who no longer worshipped his gods. Where did the truth begin? How could both his gods and science coexist?

A sharp pain erupted behind his temple. Ahk winced. It seemed that kind of thinking was only going to make things worse. He straightened his back and refocused on what was going on before him. If he was going to make it through this night, he needed all the energy he could spare.

"Okay guys, it's going to start any minute now! Remember to keep your shades on!"

Ahk clutched his head. Why was Larry yelling so loudly? None of the exhibits were hard of hearing. For that matter, no one needed those ridiculous paper glasses. None of their eyes were real so they couldn't be damaged. What good would paper do anyway? And why all this fuss over something that would be over in—

The world tipped violently to the side. Ahk barely caught himself. His entire body trembled as if instead of trying to keep himself upright, he were trying to push the earth away.

There was no kidding himself now. He couldn't keep up pretenses any longer; he had to leave.

Whatever strength he had left was disappearing with each passing second.

"N-Ni—"

"Finally!" Nicky hissed. Ahk winced and Nicky lowered his voice some more. "I said your name like ten times! What happened? What's wrong? Are you sick? Can you get sick? D'you need some water? I'll go get my dad—"

"N-no ..." Ahk blinked and tried to focus on the fuzzy Nicky-shaped outline before him. Why were his eyelids so *heavy*? "Just ... d-downstairs, pl-please ..."

"Uh, okay. If you say so." Nicky moved forward and nearly crashed to the floor as Ahk leaned on him. He grunted from the effort and tried to shift the weight around, but Ahk was too tall. All Nicky could do was drag him around like an oversized blanket. Nicky tried to move Ahk so he was supported against his back like the guys did in movies, but his shoulders just weren't wide enough.

"Ahk I can't—you need a big person t—umph!" At the exact moment everyone "*oohed*" and "*ahhed*" Nicky crashed to the ground, smothered in Ahk's unconscious form.

Toward the front, Larry was darting his head this way and that, panic welling up in his throat. He wasn't exactly sure how or why, but amidst the cheers he heard a muffled cry of pain from Nicky. Various scenarios flashed through his mind, each one worse than the next. Had Nicky fallen off the roof? Forgot to put the shades on? Been accidentally impaled by the bushmen?! Tripped—

Larry ducked to avoid getting smacked in the face by Balak, Attila's right-hand man, who had a tendency of wide hand gestures whenever he was excited. See, that was just the thing with this place. Anything was possible, meaning Larry had to be prepared for whatever danger it threw Nicky's way. Which apparently included being buried under four-thousand-year-old pharaohs.

"What are you guys doing?" Larry dropped to his knees and rolled Ahk over to his side. The pharaoh didn't appear to be in any immediate danger, so Larry turned his attention to his son. To his relief, Nicky was already moving and there didn't appear to be any blood. Larry grabbed Nicky anyway and began inspecting him for injuries. "Are you hurt, buddy?"

“Not really. Just a little scrape.” Nicky held out his right hand, clearly having used his palm to lessen the fall. “Didn’t even break the skin.”

“Well we should still clean that up, okay?” Larry said. Call him overly cautious, but it never hurt to be careful. Who knew what kind of diseases were just lying around out here?

A gloved hand rested on Larry’s shoulder. “What’s wrong, Lawrence?”

“I’m not sure, Teddy,” Larry said. Of course the President would be the first to notice. Larry just hoped they could solve this before anyone else did. “Nicky what happened? Did Ahk hit his head?”

“No, he just fell over. He kinda looked sick but he didn’t—I wanted to say something but ...”

“It’s okay, Nicky.” Larry squeezed his shoulder. “It’s not your fault.”

Larry reached out to place a finger against Ahk’s throat then drew it back just as quickly, realizing it was a futile gesture. The Pharaoh didn’t have a heartbeat, didn’t need to breathe either. The only reason he and the other exhibits occasionally inhaled was purely psychological and partly because of muscle memory. The memory of their real selves involved breathing so they did it. Same thing applied to blinking. None of them really had to, but it was such an ingrained motion they ended up doing it.

But back to the matter at hand, what was wrong with Ahk? If he didn’t trip or hit his head then why did he fall? Was there something wrong with the Tablet? It didn’t sound like anyone else was affected. Plus, Ahk still had a flesh and blood appearance so it couldn’t be that the Tablet wasn’t working anymore. (Which Larry was grateful for—he didn’t fancy seeing mummified Ahk again anytime soon.)

“Good Lord, is something the matter with Ahkmenrah?”

Larry’s shoulders slumped and he bit back a moan. He knew Clark meant well, but the man’s voice had a bit of a *booming* quality to it. Larry wasn’t sure how such a boisterous man had managed to not get their expedition killed by wild animals, but he supposed Sac had something to do with it.

Just as he feared, Clark’s exclamation had turned all eyes on them. The rooftop erupted in a cacophony of noise as everyone spoke at once. They were all questions of concern for Ahk, but Larry couldn’t possibly solve the issue when he couldn’t hear himself think.

“SILENCE!”

Teddy’s command was obeyed almost immediately, leaving Larry to make a mental note to ask for lessons later. He’d more or less gained the respect of the entire museum, but he still had a way to go in terms of getting them to listen.

“Thanks.” Larry cleared his throat. “So um, there’s no need to panic. I don’t think Ahk is in any uh, immediate danger. Has this happened—” Larry paused before rephrasing the question. “Have any of you ever felt sick before?” Everyone shook their heads.

“We’re all incapable of getting sick,” a civil war soldier said.

One of the Dutch women nodded. “Quite grateful for that.”

“—what could be wrong with Ahk?”

“Well he is different from the rest of us—”

Naida, one of the Peruvian alpaca herders, gasped and spoke quietly. “You don’t think something could be wrong with the Tablet?”

Whispers rippled through the crowd and some moved closer together. Others began a visual inspection: shaking their limbs, poking their skin, tugging on their hair, etc.

Larry stood up and held out his hands. “Guys, hey guys—calm down, it’s okay. If you could all take a step back and let us bring Ahk downstairs we’ll try and sort this out.”

It took some more convincing, but Larry was able to get everyone to calm down and get off the roof. While he was busy ushering everyone back inside, Attila carried Ahk to the security office with Nicky at his heels. The young boy clutched Ahk’s crown against his chest, fingers tightly gripping the keys to the security office.

Maybe Ahk was just exhausted. He did have to sleep every so often; maybe it had been a while since he last took a nap? The two of them *had* played a long street hockey game the other day. It could also explain why he seemed a bit cranky. His mom always said he got cranky when he didn't get enough sleep.

Nicky unlocked the door when they arrived, then set about putting pillows on the couch. None of them knew how long Ahk would be unconscious, so they might as well make him comfortable. As Attila laid Ahk down gently, Nicky crossed his fingers for luck. Ahk just had to be okay. He had to.

The world came back in fragments, followed by hushed voices in a language Ahkmenrah was unfamiliar with. He performed a mental check of himself as he had been instructed to, and while he was pleased to note he was lying upon something soft, his body ached. Mostly it was his head; perhaps he had been knocked out by a blow? Yet he wasn't bound, what could these foreigners want with him?

It couldn't be Kah's followers, that much was for sure. The lack of restraints proved that, though most telling was the unfamiliar language. His brother's followers could barely speak Egyptian properly. Perhaps he had fallen and some passerby took pity on him? That could explain the kind treatment. Yet Ahkmenrah could feel his royal garb still about his person, so the foreigners could also be after a reward. Either way, his best course of action would be to appear amiable. He'd adjust accordingly if circumstances grew worse.

Suddenly there was a hand on his shoulder, and before he could stop it, Ahkmenrah's instincts took over. He grasped the arm that touched him and twisted it harshly as he stood. Shrieks and yelps of indignation filled the air. Ahkmenrah stared curiously at the man who had touched him. He had pale skin, dark hair, a night guard uni—

"Larry!"

Ahk immediately relinquished his hold on Larry as his memories came flooding back. His temple throbbed once more and the pain sent him collapsing back onto the couch. Ahk clutched the side of his head and moaned. Now not only was he *still* in pain, but it appeared he collapsed in front of everybody and repaid their kindness by injuring one of his closest friends.

Once the throbbing ceased, Ahk glanced over at Larry. "My deepest apologies," he said, wincing. "I never meant you any harm."

"It's okay," Larry said, rubbing his sore shoulder. "Guess I should let sleeping pharaohs lie, huh?" Ahk's mouth twitched at the weak joke which Larry counted as a win. Truthfully, his arm felt like it was on fire, but he couldn't let Ahk know that. Plus he knew he should be grateful. Were Ahk at full strength, Larry knew the undead pharaoh would have ripped his arm clean out of its socket. The image of the sarcophagus lid nearly crashing against the ceiling was still fresh in his mind.

"So uh, you mind telling us what happened back on the roof? Are you ... can you get sick? Nicky said you looked sick."

Ahk sighed. "I have no answers for you, I'm afraid. I can't recall this ever happening before nor do I have the slightest idea why. All I know is I feel weak and it's difficult to think properly."

"Maybe this will help?" Nicky stepped forward with an ice pack. "Dad said you can't take any painkillers since you um, don't have a stomach but you could use this." Nicky gently placed the pack against his head and grinned when the tension in Ahk's shoulders lessened.

"Thank you, Nicky." Ahk sighed and leaned against the couch. "I hope ... I didn't hurt you terribly, did I? The last thing I remember was falling against you back on the roof."

"Nah, you mainly startled me. I'm pretty tough after all." Nicky puffed out his chest and flexed his arms, pleased when Ahk smirked in response.

"I don't wish to alarm anyone, but we must figure out what's ailing our dear Pharaoh," Teddy said. "Then we can ensure it doesn't happen again."

"It has to be the moon," Sacagawea said. "Amongst my people, we believe the moon to hold great power. Its brief absence could explain his weakness."

“But the moon didn’t actually disappear, my love,” Teddy said.

“Yes, but its light still vanished.”

“Well, not exactly—”

“I think Sacagawea is right,” Ahk interrupted, desperate to avoid another culture clash discussion. On the whole, everyone was civil about them and Ahk enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the differences between the museum’s varied cultures. However, there were times the discussions escalated to screaming or sparring matches, which Ahk’s aching head couldn’t handle at present.

“We ... my people also attribute power to the moon. Not as much as Ra’s light though,” he said wistfully. “Perhaps the Tablet only working at night means it’s connected somehow.” He stared up at the other exhibits critically. “Did anyone else suffer in the manner I did?”

Sacagawea shook her head. “We asked the others but no one felt any different.”

“Most likely, your unique connection to the Tablet is why you are the only one affected,” Teddy added.

Ahk inclined his head in a weak semblance of a nod. While he felt they were still missing something, it was an explanation that made the most sense. And despite the inconvenience, Ahk supposed he was grateful it was just him. If this were to affect the entire museum poor Larry and Nicky would be at their wit’s end. He’d never wish that on them.

“Well, now that we’ve got that all figured out let’s give Ahk some space to rest.” Larry made a motion with his hands to shoo everyone out. Teddy tipped his hat, Attila bowed his head, and Sac gave him a warm smile. “I’ll come get you before sunrise,” Larry whispered before he quietly shut the door.

When Ahk turned to Nicky, the young boy was holding out a peculiar object. There were two small circular bowls connected by a curved metal band, and one of the bowls had a string dangling from it. “They’re headphones,” Nicky explained. “This kind covers your ears and they’re pretty good at blocking sound. Here.”

Ahk gasped in surprise once Nicky had finished placing the device over his ears. “It’s remarkable!” he exclaimed. His voice sounded muffled, like he’d pressed two pillows against his ears.

Nicky moved to flick the light switch, thrusting the room into darkness aside from the small emergency light by the power box. His dad said it made sure the guards could fix the lighting should the power ever go out. Nicky was just glad it meant he didn’t have to ask for a nightlight whenever he slept over.

“Well, I guess I’ll, uh, leave you alone to rest.”

Ahk quirked an eyebrow as he lowered the headphones to settle around his neck. Nicky was glancing at the ground and shuffling his feet. “You’re perfectly at liberty to stay, Nicky,” Ahk said, fighting back a smile. “This is the usual time you go to bed yourself, isn’t it? I have a headache, not fallen ill.”

Nicky’s face split into a grin and he bounded over to Ahk on the couch. In no time they were snuggled under the blankets together like always.

“I’m sorry I scared you earlier,” Ahk whispered. “I should have been truthful and alerted you or your father to my condition.”

Nicky shrugged. “You didn’t know what would happen. Just tell us next time, okay? Don’t want you fainting by yourself with Dexter nearby or you’ll be in trouble.”

“I’m certain only your father would have cause to fear *that*,” Ahk teased, poking Nicky’s ticklish spot. Nicky giggled but resisted the urge to fight back, understanding the gesture for what it was.

“Night, Ahk.”

“Goodnight, Nicky.” As Ahk drifted off to sleep, he sent a quick prayer to the gods that whatever had befallen him tonight would not cause problems in the future. After all, he had only just regained his freedom. Surely he should be granted a reprieve?

Chapter Two – Harvest Moon, Part One

Waking up each night was normally a pleasant experience, and tonight was no exception. Or at least for the first five seconds.

After that, it felt like someone dropped a boulder on his torso. Then there was this terrible throbbing in his upper chest, and Ahkmenrah suddenly found himself very, *very* weak. Just lifting his arm drained all his energy. Ahk contemplated just resting a moment, but it was getting difficult to breathe. And not just because he was in an enclosed space—it was actually physically hard to breathe.

Ahk spent the next five minutes trying to push off the lid to his sarcophagus, feeling as if he were trying to crawl his way out of a sandpit. When he finally succeeded, he was drenched in sweat and felt as if he had run around the entirety of Egypt. *Twice*. The fresh air was welcome, and Ahk decided to just rest for a moment.

He couldn't rest for long, because he became acutely aware of how dry his mouth was, his head hurt so much his vision was swimming, and there was this terrible ... gnawing where his stomach should be, like someone was repeatedly dragging a dagger through it. The pain grew to an unbearable level, but Ahk only had enough energy to lay there and whimper. What was worse was his body started shivering. Ahk refrained from wearing his cloak and crown in the sarcophagus, leaving him with just the *wesekh* around his shoulders and half-pleated *shendyt* around his waist. It wouldn't be too much of a surprise that he would find himself chilly in such sparse clothing—except for the fact that he was dead. Ahk hadn't felt the cold for nearly 4,000 years.

Ahk closed his eyes and summoned all the willpower and energy he could muster. It was a pitiful amount, but he wasn't going to spend the night lying in his sarcophagus like an invalid. He knew someone would eventually come to check on him, and he'd rather be found with at least some of his dignity intact. He coiled all the strength to his muscles, grasped the side of the sarcophagus, and pulled himself up and over.

To his horror, his strength gave out halfway. He ended up sprawled on the floor with his cheek pressed against the smooth tile. It was colder here, but Ahk's strength was depleted. Worse yet, he was beginning to suspect what was happening to him.

Suffice it to say, Ahkmenrah was terrified.

“Hey Ahk, what's taking you so—*Ahk!*“

Larry broke into a sprint and dropped to his knees beside the collapsed pharaoh. The scene was eerily similar to what happened during the lunar eclipse, except this time Ahk was shaking. Perhaps he had a difficult time getting out of the sarcophagus? But Larry had taken the pins away that first night Ahk was freed, so what was it?

He reached out to gently lift Ahk off the ground, only to find his skin was ice cold. “Oh my god you're freezing!” Larry quickly pulled a limp Ahkmenrah to his chest and started rubbing his arms to warm him up. Ahk mumbled something and curled up tightly against Larry, eyes clenched shut.

Larry's mind whirled with confusion. What was going on? None of the exhibits ever showed any reaction to the temperature before, and Ahk had been just fine out in the snow when they chased Cecil. What changed?

Larry let go of Ahkmenrah for a moment as he shrugged out of his jacket. Ahk whimpered in pain at the movement and Larry wondered what else was wrong. He wrapped the jacket around the Pharaoh, wishing he had something warmer.

As Ahk's trembling slowed, he slowly opened his bleary eyes to look up at Larry. “Th-thank you.” His voice was raspy, like his vocal cords were rubbing against sandpaper.

“You got any idea what's going on?” Larry's legs were beginning to lose sensation, so he shifted into a sitting position. Ahk gave a small nod, yet instead of explaining he grasped Larry's fingers and

brought it toward his throat. Larry frowned at the action, but froze when he realized what he was feeling.

A heartbeat.

Larry felt a sharp chill go down his spine. “Wh-what ... h-h-how ... h-has this ever happened before?!”

Was Ahk turning human again? But how? Why now? Would it spread to the rest of the museum? There wouldn’t even *be* a museum if that happened! And forget losing his job—Larry would be handed over to the FBI for the greatest robbery in history. It’s not like he could tell them the truth. The exhibits would all become lab rats if he did, with Ahk first in line. There was no way Larry would allow that to happen. He was the night guard after all. Even if they became human they were still his responsibility and he had to protect them.

But if Ahk’s heart started working again, did that mean ... Larry started pressing three fingers at random places on Ahk’s chest like physicians did during physicals. Larry could definitely feel *something*, but he stopped from trying any further when Ahk cried out in pain.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

Ahkmenrah curled an arm around his stomach and whimpered. “It ... I don’t ... m-my head,” he wheezed. “I ... I-I can’t ...”

Larry placed his palm against Ahk’s forehead then drew it back with a yelp. “You’re burning up!”

“N-no I ... f-fre-freezing ... *lā a’rf, akh?*”

Perfect. Now Ahk was speaking Ancient Egyptian. Perhaps he was becoming delirious with fever? But how? Why would turning human make him sick?

Ahk’s breathing was more gasps and wheezes now. His back arched ever so slightly as if he were clawing for air. Larry felt for Ahk’s pulse again, at a loss of what else to do. To his horror, Ahk’s heartbeat was racing like a rabbit. What’s more, Ahk’s skin felt like it was drying out with each passing second. His skin was shriveling before Larry’s eyes!

What the hell was going on?!

“Lawrence, Ahkmenrah! What’s keeping you, lads? Everyone is—what in God’s name?”

Larry whipped his head toward the entrance, eyes wide with panic. Teddy and Sac stood next to each other, identical looks of concern and confusion.

“Help me, please!” Larry cried. “I think Ahk’s dying!”

Sac was by his side in seconds. Her skilled hands flew over Ahk; checking his temperature, pulse, pupils, etc. Larry watched in horrified fascination as Sac pinched Ahk’s shriveled skin and the fold stayed in place, like malleable wax.

“Has he spoken?” Sac asked, her usually calm voice tinged with panic. “Does he understand where he is?”

“H-he ... yeah for a little while, but he started speaking Egyptian and I don’t think he’s really here anymo—”

“He’s severely dehydrated.” Sac stared at Ahk with a mixture of horror and faint fascination. “But I’ve never, this is too...” She shook her head. “He should be dead.”

Larry choked on air as the full implications of the situation hit him. “Oh my god, he hasn’t had any water for 4,000 years! He should have died the moment he woke up! Why—”

“Don’t lose your head, Lawrence.” Teddy placed a hand on Larry’s shoulder. “We can still save the lad. Tell us what to do, my dear,” he said, turning to Sacagawea.

“I need salt and sugar. Water alone won’t be enough.”

“Break room, and there should be a pitcher you can use.” Sac was nearly gone before Larry finished talking. Teddy started after her, but Larry told him to wait.

If for whatever reason Ahkmenrah was fully flesh and blood, after being an undead mummy for 4,000 years ... somehow the word “starving” didn’t seem adequate enough. A strange calmness had

taken over Larry as he stared at the dying friend in his arms. Now that he had a clearer idea of what was happening to Ahk (though unfortunately not the *why*), he could start working on a solution.

“We’re going to need more than just water,” Larry said. “I need you to fetch blankets from my office and my lunch. It’s the brown sac on the desk.” It was only a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and apple slices, but it would have to do for now. “And tell Attila to come in here!”

“Aye, aye, Lawrence!” Teddy’s voice echoed from the hallway, also desperate to avoid wasting precious time.

“Come on, Ahk. Just hold on a little longer.” Larry cradled Ahk closer to his chest. “You can do it. Come on, buddy!”

In no time at all, Sac came charging into the room, a full pitcher clutched to her chest. There was a lid on top, which most likely accounted for her speedy return. Teddy returned seconds behind her, though with less grace as he struggled to keep from tripping over the blankets in his arms.

“Hold him up,” Sac instructed, kneeling across from Larry. “We need to do this slowly or he’ll upset his stomach.”

Ahk drank the water mixture like—well, a man with a thousand years’ thirst. Sac tried to pull the pitcher back but Ahk bumped it with his hand. Some of the water splashed on his face, but before the three of them could mourn the waste, something miraculous occurred.

Ahk’s shriveled skin *absorbed* the water, like a sun scorched earth. Sac glanced at Larry in shock before splashing Ahk’s face again, only with a little more of the mixture. His skin absorbed it all. Not only that, but the shriveled appearance started to fade.

“Come on, help me get all this off,” Larry said, tossing his jacket to the side. McPhee would kill him if they ruined Ahk’s clothes.

Larry quickly removed the jeweled *wesekh* from Ahk’s shoulders while Teddy and Sac untied the long *shendyt* around the waist. They knew Ahk wore a shorter, black *shendyt* underneath as a sort of undergarment. It more closely resembled the typical attire of Egyptian males during that time. Ahk only stripped down to this level when sparring, and while Larry couldn’t help the twinge of guilt at the mild invasion of privacy, it was no matter. Saving Ahk’s life was far more important than propriety.

Sac immediately set about dousing every inch of bare skin she could with the pitcher. It was emptied in less than a minute but Ahk’s skin absorbed it all. He was still shivering, still had shriveled skin, but no longer looked on the brink of death.

“*Daichny ni buruu yuu?*”

“Attila my lad, perfect timing!” Teddy gestured him over while Sac and Larry wrapped Ahk in blankets. “We require your strength to transport our dear Pharaoh to the break room.”

“*Daichny ni buruu yuu?!*” Attila repeated, though he moved forward as instructed.

“We don’t exactly know what’s wrong with Ahk,” Larry explained, recognizing the Hun’s preferred title for the Pharaoh. *Daichin* meant warrior, and he’d chosen it after the two of them had sparred within the first month of Larry’s employment. “For some reason he’s human again, but he’s dehydrated and starving so we need to keep him from dying.”

Larry wasn’t sure how much of that Attila got, but he figured the man had worked out the basics. While the others set about gathering everything, Larry put his jacket back on and pat himself down to make sure his keys, wallet, and phone were with him.

“All right!” Larry clapped his hands together. “Attila, you help Sac keep Ahkmenrah hydrated. I’m going to run to the closest store and get as much food as I can. I’m not sure how hungry Ahk’s gonna be once he’s no longer thirsty but I figure it’s going to be a lot. Teddy, can you keep an eye on the rest of the museum while I’m gone? I’ve got my cell so if there’s a problem just use the office phone to reach me.”

Teddy saluted him. “Understood, my boy. We’ll keep the museum and Ahkmenrah safe in your absence.”

Chapter Three – Harvest Moon, Part Two

Larry maneuvered his shopping cart as fast as he could without running into anyone or raising suspicion. Unnecessary questions wouldn't do him any good, though he supposed the uniform helped deflect at least some unwanted attention.

But what to buy? What would satisfy the palate of an Ancient Egyptian? Well, he supposed it didn't exactly matter at the moment. A hunger as ravenous as Ahkmenrah's would make anything remotely edible taste gourmet.

Still. Larry didn't want to feed the poor guy junk.

He eventually decided on heavy foods, the kind rich in calories. Two full rotisserie chickens, an armful of frozen pasta dinners, a few foot-long deli sandwiches, some sushi packets, a mini chocolate cake (Ahk had to try modern desserts after all), buffalo wings from the deli, and so on.

When Larry swiped his card at the checkout, he realized he'd be living on a diet of top ramen for a time. It would be worth it though. Larry wasn't going to let his friend starve after all. He just prayed that Ahk's hunger wasn't equivalent to 4,000 years' worth of meals. He'd be helpless in that case.

To his relief, the museum was still standing upon his return. There were no flames, police cars, FBI vans, or reporters. Only Teddy stood at attention, musket in hand. Larry called out for him and hobbled over. His arms felt like they were on fire! The cashier had been kind enough to place all the food in paper bags to make it easier to carry, but they were heavy.

"Looks like you've got enough to feed a contingent of soldiers!" Teddy teased as he relieved half of Larry's burden.

"How's Ahk?"

"I only checked in on them briefly, but from what I saw the boy's skin is fully saturated and no longer on death's doorstep."

Larry sagged forward, letting out a breath he'd been holding for the past hour. "Thank God for Sacagawea."

"Indeed. Such a remarkable woman." Were the situation less dire, Larry would have teased Teddy about the dreamy haze in his expression that only appeared around the Shoshone woman. Instead he merely chuckled.

"Come on. Let's get Ahk some food before he starts eating the furniture."

The sight that greeted them in the break room was an interesting one: the counter was splattered with soggy salt and sugar; there was a wet blanket on the ground; Sac was collapsed at the table, looking a little worse for wear; Ahk was hunched over on the floor, completely smothered in Attila's fur-lined coat and hat which made him look like a child playing dress-up; and finally Attila himself, kneeling at Ahk's side and rubbing his back while he whimpered.

"Who's hungry?" Larry asked as he and Teddy heaved the bags on the table.

Ahk's head popped up, a crazed look to his eyes. Larry swore at his mistake and tore into the bags, searching for the sandwiches. Just as he touched one, Ahk's fingers clasped around the first bag.

"Attila, hold him back!" Larry shrieked. Thankfully the Hun was quick, and Ahk only had time to rip part of the bag to shreds. Larry's hands shook as he unwrapped the first sandwich. The image of Ahk's shriveled body gasping for air was enough nightmare fuel for the week, but the sight of him driven mad with hunger broke Larry's heart.

They couldn't just let Ahk loose though. Ancient Egyptians didn't package their food with plastic, so in his fervor Ahk was in danger of trying to bite straight through it. Not to mention the fact that most of the meat had bones underneath, and Larry was afraid of Ahk accidentally swallowing some. It was best to start him off small.

Teddy and Sac at least caught on to some of Larry's intentions, and in no time at all they unwrapped every sandwich. Larry dumped them all on the table and nodded at Attila. The Hun deftly picked up the squirming pharaoh and plopped him on a chair.

Like a ravaging beast, Ahk tore into the food. The four onlookers watched in morbid fascination as Ahk essentially inhaled the first three sandwiches.

"Wh-what if he chokes?" Larry whispered. At this point trying to perform the Heimlich was likely to get himself killed.

Sac shook her head slowly. "He drank an entire pitcher in one breath and never struggled."

"Im-Impressive," Teddy said.

"Ene ni buruu yum."

"Yeah, you said it." Larry broke out of the trance when he noticed there was one sandwich left. "Shit! Here um, you guys open these. It's sushi, fish with rice. Don't let him near the ginger or wasabi—the pink or green stuff—or the soy packets either." Larry snatched all the frozen dinners and rushed to the microwave. "I've got to heat up this pasta. Just keep him eating!"

The next thirty minutes were a blur as the four dashed about to try and abate Ahkmenrah's hunger. Finally, Ahk began to slow down when one rotisserie chicken and the chocolate cake were all that was left. Until that point, Ahk had only concerned himself with shoving food into his mouth, barely sparing time to chew or even breathe. It was sickening to watch, and Larry found himself grateful he hadn't eaten yet.

It was curious though, that despite all Ahkmenrah had drunk or scarfed down, he hadn't displayed any signs of discomfort. His stomach hadn't even bulged. The Pharaoh was half-naked with his chest laid bare, and he was as thin as ever. Larry had started to fear the unquenchable hunger theory, when Ahk took a break in his gorging to snatch a napkin.

In between bites of chicken he began cleaning the errant bits of food and grease that stuck to his face, as well as what had dribbled onto his chest. He pointedly avoided the others' gaze, and Larry had to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Now with blood circulating his body once more, Ahkmenrah's face had turned bright red, from the tip of his ears to the nape of his neck.

Once he was more or less clean, he lifted his head to smile at them. "I can't thank you enough for your help," he said, voice hoarse. "Though I must apologize for my behavior."

"You'd just turned human again and were so hungry and thirsty you went nuts—pretty sure that's acceptable behavior," Larry said. Ahk absently tugged on his ear with a sheepish grin.

"Exactly, my boy. Your actions were perfectly understandable given the circumstances."

"Ene ni tulaan ölsögölön shig baisan."

Sac smiled warmly at him. "There's nothing to apologize for, Ahkmenrah. We're just glad you're alive."

Ahk's face flushed once more as he moved onto the cake. "What is this, Larry?" he asked as he pulled off a piece.

"Triple chocolate cake. Made sure to save the best for last." Larry grinned. "Prepare to be blown away."

Ahk's eyes lit up with sheer joy at the first taste. "This must be the food of the gods!" He shoved the rest of the slice into his mouth and finished the cake with barely restrained zeal. As he dabbed his face with another napkin, Larry set down a half-gallon of milk.

"Drink it. Trust me, after that cake you'll need it." Ahk didn't bother arguing. He lifted the carton to his lips and finished all of it in one go.

"So um ... are you good?" Larry asked when Ahk set the container down with a satisfied sigh. "Or do you need some more water or something?"

Sac stepped forward and rested her palm against Ahk's forehead. "No more fever," she said with a smile. "Pulse is normal, and your skin is better. Do you feel sick?"

Ahkmenrah pursed his lips into a frown before shaking his head. “No, I feel quite all right. I don’t feel ill, nor am I nauseous. Which is quite peculiar, considering,” he said, inspecting the table before him. “Did I really consume all of that?”

“I was afraid it wouldn’t be enough!” Larry chuckled. “I can still order a pizza or something if you need—” Larry’s words died in his throat as Ahk suddenly pitched forward, limp as a rag doll. “Oh my god he must be allergic to milk did I kill him?!”

“He’s only sleeping, Larry,” Sac said. Her quick reflexes saved Ahk from a painful faceplant. She maneuvered him onto the ground and laid his head in her lap. Attila retrieved his coat and once again draped it over Ahk.

“Zügeer baga zereg shig,” he said, reaching out to ruffle Ahk’s hair fondly.

Now that the immediate danger was truly (finally) over, all the adrenaline left Larry’s body in one fell swoop. He collapsed into a chair and leaned his head back, intent on taking a nap of his own.

The nap lasted all of two seconds.

“What in tarnation was all that confounded hellabaloo?!”

“In all my years I’ve never seen such an alarming display.”

Larry snapped his attention toward the far kitchen counter. “Jed? Octavius? What are you guys doing here?!”

“Came t’see what all the fuss was about, Gigantor!” Jed huffed. “All Mr. President said was that you were takin’ care of an issue an’ we needed to be on our best behavior.”

“Then once we saw the lady Sacagawea and Attila escorting someone to the night guard break-chamber, we knew it to be a dire situation,” Octavius said. “It took us a while, but we managed to infiltrate the room before your return. And we entered only to discover our esteemed leader to be in peril!” His grip tightened around the hilt of his sword.

“What’s wrong with the Pharaoh, Gigantor?” Jed fixed Larry with a hard glare, but the effect was ruined by the way his gaze kept drifting to Ahk’s sleeping form.

After a moment of consideration, Larry ran a hand down the length of his face and sighed. “To be honest, we don’t know. Ahk just all of a sudden turned human this evening. Still no idea why, but ...”

“His body returned with a hunger to match,” Octavius finished, gaping at Ahkmenrah in awe.

Jed whistled. “Wooo-eee! He was on that like a wild dog on a ham.”

“Pardon me my liege, but will this spread to the rest of the museum?” Octavius asked. “Are we all to become human again?”

Larry threw his hands up helplessly. “I have no idea. The stupid Tablet didn’t come with an instruction manual!” He buried his face in his hands, rubbing the bridge of his nose. This job was going to give him a migraine. Every night it was something different. Except tonight reminded him more of the eclipse about a month ago . . .

“I’ve got it!” Larry yelled, leaping to his feet. He pulled out his phone and clicked on speed dial. “Hey Nicky, it’s dad. Is there a full moon out tonight?”

“Huh? Can’t you check yourself?”

“Kind of in a difficult situation here, buddy. Can you just look for me?”

“M’kay. Just a sec.” The phone was set down, and Larry drummed his fingers against his leg as he waited. “Looks like one I guess,” Nicky said a moment later.

“Could you check online just to make sure?”

“What’s going on, dad? Are you okay?”

“I’ll explain everything in a minute, I just need you to find this out for me.” There was a slight pause then Nicky agreed. Larry switched his phone to speaker mode and set it on the table. At the same time, Teddy brought Jed and Octavius to the table so they didn’t have to keep shouting.

For a moment all was silent, save for the tapping of keys and the click of Nicky’s mouse.

“Um ... yeah it’s a full moon,” Nicky said, his voice echoing around the room. “Oh and it’s even got names. It’s called a Corn or Harvest Moon. Something about farming I guess. What’s this about? What happened?”

“For some reason Ahk turned human and we had to get him food and water before ... well, he just needed it.” Even with the danger over Larry didn’t want to acknowledge the near death experience.

“Oh. But he’s human, that’s awesome! He can finally come to my hockey games and I can show him my room and the city and we can go get ice cream and—”

“Those are all great ideas Nicky,” Larry began, “and I know Ahk would love to do all that with you ... but I don’t think it’s permanent.”

The exhibits glanced to Larry sharply. “Whatcha thinkin’, Gigantor?”

“I think it’s just like what you said, Sac.” Larry gestured to her. “Remember, at the lunar eclipse?”

“I said that the moon was responsible.” She glanced down at the sleeping man in her lap. “Since the Tablet is his property, it would explain why the rest of us remain unaffected.”

“But why now?” Teddy asked. “If this occurred every full moon wouldn’t Ahkmenrah have remembered such an event? No one gave him food or drink so ...”

“Maybe it doesn’t work if he’s trapped in the sarcophagus,” Nicky said.

Octavius let out a snort. “Thank the gods for that.”

“So will Ahkmenrah have to endure this process every time?” Teddy turned to Larry. “I’m not familiar with the pricing of food nowadays, but I imagine it would cause you monetary strain, Lawrence. I don’t wish for you to suffer.” Larry shrugged.

“I’m hoping not, but we’ll just have to see.”

“Each full moon has a different name,” Sac said, shifting the attention back to her. “They were chosen in relation to the season, though I’m not sure what that would mean for Ahkmenrah.”

“Well, during a Harvest Moon Ahk needed to eat a lot of food, and during a harvest you um, well, harvest a lot of food.” Larry shrugged. “Makes sense to me.”

“But what about—”

Larry held up a hand. “Look, let’s just ... we figured out a lot already. Why don’t we clean this mess and see what Ahk thinks when he wakes up. Nicky, I promise we’ll talk about this more tomorrow, okay? I’ve got to get back to work.”

“Kay. Love you. Tell Ahk I said hi!”

The next morning, Larry collapsed on his couch, not even bothering to remove his shoes. Turns out Ahk slept for pretty much the entire night. They managed to wake him up toward the end, but only barely. He was groggy and drained of energy, but had enough to insist he return to his exhibit on his own two feet.

The guy could hardly sit up straight, but Larry didn’t have the heart to deny the request. After such a rough night, Ahk was desperate to maintain some sense of control. Both Larry and Sac ended up helping him to the sarcophagus. Sac had to book it to make it to her exhibit in time, but they got Ahk back safely. He fell asleep the moment he lay down, and Larry waited to see how the magic would end.

As the familiar energy lifted, Larry was both pleased and disappointed at the mummified corpse Ahk had returned to. It really is just the moon, he realized.

Later that night he’d discuss what happened with Ahk. Hopefully they could come to an understanding of what happened as well as plans for how to handle any complications in the future. But for right now, it was time for Larry to catch up on some badly needed rest.

He just hoped the other full moons were more enjoyable for Ahkmenrah.