

## Sunset

He awoke to a field of white. A few eye-blinks sharpened his vision, and the white became canvas above him, to all sides, and there was an opening in the tent to the left. The smells of early spring were in the air, those of fresh growth and new flowers. He looked down, and saw he was lying on a fabric cot with a thin sheet across his body.

That opening was masked by two panels of the same cloth, and each undulated in its own meter to a small breeze pushing its way inward. The movement drew his attention, and then he saw the woman sitting in a camp chair near the egress.

She wore a simple shift, more white against white, setting her tanned skin and dark hair in contrast.

Her eyes were dark as well, and her features were not beautiful, nor were they ugly. She was unremarkable. Even as he thought this, one of the tent door flaps was stirred out of place by a strengthening wind, and a shaft of sunlight lit her face for a moment.

Then she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The illumination and the attendant shadows created a work of art. He thought he could look at it for hours, but then the wind diminished, and the light was gone. Once again, she was generic.

She looked at him, and spoke. She did not smile.

“Welcome, Traveler.”

He sat up, and swung his legs over the edge of the cot, but did not stand. He realized he also wore a light white robe. On the inside of his right arm he had a small tattoo. It was simple, just an outline, two triangles with a line between, and downward arcs to each side. At first he thought,

*I don't know what this means.*

But then a tiny piece of memory came back in two parts. There was the black dog for a moment, the one with the Anubis ears. And then a girl's voice, but only a single statement.

*Dad, don't go.*

That was it, nothing else. This evidence did not help him, only brought another internal question.

*Who am I?*

The words in his mind were different than what he articulated, his voice dry and dusty even to his own ears. This he spoke out loud, and knew it wasn't really what he wanted to understand as soon as he uttered it.

“Where am I?”

She arched one eyebrow before replying, as if she also knew they were wasted words. Hers confirmed it.

“That's your question?”

He tried to adjust, but the tent flap once again stirred, and she became more. He was arrested again, and remained so until the light faded. Instead of distracting him though, it helped him to get a little closer to what he wanted the answer to. He realized that the who and where probably didn't matter.

“What now?”

She did smile then, and the effect of it was similar to the light from outside the tent, and her words were like music that he might never have heard if not for being lost here. Or found here.

“You keep asking questions that you know the answer to.”

Yes. She was right. He did know, sort of. The fullness of the realization worked its way through his mind like a slow-moving vaccine.

He was almost there. The near knowing was frustrating, and his inability to get all the way to the end of it stymied him. He stared at the tattoo again, and the ghosts of memories hovered at the edge of vision but remained out of sight.

Another interrogative did finally arrive, yet it came with apprehension. Did he really *want* to know?

His hesitancy translated to the two of them silent for a long time, and light began to dim outside before he could summon the will to ask it. But he eventually did.

“Why me?”

The woman, partly in shadow now shrugged, but what he could still see of her face was kindly even without a smile. Maybe it was the set of her brows, or the dimples in her cheeks. When she spoke, there was no judgment or imperiousness in her tone. He didn’t know why this meant so much to him, but it did.

“You asked. It was given.”

Tears formed in his eyes quite against his will, but he set himself against them. He wanted to get to the end of the matter, and it seemed there was only one question left, now.

“When?”

She didn’t respond for a while, and he thought maybe she wouldn’t. The light dwindled further. But then she did speak.

“When the light is almost gone. Or at least, that is what our eyes will tell us.”

They sat again in silence, and he wondered whether she had told him the truth as sunlight leached its way out of the world. The tent was drenched in shadow now, and his hope waned.

He contemplated the options of standing and screaming, or lying back down to sleep and escape. Neither held anything. Then, a thought bloomed in his mind, a mental picture of a single word.

*Kneel.*

It was right. He knew it, and had already done it once upon a time. He remembered.

Then she stood up, and her raiment was somehow brighter than the ambient light available to illuminate it. She was again the luminous being he’d seen earlier. She swept one of the tent flaps open, gesturing outward. He stood as well, as she spoke for the last time.

“Go now, and meet your King.”

His heart leapt, and he left the tent and made his way across a field of green grass towards a city of impossibly bright light.