

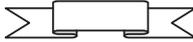
The Gift of Osiris

by

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Chapter One

Three thousand five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, was a land called tWay, which had a ruler, Geb, who ruled wisely with his wife, Nut, who was also his sister. When he knew he was dying, he divided the land between his two sons. Osiris, as the elder, was given the richer lands of Ta-Mehu of Lower tWay, which stretched from the Mediterranean to the region south of Fayoum Oasis. Set was given Ta-Shemau, Upper tWay, the remaining land that stretched along the Nile to Elephantine. His daughter, Isis, was to marry her brother Osiris, as was the custom in the royal household, and the other sister, Nephthys, was to be married to Set to rule alongside him.



The Pharaoh Set of the Ta-Shemau sat on the imperial throne dressed in the traditional loincloth, his muscular frame a testimony to countless hours of rigorous exercise with his manservant Benipe. Set was large for a tWay man, perhaps five feet nine inches tall. He had very white skin and a mane of golden hair that he wore long. He always wore a scorpion crown to keep his hair in place, and many feared him because of his striking appearance. The throne room of the pharaoh was ornate, with columns of marble supporting the high ceiling painted with several cosmic patterns depicting the God Ra. Set was in his early thirties and a man of vast appetites with a passion for life and power; his impatience was legendary. His two main advisors lay on the polished marble floor in front of him quivering in fear as he spoke to them both in a harsh, hard voice, the

venom in his speech evident to all the guards that surrounded the room. Set never went anywhere without his elect body guards and manservant in attendance; even the royal bedchamber and bathing were attended by his inner core of trusted guards. Each man was handpicked for his bravery and loyalty and known to Set during his childhood.

“Ammon, why is Osiris still alive?” Set stated the obvious.

“My Pharaoh, the slave was discovered trying to poison Osiris. He was tortured and killed.” Ammon spoke calmly, even though he knew he faced death.

“How?” Set spat the word.

“Osiris usually eats alone after his morning exercise, and the food taster smeared the fresh dates with poison, eating some of the dates that were not poisoned, and leaving the pips for Osiris to clearly see.”

“So, why did he not eat the dates?” Set asked, now clearly perplexed.

“His Nubian manservant, Panhsj, wrestles with him each day, and Osiris offered him the dates whilst he dried his body with a cloth. He died choking in front of Osiris; the poison acts immediately,” said Ammon, still calm.

“And the slave?” asked Set.

“Osiris had him tortured, peeling the skin from his body until he told him everything he knew,” said Ammon.

“What did he know?” asked Set.

“That if Osiris died, his family in your kingdom would be released from prison and each one made rich,” said Ammon. “He knew whatever happened, he would die.”

“So, why did he not kill himself with the poison when the plot failed?” asked Set.

“The slave offered the plate of dates to Osiris, expecting him just to pick a date to eat, but he took the plate and gave it to Panhsj on the other side of the room, so he could not get to the dates before they arrested him,” said Ammon.

“So what did Osiris do when he learned I had tried to kill him?” asked Set.

“Nothing,” said Ammon, “he spoke to Isis your sister about the plot, but they decided the best course of action was to remain silent and be more vigilant. He will see the food taster eat before he now tastes food, and drink from his cup before he drinks.”

“How do we know this?” asked Set.

“From the slave girl, Tadinanefar, who shares Osiris’ bed sometimes in the afternoon when Isis is resting,” said Ammon.

“He speaks to her of these matters?” Set was shocked; he never spoke to slaves.

“Yes, he tells her everything,” said Ammon.

“How did you persuade her to seek information on our behalf?” asked Set.

“My brother Hakim is a merchant here in El-Kab, and her sister is a slave in his keeping, he has promised they will both be freed if Tadinanefar provides information to help kill Osiris.”

“Could the girl kill him?” asked Set.

“Probably not,” said Ammon, “and we would lose a valuable informant.”

“So, Zosimos, what is to be done?” asked Set.

Zosimos was a small man in his late fifties and had been an advisor at the court of the pharaoh before Set was born. He had always been careful not to be the main advisor, always his assistant. He knew now that whatever he said sealed their fates. “Ammon’s plan was sound and he was just unlucky in its execution, my Pharaoh. We now need to lure Osiris away from his

private rooms and gardens to some location where we can kill him. Perhaps the sister could be bait to tempt him,” said Zosimos, the cold marble floor seeping into his bones as the fear crept up his spine.

“Is the woman beautiful?” asked Set.

“Very beautiful, my Pharaoh,” said Ammon. “She is called Nefertiti, and she is the most wondrous woman my brother has ever met.”

“Really?” said Set.

“Hakim tried to buy both women, but purchased Nefertiti first, but when her sister was auctioned, Tadinanefar was to be sold, and an aid arrived for Osiris and bought the girl for the pharaoh so the girls were separated,” said Ammon.

“I always thought Osiris was above ploughing the slaves,” said Set.

“He always plants his seed in your sister every day, I am told, but occasionally takes a slave to his bed,” said Ammon. “The girl Tadinanefar is different; she has become a regular visitor to his bedchamber.”

“And boys?” asked Set.

“Never,” replied Ammon. “He only puts his seed in girls.”

Set looked at the two men lying on the floor spread-eagle and remained silent. He was angry and wanted to punish both men, watch them being tortured, crying out in agony and dying before his eyes for this failure, but he hesitated. His advisors were very few, and capable men even less. Ammon and Zosimos were both very clever and proposed several social projects that had been successful. As he got older he learned not to surround himself with merely subservient men, but those worthy of their position.

“Stand,” said Set. “Your plan is a good one. You may proceed with it without delay. Now, what news of the Eblan, has their envoy arrived?”

“No, my Pharaoh,” said Ammon, relieved he had lived another day.

“When he arrives, bring him to me in all haste,” said Set “Now go and do my bidding.”

The two men shuffled backwards, their heads bent low towards the ground, and as they approached the door, the guards opened it and the two disappeared from view.

“Will the girl lure Osiris?” Zosimos asked Ammon.

“Probably,” said Ammon, “but Osiris is no fool and rarely travels alone. We need a much better plan to kill him which strikes his vanity. Bedding another girl will not make him careless; he can bed any woman with the flick of an eyelash.”

“We need to be clever and think quickly,” said Zosimos.

“I think best when I am rested following bedding my wife,” said Ammon.

“I am told you only bed your wife,” said Zosimos, the shock of survival making him incautious with his information.

“It is true,” said Ammon. “Fouada has been the love of my life since she was a child. We married when she was only fifteen and I was thirty, and I have ploughed her every day since and never looked at another woman or wanted to.”

“You are lucky. I have taken three wives, but none make me happy, and each day I try a new slave girl, but always I am disappointed,” said Zosimos.

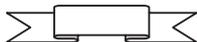
“Some men prefer boys,” said Ammon.

“I tried,” said Zosimos, “but it was not for me. I prefer women, but I have not found that special person who makes my heart leap like my beautiful daughter Fatin each time I see her.”

“Well, you have one blessing; I do not have children,” said Ammon.

“But you have the love of Fouada and are content,” said Zosimos.

“That is true,” said Ammon. “You go and find the Eblan envoy, and I will ponder on a better plan to kill Osiris.”



Fouada wore a simple sheath dress falling from the breast to just above the ankle in a pure white linen cloth. She wore papyrus sandals with a leather thong that passed between the first and second toe and was attached to a bar that went across the instep. Her jewellery was of the finest manufactured in gold, using amethyst, garnet, onyx, and turquoise to weave intricate patterns. She wore one broad anklet on the left ankle and a matching bracelet on the right wrist; these both contained amulets to protect her and her family. Her necklace was very ornate and heavy, and it covered her whole chest. It matched the simpler and lighter earrings and headpiece she wore in the ornate wig. Like most women and men, she shaved her head, as was the fashion, and put on a wig as part of her daily dress.

Fouada had been very lucky in her family life. She had a very happy childhood with her mother and father, who were doting parents and very loving. She met Ammon as a family friend when he visited her father Heru, and she immediately liked him. As she grew older, she came to consider him like a family member. When she was fifteen and ready to marry, Ammon surprised her father by asking for her hand in marriage and offering a large dowry of gold and jewels. Her father was overjoyed, but only would consent if Fouada agreed, and so he asked her one evening. She still remembered how the soft rain beat on the roof of a

veranda at their house in El-Kab during that meeting with her father.

“My daughter, you are now fifteen and a marriageable age; have you considered who you shall marry?” asked Heru.

“Not really, Father,” said Fouada, “but I would like a man, not a boy, somebody a bit older than myself.”

“Really, Fouada, why do you say that?” asked Heru, surprised.

“The young boys who came to the house are fun to play with, but are not serious about life, or for that matter the love of a woman, and are very shallow in their opinions,” said Fouada. “When I speak to you or Ammon, you speak carefully and with meaning about every subject, and I find that interesting.”

“But you must consider with an older man he may die and leave you a widow and you may then be lonely in your old age,” said Heru.

“That I have considered, but you start your life at an advantage: Your life partner is already a man and developed, and you know with what type of man you will spend your marriage. With a young boy, he may develop into a wonderful man, or somebody cruel and without honour, so marrying an older man also has many advantages,” said Fouada, as the rain seemed to softly chorus her words.

“Ammon, our family friend, has approached me already, Fouada, asking permission to marry you, and is such a man,” said Heru. “Would you consider his proposal?”

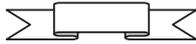
“There is no need to consider the proposal, Father. I have known Ammon since I was twelve, and already love him as I do you or mother,” said Fouada. “I think I could love him as a husband, and know he is a kind and very interesting man.”

“You know Ammon is an advisor to the pharaoh. One day he may become the chief advisor, and with that position comes risks,” said Heru. “If the pharaoh gets bad advice, he may kill Ammon and even his family as revenge, and who knows who will be pharaoh when Set dies.”

“I know this, Father, but we can be stung like a bee like Panhj in the garden and die, or fall under a donkey like Sabeen and be killed by its hoof. Our time here and our time in the afterlife are set by the gods,” said Fouada philosophically.

“So you want me to accept Ammon's proposed marriage to you?” asked Heru.

“Yes, Father,” said Fouada, as she looked into the dark cloudy sky outside and watched the soft rain wash her childhood innocence away as she accepted the marriage proposal.



Ammon always ate his afternoon or evening meal with Fouada before they both retired to their bedchamber. As he always started work early in the day, he retired very early to bed each day. Ammon did not exercise, so he had to be careful of how much he ate, and Fouada always had food prepared for his arrival.

He saw her, now sitting like a beautiful princess on her three-legged stool with a woven rush seat, simple in her white sheath dress with her dark black wig high on her head, making her neck seem so long and slender. Her gold and jewels glinted in the afternoon sunlight. In his eyes, Fouada was a goddess, and he had loved her the first time he saw her as a child, and now as a middle-aged man and husband, only death would separate them, he knew.

Fouada knew Ammon hated waste, so unlike many of their friends, she did not prepare a banquet that was wasted. Neither Fouada or Ammon were gluttons, and they ate very little each evening. As was normal, she had the servants prepare only a few dishes, one of vegetables and fruit, both of which had been grown in the irrigated gardens of the house. Today she had selected lettuce, radishes, sweet onions, and beans for the vegetables, and grapes, plums, and dates for the fruit. The fish dish was mullet, caught in the Nile that very morning. The meat was beef from their herd of cows on the family farm. The food was accompanied by bread made from barley and emmer wheat, as was traditional, and baked into a conical shape. All the food was on clay pottery without any ornate patterns, as both Ammon and Fouada loved simplicity in most of their lives.

Fouada saw Ammon arriving and removed her sandals, which was a sign of respect. Ammon had told her several times not to do this, as he was her husband, but she insisted each time that they must obey the custom.

“Welcome, my husband,” said Fouada. “You honour me with your presence,” and she bowed.

“Fouada, my love,” said Ammon, and he kissed her on the cheek.

“How was your day, my husband?” asked Fouada, the formalities now over.

“We survive another day. The pharaoh was very angry at the failure of killing Osiris,” said Ammon plainly.

“And he blames you, of course,” said Fouada.

“Of course,” said Ammon. “As chief advisor, everything is my fault, from famine, disease, to death; all is laid at my door.”

“You will succeed in time to kill Osiris and help the pharaoh unite the kingdom again,” said Fouada.

“Tonight we forget about the pharaoh and play a game of sonnet and read. I have brought two stories written by Mesopotamians we can read before we retire,” said Ammon.

“That will be fun, husband, but let us eat first,” and she poured fresh water from the well into a clay goblet for Ammon.