

Punishment of Redemption (Completed!)

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Punishment of Redemption (Completed!)

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Summary

When another reality needs help paying an ethereal deal, this reality is selected to pay the price. Nothing is ever free, and even in times of battles, something is never given for nothing. (Complete!)

Spirits and Cats

ANCIENT EGYPT:

5 year old Masika

Masika held her family's kitty lightly. The day had been normal. Ebonnee was a very sweet black kitty and she loved being petted. She meowed when she wanted attention, and she was so playful at times. She was also cute, being all black except for a strange white decoration resembling an ankh on her back foot.

Whenever other members of her family tried to play with Ebonnee, it was less than nice. For some reason, it really appreciated Masika. Her mother said it was her good luck charm. As long as her cat was alive and loved her, it was as if Bastet herself was watching over her.

What a lovely thought.

15 year old Masika

The chances? It was impossible. So many years had passed since she'd seen it. It was an all black cat, with a strange marking on the back of its foot of an ankh.

Masika's life had changed greatly since last she'd seen it. She had lost her family, ran away, met a boy named Bakura, got sold, became a wife multiple times, with her friend Bakura usually killing her owner, and then finding her a new one.

She was nowhere near her old home, yet there she had been. "Ebonnee?" She meowed and rolled over on its belly for her. Masika came closer. She heard her current husband yell something at her. She couldn't dawdle, but somehow, this miraculous cat was still her kitty. "Please bring me some good luck again."

She cared for the cat, keeping it out of danger and out of the way. Ebonnee brought no luck, but she was still her wonderful cat. A part of her past she was able to hang onto. Until one day . . .

One fateful day, Masika watched a gigantic monster, a monster that appeared like a god dragon, heading through the skies.

She heard Ebonnee meow and run. Instead of running inside, she was heading away. Ebonnee? She chased after it, not wanting anything to happen, when she saw it. Not up close, but she felt it. It moved through her soul and she heard the yowl.

When she was able to see through the dust sand, she saw Pharoah, riding on a horse with a look of nightmares upon his face. Not far from him, was the dragon god she had seen before, only now up close.

Pharoah was riding to fight something large with a god, and there was nothing she could say or do.

After all. While anyone else would be put to death for what he'd just done.

No one could touch a Pharoah. He was saving the world. Fighting. He'd never even know.

That he killed her wonderful cat.

Masika held her daughter, Heba, next to her. Such a young thing, barely spoke. "It's okay," Masika comforted her little one. She felt her child's grip tighten in hers. "You must trust in the Pharoah. He will do his best." She held back a gulp. He could protect them. He would do his best. It's not like she was her cat.

Her and her child were not the cat.

Masika was a summoner. It was a proud duty to uphold. Her daughter was too young to summon, she would stay at her side as she called to the spirit of the monsters in the tablet. Behind them, she would join three others. Once they called on the monster, their lives were tied to it. The pharaoh had to use many souls in the game, but it couldn't be helped.

If they did not win, the enemy would release the monsters to destroy Egypt. Everyone was called to defend because everyone's lives were on the line. The battle had been waged strong and hard so far, with the enemy using the same strategy. She placed her hand solidly in front of her, starting to chant with the others. If she could trust another with her child, she would have. If the wrong person had gained control of her child in such a desperate time, someone just caring about themselves at the end of the world, her daughter could end up even worse than the danger she now faced.

Death was quite possible out there. Masika had watched the battle, being ready to take her turn. The Pharoah cared about his people as much as the monsters he had waged war over. When he could, he tried to have his subject summoners pull back on those that were in danger. Find defense.

Really. They weren't treated like her cat.

Pharoah Atem was a mighty pharaoh. Untold legends would live on forever of him.

If he won the battle. He will. We will. If there was one thing the Pharoah had taught his subjects, it was faith and trust in each other. Belief, not just power. He will protect us. He will not let this evil go on, he has stopped the monsters rampage before and he can save us again from the enemy. Trust.

Trust. She had to trust that she would be safe with her daughter.

The Dark Magician appeared on the battlefield before her.

DOMINO CITY: (Close to the time in the Prologue)

Seeing Kaiba and Mokuba in the Game Shop, Yugi came down with Joey who was visiting at the time.

"What the heck's going on here?" Joey questioned as Kaiba looked at the cards. "What are you doing here?"

"We are looking for a card," Mokuba said. "My brother really needs it. It's called The Ties of Friendship."

"Yeah, uh huh, really needs it," Joey joked. "The card that proved who won the first duel tournament of Pegasus"? I'm sooo sure."

"Joey, don't aggravate him." Yugi came all the way over. "Grandpa doesn't have it and you know it." Mm. Maybe that was a little aggravating too, but- ///Yugi: He ripped the Blue Eyes White Dragon up from Grandpa last time he was here./// Yugi had gone a long way with Kaiba now, but having him there in the Game Shop itself again was tough.

"Name your price, Yugi," Kaiba said. "It's no use to you as it is."

"Wha-huh? The card does something?" Joey asked. "I didn't know that."

"I'm sorry it was important to you," Yugi apologized, "but I don't have it anymore. It wasn't a card I especially needed to keep."

"I don't blame you," Kaiba answered. "It looked like decoration, purely an honor piece and those aren't needed in a functional deck. Every card should have a purpose. Who has it now?"

"Oh, like we are just going to give you her name, so you can go hassle her?" Joey asked. "Nuh-uh, not Yug, we aren't giving you nothing. So stop hassling him and go away."

Kaiba was clearly irritated, but so was Yugi. ///Yugi: I can't believe he's here again. I don't like him here.///

///Atem: Yugi./// Yami's more sensible voice came from inside of him. ///Atem: Kaiba doesn't pay a visit very often. There must be a reason he is here for this card. Look at Mokuba./// Yugi followed Yami's command and looked toward Mokuba. He didn't look like he was there just for a simple card like his brother. ///Atem: He looks worried. Panicked. Mokuba doesn't speak over his brother, Yugi, but perhaps this card truly is important in a different way he can't reveal in front of Kaiba. I would trust Mokuba with the card, if we had it still.///

Yugi looked at Mokuba. Yami was right, Mokuba's eyes were so worried. What if Kaiba was there more because his brother wanted him there? ///Atem: We have to borrow that card, Yugi. We don't know how important it is. Seto's trying to do the right thing it seems.///

"Please, Yugi!" Mokuba begged. "This is really, really important!"

"Mokuba," Kaiba scolded his brother. "Forget it. If Yugi doesn't find it, we'll find it on our own."

"But Seto, she's-"

"Mokuba!" Kaiba warned him again. "Let's go."

"It's not right. They should be together." Mokuba hid his face. "She doesn't have anyone, Big Brother!"

"That's why we'll find the other card," Kaiba said as he left. "Let's go. Yugi can't help. Nothing new."

"She doesn't have anyone?" Yugi questioned them. That's not a normal phrase to use when talking about cards.

"That didn't make much sense there," Joey said looking toward Yugi. "Hey? I wonder if that card was stolen by Pegasus and not created. Maybe it wasn't his to give away. I mean? He liked making cards out of souls."

Yugi caught Mokuba's look. ///Yugi: He won't say it in front of Kaiba, Yami, but Mokuba must know./// ///Atem: Yes, Yugi, I think you are right. Your father, Kaiba and Mokuba must not be the only soul victim of Pegasus. There must be someone trapped inside The Ties of Friendship.///

"Wait a second." Joey was figuring it out too. "Hey there, hang on, Kaiba! Is there a soul trapped in that card? It didn't look like no one, not like a real human. It, uh?" He tapped his mouth. "It looked kind of wispy and girly."

"Your attention to detail is astounding," Kaiba said to him, sarcastically of course. "If Yugi can't help, then Yugi can't help. He doesn't need to know anything."

///Yugi: Kaiba won't share anything else. He's acting like it's an important card to collect, but Mokuba's acting like it's a soul on the line./// Yugi didn't like it. "Okay, I'll help, but no guarantees." He'd have to explain it as well as he could to Rebecca Hawkins. "I won't let you harass the new owner, she didn't do anything to you. If I can, I'll get the card back and I'll call you." Yugi looked toward Mokuba. ///Atem: Test him, Yugi. If it's a soul, use the word own. Mokuba is a good person who believes. See what happens./// "You, only. If I can get it."

"Me?" Mokuba pointed to himself. "Me what?"

"Only you can own the card," Yugi said casually, waiting to see his reaction.

"Yeah, you," Joey agreed. "We don't trust Kaiba."

Mokuba glanced toward Kaiba and then at Yugi. "No, it wouldn't be me. No one has the right to own that card. No one has the right to another."

Bingo! Yu-gi-ooohhh!

There was no more guessing in the matter, and now that a soul was on the line, Yami took over. "I want to know about the secret of The Ties of Friendship. Is it a soul card, Mokuba? Tell me, and I promise I will find a way to get it back to you. You are right, no one owns another soul."

That actually made Kaiba laugh. "That's rich. After hearing her, I know that's not true. Pharoah," he teased him.

"I can't say for sure, but there's a chance," Mokuba admitted. "We are looking for an exclusive card that Pegasus made and it seems like the closest match. It might not be it," he said to Yami. "But we have to try. It belongs somewhere, but not in anyone's deck."

"That is all I need to know. Kaiba?" Yami questioned him. "I will do my best to get that card to Mokuba. Once it is in his possession, he will decide it's future."

"Fine," Kaiba said, not caring. "As long as I have it near. I don't care. Come, Mokuba. We have a business to run."

Mokuba waved with a big smile on his face. "Bye Yugi! Bye Joey!"

"Yeah, take care." Joey waited for them to leave. "Good kid. Bad brother. Smart call wanting to get it to him, Yug, but how you gonna get it back from Rebecca? You just gonna ask?"

"It was a symbol I used for friendship," Yugi said, now in control again. "I wanted to make the card meaningful to someone. It isn't nice to just ask for it back, but if there is an actual soul trapped in that card? Then we need to find a way to free it."

"But Pegasus released all the souls," Joey said. "Why would he release three souls and then just give the winner of the duel a card with another trapped soul? How could he guarantee the winner would be you, Yug? He'd have been more prepared for that."

"You're right, Joey, it doesn't make sense," Yugi admitted. "But Mokuba clearly said 'they should be together'. Like they already had another card."

"Oh, I get it," Joey said. "So maybe like, The Ties of Friendship is like a key card to another soul card they've run across? Yeah, that might make sense, Yug."

"I believe Rebecca will understand the urgency to see or borrow the card," Yugi's grandpa answered. "If it holds the key to saving someone's soul inside, we must get it back."

"True," Yugi answered. "Maybe we don't need to give it away. If it's a key, maybe it just needs to be used one time? In that case, it shouldn't be too hard to just borrow. Grandpa, do you have Professor Hawkins' number now?"

GAME SHOP

"Yugi!" Mokuba's voice urgently pierced the air as he stepped into the Kame Game Shop. "You said you have The Ties of Friendship?"

"Not so quick there, pal," Joey confronted Mokuba. "Yugi had to do a lot for that card. Nobody likes to give up a card. He has to have a date with Rebecca Hawkins now."

"Joey," Yugi said quietly. It was embarrassing enough without him talking about it. "I'll leave in a few minutes," Yugi admitted.

Joey grabbed the card. "But we still don't know the importance of this card," he complained to Mokuba. "We just want to know? Is it a soul trapped by Pegasus? Give us something. Not the whole deets that your brother said is off-limits."

"No," Mokuba admitted. "Yes. Pegasus was involved, but not the same way as with me and my brother." He was quiet a moment, like he was trying to think of what to say. "I wish I could tell you. I should, but a promise is a promise. Kaiba's been keeping the end of his promise. But. She's just so . . ."

///Atem: Yugi, switch places with me.///

Yugi switches places with Yami, leaving him in his command.

"Promises are important, Mokuba. Being true to those we promise is something we should all strive for. However, there comes a point when a promise may have to be broken. If doing the right thing inside one's heart is overwhelming you, for instance. Are you experiencing an overwhelming need to tell us?"

"You should see. Oh, you could see!" Mokuba shouted at Yami. "Come down to Kaiba Corp! Seto said I couldn't tell you." He held up the card. "He never said I couldn't show you."

"Show you what?" Téa asked as she and Tristan walked into the game shop.

Kaiba Corporation's Experimental Dueling Arena.

Mokuba strode through the security with Yugi's friends (but not Yugi) easily. Yugi was going to wait for Rebecca Hawkins to show up and meet them down there. Joey tried to convince him to just call and make it another time, but Yugi stood his ground. He had to be decent.

Still though, a date by going over there and hanging out with Yugi's friends? Joey doubted that would happen without a second date promise.

Confident, proud and almost running. It was clear whatever Mokuba had been hiding, he was glad to finally get it off his chest. "This way guys. This is going to blow your mind." Mokuba

went to the dueling arena and turned it on. "Joey, get on the other side, but don't make any moves against me. This is delicate. Okay?"

"You bet." Joey went over to the opponent's side. "So, does the soul gotta be set free using a dueling arena? Weird."

"No, it's not what you think." Joey watched as Mokuba held up the card they once saw at Pegasus'. A picture of Cecelia, Pegasus' deceased wife. "It doesn't have an official name," Mokuba said, "but I call it the Masika card. I think you'll learn why." He looked hesitant. "I haven't shown her to anyone but Kaiba. I mean, she hasn't been seen by anyone except Kaiba Corp. So." He looked toward Joey. "I will play a monster card. Don't attack it, okay?"

"I promise, Mokuba," Joey said. "I won't hurt anybody."

"He never would," Téa agreed from outside the dueling arena. She was watching with Tristan. "You can trust in Joey. He won't attack."

"Okay." Mokuba laid the card down. "I play the Masika card."

Hm. She was bowing to Mokuba. Joey didn't really see anything different about her. "Hey, uh, how are you?"

She glanced toward him. "My soul is trapped within a dueling arena and the shadow realm, so I have had better days?" She looked toward Mokuba, like she didn't understand why he'd ask that.

"Shadow realm? Yep, I see it," Joey said confidently. "Well, dang, so like . . ."

"She's a soul, trapped in a card, that only comes alive in the dueling arena," Téa said for him. "She said shadow realm too."

She bowed toward Joey. "I only want to be reunited with Heba. She may be in the card that you brought. She is my youngest daughter's soul."

"What?!" Oh no, this got real complicated. Masika didn't look real old in the first place, that meant her daughter must be real young. "You're so young, your daughter must be a small kid."

Masika didn't seem to know how to answer his question. "She is very small, barely talks yet, but this appearance is not mine."

"She's stuck in the illusion of Cecelia Pegasus," Tristan said to Joey. "Is that right?"

Mokuba nodded. "See? This is so different than what happened with Pegasus."

Oh yeah, that's right. Wrong statement, but hey, Joey still got it part right. She was a mom looking for her kid. Stuck in a game. "Damn, Yug should have came." He better be running through those doors soon. "Two old spirits trapped within cards."

Mokuba smiled at Masika. "Don't worry, Masika. I didn't pull you out to meet this goon for nothing. Joey, play a real gentle card, but no attacking."

"Yeah, no kidding," Joey said. "Scapegoat."

"Good. Now." Mokuba looked at the card. "Let's hope this all works. Masika? I hope this is it. I hope I didn't get your hopes up for nothing." He laid the card down. "I play, The Ties of Friendship!"

She audibly gasped as she turned around and looked. The magical aura that always appeared before a card emerged had come to the arena. In its place was . . .

A cat? There was a black cat that came from the card. That didn't look like any kid to Joey. Yet, Masika looked over ecstatic, like it had been her kid?

"Eboney!" She cried out as she went and held her kitty so close. "Oh, how I've missed you."

"The uh . . .?" Joey pointed to the scene. "The cat's not her kid, right?"

"Um?" Mokuba didn't know what to say either. "Masika?"

Masika bent toward Mokuba. "It's okay, Mokuba. Since Heba's soul was not here, she must have crossed over. Meanwhile, I was once again united with my wonderful Eboney."

"Oh, man." Joey shrugged. "At least Yug didn't miss anything." Then he watched as Masika and her cat were bathed in a glow and disappeared.

Right as Yugi and Rebecca arrived at the scene. "What just happened?" Yugi asked.

Joey shrugged. "There was a soul trapped in the card, but then the old ties of friendship card . . ." He couldn't make it sound cool no matter what he did. "It had her pet cat in it and then they just kind of glowed away."

"So, her soul was waiting for her cat?" Tristan seemed just as dumbfounded as Joey.

"Wait, what?" Yugi tried to find more details. Mokuba shared that the card came from Pegasus, and was stuck in the illusion of Pegasus' dead wife, Cecelia. The other card could have had her daughter's soul, but instead it had her pet cat.

"This was a weird time," Rebecca complained to Yugi, "but at least you promised me a second date if I came here." She held onto his arm tighter. "You reunited an old soul with a cat. How funny. Let's go, we can still make the movie."

"A cat?" Yugi tried to stifle a groan. "Well. A soul was set free from its confines. An animal lover apparently. At least it's okay." But he was still stuck for two dates now. "Okay, let's head to the movies."

Ugh. Téa watched Rebecca rub up all over on Yugi. Disgusting. Seriously. Yugi only went on a date for the card, but she didn't have to get that grabby. ///Téa: Forget this, I'm going home./// She'd see them later. She came by the game shop to hang out, but was thrown into something crazy again as soon as she went to the game shop.

Today she saw a trapped soul get a cat and find peace. It sounded kind of funny, but she also thought it was nice. Adorable even, that a cat meant that much to someone. It was a cute cat too, it had this neat little design on its leg like an anck. So adorable.

///Confident voice in Téa: Really adorable. Lovable kitty.///

///Téa: Yeah, real cute kitty. Much cuter than Rebecca./// Téa continued on her way.

///Confident voice in Téa: Don't let her bother you. Life's too short for petty jealousy.///

///Téa: Wow, yeah, I guess that's true./// Téa seemed to make more sense to herself today. Like a new self full of confidence sort of emerged. ///Téa: I think I'll go enjoy life with some dancing right now.///

The Flame Swordsman

///Téa: I should have done this a long time ago./// Téa was practicing her dueling skills. Although Yugi and Joey fought for the champions, there was never any telling what was coming. She had mildly practiced before, and then had times when she insanely tried to practice, and where practice almost scared her. Like it would come true.

She was becoming better at her card games now. She had bought some new cards, found out more hidden powers about her old cards, and her collection only grew. ///Téa: Too bad I can't have The Dark Magician Girl in here. She was a real help.///

///Confident voice in Téa: Depending on yourself is more important than a single monster in battle.///

"That's right, it is." Téa checked her deck. "I trust all of my cards." She smiled. "They all have potential whether it's up front, with hidden skills, or in a combination with other cards." They were all fantastic.

///Confident voice in Téa: Well done.///

Téa almost laughed. "I can't believe I'm congratulating myself." She put her cards down and looked over at her mirror boldly. "My name is Téa and I challenge you to a card game." She pointed at her own mirror, making herself almost laugh again. Then she stared at her hair. For some reason, she had been letting it grow out more over the following weeks. It was starting to get longer.

She sat down, wanting to do something different. She took her excess hair and held it. She'd thought about it more than once since it had been growing. "You know what, Téa? Why not. What's wrong with a little change. Make your own adventure." She went toward her own nightstand and got a batch of ponytail holders she bought.

She stood in front of the mirror. Never in her life had she done it, but it wasn't that hard. "That was easy." She pulled her braided hair to notice in the mirror. "I like it. Sort of. Maybe?" It was different. Was it too different? Téa went to take a shower. It was getting late anyway. When she came back to her mirror, she tried to make a braid again.

She went to bed like usual and got up the next day. Looking at the mirror, getting ready for the day, she found herself taking the braids out again. Oh. Neat. The braids had somehow curled her hair. She patted it softly. ///Téa: Oh wow, how pretty.///

///Confident voice in Téa: Lovely.///

///Téa: I like this. How did that happen?/// She didn't have a curler. Curled hair, it was nice though. ///Téa: Maybe I should buy a curler. Nah. Let's see how the day goes with this first.///

"Whoah hoah!" Joey was first to tease as she met up with the guys. "Get a load of you! Téa, what did you do to your hair?"

"Yeah, you've been getting all girly lately," Tristan noticed too, being the second to take a stab at her. "Making your hair long. Now putting in curls. You trying to attract a boyfriend or something?"

Ugh. "No." Do something nice with your hair and suddenly it has to be about attracting guys? "I wanted to try something different."

"Well, I like it," Yugi smiled. "It's very pretty, and you shouldn't worry about those two." Ah, sweet Yugi. "I mean, a girl. Oh. A young lady, um, putting her hair all nice doesn't mean they are looking for a guy." He looked at her oddly. "Right?"

"Right," she agreed. For some reason, Yugi looked relieved. ///Téa: Oh please, even if I did date someone Yugi, I would still be your friend./// They'd never stop being friends.

"I didn't even know you owned one of those curling thingamajiggers," Joey said to her. "When did you get one of those things?"

"I didn't," Téa answered. "This just happened because I put braids in my hair last night I think, and slept on them? It's kind of weird. I don't know how long it'll stay like this." She touched her hair again. "I like it though. It's different."

"Just don't go all 'shopping the mally' on us," Tristan teased her. "Are you sure you aren't getting gussied up for someone?"

"She isn't getting gussied up for someone." Yugi's voice was a little sharper than usual. "Stop bothering her about that. Let's just go."

"Right." Téa agreed. She liked her hair, but she hated the guys teasing her all the time. ///Téa: Do I really like my hair this way?///

///Confident voice in Téa: It's pretty.///

///Téa: I don't want them teasing me all the time though. They are already worrying Yugi, like I'm going to suddenly start dating lots of guys. I don't want to do that. I like hanging out with the guys. This is where I belong.///

"Okay, I'm sorry, Téa," Joey apologized out of the blue. "It's apparent from that look on your face I may have crossed some kind of line. Wear your hair however you want. You be you, alright?"

That's better. That's the Joey she knew. "Thanks, Joey."

"Yeah, we were just teasing you to tease you," Tristan said too. "Whether it's to attract a guy or not, you look great. Not weird at all."

Weird? "Thanks?" Not as good as Joey. Tristan must have thought she was trying to catch someone's attention. ///Téa: Why would changing my hairstyle suddenly mean I'm trying to attract someone? It's a subtle change. Everyone does it.///

///Confident voice in Téa: Prettier than they expected.///

///Téa: Maybe so. I don't know. I guess the guys are okay with it. Yeah, it's decided. Some days I'll try to keep my hair down. Other days, I'll play with it being long and curled.///

/// Confident voice in Téa: Sounds fine.///

///Yugi: She's not doing that. She's totally not doing that. She wanted to change her hair just because. People change their hair just because./// Yugi continued to walk, trying to act normal. ///Yugi: It's a normal, average, everyday thing.///

///Atem: It is. I doubt it's as Joey or Tristan said. Téa isn't looking for anyone, she is being bold and trying something new.///

///Yugi: Yeah, exactly. She's not attracting anyone. She's not trying to./// Yugi heard a slight chuckle from Yami.

///Atem: I'm fairly sure Téa is safe, Yugi.///

The one thing Yugi never could hide was his thoughts. Yami knew Yugi had a crush on her.

///Yugi: It really is just her experimenting? Are you sure, Yami?///

///Atem: Fairly.///

A big sigh of relief. ///Yugi: Thank goodness.///

Téa washed and braided her hair again, wondering if it would do the same thing. It had stayed in normally like that for part of the day. It was such a simple process. Maybe she could make it happen again? As long as the boys didn't make fun of her.

She yawned and lied down in her bed for the night.

Morning

Téa got up, washed up, and got dressed. She undid her braids again and saw the same fun curls. "Neat, it did it again." She grabbed her duel deck and went to the Game Shop. Yugi's grandfather said he had a card that would be perfect for her collection. She was into the game enough to work on her collection, so he was willing to help out. It would also give her a chance to see how Yugi had been, or if any other dangerous presence had cropped up again.

Hopefully not. As she left toward the game shop the usual way, she stared down at her cards. ///Téa: Yugi's been asking if I want to duel him. I doubt I have a chance, but Joey got better with Yugi's help./// So far, she'd only dueled with Joey. ///Téa: I guess I could try? As long as I don't act like too much of a newb. I hope I don't.///

But, Téa had already made a flaw. Staring at cards on the side of the street while crossing an open alley. That lesson came too late though as someone reached out from behind, grabbed her and dragged her in.

She struggled and tried to scream, but they covered her mouth. Most of the cards fell from her hand. ///Téa: Whatever cards they want, I don't care, take them!/// But, they weren't interested in her cards. That means they wanted something else, and she didn't know what that would be.

She was dragged along farther until they let her go. She had been surrounded with other people. Some of them were cracking their knuckles and they weren't saying anything.

///Confident voice in Téa: Téa, flee.///

She would love to listen to herself if she could find a way out. She heard a catcall from one of them. "I don't have any money." She didn't, and she didn't know if that would help or hurt her.

MASIKA

Masika held one of the few cards Téa had clenched in her hand. She had tried to stay unobtrusive, to stay in the secure spot in Téa's soul she had been placed in. Destiny had chosen not to end her life, and instead placed her with the soul of a companion to the Pharoah.

Téa.

That meant destiny had a use for her. Until she knew it, she had kept quiet, as not to disturb the Pharoah from his goals. However, the girl was now in deep trouble. Several men were trying to overwhelm her. She would not let harm befall her. She glanced at the card as the men were getting closer, saying obscenities in her direction. Stones into cards. Smaller, yet the same. Same power to wield.

Masika held the card close to her as she held her second hand out and started to chant. While confused, it didn't take long before they tried to grab at her. Yet, it wasn't quick enough.

She had brought the Flame Swordsman. Chanting more, she made him strike. The blast on one of her enemies had, as she expected, also taken out the threat of the rest. Some were dead while others were dying, singed, or ran away like cowards screaming for their lives.

She stopped chanting and the Flame Swordsman came back to the card. She walked away from the area to somewhere safer. Except? Not yet. She checked one of the burning ones that were screaming. She felt the presence of a dueling card. "You owe the victor for your defeat." She took it and then left.

Sno Cone Stand

"So you gonna get something or what?"

"I don't want anything from you!" Téa yelled as she blocked herself from an attack. Then, not feeling or hearing anything, she opened her eyes. She was no longer in an alley, instead she was in a line for sno cones. What? Her eyes darted all around. She wasn't in an alley. There were no thugs about to beat her up.

"Ma'am, I think you better leave," the Sno Cone attendant warned her.

Oh yeah. She just yelled at an innocent worker. "Sorry." Yeah. She stepped out of line. ///Téa: What happened? I was pulled into an alley. I dropped my cards. Some guys were going to mug me or worse. And? I'm here now?/// She checked her pocket. She felt her cards. She went through them. "They're all here. I didn't lose a single one." But she dropped all of them. Not only that? ///Téa: This wasn't my card was it? Impossible./// It was impossible.

DIMENSION: ANIME (Pays to Save the Day)

Kame Game Shop

Téa walked in, still a little stunned. What could she say or explain about why she was late?

"Oh? Hello, Téa." Yugi's grandpa said as he noticed her. "A little later than usual. I thought you were on the way over?"

"I was." Téa went toward Yugi's grandfather.

"Are you okay?" He asked. "You don't seem like yourself."

"Hi, Téa," Yugi said as he came down. It was easy to hear voices below and he'd probably been waiting. "Do you want to try a duel game now?"

Téa scratched behind her ear. "I don't know. I got this card." She gave it to Yugi.

Yugi of course looked surprised. "You have a Time Wizard card like Joey? That's incredible, Téa, where did you get it? Did you buy it from grandpa?"

"No." /// Téa: I should tell him. I found it in my deck. But, I don't understand why it was there.///

"Téa, here is the card I wanted to give you."

Téa turned her attention to Yugi's grandpa.

"Seeing as you now have the Time Wizard though, take this instead." He put away a card with a green monster and gave her a small dragon. "You've seen Joey use the tactic. The dragon has power itself, but it's not much. However, if you are in a bind, time roulette can be worth the risk. It speeds up or slows down time, so you should have something that can survive it out on the field."

///Téa: Joey loves time roulette. This feels like a Joey card. This doesn't feel like it belongs in my deck. What is it doing in my deck?/// "Thanks, Mister Moto." She took the baby dragon.

"Téa?" Yugi asked again. "You still didn't say. Where'd you get such a rare card?"

"Yugi." ///Téa: I need to retrace my steps. I need to figure this out./// "I'll tell you later. Tonight, I'll come visit tonight. Okay?"

"Okay." Yugi smiled. "I'll be sure to let Joey know he's not the only one with a time roulette card. Having two cards in opposing decks could make a battle interesting with him. If you battle him. Again."

Oh, Yugi. "I'll get creamed some other time by you, Yugi, I promise. I'm not feeling right today, that's all. I'll see you later. If I don't, I'll call. Okay?"

"Is everything okay, Téa?" Yugi asked.

///Téa: I don't really know./// "I have to get home. I'll explain later. Thanks again, Mister Moto."

"No problem, Téa," he said as she left the game shop.

Téa didn't want to retrace her steps. What if those same thugs came out again? She went home, highly alert down a different way. She stayed inside, staring at her new cards. Her two new cards. One from Yugi's grandpa and the mysterious one now in her deck. "Maybe Joey gave it to me? Maybe it got messed up into my deck somehow when we played?" She went ahead and called Joey, asking him to check his Time Wizard card. When he said he had his right in his hand, she knew it wasn't Joey's.

Joey originally had the Red Eyes Black Dragon that qualified him for the Battle City tournament. When he gave it to Yugi, he still had another rare card. The Time Wizard. If it's not Joey's, then where did it come from?

When it started to get later, she thought about the promise she made to Yugi. To come back later for a duel. He's been kind of waiting. Ever since she got serious in her dueling with the collection and research, he'd almost been itching to have a match with her. It made sense, he loved playing Joey. He loved teaching cards. She felt like she was good enough to at least understand the lessons.

But it was raining, the sun was going down soon, and she didn't want to leave the house anymore. She almost made the call to him as she heard the news over the radio she was listening to. In the same vicinity. Around the same hour she'd been walking.

Two people dead. Three were sent to the hospital with serious burns. No witnesses came forward.

Téa picked up the phone. ///Téa: I can't do this anymore!/// She called up Yugi.

"Hello, Téa. Are you still coming over? It's getting later."

"Yugi, I can't. I? Can you come over here?"

"Wha-um? Your place? You want to duel at your place?"

"Maybe," she said. "Maybe talk."

"You want to talk at night, with me?"

"It's important," Téa added. "I need to ask you something."

"Ask me something, really?! Um. Okay. Sure, yes, okay. I will head right over, Téa. No problem."

YUGI

///Yugi: That would be good. Maybe that would be better. That could be better./// Yugi looked through his closet.

///Atem: I doubt Téa minds what you wear, Yugi. It's also slightly raining.///

///Yugi: Grandpa's dropping me off. It's fine. I just want to look respectable. Somehow. Ooh, I don't see anything in here that's that good.///

///Atem: From the sound of her voice, I believe just getting to her is more important.///

///Yugi: Right. Right, right, you are right./// Yugi closed his closet door. "Okay, as is. She's working up the nerve to say something, and I have to be ready for it."

His grandfather dropped him off at her house.

"I'll be back very soon to pick you up, Yugi," his grandfather warned him. "Unless you want me to wait here?"

"No. I'll call you when I'm ready." Yugi closed the door and went to her front door. ///Yugi: Okay. Private conversation. No big deal./// He knocked on the door. She'd been waiting for him. She looked so nervous. "Hi, Téa, I'm here."

"Great. Follow me," she insisted as she took his hand and brought her to her room. She closed the door behind her and gulped. "Yugi. I have something I need to tell you, and I don't quite know how to." She turned back around and looked at him. "Have you ever had feelings deep inside that you needed to say, but they scared you so much, that you didn't know how to say them?"

Yugi froze. "Uh huh. Does this have to do with your nice hair?" ///Yugi: Is she trying to attract someone? Is she trying to attract . . ./// "You can tell me anything, Téa."

"I know I can, Yugi." Téa moved from the door and hugged him. "I can't keep this to myself."

"Oh?" ///Yugi: It's always so nice in her arms. Oh please don't let me be blushing. Am I blushing? I cannot be blushing!/// Yugi hugged her back. "What is it, Téa?"

"Earlier, when you asked me where I got the Time Wizard card? I couldn't answer, Yugi," she admitted. "I don't know where it came from. I never found it, exchanged for it, or bought it. It was just there in my deck."

Hm "That's strange." At least the unsettled feelings could now settle. "Someone put a rare card in your deck?" There was more than that though, she still looked terrible. Scared. "What?"

"I was sorting through my deck when I left the house," Téa admitted. "I was grabbed by a lot of guys and taken into an alley."

"What?!"

"I thought I did, but then I blanked out," she said softly. "I just found myself upfront at a sno cone stand, a mile away from your house." She touched her head. "I didn't understand because I was in the middle of being attacked and then I was so far away. I thought maybe it was a weird dream, but sleep walking that far out? Then, looking through my deck. I did that because I dropped it when I was grabbed. I dropped all but a couple when I was taken."

Oh, thank goodness. "It had to be a dream," Yugi said, trying to make her feel better. "Maybe some of the scary experiences you've had triggered a terrible dream. As for your deck, I don't know how the card got in there. Maybe someone thought you should have it."

Téa looked off in the distance. "I want to believe all of that. It only made sense. That area though? It made the news today, Yugi. The same exact area, around the same time I would have been walking down it."

Made the news. Wait! "You mean the nearby fire?"

"The description. It was the same guys."

"I remember hearing that on the radio," Yugi said. Two dead, and five with terrible burns. "It could have been a similar gang. Anyhow, it was all by fire, Téa."

" . . . I guess so. It just freaked me out," Téa admitted. "I didn't really want to go walking that late." She tried to smile. "Are you ready? Taking my mind off this weird day would be good."

"You bet, and I wouldn't worry." She looked like she was doing better, just needed to get it off her chest. She must have dreamed it all up. Even the leaving of the house. "You should get some better rest after this, Téa. It sounds like your dreams are affecting your waking hours."

"Yeah." Téa took a seat on her bed. "I'd better make sure I get plenty of sleep every night."

"If you don't feel like walking alone too, you can always call me. Day or night." Yugi smiled.

Playing with Téa felt different. She built her deck differently. Before she had more magic and defense cards, with less vicious monsters. She had a great defense deck still, but she had a lot of attack power now too. She had a base of fire elementals. She used the Flame Swordsman wisely like Joey. She was even using hidden abilities of her cards she hadn't ever used before. She really did get serious in dueling.

///Atem: Her deck has improved vastly, Yugi. How much time did your grandfather help her with it?///

///Yugi: It couldn't have been that long./// A couple of times she had stayed behind on the weekends to learn from his grandpa, but not enough to do or learn this. "You've come a long way, Téa."

"It just feels natural," Téa said. "If I'm going to hang around my duelist friends, then I should have some basics down."

Maybe saving her own body influenced her. That was some time ago though. If it had a profound effect, she wouldn't have had started getting serious about dealing only a few weeks ago. ///Yugi: I don't want to think about this, I just want to enjoy the card game with her./// He really wanted to. "You've gotten very good. Have you considered joining a small tournament? I could recommend one for beginners."

"No," she said. "I don't want to go up against anyone for fun. I just want to work on winning to survive." She sighed. "If anything happens. Is that okay?"

Yeah, the digital world. The seal of Orichalcos. It all finally got to her. "Sure." ///Yugi: Survival. Téa felt like she needed to learn the game to survive. Shoot!///

///Atem: What's wrong, Yugi?///

///Yugi: I really wanted her to like Duel Monsters. Not just learn it to survive if someone challenges her. As much time as she spent with it, I was really hoping that maybe she'd like it more than . . . ///

///Atem: What, Yugi?///

///Yugi: Dancing./// "Cards can be fun too, Téa. Besides survival. It's supposed to be a fun game, that's why it's so popular."

"I don't think I'll do this for much longer anyhow," Téa said. "That dream. I was nabbed because I was staring at cards. Obsessed with them. Maybe it was a warning." Téa touched her hair, still slightly curled. "Maybe I shouldn't be trying to change myself so much."

" . . . If you say so, Téa." First and last card game he'd ever play with her.

MASIKA'S SOUL ROOM

Even this was too much. Her actions had scared the young vessel holding her soul. ///Masika: I should not have taken the card, it only led to her being scared./// She would stay even deeper, only coming out when she sensed absolute trouble. Some of herself had rubbed on Téa. ///Masika: No more. I will stay so far back, only her crying will stir me.///

Until she knew why she was there, and out of respect for the Pharaoh, she would not tamper or let Téa become too close. Téa accompanied the Pharaoh many times, so involving herself with Téa may infringe upon the Pharaoh's own destiny. A sin greater than any she could imagine.

She would remain quiet and still, within Téa. No one would ever know of her presence, unless she was truly needed.

Don't Play with the Lion, Seto Kaiba

Seto Kaiba's Home, 2002

I don't often screw up this bad. I have companies to run, I never get this messed up. Yet, Seto couldn't deny it. On his dresser when he woke up was a black cat, waking him up. "You did not just say, 'rise Seto Kaiba, there is payment to settle' to me."

"Yes, I did." The cat spoke again.

Seto rolled out of bed, looking around. It had to be a prank. "Cats don't talk."

"I am Bastet," she answered, "and you must help save the world."

"No, I must figure out who drugged me last night." A talking cat, bothering him of all people to save the world? Someone was playing dirty with him.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way," it said as he headed to the bathroom.

"Everyone must put in payment, even Pharoah."

He stopped and looked backward. Pharoah? He stared at the cat. "How do you make a dead man pay?"

"I am Bastet, with orders to gather payment for another universe of you to save the world."

Seto shook his head briefly. "Another Universe of me?"

"Think of it as . . . oh, how to explain to mortals. Think parallel universe."

Seto rubbed his face. "When I get my hands on the person who drugged me, I'm going to have a thing or two to say-Ow!" Damn cat! "You scratched me right on the back!"

"I am not a drug, I am a goddess, and you will listen!" She changed into a woman that still had a catlike appearance. "Every time you think this was all some result of alcohol or delusion, remember your scratch."

Seto felt his back start to sear. He touched it. *I can't even say I did it to myself.* "Fine, I'm listening." Though he didn't understand it. In all his years, he had never met an actual Egyptian God. He met the God Cards, and had seen them, but an actual god that could walk and talk? Not a card? "What brings you to planet Earth?"

"Payment," she corrected him as she took the form of a regular black cat again. "In another universe, a version of you is going to help save the world soon. That version will need extra power and he will have no time to relinquish payment. *You* have to pay the fee for him."

“Are you kidding me?” Another him, in another universe, needed *him* to pay his fee? “If he’s me, he’d find a way to settle the score.”

“There’s no time,” she warned him. “Payment will be taken, and the gods do not want to take payment from winners.”

“As hard as it is to imagine, what if he loses?” Seto asked.

“Payment is still needed ahead of time to have the power needed to save the world,” she said again. “I can explain no further. You must provide payment.”

Seto went over to his wallet. “What’s the damages?”

“Payment is not provided through trivial currency. You cannot buy power that way.”

“I beg to differ,” he said.

“Not *these* powers. You are a hard one to get through. Most would be praising, bowing and urging me to tell them more. You haven’t even kneeled and I had to scratch you to make you even believe,” she complained. “I am close to leaving.”

“Without getting your payment?” He closed his wallet. “Fine by me.”

“Payment will be taken with or without your consent,” she said. “When it is by the mortal’s cooperation, they feel more in control of it. The ways of getting there are better, but if you want it to just happen, *keep going*.”

Hm. “What’s the payment?”

“You will create the next wielder of the Blue Eyes White Dragon with Serenity Wheeler.”

What? “What kind of payment is *that*?” Serenity Wheeler? That name sounded almost familiar. Wheeler. Wheeler.

Hm. There was an annoying person named Joey Wheeler he used to know, thought he was a real- “Wait, that’s relation to that moron, Joey Wheeler?!”

“A sister.”

“How do I create the next wielder with his sister? Why would I?”

“Payment. You will create it the way humans create other humans, with mutual relations.”

What?! “You think you are going to stick me with some kid with Joey Wheeler’s sister? That’s not payment, that’s punishment.”

“Yes, some payments will feel like punishment.”

“What’s Yugi’s punishment?” Seto was intrigued to find out more. “Maybe I’ll be more cooperative in your little game if you tell me?”

“For starters? Half mortality,” she said.

“For starters? I don’t get it, what’s that supposed to mean?” Seto asked.

“Pharoah is the modern man Yugi Muto and the spirit that was known as Yami,” she answered. “Now will you cooperate nicely?”

“No, I was lying,” Seto said as he cleaned out his ear. “You’re probably just some bent out of shape spirit that got trapped in a cat or something. These punishments don’t make any sense. There’s no way I am bringing anything into this world, especially with a Wheeler.”

“I tried.” Bastet bowed her head and faded away. “Sekhmet.”

Seto looked around himself. He found himself on the floor in his pajamas with a lion sitting two feet from him. He found his side hurt, and most likely there was a cause if there was a huge lion right in front of him.

It took just a half a second before his mind could start pulling things together.

“Scream and I’ll enjoy biting off your head,” it hissed. “I am not Bastet. I enjoy human meat, so just treat me the same way you did her. I dare you.” She growled with a sort of smile showing off her teeth. “I don’t have to leave every piece intact for you to finish payment. Don’t test me.”

Much. More. Impressive than the kitty cat. *It’s a fucking lion!* Even if it wasn’t a god, it could bite his head off right there, and he knew he had a wound on his side. He was in incredible pain and he even felt liquid next to himself. *Am I going to die already?*

“Not if you pay attention,” Sekhmet answered his inner thought. “You are going to take the punishment in order to save the world. That’s all you need to know, mortal. Unless?” She licked the outside of her mouth. “I can give you more information in return for a limb?”

“No thanks, keep your information.” He wanted to keep all of his limbs but she was still stretching forward. He tried to block himself, and screamed as she crunched down on his finger!

“Sekhmet, no, spit the finger out,” Bastet insisted as it ripped off. She spit it out and Bastet reattached it. She took away the pain of the finger and all signs it was unattached. “There, good as new. You owe him for that, Bastet, he said no to that.”

“Human meat is so damn tasty.”

“Anything you want!” Seto would not play around in any way with this lion. He didn’t even provoke, and it tried to eat his finger! The pain in the finger was gone, but he still remembered it, and the rest of his body was still in pain!

“Do you want to remember this now or not?” Bastet said as the cat sat on top of the lion’s head like a mere decoration. “If you don’t, we will fix your wounds, heal you and rid you of

all of the pain. You will forget all memories tied to Joey Wheeler and Serenity Wheeler.”

“Finally, something good,” he tried to joke to avoid the pain.

“You will take care of your payment unknowingly and forget us. You will remember later in life. But? If you want to keep the memory now, we’ll do nothing to patch you up, and you’ll take care of your payment knowingly,” Sekhmet answered.

Ah! “I want to know my future but I need the no pain option!” he insisted.

“Okay. We wanted to be graceful,” Bastet purred. “Goddesses should have a sense of grace. To leave all to pay the punishment without any explanation wouldn’t be graceful.”

“Fuck grace, that lion wants to eat me, fix this!”

“Okay. A compromise since your state is leaving you in too much pain to make the decision you want to. You will remember in the future after you meet with her again, so you can convey the truth,” Bastet said. “Temper please.” She looked down at Sekhmet from her head. “You owe him for the finger. Humans do not multiply fast enough for you to consume all of humanity. We’ve gone over this how many times?”

Sekhmet growled.

“Plenty of alcohol when we go home.”

Sekhmet stopped growling. “Fine. Seto Kaiba? You, Serenity Wheeler, Yugi Muto, the one you ridiculously call Yami Yugi, the Cecelia Pegasus Card spirit, Téa Gardener, Joey Wheeler, Bakura and Mai Valentine will all suffer.”

“Will provide payment,” Bastet said instead. “Now, let’s take all these bad feelings away human. You don’t need to feel them anymore.”

“Those are old names, and an even older card,” Seto said. “That card was even busted, are you saying there is a spirit in it?”

“There was until it went into the friend of the one you call Yami.”

“That card went to *that* girl?” Seto Kaiba said, having come back from the flashback they showed him of Gardner getting it. It was even more intense than what Ishizu had shown him before Battle City. He could see situations he had no idea of, and heard what he never could have. “So? It doesn’t help me in any way. Not that card and not this explanation. I can’t do anything. I can’t reverse or help, all I get is the memory to say ‘this is why it happened’? That’s not good enough!” Seto complained.

“Oh. Maybe cards, would you like cards?”

Ooh? “Yeah, I’m partial to God cards.” She handed him fourteen cards. He looked at them but there was no writing, just decoration on both sides. Red cards, gold trim. All of them had

a single name on the top but two of them. “What are these?”

“Explanations. You can hand out the cards when the payments are ready and the truth will be revealed. We don’t have time to mingle with humans all the time for explanation.”

Ugh. “Just stupid explanation cards.” Not God cards at all. Seto tried to block himself again, but Bastet stopped her.

“The arm, I want the arm for the outburst!” Sekhmet insisted.

“Cease!” Bastet commanded. “Let his memory be wiped, and we can end this day.”

“Fine,” Sekhmet said, “but when he remembers, I want his arm unless he apologizes.”

Mai's Dangerous Fiance

2005

Skeezy's Lounge

When we meet again, I would be a better person. It was easier to say than to do. Mai was a better person than the piece of lost trash she'd been when she was recruited by the Orichalcos, but meeting Joey after all that past history? Mai stayed away from the open area in the lobby Joey Wheeler was currently hanging out in. Last time she talked to him? She stole his soul.

Last time she saw him?

"Hey, hey, well if it isn't Mai Valentine!"

Damn. Joey's voice. "Well, if it isn't Joey Wheeler." *Keep it cool.*

He moved up to her, clearly excited to see her. "Wow, it's been awhile. You look good, Mai."

He looked better. Joey definitely wasn't in high school anymore. "Thanks. You too, Joey. So? What're you doing way out here?"

"Ah, yeah, good question, this isn't a place dealing with cards," Joey insisted. "Never thought I'd be running into you down here."

"Yeah well, luck I guess," Mai said.

"Hey, good to hear, Mai," Joey insisted. "I mean? Real good to hear from you. Just, not real good to see you here in a place like this."

Not good.

"I remember? Oh. I remember a lot of stuff but you were a real material girl." He glanced at her clothes. "Still kind of are."

Odd look at her clothes. "You bet I still love my money." Well, it was bound to come up too. The second reason she dreaded seeing him. "Dueling's more of a side hobby now, I mainly play with my fiancée," she admitted as she showed him her ring. "I gotta fresh one. Makes a lot of money. I got everything I need right here."

"You. Marrying?" Joey looked odd. Real odd.

“Engaged,” she said. “So, yeah, I still like dueling. It’s a part of me I can never lose. Still love my harpy ladies.”

“Yeah. Yeah, great to hear.” Now, Joey seemed to be the one uncomfortable in the meeting. “Engaged. Out here. In this place. He a good guy? What’s his name?”

“What’s in a name?” Mai said. *No, he’s not a good guy, Joey.*

“But, I mean, how’d you meet?” Joey asked. “Tell me about this guy.”

“Well, he duels. Kind of how we met,” she admitted.

“Then what’s his name?” Joey asked again. He was persistent. “Maybe I’ve heard of him.”

Her fiancé didn’t have the world’s classiest name. “He was born Skylar Eugene.”

“Born?” Joey asked. “That’s a funny thing to say for saying a guy’s name. He really go by that?”

Just give in, Mai. “His name is Skeezy and he owns this hotel.”

Joey looked at her a bit. “That’s not a real likeable name.”

He’s not a likeable guy. “Hey, I’m not holding his name over his head,” she insisted. “It’s what he likes.”

“Does he?” Joey still didn’t look so good. “Skeezy always gets what he likes. *I’ve heard of this guy.* Sorry to break it to you, he’s bad news.”

Ugh! *Did he know about Skeezy before he even knew about me?* Did he actually come down there because of Skeezy? Mai pulled over her favorite drink she’d brought down with her. Dealing with Joey was tough. For one? He was absolutely right, the rumors about what Skeezy was in were bad, but Mai was on a better path there.

So far. She had what she wanted out of life, able to buy whatever her heart wanted, and it was just because she was with Skeezy. Win or lose at the few cards she played now, and she could come back to her rooms and eat the finest food all the same. Drink her finest drinks.

Which is what she was doing right now to stay strong.

“God’s Brew?” Joey read the label. “That’s potent, Mai.”

“What, you’re going to rag about my choice of drink too?” Mai groaned and poured him a glass. “It’s not potent, it’s just good. Expensive but good. It doesn’t even taste like alcohol.”

Joey sniffed it. “You kidding? This stuff smells rank.” He sipped it. “Oh yeah, it’s loaded in alcohol.” However, he was smiling. “When I was younger, there was this local beer called Mikey’s Beer and I drank it all the time with Tristan. Unfortunately, it went under like two years later.” He looked at his glass. “Tastes just like that.”

“Yeah? Well, it doesn’t taste like that to me.” Mai smiled. “It’s rare, exotic, and expensive. It doesn’t officially have a taste because it tastes different to everyone.”

“This time, I think they nailed the advertising on something right for once.” Joey took another drink. “I’ve heard the name Skeezy more than once, Mai. Drugs, robberies, and so much more.”

“Rumors are rumors.” Mai sighed. “I’m not out there doing anything bad, and I get everything I love.”

“If you really felt that way, you would have married that one guy that came after you way back in the Battle City tournament,” Joey reminded her.

“I would have now.” She didn’t mean to say that out loud. “I’m not in any groups or gangs or even clubs. I’ve got nothing close to do with the Orichalcos, can’t that be good enough? Thanks for saving me.” *Really?* Mai couldn’t believe she did that. For one, it was the first time she ever could thank him for helping her, and she did it mid sentence. For two, she wasn’t planning on bringing up that past ever again if she could help it. It just popped out.

“You were just a little twisted in your thoughts,” Joey said as he had another drink. “I may have helped save your soul, but I don’t ever think I fully pulled you out of that dark place.” He looked around the room. “You’re still nowhere near sunshine.”

“I’m fine, I’m great, and I’m on a good path to a good life. Just, don’t, Joey,” she warned him.

“I never pulled you out of that dark place.” He took her jacket and pushed it back as he took the next drink, revealing bruises. “Don’t even try.”

Damn. Right in the middle of the lounge too. “Accident, Joey.”

“I said don’t even try. Skeezy gets what he wants. Skeezy gets what he likes.” Joey slid the drink away. “When Skeezy doesn’t get what he wants, then he finds ways to get what he wants.”

Damn it. Joey. *What did he become, a policeman?*

“He found a way to get what he wanted from you, didn’t he?”

“Jerk.” *Of course.* “I’ve gotta get going.”

“Don’t forget your drink.” Joey swiped it.

Oh no, now was not the time to play. Nor was that the drink to play with. “Joey. Give it.”

“Invite me to your room,” Joey insisted. “Let me meet Skeezy himself.”

Yep, he was just using her to reach Skeezy. “He’s not here tonight,” she said. “It won’t do you any good.” He didn’t believe her though, so she brought him to her room.

The sooner she got him to see he wasn't there, the sooner he'd leave out of there.

Her Room

"See?" Mai insisted. "Nobody here. No Skeezy."

"Good." Joey closed the door. "I'll be honest, Mai, I came down to find you on purpose to track down Skeezy. I knew you two were a thing," he said. "I didn't know you were trapped that far into this. You don't want to be married to this guy, I know it. You're stuck and you need a way out. Right?"

No, no, no! "Joey, I don't want out." *Damn it, don't let this idiot do something stupid.* "Mess with Skeezy, mess with a knife."

Joey stood up. "I'm not scared of nobody. This guy needs stopped, and you need to get away from him, Mai Valentine."

Damn it! Mai stood up as straight as she could too. "He's not gonna duel you for messing in his business. He's out of your league. Mess with him and he'll kill you."

Joey still didn't flinch. It was clear he wasn't there to play cards.

Tristan answered his cell phone while he was finishing up his work for the day. It wasn't his company phone, but his personal phone. He always kept it his top priority first. "Tristan speaking."

"Hey, Tristan."

Aw, he'd recognize that voice from anywhere. "Hey, Joey. What's wrong?" It wasn't his end of the work day and Joey knew his schedule so it had to be important.

"Been tracking someone. I used my past with Mai Valentine to get closer. She was more than a girlfriend though, she's marrying him. From the way she acted, she knows he isn't a good guy. She's trapped."

Oh no. Tristan already knew what he was going to say.

"I'm not going to be heading back to Domino for awhile."

"Mai Valentine." Not this. "Mai Valentine, that cursed woman that stole your soul one time?" Nah. "No way. Keep your eyes on your job, don't waste time on her."

“I know how you feel about Mai Valentine. I don’t care. I’m just letting you know why I’m not heading back.”

Geez. “What do you want me to tell Yugi when I meet up with him soon?”

“Do whatever you guys want. Have fun, don’t cancel anything, but don’t plan on me showing up.”

“It’s like once a year, Joey-”

“-I gotta stay. Sorry.” He hung up.

God's Brew

Fifi's

"Please, Serenity?"

Serenity sighed. Life really wasn't supposed to go this way. She felt out of the loop. She knew when she was younger she'd be pretty, but she'd been gifted with being even prettier. Downright attractive.

She didn't really get it. She had the body of a super model, and she didn't earn it. She never dieted, didn't exercise a whole lot, never had been the wrong amount of weight. Her breasts were big, but not excessively. Her butt was big, but not excessively. Women were jealous, and guys around there fancied her more and more.

Serenity was a nice person, so when it first started, she gave guys plenty of chances around there. They always tended to want more though. Some even went so far as to say she had a beauty that must have been a gift from the gods.

It wasn't easy to find guys not drooling anymore. It's part of the reason she chose Tristan Taylor to go steady with. His presence usually shooed them off, and at least she knew he would treat her well.

Too bad he wasn't around right now. "I'm just not interested," she said to the latest person asking for a date. "I'd like to finish my meal. Thanks, but I have a boyfriend." Nothing.

"That means scat."

Hm, that voice was familiar. Serenity looked toward the owner. He was familiar, but she couldn't guess where.

He sat down next to her. "Name's Seto Kaiba. Yours?"

Seto Kaiba. Seto Kaiba. *I know him. I know that I know him. He runs Kaiba Corp. He created the cards? No, he didn't create the cards. Features of the cards Joey used to play. I think?* There was still more. Personally. "Serenity Wheeler. Do I know you?"

"Probably. My company is famous." He waved the other man goodbye with his hand, and this time, he left. "Getting bothered much?"

Constantly. "Constantly," she actually said out loud. Maybe if she stayed more open, she'd remember who he'd been personally to her?

He wore strange clothes, but expensive. Was that a cape, who wore a cape? His hair was smoother and well taken care of. He had brought a strange bottle of whiskey or something

from his own table called God's Brew.

Who was he?

"I feel like I know you," Seto Kaiba said to her. "I don't know how, and that's not a line. From the minute I came in here, I haven't been able to get you off of my mind. I *know* that I know you from somewhere. I hate leaving mysteries unfinished." He took off the cap of his God's Brew and poured a glass. "Do you live here in the city?"

Hm. "Yes." He was doing exactly what she really wanted to do. "Your company is here."

"Yes, it is. Are you related to anyone at my company?" He asked as he drank some of his God's Brew.

"I don't think so," she admitted.

"This is going to bug me for some time." He looked at his watch. "Are you related to someone in my Dual Academy?"

"I don't play Dual Monsters," she told him. "Sorry."

"Don't be. Would you like to take a drive in my limousine so we can talk more privately?" he asked.

For the first time, she couldn't help herself. She craved it, she had to know.

She wanted to know who he'd been. "Yes."

It was so strange. He had offered her some of his drink while he pondered on the ride. If it hadn't been for the fact he was drinking from it, she'd never trust it. Probably. It was alluring, even the bottle. She tried a bit. It was like a sweet strawberry cream traced with what lilacs must taste like. It was amazing.

They each went through guesses as they rode around. The ride was beautiful in the limousine and he even had some exotic snacks. After an hour, they still couldn't figure it out, so he treated her to lunch instead.

Such an extravagant meal. Serenity enjoyed herself the entire day with the man she knew, but didn't. So close, the tip of her tongue. It was almost like a dream.

They both seemed to be enjoying the mystery between them as time kept running. They went out and looked around in different places she'd never been or shopped before. The places were expensive, but Seto insisted on buying something for her.

She ended up in a strange silvery dress, wearing a beautiful cape, eating hors d'oeuvres and drinking God's Brew by the time supper came around. Once again, he treated her.

This time, they were both waited on hand and foot. “This feels like a strange dream. I’m playing the role of a princess in a stage play.” She looked at her dress.

“You are a dream,” her waiter encouraged her. “A dream like you only deserves the finest things.”

“Would you mind not flirting with my date?” Seto Kaiba commented.

Date? Well, the little trip certainly had turned into that. The mysterious stranger she knew, yet didn’t. He just laid it out as it had eventually become. *I am on a date. I can’t do this to Tristan.* She drank more of the God’s Brew. “Seto, um?” She was going to tell him that she had a boyfriend already. Instead, her mind went somewhere else. “Where did this come from?” she asked.

“It’s rare, or I wouldn’t drink it,” Seto answered. “The maker keeps themselves hidden, you’ll never find it out in a public store.”

“It’s so good. I’ve never tasted anything so good,” she admitted. “Strange to say that about alcohol.”

“I’ll send you a bottle to your residence,” he insisted.

She thanked him. Usually, she would never accept such a gift, but the God’s Brew was incredible. The creator certainly named it right.

“In fact, why don’t you come with me to my place? I can get a bottle to you right there instead,” he said. “If you don’t mind one more spin?”

Oh no. She enjoyed the stops, and it’d be better not to have to wait for it to arrive.

At first, Kaiba didn’t know how to treat her. She wasn’t using the same kind of tactics other women who were that beautiful used. She was even polite and sweet, a trait none of them had without wanting something in return.

She was never haughty, belittling, and she . . . acted like a lower class citizen that shined like the elite. It made no sense. Of course she had a boyfriend, he heard that before he interrupted her to talk. That didn’t really concern him. What did was how she could live in the middle of some apartment randomly in the city? Why was she simply employed at an office?

The hunt began when he first saw her, but it had paused when his mind couldn’t place her. It would be a bad idea to get mixed up with the wrong person. As time went by though, seeking out how they knew each other, he stopped caring about associations.

It was like she said at the restaurant, but slightly different. She was the very definition of a princess, seeming almost untouched by the evils of life. Innocent, naive, yet she had the body of someone who was anything *but* innocent.

How could he resist that goddess of a woman?

Morning . . .

Well? This wasn't the first time this happened, but it was the first time he didn't remember it. It's also the first time he found himself dressed lying in his bed next to someone. I *took Serenity all around Domino City, and then what?* Oh well, not a big deal. Dressed or undressed didn't matter. A weak moment of needing someone, that was all. Brought on a little stronger between them by the drinking and spending the entire day together. In the end, she was still just a woman. A woman without even any money, which definitely wasn't his type.

She was an illusion, a vision of what he wanted. As he got up, he was about to mention his usual speech of paying for a ride home when-

"I'm sorry, I have to get out of here."

Their thoughts were aligned, that always made it easier. "I'll pay for a ride if you wish."

"No, no, I'll just walk. I need to breathe, I need to move. I never do this." She looked at her clothes. They were still on as well. "I don't remember anything, but I have a boyfriend, and I'm sorry."

She said sorry too much. "That's fine." How in the world was he attracted to that yesterday? Shoot, he even promised her a whole bottle of his newest acquired brew, didn't he? Well, better just hand it to her. As fast as she was moving, he wouldn't be seeing her again. He went and fetched another one, right before she got on her shoes. He left it on the bed next to her. "Here."

"Thanks." She took it, and then she was gone.

Hm. Usually, he was the one to brush them off faster than they did him.

Serenity just wanted to walk home. She didn't care how far she was, she'd call a cab soon, but for now, she just wanted to use her feet to walk out. Seto Kaiba had never done anything nice for anybody.

When her brother and Mai got injured and they needed off his blimp, he refused to take them down. It was too important to finish his games. Even his little brother Mokuba tried to convince him.

He never even noticed her back then. Did he even say two words that were nice to her? Or any for that matter? She didn't know. *How could I not see?* It was impossible to see how she couldn't see, it was like she was blinded to who he had been! He wasn't even surprised she had a boyfriend! Maybe he even knew it was Tristan? *I cheated on Tristan, I am scum! I have to tell him.* True, she was still dressed, but the fact she didn't remember anything made her nervous. She just kept walking and walking until-

She bumped into someone. “Sorry, sorry.” Then, she saw who she bumped into.

Yugi Muto, Joey’s best friend. This was . . .

“Hi, Serenity.” As nice as ever. “Are you okay? You walked right into me. Did you need something?”

“Domino City is huge, how did I run into you?!” Then, she covered her mouth, realizing how rude that had just been. “Sorry, I mean, I’m fine!”

“You don’t sound fine?” Great, now Yugi was worried. “Are you really fine?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry. Hard day. I have to go, bye!” She had to get out quick. If he worried too much, he’d call up Joey. Then Joey would have to call up his little sister to figure out what was wrong. Then what was she going to say?

That she stayed over night with someone that used to be his worst enemy? No. No, to home. Home, home, home. She would tell Tristan what she did, but there’s no way she was telling either of them who!

That was definitely strange. Yugi usually didn’t bother Serenity for any reason, but now it had him wondering what happened. Tristan called him up in the middle of the day and said Joey was doing something stupid.

It didn’t matter that he had a presentation over his latest upgrades to his game, he had to come. Joey and trouble usually were intense words to use together. With Serenity’s strange act, he was even more concerned.

He stepped into the café where Tristan said he wanted to meet. “Hey, Tristan. I just bumped into Serenity and she looked terrible. What’s so wrong with Joey?”

Tristan seemed confused by that. “I don’t know, I doubt he’d tell her much. Sit down, Yugi.”

Yugi sat down and heard the few details Tristan knew. Joey wouldn’t be back for their yearly meetup, but he didn’t share much else except Mai Valentine was involved.

“He said to do whatever we wanted, he didn’t care,” Tristan muttered. “He’s probably going to ask for help from you soon. Guarantee it.”

That’d be okay. Yugi had plenty of money, if Joey needed help, he’d help. “I hope he calls soon. I don’t know what he needs, but I’d help however I could.” Yugi’s games had been successful, he’d be able to get Mai set up in some kind of a new life to get away from whatever mess she’d been in too if he had to. He just doubted Joey would go for that.

Not with this guy’s past. But, he knew Joey. He couldn’t risk leaving her behind. Not Mai Valentine. Joey had connected to her when they were younger, and even years later, he

doubted he'd leave her in that bind.

Joey knocked back on Mai's door. Either way this ended, he'd be ready. Nobody answered it at first. *The dear Skeezy must be back.* He wasn't giving up, he knocked harder. "Hey, Skeezy! I want to talk to you!"

Mai answered the door. "I told you he ain't here, now go away!"

He caught his foot in the door though. "Mai, there's no way you love a guy that is as bad as this guy. I know you. He's got you wrapped up in something. Give me a few minutes to talk to you? Just a few? Afterwards, I'll beat it. I'll Amscray. Just, a little talking?"

"Oh, like you'd leave." Mai opened the door and then left in a huff to the other side of the room, pulling out the God's Brew. "Damn you, Joey, I didn't ask you to interfere in my life and try to be some knight again. I don't need one anymore." She took a big gulp of it.

Joey went over and grabbed some God's Brew too. "Well, I'm stealing some of this then." He took a glass. "Now? Let's start talking about your soon to be husband. I met him some time ago in a duel tournament. I got a whiff of some things he was involved in. The deeper I got, the more I had to investigate."

Oh yeah. "You're a cop, aren't you?"

"Used to be going for a detective," Joey admitted. "I kept getting too deep though in stuff I wasn't involved in. I was tracking someone and I was watching someone involved with the target. She disappeared. To this day, she's still lost."

Mai squirmed slightly. "Yeah. People tend to disappear sometimes." Yeah, that look from him. He didn't tell her that for fun. He wanted her story in return. "It started with a duel."

Joey came closer, intent on hearing everything.

"I won. We dueled again. He won. He wanted to duel again after winning. It was strange someone wanting to duel after they beat me, but I went ahead and played him again. He started to give me a hundred bucks every duel we played, whether I won or not." She sighed. "He was just trying to find out about me. What made me tick. I did the same thing, started looking up stuff on a guy that kept paying me to duel him. I didn't see good things, so I told him I didn't want to duel again. He got." She paused. "Angry about that."

"You knew real early he was dangerous."

"Yeah. He tried to make up for his anger, which I didn't want no part of." She spread out her hand. "I *still* didn't know what I was getting into, I just went 'Mai Valentine is not about that!'. I thought he got the hint. I heard nothing until after the competition. I went home. There were presents and flowers, and he apparently bribed the landlord to let him in to drop it

all off. Along with that was a list of recommendations. People who I should call to check him out.”

“You dialed up the phone to find that info?” Joey asked. “I’d be busy calling in some backup. He got into your place and everything.”

“Yeah, which is why I dialed up them numbers,” Mai insisted. “I had nothing to lose. Not like it made any difference if he traced me at that point. What I found? Wasn’t recommendations to how great a guy he’d been. Every single caller was a warning. Warning *me* not to run away. They were all deserters I rang up, each one shocked I even had their number.” She sighed. “Most of them said don’t call again and they were packing up and moving off. I got the message loud and clear.”

She was quiet for a short time then drank more of her God’s Brew. “I planned on saying yes next time I played him. Instead.”

“He already knew he won. Why be coy.” Marriage. “When does this big old shindig happen?”

“Skeezy doesn’t do average. It’ll be next year,” she answered. “About ten months away or so.”

“Ten months. You could try and break free now, with the right connections though?” Joey offered. “Yugi’s doing well. I know with the help of my friends, I can find a way to pull you out of here.”

“I didn’t do anything different,” she said, not answering his question. “He’d been obsessed with me since the first game. I never understood it. I flirted with him a little at first, but I do that with everyone. It’s just who I am,” she admitted. “I didn’t do much though, and then after seeing what he was really about, I shut all that down. It?” She shook her head. “I don’t know why he’s got a thing for me.”

Joey tapped the bar area. “You did nothing, Mai. You’re just the kind of person he envisioned he could stand for the longest. You’re attractive. Feisty as hell, even though he knows you won’t cross him. You even play duel cards. He likes all that.”

“Well I don’t, I hate it!” She was starting to bounce back. “Mai Valentine should be a free bird, I don’t wanna be some wife stuck inside and having baby after baby. Sure, I like the money, but I’m just . . . looking at the only bright side I got.”

“Then, we are getting you out.” He stole the bottle and poured another glass himself as he pulled out his phone.

“Joey, it’s too dangerous. No. I’m not involving anybody else.”

Yugi and Tristan had ordered food, waiting to see if Joey called. Joey was both smart and stupid. He'd grown since high school, but the more emotional the situation, the more chances he tended to take. He aimed for a promising career and lost it because he got too involved in a local kidnapping. He couldn't let go.

The food was long gone. They tried to pass time by talking about their day. Then Yugi told him about his new designs. Then, running out of stuff, Tristan brought up another subject.

"I hear T  a got a new gig again. Maybe we should do something to sort of recognize the role?" Tristan suggested.

Yugi's face fell in a goofy smile. "Yeah. She'll be the cutest undead backup person on stage. I don't want to miss T  a." She tried to take a trip home every year that she'd done good. She wasn't a huge star, usually just backup roles. For what she dreamed, it wasn't of course. But? She was happy. She danced and acted, and was positively radiant when she visited. "I can't blame Joey. Last time she came, I had been away. I had to show off my new game."

"Yeah, poor you. Games that bring you a fortune had to be shown off so you couldn't see her. Priorities, Yugi. You couldn't skip that," Tristan said. "I'm sure it wasn't too big a deal."

"I see her once a year, and it was a big deal to miss that." He offered to pay for another ticket or to come see her, but she just said the same thing Tristan just did. She'd see him next year and not to spend money just to see her.

It would be year two that he hadn't seen her if they canceled. "Joey would have had some good ideas on what to do."

They stared at that phone until it finally rang. Tristan picked it up on the first ring. "Joey, you better be okay!"

"I am okay, Tristan. Is Yug there? You know, the guy who actually owns the phone?" He answered.

"I will put you on speaker," Tristan said as he messed with the phone. He put it back on the table. "And?"

"We need a plan to help Mai disappear," Joey said. "She's in deep. Real deep. This isn't an easy guy to pull away from. She isn't even trying."

"Got an idea," Tristan offered. "T  a is coming soon. You know, the one friend your standing up to help another one that stole your soul? Yugi and I can help pay for T  a to take her back with her to New York City. Then, she can get her own life walking New York's streets and stop hanging onto you as her -"

"Tristan!" This was not a time to let old grudges in. Still, Yugi was too late. He didn't even hear another sound from the phone. Joey hung up. "Why? Joey called me for help and you pulled that?" He took back his phone and redialed Joey again. No answer.

“I am sure Yugi will help, that was just Tristan butting in,” Joey insisted as he heard his phone ring again. “Mai?”

“Tristan is the only one who spoke any sense. I will figure my own way out,” she said, “or live with the consequences.”

Damn it. He was on a role, why did Tristan have to say that? “After everything is said and done, you can pay us all back if you want.” It was gonna be expensive and risky to get Mai out, but he had to do something before she got mixed up in Skeezy’s actual business. “Mai. It’s not farfetched, and I’m not trying to scare you. You do something, anything that annoy’s this guy, and he’ll kill you or make you disappear.” She didn’t look too surprised. “Mai?”

“I’m not the person you knew,” she answered. “He likes me for me. I act tough, but I don’t stand up to people. I just can’t. I lost something, that part of me, a long time ago. He could do anything and I’d just take it.”

“Loud but scared.” Joey got it. “I saw a young girl, tracked her in her middle school. Got distracted just a few seconds, and lost her. She’s still missing. I don’t think she’ll ever be found.” She looked empathetic, but that was it.

“You got tonight to hang out with me, Joey Wheeler. I haven’t had another duel outside of Skeezy for a year. He doesn’t like me joining tournaments myself. So, you wanna duel me or not?”

Joey thought he just had to loosen Mai up again. He talked about his dueling and how the duels he played lacked heart anymore. He tended to stay on paying circuits of dueling when he lost his career. Mai told him about what she had done over the years. They shared what they could over the God's Brew.

It was good. Potent. Just what he needed. They both slid so comfortably into the conversation. Joey even found himself explaining about Atem. And if that weren't enough.

“You could have asked it from me.”

“Ask what?”

“To come see you. I wanted to. I wanted to know that you were okay after getting your soul back.”

“I wanted to be better first, Joey. Then, it felt awkward to see you. I just felt too much shame. I can never make up for what I did.”

“I knew the risks. I wanted to save you no matter what ‘cause I loved ya. Did I say that out loud? God's Brew is apparently strong. Sorry.”

“Saying anything about that time with you would be wrong. I was like 24 and you were this little guy in high school. You were too young, Mister.”

“Not . . . too young *now*, am I?”

The next morning

Joey kind of waited next to Mai in the bed. He knew he had a serious problem. Although he didn't mind the angel next to him? He knew he messed up.

No idea how. They were talking last night about getting her out with Yugi and Tristan. Then Tristan said something stupid. He was trying to recover. Then, they were both just kind of enjoying the God's Brew and the company. *Did I tell her how I feel, is this why I'm here?*

Last night, thoughts and words seemed to form into each other. *Or, did she just feel like she owed me? Could she have actually said something more? Did she have better memories? Oh man, what if she's just like me and doesn't remember anything?*

This was bad. This wasn't the time for this kind of thing. Mai was in a jam, a serious jam. If she didn't remember and thought something happened, she might not trust him. She had a serious issue with trust.

Joey snuck out of bed. *If she doesn't seem any different, if I make this scene different, then I'll know.* He picked up the clothes off the bed and floor. He took one of the pillows and threw it on the floor haphazardly. Like he'd ever make up a bed on the ground? He looked around the hotel room and found an extra blanket. He spread it around the pillow.

He took all his clothes and threw them on the bathroom floor. *Mai would probably use like a hamper if they had one.* He looked around and found one. He stuffed her clothes in there.

He tucked himself back over on the floor and waited. Soon, he heard Mai starting to move around. He saw her face immediately looking out for him above. “What?”

“Uh? Nothing.” She sighed. “Do you know why I'm naked?”

“Um?” He teased to keep the lie in control. “Mai, were just friends. Maybe after this whole-” He stopped as she threw her pillow at him.

“I'm not coming onto you. You stay there and don't peek,” she demanded as he heard her footsteps hurry to the bathroom.

There's my answer. If she had remembered, she would have had a brilliant smile when she looked over then said something like ‘Wheeler, what're you doing on the floor, Goofball?’

She'd never go through with any plan he would try if she knew. Even now, because of the Orichalchos thing she had too much guilt and shame to get his help. *I've got to get her out or*

she's dead. She'd either find out about what he did and get pinned as an accomplice so she couldn't ever leave, or he'd get tired of her.

Joey felt like scum at the same time. They were with each other, and she should know that. But? *Promise Mai. Once your safely away from this guy, I'll tell you the truth.* Until then, he needed her working with him.

Best way to keep lies under wrap? "That God's Brew is real strong, I don't remember anything from last night. Ya think something happened there, Mai?" He raised his eyebrows comically. *Bring up the truth like it was a total joke.*

"In your dreams. You were on the ground and everything. I was . . ." She paused. "Nah. It was fine."

There. Suspicion over. "Hey, Mai." Still, he wasn't a moron. "Once your better off and start getting into tournaments, come get me. I'd love to join one with you again."

A little smile. "We'll see, Wheeler."

Yugi pulled himself away from his breakfast when he saw who was finally starting to call. "Joey?"

"Yug? I need some help. I need to get Mai to Domino for a bit."

"Joey, you've been following this for a long time. This guy sounds intense. Are you sure bringing her to Domino City isn't going to be easy for him to find?" Especially since it's where Joey lived too.

"She'll stay off the streets. You could put her in a hotel for a couple of months maybe while I figure out how to bring this whole thing to a close finally? Is that okay, pal? I promise I'll pay it back in the future."

Pricey but yeah. Yugi could swing that. "You don't have to pay me back, Joey. As long as she stays out of sight. I don't know how this will end though. We never get mixed up in these kinds of situations." At least not anymore. They were all pretty settled down. Yugi worked on his games. Tristan worked for his father. Joey used to be a cop but now he dueled professionally. And? Téa was happy with her career.

"Oh, and one more thing? There's something I need to tell you, Yug, but not over the phone. It's a face to face kind of talk, okay?" Joey informed him.

"You bet. When will you be here?"

"I don't know. I need to convince her to come still. Also? Don't tell Tristan where she's at. I don't need him involved in this. Okay?"

"Good idea, Joey." Tristan deciding to go to her spot and talking about the past wouldn't help things. "Although, you didn't tell any of this to your sister, right?"

“Nah, not a word. Why?”

“I bumped into your sister yesterday and she looked terrible. You might want to give her a call,” Yugi told him. “I’ll see you when you get here.”

“Got it, Yug. Take care.”

“You bet. Bye, Joey.” Yugi hung up and took a deep breath for his next call. Oh, even being on the phone he blushed. He tried to call at least twice a month to Téa. If he didn’t, she did.

He used to be able to talk to her everyday. New York City though, it was a long distance relationship from Domino. Still, she’d be taking a whole two weeks off to come down there and see them soon. Those two weeks were always magical. *You shouldn’t be like this. How many years has it even been?* He should have moved on. Done something, but he just didn’t want to.

He was waiting for that miracle day that would never come, when she came back to stay. He didn’t want to be married, engaged, or even have a girlfriend when miracle day happened. *I swore the first year apart I’d be over this. Then the second. I knew by the third it’d be ridiculous. By five, I was downright swearing it.* “Ugh. Only the gods know why.”

Crazy. He was close a few times too. He’d gotten a date a couple of times, set up by Joey or Tristan. They swore he needed to try. Then that very night, right before the date, Téa would call.

She didn’t know about the dates, they didn’t tell her. She had no way of knowing. Yet, she always said something like ‘Sorry to call Yugi. Just found myself thinking I should really call you for some reason. How are you?’

If he was supposed to move on, she wouldn’t call every time he had a chance to move on.

He dialed her number and heard her sweet hello. Soon he’d be able to see her in person. “Hi. It’s Yugi. I just wanted to say that Joey won’t be able to make it this year, but I’ll be right here with Tristan.” They talked for a few more minutes before she had to go back to work.

“I can’t wait to see you soon too,” Yugi insisted. “I know I missed out last year because of the traveling advertising for my game, but I won’t miss a single day this time! Can’t wait to see you. Bye. Téa.”

Skeezy's Reach

As much as I want to get out of here, I can't leave Skeezy. He hunts everybody down, nobody escapes. Although? It really wasn't fair.

Why her? She didn't do nothing. She didn't flirt with him any extra. She saw him more because he paid her to duel. How was she supposed to know his plans for her?

She heard the front door open and pulled out the fake, plastic smile she'd learned to use around him. It's the smile and the attitude that kept her going. "Hey, Skeezy." She turned around and noticed he didn't look so happy. "What is it, Hon'?"

"Joey Wheeler's been nosing around here," he said to her. "You have a past with him."

Ah. Jealous guy. "Yeah, I do. He was a good friend a long time ago," she said. "We just ran into each other."

"You didn't ever get romantic with him in that past of yours?" he asked suspiciously.

"What are you kidding? He was way too young back then for me to even think about romantically, Silly." She waved him off. "That guy was still in high school back then."

Still? He didn't look convinced. "I got some, uh, intel? You know, 'cause I know people," Skeezy said. "Your friend, Téa Gardener. She's in a bit of trouble." He threw a paper down between them, closer to her end. "Seems like she's just pretty enough, just talented enough, and just accessible enough to make someone's roster."

Shit! Mai immediately picked it up. "Don't you hurt Téa!" She demanded. "She never did anything to you and I never did anything against you!"

"Nah, nah, you got it wrong, Hon'." Skeezy eased up by her, holding her delicately by the shoulders. "I'd never hurt your friend. I love your friends. Hell, I keep an extra close eye on all your friends, to make sure every body's safe. I'm going to send you and Joey Wheeler to New York City. Sources say they are going to grab her tonight. I want to prove that I'm there for your friends. That your friends are safe to trust me."

Mai looked back at the paper. Even her current number? Téa just changed her phone a month ago. So damn current. So damn easy. "Skeezy." There was no way to avoid it. She called the number first. It was not going through. Not a surprise, Skeezy wouldn't let it be that easy.

She knew he was the one who added Téa to a dangerous roster of eligible women to grab. She knew that he knew that she knew too. It was all just a nice way of saying 'better not think of double crossing me.'

Just in case she wasn't scared enough. *Damn, they even had how they were going to get her.* "Messing with her car."

"She'll be forced to walk alone tonight on New York City's streets in order to reach her plush little apartment," Skeezy told her. "Don't worry. I'm going to get you straight there, along with your friend. As long as he isn't one to worry about, then I trust you. Skeezy trusts, Honey."

Téa. Even if there was a small chance to try and convince me, Joey. It's just gone. Téa wasn't just a friend she ignored like the others. She had run into her in a festival about three years ago. Téa being Téa, noticed her. She talked to her about how things ended when they last saw each other. How things went. Then, she invited her to come back.

Mai went back and visited about four times. Each time was a blast, and Téa loved her sense of adventure. She just needed to pull back on the reigns a little. *I didn't even tell Joey I kept in touch with her.* It's not like it was something she strived for. In all of New York City, they were just at the right place, at the right time, to see each other. Make a good start at a friendship again.

I mean, what were the chances? "Pretty low chances my friend Téa would be facing this."

"Can happen to anyone at anytime," Skeezy said. "It doesn't matter though why it happened. What matters is I get you down there to save your friend." He held up his phone. "I already texted Joey Wheeler."

There was an extremely urgent knock at the door. "Mai, open up, it's about Téa! Mai!"

"He seems ready to help too," Skeezy smiled at her. "Pleasant journey. I'll be resting in our room. Here are your tickets." He handed them to her. "I trust you, Honey," he said one more time. "Do *not* let that trust down."

He closed the door to his room while Mai held the paper and marched out the door. Joey almost knocked on her face, but he stopped in time. "Joey." She closed the door behind her. She gave Joey the paper. "I've been friends with Téa for about three years. Skeezy's got knowledge about this stuff. We are being sent to save her, thanks to him." She showed him the tickets. "Do you *understand* it yet?"

Joey just stared at her. He looked like he wanted to bust down that door, but also, some shred of him seemed to get it.

Téa was already in trouble. Mai never even tried to escape yet. Téa was just a warning, and Skeezy was so confident that Mai would obey him that he would let her go with Joey to get her.

"We don't have time to waste. It'll be dark in New York soon," Mai reminded him. "We gotta go."

"Mai." Joey was still stunned but he took the New York City tickets. "Let's go. I'll call Yugi on the way. I can't reach Téa, but I know I can reach Yugi."

New York City

Téa

Téa kept her eyes alert. She had to get home from work, but the sun had already gone down. She had to stay longer to keep her boss happy or she would be looking for a new role.

She didn't want a new role. It worked out perfectly for the ending and getting paid to the time that she'd be able to visit Domino and see her friends. While a lot of people tended to fade from their friends during long distances? Well, they'd just gone through way too much together.

Especially her and Yugi. What a strange relationship they had.

While it was okay? On the way home, her car broke down. She kicked the tires at first, tried to signal for some kind of help, but it was like everything about the car died. No help was coming at all.

So, she had to face facts and walk home to her New York apartment.

She stopped and reached into her pocket, looking at her Dark Magician. It wasn't the real thing. She kept fake small collector copies of Red Eyes Black Dragon and The Dark Magician, to help remember better times instead of walking home through the freakin' cold!

Soon, she'd see them again. While she loved her career, there was this sense of fullness when she went back to Domino City and saw them all. Just for that small bit of time, it felt good. Reminiscent of their teen years.

It was getting into the colder season. Some Christmas lights were already adorning so many houses. It also helped the cold journey home.

Happy thoughts. She concentrated on them. *Bright and warm twinkling lights*. It helped but when she tried to say something, the illusion had been destroyed. "P-pretty l-l-lights." She could even see her breath in the direction she spoke.

Téa didn't stop and speak to anyone she saw, tried to stay on the main roads, until she was almost home.

"Téa, Hey!"

Téa looked just ahead of her. Someone from her work team called out to her, stopping with their car in the street. "Hey there."

“You want a ride home?” He insisted. “I’ve got extra room in my car.”

It almost felt like a relief, but then again, her mind didn’t seem comfortable with it.

You hardly know him. Do not enter his car.

On the other hand, I work with him. Practically everyday.

Doing acting. You hardly know the real him, so do not enter his car. Do not be foolish.

Boy, nobody argues with themselves like I do. Téa smiled politely. “I’m a-almost th-th-there, it’s fine. Th-th-th.” Oh forget the thanks, she already sounded like a chipper.

“Oh come on.” He parked beside the road and got out. “Don’t be like that.” He opened the side door for her. “I know you had to work late tonight. It’s cold, it’s dark, and what if it starts raining? Even if it’s not far, it’s not a problem. Get in the car, Téa.”

Too demanding.

I don’t like the way he’s acting. Téa shook her head, trying to keep her chattering down. “M-my place isn’t f-far.”

“Okay then. I’ll just wait right here to make sure you get there then.” He waited by the passenger door.

Téa didn’t like that either. The gesture was nice, nothing seemed wrong on the surface, but her mind just kept rebelling about everything.

Go. Remember the self defense class you took, be careful and go.

Téa didn’t say anything as she started to walk. As she walked a few steps she heard the car door shut. *He’s probably leaving.*

He’s following.

It’s my imagination, I haven’t looked backwards, and I know him from work. Still, she looked back. He was right there, not far behind.

“I wanted to make sure you made it home safely, remember?”

Dive through the alley.

Why am I so over paranoid? “I don’t n-need . . .,” *Dangit, the chattering.* Téa gestured to her apartment building.

“Oh. That’s good, so within viewing distance of the car?” He asked. “Great. I will go back to the car and take off as soon as you’re there.”

Get away, now!

He started to step backwards. “Don’t slay me for wanting to watch out for you, okay? Sorry if it’s creepy. I just didn’t like the look of the neighborhood and wanted to help.”

Téa nodded and went back on her way, but her mind was still upset with herself. Why? What had she done wrong? *Why am I yelling at my own self so much?* She reached her front door. Her co-worker waved at her as he got in the car and she waved back. *Nothing to it. He really just wanted to make sure I was safe.* He was even getting into his car and leaving.

Téa unlocked the door. *If I keep up this paranoia, It’s not going to help me at all. He just wanted to watch out for me. Not all guys are bad, after all. Heck, I know some of the best.* As she stepped into the door of her apartment building though, everything changed.

It was so fast. She heard the ‘ert’ of the car, the sudden stop, and before she could turn around-

Without Yugi A Sacrifice Must Be Made

MASIKA

A familiar situation as last time, yet a tighter predicament. Too much had changed since last she needed to take control and help. Téa was in a predicament and Masika needed to correct it before she ended up dead. The co-worker, as she suspected, was not being all that charitable. He had taken his car, went right up behind Téa on the road, and grabbed her before she went into her building. Holding on that whole time only to build trust so she would be relaxed and unaware.

Because that was Téa. A trusting sweet fool of a woman. Often enough, speaking with her in the same kind of view as her own thoughts kept her from making foolish actions. She seemed to attract trouble to herself sometimes.

This time though, it didn't matter the words.

He had bound her mouth with tape and handcuffed her hands as he got back in and started to ride. His intentions were unknown but the danger they presented were clear.

For all those years, she had kept herself isolated from Téa's life. She tried to leave the vessel alone. Lying dormant inside, she barely said a word. Her spirit lingered deep within, unable to leave far or explore anything.

The last time she had saved Téa, she had scared her. Masika never wanted to do that again. After Téa came to New York City though, she did tap the surface area more. There was no one else to watch out for her and she couldn't always take a back seat.

Had she done so, she would have ended up in the hands of someone like this man sooner. **One card.** Masika struggled for the copy card Téa had bought. Red Eyes Black Dragon or The Dark Magician would work to be raised. If. ***Please don't let it be long enough.***

Her mouth was gagged but soon it would come off. If she could just reach in her pocket. ***There.*** She felt the top of it and clasped her fingers tightly around the edge.

The car quickly stopped. As he lifted her out, she remained as quiet as she had been in the car as her fingers slipped up one of the cards. She wasn't yelling, pleading, or screaming. She was chanting in her mind. It wasn't as easy to raise a spirit without speaking and holding her hands outward toward it, but it would eventually come if it was possible.

But, Masika could feel it. Even one monster was out of the question for her now. Masika felt herself being thrust backwards, hard. ***Téa, I cannot free us this way.*** Now she fought, trying to pull out with her own force. She was there and learned what Téa knew, but this position was not one they practiced. Her arms were handcuffed, her mouth bound shut, and her legs were pinned against the car in a dark alley she presumed was a far distance away

from being heard. ***I don't know what you want with Téa, but you cannot have her easily.*** As she struggled, he hit back. She felt the pain. ***All I can do is stay in control and not let Téa suffer.*** But it wasn't right. Téa would wake up hurt, or not at all. What if he had every intention to kill her?

She yelled in pain as she felt him grabbing her arm. ***Pain. I hate being in control.***

“Don't do anything funny, Téa. Do you have any idea what the market will want for a sexy actress like you?”

Ah, so that was it. ***He's going to sell her.*** If not murder, another easy out to disappear. Masika had seen him, watching Téa. He was waiting for a chance to get closer, knowing Téa was an easy target to sell. That's why she had been so insistent Téa move and get away. She had made bold moves against Téa's own thoughts, acting like her own to move. Still, Téa was a kind woman. Looking for the good in all people.

Yet, not all people are good.

Far from it. The way he was still holding her, pinning her but not doing anything that caused serious damage. ***He planned this. He probably sabotaged her car.*** Someone must be coming to get her, more secure and ready while he made his payday. She only had as much time as it took for them to get there.

Which would not be long. ***I will do it. It's better to take her for good and endure the pain until her final end, then leave it with her.*** There was only one thing left to try.

The last thing. The very last thing before resigning to fate. The one thing every Egyptian child had been taught ever since they could speak. Before giving up hope, before giving into the enemies when hope is desperate.

One called to the gods for help. ***Gods of Egypt, I implore you! I am desperate in such a need, I promise anything if you just give me the power to bring the monsters again!***

Afterlife

//////////Gods of Egypt, I implore you! I am desperate in such a need, I promise anything if you just give me the power to raise the monsters again!//////////

Atem didn't understand. “I am not a god, I should not be able to hear this.” All of Atem's friends also looked around, trying to figure out where the voice had come from. Atem moved from his throne and went outside. If the gods were trying to speak, they would be more likely to show up outside.

He stared at the sky where the thundering plea continued to echo. It was far above, but nothing was seen. Only a voice. A voice of desperation. “Why can I hear this request?”

There would only be one reason. “The gods must want me to hear this. Why do they want me to hear this?” Atem shouted to the sky as loudly as he could. “What do you need a god for?!”

//////////“***Please, grace this vessel Téa Gardener and I with your power!***”//////////

“Téa, she said Téa. Téa is a vessel to another?”

A spirit within Téa was reaching out to the help of the gods, and there was only *one* time that would happen. “Téa’s in trouble.” Atem tried to remember something. “Back. Back to Yugi, I could do that temporarily.” Visions passed through him. Memories. Knowledge. “She’s not close enough to him.”

Placing himself inside Yugi would do no good, the threat was too far. They would be gone before he reached the area. “Téa.” Yugi. Joey. Tristan. “She is calling for help.” Atem addressed no one, which was the best way he knew to get answers from the beings who had no physical presence. He closed his eyes. “Téa is my friend, please! I must save her, let the power she once possessed continue!”

Then he knew the reply. He understood it. Atem looked toward the sky above him, knowing what it would take. Visions flowed through his mind, of Earth, right then. Trapped, caught in the hands of an ordinary mortal man, but unable to get away. A spirit was in control of Téa’s body, doing what she could but only getting more hurt in the process. He could feel this man’s nefarious heart.

This man’s intentions.

Atem held his hands into fists. The reply.

All were being made clear. A part of himself rebelled, growled within himself. He did *not* want to do this. He didn’t deserve this. He’d done all he could, the threats were gone to the world that he could help with, and it was over.

Yet? Destiny had placed Téa with a spirit, and now, he could hear the cries of help, cries that only a god had the right to hear. There. At that moment. “Yugi.”

Yugi would do it. For her. *If the gods were so powerful, then why must I be the pawn in- ?!* No, what was he thinking? Disobeying the gods would never bode well for any spirit. Afterlife Pharoah or not. *They have reasons, reasons unseen and that I will never know.*

But what he did know? Fate was not done with him yet. Even now, the gods knew what he wanted before he spoke. The robe and his Egyptian clothes he had always worn were replaced with clothes he’d never seen before. Soft, modern and most likely what Yugi had currently been wearing.

With the puzzle around his neck. He spread out his fingers and hands to the sky, reaching and shouting as loud as he could. “I cast permission for the spirit to aid Téa while we pay the price this time.” He could not pay it alone. “There will be no other sacrifices!”

It was the words he used. But in reality, it was not just him and the other spirit that would pay that price.

But the others would have no choice.

And if the others knew their fate, they would choose it. At least, Atem hoped so.

New York City

Téa

The border of magic that she felt pushing back on her, had waned. She closed her eyes. ***The Great Pharaoh saved us.*** There would be no sacrifices, nor would she have to let Téa suffer. ***I will pay the other half.***

She started the chanting, the familiar chanting in her mind. Stronger and bolder as she held The Dark Magician card. As she felt the monster's magic pull through, the binding burst off of her mouth while the enemy was blown backward, merely by the calling of the ancient monsters.

By the time the deed was done, half a block had been annihilated from the dark magic attack.

Cursed Millennium Necklace

YUGI

Yugi woke up to a room. A familiar room he had not seen in ages. Young. Innocent. It now had some other things inside of it too, like his new games. “Huh?” Last time that happened without the Millennium Puzzle, it was Shadi using the Millennium Key to check his mind in Duelist Kingdom. Shadi was gone now too. *Why am I here?* Why could he possibly be there?

Maybe it was just a dream. Maybe he was dreaming of the past. Sure, that was possible. *So wake up and dream about something else.* It wasn’t working, and it didn’t feel like a dream. He recognized that feeling. *It’s impossible. It’s absolutely impossible, it can’t be.* It couldn’t.

Yet, Yugi grabbed the familiar door. “The sooner I see this is a dream, the sooner my mind will let me wake up.” When he opened it, he saw the familiar pharaoh’s door. *Just a dream, it has to be.*

Then, he heard the creaking sound of the door opening. Out of the shadows, Atem was there. “Yugi?”

“This has to be a dream,” Yugi said. “This has to be.”

“You’ve grown,” Atem said. “. . . what happened?”

What happened? “I’m dreaming is what’s happening,” Yugi said, “because this can’t be real. *You* moved on.”

“I was supposed to.” Atem looked confused. “We dueled. I lost. Then, I was right back here.”

“What? No, you’ve been gone for years!” Yugi said. He looked at himself. He still looked the same. “It’s been some time. You found peace. What happened?” Atem didn’t look like he knew any better than Yugi. “This can’t be.”

“As many times as you say it,” Atem said, a sad dissonance within his voice, “it must be. I have not been allowed to leave.”

“But you did. I know you did.” Yugi hated to tell him. He went through everything that happened with Kaiba after he was gone. “You were gone, you weren’t here, at all.” Yugi lived, he went on with his own life. There was no one else inside of him anymore.

“Then I must have found peace, but it’s been interrupted.” Atem looked around himself. “This looks like the puzzle, Yugi. Yet, it doesn’t feel the same.”

“That’s because it can’t be, all the millennium items fell into a huge pit, trapped in a crumbled up-“ Yugi stopped. He wasn’t making Atem feel any better. He had lost his memories of being in the afterlife and he was brought back there. Nothing ever happened

without a reason. "Sorry. I thought it was over. It was supposed to be over." Yugi learned to go on without him. He even proved it by dueling Atem! So why?

"There must be something bigger than us," Atem said. "Affecting destiny once again. I know you can carry on without me, Yugi."

"Then why? Why are you here again?"

Domino City Museum

Atem opened his eyes in a gasp. He realized he was standing straight up in something. A . . . coffin. No. "A tomb." He looked outward and saw Ishizu Ishtar along with Marik and Odion.

They each bent down toward him, while Ishizu started the greeting.

"Welcome, Pharaoh," Ishizu said to him. "On this day, you were ordained to be given life."

Life? Atem stepped out of the open tomb. He had regal egyptian clothes on, no doubt from them. "What is happening? The last thing I remembered was being beaten by Yugi, going through a door to the afterlife, and then I woke up once again with Yugi."

"Temporary," Ishizu said. "You now have your own body."

He touched his chest and his hands. "Why?" None of it made sense.

"No one knows," Marik answered. "My sister hasn't had the millennium necklace since it was banished, but she kept seeing one future. This future."

"No one gives a second life body," Atem said. What would ever call for such an extravagant thing?

"We believe there it to be a battle that will need you as your own self to fight it," Marik said. "That's our guess. We sadly don't have any more facts." He gestured to a suitcase Odion was holding. "Here are more modern day clothes for you. We can help care for you until we know what is going on."

No. "I need Yugi's number." He would have a number, he was much older now. Looking at his hands, Atem could see that he too seemed older than before.

"We have acquired that." Marik gave him a phone. "This is yours now, Pharaoh. We tried to put any of your allies in the past for you, to give you your best chance of finding out what is going on."

All they knew was that he would be back, but nothing else. Yes, he would have to dig for answers. He clicked on Yugi's name on the phone. "Yugi?"

“Click the phone icon on the next screen,” Ishizu told him.

He clicked on the icon and held the phone up to his ear again. Nothing.

“Try texting him,” Marik suggested. “He might not answer if he doesn’t recognize the number.”

Text what? Atem gave it back to him. ***If only I could reach Yugi. I don't want to stay with the Ishtar's, I want Yugi.***

Pharaoh Atem?

Yugi, we still have a connection? I am alive and in the Domino museum. What a strange phrase he had to say. ***I was given my own life back.***

Oh! He sounded shocked. *But? Uh? That's . . . not a thing?*

I've never known it to be, Atem admitted. ***The Ishtars have been prepared for me.*** They didn't seem to know anything else though, and he would be much comfortable being near Yugi. ***Will you help me find out what's going on?eah, I'll be right there.***

New York City

Téa

Téa ran down the streets, trying to find her way home. When she awoke, she wasn't inside of her body, it had been possessed by someone else. She had screamed in terror and fright, not understanding what was happening. All she had known was that someone grabbed her from behind before she went in.

And now, she was running as fast as she could from an explosion that had taken place near her that had been caused by a duel monster and someone trying to take over her body.

Téa, think about where you are running. You don't know where you are.

You think I don't know that? Téa cursed. I'm in the middle of nowhere, I don't belong out here. Who are you and what are you doing? I have a real problem with people trying to take over my body, I don't like it!

I know, which is why I have tried to never interact. I was sent here, within you, years ago. I have never caused you harm.

No brainwashing? How can I believe you?

You went through releasing the Pharaoh. You went through your graduation. You have lived as a dancer in New York. I have not influenced you in any way since that day you were nabbed in the alley.

So it was real. *I didn't dream it?*

No. I didn't want them to hurt you. You've shown nothing but compassion for others. What little thoughts were crossing over, I completely stopped. Most days, I don't even look out.

"Look out of where?" Téa asked.

Your soul.

Téa inched around the corner, checking her directions. "You know me so well and I know nothing about you. For years, you kept silent, and now you pop up to ruin my life?"

I saved you, Téa, but it came at a great cost.

Fine, but who are you and what are you doing inside of me?

You met me once. Well, we never officially spoke. It was brief, but you must have felt a close connection to my situation. You were there when I ran toward my cat, Ebonee, trapped in a card. Next thing I knew, my soul was within you. Destiny must have meant us to be together, but I did not want to frighten you.

Card. "You're the card that petted the kitty. The Masika card."

I should not be surprised that on one random day, you remembered a name of a spirit that you never even spoke to. You connected for some reason.

Well I didn't mean to, so go away. Téa moved around another corner. Her surroundings still weren't familiar. Her phone was gone. What to do? *Sorry, I didn't mean to say that. Think that. This is tough.*

Left, Téa. Do not interact with any cars coming down the street.

A dark alley wasn't any better. "I don't know where I am, no one's around, and I need a phone."

Téa, your heart is racing, you need to calm down to think logically.

You can calm down, your dead already! Oh! Téa hit her head. She felt terrible. *I didn't mean it, I'm sorry.*

Yes, you did. You have every right to be angry. I stayed within you without a word when you hardly knew me. So, come in and meet me. I will watch for you.

What? Come in where?

Téa Soul Room

“This is . . . where am I?” Téa looked around herself. Nowhere near her dank and dark surroundings. “I’ve been taken to some kind of room.” It looked strangely familiar. She picked up her old dancing shoes that were on the floor. What were they doing there? Seeing a door beside herself, she opened it and looked outward. A hall with another door. “This place is crazy. Where am I?” She opened the second door.

And yelled in surprise as she saw herself. “Another me?”

Quiet. Reserved. She had sat in the middle of the floor. It was her, yet not. The clothes were of a blue dress with red bows attached. *Oh no, that’s Masika’s dress! Impossible! I’m in my own head!*

I have seen many impossible things.

She can still hear me in here too. “It doesn’t matter if I speak out loud.” Téa looked around. “Where am I and why are you really here?” *Did she really used to look like me?*

“No, I am just a reflection of my vessel. I am Masika. You know that.” The woman stood up and moved around.

She knows my name. “You’re Masika,” Téa said to her. *She looks like me now instead of Cecelia Pegasus. Like Atem appeared as Yugi. Does this mean?* “How? I don’t have any millennium item like Yugi, you can’t be here.”

“Destiny always gets its way, no matter how much you rebel. You don’t have to wear a millennium item if the gods want you to connect with it.”

“Oh just say it so casually,” Téa shouted. She covered her ears. “No, I shouldn’t yell. You did nothing wrong, and you even saved me.”

“Don’t be frightened,” Masika said gently. “I can see outside of here. You are safe, but after all this time, you deserved to meet with me face to face.”

Yeah. That was good of her, Téa really wanted to see who was controlling her but Téa began to feel awful. “I don’t feel so good.”

“I do not either,” Masika said.

I never told her to creep into my soul, I never said it was open for business. She has been here for years without a word to me.

“We cannot hide our words from each other in here. Verbal or thought, in or out. Not anymore. It is a tied connection or none, and now that you know of me, none will be too scary for you anymore.”

I see that. “I’m sorry.” *I’m not. You shouldn’t be here.* Téa covered her face. “I know you can hear those thoughts, so I am sorry, I just don’t know what to do now.”

“You feel like you’ve had your soul invaded by someone you don’t know. It’s not a welcoming sensation. You feel blame and fault for it, even though you wanted to help that

day you saw me. It's not hard to understand. I was human once too. Invasion is never a good feeling. I tried to prevent that feeling."

She talks like Atem. "Yeah." Might as well try to speak out loud. "Sorry. I once had someone try to take my body from me and leave my mind in a digitized state. Sort of like leaving it in the shadow realm you could say. He almost won, if it hadn't been for The Dark Magician Girl. So. Some of that is bubbling up." She wasn't a terrible person. "It's not an easy thing to get over." *Oh, why am I babbling?*

"I didn't know the reason I was here, Téa."

Hm. "So? Are you supposed to help save the world or something?"

That comment just made her smirk. "Of course not. I don't have that kind of power."

"Hmm." Téa thought back to the dream time, the first time she was taken in the alley. "I had been braiding my hair all of a sudden. Did you cause that back then?"

"No," Masika said. "When we become one, we shared feelings across each other without intent. I used to wear mine in a similar fashion. I buckled those feelings out even tighter after the attack."

"But I thought Egyptians had short hair?" Téa asked. "Wait. Later on they had long hair." *My studies are rusty.* With Yugi deeply involved in Egyptian culture back then, she had been a little interested in it when she was younger. "Sort of. I thought it was a class thing."

"You are an interesting one, Téa," Masika admitted. "Yes. I was given as a wife to a rich man."

Maybe that's why she sounds like the pharaoh. When?

As soon as I was pretty enough.

Don't tell me she was that young. How young? How old was he? Oh, quit prying mind.

Masika was quiet. "He was considered elderly when I married him at thirteen."

Oh, gross! Ew! Sorry! That's kind of old. "Right. Sorry." *I hope he was good to her.*

He was better than all of the others.

Others?! More? Oh so double gross! But did you love him? Any of them? Gross.

"Your world now and my world back then were different. It's hard to compare and share how it worked. That's all I can say."

"But hang on, Divinity," Téa asked. "My cat?" Masika had loved her cat that appeared on the board all those years ago so much, everyone assumed she went in peace because of it. "Did you make me want *my* black cat?"

“I did not bother with putting anything into jeopardy when the King of Egypt was here. After you came to New York and felt more alone, our connection grew stronger. Plus, Divinity has always taken good care of you.”

“I took good care of her.” Téa corrected her. “She is sweet. I knew there was a reason I kept wanting a black cat. Even when things got hard and I had her for a little while, I kept sharing my food until I could get cat food.”

“Egyptian cats helped to make our lives safe, keeping away pestilence. For not living in my time, your home has suffered in similar ways.”

Oh come on, it was a mouse just one time.

Outside again

Téa opened her eyes. She was in the middle of the darkness again. “That really did help, Masika, thanks.” She started to take off, a little less scared. “It would have been a dead giveaway if my cat had an Egyptian name.” Then again? “Actually, probably not. I never would have guessed this outcome.”

Téa, there is something you should know. I didn’t save you easily.

“I know, you had to use a monster,” Téa said. “It tore up that block. I’m guessing my co-worker won’t be coming back tomorrow?”

He is dead.

Maiming him would have been right. Who knew what he would have done, but? *Killing?*

The deed is done. That is not the concern though. It’s how I did it. I made a decision, and I don’t know what the consequences will be for my actions. I summoned The Dark Magician with your card.

“My cards are all fake, just pretty cards to remember my friends,” Téa said crossing a street. She noticed a building she saw once.

Only to your official Earth Battles. Your card was still in the image of The Dark Magician. Although it paled in comparison to the power I could have called forth from the original stone tablets, although it was in fact quite glittery and shiny, in which I have to say they were pretty, and it worked just as well as your official cards.

Nevermind the Pharaoh statement. This spirit is really wordy and branches off into different subjects once you talk to her long enough. “The Dark Magician?” Téa asked. The environment was becoming clearer. She knew where she’d been. “That’s what caused the destruction.”

It’s not the first time I have summoned to protect you. In the alley years ago, I summoned Flame Swordsman. There were no consequences that could befall on you.

“Are you kidding? I could be imprisoned!” Téa said, making it clear. “Please don’t do that.”

You haven’t seen the big picture, Téa.

Jail and murder wasn’t the big picture?

Well, let me try again. Though imprisonment is bad, you’ll find that you don’t really escape punishment either way, with what the Pharaoh had done, while he was not a pure Egyptian God, his power reigned supreme and back then, your friend Yugi was the pharaoh’s vessel. I could summon the Flame Swordsman because the Pharaoh was still here.

Yugi.

Home wasn’t far away now. Téa never went that direction to her house, it was to the North of her. She readied her keys. Practically a couple of blocks away.

But? *Who are they?* Téa heard Masika tell her to run again as people started to run at her. “I don’t get it, now who wants me and why?”

Téa, I need to take over.

No way, you’re going to kill them. She couldn’t go around killing everyone. Téa was lucky that she wasn’t found the first time around, but she couldn’t count on that luck. She kept running, but some others were coming in another car. “What do they want from me? I’m not worth all this to anyone.”

You’d be surprised, Téa. Let me take over.

No. Téa was willing to learn to live with the spirit until she figured out what she needed to do, but she couldn’t just let her kill. *I can lean to maiming, can you get us out here maybe just maiming?* At least it wasn’t the end of their lives.

Doubtful. All you have is the Red Eyes Black Dragon. It will burn them alive with more damage than the Flame Swordsmen.

Others in these buildings around here could be hurt too. Téa tried to reason with her. She wanted to escape, but she didn’t want to kill anyone. How many times in the past had she met someone she thought she would absolutely hate forever, and they ended up being redeemed? For all she knew, they could be after her for some mixed-up reason.

She ducked through a few more streets, trying to circle around back home.

You are noble, but you are also being naïve. I cannot let you fall now. If I do, everything I just committed with the Pharaoh will have been for nothing.

With the Pharaoh? “You don’t mean Atem, do you?” Oh. Oh now she went quiet. *Is Atem involved in this? Masika?*

MASIKA

“Who else was The Greatest Pharoah,” Masika answered, having taken control of Téa against her will. There was a time and place for peace, and this wasn’t it. Of course, that is what she had appreciated about her all those years. But, it wouldn’t be what got her killed.

Holding up the second summon monster, she could use the Red Eyes Black Dragon, once. Téa was correct though, she couldn’t just use it out in the open, innocents did live nearby. ***The street, in the middle. My power has never been that great, it will barely have enough time to breath fire. Five seconds or so.*** From the look of how many were out, perhaps Téa wasn’t the only one being abducted that night.

No, too convenient. Masika checked herself over. That man that the Dark Magician killed must have slid a tracer on her. Masika held up her card. It was glittery, shiny as it turned. Kind of pretty. They were coming, each from the other side of the street.

Chanting quickly, the task was done. Masika started to run to a nearby market as she checked herself over again.

A small sensor on the side of her dress, sewed in. Finally finding it, she ripped up the clothing that was stitched around it. *Tracking her all this time.*

Home was too dangerous, but the market would have a few night people working. They could open up the doors for the emergency.

“Hello?!” She banged on the doors of the shop. “Help, please help, someone is chasing me!” When someone came to her aid, she rushed inside.

Then crumpled to the ground. She saw the spirit of Téa right next to her also crumpling down. There was a vicious pain in her chest. ***Oh no, I knew it. I knew it!*** Masika looked back at Téa. ***Your life was worth this curse.***

Kul Elna

Masika coughed and gasped, looking around. She was in some kind of underground. In front of her was a place with the millennium items. Most of them anyway. Uh? “Téa?” Voice, she had voice.

She could feel. She was cold. She was scratched. She started to try and stand up.

Bakura's Home

Bakura was playing a game of solitaire, unwinding from his day, when he heard a strange sound come from his Monster World room. He got up and checked it out. "Oh my!"

It was - was it- it was Téa! And? She was. She was . . .

She stood up. In. Nothing. "Bakura?"

Oh. Great. "Hello?" He watched her walk toward him. "You know, I am just going to go and get you some clothes!" Anything please? He went to his closet and grabbed some long shirts. The pants might not fit, but he got some anyway. "You could help out, you know."

No, this is better. I'll meet my old friend later.

Old friend? "Isn't that Téa?"

If she came to me? No. Especially as comfortable as she is at being naked. The other one could never be mistaken for her.

So, not Téa. He went back to the room and gave the clothes to her. He tried not to stare, but she didn't seem bothered by her presence at all in front of him. "Thank you," she said politely. "Bakura. Sorry about your world."

"So, you know about him?" Bakura asked. Bakura the Bandit Thief King, Dark Bakura, devoid of Zorc, had come back to him without the millennium ring. He wasn't sure what to do about it at first, but he was always able to keep him under control. He had harsh words and views, but he wasn't Zorc. He never even wanted to try and hurt Yugi or anything when he came over.

As more time went by, he even seemed to be more mellow, and expressed concepts in new ways to Bakura that he didn't know before. However, he hadn't ever mentioned knowing someone that looked like Téa. "Who are you?"

"Masika," she answered. "I . . . have been given the gift of life again." She looked at her hand. "Where is my vessel, Téa Gardner?"

Oh. "Is she your reincarnation?" Bakura had revealed how he actually looked just like him, and how Yugi was almost a perfect image to the Pharaoh.

"I don't know," she answered. "I need to find her, she is in trouble." She started to get more frantic. "She is in trouble in New York City, Bakura, we need to help her."

"We are in New York City. I was here for a convention," Bakura told her. "That's a good bit of luck."

It's not luck. If someone as unimportant as Masika came back to life, then something done by the gods is going on. We should get Téa. But, don't dwell on me with them.

I can't just hide your presence when something crazy like this is happening.

“Try.” Hmm. The Bandit King found himself in control of Light Bakura. He could only be given control if Light Bakura allowed it. “Masika.”

She just grinned at him mischievously. “Bakura. Do you know anything about what’s going on?”

“Not the slightest. Let’s go.”

“I was in Kul Elna,” she said softly to him. “Then I came to you. Like I always used to do. I was . . . given a body again.” She didn’t look proud, she looked scared. “The gods don’t gift second lives. I’ve never seen it for humanity. I’ve never even heard of it, except for the pharaohs.”

“It was just jabbering back then, that whole second life thing for pharaohs. They were no more important than you or me,” he insisted. “Let’s go get Téa before Yugi gets involved.” The last thing he wanted was for Atem to make some stupid appearance from the dead.

Atem’s line always took everything from him. He wasn’t getting Masika too.

Téa

Téa yelled as she felt something pulsating through her chest. “What is that?!” It hurt so much, like her heart was ready to explode. She banged on the ground in the middle of the shop while a couple of workers gathered near her.

She watched, half in horror and terror, as something started to rise out of her neckline. It felt choking, restricting, and a part of her felt like she was about to die. Then, there was an explosion of pain and blood as something burst forth.

Under the bloody mess, she made out the eye on the millennium necklace, before she fainted.

Téa!

Domino City

YUGI

Yugi had fetched Atem and had driven him to his home. On the way, he apologized for their last meeting. It had just been a real surprise. Atem was okay, and he complimented his home, noticing his success.

He told him about his new game briefly, wanting to know if the Ishtars said anything else. Instead, Atem was way more interested in hearing about his space game. They spoke about fifteen minutes, he showed them some of the things he'd done, and how his friends were all doing.

"It's good to hear you are all still friends," Atem said to Yugi.

"I think when it comes to friendship, we've had way too much life experience knowing the importance of it. We all stayed in touch. Even Téa, I see her at least once every two years." Although, he wished it was more. "Joey is currently in trouble, trying to do the right thing by taking down someone evil."

"That's good," Atem said.

"That led him to Mai Valentine again. That is leading him into even more trouble." Yugi sighed. "I think Joey used to like Mai when he was younger, so I'm worried about this."

"How is she involved?"

"Marrying the bad guy. Apparently, Joey said she's stuck with him. It's not a love thing."

"Throwing around power?" Atem asked.

"Yeah. It's got Joey messed up. I agreed to help for a little while. I didn't know you were coming too."

"I will help however I can to either situation," Atem volunteered.

Yugi took him toward one of his favorite rooms. His game room. It was about as big as the Game Shop itself. He settled down into some chairs and started to play some older games with Atem. Not Duel Monsters, just random games he loved to play that came out after Atem left.

Atem was just as intrigued. It was one thing they both always loved. Games. "Do you still play with Bakura too?"

"Oh, yep, every three months he makes a big campaign for his role playing games." He became a game designer too. "Sometimes I even get to beta test new ideas for his games, and

sometimes I let him test out some of my ideas."

"Sounds fun." Atem moved a piece. "It's good to see your life turned out well. This body being gifted back though, I am worried about it."

"We've saved the world more than once," Yugi said. "The Bandit King. Leviathan. Marik. There wasn't any kind of conversation about this ever being possible. We were trying to get you back to the afterlife. This?"

"Shouldn't be possible." Atem didn't know about it. "This may be temporary."

"You think you'll head back to the afterlife after you do whatever it is you do?" Yugi asked. "Or are you . . .?"

Joining him again. "I don't know." He hoped not. "I would hate to interrupt your life again."

"It . . ." Yugi paused. "It wasn't . . . bad." He moved his own piece.

Well? At least, that was a good sign.

"You would have to turn the filter up though, a lot, for certain things. Like last time."

"If push came to shove, I remember the filter levels," Atem promised. He waited for a response from Yugi, but it didn't come. Yugi didn't look so good. "Yugi?"

Yugi was feeling extreme pain, enough that it pulled him straight away from the game. He got out of his chair and walked a couple of steps. He heard Atem yell out for him as something burst out of his chest.

Then, he started to heal and the pain went away. Probably due to Atem's power. Yugi opened his eyes and viewed what was on his chest. "The millennium puzzle." Fully placed together and shining like the sun before the shine faded away. "Why?"

Yugi tried to pull at it, but it just pulled at him too.

"This isn't right, Yugi. This is attached to your body. Your . . . ribs, I think."

Attached to his body? "Are you sure?" He yanked again, and again, he just yanked himself. Like he was yanking his own arm.

"You carried the millennium puzzle before, but you were never cursed with it growing upon your body. Whatever reason this is happening, it's not a good one. This is some form of punishment on you."

Yugi didn't tug again. "Oh no. Just . . . a millennium puzzle attached to my ribs. What's unusual about that?" He said sarcastically. "Atem, can you get this out of me?"

"I wish I could, Yugi."

New York City

Téa

When she woke back up, all of the gore that befell her body was gone. "The necklace." It was around her throat. Téa pulled herself up, the pain having subsided and she tried to unbuckle it to lift the necklace off. She could not though, there was no underside? Téa felt all the way around the necklace, trying to find an opening. All she ended up doing was hurting herself with her fingernails. She cursed softly. "It's attached to my collar bone?" She noticed some workers looking at her after saying her collar bone line. "Nevermind, I'm not feeling well. Phone, please? Anyone?"

Domino City

Yugi had cut off the middle part of his shirt (now a stretchy T-shirt) so that most of the hole was tucked over the puzzle. "A heavy chain and it'll look like it's around my neck instead of bursting out of my chest."

"I am sorry," Atem said. "That cannot be a pleasant feeling."

"I'm fine. Most of the pain is gone." Yugi decided the first thing he should do is contact Joey. He's the only one that was on tour playing Duel Monsters. In his experience, things usually happened because of a tournament. "Joey is on a Duel Monster's tournament. I'll check on him and see if anything happened besides Mai's involvement." Yugi dialed his cellphone. "Joey?"

"Yugi, Man!"

Yep, that was the sound of something happening. "What's wrong, Joey?"

"Skeezy, Yug, I'm sorry."

"What about Skeezy?" Yugi asked. "Is Mai okay?"

"Yeah, Mai is fine, but someone real important isn't."

"Who?"

"Téa."

"A . . . Téa?"

"Yeah. Skeezy is sending us to go and get her in New York City. He said he's saving her, getting her out of a human traffic ring about to nab her. I've been trying to contact her, but I think he made sure that-

"We gotta get to her now!" Téa! He glanced toward Atem. "The evil person Mai is marrying set up Téa!"

"I am trying too, Yug, a plane only goes so fast. *scuffle*"

"Yugi, this is Mai. Joey's so upset he almost dropped the phone. He's right, it's Skeezy. He doesn't even know Joey's trying dumb stuff, I've been friends with her for a good three years again. He's just trying to make sure I know not to run. We're leaving out of here and heading to the airport. Chances are good she'll be fine as long as- *another scuffle*"

"Mai's daydreaming, she hasn't talked to Skeezy like he did to me on the phone! He said we'll never see her alive again if I screw things up for him, and if I somehow magically do find her, he'll have it so she'll wish she was dead. *scuffle*"

"It's just hogwash to hold me near him, I'm sure she'll be fine *scuffle*

"Those were his words. Yug. This is no game."

Yugi trembled. His hands could barely hold the cell phone. Téa. "Joey, how . . . how could . . . Why? Why, why, why? Whyyyy did you have to get involved in something that was none of your business!" He dropped to his knees.

Téa. His friend. His first crush. So far away, yet she was still so close to his heart. He could hear Atem getting to the bottom of the details. Atem took over the phone because right now, Yugi couldn't handle it.

Téa.

Light and Dark Bakuras

ATEM

Atem took the phone, taking over. Yugi needed time, things were getting serious. He didn't want to reveal himself over the phone and get bogged down with questions so he pretended to be Yugi for now. "What does Skeezy have to do with egyptian items? I have my puzzle back, none of this can be coincidence." Atem didn't want to yell at Joey, but he wasn't getting enough information. Téa was in trouble, big trouble. This couldn't be a coincidence, this must be part of the reason he was sent back. If he could figure it out, he should be able to get her out. "Joey, think about it *very* hard, there must be something. Anything." Téa. ***I have never let anything hurt any of my friends before and I will not fail now!***

True, Yugi was clearly older. Time had passed by, but it still didn't matter. Téa was his friend too, and he wouldn't let anything happen to her. Joey couldn't add much, swearing Skeezy was the last kind of guy that would mess with anything Egyptian. He'd look into it more was all he could promise, but they arrived at the airport and he had to go.

Atem hung up. "Do you know anyone near her, Yugi? Think." Then, the phone rang again. Atem didn't answer, he didn't know the number. "Yugi, this may be important."

When he gave the phone to Yugi, he had a deep feeling they were about to get some answers.

New York City.

Future Vision

Téa smiled at Yugi. The strange millennium necklace still attached to her collar bone. To anyone else, they would assume she was just wearing it around her neck.

Yugi looked like he did in the present, it wasn't any kind of a memory in her head. He didn't wear his school uniform, opting for a nice blue shirt with a tie. He looked professional, but the fact he was wearing the puzzle around his neck couldn't be denied.

They were both inside the Game Shop, behind a display case filled with all of the cards Yugi's grandpa had once sold. "What do you think, The Greatest Pharoah?"

End Future Vision

Téa touched the millennium necklace on her collar bone. *I don't know what that had been. The puzzle? The conversation? The Greatest Pharoah? No, I don't care about seeing the future, stop it!* She didn't want to know the future. She didn't want to see anything from that necklace that practically grew like a parasite on her own collar bone!

She hated to bother Yugi, but she needed help and Masika had seemed to leave her. Now there was no one to talk to or help her out. All she had was the phone.

She couldn't get through. She gave it a few minutes and tried again. The second time, she couldn't get through.

"Are you okay, Téa?"

Oh? "Masika? Bakura!" Both of them were at the window, thank goodness. She went toward the window, letting the employees know those were her friends.

They came into the store. Even though she didn't know Masika, she had to steal a hug from someone. That was so intense! "Masika!"

"It's okay, I am here now." Masika seemed to accept her hug graciously. "I had gone to Bakura for help, he happened to be visiting New York City. I could still sense and hear you, Téa."

"Thanks, Bakura," Téa thanked him. She backed away a little and showed off the millennium necklace. "I don't know what to do about this. I tried to call Yugi, but his phone was busy."

"You don't need Yugi," Light Bakura said to her. "He isn't going to be of any help, he doesn't have a puzzle anymore. Nothing has happened to him ever since Pharaoh left." He opened his shirt and showed the millennium ring digging into him. "I'm afraid this is our problem."

It was digging into his skin the same way?

"I also have a spirit. Not Zorc, but the . . . the Bandit King, but before Zorc," Light Bakura started to reason.

Bandit King Bakura?

"Don't worry," Masika assured her. "For one, Light Bakura is in charge of him. For two, I went to his monster for safety. I was friends with Dark Bakura in Ancient Egypt, and before the curse completely took him over, he helped save me many times with his monster tied to me. When it became too much, it broke." She smiled. "He is my friend again."

"Light Bakura? Dark Bakura?"

"Light is in reference to the modern-day version of Bakura," Masika told her. "Dark Bakura is of the past. Considering their difference in personalities, they seem to like it."

Atem watched Yugi practically destroy everything around the old Game Shop, looking for an old chain. They didn't have time to waste now, once Mokuba was ready, they would be going on a private jet with him to New York. Even though they didn't know the location, Yugi was sure he would find her. "I didn't know you still had keys to the Game Shop."

"My success meant I could get my own place. Bigger, with more room. Grandpa still owns and lives in the Game Shop, but I don't want to wake him up until I know what's going on," Yugi admitted. He was really hoping he could find the right kind of chain for the puzzle there. Grab it and go instead of wasting time to look at a store.

Atem watched him try to put the chains on. They looked extremely heavy, Yugi was right, they were not the same kind as before. "That will not take long to hurt, Yugi."

"I can't just walk around with this hanging out of my shirt," Yugi reminded him. Unfortunately, all of the old chains were just not the same either. "I have to get to New York and talk to her, face-to-face. None of these are going to work though." The puzzle was already heavy, chains were making it worse. "We need to go to the closest store."

Yugi grabbed his keys and headed back outside to his car. He opened it with a click and got in. Atem got in the car with him.

Yugi wasn't very talkative through most of the way. Atem could understand. Yugi didn't put the puzzle together and choose to stay with Atem while they made their way through the world together. He was forced, stuck to the puzzle with his own body. Like a punishment. The worry over Téa was no less terrifying.

Yugi was not in the mood to be chatting with an ancient Pharaoh, friend or not. His mind was completely obsessed over Téa.

Hardware Section.

"Thank goodness for hardware stores." Yugi picked up a rope that looked heavy but was extremely light. It was about as heavy as he needed to make it look secure without weighing him down. "Problem one figured out."

"Out of multiple," Atem said. "We should hurry."

Yugi took the rope, paid for it and went to his home. He'd have to fix it before Mokuba came for him to go to New York.

Yugi placed his rope around his neck after it was all fixed up. "Rope inserted through the top and no one can tell I'm a freak of nature with a puzzle growing out of my chest. Now to Mokuba's"

Atem had been quieter.

“Atem.” Yugi looked over at the spirit. “I’m sorry, if I haven’t been welcoming. I’m just worried.”

The Pharaoh was limited to the present world knowledge of what he could pick up from Yugi. “What could this Skeezy want with her?”

Yugi didn’t answer at first.

Atem tried something stronger. “What do you fear this Skeezy is going to do? You told me Joey was after him and that he’s evil. What has he done?”

“Damn it, Atem!” Yugi cursed him. The thought and fear was too strong. Yugi’s hands were trembling on the wheel.

“Mokuba’s acquaintance will get to her, Yugi. Then, we will make sure no one ever hurts Téa. I swear it on the blood of Egypt that runs through me.”

No one would hurt Téa. No one ever did. Atem had blocked several attempts of others hurting Téa, and he wouldn’t be thwarted now. A good friend. The crush of Yugi. Téa would never be sacrificed to evil. “It will not happen.”

If anything happens, I’ll find them and kill them.

Nothing Yugi would verbally say, but a sense he couldn’t block. Right from the heart. ***Yes, we will, Yugi.***

The Price They Had to Pay

New York

Bakura's hotel room was a decent size. He had even brought a compact size game of Monster World with him. Once she got in, she was ready to call Yugi, to see what he thought of what was happening.

Only thing was? "Bakura, do you have Yugi's number? It was programmed in my phone." She could remember some of the numbers, but not all of them. Unfortunately, she just didn't stay as in touch as she should have to remember the number from the top of her head.

"We don't need to do that right away," Masika said to her. "I'm sure he has his own life to deal with. We are the ones with this problem, we don't need to bother the Pharaoh's vessel yet."

Masika really wasn't eager for her to call Yugi. "I have to call him, if anyone knew what was going on, it'd be him."

"No he wouldn't, I would," Masika answered. "I . . . reached out for help when I saved you. This curse is because of me. I was supposed to pay half the sacrifice. I didn't expect to be given a body and have this happen to you."

A curse? "Oh." Téa looked toward Bakura. "You didn't have anything to do with Bakura."

"Destiny I guess," Light Bakura answered. "I've had my spirit for years, not just tonight. I know how you feel, Téa," he said with empathy. "I was so scared at first when I knew he came back. He promised not to mess with me or even talk with me unless I asked him about something. For a whole year, he stayed dead quiet. I slowly started to recognize him the second year, and by the third, I felt fine even sharing my body if I had to."

Oh. She understood now. Masika was responsible for it, Yugi wouldn't know anything. Still? "I'd just like to call him still. Just real quick?"

Bakura brought out his phone with a smile. "I think that's a nice idea. I have Yugi's number in here. I think the spirits are scowling though. Atem wasn't their favorite."

Yeah she could see that. "It's just Yugi, not Atem."

Well? It wasn't that simple of a phone call either.

New York City

YUGI

“He says she’s in the guest house back there,” Mokuba said to Yugi and Atem as he got on his phone. They had got off the jet, and went straight to his business associate.

He could tell she sounded shook up. A lot had already happened to her.

“I wasn’t supposed to see this guy for six weeks, but he got bumped up as a favor to help,” Mokuba insisted.

“Sorry I threw your business plans off,” Yugi apologized, “but this was important.”

“Well, considering you got Pharaoh with a body and a puzzle with you? I think it’s better I help,” Mokuba said. “We’ll be here for hours before it’s time to go back so enjoy yourself. Reconnect with your old friend. I’ll come to you when I’m done.”

“Thanks.” Straight to the back with Atem.

“I will give you a moment to catch up with her,” Atem insisted from his side. “Then I’ll present myself.”

Yugi didn’t say much to that, he didn’t have to. Atem knew him better than anyone.

Téa

Téa stared in the guest mirror. She had watched her back, but so far no one had tried to come for her. The property had its own security guards too. The millennium necklace was blaring across her chest. “Yugi’s already worried. I don’t want him to worry even faster.” She went towards the bed. “I don’t want to be lying in bed, that doesn’t help. Covering with a blanket doesn’t help either.”

“The delay would be slight,” Masika reminded her from the other side of the room. “It’s all inevitable.”

“All secrets will eventually be exposed,” Light Bakura agreed.

“Yeah, but any worry.” Any worrying by Yugi. “Yugi’s a good friend, but I feel really jittery. Like I’m doing something I really shouldn’t be doing.”

“It’ll be okay. Take the balcony,” Masika suggested.

Right, that was a good idea.

“I will be at Bakura’s,” Masika said outright. “You may have this moment to talk things over with Yugi yourself.”

Masika didn’t seem too hyped to meet Yugi. “He’s probably going to want to meet you.”

“I’m not much,” Masika insisted. “Truly, I am the dark side of you, Téa. When you need me again, you will know how to reach me.”

“I have talked with the other Bakura,” Light Bakura insisted. “For now? I think Masika’s right. I don’t know why she has a body right now. Yugi sounded eager to meet you, and depending on what he says? We’ll see him soon. Maybe for a game of Monster World at my house?”

Téa looked toward Masika. “It’s the fact he used to be Atem’s vessel, right? Did something happen between you two?”

Masika seemed to almost bristle.

“Téa” Light Bakura came closer with a whisper. “Masika was . . . she suffered greatly in Atem’s empire. She doesn’t want to move real swiftly into friendship? She will need some time.”

Right. That’s right, Masika didn’t have an easy life back then. “I’ll meet Yugi first,” Téa decided. “You guys can stay back here. It’s just . . .” She couldn’t explain it. She never even knew Masika had been with her but now? “I feel like I’m going to really miss you if you leave, Masika.”

Masika gave her a small bow of her head. “I know. It is a very strange feeling inside, isn’t it? I will stay, but before anyone meets, you need to make sure he’s . . . agreeable.”

“Agreed,” Téa said.

“Then agreed,” Light Bakura said too.

The guest house had a hot tub below with a bar, and then there was a small spiral staircase to reach the guest room. The staircase was solid wood. Téa stayed behind it and crouched down slightly. Now the necklace was hidden. “I can ask some questions first. Prepare him for . . .” For her collarbone holding the millennium necklace. “It’s all I can do.”

She heard a knock on the door. It was unlocked, she was expecting him and Mokuba. She heard the door creak open. As he came in, she could see him. His hair was still the same, but he had on the same blue shirt from the vision, along with the millennium puzzle. It was hanging around him with a chain, like when he was younger.

Then, he spotted her. For a moment, they just stared at each other it seemed. “Téa.”

“You have your old puzzle.” Good place to start as any considering what happened. No hi, how’s he doing, how’s the family, none of that filler. “Why do you have your old puzzle?”

Yugi crept up slowly toward the stairs. “Why are you crouching behind those stairs?”

“I didn’t want you to worry right away. I’m fine,” Téa said.

“You’re crouching on a balcony so I don’t worry?” Yugi was coming closer to the stairs.
“You can’t make me *not* worry any less, Téa. You are in some deep trouble.”

“Yeah,” she admitted. He’d see it soon. “It’s impossible to hide.” She stood up straight and started to go downstairs.

“Your wearing the millennium necklace?” Yugi asked as she continued to walk downstairs.

“I’m forced to wear it,” Téa admitted. “It doesn’t come off.” She stopped walking and placed her hands on the sides of it. “It grew from me. It’s . . .”

“Attached.” He didn’t look surprised. “Yeah, I didn’t go to Egypt and fish this out of some forbidden abyss. It’s the same thing.” He held up the chain connecting it. “This part is only for looks. It’s connected through my chest.”

Oh no, he was having it happen too? “I’m so sorry. This is all my fault.”

Yugi stared at her. “Why do you think it’s your fault?”

As she thought of his question though, it felt like a sin she was confessing. “I don’t even own my old deck.” She arrived at the bottom and looked right into his eyes. “Sorry.”

“That would be an invaluable deck by now,” Yugi said to her. “Why did you get rid of it?”

“I bought two fakes, and I got rid of the rest.” Admission hurt. “They afforded me some time to get a good job.”

“Two fakes?” Yugi asked. “What fakes?”

“Red Eyes Black Dragon and Dark Magician. *I liked looking at them when I felt lonely.* But she didn’t feel that way anymore. Any of her jitters was gone now, and all she saw was the brightest smile on his face. She could feel herself mirroring it. “It wasn’t as easy when I first came. I just wanted your cards, to remember you. Then, I got better, and - thanks for coming, Yugi!”

Yugi broke first as he wrapped her in a hug. “I couldn’t just leave you in danger, no matter how far away you were.”

Sweet Yugi. “So, do you know what’s going on?” Mm. That expression. Classic Yugi. He never could keep a poker face like Atem did. *Yugi’s hiding stuff just like I am.* They were playing a delicate game of secrets. *Reveal that card, Yugi.*

“Do you know why the millennium necklace chose to grow on you?”

“Yes.” He reversed it on her. *I guess I reveal my own card instead first.* “There was a spirit inside of me.”

“What?” Yugi was of course shocked. “Since when and how?”

“Her name is Masika, and she came from that card that was Kaiba’s. She was tied to the other card. The Ties of Friendship? It turned out to be a cat. You didn’t see it, you were with Rebecca Hawkins at the time.” *Easy. Am I still jealous over that?* “She didn’t go into the afterlife with her cat though, she came into me instead.”

He asked her why she didn’t tell him about it before and she went into how she didn’t know. She even told him about the dream she once had about being nabbed in the alley, not being a dream like they thought. Yugi’s hand on the stairpost of the balcony was visibly shivering. Rage or fright, she didn’t know.

“So this . . . spirit.” Yugi sounded like he was trying to keep his voice level. “That *hid* inside you for years without one word, what happened with her?”

“Who’s after me?” Her turn for a question. “She isn’t fond of them, Yugi, and she went through really great lengths against me to keep them away. So tell me.”

“How great of lengths?” Yugi asked her.

“No. I want to *know* this, Yugi. Who is after me?”

Yugi gestured to her necklace. “I came straight over here from hours away, and I find you trapped with a millennium item. We can move onto these people *after* you tell us more about this spirit.”

“Us?” He said us. “Oh no.”

“Oh yes.” Yugi moved back down the stairs and to the door. A look alike to Yugi, even the same age as Yugi? “Atem is back.”

“It is good to see you again, Téa.” He was being polite, but he wanted to know about Masika right away too. “If a spirit is hiding inside of you has answers, I want them. Now.”

Oh. Great, of course he jumped to that. “Atem. Hi.”

“Yes. Hello,” he answered her as he moved toward the staircase with Yugi. “I have no memories of what happened after Yugi beat me. We believe that no one is allowed to remember the afterlife, if they find a way back here.”

Masika, you didn’t! You brought Atem back? Boy, you are lucky you are not with me right now!

“What did she do, Téa?” Atem demanded. “I must know. Yugi and you are obviously being punished, and I need to know why.”

“She was my spirit, but now she’s got her own body.”

“What?” Yugi and Atem asked at the same time.

“She left with Light Bakura. I mean, Bakura,” Téa said. “Bakura has a spirit back with him, but it’s not Zorc. I did say that, right?” Yeah, neither Yugi or Atem looked happy at her. Yeah,

better not tell them she was just back there yet. “She didn’t want to stick around. She’s not exactly a huge fan of Atem. She was a really good friend of the past Bakura.”

“A fan or not,” Atem insisted. “Bodies aren’t granted without reason. I need to talk with this spirit.”

Yeah. If Atem opened up at that tempo with a friend, he wasn’t going to open up well with Masika. “They’ll head back, and they won’t have a choice but to meet you eventually,” she said. “But if you want Masika to listen and tell you anything, then you need to be really nice.”

Neither Yugi or Atem looked pleased with that statement.

“Téa?” Yugi sounded like he was trying to be polite. “You have a cursed necklace that grew from your collarbone, I’m wearing the puzzle from my ribs, and a spirit has been hiding in you for years without a single word to you about it, who also picked up a body.”

“No one gets bodies,” Atem said a little rougher than Yugi. “No one gets second chances at life like that, Téa! It is absurd for me to fathom a reason to give a Pharaoh another body, but someone who has no stake in the past personally except befriending Bakura? She has done something, I’m sure of it!”

It was for me though! They are going to grill her over me! “I’m sorry your both in a bitter mood,” she answered back roughly, “but it wasn’t just her fault, and now I’m glad she split!” She crossed her arms. “She created the curse to save me, but now she’s scared of what her Pharaoh *will* do to her, so she left to where she thought it was safe!” What a meeting! Two years since she’d seen Yugi, a long time since Atem, and this is how they had to act? But. *I saw her eyes and her reaction. She knew it would be this way.*

“Okay. Sorry.” Yugi still sounded bitter, but he was trying to be smoother. “So, you know?”

“She made some kind of . . .” Ugh! They were going to have to meet soon. She put her hands on her hips. “You two!” She pointed at both of them. “You are going to deal with me if you are too hard on her, and don’t expect me to easily just leave somewhere to figure things out if you are!”

Just like that, Yugi and Atem had the same reaction. Both were wide eyed and practically pushed themselves to the wall.

“Um? Uh? Yes? It was all just frustration. We will hear her out. We won’t pass blame. Right, Atem?”

“Then she is here.” Yeah, Atem didn’t act afraid of her actions soon. “I will not curse her or come near to her very fast. But? I must know what is going on, Téa, and how it can be fixed.”

“You better keep that promise,” Téa agreed.

ATEM

Atem watched as Téa opened the door. Beside it, was someone who looked like her that started to bow. “What did you do?” This was obviously the spirit that also received a body. Nice. Be nice. “Stop bowing, stand up and answer me this question. What happened to us?”

Masika stood up in front of him. “The future is impossible to predict or share accurately, but the past is set in stone. This will do better than my simple words.” She touched the millennium necklace on Téa’s neck.

Recent Past

“Don’t do anything funny, Téa. Do you have any idea what the market will want for you?”

Ah, so that was it. ***He’s going to sell her.*** If not murder, another easy out to disappear. Masika had seen him, watching Téa. He was waiting for a chance to get closer, knowing Téa was an easy target to sell. That’s why she had been so insistent Téa move and get away. She had made bold moves against Téa’s own thoughts, acting like her own to move. Still, Téa was a kind woman. Looking for the good in all people.

Yet, not all people are good.

Far from it. The way he was still holding her, pinning her but not doing anything that caused serious damage. ***He planned this. He probably sabotaged her car.*** Someone must be coming to get her, more secure and ready while he made his payday. She only had as much time as it took for them to get there.

Which would not be long. ***I will do it. It’s better to take her for good and endure the pain until her final end, then leave it with her.*** There was only one thing left to try.

The last thing. The very last thing before resigning to fate. The one thing every Egyptian child had been taught ever since they could speak. Before giving up hope, before giving into the enemies when hope is desperate.

One called to the gods for help. ***Gods of Egypt, I implore you! I am desperate in such a need, I promise anything if you just give me the power to bring the monsters again!***

She expected no answer. It should be a last prayer, a last surrender to everything before accepting the fate of what would happen.

But she did receive answers.

I am not a god, I should not be able to hear this. Why can I hear this request? The gods must want me to hear this. Why do they want me to hear this? What do you need a god for!

Someone that was not a god, but was trusted to hear for them? Could it be the Greatest Pharaoh? ***Please, grace this vessel Téa Gardener and I with your power!*** A deliberation of

mutters she couldn't understand whispered through the air to her until-

I cast permission for Masika to aid Téa while we pay the price this time. There will be no other sacrifices!

The border of magic that she felt pushing back on her, had waned. She closed her eyes. There would be no sacrifices, nor would she have to let her vessel suffer. ***I will pay the other half.***

She started the chanting, the familiar chanting in her mind. Stronger and bolder as she held The Dark Magician card. As she felt the monster's magic pull through, the binding burst off of her mouth while the enemy was blown backward, merely by the calling of the ancient monsters.

By the time the deed was done, half a block had been annihilated from the dark magic attack.

Normal Time

"I took half. As I was commanded to save her, The Greatest Pharaoh." She lowered her head toward him again.

Atem could hear Yugi starting to lose it. He himself did not like the trip. Someone wasn't after Téa, someone would have *had* Téa. With her connection to his Egyptian time, Masika had been able to reach someone who wasn't a god but cared for Téa's well being. Obviously? ***That was me.*** While she had been begging for help from the Egyptian gods she used to pray to in life.

Atem was no god though, and even if he did reach out to help last time, it would be with Yugi's body. Yugi wasn't near her, it took hours to get there. It would have been too late. "I understand now." He had granted the permission to use the monsters again, to save Téa. Without all of the innocent sacrifices it had taken in the past.

"You never said a word about them actually capturing you!" Yugi yelled at Téa terrified. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I would never allow it." Atem would never leave Téa to face a terrible situation. "I involved the spirit Masika into this."

"What did you do for that power? Atem?"

"Many sacrifices would have recreated the power, but if one were only a spirit, I imagine the price would be different. I don't know the price, Yugi, but whatever it had been? It was one that needed two spirits to grant." Atem looked at the puzzle attached to Yugi's chest. "Cursed items on those that were vessels."

“But bodies for the spirits?” Yugi questioned.

“This. Puzzle.” Atem looked toward Yugi and Téa. “I don’t think only Masika and I are paying it.”

“It’s some kind of punishment to pay the price. I don’t care, it was the right decision, and I blame no one!” Yugi declared. “You followed your heart, Pharaoh, and so did she!”

“If I didn’t, Masika wouldn’t have been able to use the power without many innocent sacrifices.” Atem backed away slightly. “I am sorry, Yugi.”

“Can you be redeemed, Atem? Can we get out of this bind?”

“I have no means to remember,” Atem said gently to Masika, knowing she was the only reason Téa was safe. No wonder Téa was so fiercely sided with her. “Is there more to this? If you know, speak up.”

“I know nothing more except that Dark and Light Bakura is in the next room over, Greatest Pharaoh,” she answered.

Light Bakura peeked out after hearing that. “Hello?”

“Bakura?” Yugi sounded very surprised. “What are you doing here?”

“Um. Masika came to me after getting her body,” he said.

“He’s got the thief Bakura with him,” Téa said, not holding any secret from them. “He isn’t Zorc though, and Light Bakura says he can control him. He has for years.”

Light Bakura rubbed the back of his head. “Yes? Um. I didn’t want you to worry.”

Yeah, Yugi wasn’t impressed. “You should have said something.”

“He didn’t want me to. I really can control him, I’ve been with him for years,” Light Bakura insisted. “Sorry for hiding it. Anyhow, Dark Bakura knew Masika, and Téa still has a connection to Masika.”

Yugi sighed. “Does anyone know what the punishment is or for how long?”

Masika couldn’t answer. She didn’t know.

“Something that needs spirits to bodies, and vessels to cursed millennium items.” Atem glanced toward Bakura, Masika, Téa and then Yugi. “Whatever it is, it is far from over.”

As he said that, they watched a black cat move by them. Atem and Masika kept their eyes on it while the others didn’t pay much mind. It was probably the owners. Jumped in through a window.

MASIKA

Ebonnee? This random black cat rubbing upon her had the same ankh design, just like her lovely passed on cat. She picked it up and felt the same comfort Ebonnee used to give her. That same velvet feel. That same kind of purr. ***Téa, this is Ebonnee, my cat from ancient Egypt.***

Téa looked toward Masika. *From ancient Egypt? Are you sure?*

Yes, my cat that had once been in the card Yugi Muto had brought. She placed her back down and watched as Ebonnee moved toward . . . The Greatest Pharaoh? He was watching as it came closer, and she relived her past briefly.

Ebonnee was heading toward him once again. Flicking her tail.

She went over the few steps to try and grab her. “Don’t bother Greatest Pharaoh.”

“The cat.” The Greatest Pharaoh spoke. “It has an ankh on it.”

Masika grabbed her and brought her back over. She stood behind Bakura with Ebonnee.

“What was your position in ancient Egypt?” The Greatest Pharaoh spoke to her.

Speaking to her? “Nothing.”

“You must have some position.” The Greatest Pharaoh continued to show her favor for conversation. She honestly wished he wouldn’t.

“Leave her alone.” Dark Bakura’s voice was deeper. That was the sound of her old friend. “She didn’t know you, she knew me.”

“How?” The Greatest Pharaoh asked him.

“She was just an old friend,” Dark Bakura said again. “Leave her be.”

Oh no! The Greatest Pharaoh was ascending up the steps all the way more towards her.

“Why did she grab the cat?” he demanded of Bakura.

“It’s her cat,” Téa spoke up toward him. “That’s the same cat that came from the Ties of Friendship card.”

“Then that’s more proof she wasn’t no one,” The Greatest Pharaoh declared.

I am not lying to him, I am no one important, Téa!

“Yugi?” Light Bakura’s weaker voice sounded out. “The spirit is better, but maybe you could help with something? He’s very angry right now.”

“Atem,” Yugi said to the Pharaoh. “I don’t know if anyone has the answers, but Téa is

glaring at you again.”

“I’m not doing anything,” The Greatest Pharaoh assured his vessel Yugi. “I am trying to speak civilly. She is the one who is hiding with the cat.”

“She wasn’t anyone,” Téa said to The Greatest Pharaoh. “She was a wife, stuck with a bunch of husbands her whole life, and a bunch of kids, since like *eleven*.” She put some firmness in her age. “She was just a spirit trapped in a card that went to me.”

“There must be some kind of significance. That cat has an ankh on it.” He tried to move toward Ebonnee again.

Téa, I don’t want him bothering my cat! I mean? Oh, that was completely rude but- ***he was the one who killed Ebonnee!***

“What?” Téa actually spoke out loud. *Are you serious? On accident?*

He was busy fighting a monster with a god. He trampled it with his horse in his rage.

“Cats are pretty significant in Egypt,” Téa said to The Greatest Pharaoh. “Right?”

“Right,” The Greatest Pharaoh agreed. “No one dared to hurt a cat.”

“Well? You did.” Téa gestured toward Masika. “You killed that cat when you were chasing a monster. That’s why Masika really isn’t letting you near it.”

He seemed quite surprised. “I killed a black cat?”

“I’m sure it was an accident,” Yugi assured her. “Atem would never really hurt your cat. We just want to see it.”

“I am sorry,” The Greatest Pharaoh said to her. “I am sorry that in whatever haste I was in, I ended the life of that cat. I promise, I will not hurt it. A cat from Ancient Egypt does not just appear suddenly without reason. You have a body. I have a body. That cat is now here.”

Seeing it wouldn’t do any good, but she couldn’t disobey the Pharaoh, Masika let Ebonnee go again.

Ebonnee eagerly went over toward Atem and encircled his legs, purring against him. As if she understood that he was sorry for ending her life in such a dreadful way.

The Greatest Pharaoh bent down and she jumped into his arms. He stood back up and held her, looking at her decorative Ankh. In the meantime, she was cuddling him constantly, as if he were just a toy for her amusement.

Being as finicky as Ebonnee was, when she had her fill, she jumped down and went toward Téa. Tea sneezed briefly. She had been struck with an awful cold, probably due to running for her life in that cold weather.

Téa picked her up and cuddled her, treating her like Divinity. “I have a black cat at home called Divinity. Home.” She looked sad.

Ebonnee left Téa and went toward Yugi. Yugi picked her up, still concentrating on Téa. Yugi scratched behind Ebonnee’s ear. It wasn’t something Masika did often with her. She looked irritated but she remained in his lap. “There must be a reason that . . . that . . .” Yugi sneezed. He wiped himself with his sleeve. “Sorry? I didn’t even know I was under the weather.” His voice had changed.

“Don’t worry, I know the feeling,” Téa assured him. “My voice is all scratchy and my nose is runny. I’m gonna be sick for sure tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I feel that exact same way,” Yugi said as he sneezed.

Ebonnee jumped down from Yugi.

“Strange,” The Greatest Pharaoh said as he stared at Ebonnee. “It makes sense Téa would get sick in her situation. Yugi, you were never out that long, yet you sound like you have the same sickness.”

YUGI

“It’s just a cold,” Yugi said.

Is it just a cold, or the same cold?

Ebonnee moved away from everyone.

What’s wrong, Pharaoh? Yugi said concerned. *The cold doesn’t spread that fast, and I wouldn’t get . . . Atem?* Atem’s body was gone, like he was never there.

“Masika is back with me,” Téa said to Yugi. “She disappeared. Atem just left. Is he . . .?”

“He’s with me,” Yugi confirmed to her. *I’m sorry, Atem.*

I had a feeling a body was only a short time, it’s fine, Yugi. We are being punished somehow, not rewarded. There is something beneath the cat.

Yugi saw it too. There was some kind of letter the cat was sitting on now. He went over toward it. “Hello, Kitty, I need to see what’s under you.” He tried to grab at the letter. He gave it a good yank before the cat decided to move.

He opened up the letter.

He read it. *Oh. Oh no. Oh no! Pharaoh?! I-is this real?*

I would never choose this for you or Téa, Yugi.

They really were being punished. Yugi looked at the millennium puzzle growing from his chest. There weren't any words about reversing it. It was plain. It was simple.

It was bad, real bad.

Masika was the owner of this cat. She might not have any importance at all, just chosen by the cat since she knew it.

So it is all because of that cat.

Not just a cat. I have a feeling it is being guided by a god to dictate it's demands.

Yugi was quiet, in his thoughts and his mind. Trying to deal with what was in front of him. *This isn't the first time I was pulled away, and I do get to come back.* Still.

If there is a way out, Yugi, we will find it. But, I clearly had no choice.

Téa or this. *My sweet Téa, any day.* He closed the envelope. *I want to be the one to tell her.*

As you wish, Yugi.

Bound to the Items

Téa

Téa was quiet on the stairs. Yugi looked absolutely distraught. Wrecked. His eyes were so wide and his breathing had picked up like he ran a marathon. “Yugi?”

“It was for the best,” Yugi said to her as he pocketed the letter he picked up from beneath Ebonnee. “I used to do this all the time. It’s like . . . learning to ride a bike again.”

Hm?

“Sorry. Masika and Atem, they have the ability to shut you out. When you want them out, you can tell them to go too. It’s how you get privacy, or it would probably drive you crazy.” Yugi was fidgeting. “Did you *know* you were caught, Téa?”

Téa nodded. “Yeah. Masika got me out. I remember something about it, but I don’t remember it all. When I woke up, she had used a card’s magic. Even if it wasn’t a real card.”

“Masika is a good spirit, Téa. A very good spirit,” Yugi said quickly. “Atem cursed himself to save you, but without her actions, he couldn’t have done that. They both helped you or . . .” She thought he would hold back again, but he didn’t. “That man would have grabbed you and forced you into hard enslavement probably in another country.”

Téa froze, hearing those words. They would have enslaved her . . . “but-“

“Joey’s trying to save Mai from marrying a man that deals in human trafficking, and you apparently got wrapped up in it!” Yugi was being openly honest. “Whether it was being friends with Mai, or because Joey’s been messing around with a person named Skeezy, you got pulled into trouble. It wasn’t your fault at all.”

Oh. Joey. Mai. “Thanks.” Still? “Yugi? She got away with murder. With *my* body.”

“Oh?” That was an odd little ‘oh’ Yugi had.

“Eight people in total have been killed by her.”

“It’s not your fault,” Yugi said. “She was doing what she had to, to protect you. Using the cards. She isn’t bad, and neither are you. You have to trust her. You really have to trust her. She did what she did for you. I doubt the authorities will find you. If they did, they couldn’t pin much on you.”

That was it? That’s what Yugi thought? “Are you *sure*?”

“Oh yeah, pinning magic is tough,” Yugi agreed. “Tough, tough, tough. I mean, Atem was a little . . . gungho once or twice. She wanted you out, and she did what she could. Before she used your fake cards you said you bought? She tried. She was . . . she’d been with you since

High School. Even if you didn't know, she's been there for a lot of things. She knew you and she wanted you safe."

Yugi was clearly wanting her to trust Masika more, even though he didn't really know her either. "I understand. I don't have much of a choice but to understand. Do you have any idea why destiny stuck her with me?"

"You wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for her. She's probably helped you out even more than you know of."

"Umm." Did that mean she was her more often than she thought? "She took away my body more than twice?"

"That's not what I meant," Yugi corrected himself. He fidgeted with the rope on his puzzle. "She hasn't taken over your body much extra probably. It's that when she was you? You didn't know what was going on. Atem can do that too, and we can do that to them. It's not one-sided. Did we talk about this already? Yes, okay, we did." Yugi let go of the rope. "Then, I guess there's only one thing left."

Téa watched as he touched the eye decoration on her necklace.

"I willingly understand this. It's a price paid by Masika and Atem," Yugi explained. "It's not just them though, we are their vessels, so we are getting the brute end of this too." He went quieter. Softer. "Things are going to change, Téa. But? It's really not so bad. You can wander around or nap or even stay beside yourself when the spirit takes you over. You can't go real far, but you can move."

Oh. "It's a weird feeling," Téa admitted. "At first, I couldn't see her at all, but now I actually can see her," she said. "Most times she said she liked to just stay silent inside my soul, not even looking out unless she sensed something wrong."

"Yeah, that? That is what you call privacy. She gave you privacy," Yugi said, like he hadn't explained that three times already. "Then you get it. You can get that. They can get that too."

"Three times you said that, Yugi," Téa pointed out. "Why did you say it three times?"

"As you understand the feelings inside you more, it's easier to navigate," Yugi said. "They'll help, otherwise thoughts will drive everyone crazy. A lot are just unconscious and Yami, I mean Atem, always put like a small filter, where only thoughts targeted toward him came through. You should ask about that. It'll make you feel better and less like someone hears your every thought."

Hm "I didn't know that, but it makes a lot of sense." She sighed. "What I think verses what I try to politely say. They are almost opposite."

"Yeah. She'll be able to turn that down. Experiment. You have to learn to navigate. So? It's time to talk about the price." Yugi gestured toward his old puzzle. "It begins when you've touched the puzzle, and it doesn't end until the gods say so."

‘Til when? “What? Then how long?”

“I don’t know. There isn’t a date?”

Téa looked at the puzzle. “Are you saying she’s going to be with me for the rest of my life?”

“I don’t know.” Yugi didn’t answer that well. His voice had lost its usual pitch. “The letter said there will be a sun and moon difference. Atem and I think it’s referring to a switch. A switch being when we switch who is in control.”

“Control?”

“We aren’t going to get the luxury of choice anymore, Téa. Every so often, it sounds like, maybe, everyone switches.”

What? What?! Téa’s eyes were wide, frozen in fear. “Yugi.”

“Your spirit isn’t any extra happy about it, trust me. Atem didn’t like to completely take charge for long, it really *is* a punishment. But? It had to be done, Téa.”

“Why?” Téa asked. “I’m losing my body. Half of my control, for what? For how long? What did they do? What did Masika do?”

“She asked for help from the gods, and she reached Atem. He said they’d pay the price and I don’t blame them.” Yugi reached for her hand. She gave it willingly. “You are *my* friend, and I would do the same thing. I’ll gladly pay the price too. The ability to summon the card monsters to aid her, she got that power originally from Egypt’s sacrifices. When Atem went to the afterlife, that power was gone. She couldn’t use it. She prayed to the Egyptian gods as a last resort, but Atem heard her calls. Atem contacted her, to tell her to do it. He knew he was needed, just like last time. Without that, she couldn’t do anything.”

So. Without them. *I’d be a goner.* “Atem. The Pharaoh. He . . .”

“He gave the Egyptian gods control of our bodies,” Yugi said it for her. “There was no magic, no soul on the line, no saving the world, but it was the hardest situation the Pharaoh had to fight because I wasn’t there. I wasn’t close enough to you to do anything.”

“D-do we know exactly what happens, Yugi?”

“No, Téa. No one knows, which might be part of the punishment too.”

“It’s not fair,” she said to Yugi. “Even you are being punished?”

“I said I understood, and I accept the punishment. There’s no choice now.” Yugi gestured to his puzzle. “We can’t turn our back on this. Trust me, Téa. Touch the puzzle and let’s do this. If we take too long, something else might happen to make Atem pay the price.” Yugi shook his head. “I don’t want to find out what.”

“Like losing ourselves for good.” Téa understood. “No choice?”

“No choice.”

“Who . . . starts?” Téa asked.

“I don’t know,” Yugi admitted. Now, he gave her the letter.

He softened the blow for her, but it really was right there. A sun and moon difference of change between souls. No missions, no clauses, just instructions and why.

“We’ll still be here to make decisions.”

“Are you sure about that?” she had to ask. Téa was nervous. It was normal to be nervous, she was losing half her body’s control. “What if we can’t be beside ourselves? What if that’s the real punishment?”

“I don’t know fully. No one knows fully.” Yugi recovered. “I’m not perfect and neither are they. It sounds like we are going to switch evenly. Maybe there is more to it. Maybe I’m destined to never speak to Atem again. Maybe it means something else entirely. I don’t know.” He gestured to the puzzle. “We’ll all find out the truth soon.”

“Then when I touch it, if I’m not here, she decides my life for me.” It was hard to bear. To hear! That the life she was supposed to live in her body, wouldn’t be by her.

“Téa, things get worse if you don’t agree. Trust me.” Yugi gestured to the puzzle. “If we don’t do this, they might punish the spirits harder.”

“Do they know everything we know?” Téa had to ask.

“Well? I don’t know,” Yugi said honestly “They can get very involved in your thoughts, and you in theirs. You’ll find the right balance soon. When you do?” He smiled. “It’s amazing. It’s like having a best friend always there with you. That’s why it was . . .”

“It was so hard to say goodbye?” Téa looked at the puzzle.

“Yeah, but I got over it. I got stronger. I grew up, without his presence inside of me,” Yugi admitted. “So while I feel the connection, it’s also . . . it hurts. This never should have happened again.”

Téa had a feeling she knew what was next. “I hope she can dance and act?” Yeah. That look from Yugi.

“This isn’t how I wanted this discussion to go,” Yugi said to her. “Go ahead though, test it. Do you have enough money saved up for the time it’ll take her to basically learn everything you know?”

Even if it was, I’m no teacher. This spirit. It’s been hiding inside of me, not knowing much of anything except when it mattered. She just peeked. Teaching her even average life is going to be tough. “No.”

“Yeah. I don’t think Atem is going to be moving dynamically through all the classes I had to learn to create my games since he wasn’t there,” Yugi said. “I had to learn a lot. I couldn’t just write a game down on paper and get Mokuba to produce it, you know?” He moved his hand behind his head. “I’m sure I can teach him one day, but it won’t be easy. I have enough that I can keep my head above water until then. But, I can . . . I can help you too?”

“That’d be nice, but that’s a lot of charity.” She didn’t feel right about that. Yugi had made that kind of success. He would be able to last years off his savings if he had to. “I could use the help, but I don’t want you to provide everything,” she answered. “It’s not like I’m Mrs. Yugi Moto.”

Yugi sort of . . . zoned out for a second. He had a goofy look on his face. “I don’t mind. I mean!” He shook his hands out. “Taking care of you I mean! I-it’s only right, you didn’t ask for this to happen. Besides, I mean, who needs wife status for that anyhow?”

“True,” she admitted. “Even if I did marry, I’d still want to do my own thing.” Run her own life. Make her own money. “What do you think Masika could do?” Wait. The dream. The future that she had seen? *I called Yugi The Greatest Pharoah. I would never say that.* Masika had called Atem The Greatest Pharaoh though. It was Masika in that dream. “Maybe the Game Shop is the future.”

Yugi looked confused. “The Game Shop?”

“The necklace.” Téa touched it lightly. “Even though it’s inside of me, it actually works too. I saw a vision of me and you in the Game Shop. Just like this. I had the necklace. You even had the puzzle, like now again,” she said. “Except I called you The Greatest Pharoah.”

“The . . . Greatest Pharoah?” Yugi looked around, like he was trying to think. “That’s what Masika called Atem.”

“Yeah,” Téa agreed. “It didn’t make much sense at first. But, if . . .”

“The Game Shop.” Yugi’s confusion brightened to a huge smile. “That would be a bright idea. I know how to run the Game Shop, it was my legacy. Well, is. Grandpa wants to pass it down to me. I just, I didn’t really need it. I want it though, so but, . . .”

“You already make enough from your games,” Téa said. “Much more than The Game Shop could provide.”

“Yeah, but I still really love it, and I loved the Game Shop growing up.” Yugi smiled at her. “The business wouldn’t be as hard to learn. Grandpa and I could show you and the spirits. I’ll teach you, and Grandpa can teach when I’m not around. Then, when we are all learned up with that, we can start working on teaching the spirits the other things they need to learn so we can run our own personal lives again.”

Téa smiled, trying to make this transition easier. “Yugi, I’d be honored to work with you. But? Atem? I mean, The Pharaoh and Masika, running the Game Shop?” Was it really the future?

“Sure, why not? If Atem could handle the Great Leviathan, I’m sure he can handle taking cash and paying bills.” Yugi cracked a smile. “Our lives are screwed right now, Téa, and we *need* to make do how we can until we find a way out of it.”

“Isn’t? Isn’t.” How could she ask. “There were monsters and enemies out there, but there was always a way to win. Isn’t there something out there that we could just dig up and maybe give to the gods or something instead?”

“Atem and I will be scouring for any kind of clues to end all of this. But . . . I don’t know how long this will take, Téa. What should we even look into?”

“How to get your body back after a Pharaoh wills it away to gods. I don’t think that title will be on a bookshelf.” Crazy. *We went through so much. We stopped so many things.* “Do you think Atem can settle down into such a simple life after everything he’s been through?”

“He doesn’t get a choice, as long as he’s in me, he’s not going to fight me on it. Besides. What else are you going to do that the spirits know?” Yugi asked. “All they seem to know is cards and games.”

Cards. “Yeah. I guess the other choice is learning tournaments with Joey.”

Joey?! Going with Joey? *No way, I don’t want her to be going with Joey! Téa is wonderful. Joey is wonderful. If they know how wonderful they are, and then he’s there with her all the time and no one else, then no! Joey can’t have Téa!* “You don’t want to do that. Go with Joey on his duels and-?” He held up his hand, like he didn’t even want her to think about what he said. “It’d be dragging him down. He’s involved with Mai things. It’s dangerous around him. Being with me won’t be bad,” Yugi promised. “The Game Shop thing won’t last forever, it’s just a way to start with the spirits in our lives. You’ll eventually get back to New York with Masika having learned your skills. Look? It’s called taking a break from the spotlight. This is a big life changer, Téa.”

“Yeah, because it takes my life,” she responded.

“Well, without it, you wouldn’t have a life worth living. I hope Masika sealed herself away, when you have these bad thoughts, it’s best not to explode in front of them.”

“I can’t believe I cursed him again,” Téa said. “Just walking home because my car wasn’t working. Atem was at peace and I messed it all up. I remember Atem, when you were gone and he was alone? He felt such guilt about the orichalcos, Yugi. He didn’t enjoy having your body all to his self. It was pretty apparent, that most times-“

“Even when he was in control, most times I was right there with him,” Yugi finished. He smiled with a degree of empathy. “Never thought I’d get so close up in *this* kind of topic with you, Téa.”

There would be no reason to before. No one understood until they had a spirit with them. Téa looked at the puzzle. “As soon as I touch it. So will this be, like the countdown of when we

change?” She looked at her watch. “2: 56.”

“I don’t know. If it’s a whole sun and a whole day, or if it’s half the time split between the sun and moon in the sky? There’s just no telling.”

“Not until we do it.”

“Yep. Do it with me, Téa.” As soon as he said it, his face lit up bright and he put his hands up, waving them in a defensive motion. “I mean the change, do the change!”

“Of course you did, Yugi.” She tried not to laugh. At least it broke the tension for a bit. *Okay. No more putting it off.* Téa reached toward the puzzle. *Yugi’s right, it’s just taking a break. Learning this new life I need to lead right now. It’s not forever.* She touched his puzzle.

It shined beneath her hand.

The First Switching

Atem looked toward the puzzle. "I've been removed, and I can't feel the way back in. Yugi?"

///Yugi: I can still hear you.//// Yugi was right next to him, his spirit could clearly be seen.

"Can you leave though?" The situation was hard enough. He hoped he did not steal all of Yugi's privacy. That had been important for each of them.

///Yugi: Yeah. I feel normal, like I could come back and forth. Except, I can't because there's a block between us.///

"Yes, that block is me. When it is your turn, that block will be you." Atem watched Téa. Or Masika. "Did you take Téa's place, Masika?" She gave a light nod, but the expression he could barely see as she hung her head. He knew exactly how she felt.

///Yugi: We have an hour before Mokuba is ready, Atem. We should work out what we are going to do. I did convince Téa to come back with us.///

"Agreed." Cold. Being alive meant he felt temperatures, touch, and pain. Everything those that were alive had to feel. The air was unusually cold. It felt colder.

///Yugi: You have to say something, in order for us to work anything out. They can't see me, and I can't see Téa.///

"Yes. Sorry, Yugi." ///Atem: I have selfish desires within me right now. I should have gone on. It feels like it was all taken away from me by force, even though I enforced it. No monster, no shadow game, no magic, just one mortal man and too far to save in time!///

///Yugi: I get it. I do. It should all be over. We'll look though, Atem. There must be something we can do.///

If there was something, they would find it. ///Atem: I will do my best not to get in your way. Whatever it is you want to be or your aspirations./// Yugi was so much younger than this when they first joined. Even when he left, he had not yet graduated. Different issues would arise with the passage of the time. Especially with him forced to take Yugi's body every cycle. ///Atem: I will do my best to make it possible. Some will be harder, much harder, but I vow to do what I can to make it through any difficulties that arise.///

///Yugi: You need to help Masika run the Game Shop.///

Um? ///Atem: I don't think I understand you, Yugi.///

///Yugi: Téa is going to be coming back to Domino City with me. Masika won't be able to act, and you aren't going to be able to design games. We are going to run the Game Shop while we figure this all out. You'll have to run the Game Shop too, with Masika.///

Hm. ///Atem: I know about leading and fighting, Yugi. I don't know how to run a shop.///

///Yugi: I'm sure the Great Atem can figure it out if he gave away my body to the gods.///

Atem sighed. "Bitter much, Yugi?"

///Yugi: made a great life for myself, I didn't have anyone tagging along with my every thought, and now it'll never be the same! Thanks for saving Téa, I would have made the same choice, I'd give anything for her- I'm way too emotional to think and talk right now, give me five minutes!///

"Understood." When Yugi said that, it had always meant not to listen to what he thought. A complete filter on for five minutes. It wasn't easy for Yugi, being told that he had no more control of his body. They were split. Even. And Atem hated it just as much. ///Atem: Helping with the Game Shop it is./// Honoring Yugi's requests was about the only thing he could do.

Masika didn't say a word so Atem waited the five minutes. To make sure he was aware of the time, he spoke. "Better, Yugi?"

///Yugi: Sorry. This is a big change and I'm scared. At least I can talk to you. I shouldn't blame you, you did this for Téa, and she means the world to me. So, thank you. Anyway, Téa's skills aren't going to be something Masika knows. She's going to be in real trouble, so she'll need something different.///

"And we are there to help her."

///Yugi: I know the Game Shop and so does Grandpa. He'll be able to teach you when I can't. You'll need to learn a lot, but that shop needs to run at least five days a week to make any profit unless someone comes in for or with expensive cards. Selling or buying the right card could keep you in a profit for a month, or it could put you in the red for a year.///

"I see. Sounds like we had better get the business right." Or Yugi could get fleeced on the cards.

///Yugi: Is Masika ever going to say anything? This is really something to talk about.///

"Masika," Atem addressed her. "Stand up." She instantly stood up. "Téa is going back to Domino City. You will be responsible for learning the duties of running the Game Shop." Somewhat surprised, but she recovered. "I will be helping you to learn it as well. I will be learning too." Yes, that did sound awkward. A learner watching a learner. "You cannot communicate with Yugi and I cannot communicate with Téa. This leaves us to communicate wishes and thoughts through each other or through them." She bowed gently. "There is no need to do that anymore. Without you, I could not have saved my friend. Without accepting

this price with me, I could not have paid it to help her. Thank you." She didn't seem to know what to do with that.

"Your welcome?"

Atem smirked. ///Atem: There we go, a little bit of progress, Yugi.///

///Yugi: Yeah, probably Téa telling her to lighten up. I wish I could see her too.///

Atem couldn't make that happen, but he could ask about her. "Masika. Is Téa's presence felt by you right now?" A nod. "How is she?"

Masika looked in different directions, like she was catching flack like Yugi just gave him. "Téa Gardner may need some time to answer that."

"Bitter toward you." Atem understood. "The vessels have every right to feel that way." Atem was used to control in duels. Yugi usually let him take control. During serious situations, Yugi let him take control. To have complete control and not be able to be casted out? It was a miserable, invasive feeling.

At least he felt Yugi. If he hadn't, he would have felt as miserable as he did when Yugi's soul had been casted away from him.

///Yugi: Tell her about the Game Shop. Just the Game Shop, I'll tell Téa more when I'm ready to. Uh? Don't forget you have half our bodies so you need to take half responsibility. Shower. Eat, three times a day if you can. Change your clothes each day. Comb hair. Oh, and teeth! You have to brush every day, really. Cavities are a pain. And if you make dishes, you do them. And you should have dishes if you are eating right.///

///Atem: Got it, Yugi./// "Masika." Her attention was drawn to him again. "We need to be careful to follow daily rules. Showering. Teeth. Eating. Dishes. Understand?" A nod. "Anything else, Yugi?"

///Yugi: No, except to wait for Mokuba. He doesn't know you lost your body, and Téa is now someone else too. So, be patient with him.///

As Yugi said that, Mokuba walked through the door. "Are you ready, Yugi? Hi, Téa. You look well. There's also more company-"

"Téa!"

Jealous Thoughts

Atem watched as Joey dashed up the stairs, grabbed Masika and swung her around in his arms. "Joey, there's something I must tell you. That is not Téa, that is a spirit named Masika who helped to save her."

"Huh?" Joey let her go. Masika clearly felt a little off course as she backed all the way upstairs toward Bakura. "A spirit? You gotta be kidding, Yug, there's no way a spirit possessed Téa. She don't mess around with nothing. Is this supposed to be a joke?"

"Masika?" Mokuba looked toward Masika. "Is . . ." She bent down slightly with a smile. "Masika!" He basically did the same thing, except without the swing. "You're okay."

"I'm here," she said, holding him quite dearly. "You have grown, Mokuba. I am glad to see you again. How have you been?"

"Damn, you ain't kidding, Yug." Joey shouldered him. "A spirit possessed her? That's crazy. At least it's a good spirit and she's okay."

Atem wanted to hold his ears as Joey suddenly shouted next to him.

"Yo, Mai, come say hi! Everything seems okay!"

Atem ignored the ringing in his ears.

"Hey, Téa, we were worried." Mai came over and noticed Mokuba just staying in her arms in an embrace. "Okay. That's a little peculiar."

"Téa's sharing a spirit kind of like Yugi once did." Atem felt another playful shove from Joey. "Crazy, huh? Ain't got the deets yet except that she helped save Téa. That's all I need. Oh, wait, it's not." Jonouchi strolled toward Masika as well. "Téa can hear me in there, right?" Masika nodded. "Good." Then, he shouted right next to her. "You're bringing your butt out of New York! This is hotspot number one for Skeezy, so get your shit together! We are busting out of here!" He crossed his arms. "That's final, and Joey said so."

"Oh, please." Mai went up the stairs and pushed Joey away slightly. Playfully? "You can't be here right now, Téa, it's dangerous thanks to my fiance being a little overprotective of me. You can go ahead and come on our tournaments until we figure something out." She snapped her fingers. "Stay near me, and Skeezy will stay away. He just wants me."

///Yugi: No! No, no, no! I do not want her at tournaments, Atem, speak up because Joey is not going to be with her alone!///

///Atem: Hm. Am I missing something, Yugi?///

///Yugi: He isn't getting her.///

///Atem: Getting her?///

///Yugi: He's not getting his hands on her! She isn't for that, she isn't like that, and I will ring his throat if he ever decides to-!///

"She is coming to Domino City to work on the Game Shop, Joey." Simple and done. Atem often didn't point out to thoughts that would create expressive creativeness the wrong way. It was his fault, not Yugi's. Nothing was his, they were Yugi's private thoughts. Nothing Yugi even spouted was probably true but stemmed in jealousy, love, fear, and nature. Atem always had the same issues.

Private thoughts weren't always kind, well-mannered, or perfect. Even the innocent weren't completely innocent, or they would not be human. Often scrambled, only the most well-defined reached Atem, but this was a new adjustment. He adjusted the thought barrier even higher to filter.

"You are coming back to Domino City?" Mokuba finally let her go. "Sorry."

"No worries, Mokuba," she responded. "Yes, we are coming back."

"Great, that's fine, just stay out of Skeezy's way," Joey said, his usual warning flair. "Let's book it out of here. Mokuba's letting us ride with you all too. Which'll be great because then I can go see my sis. Oh yeah?" Joey moved toward Masika. "Oh yeah and hi. Joey Wheeler. Thanks for helping out Téa."

"She isn't the only spirit who is back." Atem was trying to convey he was not Yugi. "Quite a lot has changed, Joey. I am not Yugi either."

"Eh?" Joey looked at him oddly. "No way." He looked at the millennium puzzle. "Okay, so I obviously noticed the jewelry on Téa, comes with a spirit but . . . you moved on. It can't be you."

Atem noticed Joey's gaze; he knew who he had been. He gave a slight nod. "I'm afraid it is me, Joey, and things only get darker."

"Darker?" Joey was on edge again. "Things always get dark with you, give me a second to catch up, huh?" Joey pulled back some. "That was the hardest day for everybody, but it was over. You were at peace, Pharaoh. The hell are you back for?"

"Yes," Atem agreed. "It's a long story. Yugi and I are one again, the same as Masika and Téa." He quelled his worry quickly away. "Yugi and I are one, but we are no longer afforded the luxury of when we change from each other."

"No control? So." Mai looked toward Masika. "Same with you?" Masika nodded. "So they only live, what, half their lives?"

///Atem: And we are forced to live the other half./// Atem watched as those words triggered Mokuba to hug Masika again.

"Thank you for helping," Mokuba told her. "You're more than welcome to come back. Everyone is. We'll go to Téa's place to get whatever you need, and then we'll go."

"Wait," Masika added. "We are working something out." Masika reached in her pockets and pulled out the wallet. She looked at the credentials. She put it back away.

"Can we go now?" Joey asked. "I mean, we got us, we got Kaiba Corp, a freaking Pharaoh, so this'll be the last time you'd go home for anything. Ask her what she wants so we can get going."

"No, Joey." Mai nodded toward Masika. "Don't rush Téa and don't make her do anything. If she doesn't want to go back to her apartment too, then forget it."

"Yeah, but? Documents. Resumes. Pictures of friends. Computer?"

"Joey, just drop it!" Mai was aggressive toward him, no playfulness in the manner. "Stop trying to play the budding hero. I hate that in a guy."

"Sure, but when Skeezy uses that as an excuse for what happened to Téa, it's fine, huh?" Joey yelled at her.

"I'm not fighting with him over this. It keeps her safe," Mai said. "Skeezy let me come because he trusts me. He let me come with you for the same reason. I'm marrying him, so just drop it. I'm used to getting the short end of the stick."

"It's freaking marriage, Mai!"

"It's my friends' safety, Joey," she reminded him. "Drop it. Just do whatever Masika says."

"There isn't anything pressing except for her cat, Divinity. Téa wants to go with Joey and Mai to get her," Masika said, although she didn't look happy about it.

"Yeah, okay." Joey agreed. "Sounds great, we'll go get this Divinity, I don't mind. You can even stay with me if you want until the Game Shop is ready for you."

The thought barrier was higher but Atem could hear the consistent muttering. Yugi was having a subconscious involuntary fit. ///Atem: Yes, I know, I will tell him, relax./// "I believe Yugi will take care of them from this point forward," Atem said. "This is an unusual predicament, no one knows for sure what will happen, and I think it's a good idea to stay together for now. Being away from Mai is a better idea too."

"I don't know about that?" Bakura decided to speak up. "I can't . . . stop getting the . . . bandit to stop cursing about that decision."

Bakura? "What decision?"

"The decision to take Masika with you. He is very adamant she does not go with you or Mai Valentine," Ryou Bakura said. "Very adamant." He rubbed his ear. He was probably getting yelled out very loudly by him.

Mai looked at Masika. "If Skeezy wanted her away from me, he wouldn't give me the chance to get her and protect her."

Even with the connection turned up, Atem turned it up even higher, making it even harder for Yugi's thoughts to reach. "We will get things figured out. This is something spirits and vessels must work out in our own way." He noticed Joey's look toward him. "What is it, Joey?"

"So, like, this thing," Joey asked him. "For how long really? How'd Yugi get the puzzle back and how'd Téa get the new jewelry?"

"Save it, Joey, it's a long way back home," Mai warned him. "Let's go get this Divinity and then we'll squeeze them for answers after we're up in the air."

///Yugi: Why is Bakura throwing such a fuss? Why can't she just come with us? Why is she going with Mai and Joey now?///

///Atem: They brought a rental car, Yugi. I don't know about the Bakura thing.///

///Yugi: Oh. Well. They better not take long, and there's no way Téa is going to go with Bakura!///

///We will get it figured out. Relax.///

Metal Bird of Death

///Masika: I do not want to do this. I am going on a huge bird object that will be flying so far off the ground, one step off is instant death.///

///Téa: Relax. I fly all the time, Masika. You always did just fine. Divinity should be having more of a problem than you.///

///Masika: Téa, I buried myself completely inside of you during this, not even looking outward. This. Plane. I hate it. I hate this overwhelming fear inside of me. I wanted to pass into the afterlife safely, but no, it will be with pain, plunging to the Earth!/// Masika stared at the stairs while holding Téa's cat. Mokuba was trying to pull her up into the jet with her other free hand.

"Hey there, relax, come on," Mokuba said kindly to her. "It's not going to hurt you. Didn't you go through this before? What's wrong?"

"She was buried too deep." The Greatest Pharaoh stood beside her. "You barely broke the surface within Téa, even I could not sense you, Masika. Now, you are in complete control. I know what you are feeling. Being alive. It's not easy to get used to it. Feeling fears, anxieties, even speaking and walking is hard. The fears we felt in life are even more amplified. But, I know you can do this. Take Mokuba's hand and be brave."

Masika watched as Joey just patted The Greatest Pharaoh's shoulder, hard.

"Yep, that's Yami confirmed," Joey said out loud. "Nobody else gives speeches like that."

///Masika: The amount of disrespect for the King of Egypt!///

///Téa: Yeah, that's Joey. He treats everyone equal, Masika. As much as it feels wrong, Joey is right. Treat Atem like you would treat me or Mokuba or anyone else.///

///Masika: I am not prostrating in front of the King of Egypt, The Greatest Pharaoh, and I have exchanged words. Isn't that enough? Where's Bakura?///

///Téa: Don't worry about Bakura, you can see your friend later, but you aren't staying with him. You are going to be running a shop with Yugi and Atem and me. Get over it. Treat Atem like a regular guy and he's easy to get along with. I know you can. When you were in the game, you weren't speaking Egyptian. When you introduced yourself to me, you weren't speaking Egyptian. Maybe you tried to stay deeper, but you can't tell me that things didn't change.///

///Masika: Fine. Yes. I have modernized myself a little. I still don't feel, as you would say, I should 'rub shoulders' with the frickin' Pharaoh.///

///Téa: Life goes on. You said it yourself. Life changed a bunch in the few years I ran it.///

///Masika: Téa. You don't understand what it's like being near him. Take the highest celebrity you have ever known and take that excitement and add absolute fear to it.///

///Téa: I know you don't think of Atem as a friend, but we are sharing bodies, and I do.///

///Masika: Well, I am not very adamant about being near The Greatest Pharaoh! One wrong word to a Pharaoh sent people to death in my time. If they were having a bad day, many people could die for no reason! We should go with Bakura, he protects us!///

///Téa: I'm sure Atem didn't do that. Maybe the people around the Pharaoh. You know, like businesses today. So? Don't think of Atem like this evil person. He even saved me, knowing there would be a bad punishment, Masika. He's a friend.///

Hmph.

///Téa: I know he hurt your cat.///

///Masika: He stampeded over it with a horse. Is that what you call hurt?///

///Téa: I know. I am sorry. That shouldn't set a precedent of how you get along with him though, it was an accident. Even your cat seemed to forgive him. I promise, he won't hurt you. You could be good friends.///

///Masika: I am friends with Bakura, and I know from your words, what transpired between them. I highly doubt I can be in the elite that stayed by the Pharaoh.///

///Téa: Well, you are going to be running a business together, so get over your fear! Just take it as a nice honor if you have to, but don't cower.///

///Masika: I don't cower. Bakura would never forgive me if I did such a thing to Pharaoh Atem! I respect, I do not cower.///

///Téa: There, you see? You said his name.///

///Masika: His name is The Greatest Pharaoh Atem. I was speaking formally with you though, not him.///

///Anzu: His name is different in different company?///

///Masika: Ooooh, my goodness, yes.///

///Téa: Yeah. I'm guessing Bakura never called him that.///

///Masika: That fucker would never call him anything honorable.///

///Téa: Masika?!///

///Masika: What?///

///Téa: You. Cursed.///

///Masika: So?///

///Téa: I didn't picture you as a curser, that's all. But? I guess, Bakura was your friend. Is your friend. Anyhow? I can imagine how much it's changed in your time but I have a request.///

Hm?

///Téa: I want you to call him Atem instead of Greatest Pharaoh. In fact? I want you to tell Yugi to make that request of everybody. You can't run a shop with someone saying 'Hey, Pharaoh, how much is this card'.///

///Masika: I cannot connect with the Greatest Pharaoh's vessel.///

///Téa: No, you have to tell Atem to tell Yugi my request.///

///Masika: Have you been drinking out of the wrong side of the Nile River?!/// Masika picked up one foot and reached for Mokuba's hand. ///Masika: Ending my life on a gigantic metal bird of death./// Although she couldn't just disobey Téa either. What could she do?

Masika held onto Mokuba's hand as she arrived onboard. She sat down. The longer she was inside that body, in control, the worse she felt. Feeling. She gave Divinity to Mokuba and stared straight. ///Masika: Just don't think about where we are. If only Bakura had come too, but he didn't want to travel with the Pharaoh when Téa made it clear she wanted to stay with Yugi in his Game Shop.///

"Loosen up, Hon, you're going to be okay," Mai said to her. "I'm not leaving Skeezy. He won't go after friends again."

"After friends," Joey muttered. "Ignore me all these years, but you stayed actual friends with Téa. Slumber parties too."

"It's called staying in New York for the weekends," Mai told him. "I told you why, Joey, don't start this."

Joey muttered but stopped talking.

///Masika: Am I not supposed to be okay? Why is she telling me that I am going to be okay?///

///Téa: Because you will be okay. Mai is a good person, don't worry. Remember? She comes down sometimes. Usually tears up something in my life for a day, but the day before that's always fantastic. Never would have changed a thing. Barely made work though when she came.///

"The edges." The Greatest Pharaoh's voice again. "Your hands are unconsciously gripping the edges of your chair."

Okay. Masika should let go of the edges. It sounded like something The Greatest Pharaoh wanted, but her hands wouldn't stop clenching.

"Okay, so," Joey started once everyone was on and strapped in. "This whole switch off thing. How long and why? And the more I'm looking at you, Pharaoh, the more I'm starting to notice something strange about that puzzle."

"Yes. I will try to explain from the beginning," The Greatest Pharaoh said. "I was in the afterlife, but I don't remember it. However, through the power of the millennium necklace, I saw what happened. Téa was in trouble, and Masika had no more power to help, without me there. However, to regain the power of the monsters that Egypt possessed, many innocent sacrifices had to be made. She prayed to the gods for assistance, and they let me hear her voice. I could not allow the sacrifices, but I could not allow Téa to suffer either."

Masika listened to be aware of the Greatest Pharaoh's words while she tried to unclench her fingers on the seat.

"I made a deal. A spiritual deal," The Greatest Pharaoh continued. "The millennium necklace on Masika grew from her, it is attached by the gods. As is, the millennium puzzle. Yugi uses the rope so no one notices it attached to him."

"Whaaa- the puzzle is growing from his stomach?!" Joey almost flipped backward in his seat. "Say it ain't so!"

"It is so, Joey," The Greatest Pharaoh said. "Unless we find a way to appease the gods with a different price, or a way to lessen the severity, then we are doomed to live half-lives, with them."

///Téa: Okay, maybe try just one finger at a time, Masika?///

///Masika: It still won't unclasp. Hands are not a hard object-Nyah, heh, we're moving?! I still cannot let go.///

///Téa: Masika. Is there anything I can do?///

///Masika: This is not taking care of your body, Téa, I am the one at fault, I just don't know-///

"She is really out of it, I don't even think she's recognized I'm right here."

Masika looked beside her. The woman Mai put her hand on top of hers.

"Hey." She rubbed her hand. "Relax, okay? I gotta imagine being from some ancient Egypt, being thrust into a body, and forced to get on something impossible in your time as a plane is a lot to handle."

Atem watched Joey for a reaction. So far, he hadn't mentioned anything else beyond a shout about the puzzle.

///Yugi: Atteem!///

///Atem: Yugi?///

///Yugi: Go help Masika so Mai gets away from her now!///

Yugi was paying attention, wasn't he? ///Atem: I just told Joey that a puzzle grew out of your body and you've been cursed to live a half-life. Aren't you interested in his reaction more? Advice? Suggestions? He can sometimes be very smart.///

///Yugi: If she and Téa feel more comfortable with Mai, then she'll want to go with Mai or Joey. You don't get it. Joey said Mai even stayed for weekends with Téa, she's comfortable with Mai, and she's the only thing missing in my life, this could be my last chance!///

Atem understood. Yugi's friendship with Téa was extremely delicate. He got up and over to the other side. The jet had decent seating, although not many. Joey would say something in his own time about the situation. Atem watched Masika, but she only seemed to clam up more, sensing his presence now. She presented herself straight and kept everything under control, except her hands. "Mai. May I sit there so I can talk to her and calm her down?"

"Be my guest if you want to try." Mai stood up and went to another seat.

Atem tried to think of what to say. The rest of her body was trying to be good, but the hands would not let go. His presence near her was never relaxing. ///Atem: I don't know what to try, Yugi. I believe I make her worse, not better. She sees me almost like a god, I stress her out.///

///Yugi: I don't know. Take her hand. Say 'there, there'. Something, Atem. Even if it doesn't work, if they see we are affectionate, maybe they'll feel better with us.///

"Hey, Masika?" Mokuba came around the corner. "I heard you weren't doing so well."

"I am fine, Mokuba," Masika said. "Only a small problem."

"It's a long way back home, so that small problem is a big problem." Mokuba examined her hands. He rubbed them. "There, there, Masika."

///Atem: She hasn't loosened up a single bit./// Masika was no ordinary human being, she was a spirit, and she had kept herself hidden deeply inside Téa. Too deep. ///Téa is not the only one who will be getting a crash course in a double spirit bond, Yugi. Be patient./// He watched as Joey came round the corner.

"So, like for Yugi's whole life? He doesn't own his body any more than you do?" Joey was coming to terms with what he said. "Same with Téa's ghostfriend. Unless we figure out something? Then, we gotta figure out something 'cause that ain't no way to live." He looked at Masika and Mokuba. "Whattup with the Masika hands?"

///Yugi: Pharoah, please, try something!///

"I am handling her." Atem had already told him that.

"You're handling her?" Joey looked disgusted and mocked him. "Nice job, Great Pharoah, on the handling 'cause you suck at it." Joey touched her other hand. "Hey, loosen up or your gonna lose your own fingers there."

///Yugi: Joey is touching her hand!///

The stimulus from Yugi was incredibly high, it felt like he was yelling right into his ear! Atem moved Joey's hand away. "That will not do, Joey, I said I am handling it!"

"Oh, you guys." Mokuba sighed and undid Masika's seatbelt. He took her hand. "Stand up and move around from here to there. Then, when you sit down, maybe you'll feel better?"

Atem watched as Mokuba managed to get her to stand up and walk. **///Atem: It was a joint try?///** Yugi was far from happy. **///Atem: I'm sorry to disappoint you. I will try to get her to get along with me, but this won't happen overnight.///**

///Yugi: I know, but please, never stop trying. The closer you are to Masika, the better things can be between me and Téa. Masika is much closer to Bakura, and you accidentally killed her precious cat.///

Right. Yugi needed this. **///Atem: I will find a way to make friends with her, Yugi. I promise.///**

Domino City

Game Shop

Rooms weren't that hard for them. Even though there were four of them, there were only two bodies. Grandpa of course welcomed them.

"Did Yugi want his old room?" Grandpa asked him. "Or did he want a bigger one now?"

///Yugi: Tell Grandpa my old room is fine, Atem.///

"Yugi will take his old room," Atem spoke for him.

"Okay then." Grandpa moved over slightly. "I guess Téa would be fine with the room next to yours?"

///Yugi: Yes!///

"That's fine too," Atem said for him again.

"Good." Grandpa nodded. "Then?" He scratched his cheek. "There's a lot of old storage in there you need to clean out. Have fun."

///Yugi: Yeah, that's Grandpa. Ask him where he wants-///

"Yugi's got a huge house he's not using right now, so I'm sure he can find room for it." He walked off.

Atem walked into the room. Tried to walk into the room. Yep. ///Atem: Do you think you'll be changing back soon?///

///Yugi: Oh, I hope not. Have Joey help you drive back and forth. The keys to my house are in the pocket. I'm going to go rest in my soul room for a little while.///

At least Yugi found some silver lining. He looked toward Masika who was getting shown around her room with Grandpa.

"There's a nice window. A nice bed," Grandpa said. "You can decorate it however you want. Or? Well I suppose you should ask Téa first."

"Téa said she doesn't mind the room. We'll focus on decorations later." Her mouth squirmed around.

"Ooh, what's that?" Grandpa asked. "What's Téa telling you? Ooh, is it a nice juicy secret?"

Masika took a moment to answer. "I need to find Joey to do all the work for me. I mean? He should help. I shouldn't phrase it so impolitely."

Grandpa just chuckled. "Oh, you definitely have Téa in you."

Masika bowed and started to head downstairs.

Atem followed behind her, not too close. They would both need help moving things. Joey was just outside, trying to work out something with Mai.

"Joey." Masika bowed toward him. "Hello. Téa said to ask for your help. If you are too busy, then I will get Bakura. He always has strong hands."

"Eesh, Yug won't like that." Joey went toward her. "What do you need?"

"The rooms have been storage areas," Atem said coming closer. "We need to move things out of there, put them in a car, and put them into Yugi's home."

"Oh, man." Joey of course wasn't thrilled. "Fine, let's get this moving. Mai? You want to help?"

"Not really." Mai came with them anyhow. She started to help Masika, while Joey helped with Atem.

"So?" Joey said to Atem as Masika went downstairs away from them with Mai. "Yugi okay with this?"

"He's taking it well," Atem said.

"He couldn't stop thinking about Téa. Seriously, guy just never got over her, after all these years. He must be going nuts right now having her here for so long and so close again. You really need to get along with Masika, whenever all the learning to live in their daily lives is done, he's going to want to have Téa stay with him."

"Yes, I know," Atem agreed. "However, Masika can't see me as a friend."

"Well, peasants probably didn't make friends with Pharaohs. Ever," Joey said. "Maybe she'll get over it as she hangs around modern times more. You really need to make sure you get along though."

"Yes, I know Joey."

"Can't be easy with her liking Bakura. She wanted to get him to help if I didn't. They are way too close."

"It isn't the greatest thing. I'm sure it won't be pleasant." Even if it wasn't Zorc, it was still Bakura. The Bandit Thief. He was never an innocent person.

"It'd probably be a good idea if our friendly Bakura picks her up to hang out so she doesn't run away with Téa's body," Joey recommended. "Then again? Maybe not. We don't need another cool guy comin' on over here to steal another friend away."

Atem knew he was talking about Mai. "Yugi will still help however he can. We'll eventually figure out something. We won't leave Mai in that predicament, Joey."

"You probably have a lot in common, it shouldn't be too hard to get to be friends." Joey didn't stick around the subject line of Mai. "You died in Ancient Egypt. She died in Ancient Egypt. You like games. She probably likes at least one game."

Good point. "Playing a game could break the ice." It could also strengthen the ice. "It depends on the game we played."

"Yeah. Just try something. Whether he goes to New York or she stays in Domino City, they gotta get a real strong connection to decide that kind of thing." He drifted off as they moved closer to Mai and Masika. "Be sure to tell me when Yugi gets back. You sure those are the keys in the front pocket?"

"Yugi said so." Atem gave him the keys.

Joey grinned and took them. "Guess until Yugi can drive, I get his car."

Atem expected to hear a line from Yugi. He must still be in his room.

"Okay then, since spirits don't have licenses, everybody get in." Joey spun the keys around his finger.

"Yeah, we'll get this done and everybody safe," Mai said. "Then I need to get back home."

"If that's what you want to call it," Joey muttered.

Mai didn't reply to him as she got into the rental with Masika.

Joey took the majority of stuff with Atem.

They just stuck everything in the main room of Yugi's home for now. Seemed fair, Yugi could figure it out later when he got back to living at his own home.

Joey and Mai gave Atem and Masika a ride back to the Game Shop and said goodbye.

Now?

"Do you like to play any games?" Atem asked Masika.

Masika's Past

Like Atem thought, she didn't know how to respond to his request for a game. "We are in a Game Shop. We could take a break and play a game after the stress of today," Atem added.

"Yes, The Greatest Pharaoh."

"Atem is really what I would prefer," he said. "Do you prefer Masika?" She was quieter again.

"Yes, The Greatest Pharaoh Atem."

Oh. This wouldn't be easy. He went around to find a game that wouldn't be too competitive. Something simple. Ah. Strange game to be hanging around. He bent down to grab it, noticing Ebonnee was on top of it. Yes, very correct game.

"Ebonnee?" Masika noticed her too as her cat jumped off the game and went over toward her. She rubbed up against her leg.

"Here is an interesting game." Atem held it up. "Connect Four." He went over and set it up, explaining the simple concept. While Grandpa was away, as well as Yugi and Téa, he could try and get to know Masika.

They didn't talk much while they played, but Atem could tell Masika was enjoying the game. She was watching the sides very intently. While she was watching the game, Atem noticed her cat kept rubbing up on her stomach and chest while they played. That cat truly loved her or loved attention.

Yes. Him killing it was definitely a hindrance, but he had to get her past that.

Masika gently petted it a certain way, from the head to halfway down the body as she held her game piece.

Atem watched as the front door opened. It was no customer, it was Mokuba.

"Mokuba," Masika called to him. "Hello."

"You're playing a game with the Pharaoh?" Mokuba asked as he came over. "Connect Four?" He just kind of looked strangely at Atem.

"A simple game to break the ice between us," Atem said. "We might be here for some time before we figure out a way from this punishment. It's better if we know each other."

"Oh." Mokuba seemed to understand that. "Um? So." Mokuba shifted around. "Can I steal her for a little bit?"

What? "What do you need with Masika?"

"It's personal," Mokuba said.

"I don't think that's a good idea yet," Atem informed him. "We still don't know how long it will be before we switch back."

"Oh. Do you hear Yugi right now?"

"I did before." It had been some time since Yugi chimed in again. It would be harder to catch him in the soul room. He turned down every single filter so he could hear him. *Yugi*. Still nothing? He should be getting blasted with Yugi's thoughts. "Masika, can you reach Téa?"

Masika concentrated, her eyes darted around. "She isn't speaking to me."

Hm. "Did she stay in the soul room, or had she been talking to you?"

"Oh. We spoke . . ." She looked at the watch she was wearing. "She scolded me a few minutes ago."

Scolded? "About what?"

"Pharaoh. She does not wish for me to call you The Greatest Pharaoh."

Perfect. "That's fine. I really do prefer to be on first name terms only. Simply the name Atem works better." Yet, she still didn't look very comfortable with that. "I know that my role in Ancient Egypt was much different than yours, Masika. However, that role doesn't define me today. I am simply a person trying to be a friend."

"Being friends is good," Mokuba agreed. "So, as a friend, could you come with me now?"

Not again. "We just lost contact with Yugi and Téa now, Mokuba," Atem reminded him. "It would be better to wait and see when they return."

"Fine," Mokuba groaned. "I'll wait. Masika, can you call me next time you're here though?" He gave her a phone. "That's your new Kaiba phone. The number in there is just to me. You can add more numbers as you get friends. Call me when the Pharaoh has freed you."

He didn't have to frame it with those words.

"Thank you." She bowed gently and took it as he left.

They went back to playing the game. He finally got her to call him Pharaoh Atem. Not Atem, but at least it was progress. However, there was another interruption.

One that if Yugi could connect, he would be connecting right now.

Ryou Bakura strutted in. "Sorry for interrupting, Yugi. Or, are you still . . ." He seemed to struggle with his name too. "Pharaoh? Pharaoh should work, right? Sorry."

"I am still Atem," Atem answered him.

"Sorry. Um? No Yugi yet. Then, you must still be Masika?" He looked toward her. "So? Bakura has told me a great deal about you. Um? Pardon, but do you think you are going to become a good little fuckbuddy to the Pharaoh?" He grinned mischievously.

Ugh. "Bakura." Not the friendly Bakura. "Leave."

"No." His voice changed, done with his trick of mimicking Bakura's personality. He showed off his chest and showed the millennium ring, digging into his skin. "I have no powers, same as you. Unless you want to put up a physical fight, you weak prick, then you'll let me have her."

"Téa wants me to stay, Bakura," Masika told him. "I am bound to her, so I have to listen."

"Your half and halving." Bakura leaned in the doorway. "You have half control, so half leave with me."

"That isn't an appropriate way to think about it." Atem tried to keep his voice steady. ///Atem: This. Fiend! I can't believe he's just walking around freely again!/// He didn't mind sharing space with a random Egyptian woman that never did anything wrong. But, Bakura?

Yes, if Yugi was there he'd be telling him to calm down so he didn't upset Masika about her 'friend', which would be bad for Téa, because she was sharing with Téa. But? It was a real.

Real.

Hard.

Thing.

"Come, Bitch, we're leaving," Bakura answered. "I've been with Ryou Bakura for years, I know his whole job, I can take care of you."

"No, fucker," she said right back to him. "I need to listen to my vessel, not a right bastard like you right now."

Atem wouldn't mind her words, if she hadn't been smiling the whole time. They were literal friends, cursing each other, because that's how they had acted before.

"Weak bitch, Rider," Bakura chuckled.

"Téa is in charge." She made a move in Connect Four. "I need to ask her permission about what she wants."

Bakura groaned. "Fine." He glared at Atem.

Atem glared right back.

"Even if her vessel says so, she'll never call you by your name, Pharaoh."

"I know that I was responsible for the death of her cat." Atem wasn't going to play with him.

"I saved her so many times, I am her hero. You have no idea the things I did for her," he muttered. "Yet you sit there wearing a puzzle made of the souls of my entire village. No matter what you do, or what you force her to call you, she'll never be your friend."

///Atem: Keep it together. Breathe. Keep it together.///

"How many times did I save you, Masika? Tell . . . Atem," he said snidely.

Masika didn't answer right away. " . . . it depends upon your definition of 'save'. If you mean how many times you physically saved my life, I would say three, however if you are also counting the times you helped free me from terrible situations which made death more appealing, then it would be . . . a lot."

Hm. That's the most he'd heard her talk so far.

"Perhaps we can play a game around here, where you can be surveyed from being a right ass?" Masika asked him. "Téa should be fine with that. It'd be a good starting point."

"What about you, Pharaoh?" Bakura asked him. "Do you mind if the fucker who skipped rope with your father's corpse plays in your game shop nicely like a good boy?"

///Atem: Yugi, I cannot handle this!/// Atem stood up. "Leave this place until you learn some manners!"

"Fucking make me," Bakura threatened him. "Yugi's still a weak ass, Ryou Bakura's body can take him any day!"

"My Bandit King," Masika called to him. "Stop annoying the Pharaoh and go. We'll talk later when you're more interested in playing instead of annoying The Pharaoh."

"That'll be awhile," Bakura said as he finally turned to leave. "Fine! Maybe I'll just go and get Bakura in trouble instead!"

Bastard. Atem looked at Masika. She didn't seem concerned with the matter. He probably wouldn't hurt his host body then. "How?"

"This way." She gestured diagonally.

Huh? ///Atem: She won? She did./// Bakura distracted him so much he wasn't watching hard enough. "Congratulations. I'll set up the next game." This time he wouldn't get distracted. "How did you know Bakura, and why did he save you multiple times?"

Masika paused thoughtfully. "Your subject's past life isn't that important."

"I think it is." He wanted to know.

"Similar upbringing circumstances. He helped because he was my friend." She absolutely dodged the question and details. "Who goes first?"

"You do," he said. "I'd appreciate knowing more details than that, Masika."

She made her first move. "My family was killed when I was eight. I was sold to someone else and ran away. Bakura found me. He tried to take me to Kul Elna to live with him, but the spirits wouldn't allow it. Instead, he tied me to his monster, and watched out for me that way."

Diabound? He made a move. "How did he tie you?"

"Whenever I was in deep trouble, I would be teleported to him." She watched the board.

They found camaraderie as children. So? There was a spark of good left in that side of Bakura. A spark. A small spark. "If he can resist saying anything mean to me, I wouldn't mind if you played with your friend here."

"He'll need time," Masika said. "I knew him best before the curse of his village boiled inside of his blood. He stopped coming to my aid when he said he was getting too dangerous."

Oh. "The curse of his village moved slowly in him?" Atem never knew that. All that anger and hatred piled up within him, causing him to bond with Zorc. ///Atem: The village is now at ease. Zorc is gone from Bakura completely./// He looked back toward Masika as she made a move. ///Atem: He didn't come down for a fight. He is wanting the friend that he deserted back then./// Bakura's soul was beginning to be cleansed.

Ryou Bakura was right, he wasn't really a threat. The test will be to see how he respects Ryou Bakura's body now that he has control. Would he hurt it or abuse it in a way his vessel wouldn't like?

He played several more games with Masika. Now that he could concentrate, he won all but one. The first one. However, she would eventually win against him. She herself was very good at that game.

He asked her about her experiences in her time since she had her full memory. She shared some, not going into much detail. It was clear, Ancient Egypt wasn't as kind to her. When he got the nerve to ask how she passed on though?

Things turned.

"I respect the almighty Pharaoh," she said as she released the catch to let the pieces fall, "but I find it a great offense to ask about the end of one's life."

Hmm. "I know that you were the owner of Ebonnee, but I wondered if your death had anything to do with your chosen place as well." He tried to explain it.

She lifted her eyes toward him without lifting anything else. A disturbing look came across her eyes. Even though she had obeyed him, this was something that she couldn't seem to do.

Okay. "Did you look like Téa when you were alive?"

"Similar. All but the hair," she answered. "I kept mine in braids and curls, or I shaved it off. Depending on the husband at the time." She made the first move of the new game.

Hmm. ///Atem: There is a block of ice between us. More than just getting used to being friends with a past Pharaoh./// Was there something else Bakura knew about how she died? ///Atem: That block, it must be that./// "I would appreciate knowing what is keeping you distant from me?"

"You are The Greatest Pharaoh, I am but a humble servant to you."

"False." No. "You are using that as an excuse. You are a very good actress." He smirked. "If you had absolute respect for your Pharaoh, you wouldn't have cursed in my presence."

Yep, there it had been. She started to relax, almost in defeat. "Ebonnee came out of the card. Do you remember who was supposed to come out of the Ties of Friendship?"

Oh, it had to do with the Ties of Friendship card. "A daughter." Yes, Yugi even dated Rebecca to get the Ties of Friendship for it.

"You used people to summon the monsters. When a monster was defeated, the summoner was too."

Hmm. "You and your daughter were used to summon?" Impossible. "The millennium items allowed the closest to me to summon. I would have no need of that."

She stubbornly put in a piece. "You're right. It's just the pathetic puny mind of your subject. She remembers Ancient Egypt, but no, she must be wrong about her death. Your move, The Greatest of All the Greats Pharaoh Atem."

Oh. Oh. Oh! "You are a *very* good actress." This whole time he had thought she just couldn't call him by his first name. ///Atem: The longer the name, the more foul she has actually been to me. Her version of cursing, without being accused of anything, to stay in good manners with her host./// She wasn't afraid or frightened of him, she hated him. "Why would I use you when I had millennium items at my disposal?"

"I don't know," she said firmly. "I have no idea what things a Pharaoh thinks about. Your millennium items were strong but not perfect. You only had so many, yet there were so many disposable subjects."

That attitude. "Who did you raise?"

"Heba and I were in charge of your Dark Magician." She held up the fake Dark Magician Téa had. "You're right though, it must all be in my head. It was absolute instinct that I knew how to summon from a picture. Came with the position as spirit with Téa, right, The Greatest of all Greats Pharaoh Atem?"

That? "If I did have need of a summoner, that wasn't one with a millennium item, I'm sure I wouldn't have chosen a wife and child." He made a move.

"You didn't see," she said hoarsely as she put the card back away. "Just like you couldn't see an innocent, small cat in the way."

Hm. ///Atem: She might have something. I cannot always win. I cannot always be right./// That was something he needed to remember. Maybe she was onto something about why she was chosen.

"Are we done yet?" She clinched her teeth together. "Do you feel like you tried to be friendly enough today?" She glared at him. "You *have* to be friendly to your past lowly subject, Pharaoh, there's no choice. This past spirit is trapped with Téa, the one woman your Yugi self always loved and still can't get over years later. Oh no, you don't get to decide anymore." She threw in another piece. "You're stuck running a peasant little game shop with an unkempt spirit and her cat. Screw up, and Yugi will lose Téa. I'll convince her that Bakura can help her with the same thing, even faster considering he already knows everything his light side does, and with me whispering in her ear all the time, it won't take long before she has a new husband in the other gentler Light Bakura. Then you'll have a real good rest of existence with someone who would always secretly hate you, just because you couldn't make a friend." She emptied the playing board and let the pieces smash on the table. "Is that about right, The Greatest Pharaoh of all the Greatest Greatest Pharaoh's Atem?!"

Atem watched her stand up.

"I will stay peacefully here, you do not need to try to be friends with me. I will learn the way the Game Shop works, however, I will also give it my all to learn from Téa, so that she does not have to give up on her dreams in New York. In the end, whether it is the Game Shop in Domino City, or dancing in New York, her wish is what I will listen to. Not yours, Not Yugi's, no one but this vessels own wishes will dictate my actions! Anything else and I will convince her to go to that sweet Light Bakura."

Atem folded his hands together. ///Atem: Okay. Every friendship is different. This one will prove quite a challenge.///

"Oh, don't look like that," she complained to him. "That was not a challenge I just set upon you, The Greatest Pharaoh. I tolerate you. I do not need to be a friend." She groaned with a mocking sound. "Atem."

Téa's Proposed Deal

///Yugi: Atem?///

///Atem: Yugi? Oh thank goodness.///

///Yugi: I lost contact with you, I got worried. How were things while I was gone?///

///Atem: Bad. Masika believes I killed more than her cat.///

///Yugi: Oh no. Who else?///

///Atem: Her and her child, Heba.

///Yugi: You would never do that.///

///Atem: She swears it happened with her being a summoner. I told her that I had others who had millennium items to help summon monsters, but she believes it. I tried to play some Connect Four. She isn't what we believed Yugi. She isn't a shy subject, and Bakura came to see her.///

///Yugi: Is Ryou Bakura in control?///

///Atem: No, he wasn't. He wanted to bother me, but he was mainly here to take Masika away. He was her friend, Yugi, and I don't mean lightly. He saved her life at least three times, and he helped her out of dangerous situations multiple times.///

///Yugi: The Bandit King?///

///Atem: Yes./// Yugi was quiet. Atem knew what he feared, so he spoke again. ///Atem: She won't leave the Game Shop, even with everything she believes. She is loyal to Téa, however, she is fond of the idea of her ending with the Light Bakura.///

///Yugi: My friend?! She wants to hook Téa up with my friend Bakura?!///

///Atem: I know, Yugi./// They had a long way to go with everything.

"Whatever it takes, we really need to prove it wasn't you." Yugi looked toward Téa. "Oh, are we back?"

Téa smiled. "Yes!" She looked toward the windows and then checked her watch. "2:56 PM to 8:56 PM. We couldn't communicate for three hours between that."

Yeah, Yugi noticed that too. "Six hours, no body. Three of those six, no communication."

"From 3:00 to 9:00, I can't control myself." Téa looked at herself. "Thank you for not . . . not hurting my body. That's not right, sorry, Masika. Thank you for taking care of it."

Oh, she was talking to Masika.

"Really?" Téa looked delighted. "Masika says she'll do her best to really learn dancing too while she's learning the shop so I can still move on with my life. She already gets how important it is, and she already said she's a very good actress. Even Atem complimented her on it."

"Oh." Yeah. "That sounds great." ///Yugi: Be happy, Yugi, don't be a bad friend.///

///Atem: I am sorry, Yugi. I am trying with Masika.///

Yugi watched the expression on her face though. She started to wipe her eyes. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Just? Sorry." She got up and got some tissues. "Sorry. Masika was just telling me a little about her past." She shook her head. "Don't ask about it, Yugi."

Okay. "I won't."

"Tell Atem not to bother her either. She says he even asked how she died?" She just stared at Yugi. "What?"

"I'm sure Atem didn't kill her," Yugi said, cutting her off. "She's got to be mistaken. We know it took millennium items, he'd have no reason to use her."

"Yeah." Still, Téa didn't sound well. "She said he didn't even look at his subjects, so he didn't know. Were there things going on that maybe he didn't know about?" She looked at her necklace.

Yugi didn't know what to say to that. Maybe she could get more details with the necklace?

"Sorry. I have one spirit in one ear, but I have experience with another, and . . ." She shook her head. "Sorry. I'll talk with you later, Yugi. I'd like to find my room and talk things out with Masika for a little while?"

"Yeah. Sure, no problem," Yugi assured her. "Take your time." Maybe she'd see something different if she looked into the past moment to clear things up?

Téa's Room

Téa touched the necklace after asking Masika if she could try to see the moment. She just couldn't believe it was Atem. He never hurt anyone that didn't deserve it. Maybe others around him did, in the name of him, but not him.

«<During the vision, she could see Masika holding a young child that was . . . "That looks like Mokuba." Only much younger and longer hair. Strange.

"That is Heba." The modern day Masika said from her side.

Masika came over with the younger looking Mokuba in the vision. She looked nervous. There were other people in front of her as well. An old man. A young woman. They all looked terrified.

"Those are the sacrifices before me."

Téa watched as the young woman went up and started chanting. A card rose in front of her. She didn't know the card, but it started to fight. "Where is Atem?" She looked around. "Atem isn't here, Masika."

The woman's card was withdrawn and she backed away quickly, heading away. The older man came up now and started chanting.

Téa moved around to try and see Atem. "There's no one here in charge at all. Who is battling cards with you?"

"I don't know, we were just told to be followers for Pharaoh."

"Well, he isn't here. Someone lied to you." She tried to see anyone on the other side that was also controlling cards. "This doesn't feel right." She watched the battle of the older man chanting and the card he summoned. The card won and the older man moved away.

Téa watched as Masika nervously approached with Heba.

"You will be the chosen for Pharaoh," someone that she didn't recognize said to Masika.

"Chosen for Pharaoh? Chosen isn't follower to Pharaoh, Masika."

"Isn't it the same thing, Téa?"

Maybe Egyptian to English translation? "Follower is someone who needs to follow someone's lead. Chosen is when you are . . . okay, that's a terrible definition. Let me try again. A follower would follow the actual Pharaoh's wishes. Being chosen for the Pharaoh, doesn't mean that you are following his wishes. It just means you'll be like . . . beside him? Maybe?"

"Okay? So being the chosen wasn't something the Pharaoh selected himself?"

Yeah, pretty close. Téa watched as Masika summoned the Dark Magician. "Someone made you play this game, and Pharaoh isn't even around and-">>>

That was it? Téa touched the necklace. "Masika, it never showed your death. It never even showed the Dark Magician losing."

///Masika: I . . . saw that. I remember what happened, but the necklace kicked us out. Why was I told 'chosen' instead of 'follower'?///

"I don't know, but Atem wasn't anywhere near there." That was worrying. "I couldn't see anything but the cards and you from the distance."

///Masika: The game was so great in size, each summoner just watched in front of them. That's all that mattered.///

"I don't think so." Téa took a deep breath, knowing Masika wouldn't like what she wanted to do. "Can we . . . show Yugi and Atem?"

///Masika: What?! No, it's my death, it's private! It's not for gazing for a past fucking Pharaoh's sadistic pleasure!///

"I don't think it's your death. Having more people look at the scene could really help. They're really good at puzzles," Téa tried to convince her. "I don't think that's how you died."

///Masika: Then how did I die, and why can't I remember a thing after the Dark Magician summoning?///

///Téa "Please?"///

///Masika: No! It's bad enough you are making us stay near the Pharaoh and his vessel!///

Oooh. "Bakura was your friend, right? I'm sure this is super important," Téa said. "I'll tell Yugi and Atem to let Bakura come spend time with you at the Game Shop, and eventually . . . you can, you know, spend more time with him away from here."

///Masika: You should be very weary of your words. My life was not your life of today.///

"I get it," Téa said softly. "Look? I have a feeling we are going to be stuck like this for a long time, unless someone figures out something. This moment. It could be something that leads us to a truth." She groaned. "As long as it's not a time that I am present with you. When I'm in that chamber place, I can't tell what's going on."

///Masika: The Greatest Pharaoh and your precious Yugi Muto will be very angry. I do not think you understand the rage you could create if you give such permission to me.///

"It's my life," Téa told her. "Not theirs, and it's halved. What right do they get to complain about what I choose in my life? Someone else is taking care of me for the other half. I'm not in any kind of relationship right now with anyone anyhow, Masika. It wouldn't be like cheating."

///Masika: You know, Ryou Bakura, that Light Bakura side, seems to be a sweet darling. He was bashful when I showed up naked, he fetched clothes immediately, and helped me to New York. If you get lonely, perhaps he would be good for you?///

///Téa: Bakura? I don't know. I mean, I guess it would be really convenient if we both had the same body for a boyfriend?/// Téa laughed. "I can't believe I just said that. I don't really know Bakura that well. And, well? I mean, I don't know if I want anything right now."

///Masika: So, you'll let me do whatever I like with my friend Bakura, if I let you show Yugi and Pharaoh Atem the scene? Is that the deal you are trying to impress upon me?///

///Téa: It would be fair of you, Masika. Present or not, this is still my body. I'm trusting you with it, especially when you do leave the Game Shop. Don't get yourself killed.///

///Masika: Bakura would never hurt me.///

"We aren't starting with you leaving though, I want him to come over several times before you two attempt anything," Téa said clearly. "Is that fair?"

///I don't believe there is a real choice, but I am not choosing this right now. We are just starting this strange phase. Maybe something will come up in a few days to turn it around. That happened quite often with you in the past.///

"Fine, we'll wait, and see what happens." Eventually though, Téa would be ready to make that deal.

The First Tears of Ra

"Yugi?" Téa came downstairs. "I want to show you something." She had waited for some time, just to see how things went, but nothing had changed. There was no new adventure, no new clues, and no information that anyone could find. It was time to move onto the area that might provide something they needed.

Yugi looked toward her. His expression sweet like always. "What did you want to show me?"

She moved closer to him. "Maybe you or Atem will see something that I don't?" She gestured to her necklace as she approached him. "It's Masika's death scene."

"Really?" Yugi looked uncomfortable. "Is she okay with that, Téa?"

"We worked out a deal. She can spend time with her old friend here safely for awhile, and eventually I'll be okay with letting her go with him away from the Game Shop."

"The Bandit Thief King?" Yugi didn't look happy with that at all. "You don't have to make such a bad deal, Téa."

"It's going to be awhile. We haven't found anything to help, Yugi. Look? She's taking part of the responsibility of my body, so I have to compromise too," Téa said. "She's going to spend several sessions safely in the Game Shop with me present until I feel like I'm okay with her leaving away from it. It's a good step to take in between going back to New York."

"But, but things happen!" Yugi practically yelled at her. "She could do anything with your body."

"She could already do anything with my body. She could leave in the middle of the night and sneak away and do whatever she wanted before I returned," she reminded him. "It's really about trust. Once I trust her enough, then she should be able to leave the Game Shop and live a life."

"Yeah. But." Yugi was fumbling. "I hate it. It's not hers. She's not alive." Yugi stood up. "Did she make this deal?"

Geez. "No, I did," Téa answered. "I want to show you guys what feels to her like her death. She doesn't know anything after this moment. She was highly offended by the thought I wanted to do this."

"Then maybe we . . ." Yugi groaned. "Atem says we should look, but . . . do you really have to-"

"She could run away, and I could run right back, and she could just run away again," Téa said again. "Masika has never done that once though. Please, Yugi? This could really help. You

might see something that helps."

"Fine," Yugi muttered. "We should find out what's going on. It could clear Atem's name."

The Millenium Necklace Vision . . .

Atem watched the scene being played out when Téa used the millennium necklace. It was hard to see much. He saw someone that looked like a very young Mokuba in Masika's arms. ///Atem: She really does look like Téa. Interesting./// He watched as a young woman summoned a monster.

Why would he ever want something like this? He had millennium items, he wouldn't put regular people through this. Atem looked all around. He noticed the cards being summoned, and other cards being summoned.

He was nowhere near there. ///Atem: This event must have happened without my consent./// Was someone else in charge of this, saying that he condoned it?

Then, he finally heard someone. Chosen for the Pharaoh? He headed toward the sound with Yugi's agreement.

Farther and farther they left the vision area. This was their chance to find out what was going on.

Until? Ebonnee. Her cat was there.

"Using the millennium necklace already?"

A woman with a cat's head appeared next to the cat. Oh they knew who this had been!

They immediately bowed. A well known Egyptian goddess.

"As we showed grace for Seto Kaiba, so too will you receive the honor," she spoke. "I am Bastet. This is the moment where Masika was chosen to play her future part with you. Now that you have seen this, we will restore her memories of her real death in Kul Elna. She sacrificed her life to the Egyptian gods to save Bakura's soul. Though this promise was not granted right away, our deal is now completed."

Bakura. That is why Bakura's past friend was chosen for this role. "Is there another way that we can provide a sacrifice without involving living beings?" Atem asked, knowing this might be their best chance to find a solution.

They were all out of the vision. Téa looked terrible.

"Are you okay?" Yugi asked.

Téa just stared at Yugi a second. "Yugi." Then she held onto him. Not like a nice friendly hug, it was a hug like when he found her after the virtual duel on her body. She was absolutely terrified.

"It's okay, I'm here."

"I know how Masika died," she trembled.

"I do too. Atem and I saw an Egyptian Goddess in the necklace," Yugi told her.

"I know how I died," Téa said softly.

How she died? "What do you mean, Téa? Are you an incarnation of Masika?"

"No." She clung to him tightly. "It's just too much. I'm scared, Yugi, this isn't good. This isn't good at all. This isn't it, this isn't just two spirits playing body games with us! We know it, they want us for something huge."

We. Us. Téa was talking like the two of them were exactly the same. "I'm here. You don't have to get it exact, Téa, but could you tell me a little about the connection of you two?"

"I'm not . . . I'm not . . ."

"She is part of the tear of Ra, while Masika is the other half." Bastet had appeared before them, along with Ebonnee. She was disguised as a black cat this time, but her voice was the same from the vision. "You can explain with this contraption." She nudged a rubik's cube towards Téa. "Masika did once."

Yugi looked at the rubik's cube.

Téa started to move it around. "I'm green I guess? All of this is me." She said it without any emotion, almost dull. She mixed it up. She pointed to another side. "I'm not as good, but imagine I got all the greens on just two sides? If I can. Just." She started to cry. "My way." She went over to the Christmas tree Yugi's grandpa had set up. She picked up a few balls. "I'll be careful, Yugi."

"That's fine." However she needed to explain.

"So, let's say these red balls are me." She put four red christmas bulbs on the floor. "This is my whole soul." She split the red christmas bulbs into groups of two and added a green and yellow ornament. "The red is still my soul, but it's on two sides, and there's other parts. Making me different? The rubik's cube probably was smarter." She looked at it.

Yugi couldn't quite see what was going on, maybe the rubik's cube could help? "I can help," Yugi insisted. "I can get green on two sides for you if that's what you need." He played with the rubik's cube a few minutes. "There you go." He gave it back but side-hugged her. "It's okay, Téa, take your time."

"I'm green then, instead of red." She pointed to one of the green sides. "This is all Masika, but the green is me still." She pointed to the other green side. "This is all me, but the green is also Masika. We come from the same soul, but with different parts?"

Oh. "Like Egyptian's belief of souls? They are in different parts?" Yugi understood it better now. "So, when you saw Masika's death-

"I saw our death and the beginning of me separately from her." Téa closed her eyes, trying to get her crying under control. Téa watched Ebonnee crawl at her shoe and meow. "A lot of memories hit me."

"Not much, not overwhelmed, and you won't remember everything for long," Bastet said to her. She looked toward Yugi. "You are the same squares with the Pharaoh Atem."

What? "You mean, we had parts of the same soul?" Yugi asked.

"A soul is so small and complex like salt and death is a strainer. While most of Pharaoh Atem went into the puzzle not every piece did."

Okay. He was once . . . ///Yuugi: I will wrap my mind around that later.///

"How else would you be able to share one body? Souls are quite complicated things, pieces must fit right," Bastet said.

///Yuugi: I guess this is a way to break the ice?///

///Atem: Yes. Ask about the connection now, Other Me.///

Other Me. That was a phrase they hadn't used in awhile. "Is there a way to pay the price for what happened, without having the spirits sharing bodies on Earth?" Yugi asked Bastet.

She just smiled. "No."

No? "There must be something that-"

"Oh. I almost forgot?" Bastet gestured toward Ebonnee. She moved toward Téa. "Your favorite pet cat, now one. Divinity and Ebonnee share a similar connection. They will each stay with you through these changing times, and will end their lives only when you end your life. A lifelong companion."

///Yuugi: Did? Did she really just brush us off . . .?///

///Atem: Try again, Yugi, she was distracted. Bastet is a great ally to cats.///

"Sounds great," Yugi said to her. "About the body sharing?"

"The sacrifice you made gave your bodies to the gods and goddesses of Egypt," Bastet told him. "This arrangement is just."

"For how long?" Yugi asked. "Weeks? Months?"

"Until the end of your life," she answered. "Don't quibble with me. Thoth has already written it."

///Yuugi: Oh no. I'm not getting anywhere, Atem! What do I try?///

///Atem: Anything! This is important, Yugi, this might be the only shot we have left, just anything!///

"Anything!" Yugi yelled at her. "Look, Téa and I are mortal beings, and we are living a half-life."

"You agreed to it." Bastet did not look happy. "I brought your chosen cats and gave the gift of a longer life for them to allow continued companionship, and you insist on this? I suggest you stop your squabbling. Your friend Seto Kaiba has some cards to give you. He also knows what happens if you don't agree with the cat."

///Yugi: Seto Kaiba? She visited Seto Kaiba? Atem?///

///Atem: Anything. I was desperate to save my friend, but I didn't want to hurt others. I can take on any mission you wish to deal, I will not shy away from any challenge, please let Yugi and Téa leave our presence.///

The goddess definitely heard Atem, but she didn't look like she was changing her mind. "My last words. Squabble afterwards, and I will call Sekhmet." She breathed slowly. "The you's that will save the world? Are in fact surviving in a dying vision of Domino City. There is nothing but sand and ruined buildings, people with millennium power subduing the people, and another Pharaoh who has power over all. Pharaoh Atem has no power at all, he is surviving in the last vestiges that survived with the tears of Ra, Joey, Mai, Bakura, Serenity and the Kaiba's. To grant your wish of separation into another body would kill them all, and every universe afterwards, including yours."

///Yugi:. . . Atem?///

///Atem: I don't need a body, I don't seek a body, and neither does Masika need hers! We would go away again to the afterlife, and leave our living halves alone.///

Yugi watched as a lion now appeared before them. Oh no, Sekhmet.

"Let me help explain." Sekhmet came toward them, bending on all fours and moving as fast as a lion. She looked like a predator wanting to play with its prey. "I'm the one called when idiots cannot talk peacefully with one of the nicest goddesses! I am Sekhmet. I do not need a lot of reason to start gnawing on humanity, so let's make this as clear as day."

///Atem: Watch out, Yugi! Bend down on the ground with your whole body quickly and fast!///

Yugi pulled Téa down with him, hoping she would catch on as he started to kneel down. He kept his whole body out, exposing his back to Sekhmet. What a creepy feeling. Téa started to do the same thing.

///Yugi: Ask for forgiveness and quickly or she will take a limb!///

"I'm sorry!" Yugi told her quickly. "We don't mean to upset anyone."

///Atem: Nothing and no one, we forgot our place, and will not pursue this matter anymore.///

"You say so now," Sekhmet said as she still crept around Yugi. He tried to remain still. "We know your hearts, all of them. This future is already written by Thoth. You will risk a limb to approach this subject again. Which is good, we could use one."

"Sekhmet," Bastet called out. "With their emotions, the humans are overwhelmed. We should give the half option. They will need it temporarily anyhow to pay more."

"The half option? We don't need to give that now," Sekhmet disagreed. "You're too good. They aren't the important ones, they are just paying the fee. They aren't even worthy of seeing our true forms."

"A half option," Bastet said toward Yugi and Téa. "You will all have your own bodies, but only one half will have the souls at a time. Whether in Atem or Yugi Muto's body, both souls would only be in one."

A half option? "Atem and Masika can have their bodies part time, but we'd be with them anyhow?"

"Yes, they are already blessed with living bodies just comatose. Your bodies will do the same when you leave them. Be thankful," Sekhmet warned him.

"That's just switching bodies," Téa pointed out. "That's not much different at all, we still share the same space."

"There is a difference," Bastet said. "Taking over a body that isn't yours feels parasitic. If you allow them theirs, they will feel better, especially over time. This is for life so it would be nice to give them that choice. However, once you cross this bridge, we can't do anything. Nothing less than Horakhty could reverse it."

"It doesn't matter," Sekhmet said to them. "Unless you want the universe to end and not give your world a chance by paying the price? Then this is the best outcome."

///Atem: I don't like this, Yugi. There was no reason they needed to give me or Masika a body for such a short time, and there is no reason that they would be offering it part time. This feels risky.///

///Yugi: Then we shouldn't pick it yet.///

///Atem: It's a choice right now. These goddesses are not offering any choices for us. We seem more beneath them than the other us' who are saving their universe.///

///Yugi: I would save the universe if it broke us free from this punishment.///

///Atem: I know, Yugi, I would rather do that too. It's clear that is not our fate to decide. For now, we should remain steady. I feel as if when we open another body door, we might seal all options away forever. No one uses Horakhty lightly.///

Right. "We don't want a half body option," Yugi said.

"Yet," Bastet said. "You will have to, at least for the tears of Ra, but give yourselves time to adapt to your new life. Get to know each other. It's not changing anytime soon. Now, I am off. We have others to speak to."

"Like Seto Kaiba?" Yugi asked.

"He got the gist. He knows the price," Sekhmet said as she stalked wearily toward Yugi. "He knows because I rambunctiously couldn't help taking a finger. Bastet granted him a favor and told him what it had been. He remembers now." She moved back and forth around Yugi. "I could offer that. Cut through all the wondering what it all costs and what you can get back? Just offer this goddess your finger."

"Sekhmet," Bastet scolded.

"One finger, I'll tell you everyone you know that's involved in payment and what it's all really for, it's much bigger than just making up for the millennium item use."

"Sekhmet!"

///Yugi:That will really hurt.///

///Atem: No, do not fall for it, Yugi. We will know soon, and we will not have to lose a finger.///

"How about this? How about I give you a tiny taste of information? So you'll give me that finger," Sekhmet encouraged. "Seto Kaiba is involved too."

"When?" Yugi asked.

"Before you." Sekhmet licked her lips. "I can't feast on the other one, but you are only giving payment. Just a tiny finger for all the knowledge you will never know. Things will happen all around to your friends, and you'll never know why."

Yugi held his fingers closer. "Thank you for letting us know Seto Kaiba knows about you."

That only made Sekhmet angry. "Give me that finger!"

"Sekhmet!" Bastet called out. "Let's go drink some God's Brew and feel better."

Sekhmet stared at Yugi. "Just call my name when you are ready to know the truth." She disappeared along with Bastet.

"Kaiba. Involved. How? Things happening to all my friends." Yugi looked at his finger. "Would I get to pick the finger?"

///Atem: Yugi!///

Just a Hand Meal and some God's Brew

Bastet sighed. Once again, Sekhmet was just too gungho. She had to use her magic to restore another hand for Yugi. Stealing a finger from temptation was Sekhmet, someone offering her their finger? Oh, that never turned out well. "That wasn't nice. We owe them now, Sekhmet."

"Call it payment to the gods. Still worth it." Sekhmet was happier now. Bastet watched her sucking on her God's Brew while gnawing on Yugi's former hand.

Bastet looked back at Yugi. The tear of Ra was glaring at her while Yugi seemed paralyzed. "I have restored your whole hand with fingers back." She tried once again to reach the human. "There is no more pain, and you are safe. If you understand this, wave your new hand again."

Yugi looked at his hands and waved both of them.

"Never make a deal with Sekhmet," Bastet said. "She will always take more than offered. Because of her vile behavior." She looked at Sekhmet still gnawing on the hand. "Some grace, Soul Sister. Will you stop chewing on it in front of the owner?"

Sekhmet grabbed the hand and turned around. She continued to gnaw while she was turned. Well, at least it was less rude. "Close enough to a sacrifice for a winning, might work," she muttered as she took one of the fingers, before her sister snapped at her. She pocketed the finger. "I am not wasting much time explaining everything, but you may ask a little while about yourselves."

Yugi couldn't think much. ///Yugi: I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have.///

///Atem: It's over. You are safe now, Yugi. I'm sorry but we must ask things quickly. Kaiba is involved.///

"Yes," Bastet answered, "but these questions to be answered are only for you and I'm not sharing everything. Don't waste time."

"Is there any way that we can get our bodies back? You have to tell us, and you have to be truthful."

"Yes," she admitted. "I can, but it will end your reality as well as all others."

What? "How?"

"In another version of your world, Yugi and Atem are fighting with Kaiba and Bakura as allies to save human existence against a man that was an older Pharaoh who has the respect of the gods. Yugi and Atem are both players. They both must play in a God's Game, or they

forfeit. They need that body from somewhere. A price must be paid for it, and since you not only made a sacrifice, but a sacrifice because of friendship? You were chosen for payment."

"So, do you mean, the whole sacrifice Atem made, brought us the end to one body?"

"Yes, but you willed yourself to the gods of Egypt. This is of the lighter side of servitude chosen. So far."

"But Masika and Téa aren't playing in that same game, are they?"

"Players in the game? Hm. That's a spoiler. Let's go with no."

"Then what is the sacrifice of them for?!" Yugi was starting to lose it. "Why are we switching bodies, why isn't just me and Atem involved, why involve her?!"

Bastet sighed. "She has always been involved in things like this. Téa and Masika have a more suitable name together, they are called the First Tear of Ra. While humanity was born from the tears of Ra, they were the first. When the others saw them for the first time? Well, they doted on them. Humanity looked so quaint and cute. She kept getting reincarnated because she's the sweetest pet to everyone. A piece of nostalgia."

"Cute?" Téa asked. "Reincarnated over and over?"

"Yes. You are like our favorite little pet to watch. Most gods don't even look at humanity anymore, but you? Oh, you are like everyone's favorite stuffed teddy bear."

"What's that have to do with gods?" Yugi asked.

"To explain the whole plan could ruin the outcome," she said. "So, I guess you could say? That we need a new power to make others take . . . pity on humanity. By giving Yugi and Atem a god's blessing, they could reverse time and get their own futures back. You see, mankind is wandering around in an apocalypse of nothing but vast amounts of the dead covered by sand."

Oh. "That sounds . . . horrifying."

"Yes. With some help, they will not only restore their world and modern structures, but those who were lost during the apocalypse," Bastet said. "From a beloved of Joey Wheeler, to a dear man you know as Tristan Taylor. If they win, and if they have the power? They will have them and so much more back."

///Yugi: Tristan? Someone Joey loves? People we really care about.///

///Atem: Yes, I get it, Yugi.///

"The god thing power?" Yugi was confused. "How?"

"You do know the concept of fusion, don't you? It's within the card rules that you've seen before," Bastet said.

///Atem: The cold! The cold, the cold, you had Téa's exact cold!///

"What's important about that right now?" Yugi looked toward Téa.

///Atem: It was not a cold, Yugi, it was her cold. They were exchanging things with that cat! That cat was not Ebonnee, it was Bastet at the time.///

Huh? "The cat was Bastet?" Yugi looked toward her.

///Atem: It was purring against everyone, demanding to be held, nuzzling up not just to it's owner. Yugi!///

"Please don't yell, I get it!" Yugi covered his ears. Oh no. "Is it . . . so you aren't fusing them back together, are you? Into the original rubik's cube? Téa would be lost!"

"Oh no, we do not plan on ever joining them together," Bastet confessed. "There will be something akin to cards. Light and dark."

"Light and dark?"

"Yes. That's good for now."

"No, wait!" Shoot! "That wasn't a lot of information. What about Bakura, why is he back too?"

"Bakura is safe, Zorc is gone, and the curse is gone," Bastet answered. "The gods gave him another chance, and he will have a body choice too."

"Why?"

"The First Tear of Ra will choose either Atem and Yugi, or Bakura and Dark Bakura. For one day each week, everyone will have their own body. It is a time to get to know the counterpart you don't know. There cannot be a split. Afterwards, everyone will be as they are now. Switching and changing within one body always, until the end of each life. Time is up."

"Unless they don't get picked? I don't understand, what is Téa and her spirit choosing?" Yugi begged.

"Who matches them most." Bastet sighed, clearly getting tired of it all, even though she wasn't giving any real good answers. "Assume that the one the First Tear of Ra chooses, will stay with them in their lives, and the other will not. Now, be thankful Sekhmet got greedy, you gained some information and your hand back."

Yugi saw a card fly toward him along with a gold pen. On it, was his name and . . . "What is this?" He read it. "Again?!"

"No, I took your last finger from Sekhmet's eagerness. This wasn't planned, but it'll help," Bastet demanded. "Sign the card and give it to me."

"What is this for?" Why did he have to sign a card to give a finger? "I didn't give it in the first place."

"Your friend Joey in the other universe has lost someone special. He is desperate and miserable, and only has two winnings. He will lose her, without something else. We reasoned that we would put him in debt until the power is balanced. This sacrifice would balance it. I thought humans that were friends felt compassion?"

Joey? ///Yugi: This is for Joey. She won't tell us much, so I guess this must be important. And, I do have a new hand?///

///Atem: Everything is new to me as well.///

"So the other us' in another dimension, just get the energy, of our bodies?" Yugi said roughly. "In our world, is the winner the one who gets to keep their own bodies?"

Bastet frowned. "Time is up. I will not spoil anything else, fate and nature should decide the rest." She took the card. "Expect more of these in the future."

"And of course, Bakura and Ryo Bakura have the same Rubik's cube thing going on," Yugi said passive aggressively. Unfortunately, it wasn't passive enough for Bastet to miss.

"Mortal!" She picked up on the tone. She took a moment to relax again. "Heed. The parasitic feeling crawling on you when you connect with a body that is not yours? It will slowly start to dissipate the more you exchange. Whether you lose a body or not, you will feel fine for the eternity you will share if you choose to switch."

" . . ." Yugi blinked. "Eternity?"

"Yes, Eternity. Your old soul paired with other parts, creating each of you, but once we fix the problem? You will be able to share eternity. Forever apart yet forever together with our blessing." Bastet looked toward Téa and Masika. "We shall see with you two, you keep getting reincarnated, the gods love watching you play on Earth. Maybe they will finally let you rest."

Then without a goodbye, she was gone.

Yugi looked toward Téa. She had been a little . . . not herself. It was understandable. He wasn't quite himself either. "T-Téa?"

"You or Bakura? For what?" She looked toward Yugi. "I don't mean it rudely, but, that didn't make any sense. What am I choosing, for good or bad? For staying with? For who gets an extra body, or gets dragged into more games with the gods?"

"To help save the world somehow? Maybe?" Yugi didn't know what else to say.

"So then whoever I don't choose, doesn't get a body? Is that it? Because I can't tell," she said sharply. "I can't! I feel like that's not it. Light and dark? Cards? It's like a game of words!"

//Atem: God's love games, Yugi. Most likely, Bastet is using riddles. Light and dark. Like the cards? This choice could be important.///

Yugi tried to touch her arm but she backed away.

"Sorry, just, we don't want to be touched right now!" Téa left in a hurry up the stairs.

Yugi just stood there. " . . . what do we do?"

///Atem: Call Bastet's name. Take the body deal now.///

Atem didn't feel right either. That confidence, it didn't feel the same to Yugi. His voice inside of him. Unsure. "But Téa doesn't get what's going on, or what game they are playing. If we take it, then-

///Atem: It sounds like it is used for all people to get to know each other. One hour each day. If things are as the great and mighty goddess Bastet states? Then. We really need this. And? If Bastet is sure it will take the terrible feeling away when I become you, then we should take it.///

///Yugi: Should we really rush this?///

///Atem: We won't get them back easily if the power is being used for such a good cause. They should get back Tristan.///

///Yugi: Yeah. It's another world, but he's such a good friend. They all are such good friends. Losing Tristan or Joey or anyone! In any world./// "Okay, you can have it." Yugi just stared at the front door. "I once believed that you'd be with me forever. I even really wished it once. I'm sure . . ."

///There are worse things, and you are the only one I would want to be paired with for eternity.///

///Yugi: Which I now am. Forever apart.///

///Atem: Forever together. Sorry, Yugi. But? This wouldn't be an offer without reason.///

///Yugi: It's okay, Atem. I'll choose it./// "Bastet? We want to talk about the body deal now." He probably should have spoke louder, but Bastet in her cat disguise showed up next to him.

"Atem wants it. He usually doesn't ask for a lot, so I guess, if it makes him feel better, we'll do it."

Bastet nodded. "Calendar will be of your world. Seven days. One day each week, everyone will have their own. Soon after, only one will be used each day. Do you understand this?"

"So it isn't really switching every six hours?" It was 23 out of 24 hours as himself or in Atem's body most times? "That might make things easier or harder."

"It will only change if you take this deal. The First Tear of Ra must take the deal, but it would be beneficial if everyone took it," Bastet insisted.

"Okay." Atem wanted it. Atem even saved Téa. "Please make it happen then."

Téa yelled upstairs. "Don't be alarmed," Bastet said to him. "She saw an extra bed appear before her with Masika's body in it resting. In your room, is now the same thing. Make sure every six hours you are in the bed for the best transitions between. The scratchy feeling you each will feel in each other's bodies will eventually go away. I will have to offer this option to Bakura now."

"How are we supposed to live like this?" Yugi couldn't help himself. "I'd just . . . I'd rather be the one fighting."

"Sometimes, people just need to pay when others can't, to help save the world," Bastet actually answered him with a degree of sympathy. "While payment feels like punishment, it might not always feel that way. Be at peace with your new lives. Be thankful you have some choice. In the other world, other things were lost that cannot be restored even with more power. People you knew. People you loved. The other Yugi would almost do anything to switch places with you right now. Treasure your grandfather, human. The battle they wage involves so much more than cards."

Then, she was gone. Yugi just stood there. Atem didn't say anything. He just stood there, not moving, not really noticing anything or watching any amount of time.

Thinking. Their bodies would be needed for power. Would Téa and Masika choosing them give them their bodies and Bakura's would be used for the payment? Would it throw them into more mischief for the rest of their lives? What did it have to do with light and dark? With card fusion?

Time just sort of moved by. Grandpa moved by them over to the fridge to get some food. He went by him again and almost up the stairs, before he called out to him. "Huh?"

"I've been asking my grandson if he's okay?" Grandpa said to him.

"Oh." Yugi didn't know what to say. ///Yugi: Treasure my grandfather. Did he die in the other world? Was he killed? The power can't restore him, so was he dead before it all happened?///
"Um. Téa and Masika are going to have something to do with light and dark. So. Whoever

they pick will be involved. We don't know for bad or good. It looks like being stuck with each other might be our eternity."

"What?"

"Yeah. Goddesses. Fusion. Stuff. Atem kind of stopped talking." He must have been trying to think too.

Grandpa moved right over toward him. "What and how?"

"Gods. Another universe needed help. Since we offered ourselves, we are the help. Something to do with Kaiba too. Bastet was just so vague."

Yugi watched as Grandpa had him follow him and sit down on a chair. He didn't ask for a lot of details, he was more interested in hugging his grandson.

"I think . . . I think I really need to talk to Téa."

"I think you need to take some time for yourself before approaching either of them," Grandpa recommended. "You don't know whether a choice is good or bad? Whether it could restore your body or make you an even bigger servant?"

///Atem: Yes, Yugi. Neither of us should approach Téa or Masika right now. They should bond with each other, to sort out their own feelings. So should we. This has to be some kind of puzzle. A game. Gods and goddesses love to play games, there is an answer somewhere. Perhaps we can find out more from Kaiba.///

///Yugi: I always wanted a life with Téa. I always dreamed of her coming back to me and settling down with me. If she chooses me, does that mean we are always bonded no matter what?/// Yugi looked toward his Grandpa. ///Yugi: I don't know if the other me got that, but I think I have something he would have wanted.///

///Atem: Yes, Yugi. The way Bastet phrased it, I'm sure something happened to Grandpa.///

///Yugi: Yeah, I know. But? Téa might choose Bakura instead because of Masika. And you, how about you?///

///Atem: Me?///

///Yugi: It's hard enough accepting that we can't break apart. If this bonds us together with them for the rest of their life. How are we going to handle that?///

Ah. Atem didn't speak back right away. ///Atem: I don't know."///

///Yugi: I don't want the girl of my dreams to go to another person. I don't know if getting chosen is good or bad. It sounds more like it's good. But what if this shoves everyone

together in one body?///

///Atem: Yes, Yugi. I have thought of that too. Fusion cards of light and dark, with a promise not to combine the First Tear of Ra. Joining everyone's spirit in one body but remain separate, it would fit the riddle.///

///Yugi: I want to be with Téa. I don't really want to share a body with her, I want to use her body. I mean, not like that! Well? Oh.///

///Atem: Yes, I get it Yugi. It could be very bad. In context of the puzzle hints, getting chosen feels like it's the bad decision.///

///Yugi: Then again, if it really does just keep Téa in my life for all time. But not the same body. But it didn't say that. Do we get our own if we are chosen? I wish I knew! What do you think, Atem?///

///Atem: My answer would not change any facts.///

///Yugi: Atem? I need to know what you really think.///

///Atem: Sure, yes, why not? Stuck in one body, watching over a Game Shop with two incessant other people in our rooms. It would be madness if that's the choice, Yugi!///

///Yugi: Ouch.///

///Atem: You wanted real words, I gave you real words. Here are some more. If it were just me, I would hand them straight to the Bakuras. Masika likes the one I find repulsive, and Téa could learn to handle our friend Bakura, he is gentle and sweet.///

///Yugi: Just hand them over?!///

///Atem: To avoid the risk of getting stuck with two others! I do not mind you, Yugi, you are a comfort. I have always paired well with you, and now it makes sense why. Their spirits are not ours though. They will be an absolute itch! If it were just me. It is not just me.///

///Yugi: I don't know if it's fusion into one body. I just want Téa to stay in my life. Both of us can't walk away happy with this one.///

///Atem: Agreed, Yugi. Ultimately, it is the First Tears of Ra who will decide.///

Destined Phone Call

Joey kept going on tournaments. Kept trying to keep tabs on Skeezy at them, and kept trying to run into Mai. Skeezy acted like he was no threat, even let them talk back and forth. Within his presence or not.

Now, he was at week four since the incident with Téa. "Fancy seeing you here, Mai."

"Yep. You know Skeezy likes the coolest tournaments," she said offhand. "Joey. You gotta quit this."

"Nah, I'm never quitting." Joey just smirked. "I love the game too much, I'm never gonna get tired of it." He knew what she meant, but he would never give up trying to get her out. Even if she did go through that so-called wedding, he wouldn't call it quits.

Mai just sighed. "So? How are things with the switching spirits?"

Oh. "Masika wants the Bakuras. Téa probably wants Yugi and Atem, but Atem isn't into joining more people. He tries to ignore that, and he says that Bandit Bakura is the same way, but yeah. Tea and Masika themselves aren't into it either. No one knows if being chosen is good or not. No gods or nothing coming out with any details. Same crappy standstill."

"Mm." Mai's response felt weird. "The Bakura that was Yugi's friend was so sweet, and so is Yugi Muto. Either of them should consider themselves lucky."

Lucky? "That ain't the sort of thing you would say Mai. What's up?"

"I need you to really give up on this," Mai said to Joey. "I'm not moving anymore, and I'm gonna really try and get married in a few months."

What?! "Are you kidding, Mai?! Why are you pressing it faster?"

"Because. Skeezy wanted heirs." She played with a non-used straw. She opened it up and spun it around lightly. "He's ecstatic about it."

An heir? Ecstatic? Wait. "You're pregnant?"

"Yeah." She put the straw down. "He's thrilled."

An heir? "Well."

"It's over, Joey. Nail in the coffin. I'm not leaving Skeezy and putting this kid in Jeopardy no matter what."

"Nah." He had to let her know now. Most likely, it probably wasn't, but now he had no choice. "It might be Skeezy's. But . . ."

She looked offended. "Might? What do you take me for, Joey Wheeler?! I don't like or trust the guy, but I'm not gonna fool around like that!"

"Well, I mean. Okay, Mai, I have to tell ya something." Joey took a deep breath. "That God's Brew stuff was pretty potent, and-" She was walking off. "Mai!" Dangit. "It might not have brunette hair!" He tried to go after her.

"I'm not in the mood for jokes, Joey. And a hair one to boot? It's none of your business whether I'm naturally blonde or not," she said as she kept marching away. "Just give up, don't you get it?"

"Don't you get it?" He couldn't say what it could be out loud, if Skeezy's men were around they could screw over Mai. "Will you just talk to me?"

Like he thought, one of Skeezy's men came over and pushed him back some. "She's done talking. You know the rules, you can only talk to her, if she wants to talk. Knock it off."

Joey didn't know what to do, but he did notice a cat that looked like Tea's pet cat strolled past the guard. He knew from talking to Yugi and Atem that the goddess Bastet had actually pretended to look like that cat. "Oh. There's no reason you'd be here." ///Joey: I really, really hope that cat's got something useful, and ain't just a regular cat that looked like that Ebonnee cat. Joey Wheeler could really use some help right now. Really, from anybody!///

Then he noticed a note on the ground by his foot. Gold paper. Fancy script. On it?

A number. He pulled out his phone as he started to leave the area. Maybe someone was throwing Joey Wheeler some help after all?

"Trust is important." The cat spoke.

Mai turned and looked at the cat as it came toward her. "A talking cat?"

"You will get out of this situation soon," the cat said as it rubbed against her leg. "You must trust in the goddess Bastet and Sekhmet. We will not leave you here for long."

"Goddess?" Mai just stared at the cat. "I don't understand."

"The way out will come soon," the cat promised.

"No, no, no, no," Mai corrected it. "I've got nothin' to do with the Egyptian thing of everybody else goin' on!"

"Yes, you do. You have a price to pay as well." The cat licked its paw.

"Why? Why would I? I'm not related to anybody that's a part of that," she protested. "I got a ton of my own problems right now!"

"Joey Wheeler is Yugi and Atem's best friend," the cat told her. "That has consequences."

What? "Just 'cause I talked to Joey for a bit, you're gonna make me pay for something?"

"Connections," the cat said as it leaped onto a bed and went out the window.

Just, left. That cat just up and left.

Oh! As if she didn't have enough to deal with.

Kaiba's Ride

"Serenity was a lovely lady last month, wasn't she?"

Seto looked beside him in his limousine. Strange. It was a cat talking to him, but it somehow felt- "Sorry! Where's the lion?!" He felt himself cringe from feeling so frightened. It wasn't a feeling he often felt. He grabbed his finger unconsciously as his eyes darted from side to side. Not long ago, Yugi had already asked if he'd met a goddess. He laughed in the phone, thinking Yugi was having some midlife crisis. The thought was no longer funny.

"As long as you listen to me, Sekhmet will not come," the cat said.

The cat. ///Seto: This, I remember this. Yes. Bastet. Play nice with kitty and the lion won't take my arm./// "What is it that I can assist you with?"

"I am here on behalf of Sekhmet. That way you have a chance of keeping your arm," Bastet said. "You haven't given out any of the cards yet."

Oh yeah. "I wasn't allowed to remember, and I don't know where they are even-"

"Hip pocket."

Of course. He reached in his hip pocket and saw them all. They were all still decorated on both sides. On one of the cards though, the name of Serenity was on it. "That's not good."

"So, I will tell you a little more about the payment. For one, we can't just make another dimension pay for another. It's unfair. However, we need payment, and so we have been triggering events to make sure you all receive what you need to give."

"You can't enforce it though?" Odd. "Then how do you make us willingly give payment to you? Especially when you won't share what's supposed to happen with anyone else?" Speaking of which, what was his payment supposed to be again? He stared at his own card. "In all of these cards, I only have one. I'm hoping that's lucky."

"We can predict possible payments, and we know some that must be paid eventually. As for making sure you pay? Without paying, no world is saved in any universe. No world is saved, you and all of your friends and loved ones are destroyed. You are defeated without a fight, in

the most pathetic way possible. Plus?" Bastet licked her paw. "We have other ways of persuasion. However, you need to be ready with your payment in order to offer it."

"I remember you said even Yugi had to pay last time." Kaiba was interested in that detail. "How is that going to happen if you can't enforce anything?"

"Hm. You are very good with your question," Bastet said as she wiggled her tail. "We had him trigger it himself. It is now being paid, and plans to continue more are under way."

She wasn't going to give him any details about them. "What about for me? Do you have anything to do with Serenity Wheeler? Her name is on a card."

"Most likely," she admitted.

That was not good news. "Are you messing with my mind so I don't remember?" He tried not to moan in frustration. He didn't want to trigger the tiger into coming.

"Most likely. React kindly and listen carefully to your next call if you wish to learn more. Goodbye, Seto Kaiba." She vanished.

Those goddesses. What did they have to do with Serenity Wheeler? Hmm. ///Seto: How do I know her?/// He still didn't know, and from the way she left, he wouldn't be able to call her up and ask. He didn't want to bother her again. Unless it was truly important.

Was it truly important? ///Seto: Serenity Wheeler. It still sounds so familiar. Wheeler . . . Wheeler . . . Wheeler . . . it sounds annoying. Grating.///

As his phone rang, he remembered what the cat said. He'd need to pay attention to this call. "Seto Kaiba."

"Seto Kaiba? Whoah, that's crazy it's you of all people. I found your number on a piece of paper. I know this is strange but please don't hang up!"

Normally he would have. People asking for help wasn't something he wanted to deal in. He needed to learn more though. "Who is this?"

"Joey Wheeler, but don't hang up."

Okay. "Serenity Wheeler's brother?"

"Uh, yeah? I got some problems with Mai Valentine. You see I? I know you aren't going to believe but I'm really desperate. She's marrying a sleazy crime boss I've been tracking for years, and she can't get out of it. I've been trying to help her, but we both got mixed up with some tough God's Brew and I ended up with her. I crawled out like nothing happened, but she's pregnant. I don't know if it's mine or not, but I can't just leave her there. Seriously, he's killed with no problem. People disappear all the time with him."

None of it was important to him, except two words that stood out. "God's Brew?"

"Yeah, it was a pricy drink of Skeezy's. Threw me for a loop."

"God's Brew. That's tasty." Expensive, tasty, and rare. The chances anyone just had it when they were having troubles and calling? It's time to find out who makes it. "You want me to help her out?"

"Yeah. I know, I'm desperate, I'll do anything!"

Hmmm. "How are you at finding out things?"

"Pretty good, I used to be a cop and I was going to be a detective. Things just didn't work out."

That was fine for him. Finding out things in a non-official way were just the kind of people he liked. Maybe he could use him?

"Can you help, Kaiba?"

Right, the pregnancy crime boss problem. "I'll think about it. In the meantime, I have an address you should check out. It's what little I could find about God's Brew."

"That alcohol, huh? If I do that, will you help?"

"Maybe." He hung up.

Kaiba Visits With Some Cards

Hollywood, California

"Hey, Duke!"

Huh? That was a familiar voice. Half annoying, half nostalgic. Duke Devlin looked between an alley and saw an old friend. "Joey Wheeler?" He smiled and went toward him. "Wow, I haven't seen you in a long time. How have you been?"

Then, he felt himself getting grabbed and pulled up by his shirt. "What the hell, Man?!"

"What's God's Brew?" Joey didn't look friendly at all anymore. He looked like he was ready to beat him up. "Your new business venture, pretty expensive and pretty flashy. Pretty sure there's something not on the up and up with it!"

Whoah. "My God's Brew?" How would he ever know anything about it. "Are you still friends with Yugi?"

"I'm not here for idle chat, tell me about your God's Brew!" Joey demanded. "Last time you were all into dice games, and now you are brewing up luxury alcohol?"

"I don't brew it up," he said. "Well, I mean my company mixes it. How'd you even know?"

"I got friends with connections," he said. "Sometimes, you just strike gold. Now tell me."

"You really won't believe me." He felt Joey about ready to attack. "It was because of this cat and tiger!"

"Cat and tiger?" Joey actually seemed to listen. "Were they a talking cat and tiger?"

The words could be Joey teasing him, but Joey looked sincere. Maybe they messed with him too? "Yeah, they do."

"Okay, go on."

"They were like goddesses. Egyptian. I'm not kidding," Duke promised him. "They told me my role was to provide a drink called God's Brew, and that it would be responsible for saving the world. I didn't want to believe, but the tiger looked really hungry."

"Yeah, that tiger is real hungry, ask Yugi." Joey sat him down. "What's in it?"

"This special mixture mostly, comes pre-packaged and labeled as a special alcohol falsely," he admitted. "I am using the funds to work on my games. It's not real popular, Joey, it's too

expensive. They wouldn't let me drop the price or anything on it."

"So only the elite can get it?" Skeezy and Kaiba. "Man? What the hell." He completely let go of him. "Who else is getting it?"

"Senators and people in charge of stuff?" Duke reckoned. "The cat and tiger control the distribution more than I do. For some reason, certain people start to change their minds or do things they don't normally do when they consume it. It's like drinking way too much in a night and the next morning completely blanking out, but like a hundred times worse. I've seen this group of three business professionals that ordered one bottle to celebrate a new merger. Next morning, they were found waving their clothes off the empire state building and were completely insane. They're still locked up to this day, it never wore off."

Damn. "That is powerful." So, those goddesses were in charge of that stuff?

"Even the bottle itself? It just beckons people. Someone just needs to be near it, and they get this feeling like they want to try it. When they do, it tastes like some nostalgic thing they love the best in the world."

"Yeah." Joey couldn't say much more. "I gotta go then. Sorry about jumping you, Duke Devlin."

"Ah, I could have taken ya if I had to," he said falsely. Really, Duke didn't fight much anymore, he was a business person. He watched Joey walk off, wondering what God's Brew had done to him?

Game Shop

Kaiba entered into Yugi Muto's Grandfathers' shop. Serenity Wheeler must have something to do with the Egyptian connection. After a strange call from a Joey Wheeler some time ago, he started to look into things himself too.

Now he was ready to see what Yugi knew. "Old man."

Yugi's grandpa raised his head from a game he was looking at. "Seto Kaiba? I'm surprised to see you here. Yugi tried to reach you. It was hard to even get your number, what with the whole duel monsters school now. When he did, you didn't help at all."

"I laughed in the phone and hung up." Eh. "I didn't remember. I do now. Where is he?" Kaiba asked as he came closer. "I want to know if he knows someone named Serenity Wheeler." The old man seemed out of it.

"Of course he does, so do I," the old man said. "That's Joey's sister."

"Joey . . . Wheeler." The guy who called him. He knew him that well?

"Of course Joey Wheeler," the old man said. He looked at him strangely. "You remember Joey Wheeler, don't you?"

The guy who called. "How exactly do I know Joey Wheeler?" He heard the sound of someone coming downstairs. Yugi?

"You don't remember Joey?" Yugi stood there, staring straight at Kaiba. "You would never forget Joey Wheeler. Both of you tried to ruin each other's pride several times. He placed second in Duelist Kingdom, and he lasted onboard for your Battle City Duels."

Hmmm. Kaiba knew he should really notice that. Also, Téa was there behind Yugi. "Gardener is back?"

"You remember Téa, but you don't remember Joey?" Yugi looked at him like he was strange. "So you do remember the goddesses I tried to talk to you about it before you laughed at me and accused me of having a mental health crisis?"

"Did I hit a sore spot, you don't have to be so descriptive of the moment. I was there." Damn. He couldn't risk messing with Yugi right now. "Joey is Serenity Wheeler's brother, right?"

"Yes." His yes sounded strange.

"Yes. The main point I am here is not because of this Joey," Kaiba told Yugi. "I know there is something between Serenity Wheeler and I. A very important connection, and I am not able to remember it." He held up her card. "I know she's gotta have something to do with a cursed payment."

"Serenity Wheeler was on your ship in the Battle City finals with us," Yugi tried again. "You weren't nice to her or her brother."

Oh. Sounded like him. But? "Why is my memory being compromised still?"

"Kaiba," Yugi said as he came in closer with Téa. Téa however stayed further behind. "You are not the only one having weird occurrences happen. Yugi and I, while another spirit and Téa, have been cursed."

Kaiba watched as Yugi took off his rope, but the puzzle remained there. "What?"

"It's growing from Yugi's chest," Yugi said, "and I am not Yugi. The woman beside me." He nodded to try and get her to approach closer. "Is Masika, another spirit."

No way. "Pharaoh?" Insane. Insane! "So, they did punish the dead." The dead. "Sekhmet."

"Sekhmet." Yugi grew closer. "You have met them too."

"Sekhmet is one bad kitty that you do not want to mess around with," Kaiba revealed. "Deal with Bastet. Don't piss her off, or a lion will put you in unbelievable amounts of pain." Yes. The more he thought about it, the more he remembered. He pointed at Yami. "You are living

half lives now, aren't you? All of you. I get it now." He whipped out the cards and plucked some that had weird names on it. "Light Masika, Dark Masika, Light Yugi and Dark Yugi. Here, take your whole lot." He tossed four to Masika, and two to Atem.

Masika caught the cards and looked at one.

Yami caught the cards and looked at one.

Ooh, that expression. "What do the cards hold for you?"

Yami put the card away. "We are switching bodies almost every other day. This is the only information I knew before I got this. Thank you, Seto Kaiba."

Yeah, his eyes and expression didn't look thankful at all. "Thought so. Yugi was never into tanning salons when I knew him." Ah, he'd tease later. What was his own punishment dealing with Serenity Wheeler? "You aren't the only ones involved." Bastet said it. He almost wanted to laugh it off. It was almost comical. A situation he would never find himself in. He remembered that much. "Serenity Wheeler . . . I'm supposed to . . ."

"Bastet revealed your name after Sekhmet bit off Yugi's hand," Yami admitted. "It is back, but we were offered to ask questions for a few minutes in return."

"Knowledge for a limb, sounds familiar," Kaiba said. "What information was Yugi's hand worth?"

"For you? Nothing. For us? Nothing but puzzles and frustration."

Hm. Kaiba started to notice his card finally changing. It had a large blue eyes white dragon on it. ///Azure. The next wielder of the Blue Eyes White Dragon. Daughter of Seto Kaiba and Serenity Wheeler?! Will you sacrifice her power to save all of reality?/// "No!" What? It didn't even stop there! "What? What?!"

"It's . . ." Atem tried to say something. "It's not easy to read your payment, is it?"

Kaiba's nostrils flared as he stared and read the card. "So another me, needs more power? Than they already had?" He scrunched his other hand together, trying to contain his anger.

"Kaiba." Atem came down further. "Payments are never easy."

"Don't give me that!" He didn't want to hear it. "Where is Serenity Wheeler? I need to talk to her," he said as he gritted his teeth. "Now."

"Oh, not in that state," Yugi's grandfather said to Kaiba. "No, no, you must settle down first."

Seto didn't have time for this! He took his own card and shoved it right in the spirit's face. "Tell me!"

Yami was reading the whole card, taking more time than Kaiba did. "The other you is in danger. The other me is in danger. The other Yugi is in danger."

"Damn it, just tell me where she lives?!" Kaiba showed him another card. "See this one?" He showed it off. It kept changing names on it. "This is your secondary payment, or it's someone called Dark Bakura's. I also have a changing one for Yugi. Now, *someone* is going to get this card to hold. Who will it be?"

"More?" Atem looked almost as angry. "We are already-!" He caught himself from saying more. Shouting at goddesses would never end well. He looked at Kaiba, gave him the numbers to an address, and took the card as Kaiba got out of the little shop.

"Atem? You okay?" Grandpa asked Atem. "Both of you don't look so well."

Atem glanced toward Masika. She had three cards in her hand, and one that looked like it was revealed. He could guess what hers said, since one of his had been revealed too. "We made the sacrifice."

She nodded. "We must keep it." She looked at the other card with her name. "This won't reveal itself to me."

Atem looked at the other cards. One was for Yugi, and another one was Yugi changing to Bakura when he moved it around. He also had the one Kaiba showed him that had Dark Yugi and Dark Bakura on it.

A part of him had thought, like in the past, they could find some way out. But, with the card. Even if they did, they couldn't take it anymore. ///Yugi. Please come back soon.///

Is Choice Good or Bad?

Bakura bursted into the Game Shop. This revelation just learned? Well, he wanted to have it all worked out precisely as it should be. And? And he also just wanted to talk to apparently the First Tear of Ra. "Hello?"

"Hello." Yugi's grandfather was right there. "Everyone is lying down in bed. They all have bodies, and they are using them, just lying down."

Oh. Well, his presence got them up. He could see Yugi coming down and heading his way. "Hello, Yugi. Um? I heard the strange news."

"Yeah." Yugi spoke softly while Atem was starting to come down.

"Well? I just thought we should have a small discussion," Ryou Bakura pointed out. "Because-"

"There's no way!" Dark Bakura had pushed his way through the door. "Where is Masika? She is not joining with Yugi or Atem like that!"

"There is no real answer to what happens once chosen," Yugi tried to correct him.

"Yes. Well." Bakura fidgeted as Téa and Masika started to come downstairs. "Hello?"

"Not really in the mood," Téa answered.

"I know, but, in these strange cases, I think we'll all do better sharing our feelings and thoughts about the matter," Light Bakura stated. "Would you like to go first, Téa?"

"No," she answered.

"Oh. No, I guess not." Hm. "Well? I just want to say that I don't know either Masika or Téa very well. We were good friends when we were younger. I don't know if that means anything, but I feel like I might not be a good fit-"

"You're the perfect fit," Dark Bakura complained. "You fit me just fine."

"Bakura?" Masika asked. "I think it only makes sense it should be the two of you."

"No, it doesn't make sense!" Yugi suddenly yelled. "For you, but not for Téa. No one decides for her."

"She'd be . . ." Masika looked toward Téa, who suddenly looked worried. "I vote for the Bakuras."

"Well, I vote for . . ." Téa paused. "I don't know. I don't even know if choosing is good or bad." She looked toward Yugi. "Bakura talked at least?"

Right. "I think that I would do whatever my friend needed from me," Yugi said as he looked toward her.

That was sweet. It would make things easier if Atem followed his footsteps.

Dark Bakura scoffed. "What about you, Pharaoh Atem? You've only ever been in Yugi, do you think you'd like to fuse with two more people?"

Oh, the Pharaoh's answer was clearly in his eyes. He really wanted to kick them out. "I'd . . ."

"We should all share how we feel about it. About every aspect," Bakura encouraged. "Like? I think it would be nice to have nicer company in oneself, and to get time off. But I imagine having control for . . ." He counted in his fingers. "Maybe six hours out of 24 hours wouldn't quite be my thing? If that's what it is?"

Atem glanced toward Yugi. He looked toward Téa and toward Masika, though Masika was not looking toward him. "I follow Yugi's decision."

"No," Téa said, almost in a commanding tone. "You speak Atem. You get half say, as much say as Yugi or anyone else."

Atem glanced back at Yugi again. "I don't think anyone here would be fond of the idea right away of sharing one body, if it is that," he tried to correct himself. "I don't need much company."

Bakura watched Yugi looking terrible in the corner.

"But I will do what is necessary and I would rather it be I and Yugi before it was the foulness of Dark Bakura tainting anything that should be a gift to help others," he said.

Ooh, nice save.

"I don't want to do anything with fusion," Téa admitted. "I wanted to stay in New York and live my life. I don't get a choice."

"This is for another version of us, correct?" Bakura asked. "They said there was no time for them to do it on their own. Is time a concept the gods are worried about?"

"Time?"

"Yes," Light Bakura explained. "They messed around in the past. Do we have to decide the answer quick or do we have a long time? Do the gods travel through time to get the payment?"

"Like years?" Téa asked anxiously. "Like maybe years and then Bastet just takes the power back in time? It's already going to a different dimension. Maybe time traveling isn't out of the question with a goddess like her."

Oh. They didn't know. Well? "Bastet took the finger for something that she said Joey was in debt for. It wasn't planned it seems, but it balanced it out." Maybe? "Are there any gods that

might be merciful enough to tell us?" He looked around.

"Finger."

"No way, don't come near us!" Yugi exploded toward the voice. He must have had a bad experience with whoever owned that voice.

There came another voice. "Decide in three months but make progress in the decision now. Go on dates, Mortals."

Dates? Why would there be dating involved? "Why do we need to date?" Bakura asked. "Also, can we split apart after you get whatever power you need from us? Also, is being chosen good or bad?"

"Whoever the First Tear of Ra chooses will be the one you choose to live your half-lives with, but if we grow weary of the indecision, obviously we will bear more weight to the one you are the closest to. Now no more questions. Next time it will be a finger to get answers." That was the voice he had heard before he got his body back. Sounded quite tired of them. Didn't answer any of Bakura's other questions.

"Light should go with light," Yugi said, "That was probably part of the puzzle. So Téa, you shouldn't have to worry about dating the Bandit King."

Yes, just him and Yugi. Apparently.

"At least. Three months is a decent amount of time to figure it out, I guess," Téa reasoned.

"Hm." Yugi's grandfather seemed almost cheery. "Well, this is pretty exciting."

"Yes, three months," Téa said real firmly while she looked back at Masika. "Things change in three months. Many things can change, give it a chance?"

Oh yes, it was clear Téa still had some connection to Masika. It didn't look like Masika even wanted the months.

"I don't care, no it's not, and I don't care!" Téa yelled at Masika. "Stop it. You already know Atem didn't kill you, so you need to give anything a chance, don't just keep, Masika!"

Ooh yes, a real fight. ///Light Bakura: It seems Masika doesn't want a choice.///

///Dark Bakura: Of course not. Why would she want to spend her life for the one that made mine hell? She'll never cooperate. Yugi's friend should just give up.///

///Light Bakura: Yugi's friends tend to be very determined themselves.///

///Dark Bakura: I am Masika's hero. Atem is still the one that killed her cat and hurt her friend. She won't just give in to that life after a simple game or two.///

"Fine," Téa said almost in exhaustion. "It doesn't make much difference I guess." She crossed her arms. "Bakura? Would you like to try a date to discuss stuff?"

///Dark Bakura: See? That's my Rider.///

"Oh." ///Light Bakura: That is going to really hurt Yugi. He doesn't even date others, she is his eternal crush./// Yugi looked completely defeated, almost looking away and slumping slightly. ///Light Bakura: I just can't hurt Yugi that easy, he should go first./// "Do we have to start first?"

///Dark Bakura: Don't mess it up!///

"Why don't you start with Yugi first?" Bakura recommended. "You two did have a small relationship before you left to New York, right?"

"Well." Téa looked toward Yugi who had straightened himself up completely. "We had a connection, I guess."

"Yeah, so, maybe we should try and date first?" Yugi enthusiastically asked.

" . . ." Téa sucked on her bottom lip like she wasn't sure at all.

"You have to try each option," Light Bakura reminded her. "It's three months. Not that big of a deal to have a date with someone you had a connection to before? You'll probably have several dates."

Téa scratched her head. She looked toward Yugi again. "It doesn't matter who I start with. It doesn't." She sounded tense. "It's just one date, and it's fair, and we can date Bakura next time." She glared at Masika. "Yeah, I know he doesn't. I wasn't talking about him, I was talking about-" She shot her attention to Yugi. "Yes, date, Yugi!"

Masika moved away from her. "It's ridiculous," she almost hissed.

"Date Yugi!" Téa yelled again while she stomped her foot.

"You are dragging out the inevitable," Masika said to her softly.

"Shut up!" Téa covered her ears.

"I am done with words," Masika answered. "Thoth probably has already written this one too."

Téa started to wipe her eyes.

"Nothing is final, and nothing is written," Atem said out loud. "This is three months. Time can change things. Dating Yugi is fine."

"Of course, Greatest Pharaoh of all the Greatest Pharaohs Atem," Masika said as she strolled over toward Dark Bakura, relaxing near his shoulder.

Dark Bakura wrapped his arm around Masika like he'd done it thousands of times. "I have no problem with anything, I've been in worse situations. We could even move to New York so that Téa can keep following her dream."

"Did you just recommend moving to New York?" Bakura asked.

"New York is wonderful, and I will try very hard to learn everything I can to help Téa rise to the stardom she seeks," Masika insisted.

Oh these two were buttering it all up. More and more, it looked like Bakura wasn't going to be able to help Yugi.

"Masika!" Atem actually stepped out from the shadows he had been in. "You were right to tell Téa I said you were a very good actress. You are an excellent actress, and I don't doubt with your ability, you will be able to keep Téa in the spotlight she wanted. However?" He moved closer, swishing the jacket like a cape. "This is far from over. While I'm not fond of sharing a room with others, I've no doubt your 'Dark Bakura' is either. To me, it seems the dark energy's are about the same. This is far from being written by Thoth already."

"Well, we have three months to see who was right, Pharaoh," Dark Bakura said. "Time is getting closer though. We need to return home, Bakura."

"Right," Bakura agreed. He looked toward Téa and Yugi. "Three months is a long time, Atem is right. Everyone should work hard to see what's best."

Masika let Dark Bakura go as he and Bakura left. She refused to look at anyone as she went up the stairs.

"We should all follow suit," Atem said toward Yugi and Téa. "There is no telling which body will be used first."

"Right." Yugi followed up the stairs with Atem. ///Yugi: Thanks, Atem. It really looked like they might just pick the Bakura's right now.///

///Atem: Téa has had your heart since we were teenagers, Yugi, and she still does. I will deal with the results if it means you have her. I am here anyway, I am not allowed to go back.///

///Yugi: But Masika is very, very good at convincing Téa of things. She really doesn't want anything to do with you, Atem. Even after knowing why she really died, she isn't letting up. Do you think that Dark Bakura was more than just a friend? The way she curled up to him and he held her?///

///Atem: Maybe, but she was the one who moved toward him first. He could have known that move. I'm not kidding Yugi, she is an excellent actress. She may have never taken a stage, but I have a feeling her entire life was a stage she played to survive.///

///Yugi: You're probably right. You have to break through that acting then. You have to become more than just basic friends with her. As long as she is more of a friend to Bakura-///

///Atem: I'm mincemeat, I know, Yugi. I have three months to gain a closer relationship. I can't force anything, but the closer we are, the more of a bond we can make.///

They each headed to their bed while Téa parted to her own room without a word.

They each rested their eyes, waiting. ///Yugi: I'm sorry. This was such a messed up thing to do to us. We don't even know if getting picked is good or bad or going to fuse us or anything. It's just? We've always been there for our friends.///

///Atem: We may not be saving the world, Yugi, but-/// "we are doing our part. We must remember that." Atem pulled himself out of bed. "I guess it's mine today." Oh he absolutely knew it was his, he could feel the need to want to possess it.

///Yugi: Why do I feel like I'm covered in peanut butter and syrup?!///

Hm. Good comparison. "You are the spirit in a body that is not yours. Bastet said it will fade in time."

///Yugi: Ah, no wonder you never wanted to come out at first!///

"It will get a little easier," Atem assured him. "Go rest in the soul room."

///Yugi: It's all slime and syrupy feeling.///

Although it was tough knowing how it felt? Atem was also kind of glad Yugi knew finally how it felt now. ///Atem: At least you didn't have to last through entire card games.///

Crush You . . .

Serenity Wheeler's Apartment.

Just tidying the couch. She straightened a pillow. Just fixing the frame. She touched a frame of her picture with her and her brother. It looked crooked, but she made it more crooked. Just fix it again. She fixed it back to how it had been before.

"Serenity, are you okay?" Tristan asked as he got ready for work again. "You don't look good."

Oh no, she could not make him worry. "Hey? Oh. Sorry, Tristan. It's . . ." What to say? He was already understanding enough about the whole accidental cheating thing some time ago. He blamed it on Kaiba, swearing he gave her strong alcohol on purpose. She doubted that, she woke up just fine with clothes on still. It would be strange for anything to have happened.

Not to say something didn't happen, but most likely it didn't. There wasn't an ounce of anger at her, but Tristan was staying closer to her. He was even starting to ask if he should move in.

"Serenity." Tristan just smiled at her. "It's okay. Whatever's wrong, you can tell me. Hope you tell me soon, but you can tell me when you are ready." He gave her a quick kiss. "This isn't still about that Kaiba deception thing, is it? I don't blame you for that."

"No." Yes. Maybe. Serenity was incredibly nervous. It had been weeks since she had her period, and after the Seto Kaiba thing, it left her anxious. ///Serenity: Nothing happened. Clothes were on./// Nerves, just nerves.

She had been with Tristan a couple of times, but only recently. She felt too much guilt to get too close after that strange night. ///This is incredibly stupid. Just go take a test./// No, that was admitting pregnancy could even be a possibility! ///You had clothes on, Serenity. Don't let your nerves take you down.///

It couldn't be a possibility. It was not . . . gonna . . . "There's probably just something medically wrong with me. I should be going to the doctor to check out what kind of condition I have." Because it couldn't be pregnancy.

Fix the cushion again. Just tidying the couch.

"I know you were in and out of doctors as a kid," Tristan told her, "but you've been great for a long time. I think you are nervous about something. You don't . . . you say you don't remember-"

"I don't remember at all!" She said quickly.

"Okay." Tristan looked worried. "I forgive you, but if you have tremendous guilt that won't go away because of what happened? You might need some more space. I've been trying to hold onto you even tighter lately, but . . . maybe you need the opposite?"

"I don't know if I do," she admitted.

"Hey, it's okay," he promised. "I promise. Tristan Taylor is right here, day or night." He gave her one last kiss. "I'll see you later. You make the next date when you are ready. Okay? Whether it's in a month or you wanna get spontaneous tonight."

"Okay." She smiled at him. That wasn't it either, she wasn't feeling smothered. Just worried. So worried.

As he left for work, she did feel a small amount of relief. ///That's all it is. Stress. It messes me up real bad too. It's all just stress.///

The doorbell rang. Yes, more distraction. "Coming," she said as she came straight to the door. It was probably a friend.

When she opened that door, she wasn't prepared to see . . . "Shit."

"Not the first time I heard that when someone opened the door for me," Seto Kaiba said to her. "I need to talk to you."

///I don't want to!/// "I'm fine. I told you, I have a boyfriend. It was just a fling a month ago, right? Even you said it was just a thing. What do you want then?"

"I'm curious about something." He put both his hands against the sides of the doorway, half like he wanted to break them, and half like it was supposed to support him. "Anything new happen since our night together?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You had your period. Right?"

Why? Why would he ask that? How? "Why would you even . . .?" How would he ever even guess?

"Egyptian gods suck." Kaiba's words straight to her. "Another version of us are helping to save the world."

"What?" That didn't make any sense.

"A parallel version of us is saving their world," Kaiba said again. "Ask fucking Yugi to explain it if you want. While they do, we have to pay the price."

"I?" A parallel universe. "A price?"

"I always wondered how God's Brew worked. Such an exorbitant price. So addictive. Had to have been made by the gods themselves." Kaiba stared straight at her. "Our price to pay." He tossed a card, about the size of a duel card. "Is Azure."

Azure? As she picked up the card, it started to dissolve and revealed a picture with . . .
"What?!" Oh no! He was kidding, right? He was kidding. He was kidding? "You are kidding! This is a sick joke, right?"

"Yugi and Téa Gardener have spirits taking half of their lives. That's their price to pay. Those spirits are being forced to live for them. That's their price to pay. I don't know what the others are," Kaiba said to her as he sighed. "Let me in."

"You're crazy." No. "It just can't be."

"You are Joey Wheeler's younger sister." He remembered who he had been. "I've seen you. You were on my ship. I even forgot that moron brother of yours. It was the work of the Egyptian gods." He stood up straight and tossed her a pregnancy test.

It was now in her hands. The test she didn't want to take. It was the biggest test of her life.

"Go pee on the stick," Kaiba told her. "Confirm what the card already knows."

"Well, maybe it's wrong. We never did anything, we just talked."

"If it's not, then that just means we have to keep at it. To save the world, we clearly have to have a child," he said. "It's on the back. I have to help save the other me."

"Why? Wh-why would some baby with me be helping to give some kind of payment?" It was absurd.

"I don't know, but Egyptian gods based a lot of things off fertility. New life. Creation of other gods," Kaiba said to her. "Just take the test."

It was wrong. It was stupid. It was a waste of time. "Don't touch anything." She just wanted to command him while she went to the bathroom. He could probably afford anything she had with ease. Still, it was her home and her stuff.

He was not invited.

Kaiba stayed close to the bathroom door. He already knew how this would play out. Giving him a whole month before addressing him again. Not letting him remember her or Joey Wheeler. ///Seto: Yeah. There will be a new little Kaiba on the way.///

He started to make calls on his cell phone. He had already got a head start on everything, knowing what would occur, he just had them all waiting for his final word.

Kaiba was many things, a bastard to several people, but he wouldn't leave a bastard. He wouldn't let his son or daughter go. It was his blood. His responsibility, his family, just like Mokuba. He also wouldn't let it fester around with a mother who lived in a simple apartment that had a job that only covered her living expenses. Nor would he have anyone question it's upbringing.

It would never be considered a bastard. He would never allow it.

When she came out of the bathroom, she turned to face him. "I'm-."

"I'll finish that thought for you," Kaiba instructed. He took her hand and slid a ring on her finger. "The future Mrs. Seto Kaiba."

She looked at what he slid on her finger. It was a ring. "Are you kidding? I have a boyfriend and I'm not pregnant." She held up the stick to prove it.

"I won't let my family be torn down in reputation in any way," Kaiba said. "You are moving in with Mokuba and I, and we'll raise it together, married."

What kind of fantasy world was he living in? "No. I'm not even pregnant."

"No. That's a charming word," Seto Kaiba responded. "I don't hear it very much. Probably because everyone wants something in this world. I can make anything happen. Just name it."

He was trying to buy her off? "I don't want anything."

"Everyone wants something. If not you, then someone else you know. They want something," Kaiba said. "That's how the world works. Figure out what you want and I'll take care of it. Then we'll load up anything you want to keep and move it into the Kaiba residence."

Ugh? He just wasn't getting it! "I'm not pregnant!"

"Which doesn't really mean anything because you need to get pregnant. The outcome of what must happen doesn't change."

Okay. Some goddess needed her to get pregnant with him, but it was just? "I have a boyfriend." His expression still said he didn't care. "No, I can't just jump into any of this. Even if there needs to be a baby, it doesn't mean you have to marry me."

"He or she will see me every morning, in our home," Kaiba corrected her. "I won't allow you to 'just get pregnant'. Think hard."

Serenity felt offended by that. She was trying to be nice. Sure, she had heard about stuff happening lately to the others. Joey kept her in the loop. But? ///Not me. I'm not a part of anything. Joey is, or his friends. Nothing ever involves me.///

Since Kaiba wasn't moving, Serenity left her apartment. She stayed over on the side of the stairs. She looked over every once in awhile to see if he left.

There was nothing Kaiba would consider of value to take from her apartment, and she couldn't deal with his all or nothing options.

Finally, he seemed to get the hint she wouldn't follow his command and left. He went out toward the elevator. His attitude still seemed to be the same. Thank goodness she never got to know him that well.

Game Shop Some Time Later . . .

Mokuba waved at Yugi's spirit they all called Atem. "Hey, is Masika here?"

Atem gestured to the back.

That was normal. Masika didn't like to be in Atem's presence much. She was in the back counting things. "Hi, Masika."

Masika waved to him. "Mokuba, hello."

"Can you do me a huge favor?" Mokuba asked her. "It's a really big favor." He wouldn't sugarcoat it. Kaiba had tried several things with Serenity, without getting aggressive about it. None of it worked though. They would have to start getting meaner if he didn't find someone she connected to. "Please?"

Masika came toward him. "What is it?"

"Come with me in my car and head to Serenity Wheeler's with me?" he asked. "In exchange, I'll tell you a secret Kaiba's been hiding."

"More secrets?" Atem's voice wasn't far. "What I wonder are those?"

Shoot. Damn. Atem was a great guy. He really was, but every time he was around Masika, she just clammed up so fast. "Nothing to do with you," Mokuba told him. "It's a secret, and it's only for her, and only if she helps." He took her hand. "What do you say?"

Great, now she didn't want to say. Mokuba knew Atem was trying to get along. Yugi said so, he really was trying. Masika was just . . . not comfortable having a casual time with Atem. Too much past friction.

"I know that Kaiba wanted information on Serenity," Atem said to Mokuba. "I wonder if it has something to do with that?"

"I want Serenity and Masika to have a conversation," Mokuba said to him. "That's all." He better not try to use his power to make her spill secrets. "And you better not use your power over her to make her spill secrets!"

"I wouldn't use power over her." Atem seemed like he was bored over that statement. "I use nothing. If she talks, I'm The Greatest Pharaoh that cannot be Greatest Pharaoh or 'Sir'."

Huh? "What do you mean?"

"Tea dictated she could not call me Greatest Pharaoh," Atem said. "She couldn't accomplish that easily though. At least she is down to 'Sir' now." He leaned a little to the left from Mokuba. "Atem is still preferred, but not demanded, Masika."

Yeah. That look? Atem was a good guy. The only thing he wanted was to be treated like a normal person. To talk to Masika like a normal person. It would take a lot longer than a month though, Atem was involved in hurting her accidentally in the past. Even if he didn't know he killed her cat, and he didn't know about the curse of Kul Elna. It was hard to get past that kind of bitterness. "You'll get there, Atem," he encouraged him. "It'll just take time, don't push it."

"Oh, The Greatest Pharaoh who isn't called The Greatest Pharaoh will never not push," Masika said. Almost offhily?

Yeah, that was definitely not in a nice way. "Is everything okay between you two?"

"We all have our own secrets," Atem answered. "You don't need to worry about us knowing Kaiba's secret, we already know. We saw his card."

"Really?"

"Yes. I don't know what you'd want Masika for, but your business is your business." Atem just moved away back to the front of the store.

Mokuba looked back toward her. He didn't know their secrets, but at least she could come peacefully. "Please come with me? For me?"

Masika nodded to Mokuba. "Sir, may I leave with Mokuba?"

"Of course," Atem told her. "Stay out as long as you wish."

She bowed toward Atem again and then quickly headed for the door. Mokuba was right behind her.

Atem watched them both leave, while Joey was coming back in. "A game?" Poor Joey. Without a plan, Joey tended to be more miserable lately. Today, he had an extra depressive flare.

"Nah." Joey's voice was soft. "You only got to ask questions, right? Of the gods and stuff?"

Hm. That didn't sound good. "Yes, only questions for us."

"So, they didn't volunteer anything else?" Joey asked.

"Nothing I can reveal yet to you Joey."

"Then did . . . wait, did you know?" Joey was definitely angry. "You couldn't know, you would tell me!"

His friend was very on edge. "It was not our place." The goddesses would share nothing of others.

"Screw not your place, yes it was!" he demanded. "I had the right to know about Mai!"

Mai? "What's wrong with Mai?" Atem asked.

"You mean, you don't know about that?" Joey asked. "Oh. Sorry, Atem. I jumped the gun." He closed his eyes and just hung his head. "I don't know much. Just, a cat like Ebonnee showed up when I was talking to her. I found out . . ." He wasn't speaking easily. "I'm scum."

"You found out you were scum?" That made no sense, Joey was not scum at all.

"I am. I? I had this stuff called God's Brew one time when I was talking to Mai about escaping," Joey confessed. "I woke up in her bed with her. I didn't want to frighten her away, she was already spooked enough to take a deal to get out. I crawled out of bed and acted like I slept on the ground."

God's Brew. "It's doubtful it was your fault, Joey." Bastet had used those words with Sekhmet. "Goddesses spoke of God's Brew."

"I looked the stuff up for Kaiba. It's a Duke Devlin side business."

"Duke Devlin?" What?

"He mentioned that the real owners are a familiar cat and lion goddess pair to you. I think I'm screwed," Joey admitted, "Last time I talked to her, Mai said she was pregnant. She thought it was Skeezy's. But I don't know, maybe, I mean?"

Oh, Joey! Those goddesses again! What could they have wanted from a child between him and Mai? "I don't have any doubt, Joey. I don't know why they would need something like that, but they made it happen."

"Then . . ." Joey kicked the counter. "Then Mai's got mine, but she's still caught with Skeezy!" He kicked the counter again and turned. "I gotta go before I bring this whole place down!"

Atem watched him run off. Why? Why did all of his friends have to keep hurting over this payment? They agreed to the sacrifice for them, but why did others not getting any say have

to be pulled into it?

Kaiba must wield another card for Joey too.

Or Crush Your Enemies

Chapter Notes

This story is now updating each day until it is finished. It is all finished on another site, so I am just pacing myself and not overextending myself.:) I am trying to update one chapter, but it was previously published in smaller segments, so sometimes a chapter ends up being way too small or too big for the whole concept so sometimes it might be two or three. Thank you and please enjoy. Once I finish this, I will start posting Concrete Gods (my current work in this trilogy.)

Serenity's Apartment

When Serenity opened her door, she saw Mokuba and . . . "Umm?" Her brother had told her about this strange situation.

"Masika." Masika had no problem talking to her. "Hello."

Serenity glanced toward Mokuba. "Hello." Not this again. Mokuba and Seto Kaiba. They were really adamant on getting her to change her mind. She just told them unless the goddesses themselves made her pregnant, then there was no way it would happen. She had her brother's stubbornness, so they really should have known to back off.

Mokuba tried the hardest, trying to appeal to her how he could. Telling her all about Egypt and what the goddesses could do. There was a difference between Myth and fact, and she'd seen god cards before. Amazing, but god cards wouldn't dictate things to her. She had to, according to Yugi, give up a card to sacrifice what she would bear.

There were always ways to make other things happen. This whole baby with Seto Kaiba wasn't set in any old stone to her. A different thing might come along. Maybe the other dimension won't need it after all because they will have enough power. Serenity never gave up on hope.

Mokuba pointed at her. "Look, you are going to be carrying my little nephew or niece soon. My only other family than Seto. Why won't you come to our home?"

Oh. Boy, they never learned. "Marriage is more than about children. It's love too, and I don't love Seto Kaiba. I love . . . I have a boyfriend."

"Boyfriend, schmoyfriend, this is family." Mokuba gestured to Masika. "Talk with her."

///Shizuka: Talk with her?/// "There's no need to talk," Serenity told him. "I'm not going to flip my whole life over for him."

"Hm?" Masika stared at her. "Serenity."

"What?"

"I just realize it rhymes with stupidity."

What? "That wasn't nice," Serenity said to her. It also sucked as a comeback, this woman would be a waste of time.

"The deities Bastet and Sekhmet will's must be followed, or you will find yourself in ten times as much pain for not listening to them. If they state a babe, so must it be. Seto Kaiba shines brightly as fire, and anyone associating with him must accept the risk of being burned. No one commands him except for deities," Masika said to her. "Forget your dawdling affair and go to your husband, foolish woman."

Oh, Serenity knew now she did not like Masika at all. "You can follow your own beliefs, but I will follow mine. The world has changed since you were alive. I have options."

"Not against the rich."

Serenity wasn't expecting that phrase from her.

"The all mighty and powerful, they will step on those below them without a second thought. Even in this world, I know this fact has not changed." Masika sounded different now. "The poor are pawns to the rich." She turned toward Mokuba. "If she decided to not let your brother see his child in the future, what would he do?"

Mokuba looked grumpy. "That isn't helping. She isn't even pregnant yet. I thought you would help me out."

"If Bastet and Sekhmet state it will be so, then it will be so. Assume it will be so and answer."

Mokuba had a strained expression.

"Look at his face," Masika instructed as she gestured toward Mokuba. "Then ask yourself, does anyone win against Seto Kaiba?"

Hmph. "Yugi did."

"Yes, and he did it with the help of a sacred Pharaoh. Even with that, did that affect Yugi well?"

Um. Hm. Mm?

"And who else has won? Who has challenged him and won?" Masika asked.

"Not many I suppose." Still, she wouldn't give in like that.

"Do you feel he is evil?" Masika asked.

"Masika, you really aren't helping," Mokuba scolded her. "You're supposed to help us bring her to our side, not further away!"

"Do you, Serenity Wheeler?" Masika asked again. "Is he nice and sweet? Calm? Reassuring?"

"No, he's none of those," Serenity answered. "I mean, that I've . . . well, when I was with him . . ." How hard to answer. "The things he's done to others isn't nice, and he was always downright cruel to my brother."

"Then with that kind of power, that kind of evil, and that kind of reputation? He could also take out someone with evil power and reputation." Masika folded her arms. "Joey has a dear friend he can't get over trapped with a crime boss so evil he went after their dearest friends just to prove a point. Mai Valentine will never get away from him. Joey will never win without a desperate choice. Good men don't make good choices with bad men. He'll either end up dead, or wish he had been because he will never give up on a friend."

" . . ."

"You know this to be true. He gets careless with his life if it means saving a friend."

Yeah, Serenity knew that. It hurt Joey so much that he couldn't save Mai Valentine from that evil . . . ///Serenity: I know my brother. He'll never give up. She's right!/// "Mokuba?" She glanced toward Mokuba. "Do you think you could get someone innocent away from a crime boss?"

"A crime boss?" Mokuba looked uncomfortable. "I mean, those are gnarly things."

"Have you heard about my brother?" Serenity asked. "Has anyone asked you for help for Mai Valentine?"

Mokuba sighed. "No one's asked for help from me. Yeah, of course I know about the deal, but it'd be a bad idea from me. First, it doesn't matter how much money you use to hide. People like Skeezy have weasels beneath him too. You can't just hide and watch your back the rest of your life. It's no way to live."

Serenity paused, holding her breath lightly. "Could Seto Kaiba?"

Mokuba didn't answer back right away. " . . . yeah. It'd take a little time, but yeah. Seto could definitely get rid of the guy. As long as . . . I mean, you don't ask how anyway."

Oh. Serenity was starting to see what Masika meant.

Mokuba smiled. "Mai Valentine could walk free and live her own life without every worrying about Skeezy again if Seto got involved."

"I don't suppose, you could just ask nicely?" Serenity tried to smile. It was obvious though.

"Seto doesn't get involved in stuff that doesn't concern him. Especially something like this, it would take a lot of resources. Bodyguards. Security systems. Cover-ups. Bribery. But, if his Brother-in-Law was involved, I'm sure he would!" Mokuba winked and gave Masika a thumbs up.

"Goddess Bastet and Sekhmet will still make it happen against you in some way. That is up to no compromise and Seto Kaiba knows this. You are being given the luxury of an option as to how Seto Kaiba will treat you."

Masika held up two fingers. "This will go one of two ways with someone like Seto Kaiba," Masika warned her. "If you say no to him and do not work with him? He will never help your brother or Mai Valentine. He will come after your apartment. He may even just buy it in order to kick you out. I know how the greed of the rich works. He will make sure that you lose your job by donating money to the company in some way. He will fight you in court with the best lawyers he has, and with them? You will be lucky to hear your child's first cry before you lose rights to it and never see it again. Except? On maybe a magazine cover."

Ah?! "That couldn't be true!" Serenity looked toward Mokuba. "That's not true, right? He wouldn't use his money against me like that?" Would he be that cruel?

"Kaiba's do anything for family," Mokuba told her with a grin on his face. "Seto's been really nice so far about this. He's not thrilled about it either, but it's going to happen no matter what, and he will secure his family. Kaiba's are only nice for so long."

"If you say yes and work with him, you will have peace of mind," Masika finished. "Save your brother. Save your friend. Live well with your child and never worry about money again."

"Or worry about what Kaiba has up his sleeve, because Big Brother never loses." Even Mokuba was embracing the reality with Seto Kaiba.

Were those really the only options? "It's so . . . hard to decide." To say.

"He could crush you," Masika said to Serenity, "or he could crush your enemies. Decide."

It was cruel, but probably true. Even Mokuba didn't deny it. Seto Kaiba always got what he wanted. "I won't marry him," she decided. She couldn't just lay out like that for him, and she needed time to discuss this stuff with Tristan too! "I'll . . . I'll move in with him, if he can find a way to save Mai Valentine."

As soon as she said that, she could see her words having an instant effect. Mokuba didn't smile, didn't say 'thanks for the chance', nothing, he went straight to his phone. "Seto? Serenity Wheeler needs you to help Joey with a crime boss problem involving Mai Valentine, and then she'll move in. She won't marry yet though." He grinned and hung up. "Seto will be right down."

Wow. Seto Kaiba was at her door in less than a minute. Was he working with Mokuba and Masika the whole time?

He leaned in and looked straight at her. "Information."

No choice now. "Joey wants to save Mai Valentine from marrying a crime boss," Serenity said. "He's too attracted to her, and it's too dangerous to leave him. This guy finds others that leave him, no matter how far they go. They met playing cards."

"Card player. Skeezy?" Kaiba asked. "A constant suspect in money laundering, murder cases that are never solved, human trafficking, and torture."

He did all of that? "I guess? He went after Téa Gardener in New York just because he suspected something."

"Got it." Seto Kaiba glanced toward Mokuba.

"I know, Big Brother," Mokuba simply said. "I told her not to ask for details if you took it."

"Hm." Kaiba looked toward her again. "If I save Mai Valentine's pathetic life, and your even more pathetic brother, then you'll move in?"

"Not marriage," Serenity insisted again. "I would consider moving in with you." She would agree to that. It seemed okay. It really did. "I need to . . ." She felt dizzy. She needed to tell Tristan before anything, but she was really dizzy.

Then the world faded away.

Kaiba Home

Seto watched the time. He had been in the middle of an agreement when Serenity lost consciousness. Not wanting to take any chances, he took her home and had his personal physicians come over. Mokuba was concerned and tagged along with whatever the other spirits name was again. "What happened?"

"Her eyes for one," the doctor said, "they are losing vision every once in a while. I cannot determine why. It's happening in short spurts. Her previous eye surgery still looks good. It was successful."

"Is my new sister going to be okay?" Mokuba asked himself.

"I don't see why not. This really shouldn't have happened, Mister Kaiba," the eye doctor insisted.

Another physician approached Kaiba. "Her body seems to be undergoing some physical changes. I've been able to reach her current doctor and have looked at her previous

information. She had some health issues growing up but they're mainly cleared away."

"What is changing?" Kaiba demanded. "Is she okay?"

The doctor gestured for him to come into the room she was being examined in. Seto went over into it with Mokuba.

The perfect figure she used to have, seemed to be changing. Her nose. Her eyes. She looked a lot closer to the simple woman from Battleship City. Well. The gods wanted perfect attraction for me. They made her some Venus de Milo perfect for my eyes? "It's fine."

It angered him though. Not the fact that she didn't have the perfect body or face, but that they would really go that far.

A proper greeting and a card was all he needed. From there, he could set up marriage and prenup information. Once his business was secure, he could pay for invitro since it would be done by the gods First try guaranteed.

No messy God's Brew or one night stands. That was all inefficient.

He watched as she started to wake up. The doctor talked to her first for a minute and prepared her for the changes.

She looked in a mirror he gave her and touched her face. "I look . . . different."

"You are as you should be, before the gods messed with you," Sero Kaiba informed her. "It was for attraction."

"Blind. I was blind, for just a little while." She trembled. "I remember now. So, I might . . ."

"Maybe." Seto Kaiba shrugged. "I don't care. I don't care about your vision or your physical changes unless it harms you. I doubt they will. I think the gods are just undoing the work they put in because we just reached an agreement to make this happen."

Serenity covered her face. "I could go blind. I'm nothing like I was before."

"It's a shock, I get it, but I want to get this worked out," Kaiba insisted. "If I get Mai Valentine out of her jam, for good, you'll agree to move in."

"No marriage," she muttered softly. "I need to talk to my boyfriend Tristan first."

"Strange. I thought marriage is what women wanted. I'd have to spend time figuring out a strong plan to make sure you couldn't divorce me, and now I don't have to rush that." It wasn't what Kaiba wanted, he was lying to make her feel better in the arrangement. He didn't want a son or daughter that would be labeled a bastard because 'mommy wouldn't marry daddy'. It would have been the best idea for all involved to just get married.

The boyfriend was a nuisance, but no doubt he wouldn't be a problem for long. It was after all, Tristan Taylor. He already had time to look into him. There were ways to make him back

off. Depending on how much he was filled with the 'righteousness' of his youth, would determine how far he'd go against him.

Either way, he would keep Azure. At least the woman was smart enough to start giving in. It wouldn't be a nice bedtime story to tell his future child about dragging their mommy to court. Kaiba had the power and money to make sure he won his child, no mistake, no matter how the gods made it happen.

Moving in was a start, a compromise to a future he himself wasn't really prepared for. "Agree. I'll save Mai Valentine if you'll move in."

Serenity was still touching her face. "This is who I really should look like. I was more like this as a kid."

"It's not bad," he said to her.

She put the mirror down. " . . . thanks. I think."

He was still waiting for a reply. She didn't answer with a confirmation so far. "Here, let me help you make up your mind." Kaiba merely held up his phone to her. The name Joey Wheeler was being shown on it. Too bad he'd been restored of all the annoying memories of Wheeler again. It'd be easier to deal with this kind of thing, without having to know Joey Wheeler would be fucking relation to him.

Still, this would move it along. He pushed a button on his phone and started to talk on it. "Hey, Joey Wheeler," he said on the phone. "This is Seto Kaiba of the Kaiba Corporation. I've decided to help you out with Mai Valentine after all."

Serenity could hear the hope of Joey leap out straight over the phone. Just like he wanted from her.

"Really?! I mean. Thanks, Seto Kaiba. I promise, I'll make it up to you! I already found out about your God's Brew too, it came from a guy I used to know named Duke Devlin. It ain't his, it's a mystery connections to gods. That means the kid is probably mine because of Yugi or something. With your help, I'm sure Mai would finally say yes! Whatever it is you want in return, you got it!"

"Hang on a second. I'll call you right back." Kaiba hung up and looked toward Serenity. "Your brother's really helpful. It turns out he was a cop wanting to train to be a detective. I could use that kind of asset. So? What does he owe me, Serenity? Should he owe me anything or do we have a deal?"

Serenity wasn't answering, but it was all written on her face. "I didn't even know about a baby."

Excellent. Extra bonus to make her do what he wanted.

"I will move in with you if you do it," she said softly.

Softly or not, she caved. Good. "Great, and don't worry. I won't tell him yet. We both need some time to digest this . . . news. I'm just securing my investment." He dialed up Joey and spoke on the phone again. "You owe me nothing yet, Wheeler. I have my own reasons for helping. Give me Mai's number and location." Kaiba chuckled on the phone. "What, just hide her while you take on a crime boss? No way. You know reality, Wheeler. You get what you want doing hard things. If you do those same things, you'll end up in prison for life. I'll protect her for so long, until I get Skeezy out of the picture for good. No questions asked. Understand?"

"Wow. I just, I can't believe it. You're really going to do all that for me? For what, I mean why?"

"Don't worry about that right now," Kaiba said to him. "Worry later."

"Yeah. The price, I know I have to pay it later. It's worth it, I'll do it."

The information poured across Kaiba's phone. Kaiba called Mai, told her everything in detail, had arranged for a private jet to pick her up to bring her to Domino City, and had her assigned some of his most trusted bodyguards.

Mai would be staying with Joey so he could protect them both. At first, the moron almost wanted to argue with him, but when he heard he'd be near Mai until Skeezy was taken care of, he eased up.

Now, Joey Wheeler was protected from Skeezy too. Definitely a requirement for a smooth transaction.

"What about Yugi and the others?" Serenity asked him.

Kaiba stared at her for a second. Fine. "Okay, I'll add some guards to watch over them from afar, but you owe me one more favor. We don't have to get married, but you can't deny it either."

What? "What do you mean by that?"

"No one will care about the baby's status, as long as it looks like I will marry you." Which he would, but he'd keep her relaxed for now. "As long as you keep an engagement ring on, and tell everyone we are getting married? We won't set a date." Yet. "The longer it takes, the more extravagant it becomes. Say you wanted a beautiful marriage in Africa itself, that'll be about two years at least."

"Those sound like lies."

"Nah, you can make the actual arrangements. Music. Whatever. Keep sending me the information, so I can make sure everything looks legit." Plus, actually book the things. He'd eventually find a way to make her cave, and when he did, they'd already be ready. Kaiba continued. "I had a business associate that ended up in a similar position. Their daughter is now twenty. No one bothers asking them anymore about the marriage, they are more interested in the daughter's life."

"Really?" Yep, her face said she believed the lie.

"Just make sure you do something each week or month so it looks genuine."

"That could get really expensive. They might charge me up front."

"I don't care about money or price. To a point." He grabbed his chin, thinking. "I'll get you a special credit card to keep you from going money crazy. Spend what is on that limit each day for the wedding or yourself, and you don't have to bother telling me about it. If you want something pricier, then you have to ask."

"That sounds restrictive," Serenity said. "I have my own job and my own money."

"Your limit is 10,000 dollars each day. You don't need your job anymore."

"A day?"

"Yes. If you need more, then tell me why. That simple. It keeps you from bothering me all the time over money. I've got better things to deal with."

"I can't even do the math of that for a year. That's too much."

Annoying. "You're not supposed to spend 10,000 dollars a day, that's just the limit at where I start caring about what you're spending." Ugh. Compromises are so annoying. This all better be over soon. "Work if you want. It doesn't make a difference to me," he added, "but don't be surprised if you start getting hassled at your job, considering who you are supposed to be marrying." No, that wouldn't last long. Others might start to use her for ransom at such an insecure position. Bribing to have her fired would probably work better.

"I can't have my boyfriend anymore."

Perceptivity was a little low. Kaiba should have had more problems keeping Tristan Taylor away than her getting over a stupid boyfriend.

"Could he still be my friend?" she asked. "You're not going to hurt him?"

"Waste of man power." Oh. He caught it after he said it. He should have stuck with the lies, the truth probably hurt there.

"If we are just pretending, and I just have to live with you, than I should be able to go on friendly outings with Tristan," she reasoned.

Serenity Wheeler was someone who didn't want to give in. Forbidding that stupidity would lead to more rebellion. Damn those goddesses. He wouldn't leave his future heir to chance. He just needed to try not to remember Joey Wheeler. His future brother.

Son or daughter, bastardized.

Brother Joey Wheeler.

Abandonment versus Relation to the idiot.

There just wasn't competition. Morons were a part of life.

Serenity just stared at him. "It's just moving in. I'm just getting information for a fake wedding so it looks good. I don't want to move faster than I have to, because things change all the time. Maybe the goddesses will change their mind or something. Plus, I need time with Tristan."

"Fine. For now, you can see him," he stated. "It's not like I own you. Don't let the press catch on to who he is." Hopefully he was smart and just started to stay away.

"If, if it isn't undone. I am not going to-"

"It's modern day, we can use in vitro." He already knew what she wanted to say. "My home is huge. I will make optional appointments to meet, but you won't be required to engage with me."

That seemed to appease her. She was now locked in for the long-term.

Happy Not Happy

Mokuba took Masika back to the Game Shop eventually. First, he really wanted to treat her for her help. He thought at first she would reason with Serenity as a friend or something, but for Kaiba's side. Instead, he seemed even happier that she had used a fear and truth tactic. Like she wasn't as clean and perfect as the rest of 'Yugi's gang'.

When she finally got back, Atem was watching them at the door.

"When I said take as much time as you want," Atem said to her, "I didn't actually mean all day long."

"Well you didn't say that," Mokuba complained to Atem. "She was with me, she was fine."

"I see you have a new necklace." Atem noticed one of Mokuba's many gifts around her neck. "Is that from Mokuba?"

"Yeah, so?" Mokuba said offishly to him. "I can buy her things if I want."

"A new scarf, a new dress, new shoes, and a new necklace. I thought she was doing you a favor, not going shopping all day with you?" Atem questioned.

"I am allowed to go shopping with Mokuba if I wish The Greatest Pharaoh that is not The Greatest Pharaoh," Masika warned him. "My counterpart is fine with it."

"Yes, but you could have said that. Instead, you were talking about Seto Kaiba," Atem said to her. "Which means? You did something for Kaiba to earn all the gifts."

"What if she did?!" Mokuba yelled at Atem. "I can show my appreciation to her if I want."

Atem gave a rough sigh and put his hands on the counter. He clearly wanted to know what happened.

Of course. "I helped with a matter," Masika answered. "Do you suspect me of foul play?" Oh, those eyes. "Of course you do." She whisked her new scarf behind her as she took off upstairs. "Goodnight Mokuba. Goodnight Greatest of All the Greatest Pharaoh's Pharaoh." She heard his usual grunt that ended with half a 'hm'.

She just went to her room and toward the bed. /Masika: Téa would be proud of me./ She had helped Joey, and she gave Serenity a different point of view to accept the best hard choice that needed to be made. She took off her new necklace. She liked all the nice things Mokuba had got her in exchange for her help. She didn't really have anything that was just hers.

She just lied down.

Atem was trying to concentrate on the numbers of the register, but Mokuba hadn't left. "Do you plan on sharing something with me?"

"That wasn't right." Mokuba was glaring at Atem. "A whole month so far and you still think you see something bad in Masika?" He pointed at him. "Fine, I'll tell you, you are wrong. I didn't buy her those things to get her to help me, I got those after she helped. I wanted to, she helped me and Seto with a really personal matter. We would have had to get underhanded later to get something to go our way, and we didn't want to resort to it with the . . . nice person," he stated. "She helped us find a peaceful resolution so I really wanted to show my gratitude."

"I wasn't accusing her of anything," Atem said to Mokuba.

"Next time instead of investigating things right away with questions? Maybe try saying Masika looks pretty instead in her new things," Mokuba recommended. "Might get you closer to winning, because right now, you've been striking out like one big loser."

Loser? "She doesn't make things easy."

"Of course not, but you are good at challenges, so it's kind of lame that you of all people are using that as an excuse," Mokuba said, looking at him like he was pathetic.

Atem didn't know what to say to that. "When an opponent comes to meet me at a battlefield, I know how to wield my skills to get somewhere. If Masika were my opponent? It would be like saying anything to her triggers her to step back further and further until I can no longer even see her near the game arena. I have to keep a certain distance to keep her from moving away so far I can't even reach her."

"Okay." Mokuba came over closer. "While you're playing 'let's stay a certain distance' game with Masika, Yugi is losing Téa. There's no way she's going to choose Yugi if you and Masika stay this distanced."

"I am aware of that," Atem said softly.

"Are you? A whole month and you still suck with her. In the meantime, Bakura is doing great. On both fronts," Mokuba warned him. "Light Bakura gets along great with Téa. Even Dark Bakura has been really nice on dates I bet."

Nice? Sure, his foul cursing was so sweet. "Mokuba? I am doing what I can, this isn't easy. I can't make much progress with talking, let alone trying any form of dating. Masika knows what she wants, and getting her to change her mind isn't an easy thing."

"That and she knows you don't really want to join," Mokuba said.

"Well, neither does her Dark Bakura want to join." Ugh. "He doesn't want anything either." No one did.

"Yeah, but she's friends with him, and she feels close to him. Having something with him probably feels as comfortable as Téa choosing Yugi." Mokuba stepped away. "So you need to stop backing away and take her out of that comfort zone." He smiled. "Maybe you should try wrapping her up in a game, right before that Dark Bakura comes?"

Wrapping her up in a game?

"Make it so that she wants to finish a game with you, instead of head out with the thief," Mokuba insisted again.

"Games don't work with her," Atem told Mokuba. "She has different interests."

"Oh yeah, what interests?" Mokuba sounded goofy. "Games aren't her thing? Boy, you haven't made any progress at all with her. Seriously. I'm going. Tell Yugi I'm cheering for him, but with you as the Wingman, he is going to fail."

Atem watched him walk away. /Atem: I am doing what I can./ He couldn't convey just how much he was trying. /Atem: If I push too much, she gets upset and only accuses me of trying to win her over for Yugi./ Which he couldn't deny, he was doing that. /Atem: If I don't push, she ends right back with Bakura, and if I push just enough I can hold her in a semi-conversation for a few minutes./

Although, the fact Mokuba said that games would hold her interest, it could be an interesting lead. He did manage to break enough ice with Connect Four to figure out she wasn't shy but angry. Maybe he could do more? They still had one hour before they changed back from their one day a week of losing bodies. He headed upstairs and toward her room, knocking on her door. "Masika?"

"Yes, The Greatest Pharaoh That isn't called The Greatest Pharaoh?" Masika said through the door.

"How about a game?" Atem didn't hear her reply. "Your choice." He watched the door open up.

She didn't look pleased at all. "Why?"

Why? "Games are fun."

"I am sure that I as a player will be too lowly and inexperienced to play anything challenging to The Greatest Pharaoh Who Isn't Called The Greatest Pharaoh."

"Will you stop cursing me out? Honestly, I've heard Dark Bakura be nicer," Atem told her. "We are stuck, in a no-win situation."

"I am not," she said.

"Yes you are, Yugi wants Téa, and Téa feels more comfortable choosing Yugi."

"Oh, the direct approach." She actually seemed impressed.

Well, then maybe this was the way? "Téa has dated Bakura twice, while she's dated Yugi over ten times. Bakura is not reaching for any dates. Our vessels would rather choose each other." Atem was laying it out.

"Hm." Masika played with her new scarf, twirling it around. "Where do you think this conversation is going to get you? If I was not shoved into this sacrificial position, then I would let Téa have full command. As it stands, the only thing that I have the tiniest control of? Is whether I choose someone I trust, or whether it is the immortal and mortal enemy of the friend I sacrificed my life for."

"Not quite," he corrected her. He always had a hard time getting a good read on her. Maybe, a more gaming approach would be wiser? "You indicated that your friend Bakura was possessed by the spirits of Kul Elna and got worse as time goes by. That means that by the time I actually met him, your original Bakura was long gone."

Masika rubbed her ear briefly.

Yes, that strategy was working. /Atem: Make her see things in a new way./

Then? She continued. "You wore the pendant of his sacrificed village, and you killed my cat."

Oh, of course it went back to her cat. "I did not know where the pendant came from."

"If it wasn't stuck to Yugi's ribs, would you continue to use it, knowing where it did come from?" she asked.

Oh. "Yes I would, because we are paying every day for that sacrifice." It no longer had anything to do with the village. "I apologized about your pet as well. Your cat accepted-

"A goddess possessed Ebonnee." Masika moved from the door and actually brought Ebonnee over. He didn't see the cat for long as it made a strange 'mrowl' sound, crawling over Masika's shoulder and jumped backwards. It had moved so fast that it must have left scratch marks on Masika. "Urgh." Yep, scratch marks. "Living has so many downsides and upsides at once," she groaned. "Feeling pain is a gift, but it's a gift that hurts. Anyhow, as you can see, the real Ebonnee is not okay."

Hm. Okay, a dialogue of understanding was starting to form. A different move needed to be used. "If I become friends with Ebonnee, will you give me a chance?"

"You don't really want that." She looked like she could read him. "You want Yugi to be happy, but if you are involved in this, you won't be." She shook her head. "I am stuck with this. Téa is stuck with this. You are willingly trying to make yourself unhappy, to make Yugi happy."

"Like you said before," Atem admitted. "Where is this conversation going to get you? We know each other's true feelings about this. We know what our vessels want, and we know what we actually want. You don't want to choose anything, but it isn't a choice for you. As much as I don't want to choose this, I would rather do that and let Yugi be happy instead of miserable. I care about my friend, and he is the closest. He loves Téa more than you know."

"I don't know Yugi that well," Masika said to him. "And? Bakura." She looked like she was debating something. "If I tell you something, you cannot tell your vessel. It will make mine upset."

Upset Téa? "I won't tell Yugi anything Téa wouldn't want him to know."

"Bakura is not an easy option for just me," Masika told Atem. "I don't know Téa's memories beyond what I peeked out from her soul, but she knows mine. She knows more about Ancient Egypt than she lets on. She remembers Bakura as well."

Oh.

"She will be telling Yugi her decision tonight," Masika revealed. "Do you still wish to play a game?"

Restaurant . . .

Téa stabbed at her fish a little. Poke. Poke. "Yugi?"

"Hm." Yugi wasn't in the best mood.

"It's just that . . . I . . ." She didn't want to tell him.

"It's just been two dates," Yugi said huffily. "Two with Bakura."

"I know, but . . .?" She couldn't tell him.

"But what?" He scooted from the table. "You'd rather go to New York again and just start a new life with the Bakuras?"

"No." Oh. "I like staying with you, Yugi. You're one of my best friends," she said. "We've been through a lot together."

"Then I can be here for this with you." He tried to grasp onto her hand. "Téa? I know it's selfish, but I really don't want you to leave me, and I don't like the way the goddesses phrased it. What if the loser is actually separated forever instead? I could figure out something in my work, and I can tag along to New York if you really want it. Just, don't pick the Bakuras."

It wasn't about New York. "Yugi? I?" She had to, he just wouldn't understand if she didn't. "Masika and I aren't just the same pieces of green on the rubik's cube. You know? We actually were green, and I remember being green with her. I? Masika didn't get my memories, I got . . . hers." There, she said it.

She could see from his expression that he was starting to understand slightly. "Oh."

"It's more like a reel of film playing in my head," she told him. "Atem's father hurt Bakura's village soooo badly. I gave up - she gave up!" She stopped. "We gave up our life to save someone who saved us so many, many times. I mean seriously, there wasn't a whole lot worth living for. He was the only bright spot that kept us going, and he would be leaving, and then what for me? For us? Bakura was our absolute hero, you'll never understand-"

"-No, I guess I won't." Yugi couldn't stand to hear it. "He killed a bunch of people!"

"With Zorc," she added softly, almost like a pathetic whine.

"Without Zorc too!"

"Well, not everyone was innocent!" She yelled back. "I mean? Some." She was quiet for a little while. "I'm not going to be with the Bakura that you'd see as dangerous."

"No, no, you'll be with the sweet and nice and perfect Bakura." Yugi was miffed.

"It's probably a fricking fusion, Yugi!" She yelled back at him. "We've always been good friends. Learning to be together in the same soul would be so weird. Plus, Atem isn't into the idea at all. This kind of thing, it's best between alike souls. It'd just be more punishment."

"Well, Bakura isn't part of your original soul either."

"No, but our soul has history with him."

Yugi was holding his head in his hands as they were folded up. "You said Bakura wasn't just a friend, he was your absolute hero. So, if you don't mind joining with him, then he was more than a friend? Right?"

"Not . . . well?" She was pausing so much. "Oh, Yugi. It was . . . we had to survive in a bad environment back then and learn how to act real well. It was a hell without knowing what to do! He helped train."

"Train to be good actresses? Trained to be loyal?" Yugi questioned.

She hated to. It might be close enough for him to know, but she'd try to wiggle the line. /Téa : This is the way it should stay with Yugi. Don't hurt him./ "To keep our master husbands happy?" Yeah. Yugi stood straight up. He stared at her for a little while and then walked off outside. She could see him out the window. He wasn't moving from the window.

Téa moved outside toward him. "Yugi." He didn't answer. "I could still see you on the outside. Maybe six hours. Maybe it'll shift into days like now between everyone, and I'll get a full day?" He still didn't answer. "I like being with you on the outside."

"But we don't even know if the fusion joining is what it is! Nobody has said it for sure," he reminded her hotly. "It's a game, a puzzle they gave us. Choosing might not be the fusion we are thinking, it could be something else!"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. But? We've always trusted each other to get through things. You've always been at my side, cheering. I'd rather risk being infused with you like I am Atem, than losing you in a huge mess."

"You could visit, I guess," she reasoned. "Different soul rooms."

"Yeah, I can," he persuaded her. "It's a puzzle, Téa. Please?" He held her hand. "Give it time to figure out the puzzle."

It was just so much harder with Yugi! /Téa: I don't want to be a part of him, I want to . . . be with him, on the outside./ Then again, would she and Masika keep either of their bodies? What if they changed to the Bakura's bodies? Would Yugi still give her that dreamy look like she was his everything?

"We can still go to New York if we do join. I'll figure something out with Mokuba," he assured her.

"Atem hates this idea."

"Well, Light Bakura hates it too. He got used to one spirit that was demonic, felt traumatized for a long time, and got over being scared of another one. If it is fusion, I doubt he'll feel good about two more." Yugi sighed. "Atem has a room where he can stay away from everyone. So do I, thanks to the cursed puzzle. He and I have had a lot of time to talk about what this could all mean over the last month."

Game Shop

"It could be that, or it could be something different," Atem said to Masika. "It might mean the Bakuras would lose their two bodies, and we could actually keep ours. There is no telling, not enough hints were left to be sure. All we know is that payment for bodies will be needed. It doesn't mean every body might be needed."

"You are open to fusion or getting your own body back fully," Masika responded. "It could still be something else. I have a bad feeling about it. Choosing is only supposed to be based on mutual feeling of wanting to stay together."

"Which shouldn't . . . be bad," Atem said. "Friendship is often the answer."

She stared at him for a moment, and then looked away. "I don't know about that."

Date Restaurant . . .

"Either way, Atem says we can get through it all together," Yugi promised her. "No matter what it takes? If it comes out of friendship, than we should trust it. And think about it, friendship was the answer for Horakhty."

"Friendship." Téa took Yugi's hand. "The one you feel the most connected to." She smiled. "You're one of my best friends, Yugi." She reached over and hugged him. "Okay. No matter what. We'll take the three whole months to figure it out!"

Game Shop

Atem held his fingers closer together. "A small game? Will not end the world between us."

Masika checked the new watch she just got. Would she be willing to set differences aside for one night? "Which one?"

"Connect Four," he said thoughtfully.

"Didn't you stop playing that because Mokuba teased you about it?"

"Not all games are the same with every player. While it isn't as interesting with say Yugi to play? It is an interesting game with you to play," he answered. He watched as he finally got a nod and went downstairs. Finally, some progress again.

He pulled out Connect Four and watched as Ebonnee tagged along behind her. He should really get closer to the cat too. He set up the board and started.

Yes, Mokuba was right. This time, he was able to concentrate on just her and her reactions, instead of just the cat. He also saw that Mokuba gave her an entire new outfit, complete with a watch. /Atem: If she's truly a good person like Mokuba believes? She must have really helped Kaiba and Mokuba." They were indeed thank you gifts. Not bribery. "You wield your scarf like a cape."

She picked her glance up from the board, to him. "I didn't wear capes."

Strange. She had a flair for it. "I am sorry if I sounded accusing earlier," he apologized. "I was trying to figure out what Kaiba was up to, it wasn't against you."

She moved the first piece. "You know it's about Serenity."

He held his own piece thoughtfully as he placed it. "I am assuming he had some troubles conveying the truth still?"

"Yes, but I helped out," she answered. "It will make Joey a trifle unhappy, but incredibly thankful in the near future."

Thankful? There was only one thing on Joey's mind right now to make him feel thankful to Kaiba. "You found a way for Kaiba to save Mai?"

"Mm." She placed her piece.

Oh. Joey had been wanting to help Mai for some time, and that want would only increase with a child within her. /Atem: How would she be able to get Kaiba to help?/ "That's some trick, Masika. Care to share how that happened?"

"Just, putting things in perspective for . . .?" Masika looked odd. "Serenity."

Atem felt a strange feeling next to his leg. He looked down and saw Ebonnee. This wasn't Bastet again, was it? He reached down closer to it, and it backed away some before taking off back toward Masika. She jumped in her lap. No, not Bastet.

God Brew Co.

Bastet looked at the supply of God's Brew. "This will hurt these humans so much." Sekhmet was less caring. "Some payment does feel like punishment, but this is just outright punishment against this dimension."

"They aren't the winners, they are the ones who even it out," Sekhmet reminded her. "It must be done. We can start with the one that is most important to them, giving him some credit in history if you wish? It'll help them each understand that, although we can't force them to give cards, we are serious."

Bastet doubted that it mattered who they started this with. "For the fee. It will also end some friction. Perhaps. Joey will not take it as well."

"Who cares if this dimension's Jounouchi takes it well? It's all the same," Sekhmet insisted. "It must be. Let's just rush it and get it over with. We are so close to the goal, Bastet, Horakhty will grant it soon. So, their friend for honor and understanding, or not?"

Bastet nodded. It had to start.

Kaiba's Mansion The Next Day

If only he could see some kind of decent joke out of this mess. Tristan Taylor had come by, as expected. The fool even tried to punch him, but his guards stopped him. Most of them pointing like losers (like that would do anything) and some grabbing him from behind.

That upset Serenity, so he had them release him. He tried to be cordial, but Tristan Taylor wasn't making it easy.

"Tristan," Serenity even called to him. "I think Kaiba understands."

"Well he should," Tristan demanded as he pointed at Kaiba. "Serenity can't be bought. She's my girlfriend, and no matter what you try to do, you'll never be able to tear us apart."

/Seto: I think I might have something happening soon./ Kaiba went ahead and pulled out his agenda to see what he had scheduled that day. /Seto: Oh, right, a two o' clock./ That left a little while for some downtime before he had to-

"Stop ignoring me!"

Hm? Kaiba looked back toward Tristan Taylor again. He had tuned out his useless declarations of love, blame, shame, or whatever he was talking about.

"Tristan!" Now Serenity was yelling at him. "Just, just stop it already! For the last time, Kaiba isn't anymore responsible than me, stop blaming him, stop trying to tell him you and Joey will beat him up and, just, stop it!" She was upset. "It was some kind of god thing. I know you believe. You've seen the spirits. You know about Mai. It's not Seto Kaiba's fault."

"He made you come over here and live with him. He is dictating everything Serenity," he tried to convince her. "You may have chosen to stay, but that's just to help Joey and . . . and someone not even worth it all," he said softly. "I know Joey is hurt, but . . ." He didn't finish his thought.

Meanwhile? Kaiba checked his schedule again. /Seto: Hm, I could eat around that time. A three solid hours of free time./ He always tried to add some free time to spend with Mokuba. "Would you like to eat at 6:30 tonight? Italian sounds good, but I can get you something

different if you don't want that." He looked up and saw Tristan Taylor, just about ready to want to smack him again.

"6:30 is fine," Serenity agreed.

"Good." He closed his agenda. "Anything of value need to be uttered before I leave?" Tristan started to blame him again, "I mean, anything new you haven't tried to tell me already? Let's get past all the regrets and threats, do I need to hear anything else important?"

"No," Serenity insisted to him.

"Fine, I'll be off then." Kaiba started to leave her area. His place was large enough he was able to give her a more distant area from his. He gave her a tour and had let her pick the area she felt the most comfortable with. At first, she wasn't speaking much until she saw something she preferred.

A tranquil garden with a pond, foliage, and a yelling Tristan. It would be more enjoyable for her when the yelling Tristan left. She would be able to relax which would be better for her, but he held no command over her want of a visitor. If she wanted him out, she would have to tell him to leave, or instruct the guards. Either way, neither was something she would probably do.

Who Was She To Judge?

Serenity went back in her room. It was called a room, but on Kaiba's estate, it felt like her own little home. It was on the back of the house with it's own garden just outside the back glass doors. With benches and a pond and lovely fish. She really wanted to enjoy it, but she couldn't. She felt too much guilt about what happened with Tristan.

Neither of them were speaking in that room.

"All this just for Mai?" he finally spoke. "Mai Valentine, someone who stole Joey's soul? She was like 24 when they first met at Pegasus' tournament. You know, when we were sixteen? Sixteen?"

She was eight years older than Joey. Yeah, she knew that, but it wasn't nearly as bad now. Joey wasn't that young. Tristan couldn't accept Mai because she stole his soul. Serenity didn't know how to take it either with Mai. She wasn't the best thing for Joey, but she also needed help, and Joey would go through great lengths to help her.

Plus, the obvious fact she hadn't told Tristan yet. "You need to get along with Mai when you see her."

"I can do a lot of things," Tristan said, "but Mai Valentine? That's hard. She's a soul stealer."

"You have to, and don't go on about that with Joey," she warned him. "Whether you like her or not, she was affected by God's Brew." She watched his look. "She's pregnant, and Joey thinks it might be his."

"What?!"

"Kaiba has a card for Mai and Joey he'll give when they arrive." Which pretty much sealed it. "Joey hasn't told her yet. He's trying to process it himself right now." Tristan was real upset, but he needed to understand. "Tristan?"

"So is this payment just making everyone have babies or something?" Tristan asked. "What about Téa and Yugi, are they expecting something too?"

Ugh. "You know how they paid their price."

"Then maybe it's something like that for Joey. We can't just assume it's the same thing. What god would say she's worthy of really being involved like that? Maybe she's just a sacrifice or something."

Oh, he didn't want to accept it. "Tristan. I'm tired. I want to rest for awhile." She watched him start to fluff her pillows and gesture to the bed. "By myself."

"I wasn't insinuating anything," he said to her. "I was just making it comfier. I won't be far."

No. "Tristan. I want to rest, and I want you to leave," she requested.

"Oh. Yeah. Sure." Tristan came over and held her hand. "I'm not real far, okay? If you ever decide you need to get out of this, I'm sure we'll find a way. Kaiba doesn't have to win."

///Serenity: I'm not a game./// Just, the way he acted? His words? Sometimes, this whole thing felt less like it was about her. He blamed everything on Kaiba, and he just pushed him as the villain. He had even mentioned when he was the villain and Joey and his friends 'conquered' over him.

And yeah, Kaiba was sort of being pushy, but after talking to Mokuba more, she could start to see why. And he wasn't forcing anything like physical relations to have a baby, or even pressing the marriage. He just wanted to stay close with his future family.

"Why don't you rest, and I can take you out for dinner?" Tristan smiled at her. "My treat."

"I agreed to dinner with Kaiba," she reminded him. "At 6:30."

"But you don't have to feel forced to eat with him. You already live with him," Tristan pointed out.

"She doesn't have to."

Serenity saw Mokuba at the door with a gift. He walked in and gave it to her.

"It's a gift to welcome you," he smiled at her. "You don't have to eat with me and Seto. You can have cooks fix you something anytime you want. It was just an invitation, you can turn it down if you want. At anytime, Seto explained that before."

Right there. That was a nice gesture. She looked at the gift. "Thank you. I will be coming to eat with you two." He was even going to have his little brother there, so Tristan shouldn't be upset.

She had been extremely upset at first with Kaiba. When she told Tristan, she probably had some of that bleeding through, which made him even more standoffish. Not even once did Tristan blame or fault her, it all fell on Kaiba. They hugged and he promised to be there for her no matter what, and she felt better. Tristan would stay even though her looks had changed. He would stay even though she was supposed to one day have Seto Kaiba's baby. A girl couldn't buy a boyfriend like that.

She felt a lot less like someone giving in because of power like Masika made her feel. She even invited Tristan to come with her when she moved in, which was super quick. Kaiba's men were ready to grab everything as soon as he gave the word.

But? So far. Seto Kaiba hadn't pushed for anything. He wasn't dousing her with love or affection, he let her pick a living space, he dealt with Tristan, and he invited her to dinner and then left. Mokuba had done nothing, he was just handing her a housewarming gift.

This wasn't the work of someone being evil or wanting to possess her. It was just the work of someone who wanted their family to stay close by. ///Serenity: He is saving Joey just because of this. Don't think of them as nice, if it wasn't for this, no one would help.///

"Oh, why do you still have that?" Mokuba noticed the God's Brew container. "You're not drinking that, are you?"

"No, of course not," she promised. "I wanted to keep the bottle. If it's really from gods, it might hold some clues in the future." That was something her brother would say and do. "A lot of things ended up being pieces to a puzzle or a game back when Joey was in the thick of card came playing. I want to make sure I don't mess up."

"Oh yeah." Tristan picked it up and looked at it. He opened it up and smelled it, pulling his nose away. "That is absolutely raunchy, who would drink that?" He closed it back up. "Maybe god drinks expire quicker." He put it back and looked toward her. "Are you sure you don't want to dine with me? If not, I'll come with you."

What? ///Serenity: Tristan, did you just invite yourself?///

"I'd rather be there with you, to make sure you're okay," he told her.

"Fine," Mokuba said easily. "But if you make a scene, yell, or start to bug Seto, you're out."

What? Tristan had just bothered Seto even more than Joey had that day already. "Are you sure that's going to be okay with your brother, Mokuba?" she asked.

"Why wouldn't it be?" He seemed confused but shrugged and got on his telephone. "Hey, Seto. I just invited Tristan to dinner too. If he acts up, we'll throw him out."

"And I would care why?" Seto Kaiba's voice sounded through the phone.

"I don't know, manners? Serenity wanted to make sure it was fine with you."

"I don't care." He hung up.

Mokuba put his phone away too. "Better?"

Oh. "Yes, thanks," Serenity said. ///Serenity: Seto doesn't treat Mokuba differently because of his age? Mokuba was a teenager, but he could invite someone to dinner with no problem. Equal footing. They both treat each other with equal footing.///

"Hope you enjoy your gift. I was out shopping with Masika but I didn't know sizing, so I got you something without sizing." He waved goodbye and left.

"Probably bribery shopping for what she conned you into," Tristan muttered. "I still don't know if that was right or wrong."

"A baby is involved too," Serenity reminded him.

"Both ways. I wonder which is worse? Getting stuck with babies, or getting stuck with spirits?" Tristan asked himself. "I personally think babies would be much better than sharing a body."

Serenity looked over to him.

"They are actually up even higher," Tristan said, taking his hand and putting it up real high. "Like there's no difference at all, kids are great. Um?" Tristan looked like he wanted to say something. "Dinner. Right. I'll get ready for it. Yeah." He didn't look so well. "I'm going to go stop by the Game Shop and see how everyone's doing first. I'll see you soon for dinner, okay?"

She watched him leave. What was that strange pause? She opened her gift and saw a pretty necklace. It sparkled. She used to get those all the time when she looked different, right before she stayed with Tristan.

Tristan kept all the really bad people away. He was sweet and adorable and really forgiving toward her. If only he . . . could share some of that forgiveness toward Mai and Kaiba too. ///Serenity: At least Mai. If he can just get along with Mai . . ./// it was going to be important to do that.

Still? Who was she to judge.

Not A Boyfriend

Game Shop.

"Hey." Tristan walked into the game shop. "So?" He looked at Yugi or Atem, or Téa or Masika both playing a Connect Four game?

"Atem," Atem told him. "It is our double day, and Yugi is out with Téa."

"Oh. So you're out with Masika?" Tristan asked.

"We are just playing a game," Atem told him. "Is something wrong?"

He couldn't help a small disapproving look at Masika. "I've got something to ask my friends, but I don't . . . really want to ask in front of her."

Masika gave him a small nod. "You should wish I leave this room?" She stood up. "If so, I declare I won."

Oh great. Tristan looked at Atem. "It's not a big deal."

"If you leave, it's a forfeit, and I win," Atem answered her.

Oh, not this! Did they both have to be super competitive gamer people? Was it just a thing in ancient Egypt? "Just, end the game with a draw?"

"It isn't a draw, I am being forced out of the room. To claim victory at such an expense?" She bowed. "Only The Greatest Pharaoh Atem."

Wait, that was actually kind of playful? Were these two finally getting along?

"We will postpone our position until after I talk to Tristan," Atem insisted, also not half as grumpy as he usually had been with her.

She left easily now and went softly up the stairs.

Huh. "She's getting better with you having killed her cat?" Tristan asked. He heard her footsteps become much louder.

"No." Atem didn't seem happy with his words. "The cat itself and patience will be the key. What is it you need to discuss?"

"Today," Tristan said to him. "I already knew something happened between Serenity and Kaiba. I didn't get mad at it, but." Did he know? "Do you know?" Atem gave a slight nod. "Masika is the one that made her cave into Kaiba's demand to move in. She was practically getting moved as soon as she called me on the phone to tell me about the! About the."

"It's not their fault," Atem said.

"I know." Their? "I know it's not Serenity's fault."

"It is not Seto Kaiba's fault either," Atem stressed. "He was not looking forward to this."

"Oh. Whatever." Tristan didn't want to handle that right now. "She's with him now, in his house. Going to be carrying his baby. I told her I wouldn't leave her and I understand everything's that happened to her."

"That's decent of you," Atem said.

Yeah. "Kaiba always gets everything he wants. If he wants Serenity, then I have to get Serenity first." Atem didn't seem to understand. "After Joey's deal with Mai goes through, I think I should . . ." He took a deep breath. "I think I should ask her to be Serenity Taylor." If he didn't, she'd be Serenity Kaiba!

"Oh." Atem sat back down in the chair. "If that is what your heart is telling you, you should follow it."

"My heart is telling me if I don't do something quick, Kaiba is going to push the envelope enough until he gets her as his Mrs. Really, Serenity told me the first thing he did after he gave her that stupid card was propose!"

"Masika left to help out Mokuba earlier," Atem told him. "I am guessing that means she did not accept his proposal?"

"No, she didn't accept, but she did move in with him. Stuff packed in a day, a night in the main Kaiba household, a spot picked out the next day, and her stuff unpacked just like that," Tristan pointed out. "If I'm married to her, she can stay with me. I could take care of her and that baby. She doesn't have to give into Kaiba." He noticed a strange look from Atem. "What?"

"I don't believe you should make such a proclamation yet," Atem said gently. "This might not be from your own heart, more from your own anxiety, Tristan."

Tristan stuck his hands in his pockets. "You think I'm jumping the gun?" Maybe he had been. That's why he wanted to talk to his friends.

"I think everyone is wrapped up enough in problems, that adding more stress might not help out."

Tristan watched as there was a heavy knock on the door. Bakura was outside. He didn't look friendly. "Yeah, maybe there is too much stress."

"Oh, not him. We were even in the middle of a game."

Tristan watched as Masika came back down. She was carrying her cat. She let it go on the floor. It went straight back up the stairs. "Which is you, and which is Serenity?"

Oh, what a- "That was a private conversation."

"I didn't listen in. I just guessed it was about Serenity," she said. "Serenity is like Ebonnee. She is confused by words, truths, feelings and hormones. She will run just like that if you don't give her time in whatever you are planning to do."

Oh. Tristan thought she'd just give him a hard time since she was the one who convinced Serenity to go in the first place. "Patience." He watched her approach the door where Bakura was waiting. "Are you allowed to leave like that?"

Tristan was surprised to get a look from not just Masika, but Bakura, and Atem.

"I told you, we have our own bodies today," Atem repeated.

"I change in 22 minutes back to Téa," Masika answered. She didn't say where she was going, just left out the door to talk to him.

Hm. "Do you trust her like that? I mean, not like that, with Téa?" Tristan asked him. "When spirits run the body, they have complete control. I know your great, Atem, but what about her?" Atem still didn't look too happy with his words. Oh yeah, maybe that was sore area? "Well? I mean, how do you know she's not using Téa's body with Bakura's when she isn't using her own like today?"

"Téa made her own deal with Masika," Atem told him. "That's all you need to know."

"Yeah, but . . ." He looked out the window. They weren't doing anything but talking. Still? "She was real close to him, when Téa isn't even there, she could be? You know? With him?" Atem didn't answer. "You should care, Man. Yugi is still obsessed with Téa."

"And Mokuba gets on me for distrust," Atem answered back. "I know how Yugi feels, but even he knows that he is in a friend zone. Téa and Masika run their own deal, with their own rules. Same as I do with Yugi. I do not know if anything is between them or not, nor do I want to."

Hm. Fine. "Yugi is on his date right now." Joey wasn't there, and his advice would probably be 'not'. ///Tristan: Give it time. That's the advice I got so far. But, what if Kaiba sweeps her off her feet and he gets her to marry him before I ask?/// "If I give it time, will Kaiba? That guy doesn't like to wait." He watched as Masika came in and took her spot again.

"Did you have enough time to think about your next move?" she asked Atem.

Atem quickly moved.

Masika stared at the move and her piece, and around the board for awhile.

"Thanks for the talk," Tristan said, not wanting to stick around just to watch a game of Connect Four. He left and went outside, seeing Bakura pulling away on his motorcycle. He wasn't the only one with one of those.

Call it overprotective, Yugi should probably know if anything was going on with those two. Tristan hopped on his motorbike and tailed him for a time to his home. When he arrived, Bakura was just looking back at him on the bike.

Tristan relaxed his arms over the bike. "Hey. I got a question."

Bakura just stared at him.

"Are you friends with Masika, or are you a boyfriend?"

Bakura didn't look upset with the boyfriend question. He got off his bike and went right toward him. Tristan wasn't scared, he didn't have any powers anymore. He could take him if he had to. "That's against the rules. Masika and Téa agreed that no one would ask. If no one asked, then the question goes unanswered."

Hmm. That wasn't a friend vibe at all. "Well I just asked."

"Oh please don't!" His friend Bakura came over to the darker one. "I just heard what you ask, and you shouldn't do that. It's not your business, and it's not your deal," Bakura warned him. "It is for Masika and Téa to know."

"Oh, but you know." It was obvious his friend Bakura knew.

"Look. Ancient Egypt is not like now," his friend Bakura insisted. "Things were different. Relationships were different."

Damn these guys. "Are you getting it on with Masika when she is Téa or not?"

"Don't ask that!" His friend Bakura looked serious.

Well? "I don't think I have to ask. I think I got my answer." ///Tristan: Poor Yugi. He needs to pull himself out of the friend zone if he wants this to stop./// Tristan knew now. Yugi couldn't bury his head in the sand about it.

"Not at this time," the Dark Bakura actually answered him. "Not *in* this time."

Oh? Good, Masika was respecting boundaries. Although, his friend Bakura looked horrified at the evil one. He obviously knew, what was that about?

"In Ancient Egypt,-"

"Stop, Dark Bakura-"

"-I had Téa too, but I wasn't-"

"You!"

"-boyfriend."

Huh? Tristan watched his friend Bakura turn around and practically start to pace. "Not a boyfriend?"

"No. You see, Téa remembers being Masika. Ancient Egyptian memories are all wound up in her too. They are distant, farther away, and she is a different part with a different personality. But they were once, one. And they were more than once, both mine physically."

"Then you were a boyfriend."

"No," he insisted. "I'm a friend. I wasn't jealous if others were taking them in pleasure. I was usually the one instigating it."

" . . . what?!"

"it's like training," his friend Bakura said. "Oh, that sounds horrible! But? They . . . were slaves, Tristan. That means that they had to follow their owner's wishes. Husband's wishes. Whoever owned them. They couldn't yell or say no," he said softly. "He just showed them how to survive the easiest."

Oh . . . Tristan nodded. "I get it."

"Don't tell Yugi!" his friend Bakura said to him. "Téa doesn't want him to ever know a lot of details. He knows that she knows Ancient Egypt. She was supposed to tell him soon, but she was going to act more like Bakura was just a boyfriend on the side." He glared at the evil Bakura. "You are the first person he told in more vivid detail."

"That's no detail," the evil Bakura insisted. "I'm not going to pull that card out on them."

"Surprising," Tristan said to him. "You've pulled off a lot more than that without any conscience." He watched the evil Bakura walk away.

"Just, don't mention this again," his friend Bakura said, still not being overly sweet. "Night, Tristan."

Right. "Night. Night?!" He looked at his watch. Oh man. "Shoot, dinner and Serenity!" How much time did he waste on this? ///Tristan: Okay, I just have to go home and take a shower. Change clothes and fix up my hair. Then I'll just head over and meet her in her room to see where we are heading to. No problem.///

Tristan's Place

After he was almost ready (don't forget deodorant) he answered his phone. "Hey, Joey."

"Tristan. You gonna be there tomorrow when she arrives?"

Ah yes, Joey would be back, but with Mai. "You know I'm there for you, Buddy."

"I want you there, but don't be there if you are going to say anything bad to Mai. I've already gotta tell her about . . . you know, the card."

Tristan rolled his eyes. "These payments. It's not fair."

"Yeah, I know. Yugi and Atem and Téa. Now me and Mai."

Oh, that wasn't all Joey. He wasn't going to tell him over the phone, Yugi wanted to tell him face-to-face about Serenity. Serenity just couldn't bear to tell him all about it. She shouldn't have to either, nothing was her fault. Just that terrible smelling God's Brew. He swore he could still smell it in his nose. "How could anyone drink that God's Brew? It smelled disgusting."

"Nah, I liked it. Nostalgic. Wait, how'd you get your hands on some?" Joey asked him. "That stuff is real rare."

"Rare and stinky."

"Where'd you get it from?"

Oh. "Kaiba."

"You snuck a drink of Kaiba's, huh? Yeah, it kind of lulls you to it. Real strange."

Let him believe what he wanted. "I gotta go, Joey, I'm meeting Serenity for dinner." And more, but that was best left out for now. "If I show up, I promise to be good."

"If you show up?"

"I'll see you soon afterward if I can't."

"Can't you just get over it? It wasn't even your soul."

"Yeah, it was yours, which is . . ." ///Tristan: Which is why I don't get why you can get over it. She stole your soul, Joey!/// Ugh. Even though the God's Brew was to blame, Joey wouldn't have ever been anywhere near Mai if it wasn't for wanting to stay beside her to protect her.

"Fine. Then, I'll see you afterward, Tristan."

"You'll see Yugi either way. He's got some stuff to share with you," Tristan told him as he ran a comb through one last time. "Alright, I gotta go. See ya, Joey." He grabbed his keys and wallet.

Game Shop

"Sorry, we were cutting it kind of close," Téa apologized as her and Yugi entered the game shop. Masika just gave her a look. "Up to our room for the night." She went up the stairs with Masika tagging along.

"You didn't tell him."

"I did, but-"

"-you caved-"

"I don't want to hurt Yugi. And? I feel like he's right," Téa said as she went in her room with Masika. "It's really about friendship and trust, so it can't be a bad thing if he's picked. We should give it the whole amount of time to solve the puzzle of what happens. Three months is three months."

Masika bitterly sat on her bed. "Of course, I knew it."

She did? "How did you know?"

"Atem was very at ease."

Huh?! "You didn't tell him?"

"I didn't give him any fine details, and he won't tell Yugi."

"Yugi sort of heard it." Not all of it. "Close enough." Dang. "Are you getting along better with Atem?"

"Ebonnee is still so fearful. She won't leave this room until he is safely gone or in his own," Masika answered. "Still? He played Connect Four with me."

Téa smiled. "I'm glad to see you are making an effort."

Masika sighed. "You are the vessel."

Oh? Was she finally going to start to cave? "So? Yugi?"

"No, I never agreed to that," Masika said to her, "I just know that it will not be easy to get you to see reason with your feelings for Yugi."

Yeah. "He's a really good friend."

"Friend, yes. He is." She stood back up. "If a robber actually came in here with Yugi and Dark Bakura in the same room, you know which you would run to first. The same one we always did."

Téa made a cutting motion with her hand. What if Yugi overheard her? She looked out the door. The guys weren't coming up yet. She closed the door. "Joey comes tomorrow. Yugi

wants to talk to him privately first, so you can stay here tomorrow. Grandpa can help if they are gone awhile. You'll meet Mai later again, I'm sure."

"Yes, Téa. I will stay," she answered. "Yugi and Atem can have a day with their friend, I don't mind. But? Do you feel something strange?" She looked toward Téa.

Téa looked back. She looked at the necklace. There was a feeling that she should check it, but she didn't want to. "We don't need to know. Things can change anyway." She didn't touch her necklace, just lied down in bed. "Goodnight, Masika."

A Different Kind of Sacrifice

Joey felt weird with all Kaiba's bodyguards around him, but he didn't let it show. He remained steady and watched as Mai came straight over, accompanied by a bunch of other guards. "Mai Valentine."

"How?" She asked him. "How did you get Seto Kaiba to help?" Kaiba stood right next to her and gave her a card. "What's this?"

"Your own personal hell," Kaiba said. "Enjoy."

"I don't know why he helped. Goddesses I guess," Joey said. "I'm thankful for this miracle."

"Well, I didn't get much choice." Definitely upset. Not an ounce happy as she looked at the card. "Bastard."

"Pardon me for wanting to remove you from a crime boss."

"That's not what I mean." She was gritting her teeth. "I had it all worked out, Joey, I knew what I was doing. You!" She pushed him in the chest. "You lied and kept secrets from me. You're just as bad as Skeezy."

Ooh. "So you knew before the card?"

"A freaking cat told me," she growled. "I accept that dumb things happen with alcohol. I am more flirty and more flimsy with morals, but you hiding it from me couldn't be more wrong!"

Yeah, she knew. "It wasn't us. I didn't remember either," Joey said to her. "That God's Brew, it's actually pretty close to it's name. Made by the gods, to make us mess up."

"It was stupid. Why didn't you gloat afterwards, instead of keeping it a secret?"

"Like I said, I am sorry. We still got off lighter."

"Lighter?" Still so angry. "What do you mean lighter?"

"Because at least you have your body full time."

Joey watched as Yugi or Atem (whichever, he'd figure it out pretty fast) came walking up to them. "Thanks for coming out."

"Why not?" he said. "I can be here to lend support to a friend. Friends, actually." Yugi looked toward Kaiba. "Thanks for waiting to tell him."

Yep, that was Yug. Joey gestured to Yug. "Yug has a way bigger problem, Mai. You wanna tell her?"

"Not really, you can."

"So somehow, either Yugi and Atem, or the Bakura's, are going to be trapped with Masika and Téa."

Mai looked toward Yugi. "All I can say is, I'm sorry, Yugi, to hear that. It can't be easy going through that. How's it gonna be decided?"

"Téa and Masika, when they agree," Yugi said. "That's what we think. There's no set rules on what should happen, but that seems likely. They have to choose who they want to be with forever."

"Oh. I'm sorry. That sounds rough." Still, she glared right back at Joey. "We all got rough spots."

"He was trying to make sure you didn't reject anything he could find to leave Skeezy," Yugi said toward her. "Plus, God's Brew is more wicked than you know. Joey?" He looked toward Joey. "There's another reason I wanted to come see you when you were here with Kaiba. I wanted to tell you, face to face."

More? "What is it?"

"The reason Seto Kaiba helped you. The reason he's here right now too," Yugi warned him. "He and Serenity are involved in payment too."

Joey just stared at him for a bit. "Yug. Don't say it."

"Can't escape truth, Wheeler," Kaiba spoke to him. "What else was going to make me do all this?"

"Joey. Kaiba and Serenity-"

Joey covered his ears. "Oh my gaw, don't say it!" He closed his eyes but opened one to look at Yugi. He uncovered his ears. "I'm gonna be a big baby about this, I don't care how old I am!"

"You'll piss and moan like an infant even when you're too old to eat by yourself," Kaiba said to him.

" . . . they have to have a baby too." Yug finished it, nonetheless. He glanced toward Mai. "Everyone is hurting and scarred by the payment we paid. All the details are on your card."

Joey interrupted again. "So now, I'm supposed to sit back and let Seto Kaiba have my baby sister because he . . .?" Joey's fists were tight. "He doesn't belong with her at all! She's dating Tristan anyhow! So how's he taking it?"

"Oh." Yug didn't look so keen on telling him. "Serenity has just moved in with Kaiba for you. She hasn't agreed to any marriage yet." He didn't mention Tristan at all.

"Good, 'cause he can't! That thing was a payment, it doesn't deserve to be raised by the likes of him!"

"Oh yeah, 'cause Joey Wheeler is gonna be a much finer example!" Mai let him have it right back. "I'm staying with you and them guards of Kaiba's until they pull whatever miraculous thing they've got out, and then I'm off."

What? "Naw, you can't leave again. That's mine."

"It's not a ticket to keep me, just like it ain't no ticket for Kaiba to keep your sister," Mai reminded him.

"Sorry, Joey," Yugi said to him. "I couldn't tell you this over the phone. I had to do this, face to face. Serenity wanted to, but."

"I don't blame her." He didn't blame her at all. "She don't have to worry about me like that, I don't blame her for anything." He glared at Kaiba. "I blame you!"

"He's not to blame either," Yug tried to cover, but Joey just felt! Argh! Yeah okay he wasn't, but it still felt better to pin it on him!

"You still should have told me," Mai told him again.

"I'll make it up to ya," Joey promised to her as he took her bag. "It was all the God's Brew fault."

"I told ya, I don't care about that for an excuse. It made it happen, fine, but it didn't tell you not to tell me," she came back with. "Serenity and Kaiba worked it out."

"Cards help," Kaiba just had to butt in.

Joey ignored him. "Right." Mai was right. "Sorry, for not telling you. I planned on it afterwards, once you were safe."

"I hope that's right," she said. "Otherwise, that was really cruel, Joey."

"I really did," Joey tried to convince her. "I even told Atem about it. I wouldn't have hid it and then told my friends."

"Fine." Still mad. "We'll see how things go. But don't expect nothing else special from me, Joey Wheeler. You are lucky to stay friend, and only if the Pharaoh confirms that statement."

"Never looking for a relationship, just an old friendship. It was all the brew," he insisted again.

"Okay." Mai was starting to relax until she looked at the card. Mai freaked out. "I'm having a monster?!" She looked back at the card. "What the hell does potential hybrid mean?!"

Oh. Yeah. "It's just someone who could control them, or maybe become partly one? But it's a cool one, a pretty one, the Dark Magician Girl. So, you know, not like she couldn't go to school or nothing."

"Are you kidding? The kid could destroy it's first daycare, Joey!"

"Naw, because the payment is the power. It'll be a regular baby," Joey said to her. "All it's power is leaving to aid someone else."

"So we get shoved to pay a huuuuuge bill, and all the power just goes somewhere else? It's not fair!" Mai complained.

"I know, Mai, but you really need to watch your words. Goddesses apparently like flesh, it doesn't take much to trigger them to bite."

Mai moved backwards, frightened a bit. "Thanks for the warning." She bit on the inside of her cheek as she stared at Joey. "I want my own bed and my own room. I better have those."

"Got it all cleared out," Joey insisted. "Got some guards on the outside and the parameters, and it'll be cozy and safe. We'll get rid of Skeezy and then you'll be free. To an extent," he added. "We gotta agree about the future."

She pushed past him. "I want to lie down, throw my stuff on the ground, and spend some time by myself in my own room for awhile, Wheeler. Got it?"

"Yeah. No problem." Joey looked at Yugi. "This ain't gonna be easy, Yug. She's pissed as hell."

"At least she's safe, and she's here with you now," Yugi encouraged him. "Give her time. Give Serenity some time too to adjust."

"Can't I just fight this huge old fight instead of paying for it?" Joey asked.

"No. This is all we can do to contribute to the fight for reality," Yugi insisted. "Trust me, we've asked."

"Yeah. I figured it'd be something like that." Joey held Mai's bag close. "This is just the part I guess we're stuck with. I'm right behind you, Mai!" He yelled toward her. He glared at Kaiba though. "Thanks. I needed help. I'm not a gateway to Serenity."

"Yes you are," Kaiba disagreed. "It doesn't matter how much you hate me, Wheeler. Serenity will appreciate saving your life and Mai Valentine."

"My life isn't on the line!"

"You are a reckless moron, Wheeler. You would eventually screw this up yourself."

"Just head out, Joey," Yug insisted. "Mai's getting further away."

She didn't break her stride at all as half the guards had kept up with her. For now, Joey would drop this with Kaiba. His help was keeping her safe. Hopefully he saw Tristan soon too. He knew that Tristan was upset about Mai, but he still wished he would have shown up. This was a difficult time for everybody.

"You won't be able to marry Serenity if you can't even get along with your brother-in-law."

Kaiba glanced at him. "Perceptive."

Not really. Seto and Mokuba Kaiba were adopted at a young age. Mokuba meant the world to him. He was very connected to his family. If he was suddenly faced with anyone having his? He was going to get extreme. "Tristan said he's going to be having an affair with your future wife."

"I don't care what words he uses to annoy me. Serenity and I have our own agreements," Kaiba answered him. "He'll eventually get tired of it. Hopefully. Your rabble has always been annoying."

"Nothing has been Serenity's fault so far," Yugi told Kaiba. "Unless sparks actually happen between the two of you, there's no way things will get to there."

"Before giving advice, figure out your own situation."

"It's already figured out. There's no way out."

"Well? I'm not hearing much of that shining hope you annoyingly always have in your voice."

"This won't change," Yugi said to him. "It never will. If we did find some way to reverse it, the sacrifice would be reversed, and we'd end it all." Yugi sounded rough. "Then? Atem and I. We don't even know what to hope for. I want to stay with Téa no matter what, but being inside someone is already hard enough, let alone four people in one. Atem hates the idea but he's still following my lead."

"Gee, let me see if I care? Hm." Kaiba held his chin thoughtfully. "No, I don't. I never said 'I want to be a daddy'. Your future will be whatever it will be because of god interference and no one gets a choice."

"Atem lived his life, and all he wanted was to pass on. All he remembers is the thought of finally being able to pass on. And now, he's been sealed to half of my life until the day I actually die, and that's not even counting if we win." Yugi sighed. "He's still trying to get along with Masika, and even though he isn't happy, he still considers me the host. He still thinks he should please the host." Yugi gestured to his skin. "This is even his body, but I am still 'the host'."

"Sounds like someone might need therapy," Kaiba teased. "I'm out. You'll be having guards around you too. You probably won't spot them, they are trained to take out enemies and not be spotted. In fact, if you do spot one, tell me so I can fire them."

Yeah. Kaiba didn't share much more than that.

Yugi was about to start following Joey, when he felt his phone ring. Téa? "Hey, Téa. What is it?" She was crying. He could hear it clearly. "Téa, what's wrong?"

"Yu." She couldn't even finish his name.

"Okay, I'm coming, I promise right now." Yugi hung up, went back to his car and then went the way Joey was walking. "Something's wrong with Téa, I'll see you later!"

"Let me know what's going on later!" Joey yelled back.

Game Shop

When Yugi arrived, he wasn't quite sure what to make of what he was seeing. Bakura was holding Téa in his arms. She was crying so hard. "Téa?"

"Yugi!" She yelled and went straight to him, now wrapping her arms around him. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry! I don't know if I could have, Bakura says I couldn't have, but I know I should have!"

Yugi didn't understand. He just looked at Bakura. He had wiped away a few tears. "It's okay? What's wrong?" Bakura handed him a card. Another card?

"Téa found it in her bedroom," Bakura stated to Yugi. "I'm sorry, Yugi."

Yugi looked at the card. He read it. He read it again.

He read it again.

He held Téa back just as tightly. No one ever agreed to that! No one agreed! It wasn't even their card!

Bakura took the card from Yugi's grip. "Careful, Yugi. We'll have to repay somehow if something happens to that card."

Yugi didn't care, he didn't care at all right now. Even though he knew Atem wouldn't be communicating for at least a little while, maybe more- ///Yugi: Atem! Atem, Atem, Atem! Ateeeemm!///

"I felt something calling to me in the necklace last night," Téa said between crying. "Masika did too. We both felt it, but I refused to check."

"It's okay." Yugi tried to be braver for her. "The necklace isn't a weapon. You couldn't have done anything, just seen it." He tried to take deep breaths.

"Why us?" she asked softly. "Why of all dimensions or whatever, why us? Why do we . . .?" She dug herself closer into Yugi's embrace. "Joey?"

"We'll tell him," Yugi said to her. "In a little while, we'll tell him."

"It's not fair," she cried out. "It's not fair."

It wasn't fair. It wasn't, but without their sacrifices, nothing could be done. Never has doing the right thing felt so wrong.

"How . . . do we . . .?"

Tristan's Apartment

Serenity knocked on his door. She wanted to go see Joey after he heard from Yugi. She was already a coward about the situation not telling her own brother, but she couldn't hide forever. She knocked on his door again. "Tristan?"

Tristan had decided not to come out for dinner with her and the Kaibas either for some reason. She even had Kaiba wait an extra 15 minutes before they left. The whole time, he had never even called her.

She took the spare key he gave her and unlocked the door. Sometimes when Tristan got upset, he would just get kind of depressed and drink. Her brother did the same thing. She walked into his place.

She saw some deodorant on the floor sticking out of his bedroom door. "Tristan?" She creaked the door open.

And.

"Tristan?!"

You Have To Remake What?!

Kaiba had a hell of a day. Serenity had to give her statements of what happened to the hospital, why she went to Tristan's, and why she had a key.

If that wasn't enough, she wanted to stay at the hospital with her brother and Yugi's friends.

Mai and Joey weren't fighting. Téa and Yugi were being quiet in the chairs, both just staring down. Even Bakura had shown up with the Bandit King.

The final decision? Unknown causes were causing Tristan to slowly slip away, but everyone there knew it. Everyone was just hanging on by a thread, mainly waiting for-

"Atem," Yugi finally said. He made contact. He didn't say anything out loud, but he was probably conveying the story. Téa seemed to find her own spirit as she started to act strange, finally moving away from the crowd.

"Bastet and Sekhmet!" Clearly, Atem was now in charge. He pushed through the hospital doors, through the main doors, and went outside. The rest of the group followed so Kaiba did too. He was interested to see what the Pharaoh of long ago was really going to do against goddesses.

"Bastet and Sekhmet, no one has cleared any sacrifice of Tristan Taylor!" Atem yelled to the sky. "I revoke this card and will not help save any reality until you come and have a discussion with me!"

Kaiba took a step back when he saw it was Sekhmet who answered the call. At least it wasn't his butt on the line this time.

"How dare you call down like that!" She appeared in her lion form, almost ready to eat him.

"Wait, Sekhmet." A cat appeared on top of the lion. "Wait. Let's hear them out."

Sekhmet looked at her strangely. "Too much humanity for you again."

"Just give it two seconds," Bastet said. "What do you wish to discuss?"

"Our given sacrifices will not take lives," Atem insisted. "That is not the way this world handles things. We will do what is necessary to help save the other reality, but in a different way."

"Oh, Bastet. I do believe he's saying he isn't permitting actual goddesses to take anyone's life? This small, simple man think himself a god."

"No, I do not, but I do not condone this." Atem moved himself closer together and to the side, seeing Sekhmet wanting to get closer. "We will help, but it will be in our way, and it will not

hurt other people in this world."

"Not hurt other people in your world." Bastet seemed to be thinking. "Thousands of years of deceit, I felt proud but bad. The looks in their eyes. They'd been through enough."

"Please?" Atem eased up. Sekhmet bared her teeth and saliva started to drop from her jaw. ///Atem: Yuugi took this chance to survive. I need to take this chance to grant more audience./// Even now, it was clear Bastet was willing to listen, but she was thinking about something else.

Atem bent down on the ground, the action Masika had taken right away already. "I beg you. We will take any deal." ///Atem: This world shouldn't be hurt in exchange of another. Anything.///

Bastet started to twitch her tail on top of Sekhmet's head. Sekhmet looked annoyed but didn't say anything. One swipe of the tail. Two swipes of the tail. "Ooh! I have an idea. Sekhmet, watch over the humans, I must talk to Isis!" She disappeared.

Some of them started to slowly stand, feeling Sekhmet's predatory gaze upon them.

"I know what she thought of," Sekhmet chuckled at him. "Really. You should have gone through the original deal. This world tends to get off nicer in events. It tends to have a few more happier days than the other dimensions. Be ready to write the biggest check of your lives."

At least Sekhmet was not moving toward them. Bastet seemed to have an idea for something different and no one wanted to dismiss it.

When Bastet came back, she twirled around Sekhmet's neck like a happy kitten. "Isis has a wonderful idea with it, even better than mine." She landed near the ground near Atem. "A different deal. Ebonnee." Ebonnee came from the side of the Game Shop.

Game Shop? Of course, it seemed Bastet had transported them all to the Game Shop now.

Ebonnee stopped, looking at Atem.

"Have you forgiven him?" Bastet asked.

"Is this really going to be based on whether a cat forgave Atem for killing it?" Joey asked out loud.

Atem faced the cat. "I am sorry. I can say this several times over, but it will never change the fact that I did shorten your life." He spoke to it like a person. "If you find it in your heart to forgive me, I will honor you once each day for as long as I am here."

Ebonnee crept closer. She moved toward Atem and jumped into his arms. She meowed curiously.

Kaiba watched the cat move back toward Masika, which like some slave to be sure was bowing down to the goddesses the entire time, from the hospital to the Game Shop. She only moved up to take her cat.

"The others really don't want to, and they've been through so much. We know this," Bastet said to the lion. "We can make a much better exchange. Let's make them pay in a different way. The humans over there will appreciate it when they understand."

Bastet strolled toward Masika as well. She moved her head down to be petted. A goddess wanted to be petted? Masika pulled up, bowed and stroked the goddess' head. What was up with her?

"I haven't seen you this playful in at least a thousand years," Sekhmet said to her.

Bastet moved toward Atem while Ebonnee stayed next to Masika. "You wish for another way that does not include the gods causing human sacrifice, and that will save your friend Tristan Taylor?"

"A way to help without taking innocent lives," Atem announced, "Yes."

"Hold out your arms." Bastet jumped in them and strangely rubbed against him before disappearing and reappearing on Masika's shoulder. She said nothing, and seemed to almost slump forward even more.

Hang on? "Don't Téa and Masika each have their own body still?" Kaiba could have sworn that had been the case now.

"The times have been shifting around on what has been happening," Atem answered him.

"Yeah, they do, but this is getting weird." Yugi walked out the door of the Game Shop. "I guess I got my body back again?"

Well? Whatever the hell these goddesses were planning wouldn't be good. ///Kaiba: I better keep near to Serenity./// She was on the other side of Joey. He moved over slowly. Atem was the one barking about new deals, not him.

Bastet moved away from Masika's shoulder and moved toward Yugi. She climbed up him, leaving a few scratches on the way up. "Do you accept this deal too? To help, without gods sacrificing all of the human lives we had wished to sacrifice?"

"What is it we need to do?" Yugi asked.

Oh no, they weren't going to be answering that. Kaiba could see that right away. ///Kaiba: Promising Tristan. Nobody dies. Their bodies back. Whatever the hell they want, it's nothing I would ever choose.///

"Yes," Yugi agreed when they refused to say anything. "I don't know what I have to sacrifice for it, but yes to everything, yes to all of it."

Kaiba watched as Téa now came out of the Game Shop too. Bastet moved toward her, hopping straight on her head and moving downward against her. Ouch.

"A pleasant surprise for Parts of Atem, they will appreciate this when they know." Bastet purred and took all of the cards away from the pockets of Atem, Yugi, Téa and Masika then disappeared again.

Sekhmet just chuckled and lied down. "Idiots."

"I don't know about you," Kaiba said toward them, "but I think you two morons switched your destiny to something worse than you already had."

"No one else dies," Yugi uttered. "Whatever it is, we'll pay it."

He said that now. Meanwhile, Kaiba stayed close to Serenity but she kept creeping closer to her brother. Being related to Joey was even more annoying than the thought the next Kaiba would have Wheeler genes. He said nothing though. Things might be changing.

He watched as the cat came back with four new cards beneath her.

"Remember. Instead of killing 33 million people, for starters, you chose this for yourselves."

"33 million people?" Atem spoke up. "Yes, anything's better than that!"

"Then it's been decided."

"What about Tristan?" Yugi asked her.

"The child Mana becoming a hybrid is no longer needed," Bastet said to Jounouchi and Mai. "I can take your cards back." The cards came straight from their pockets to her. "We can't reverse her coming, you two rushed her here yourselves."

"It was God's Brew," Joey muttered as he caught a look from Mai. "Oh, hey, my sister and Kaiba?"

"Azure will probably not be needed," Bastet said to them.

Probably? Why did she just say probably?

"You'll give one of these a piece at the end." Bastet tossed four cards to Bakura and Bandit King as well with her magic. "You are now just as important."

Kaiba didn't want to draw the attention to him, but his gut didn't feel right. ///Seto: No./// "I'd rather not change my sacrifice yet." Everyone looked at him strangely. "I trust my instinct. I'd prefer my original sacrifice, Azure with Serenity Wheeler." He held his original card.

"Well, that's not just up to you," Joey had to open his big mouth. "It involved my sister, and she isn't going to want to stay with you."

Annoying. "Sekhmet said our dimension tends to get the easy side of things." Didn't any of them pick that up? "I doubt she was joking." He heard another chuckle come from her.

"There's one smart one in the lot," Sekhmet actually complimented him.

"You still have Skeezy out there to deal with," Seto Kaiba answered back to Joey. "Until then, nothing changes with the deal. She stays with me, and I take care of Skeezy. She leaves? So does your Mai's safety." That was a decent dirty look from Joey.

"A deal is a deal." Serenity might have seen what he'd seen too. "Seto Kaiba hasn't done anything wrong, Joey," she assured Joey. "We can always keep the card."

Hm. Seto glanced toward Yugi, the pharaoh, the evil Bakura and the regular Bakura. Their cards were clearly covered, but he could already tell the weight of what they had to carry changed into a different form. He'd rather easily just create a second Kaiba and call his debt over.

"Understood," Bastet said toward them. "If Azure isn't needed, we'll take the cards back later."

"Could?" Yugi was trying to say something. "Could-?"

"No." Bastet's voice was sharp. "You'll choose between two cards. You have now seen the first."

Kaiba noticed Atem's look straight at Bastet. Damn. Those cards were already revealed.

"This would never be a choice," Atem said toward Bastet. "I don't know what the second card is, but I could never do this."

"Neither could I!" The Bandit King was angry as he stormed right over to Atem. "If you do, I will hunt you down into the-"

"I never would!" Atem yelled straight back at him.

"I can't." Yugi looked at the card. "I just can't, who could?"

What did the cards say?

"What do they say, Yug?" Joey asked as he came over.

"33 million lives spared, plus whatever else the total cost of the mayhem will be!" Bastet hissed toward Atem, Yugi, and the Bandit Thief. "You said anything."

"I didn't say a god damn thing!" the Bandit King said to her, choosing his words harshly. "It was Yugi and Atem, I am not fucking doing this!" He tried to toss the card, but it just came back to him. "I will never do this! What's the other option, I want another option as well!"

"33 million lives spared," Bastet said again. "Would you like your original deal back? You can have it back, but we'll have to use our infamously famous God's Brew to take 33 million lives, for starters."

///Seto: That looks like a bluff, is that a bluff?/// It was hard to tell on a cat. He was pretty good at detecting lying though. ///Seto: That God's Brew did have a reason for being here. They never said a thing about the amount of sacrifices to them. It wasn't really on them, just the joining soul thing. They could have done the God's Brew without anyone knowing. Feels like a bluff.///

"What is the second card?" Atem demanded to know. "Why is it not revealed?"

"Hmph." Sekhmet sat up on her haunches. "This is wasting time. I want to move onto the next phase!" She barreled right toward Yugi's chest.

Kaiba watched as almost everyone screamed and Yugi hit the ground, bleeding. Not just a little bit of bandage bleeding. Atem had yelled the loudest as he went to him. The goddess would fix Yugi, he wasn't concerned about that.

He was more interested in seeing Sekhmet having the millennium puzzle perfectly cut into two.

"This will do for now," Bastet said toward them. "We'll be back."

They disappeared. Yugi was healed enough to stand up, but he was definitely still in pain. He just stared at Atem, Bakura, and the Bandit King. "We . . ."

"We can't. Ever." Atem actually looked at Kaiba angrily, like he didn't even want to be casually noticed. "It doesn't matter what it was, we can't pick it."

"You traded 33 million lives, maybe more, for a single sacrifice card," Kaiba had to say toward him. "You knew it wouldn't be a walk in the park."

Still, Atem was angry. He helped Yugi up better, along with Bakura.

"It's okay, Yugi," Bakura said delicately. "Really. I'm sure the other card is doable."

Joey came over to try and help too, but at the same time, he was still stuck between Mai and his sister. Looked like the moron finally made a choice and left their side to help.

Kaiba took his chance to sneak closer to Serenity. "Everything's not over, you were right to back me up. If things end up fine, we'll back out, no problem. Until then, you have to be defiant."

Serenity didn't answer him, but he caught a knowing look back.

"Yug!" Joey came and looked at where the blood had been. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Nothing stuck to the ribs anymore." Yugi sounded pained.

"Stuck to the ribs? You're lucky you still have any after that. Yug?" Joey tried to be gentle as he took over for carrying from Bakura. "You gotta show me that card."

"It's not possible," Yugi muttered. Still, he briefly showed Joey.

Yeah. That should end all suspicion. Joey might be older, but that moron could never-

"You have to remake brand new millennium items?!"

-be quiet when he should. ///Seto Kaiba: New millennium items./// Ooh. Now that would be interesting.

In the Mood Part 1

"It's been awhile." Sekhmet appeared back among them. No one moved after what she had already caused.

Bastet appeared behind Masika. "Let's go for a ride, Ladies. Sekhmet, if you please?"

Masika and Téa both got scooped up by Sekhmet with Bastet. Since Bastet requested it, neither refused. Although both didn't look so well.

"Téa?" Yugi asked toward them. "Where is she going?"

The goddesses didn't answer as Sekhmet bounded away.

Téa and Masika both held onto Sekhmet's fur hard as she galloped through the town.

"Hold on, Ladies, Sekhmet loves buildings," Bastet said as they felt themselves head up.

The gravity wouldn't have held but somehow they found themselves bathed in light and able to withstand the straight upward climb up the tall building.

When they reached the top, Sekhmet stopped and looked outward. "No one will be mad at us at all. What a peace offering."

"Agreed," Bastet said to her as she walked along Masika's lap. She laid down on it.

Masika just shared a look with Téa. ///Masika: I don't have a good feeling about this, Téa. Goddesses don't scoop up humans for fun and take them for a ride.///

Bastet stretched as did Sekhmet as she lied down as well. Sekhmet started to groom her claws. Bastet walked over toward Téa this time.

"Okay?" Téa just couldn't be silent. "Why did we just get a ride?" Then, there was some kind of tune around them. They were up super high, where was that coming from? As she looked up it started to rain on them.

"Ooh, I love rain. Someone is feeling very happy today." Bastet stretched against Téa and leapt onto her shoulder.

"The thunder is a little annoying," Sekhmet groaned. "They need to calm down a little, it's ruining the mood."

"Oh, Sekhmet, don't confuse them," Bastet said toward her. Then, they watched as Bastet changed from a cat into a woman who had a cat's head. It was her true self.

Masika bowed. "We are not worthy of your true form!" ///Masika: I hope we are not worthy enough of their form, please let me just stay meaningless in the background!///

Bastet purred with a small chuckle. "Now, now. You must stand much firmer, even against goddesses."

Ooh, that didn't sound right at all. "Firm, huh?" Téa would use the moment. "Then can we ask why you took us for a ride all the way up here?"

"It's pretty up here," Sekhmet answered. "When you look straight across and not at the civilization below, it's one of the few pretty spots your world has left."

Okay? "It's a great view," Téa agreed, "but that whole scooping us up and taking us away in general thing? Why'd you do that?" She started to hear lots of sirens going off, and cats and dogs barking.

"In what way is that supposed to be celebrating?" Sekhmet complained.

Téa watched as a small . . . person. With a beard. Pinched her nose and left.

Then, he appeared in front of Masika's face, pinched her cheeks and left. Masika just shared a look with her again.

"Don't mind him. Everyone is just more delighted with this arrangement than the other one," Bastet said. "You'll find several gods and goddesses watching over you here and there. Sekhmet and I will be the top two though."

///Téa: What on Earth? How did everybody go to meaning nothing to them, to suddenly we mean something?///

"You made yourself in disposable," Sekhmet answered her thought. "The others still mean nothing to me. Masika means something to me, and you mean a little something."

Bastet hissed at Sekhmet. "A little?"

"I was just playing around with you, Bastet. Of course they both mean the world to me. No human will even bump into them on land without my claws personally ripping out their throats."

"Oh, Sekhmet, that's so terribly sweet of you," Bastet complimented her. She looked back toward her and Masika. "Sorry. Everyone is just so delighted, even if you will not be. Even Sekhmet is showing favor toward you."

Téa watched as Bastet's tail curled in front of her playfully.

"What do humans know of gods these days? It's not an easy question to answer, is it?" Bastet patted Téa's head. "You are doing well."

Doing well? "Thanks?" Téa answered.

"Not very much, but enough to keep going with a little more help. Masika barely needs any help, she has held the brunt of it."

Oh. Holy. What? Téa couldn't . . . another definite goddess showed up. This one? Uh. Unique. And?

///Masika: What's she doing here?!///

Some hippo. Some definite crocodile. Some lion, and a weird center that definitely pointed to human. "Hi?"

///Masika: Only you just casually say hi to a goddess, Téa!/// Masika was on her knees in front of the new god. "We have all been blessed by several gods so fast, I don't even know how to keep up with worship, forgive Taweret!"

Taweret. Yeah, that rang a bell. What had she been the goddess of? "Hello Taweret. Nice to meet you." Téa met all kinds of people, supernatural or digital, and she'd just go with her instinct. Be nice.

"Yes, me for you," Sekhmet said toward Masika. "Honorable, but to a point. Sacrificing Ebonnee to instill wrath against the powerful worked well."

"Oh, Sekhmet!" Bastet complained.

"They are ours now. It's best not to keep secrets," Sekhmet said toward Bastet.

Masika lifted her head up to look toward Sekhmet in surprise. "Ebonnee?"

Sekhmet stood up and showed off her true form. A woman with a lion's head. "This is a much better idea. It'd be too weak just like this. Their needs to be some umph in the power."

"I wasn't thinking power," Bastet told Sekhmet. "I was thinking-"

"Téa?!"

Téa looked down off the building. It was high, but not high enough to miss who called out to her. ///Téa: Yugi.///

"Téa, are you okay up there?" she heard Joey's voice next. "Can you maybe come back to Earth at some point?"

Aw, Joey never changed. Téa heard a light growl from Sekhmet. "My friends are just worried."

"I was thinking in fairness," Bastet answered Sekhmet. "Too pure and they wouldn't stand a chance."

"What?! But-" Sekhmet was angry.

"We can wait a little longer if that's what is decided," Bastet announced.

"Corruption of an ordinary human!" Sekhmet wasn't pleased.

"Sekhmet? Téa and Masika are ordinary humans. The parts of Atem are also ordinary now."

"They are both Pharaoh, and once they are both gone, then they will pass Ammut's test with flying colors and become gods! As for Téa and Masika, they are everyone's favorite, so that doesn't count for them. Oh, this choice should have stayed in the other dimension. You and your bright ideas." Sekhmet growled, and grabbed Masika with her huge teeth.

"Masika!" Téa called out.

"Put her down," Bastet said calmly. "You must share."

Sekhmet made a sound like a cat trying to get away with a treat.

"I really beg of you, I do not enjoy this!" Masika spoke up from inside Sekhmet's mouth.

Wow. Hard to imagine her mouth was so big, she could actually hold Masika in it without damage. It didn't look like it was trying to hurt her, more like . . . a lion mom picking up it's cub or something?

Téa heard everyone down below again. "Yeah, I know! I still don't get why I'm up here either," she yelled back down.

"Yes you do. A part of you does," Bastet said toward her. "An ancient part of you has had the suspicion for some time."

Oh. That wasn't fun. Téa looked toward Taweret. The way Sekhmet was holding Masika. "We're not important enough for . . ."

"You are perfect," Bastet announced to her. "It has been thousands of years since even a simple god was born again, that even Taweret wanted to come down."

///Téa: No./// "But? Just . . . not really . . . you know, we are sort of human? Not like you, but I mean, me and Masika? Human? Can't?"

"How is Horakhty created Téa?" Bastet asked her as Sekhmet finally lowered Masika and started to groom her head.

"The cards. The . . . " ///Téa: Stop trembling, Téa!/// "Winged Dragon of Ra, Obelisk, and Slifer the Sky Dragon."

"Where did we put Masika at first to bond with you again?" she once again asked for something she probably already knew.

" . . . a c-card."

"What do cards do? How does the player become more powerful in the face of enemies?" Bastet asked. "Think back to how your games are played. What do you do with weaker cards?"

Téa sucked on her lip. Weaker cards. "They can be combined with trap or magic cards. They can be . . .?" Oh. She really didn't want to say that word, but it looked like Bastet wanted her to. "They can be given more defense power, and they can sometimes join with other cards depending on their ability."

"And?" Bastet urged her.

"They can be put in defense." Téa didn't want to say it.

"They can be sacrificed, for a stronger monster," Masika said for her as Sekhmet continue to groom her.

"We are humans, we can't be sacrificed! I mean, what good would that do?!" Téa felt like she was freaking out. "There's no way just little us equals 33 million people, right? We're just meaningless when you think of it that way."

"Oh, she's so scared." Bastet scooped Téa up like she was the cat in her large arms. "Don't be scared, Part of First Tear of Ra. Of course you aren't worth anything alone except nostalgia. The key word to the thinking is 'combination'. Infusion and de-fusion, creates gods. Hathor was split apart, defused, to be Sekhmet and I. Horakhty is infused of three gods, Ra, Slifer, and Obelisk."

"Okay, let's do this!" Sekhmet said as she used her magic to lift Masika upward. Téa watched as a big white glow started to appear behind Sekhmet.

"Sekhmet doesn't like long explanations, sorry." Bastet lifted Téa as well, while more white big glowy orbs showed behind them. Bastet leaped backward into the light, as well as Sekhmet.

"I have a bad feeling about this!" Téa looked toward Masika and tried to hold her hand as she felt herself being flung into a huge light orb.

"What's going on already?" Yugi could see a lot of light going on top of the building.

"I don't care the risk, we gotta get up there," Joey insisted.

"Atem?" Yugi asked. "What do you think?"

"He doesn't know anything, he's royalty," the Bandit King answered. "I'm going up."

"Are we sure about this?" Bakura asked him as he followed him and Joey.

"Wait, there's something coming down," Atem warned them. There were large white orbs and-

"Got some bad feelings about this," Joey said as he watched everyone there but him get pulled into glowing orbs and moving toward the top of the building. Should he go back to his sister and Mai? Kaiba was there. "Something's going on, and I've gotta find out what." He headed upward into the building. It was a simple hotel, so he got a room on the top floor. He went up the elevator and then found the emergency exit.

By the time he got up there he saw Téa and Masika on the ground, resting in some gold blankets, with Sekhmet and Bastet around them.

Sekhmet roared at him, but Bastet made it easier.

"The ladies will join you soon. They are resting. Go seek the others, they went back to the ground."

Yeah, they looked like they were resting. They were kind of glowing too. Like a lot. Should he leave? ///Joey: Yeah, yeah. Lion saying she don't care if I live to see if my kid is born right now./// He headed back down. The white orbs were hanging around the back of the hotel where they had hollered before. "Hey, guys? Can you leave the big white . . . orb things? Hello?" Nothing.

He waited a little while. Kicked a rock around on the ground for a bit when he watched one of the orbs spit up one of his friends. Oh, not one of his friends.

Bandit King growled as he pulled himself out the ground. "Fucking blasted- the fuck was that?!" He looked at himself and then toward Joey. "Are you waiting to take a picture?"

"Naw." Joey glared right back. "Don't flatter yourself. What happened?"

"I don't know. We were sucked up and then spit out."

Yugi tumbled out next. Also definitely naked, but a lot more upset about it. He crawled behind a trashcan. "What the heck happened? Where are my clothes?"

Joey heard a yell as he watched another one come through. The other friendly Bakura. "Hey, Bakura. You'll probably be naked, and I don't have any clothes for anybody. Sorry." At least he could apologize.

"Thanks?" Bakura went behind the trashcan.

He watched Atem leave the orb, but he landed on his feet. Still, he looked at himself and didn't seem happy. He joined Yugi and Bakura behind the trashcan.

"Joey? Could you go and get some clothes? We can't really go anywhere like this," Yugi warned him.

"Yes please," the friendly Bakura announced. "We can't help anyone if we are naked, Joey."

"Okay, okay. I'll try to get something for everyone." Ooh. "You think Téa and Masika will need some clothes too? They're wrapped in big blankets up there, and those goddesses didn't want me getting close."

"Why the hell is Masika gaining any of this attention?" The meaner Bakura said as he just walked away being naked like it didn't bother him a bit. "She was trash of Egypt, just like me, what is going on around here? Why am I naked? Why was I thrown into huge orbs of light with the likes of all of you?"

"I don't know," Joey said. "You stay here, you're gonna get seen by people and arrested. We should figure out what's going on. Home isn't far."

"He's right," Bakura urged him. "Please stay here."

"Oh, fine, but I'm not hiding with all the trash," he said, "or any of the garbage either."

Yeah, yeah, he could joke all he wanted, he didn't need ladies seeing a naked angry mean spirited guy heading toward them. Joey arrived at the Game Shop and saw Mai, Serenity, and Seto Kaiba all there. "So? Yugi and everybody else got sucked up by some magic and spat back out. They're kind of all naked though, so I need to get inside and get some clothes."

"And that's just the beginning," Kaiba said to him. "I'm telling you, you should have kept your card. Things are going to get worse, not better."

"The hospital called," Serenity told him. "They said Tristan is starting to become responsive. We are all going to go down and make sure he really is okay once Kaiba's escort gets here."

"Nyah, hah, see?" Joey looked toward Kaiba. There's no way he could bother Serenity about a real relationship now. It would last until Skeezy was out of the picture, and that was the end of this thing with Serenity and him. He wasn't real fond of Tristan being Serenity's boyfriend, but he was way better than having Seto Kaiba. "Clothes."

"Not my place. Ransack it all you want," Kaiba said as Joey passed by.

"Hey, I'm fine by the way," Mai called out to him. "I'm heading out with Kaiba to go see Honda too."

"Probably a good idea," Joey said. "Sorry. I know this is all weird. We'll get a chance to relax at my place soon. You still got the key?"

In the Mood Part 2

"The dresses are gifts and you may keep them," Bastet insisted to Téa and Masika. "You look very lovely."

"It's fitting," Sekhmet complimented each of them. She bent down in her full lion form as Bastet changed back to a cat.

"Come," Bastet beckoned. "We shall take you back now."

Neither Téa or Masika made to move.

"You can't stay on a rooftop forever. You must go down and explain properly," Bastet told them. "You cannot hide it. There's no grace in that."

///Téa: Oh yeah? Well, I might be a dancer, but I hung out with three guys most of my life! Screw grace!///

///Masika: They can hear you.///

///Téa: I don't care.///

Bastet sighed. "They will know it is not your fault."

"They won't know anything because we aren't telling them anything." Téa looked toward Masika. "You better not either."

"We cannot hide this-"

"-Yes we can," Téa declared. "For one? It doesn't really matter, because they are never going to pick either one. My Yugi would never pick either one. So, we will pick for them. Done."

"Oh, I forgot how incredibly stubborn you had always been, Masika," Bastet said to Téa.

"My name is Téa, and I'm not in the mood for hearing anything else! Unless you goddesses spill the beans, then they will never know, and that's fair."

"I've always followed your will," Masika said to Téa. "But these are goddesses wishing for-"

"Wishing but not demanding," Téa said. "Do we have to, is it required of us?" Bordering on mockery. She didn't feel like she had anything to lose.

"It is not required," Bastet said. "We will not tell them. Yugi's card can be given to you."

"Good, because I'm taking it and my butt back to New York. I still have my apartment, everything's still fixed, I have plenty to wait for a new gig to hit to try out for." Never.

"Téa? I know this is sudden news, but-"

"I said no!" Téa commanded her. "And if you tell Yugi, well then, I'll never believe that we were really one being to being with! I'll never talk to you again, Masika!"

"May I tell-"

"No!" Téa said again. "Nobody. Not even our Bakura, the friendly Bakura, the mailman, nobody will know." ///Téa: Don't break./// "Not one person will know." ///Téa: Don't break./// "Because it'd just hurt worse. It's a lot easier to accept it this way." She looked toward Bastet and wiped a tear from her eye. "Okay, so we are doing this thing. You aren't going to hurt Yugi ever again. Not you or Sekhmet."

"I forgot about the fire that burned in her," Sekhmet mentioned too. "I will not snack anymore on your Yugi."

"Nobody hurts him. Nobody is going to know. Whenever they ask for a new deal, just tell them some simple stuff. Like? I don't know, just simple stuff to actually help. Send stuff to the other side that will help."

"We are already doing that," Bastet said.

"Well, let them be involved. They'll feel better." ///Téa: Stronger./// "Masika? We are going to disappear in a couple of months. They'll never know. Then, we won't see them ever again. We'll move to a different country or something." She looked toward Bastet. "Can you help us if we move to a different country until it's time?"

"Oh, I should have left it on the other side," Bastet said. "After getting everything, we just . . . I just wanted to make something right. Extra power, more energy, more time they didn't have . . . and humanity wonders why we never connect with it. It will be worse if you just leave your friends and disappear without a word. Their concern will be nothing but regrets."

"No, it's worse if they did know what you jerks did!" She yelled at them, not caring about whatever woes Bastet was wailing about. "And if it was just one thing, I could have awkwardly dealt with it, but it's against the millennium items. No one is going to make those for you, so tough!"

"If they don't, the other you could die in the other dimension later," Bastet warned her. "So it's been written by Thoth."

"I'm sorry, for her," Téa said. "I'm sorry for us."

"It's not in a normal way the Pharaoh's will ever want to let you go," Bastet tried again. "It's not a way that we prefer you to go either."

Sekhmet shrugged. "She knows what she wants. As you wish. I'll leave them alone. We can easily take care of you. I will send my cats to protect you from the villain that is after you in New York."

"I think I'll need more than little cats," Téa said.

"Little cats and big cats like I am," Sekhmet added. "They will hide around you, never interacting unless someone does something you don't like or if you call for them to show themselves. Then anyone hurting you will have mere moments left to breathe."

"Oh, that and so many gods and goddesses are already watching over you," Bastet said. "This isn't very graceful, but it is your life, human."

"They won't stop pursuing. Pharaoh's rarely stop when they should," Sekhmet warned her.

"You said that we have the power inside of us," Téa said. "I'm glowing like a neon sign so obviously I'll just tell them that, if they kill us, they can have the power to actually help save the world. They never would. They'll let me go and they will struggle to find a different way until the last minute. That's what they do, they keep going."

"Oh great." Masika wasn't happy about that.

"It'll be fine," Téa said to her.

"Says the one leaving to New York. Are you really leaving me for New York?"

"You can go live with Bakura for now for two months. We'll just be separated for two months." Two months was plenty. Just a little time to unwind to the truth. Just a little time to dance again. Just a little time to get away from Yugi again. To pretend reality wasn't there. "It's a nibble of the truth. We are cursed to die either way."

"Understood." Masika bowed. "Téa, you're a silly fool."

"And if you dare tell anyone, then I won't meet back up with you. You can figure it all out on your own," Téa warned her. "I mean it!"

"I understand," she said again. "You're still a fool."

Several small gods started to show up briefly, wave and disappear. Not even Masika bothered to address them.

"It will be fine," Sekhmet added as she scooped them up herself along with Bastet. "Let's go. History is being made, and we are here to meet it."

Yugi got the rest of his shirt buttoned up when he saw the large lion goddess come charging down the building. He immediately backed away, so far never having a pleasant experience with her!

Sekhmet stopped at the bottom. At least she didn't attack. Téa and Masika climbed off her back. Well, more like were slid off her back. Neither of them looked well.

While Yugi was petrified of Sekhmet, he couldn't help but notice her grooming Téa and Masika lightly. When she left, Téa and Masika didn't move. They didn't reach out for a hug, call out a name, nothing. What had happened? "Téa?"

"What the hell did the goddesses want you for, Masika?" Bandit King addressed Masika.

Masika looked toward Téa. Téa looked toward her.

"So?" Téa looked odd. "You guys wouldn't ever kill me."

Uh? That was weird. "Of course not."

"Heck no," Joey answer back, "we would never do that, no matter what."

"Even Atem." Téa looked toward Atem. "You'd never do that, right?"

///Atem: This is a bad question to be asking./// "You are my friend."

"Right." Téa nodded. "So you guys just have to work out something else." She gestured to her and Masika glowing like light bulbs. "Masika and I were this prophesized thing in Egypt called light goddesses. Well, not, we aren't goddesses, but it's what we were written down as. So, it counts. It's not defined as human sacrifice."

"What?!" Oh no, this wasn't happening! "You?! If we don't build the millennium items, then it's you?"

"No. No!" She sounded awkward. "It's not us, it's inside of us. This light stuff. If you figure out how to get it out, then you have a lot of power to gamble with instead of the millennium items. I don't know how to get anything out, so it's probably like killing us."

"It might not be." A prophecy? "We need to learn more about the prophecy. Maybe there's a ritual or something."

"Good idea, Yug, absolutely," Joey agreed. "There's gotta be a different way to get at your light bulb power. If they shoved it in, there's probably a test to get it back out."

"Look, I have some protection now. A lot of it, so I don't have to worry about anyone coming after me," Téa said. "Everything's fine again, so I need to get back to New York. My life is still there, and I have a real chance of getting it back. I'm going to pack up soon."

"What, you are just up and moving?" Joey asked her. "That's not good, Téa. Plus, you are a light bulb."

"I up and moved here, temporarily, until this situation was figured out," she said. "It's figured out now."

"You should stay," Yugi said. She really did glow like a light bulb. "We can find more about whatever this prophecy is, to get that power out, and help that way."

"I really want to get back to my life," Téa said, "and it's been long enough. It was great visiting, and I really appreciate everything you did. I promise, I will pay you back for it all. This was really the best extended vacation. Don't worry though. If you find something? Masika will be just over at Bakura's. You can try it on her, and if it works, then I'm just a phone call away."

"She's coming with us?" Bakura asked.

"Yep, she's with you," Téa all but demanded. "Oh, and hey!" She wrapped her arms around Yugi, in the fakest way possible. "Best news ever? Nobody has to worry about sharing bodies anymore. Everyone gets their own from now on. No more switching or anything. Pretty great. Oh, and these?" She took the necklace off. "No more of these sticking anymore. These actually belong to another dimension anyhow, so it's better to get rid of these. That's why Masika and I had to choose between you guys and the Bakuras. They just didn't want three items from another dimension to stay over here." She patted his chest while he took the necklace. "Oh! And. No more Sekhmet, Yugi, she promises she won't hurt you. No one will hurt you anymore, Yugi. Ever again. Everything's going to be fine."

///Atem: She's lying, Yugi. Her death must be a way to ignore making the millennium items.///

///Yugi: Which would never happen! We'll find another way to get at the power.///

///Atem: Yugi. You understand why she is nervous, and why she asked us those questions. Why she is leaving back to New York very quickly./// "We will do everything in our power to find different ways to pay the price while you are back in New York."

///Yugi: We never will, we'll never kill her for whatever those goddesses put in her. Why would they even do that, why not just hand it to us?///

///Atem: They want us to create the millennium items.///

///Yugi: Why?///

///Atem: I don't know why, but it's not an option.///

///Yugi: Well, neither is killing Téa.///

"Nobody here, ever, is ever gonna hurt you," Joey said to her. "Ever. Now, if going to New York gets your mind off of this, then okay. If you are just trying to run though, from whatever is going on, you're going to have to face it someday, Téa."

"Masika can be used," Téa repeated.

///Atem: Masika is a spirit that came from the afterlife.///

///Yugi: That's still not right, Atem.///

Atem glanced at Dark Bakura. ///Atem: He would give anything to not have those items remade either. She could be doomed either way.///

///Yugi: Yeah, but what if it's too much power? What if he gets a hold of it and decides to actually just keep it? He liked power. Oh. I didn't . . . I'm not actually talking like this.///

///Atem: 99 people plus Téa in exchange for a spirit who should be in the afterlife. You are talking about it, Yugi. We will look and research into this prophecy. If we find nothing, then something must be done.///

///Yugi: It will never be Téa./// "Hm?"

"I said I was already going to book tickets," Téa said. "I didn't bring a whole lot, so it shouldn't take very long to leave."

"Right. You don't have anything to worry about," Yugi told her. "We'll figure this out. The glowing too."

"I know. It'll quit."

"It should probably quit before you leave," Yugi suggested. "Right. You don't have anything to worry about. We'll figure this out."

"I know. I just, I have no reason to stay, Yugi. I need to get back to my real life, you know?" Téa said. "It's okay. I'll be fine."

///Yugi: Her smile is so dead./// "Well, take a little time here before you go. No need to rush off."

"Yeah, but, I just really miss my home," Téa said. "Enjoy your life, Masika. Let's go see how Tristan's doing now." She walked off, straight toward home. Not even a look back at Masika when she said to 'enjoy her life'. That felt so cold.

"Come Masika, let's go," Dark Bakura said to her as the two of them also started to walk.

Bakura looked back at Yugi with a shrug. "What's really happening, Yugi?"

Yugi didn't know how to answer that. "Maybe we should all meet for one more game at your house before she leaves to New York?" The way she brushed that off so fast, like she wanted Masika gone quickly.

"That might be the best idea ever," Bakura agreed. "Good luck, Yugi. I hope Tristan is okay. I'm sure he has lots of visitors right now." He sighed. "It must be something terrible, she is absolutely lying about everything." Then he walked away.

"I don't know if she's lying about everything, but she is hiding several things," Atem said to Yugi. "She didn't give Masika an ounce of time to talk, sent her away without a proper goodbye, and is up and leaving to New York as fast as she can get a ticket." He glanced back to the direction Bakura walked. "One more game before she goes is good, Yugi. Isolating Masika to find out what really happened is better."

Really? "I don't know, Atem," Yugi reminded him. "You and her don't really ever seem to click."

"I was always trying to be friends to her for you," Atem corrected him. "This time." He didn't respond. "I need the necklace, Yugi."

"Not saying anything bad," Joey said, "but it can't be Téa."

"Can we change her mind?" Yugi asked Joey. When it came to Téa, usually Yugi knew how to handle her. But, that stubborn side of her. That firey side, it was there in full swing. When she got that stubborn, she didn't always step off easy.

"She got them eyes," Joey said. "I think whatever she's hiding, she's intending on taking it to the grave. I really hope that's not literal. Is she already on the chopping block and she's not telling us?"

Yugi gasped. ///Yugi: No!///

"She got Masika outta here like fast," Joey noticed too. "Yeah. I think Atem having a good old-fashioned talk might work better."

Atem looked at the millennium necklace Yugi handed over.

"Let's just try to each research what we can about light goddesses first," Yugi said. "We have time."

"Do we? Téa is fine here, plenty of help and money, awesome friends, and she just shot out for the first ticket she could get, to get out of here. It wasn't like her. Especially after being out here for so long," Joey said. "Shoot, it isn't like her to just up and leave when everything's all wonky. Tristan. These cards. She's running, guys. Maybe we don't have as much time as she's saying."

Atem clenched the necklace. "Joey's right, Téa's move was terribly fast. If something is going to happen, it may be soon. We should call up Bakura."

Yugi hated to move too fast, but what if Joey was right? Nobody there believed a word she said, even Bakura wasn't fooled. "Joey, you talk to Téa first. Then I'll talk to Téa. Atem?" Please let this end well. "You talk to Masika. We need to find out what's really going on, and how long we actually have before something happens to Téa."

"You talk first, Yug, tonight. Just make sure she doesn't leave tonight. If she does, then I'll come over and talk. Otherwise, I'll be here first thing in the morning. I'm sure I've got a nervous Mai at my house. I don't want her to bolt," Joey reminded him. "Right now, I don't want to leave her alone for very long. She can be . . . hard to read sometimes."

///Yugi: Yeah. Like joining the Orichalcos kind of hard to read./// "I get it, Joey. I'll talk to her first." He looked toward Atem. "You're going to need more than a Connect Four game this time."

Don't Break, Masika!

Masika tried to relax. It wasn't an easy thing, to relax. She was being sent back to the afterlife soon, but she didn't remember it or know it. There was a great peace of mind that it would be better now. Everything else though, was no comfort.

Téa went off the deep end. It was an unusual predicament, and she understood the unfairness and feelings, but to hide it? Yes, most likely, they would die. But? There was always a chance for something to turn. Hearing that the 'them' in another dimension would be dying, not just naturally, but in a way that 'Pharaoh's didn't like'. It only meant one thing: Their afterlife was sealed, could not be changed by even a goddess, and would be terrible.

Terrible enough that a Pharaoh trapped in a puzzle for thousands of years thought it to be 'terrible.' Whatever happened, Masika would not want to know the details. They certainly didn't deserve it. More details about the items, more time? Why were goddesses wanting them remade? Why couldn't they remake them themselves?

Life moved on though, and even though she had her own body, she still felt obligated to follow Téa's wishes. She had lived inside of her for so long, unknown, that it still felt like she should listen. Still, Téa jumped so fast, that it made her jumpy. It wouldn't be long before the Pharaoh's were knocking on the door to seek the truth.

"Would you like something to drink?" Light Bakura was being sweet. Though he certainly wasn't okay with two spirits suddenly coming into his home, Téa commanded it. While Téa was a sweet girl, usually a pushover for certain things, when times got rough? Téa dove straight in with an anger that only the original Masika used. Something she could not muster.

While Téa was sweet she could have such a fire inside of her sometimes. It was honestly part of the real attraction that the Yugi Pharaoh part didn't understand. He never glowed more than when she was upset.

///Masika: For now, just relax./// "I am fine. I will only be staying for two months. I prefer to find my own way in this world, now that I can."

"Absolutely not," Dark Bakura insisted. "The skills you possess now would only land you on the streets to get out that fast."

"Yeah, he's right," Bakura agreed handing her a water anyway. "I think from hearing . . ." He paused. Of course he did, he was too sweet to address it much. "We can figure out something. I'm sure the Ishtars would probably help you get established."

Masika took the water politely. She did feel parched. "Thank you for your kindness."

"No problem." He gave her such a sweet smile. "There is only one guest room, I'm sorry. You can . . ."

"She can share just fine with me," Dark Bakura insisted as he came closer to her. "So? While you were up there fooling around with goddesses, everyone but Joey down there took a tumble into a light orb."

"Sorry to hear. Hope it didn't hurt," she teased. "It wasn't fun."

"No, it wasn't. Do you mind telling me? Oh, I don't know. What the fuck that was all about?" Temper. "Téa practically raced out of there and commanded you here. I'm not complaining, this is where you should have been in the first place, but none of that bodes well."

Was he Masika's hero? Yes. Great at extracting information? Not without serious harm. Would he hurt her? "I have nothing to say." Not in more than a thousand years. "This water is good."

"Out with it, woman!" he demanded. "What happened?"

"A ball of light consumed me and I took a tumble. We all tumbled around like toddlers and came back out," she said. "I am rather tired."

"Why aren't you telling me?" A cross between anger and concern. "What's wrong?"

"I can't break a promise to Téa," she admitted. "It's best not to worry about me. I won't be your responsibility soon."

"It wouldn't make any sense." He just stared at her. "Sure, you're like a beloved pet to the gods, but you aren't worth the price of all those lives combined. Not your life, not just a single life. What is being asked of you and why?"

She couldn't say. He poked and prodded but he finally gave up. ///Masika: Téa.///

///Téa: Don't break, Masika. It's better this way. Yugi is trying to bug me, but I won't break. No one will make me break. There's no reason to break, all it would do is crush them.///

///Masika: Téa. Maybe at least telling them that the other us will die-///

///Téa: I know myself, and if she's really like me, then she'd rather die than hurt anyone else. Bringing back Zorc can never happen. He was responsible for Atem's death. Atem killing all those people, slaughtering them? No, we can't.///

///Masika: I fear for our other selves, not just their death, their afterlife. It is not a light matter when goddesses grow concerned! We have several months to figure this out, and you and the others have always-"/

///Téa: I can't. I can't, not for this. I don't want to play let's figure it out, when we are already like this. They would be searching and hoping for the whole time, or they might even . . . I don't want to die, but I can't ever make Atem or Bakura reform what essentially killed them. If Zorc comes back too, both Bakuras . . . I can't. This saves all those lives, Masika. Everyone's happy this way. Everyone gets to live. Everyone gets their own bodies.///

///Masika: I care not if I have a body this much! Please. I know you are upset. Greatly upset. Give yourself some time to think about it. Wait at least a few days before returning to New York. Let's see what happens.///

///Téa: No, and don't you dare try to set up some last minute game over at Bakura's to say goodbye. It won't help. It won't do anything. I yelled at poor Yugi long enough his face turned red. I made him so upset.///

///Masika: Probably a combination. He is worried, but he loves when you yell at him too.///

///Téa: Not the time for jokes, Masika. Ugh. Someone is knocking at the door again. Probably Yugi.///

Someone was knocking at Bakura's door too. Bakura seemed a little too chipper to answer it.

Yep. Pharaoh Atem was at the door, with a game of Connect Four. ///Masika: Not even close.///

Bakura led Atem straight over, they must have worked out a strategy over the phone.

"Masika," Atem greeted her. "I wanted to discuss something with you, and we tend to get along better when we are in the middle of a game."

"I am not in the mood," she answered truthfully.

"Oh, come on." That sway was not his. The way he just pulled out the game anyway, that was not like him. He was already gaming his open personality. "We can finish one game of Connect Four, and I will leave you be."

He was still plainly yet aggressively setting up the game. "I'm tired."

"It won't take long," he insisted.

"It always takes long with me," she insisted back.

"Masika." Yep, there was his real voice. "You know me well enough to know, that if I want to play a game, I will find a way to make someone play a game. Sit up straight. We are talking."

Unfortunately, he was right. Pharaoh always got what they wanted. She grabbed a game piece. "Yes, Greatest Pharaoh of all-"

"Greatest Pharaoh, yes I was, and don't forget that."

Masika watched the area around them turn dark with a familiar mist. They were in their own space now. The rest of the world was gone, only their table remained with them. Impossible. How?

Oh. That's how. She saw Atem swing the necklace up from his hand. ///Masika: Atem has tricked me, Téa, I told you this would not end well. Téa?///

"Trying to get through to Téa?" Atem held up the millennium necklace he had hidden on him up more clearly for her to see. "It will be harder in the shadow realm."

Shadow realm. Again. This place. Atem was not messing around with her. "If you trap me here, Téa will never speak to Yugi again." Not even phased. No, they were too concerned about her to think of such a menial thing.

Then, as if a reoccurring nightmare couldn't be more true, Atem reached into his pocket. The Connect Four was just a lull to make her accept the game. "I need information on Téa. The sooner you tell me what I want to know, the sooner you will be allowed to leave."

Shadow realm. Not here again. "You don't have a single remorseful bone in your body to be so cold as to bring me back here."

"Tell me what I want to know, or you will end up staying here. Check your side of the table. There's a drawer. Open it." Factual. Simple.

Masika already knew what would be in it. Bakura must have prepared the area earlier. Too sweet. What a nice cover. She opened it up and saw the cards. If she lost a game with him, she would stay sealed in the shadow realm.

"Everyone knows Téa is hiding something," Atem told her. "What happened up there with the goddesses?"

"She yelled at them like they were common trash," Masika said. "Quite amazing."

"Téa yelled at them? There must have been a reason."

"Yes, we were flung into orbs and taken out naked."

"I don't think that's it," Atem said. "That's not enough to make her book the fastest trip out of here. Something is happening. How much time do we have?"

Technically, it wasn't against Téa's will. "I have no idea. Less than a year."

"If it's less than a year, and not simply days, then why is she running?" Atem asked. "Her life is at stake."

"She doesn't know how long either." ///Masika: If I leave him mad, and he leaves me here, then the goddess inside will stay in the shadow realm too./// He would end up trapping his own . . . ///Masika: Daughter./// "You are making a very big mistake doing this. You have no idea what you put on the line by trapping me in the shadow realm. I cannot tell you, but you cannot do this."

"I understand that the goddess' may have already made my friend a sacrifice card." He wasn't stupid. "It's clear to everyone her life is in danger. Why isn't she asking for help?"

"She would rather die than let any of you know the truth." How could she approach this. "If you have to choose to remake the millennium items, or sacrifice your friend, which will you choose? Sorry, you don't get that choice. She made it for you."

It was just enough information. Enough that they could understand why she was running. Hopefully enough to pull her out of the game.

"Her life is the sacrifice, I already guessed that, that is nothing new. Why do they want the millennium items recasted?" Atem asked. "Is it yours too?"

It was getting more dangerous now.

"Masika." Oh, that pause. "You have lived a life before. I am your Pharaoh in your afterlife, I can make it easier for you."

Yep. "You're ready to sacrifice me?"

"We should not even be here, we have been through our life cycle. If you returning to your afterlife saves Téa, you must accept it. So should she. Running off to New York and placing you in the safety of the Bakura's does not change the facts. State what you want in your afterlife."

///Masika: I am not getting a choice, Téa./// "You will regret this for thousands of years, and then, you will regret it more!"

"State what you want, or tell me the full truth." Committed.

"My afterlife. I want . . . I want . . ." What to tell him? "The day I died. Where you met Sekhmet and Bastet. When you killed me with Heba." It wasn't just coincidence.

"That is not how you died," Atem replied.

"The great Atem sacrifices me and mine for what he thinks is something greater! Maybe being punished in the puzzle wasn't an accident, maybe it was the price you paid for this mistake you are making now! A mistake so great you needed to be pre-punished for it!"

"You aren't making any sense, I never killed you and yours before, you died sacrificing yourself for your friend. Is the shadow realm disturbing your mind already?"

"If I tell, Téa will stop being my friend. I still feel an obligation to her. However, I have a greater obligation too. I do not want to fail either one." Masika waited for him to make whatever move would knock her card away.

"What will you tell me?" Atem knocked away her card easily with some trap. "What is the prophecy of the light goddess?"

"I don't know," she said. She placed another card in defense.

"What is the light?" Atem asked, this time attacking it and taking it out. "Where did it come from?"

"The other dimension, as well as this one. That's all I know about it," she told him. Another card in defense.

"Can it come out without causing death?" he asked. "Do I have to sacrifice you to save Téa?"

How much longer could she keep this up? The shadow realm was always such a drain. Strangely, she found herself wiping at her eyes. Grieving? "I can't believe I'm actually crying." Yet, she had been. "I haven't cried in thousands of years, I thought I couldn't anymore." She felt herself sniffing. "This body is betraying me."

"The body is not betraying you." The edge of the enemy he had used on her was waning, but he still attacked her card, wiping it out. "It doesn't let you hide what you are feeling deep inside. You do not want to lose Téa's friendship, nor do you want to lose yourself or Téa again. Fear. Doubt. It's all written on your face."

Fear. Doubt. "She should tell, Greatest Pharaoh, everyone involved deserves to know what is going on here, as well as on the other side."

"You know about the other sides of you?" he asked.

It Was A Premonition!

"The humane, living part of me that won't stop crying being in this dreadful place again, that is breaking down shamefully, that has such doubts she will escape. It feels all of the pain and regret festering inside, and it knows that while you hold the upper hand and can clamp down at anytime on me? That you will endlessly weep into eternity, because you at any moment could commit a sin that cannot be undone. That side wants to do nothing more than to tell everyone and cry out the truth! But the spirit side of me, the knowing side of me that feels such a deep connection to Téa, to protect *her*, to follow *her* will, it cries out for me to put up with any hell you throw at us to protect her secret!"

He didn't answer right away. "What do you know of the other side of you?"

///Masika: I don't want to be owned again!/// Masika tried to control herself. "Too much emotion!"

"Yes. It's tough sometimes."

///Masika: Husband after husband after husband. I wasn't even alive anymore, and I'll be owned by two husbands right before I die! /// "I hate living and I love living."

"Yes. I do too."

Okay. She had to get herself under control. "The other versions of us are not only doomed to die, but doomed to die in a way that the goddesses themselves want to prevent. They said that the Pharaoh's will be pained, in the way that they go. When I saw Bastet's face, her concern, it is not mere torture. The very fact they want the millennium items recasted to save them tells me that they must be tricked into a terrible-"

"Afterlife." Atem finished for her. "There is only one reason to want the millennium items remade. Zorc must somehow . . ." he paused. He took his finger and stroked down his chin slowly, turning his finger into a wave. "If we don't recast the millennium items, then we lose you and Téa as punishment for not saving the other you's."

He didn't cry like her, but he seemed to be going through his own emotions. "It's the basics," she uttered. "Take what you know, and triple the pain and secrets, and you will arrive at the truth I want to scream."

"Just with what I know? This isn't easy," Atem admitted. "You and Téa are to be sacrificed, because we don't make the millennium items. It is emotional. It will tear Yugi apart forever. If I had to do it, he would never speak to me again. But, as emotional and tragic as it is?"

She watched him. Even that much wasn't going to be enough. He wiped out her card easily. She put up another card, in defense mode.

"Two simple lives do not equal the massive damage that will be caused, plus the millennium item power. That means, that light inside of you and Téa is more than equal to the millennium power. It can't just be you and Téa. That can't just be energy."

Doomed. "I tried to be loyal to Téa." ///Masika: Owned. Again. ///

"Téa is scared and irrational. Even you believe she should say something instead of running away. What does she need?"

"Something that I don't think anyone can give us," she said. "I already told you everything I can without telling you. That you killed me and mine for a higher power."

"That was a delusion brought on by the goddesses."

"No, it was a premonition. Of things to come. That was not me, that was the real Masika, Téa and I together. Holding such a precious thing, being sacrificed for a higher purpose."

"The light inside is something precious. It is the real sacrifice?"

Masika couldn't answer.

"Masika. I will say this plainly, and I want an answer. I swear to Ra, that no matter what, your afterlife will be better. If I sacrifice you, would it save Téa?"

"And so it comes to pass," she uttered.

"If you go, will she be okay?" he repeated.

"You will mourn over a thousand years-"

"Then I will morn over a thousand years, I have done everything I could before to protect my friends!" Yet, she could still see some humanity hiding inside of him. "You are a friend too, but you have already had your chance at life. Do this for Téa."

"I would, if it were just me. You may be right. No, you are right," she said softly. "Sacrifice me and this energy, and it's all over. No more worries. Except, that you only still see another spirit in front of you. I was carrying Heba that day."

"That was a delusion, I did not kill you."

"You are not listening. I was in control of your Dark Magician, your most trusted card! It is not a card I wield, but it is your most trusted possession!"

Sehket's Move

Border between the Afterlife . . .

Masika looked around herself. She was no longer in the shadow realm? The air felt strange. She was surrounded by several old statues, short along the borders of the wall. "Where am I?"

"The Border, Between Death and Life. Call it Limbo if you want to."

Deadly voice. She could feel her skin want to crawl as she shivered to it. "Are you a god?"

"No. I'm sure you can sense that."

Masika didn't know what to do. What did Atem do, where did he send her to? "This isn't the shadow realm."

"The shadow realm is *my* territory. The goddesses know this."

"Masika!" Sekhmet was in front of the doorway, but she didn't come in. She held out a paw. "You are going to be okay." She pulled her paw back. "This is as far as I am allowed to step. You are in a spot that gods nor demons inhabit. It's neutral." She lied down. "It was the best I could do. I sensed when the shadow realm was coming near our goddess, but I could not reach you. How dare that Atem try something so sinister!"

"He is a Pharaoh. Pharaoh's demand obedience." Strange. She wiped a tear away. "I can still cry?"

"You are still alive, you are in the neutral border," Sekhmet told her. "Zorc tossed you in there, but he cannot retrieve you easily. Both sides of god and demon must come to an understanding to deal with the area humans so easily possess."

Zorc. "He grabbed me in the shadow realm."

"I couldn't get to you, but I could hear you. I heard Atem's words, and I was not going to let that mongrel trap our daughter in the shadow realm for eternity! Imagine. A goddess, a new goddess, trapped in the shadow realm."

"She'd be a new demon," Zorc's voice came from around her. "Interesting company."

"We knew somehow Zorc would get involved in the god's game," she growled. "Thoth wrote it, it must be true, but we didn't see how. It was Atem this whole time! As much as it pained me, I told Isis, and the future once seen will be." She propped herself back up. "Zorc will join the god's game."

"God's game?" Masika asked.

"It's the other dimension's problem, not yours." Still, Sekhmet tried to put her paw in again. "Come here."

Masika didn't feel a threat from Sekhmet. She came closer.

"Our sweet goddess is at risk of becoming a demon, due to Zorc's presence always being here. Bastet and I have to navigate all around between dimensions, but Zorc will camp out right here. He has nothing to lose."

Masika heard a deep, sinister chuckle.

"Taweret has agreed to stop when she can. Bes, a god you don't know, but also an ally for you, will also be here. He will probably drive you batty with his music," Sekhmet said, as if trying to joke with her to lighten the mood. "You may have human visitors too, but they will have to come in a different way. Almost every Seto Kaiba out there was drawn to make a way to cross into the afterlife to win against Pharaoh. Only one was allowed to cross, but Isis will let your Seto Kaiba cross the threshold now."

"Téa?"

Sekhmet put her paw on the ground, and put in her other paw. The ground seemed to pain her and she pulled back. "A regular human will have trouble getting inside."

"Then I can leave?" Masika asked.

"Zorc won his way into a reward, but there is no way I can stop him from interfering with you when you come out of here." Sekhmet actually seemed pained. "No human can last more than a few minutes in there. You will need Silhouette to be born to survive, but then she will be at even greater risk of being taken by Zorc. You won't be able to leave until Zorc leaves this area."

"Oh, it's quite homey here," the evil voice said again. "I'm not moving. That dark energy is mine, that means it's mine too."

"He will leave you unsecured, when the other version of you comes here," Sekhmet said. "She won't be here in this sanctuary with you, she'll be in another one far enough away Zorc will have to move."

"To . . . take her over." It was beginning to make sense now. "The other me will have no protection." Zorc could hear every word though.

"Infecting a small amount of goddess is one thing, a chance to erase all of existence is his ultimate goal. He will move. When he does, the humans must be ready to collect you."

"What about the other me?" Masika asked.

"That you does not have to survive for everyone to win the game. She also is not carrying our precious goddess. It is a crueler fate, but we have bent over backwards to make everyone recast the millennium items in your dimension. It would pull him back to Earth, and into your

dimension. If they do not, he will be here." She roared like something hurt her heel. "Damn them, if this wasn't enough, then I will hit it where it hurts for their sacrifices!"

Oh, Sekhmet was angry! Masika bowed to her. "Please, not Mokuba!" She didn't want anyone to pay the same sacrificial price but Mokuba never did anything wrong. "Please."

"We know you care for him," Sekhmet answered her. "We have not involved him at all. It would be a better chance to make Seto Kaiba make the items, but we know he means much to you."

"Can he visit?" Masika asked.

"Visits are going to be rare, they take power visiting this way," Sekhmet reminded her. "It'll probably be just the Pharaoh's since they are potential future gods if they pass a test- insepit Atem! I can't believe I have to share my goddess with him."

"What about Hikaru?" Masika asked.

"Téa will be fine," Sekhmet said.

"No, she won't," Masika said back. "This has frightened her so much. It will haunt her forever. It isn't right to take her life for this. If this place is safe for humans, and she can birth Hikaru here, then can't we survive this way? Seto Kaiba could come retrieve us like he has to now."

"It is a way to survive, but no one has stated they will build the millennium items. It's more than just a way to get Zorc to leave. The dimensions balance against each other. Bastet and I had no choice but to create two sets of millennium items in the other dimension. We used a lot of power to do it."

Sekhmet laid back down. "We used a very good deal of power on a lot of things. We are still using our power to give everything we have. We need time to reoperate to take on such a massive task again."

That was why they just didn't recreate it. "Balance."

"Everyone who could help, is helping somewhere else, or are reserving power to help afterward. A lot of forces are in motion. If they did it? It would save both of you, and the god and goddess would be fine on Earth. Drained, but fine on Earth." Sekhmet once again tried to step in. "Come as close as possible, I do not have much time. This is going to hurt, but you'll die with the goddess in you if I . . . don't . . ."

Masika watched as she roared and headed right for her.

The mist went away, the table had appeared back in the real world, but Masika was missing.

"How did it go?" Bakura asked. "Did the ruse work?"

"It would have." Atem continued to look around. He was sure he had her scared enough to start speaking the truth. "She kept talking about the delusional way she thought I sacrificed her last time. The shadow realm was harder on her mind."

"Asshole."

He ignored Dark Bakura.

"You too!" Dark Bakura said to Light Bakura. "Stupid plan. Scare the crap out of her until she tells you. What kind of plan was that?"

"Simple, desperate, and it was working." Atem didn't understand it. She had started to panic. He had hit one of her worst fears. Something was happening to Téa, and she was too panicked to help explain it. If she had left, she might have been lost. Having their own body, to live again, was a very freeing feeling. Yet, they were still spirits. Still very connected and it would take a great amount to make her tell a secret her host did not want to share.

"Where is she?" Bakura asked. "I don't understand."

"Someone else broke the millennium power I held over the game." He didn't know what to do. Where did Masika go?

He communicating with Yugi to see if Téa had heard from her. He got Yugi to ask, and said she wasn't communicating with Téa right now. "Masika is not communicating with Téa."

"The gods must have interfered," Bakura reasoned. "Where would they have taken her?"

Atem didn't know. "If the goddesses took her, then we must trust they will bring her back."

"Sure. We'll call you when she gets back," Dark Bakura said.

"No, I should wait." This wasn't good. The shadow realm was not a place that gods would dwell in the first place.

"You cannot sacrifice in the name of good, in the shadow realm." Sekhmet's voice boomed before she appeared, bearing her teeth at him. "It is not our domain."

"I know that." Of course.

"You were about to sacrifice her!" Sekhmet accused him.

"No, he was just trying to fish the truth out of her," Dark Bakura said. "Him and Bakura are responsible."

"Téa was hiding something terrible, and we wanted to help," Bakura said to her. "Atem said he would use it to scare her."

"You sounded like you were about to end her!" Sekhmet complained again. She didn't look any better knowing it was a trick. On the contrary, her claws started to come out as she marched across the floor. She looked ready to devour her next meal.

Atem didn't know what to say, he didn't want gobbled up. "I am very sorry for not reaching out to tell you. You aren't easy to reach," he reminded her. "Where is Masika?"

"I should eat you!" She swiped close to him with her huge paw. "I promised Téa I would not hurt Yugi, but you aren't joined with him anymore!"

Atem took another step back. "I did not mean-!"

"No, you wanted to play cards and gain the knowledge that the women hid. Of course, you are Pharaoh. You never know when enough is enough." She growled and backed away. "We had to call in a deal, a deal with a demon that no longer bothered your dimension. Thoth did foresee we would need him, we tried to manage around it, yet you are the one who brought this to be."

Oh no. "Zorc?"

"Yes. We had to ask him to save Masika from your idiotic mistake! Now, he has earned his place with Isis to make the deal." Sekhmet layed down. "I could hear, but I could not enter the shadow realm. I have no form of friendship with you, I'd rather eat you if given the choice, so my words couldn't reach you. You are no longer spirits, but your souls are still tied to your original host. You can hear them, and you would do everything in your power to obey them."

"Yes. Still, I was breaking through to the truth." He watched Sekhmet. "What is the truth?"

"She told you, as best she could. She was holding your most trusted possession, and you are bound to sacrifice her if you don't recast the millennium items." She propped herself back up to her haunches. "She is holding your child. You've just casted a queen you did not know you have, and the unborn you did not know you have, into the reach of Zorc."

What? "Did she tell you that?" He had never done anything like that. "She is a very good actress, but I have done nothing with her."

"Look at your second card, I have revealed it to you now. That power you feel within Masika is a goddess. Your goddess Within the other, it is the same, except with the light sides."

What? Atem checked his card. "How . . . but . . ." Each time he wanted to ask the question, he got the answer. It was a small card, but it was filled with all of the information he had wanted. "She is 45 percent mine. She is five percent yours. She is five percent Dark Bakura's?"

"It is what?!" Dark Bakura checked his card, as well as Bakura now.

"Blimey, I'm the father of Téa's child?" Bakura didn't look so good as he leaned against the wall.

"Yes, in preparation for some challenge, Bastet wanted it that way. She is five percent mine too, which is why I had to make the deal for Zorc. I don't trust either of you to actually make it pass Ammut's test, and the next new gods are not going to be powerless because of you."

"Yes, I see that!" ///Atem: Curse this!/// "I just handed Zorc an unborn goddess."

"Yes, your only blood ever born unto you. How's that sit in your loins? You'd sit well in my loins," she said casually. "It is the same with your other half, so run home. Go. Tell Yugi to look at his card. I hope the price of the secret was worth it to you, ignorant Pharaoh."

"Masika?"

"Oh, *now* he cares. If your other self knew that you . . ." She started to groom herself.

"Nevermind, I forgot he pulled that move too when he felt power inside. He was smart enough to know when to stop though."

"I didn't actually sacrifice her, I would never sacrifice her life so easily." Yet, he couldn't just say it was her interruption that caused it, she already wanted to carve at him. "How do we get her back?"

"She isn't coming back easily. She is in a place not reachable by gods or demons. I will tell you more later but I have to recruit extra help, whether they like it or not." She growled. "One of you will bend!"

Hospital

///Seto: Ridiculous./// Tristan kept spewing about his feelings and how he was so scared he'd never see Serenity again. He was laying it on extra thick. True, he was supposed to die, but he was saying things he had no right to say to her.

He shouldn't care. He didn't even know how he knew Tristan was lying; he hadn't seen him since he was a teenager. Even then, he was just a background character, hardly noticeable in importance. He watched a cat stroll into the room. He watched another cat stroll into the room. Both of them stood right beside him and stared at him. Not exactly common in a hospital.

"Sorry," an attendant came in. "We don't know where they came from or how they got in." She tried to take them but they just hissed at her.

"Sorry to interrupt your lying chauvinistic speech possibly leading to a cliché proposal," he said to Tristan, "but I think I have a cat outside that needs to talk." He walked away and followed it out the door.

It led him around the back, but it was leading more than him. Serenity had followed too. Tristan probably would have, but he was strapped in IV's. Idiot might still follow.

They continued toward the back, and met the cat he didn't like to talk to. "You called?" He felt his sacrifice card getting stolen away, and watched as Serenity's did too.

"Blame Atem," Sekhmet growled. "Go to the Game Shop." She tossed him two cards and gave Serenity none while she disappeared.

Kaiba looked at his new cards. "Damn."

"What are they?" Serenity asked. "I didn't get one."

Kaiba didn't answer as he looked at the cards longer.

"Seto Kaiba?" she asked again.

It wouldn't be right to hide it. He showed her. "Card one, let's me join the gang of 'let's remake the millennium items'. Card two, is you." He let her hold the card.

"I'm going to . . .?" She read it. "Can we get the original cards back? Please?"

"Atem did something that pissed off Sekhmet," Seto warned her. "I have a feeling this is the lion's tantrum." Oh yes, there was that pitiful sound of a moron chasing after him. The bleeding Tristan was right there. "You already missed the show."

"Serenity, are you okay?" Tristan ignored him in favor of Serenity.

"The card was changed," she said. "I don't have to bear a child anymore."

"Oh, that's great!" He tried to hug her, but had to quit halfway through from the pain. "That couldn't be better news, Serenity."

"I have to die instead." Her voice was plain. Not quite getting it yet.

"What?" Tristan asked her a ton of questions she didn't know.

Seto Kaiba just stood there. ///Seto: It's real apparent these goddesses want the millennium items back. Why? Pharaoh, what the hell did you do?/// He was barely even paying attention to the couple, until the clichéd line that he said Tristan would say, almost came out. He was really almost there, but Seto couldn't help himself. "Really not the time to propose when the bride to be will be a corpse soon."

"Shut it, Kaiba!" Tristan yelled at him, probably because he interrupted his dumb proposal. "Serenity, I promise. It'll be okay."

"Marriage isn't going to save her any more than eating a sandwich without mayo," Seto Kaiba pointed out again.

"I didn't ask anything." Tristan glared at him. "Don't listen to him Serenity. If I were to propose, I'd do it way better than out of the blue. You'd have a fancy restaurant and a nice ring and-"

Whatever. "I'm heading back to the Game Shop. We need to see what Atem did to make the big kitty mad. If we can correct it, maybe we'll get the original cards back."

"We don't want the original cards back, we want no card," Tristan said to him.

"I'm not going to be picky right now, Tristan." It seemed like Serenity was getting tired of him too. "I just became a sacrifice. I want to go to the Game Shop too."

--

Joey's Home

Mai. Safely at home. Well, his home. Joey used the keys to open the door. He saw her watching TV. Good, still there. "Hey."

"I went to see Tristan, but there were only so many guests," she said to him, like he was going to see if she cared. "Even that goddess said the God's Brew wasn't to blame."

He sat near her. "Fine, maybe it was just an effect it caused like actual alcohol. Maybe I should have said something. I was afraid that would ruin the chances you'd leave with me. I'm sorry I hurt you."

She stared at the TV. "Well I stole your soul, so I guess it's-"

Sekhmet appeared in front of the TV. She tossed Joey two cards. "Blame Atem!" Then disappeared.

Okay. "Cards again?" Joey stood up. "Hell no, not likely!" He looked toward Mai. "I gotta go to the Game Shop. Come with me."

"I'm not going to run away," she promised. "Deal with whatever the goddess gave you. You can't watch me 24/7 because you think I'll leave."

Joey showed her the card.

"Nevermind, I'll tag along." She got straight up. "How did we go from I am bearing a monster girl, to I die after she's born? What did Atem do to the lion?"

"I don't know, that kitty has a temper, we better just go now." ///Joey: I just got her back, I finally got her back. There's no way I am losing Mai again!///

Game Shop

Téa stared in the mirror. It hadn't even been a whole hour of coming down from the building, and she already messed up. Sekhmet already talked to her.

Atem already knew now. The cards had to be revealed, and her ignorance of 'playing with the Pharaohs' caused Masika to be taken far away. "I didn't really want to die. Especially while I was young. Does it hurt?"

Yet, she knew no one could hear her anymore.

"Maybe we'll be just up there sitting around with gods and goddesses, shooting the breeze, while we stay with these god kiddie things they all created." It didn't cheer her up any extra. "Do we stay with them or not? Why can't you hear me anymore? Why did I screw up so bad you were taken away?"

"Oh, you will stay with them."

Téa turned around and saw the strange hippo crocodile thing again. "Are you Ammut, the one testing Yugi and Atem when they die?"

"I am not here to test anyone's will, Téa. I am known as the goddess of fertility and pregnancy. As joyful as it is that a new god and goddess are coming, the conditions in which they are coming? Haven't left me happy."

"When we die, do we stay with them?" Téa asked.

"If they want you, they will cry, and they will have you," she answered. "Just like any other baby when a caring mother is near."

"Which one is god and which one is the goddess?" Téa asked again, getting the point that this goddess could answer some questions.

"Hikaru is the god of light, born of the light sides. Silhouette is the goddess of darkness, born to the ones of the dark sides."

"Great, already named?" Still, Téa didn't completely mind. She liked the name Hikaru.

"You can change it if you like," Taweret answered. "It will confuse people when they pass down the legends, but they never understand correctly anyhow."

"It's fine, I like the name." ///Téa: What about you, Masika?/// She knew she couldn't hear but, it was still such a habit. "So can we survive, if like for some miraculous reason the millennium items were brought back and we didn't have to go?" Téa asked eagerly.

"Bastet and Sekhmet are bound to take you away for a peaceful birth, but the soon-to-be husband to the current keeper of the Blue Eyes White Dragon, can help you find a way back."

Soon to be husband? "That doesn't sound like Tristan. That sounds like bad news for Joey."

Taweret laughed. "I was referring to Seto Kaiba, yes."

"Can I stay here until the birth part or am I going to Masika too?" Téa asked, "and can you like take a lot of this glow away please? I'm sort of neon. This stands out here."

"Yes. We can lessen the glow. We are already sharing the glow with your other selves, or you'd be even brighter. It helped to create the illusion they are both pregnant. And, no, I don't know if you will go with Masika but you do not have to be rushed to have yours. Another god's magic can be used in exchange of their godly magic when it's needed in the other dimension."

Téa watched her glow simmer down. "Thanks."

"Any other questions?" she asked. "Once I leave I won't be back until it's time."

Oh. "If somehow we do get to survive here with these . . . gods."

"Your babies," Taweret said. "I know technically gods, but honestly, not even close to a quarter. They are incredibly human, like you. Monkeys are closer to humans than your baby will be to a god."

"Oh." At least Taweret was actually a lot sweeter to her. "Ooh. I mean, not that they ever would choose to actually make the millennium items. I mean, 99 people. Uh. Possession too. Zorc. But, boy. Yeah. Yugi would be like the dad, for the rest of their lives. And Bakura. Maybe. Slightly. Should I be saying any of that? Sorry, it's just that human babies are always 1-1 in their genes. It's like 50/50, so Bakura being like 5% is-"

"You are moving into an area that is not mine," Taweret said. "Math. Ask the goddess watching over you."

Oh. The cats. "I don't want to ask them about anything," Téa muttered. "Especially Sekhmet. She is pissed right now. She didn't even tell me a whole lot about Masika. Just that she's safe but I can't reach her, she can't communicate, Atem is a jerk she wants to eat, and she'll be back later for more."

"Yes, it's a complicated matter. Bastet can't be here right now, and Sekhmet needs some guidance to keep from getting out of control sometimes," Taweret admitted. "Your future is murky, and most of it depends on if the millennium items are recasted."

Ugh. "I don't know! Look? 99 people! Why do we have to make new millennium items? We shouldn't just let Zorc come back."

"Right and wrong are seen in spades." Taweret explained. "This world has too much purity to balance without the demons existence. In fact, your friends tend to get hurt more often on this side by the goddesses to try to even it out too. At least until the new arrivals come."

Nice way to ration it out. "So, we actually need the items to exist?" It felt weird to say that. "I don't think we are really that gentle."

"Your friend in another dimension had to face off with a serial killer that Seto Kaiba had put in a game called Death T, where the objective was to kill everyone off except hopefully Yugi. He wanted to fight him."

What? "Uuh."

"Pegasus was killed violently."

Hm. "Okay, Pegasus was hurt and gone for a long time. Some things are different. But? Look, we did fight this guy called Marik. He was really bad. He trapped our friend in a coma and she couldn't wake up without help."

"Yes, he had been. In the other dimension, she had brain insects falling upon her and eating her flesh in her soul room."

Eh?! "Okay. Well, we also, there was this huge leviathan, and Yugi got separated from the spirit, and, you know maybe the other dimension is just a lot rougher instead of us being gentle."

Taweret held up her strange paw. "I didn't mean to say this was a paradise dimension, just that it was more gentle than others. Those actions also happened when Zorc was around. As for Zorc. It may be many centuries before Zorc finds a qualified host here again. Even then, it doesn't mean he'll have a means to end everything," Taweret said. "It's not easy."

"Yeah. Nothing's easy." She cradled her stomach. "I hope Masika's okay."

Taweret smiled, all of her crocodile teeth showing brightly. "I think someone is about to knock on your door that is not Yugi."

Bakura Talks

Atem was still dwelling in the apartment, wrapping his head around what happened. Yugi would clearly not be okay with this, and he shouldn't be. This never should have happened. Still? ///Bakura: Even 5% is still me too./// He had told Yugi he just wanted to have a private moment with her. Yugi was confused, but since he really wanted to know what was wrong with Téa, he allowed him up to try.

He'd tell Yugi soon to look at his card. He would. He just wanted to talk to Téa privately first before crossing that awkward bridge. Understanding that she had a friend no matter what in him, it was important.

He knocked on the door lightly.

Téa eventually answered it. She didn't look cheery at all.

"Hello? I'm sorry, I know this isn't the best time, but finding time could be tricky for this," Bakura apologized. "I wanted to let you know that I?" He held up the card, showing that he knew. "I want to help you out, however I can. I don't know the future, but I . . . I am not looking for a relationship, Téa, but if things do work out, then I want to be here for it as well. I've really always wanted a son, someone to play with and teach things and watch grow up? I think it would be wonderful, so I really do want to help. I just never found the right kind of person."

"Oh." Téa didn't seem happy or sad. "That's good. I guess."

Yes, awkward considering the sacrifice thing. ///Bakura: Keep trying./// "I didn't tell Yugi yet. He hasn't noticed the card is revealed yet." She should know that.

"I appreciate that. Yeah, all my trying to save heartbreak ended up doing nothing because you just aren't allowed secrets with Pharaohs." Bitter. "However it might turn out. It's great to have a friend like you, Bakura. I'm sure in the meantime, I'll be fine," she insisted. Oh wait, did she tell him too? She reached over toward his neck. "That. It should come off now."

"Oh, I almost forgot. You're right, you even gave the necklace away to Yugi." Bakura looked down his shirt. "Thanks for the reminder, Téa." He tried to bring it through his shirt, but it was too big. He unbuttoned it lightly and brought it up and over his head. "I guess that seals it. The Bandit King isn't a part of me anymore."

"Nope, you're all separated," Téa said as she took the ring from him. "Hikaru is supposed to be just the light energies. Silhouette is the dark energies."

"Hikaru?" She already knew the name? "Fitting name."

"Is it? It's what the gods wanted to call it, and I don't want to be picky," Téa answered. "It sounds nice for a boy. I think it's a boys name for him?"

"It does." ///Bakura: It's a boy. I'm having a boy!///

///Bandit King: You already knew the gender.///

///Bakura: Yes, but, it just felt nicer to have it confirmed.///

///Dark Bakura: Yes, that fits you./// Dark Bakura was nearby, he had actually beaten him to the Game Shop. He just didn't feel like using the front door to sneak in. ///Bakura: Yes, Téa is having a boy named Hikaru.///

///Bandit King: Masika is having a goddess?"/

///Bakura: You're having a little girl named Silhouette.///

///Bandit King: Wonderful. Too bad I can't say hello with her trapped away for eternity.///

///Bakura: Don't say that! We will figure this out. Oh!/// Once Téa moved he saw . . .

///Bakura: New goddess here.///

///Bandit King: Which one?///

///Bakura: It's not Ammut, the hind legs aren't short enough./// She did have a crocodile head though. He gave a small bow as she took his ring. ///I think it's Tauret?///

She bowed back. "I am Taweret. Take care of your woman. Pregnancy isn't easy, let alone what they must go through. They will start feeling the effects very soon. Do you have any questions before I leave?"

///Bakura: She is Taweret. She will leave if we have no questions./// "I am really part of the god in Téa?"

"Yes," she answered.

///Bandit King: You already know that, will you quit getting bashful? Ask her if we made the millennium items, would we be susceptible to Zorc again, or would we be more protected?///

"No," she said to Bakura. Being a goddess, she seemed to actually hear Dark Bakura's request. "Everyone creating this time is protected. Those who actually do not create, will not be protected."

///Bakura: Those involved in the creation are protected from him, and she can apparently hear you.///

///Bandit King: Does everyone who has a millennium item card have to be involved to save them?///

"The one who creates the millennium items, will keep whatever their other sacrifice should have been. If you were to create the millennium items, then it would save Masika and Téa. It would not save Mai Valentine or Serenity Wheeler," Taweret answered. "If Joey Wheeler for instance created it with no help from anyone else, only Mai would be saved."

"Oh goodness, it's a good thing Seto Kaiba kept that card," Bakura said. ///Bakura: The one who does it, saves the one that was in the secondary card. Apparently if something happens to Seto Kaiba's card, Serenity Wheeler would be sacrificed./// What was he going to choose? The only thing he had seen any concern for out of the Bandit King was for him and Masika.

But, the millennium items, the way they were created last time. 99 people. 99 people. "Is there a way to work out another deal?" Bakura asked her. He looked behind him. He spotted Yugi around the corner. He waved.

"Still talking?" Yugi asked. "Sorry." He sheepishly went away. When he was gone, Bakura looked back at the door. Taweret was gone.

Dark Bakura snuck around the corner.

"I'm gonna." Téa didn't look so well. "I'm going to lay down. I don't feel so good." She suddenly looked very tired.

Oof. Bearing a god was probably not going to be good on the system. "I will go then."

"Sure. In a second." Dark Bakura snuck past Téa into the room. "Masika?"

"I don't know. I got a quick run through and that's it," Téa said in frustration.

"Is there any time that you exist where you don't need help constantly?" He looked toward Téa. "Both of you, destiny has always made you the ones most likely to fall into trouble. Do you remember how many times I had to help you?"

"Yes, what's the point, I'm tired," Téa said to him bitterly. "I want to rest before someone else knocks on the door."

"Yug!"

"Or yells the truth out before even going to the door." She looked toward the door. "I gotta go." She headed downstairs toward Yugi as Joey was coming in and shoving a card in Yugi's face. "Shutup, Joey, I'm telling him!"

"Telling him?" Joey asked as Yugi looked at the card.

"Mai is a sacrifice now if you don't make the millennium items?" Yugi asked as he gave the card back. "How?"

"Atem made the big kitty mad," Joey said. "Real mad. I don't think there's a choice about them items."

"Brother." Serenity called from the front doorway to. She apparently came with Kaiba and Tristan. Tristan? He should be in the hospital.

"You should be in the hospital," Joey chewed him out too.

"Joey? My card was taken, and Seto Kaiba got two new cards," Serenity said.

"Millennium items or her," Seto said. "Atem made Sekhmet mad."

"Okay, just hang on, guys." Yugi said. He looked toward Téa first. "Do you want to talk about something, Téa?"

"Nobody wants to talk about it." Téa didn't know how to start it, especially with the line of people already having problems. "Your card, Yugi. They are revealed now."

Yugi looked at the extra card. His eyes went a little wide as he was reading.

"What did Atem do?"

"Yo, Yug, how'd he make her so mad?"

Yugi didn't say anything, as he watched out the door. Atem was coming. He didn't look any more pleased either.

"So why'd you piss off the huge kitty?" Joey started it. Atem didn't answer.

"If you make someone mad, can you try and make it not a goddess? They tend to get mean," Kaiba told him. Still no response as he walked straight in.

"The card," Atem said to Yugi. "I see you see it."

Oh great. Atem just had to glance at her. "Don't even!"

"You aren't leaving to New York," Atem told her calmly. "I forbid it."

"You definitely aren't leaving to New York," Yugi agreed. "You need to stay right here, and we need to figure this out."

"We need to figure everything out," Joey said, "because Mai and Serenity shouldn't be put up for a sacrifice just because Sekhmet got mad about something. Atem, man up and go apologize or something."

"Masika?" Atem said toward Téa instead.

"Sekhmet said I can't reach her, no one can, and she'll be back later to tell me more," Téa said. "Don't you look at me like that. What in the world were you doing, pulling Masika into a shadow game?"

"A shadow game?" Everyone asked pretty much in unison.

Atem didn't answer back. He still had some real guilt trip eyes on her, like she was the one who messed up, and not him.

"It never would have showed up on the cards if it wasn't for you!" Téa accused him. "Why couldn't you just leave it alone? Just, let me leave and disappear, and no one would be hurt. No one would have ever known anything." ///Téa: No, no breakdown!/// "Stupid! All I want to do is go lay down, but I have a bunch of stuff to deal with down here because you couldn't just let me have this. Jerk."

She felt Yugi hug her. Dangit. That wasn't fair.

A Pyramid Would Have Been Built For Her

The sands of the afterlife. Atem had been transported there somehow. He started to walk, looking for something. Masika. A goddess. Someone brought him there. "Masika!" Hmm. He kept walking and then saw a great kingdom ahead. He called out again for her.

There, he heard her. A small smile. *Life's not over yet for her. Someone pulled her from the Shadow Realm.* Which direction? He called her name again and heard her ahead. He could see a figure, but it wasn't clear. He pressed onward toward the figure. It had to be her. "Masika?"

"Atem." That voice was not Masika's. He turned and saw a deity. Part hippo, lion and crocodile. "Tawaret." Another goddess helping them. One that was worshipped especially around the time of delivery.

He disappeared and then found himself right outside a stone area.

"You and Sekhmet have put Masika in a terrible position."

"Miscommunication of the biggest kind," Atem said. "Is she in there?"

"Yes. You must be careful when you get her. You cannot come too early or too late. It's dangerous. Come." Tawaret led him away. "Sekhmet has tied her mind to Masika so that if you have questions, you may ask through her."

That would make things a lot easier.

"Silhouette is already born."

That would make things a lot harder. "Already born?" Atem asked.

"Sekhmet had to make a deal with Zorc. He tossed her into the Border Between the Afterlife," Tawaret answered. "No living thing can stay there for a vast amount of time. She had to have Silhouette to survive. We also had to steal a special cape for her to wear, to help the chances they make it through as well." She pointed to a structure ahead of them. "Less than ten minutes if you step in."

"I understand," Atem said. He headed toward the sanctuary and looked in. She was facing away from him.

"Such pleasant company."

That voice. ///Atem: Zorc.///

"Thank you very much. You didn't have to give me so many gifts. Sacrificing a past wife and a new daughter. I'm overjoyed." Zorc's voice was heard but he couldn't be seen.

"Zorc is present," Taweret said. "We had to make many deals with Zorc. Your other selves will hate you, and the price you pay is the price of something you had caused."

"Accident." He didn't know how many times he could say it. Zorc was around there?

"Go in. See them. Ten minutes only."

He came closer to the sanctuary entrance. "Masika?" Polite first, she deserved some explanation. "I never meant to kill you, it was a tactic to find information. I am sorry. May I come in?"

"Yes, Atem, I have already been made aware of that. Thank you for the apology." For once, she just used his actual name. "I forgive you if you promise me something."

After all she'd been through? "If I can grant it. Is it fixing an eternity of less worry?" He started to step inside.

"No, the goddess' already did that, you can't use that one with me," she said. She turned around.

"We are trapped in here until Seto Kaiba comes to get us," she told him. "Sekhmet has left me tied to her thoughts, so that I can convey questions to her."

Atem went inside and . . . she was there, wearing a similar cloak as him, but no clothes. Her breast was covered with one side of the cloak. On the other side covering the breast. It. Was. A. "Goddess." A small goddess that was a baby.

Impossible.

It had a soft glow to it, almost invisible in the light. It wasn't a newborn, not as small. It looked months old already. The hair though was the giveaway. It was long and already to its shoulders. And the hair.

Black.

Yellow.

Pink.

"Atem. You came." She lifted her gaze toward him. "We have Tawaret and Bes for protection currently."

Atem didn't know what to say. This was impossible. How in the-? He couldn't even say anything. Just watched as the young goddess squirmed against her slightly as she approached him closer.

He was trying to think, to figure it out. Strategy, there was a strategy to what he'd been seeing.

Masika came closer. "I know. You are clever."

Atem backed away and started memorizing his surroundings. “This area must connected to the afterlife, but it’s not it. It’s like a separate dimension tying the two?” He gestured to the god and goddess statues. “Tawaret and Bes are guarding this area until we leave.” She held the child up slightly higher as he gestured to it.

Atem didn’t give up yet, that wasn’t all. He looked at everything he could glance at. There were only empty summoning stones and statues of Tawaret and Bes. “Details.” He would treat it the same way he used to treat every game. The way he used to treat situations before Yuugi knew of his presence.

Atem looked at the goddess again. Pink. Yellow. Black. “Zorc will immediately take her.” What to do? “We’ll need to keep her well hidden.”

Masika was mostly covered up, the little goddess was over her chest while the other side was under the cloak mostly, yet she wasn’t clinging to it like Anzu would. She spoke to him as casual as if she were wearing full proper clothes. *That* was because she was lower class Egyptian. She had fewer clothes if any.

She didn’t have to remember everything for her inner self to feel like that. It was just like him. Before Yuugi met him, he dressed differently. As soon as the first night he arrived, Atem felt the privilege and desire to deal with Yugi’s bullies. Not remembering a thing of his life, he did desire something more though. He went looking through Yuugi’s things and found a neck collar trapped away. He could feel how much better it was to wear it.

Though fashion statements of Yuugi’s modern times were different than his, he wore Yuugi down to wearing more of his fashion slowly. Because he was Egyptian. Even his jacket, he preferred to wear it as a cape. *Why am I dwelling on any of this? What does any of this matter right . . . now.* Atem pointed to the goddess. “Pure energy. Goddess energy.” What was he missing?

“And demoness energy. The millennium power is also within her. A power that . . . seems to stabilize her. Also, seems to be why Tawaret and Bes want to help.”

Atem approached them both closer. Now that he worked out the situation. Black. Yellow. Pink. The hair didn’t stand on its ends, instead falling against the scalp like normal hair. Traits of her mother. He tapped her forehead and the eye of Anubis glowed brightly at him again.

Eye of Anubis. She didn’t need a millennium item, she was fused with the power. *That energy feels like the puzzle, the place I was forced to call home for so long.* While he stared at her head, the little goddess reached out to him with her small arm and chubby little hand. Trying to grasp onto his cloak. She pulled it back and forth, playing with it.

The power of darkness. The power of a millennium item. This divine being . . . loved playing with cloaks.

And that thought? Atem couldn’t help himself as he smirked. He could feel Masika giving her over to him and he raised her up to look at her. Her Eye of Anubis still glowing yet she

was laughing too. "You are absolute nonsense, a fusion that should be impossible. As impossible as me living and breathing, yet here you are."

Right now, in his time, there would have been artisans chiseling and working to try to capture her visage in rock. Placing proper hieroglyphics of her name in their place. A temple would already be talked about with the best builders ready and willing to create one to worship and honor her.

Instead? She was trying to stick her hand in his mouth. "Not for you, don't."

He brought her closer, but had little idea how to hold her.

"The demon in her is small, and it will be the power that is sacrificed." Tawaret was right beside the outside of the cave. "Humans are more vicious than that much demon in her," Taweret said.

"Good." It wasn't big then.

"We are trapped in here until Seto Kaiba comes to get us," Masika told him. "Sekhmet has left me tied to her thoughts, so that I can convey questions to her. You don't get very long, Atem," Masika told him. "The goddesses have stretched their power more than anyone knows, and it takes energy to come here with them. I cannot be attained except through some gateway that Seto Kaiba had once created. It would not let him reach over. It will now."

Atem handed Silhouette back to her. "I know that Téa, you, and the powerful children you possess will be sacrificed in place of recasting the millennium items." He wouldn't waste time. He heard a coo from Silhouette as she tried to put Masika's cape in her mouth.

"No, Dear, capes devised by madmen aren't for putting in the mouth." She moved her around again. "It will be dangerous to come and get me. It seems in this border, that dimensions mix across it."

Silhouette reached out toward him with her chubby little hand.

Atem touched her fingers. "I thought with all that light the goddess would be brighter."

///Masika: She is wasting her energy on keeping us alive, Atem.///

"Right." That made sense. "Thank you for finally calling me Atem."

///Masika: When a goddess treats you lower than I, it muddies the illusion you are someone I really need to watch out for.///

"Wonderful. That you are calling me by my name, not that I'm mud on Sekhmet's heel." Still, he would take it. "This isn't over. If Seto Kaiba devised a way to reach, then we will get you two out."

"They aren't going anywhere." Zorc's voice invaded the space. "I know so many details, Atem. I know more than you. I know your past. I know your future. I know exactly when

they want me to leave, and I know how dimensions work too. Is it funny that a demon can be mistaken as an angel when things just take the right turn?"

///Atem: I don't like the sound of that.///

///Masika: Neither do I. Dimensions crossing here would be extremely bad according to the goddesses, Atem.///

"More than bad," Taweret said as she came near. "Whether you recast the millennium items or not, you need to get her and Silhouette out. If a goddess dies in there, that will be her space for all of y. If she goes with Silhouette's power, it won't be enough of a sacrifice. Téa and her baby Hikaru will make up the rest."

"I can't." How? "There must be some other way than to sacrifice all of this?"

"Yes. You can sacrifice millions of lives, as was the original payment," Taweret reminded him. "The price to save is high, and that will not change." She sighed. "We staleness go."

Now? Already? "It hasn't been ten minutes."

"I need to reserve some energy, I cannot waste it anymore," Taweret said.

///Masika: Don't worry, Atem. I will see you soon.///

"How?" Atem asked. "Sekhmet gave you the power to communicate with her and we haven't even . . . ///Atem: Wait. Have you been speaking through the mind with me?///

///Masika: Yes. Sekhmet wanted to connect me to you, and Téa to Yugi. She said Pharaoh's are good leaders, and keeping in contact would be the best way to make things work out.//

"Close your eyes," Taweret commanded.

"Half open your eyes to the twilight light. If you see too much light, you've gone too far. If you head toward the twilight, you will see Masika and Silhouette here. I took you here so that you could connect y and mentally. The more you stay connected, the less chance she will get infected by Zorc. The more he is around, the worse off Silhouette and Masika will be."

Atem walked in the direction of the light. She was right, he could still see the sanctuary though his eyes were closed. He opened his eyes when he heard a gasp. "What's wrong?"

"You nasty demon!"

"What?" What was Zorc causing to happen?

Taweret gripped her paws together. "They are here. Honda and Masika."

"Honda?"

"Honda is Tristan, from another dimension. The Masika from that dimension, Zorc has already grabbed her and brought her here! You cannot cross, no one can cross each other."

She patted her feet to the surface hard, rumbling the area. "We haven't even seen Seto Kaiba, there's no way you can physically come here until after the other one is gone! That is so much longer."

Zorc just laughed. "Well, you did fetch me Honda back from the sands as a favor. You knew things were coming."

"We did what we had to. Our influence, it always gets in the way," Taweret said. "A million reasons why we don't bother with humanity. Even those who care end up ruining it even more. Ooh, and the cape?"

"Yes, things can't be missing when they are needed." Zorc's voice again. "Play fair."

"Oof! Fine. Time to go. Let's hope your Seto Kaiba has his own capes."

The First Sacrifice Card

Game Shop

When Atem arrived again, Taweret did not say anything else as she disappeared. ///Atem: That looked very bad.///

///Masika: It sounds very bad.///

He could still hear her voice, but he also heard the sound of a horse running. He looked toward Yugi. "Your thoughts are connected to Téa now." It wouldn't be very long before both of them landed in trouble with each other, but it was needed anyway.

Yugi just made odd faces. "That's bad. Why is that a terrible thing? I mean, a thing? Why'd they do that?"

"I suppose we have to keep a link to someone open," Atem said. "I have been tied to Masika, and she has been tied to Sekhmet."

"Great. Then?" Joey looked toward Atem. "Can we get death sentences lifted then?"

"Serenity's is already lifted," Kaiba reminded Joey.

"Can we get baby arrangements lifted at all?" Joey asked.

Atem put his hands on the counter. ///Atem: Masika?/// He heard the sounds of a horse again, this time with wails in the background. ///Atem: Are you okay?///

///Masika: It's no different than five minutes ago.///

Strange. ///Atem: We need to work this out, once and for all. What the sacrifices will be, so that we can get them granted and move on. Things are getting worse as we delay.///

He closed his eyes. He felt the light like last time. While knowing he had his eyes closed, they were also opened at the same time to see that light. He walked toward it the same way he did with Taweret.

Inside, she was still in there. Her cape a little more . . . disheveled. ///Atem: Should have knocked.///

She turned to look toward him. ///Masika: We are in each other's thoughts, I doubt knocking will be an issue. Just don't go too deep. We must give space like we did with our host. We must try. You were an Egyptian Pharaoh, why are you gazing at me?///

He inched away a second. ///Atem: Sorry. My memories are limited of it, and I was not . . . ///

///Masika: More of a modern man. Fine, I will try to rearrange the cape. It's big but it doesn't cover everything. There, that's enough.///

Atem went back toward it and looked in. ///Atem: Let's start with the smallest and see if that leads somewhere. Is there no other way but for Serenity and Kaiba to have a child?/// He waited.

///Masika: Sekhmet said that there is a very evil pharaoh god that made it impossible for Mai to live. She died barely bearing his child in that world, and this evil god was after his sister next. She is far away and Joey cannot help her. Only Seto Kaiba can, and Kaiba needs the power to protect her. Serenity has the power of the blue eyes white dragon but her child will have more power. If they steal that energy from it when it's born . . . it will be blind, but the power to use it will be transferred to the other side.///

///Atem: Blind?/// A pause.

///Masika: The wielder who uses the blue eyes white dragon will be blind, so that it can see what it sees when it is being controlled.///

///Atem. Serenity will not . . . one more question. Is there a way for her child to see and wield the dragon?///

///Masika: Sekhmet says it is all about balance between everything. Due to something happening on the other side, there is some kind of loophole now. Serenity could give her eyesight to her child, and it could see for itself, as well as with the blue eyes white dragon. She said it is most likely that the blue eyes white dragon will never be summoned in her child's lifetime.///

///Atem: Okay, I understand the options for that./// Silhouette was fidgeting around with the cape again, this time with purpose. He backed up. ///Atem: Feeding time I see. Just like a real brat. Baby.///

///Masika: Yes, she is. She tends to be on the better side though, like Heba.///

Atem moved away and opened his eyes fully, which immersed him back into the real world. "I know the options for one." He noticed everyone staring at him. "What?"

"You lit up like a peach back there, Atem, what are you doing?" Joey asked.

"Finding options. Serenity?" Atem came away from the counter. "Your brother is trying to protect you after a crushing loss. He cannot handle another one. He needs the power your child will wield. It will have it here, but it will probably never use it. Just like you have never used yours."

"Oh." Serenity sounded shaky.

"That power will strengthen that Seto Kaiba, so that he can defeat the one that hurt someone Joey loved." It was probably better not to get into details. "However? It will be blind." That

would hurt a sensitive spot inside of her.

"It will be fine," Seto Kaiba said casually. "Kaibas are strong and we deal with everything in this world."

"No." Serenity stared at Atem. Of course, he knew that wouldn't be easy for her to accept. "Can I . . . change that? I mean, I'll have the baby, but I don't want it to be blind."

"It only sees what the dragon sees," Atem told her. "Since it won't use the dragon, it will never see. The only loophole is that you can give up your eyesight for it."

"There's still gotta be something else," Tristan interrupted. "Come on, Atem, really? That didn't do any good, she already had the sacrifice thrown off. That's asking more, not less. Isn't there anything else we can try?"

"Joey is saving her life by strengthening Kaiba." Atem tried again. Serenity seemed to understand it. It wasn't good for their relationship, but this was on the smaller scale of the problems.

"But . . ." Of course, Tristan didn't look happy. "Is their solution just always make babies? First it's Mai, then it's Serenity, then it's you and Yugi. Don't they ever have anything else?"

"Yes, they kill." Atem tried not to be as forceful, but Tristan wasn't understanding. "Life is a balance, if it's not being added to, it is being taken, and in greater numbers."

"You were supposed to kick it out of here," Joey said to Tristan softly. "That wasn't just luck you coming back like that."

Tristan needed to get over it. Serenity was already dealing with the second fact of the matter.

"This isn't right, Serenity," Tristan tried again. "In what dimension, what reality, what universe would someone as sweet as you end up with Seto Kaiba?"

"The dimension that is fighting a war against an evil Egyptian Pharaoh, with a Joey so overwhelmed by his limited options, he was willing to do what it took to save the Serenity of his time!" He looked back toward Yugi. Too much anger. "Sorry."

Yugi looked toward him, knowing something was wrong.

"Silhouette is already born," he revealed. "There is no simple change for that fact." She was there. She would either be sacrificed or be a part of the world.

"Your kid is already born?" Tristan asked. "Whoah. Okay, definitely a tough subject." He moved over toward Yugi, probably to pressure him to find another way.

///Serenity: Blind. It'll be born blind. It'll never get a chance to see color, or a single vision.///
Blindness scared Serenity more than she wanted anyone to know. It scared her too much. It

scared her so much that . . . she glanced toward Seto Kaiba. ///Serenity: It scared me that night.///

She couldn't remember for the longest time. Nothing. She just knew that she woke up next to him in his bed, but on top of the covers with her clothes on. But now?

Her fuzzy memories . . .

///Serenity: I really should go home. I really should go home./// She was in a strange house with a strange man. She wasn't doing anything, but if she told anyone what was happening, they would tell her that she was being an idiot.

Yet, she really didn't fear Seto Kaiba. She'd spent the whole day with him so far. He told her about his brother, and she told him about Joey. She told him so much about everyone she loved. She told him about all the great things in her life, except for the one thing that was probably the single most important at that moment.

"Serenity?"

She stumbled to the carpet, his all white carpet with the delicate red of the God's Brew. It looked like blood murdered the carpet before all the lights went out. All she felt was a wet floor beneath her darkness.

"Are you okay, what happened?"

She told him that she couldn't see, that she once had problems with seeing. He said he'd call her doctor and he helped her up.

"Where do you want to go?"

Good, she hated when people took charge of her when she was like that. It was something Tristan would always do when things got rough. "Somewhere to lie down. Sorry about your carpet."

"Who cares, I'll buy more." Not sweet words, but his words. She felt his guidance and felt a nice, comfy bed beneath her. He asked her questions about if she lost her vision recently, if she had anything around if she was experiencing relapse, if he could use his physician to look at her because his were way better.

She refused to use his doctor and just wanted to make an appointment with hers. He made the appointment for her. He asked about friends or family he should call. No one. She didn't want anyone knowing. He told her that he thought it was a bad idea, but he didn't push the issue, following her wish.

For a long time, she stayed on the bed. Her vision started to slowly come back. Fuzzy at first. She told Kaiba that she didn't want to leave until her vision was restored, but she knew it was

his bed. She was beautiful, and things happened.

"Things only happen when I want them to happen," he told her. "You're fine. I'll sleep on the other side. We'll go in personally to see your doctor first thing tomorrow. I have about a thousand words to ask him, starting with how the hell they can't answer for emergencies."

"It's a small office."

"He better have a real good answer, or it will be no office."

Interrupted from her fuzzy memories . . .

"Everyone learns their own way in life." Seto Kaiba's voice came back to her. She snapped out of the memory. "Setbacks just make the Kaiba name stronger." He looked at her, like he just remembered too. "It's no big deal, we live in a time that it'll be fine. It'll thrive."

He remembered how scared she had been too. "I remember now."

"Yeah, nothing big." Seto Kaiba waved it off.

"What do you remember Serenity?" Tristan was right there by her side. Again. Fast and on time. "Do you remember what that bozo did?" He glared at Kaiba. "It doesn't matter, don't feel bad."

"No, it wasn't that. I lost my vision," she revealed. "I didn't want anyone to know. Kaiba just kept me safe because I didn't want to move. That's all." The look on Tristan's face. She swung back around to look at Kaiba. ///Serenity: Yeah. I don't think it's going to be as bad as everyone thinks. At least. I'll have someone who gives me some control./// "Atem?"

She watched him move back toward her. He seemed to be in his own little world of problems. This was not the biggest thing by far for him, so it'd be good to get this worked out. "Could you get me an extra card, so I lose my eyesight instead of it?"

"Serenity!" Tristan and Joey both yelled at the same time.

"Things are changing all the time," Tristan said to her. "Don't do that, don't agree to this. Once you do that, you'll be in Kaiba's web!"

A web. Really? "Atem's already stated it. It's about big sacrifices or big moves. Everything keeps changing, because we won't settle down and decide on what we really need to give! There is a Serenity out there in trouble, and she is going to need someone else to help her. You know who that someone will be?"

"Kaiba?" Tristan asked.

Ugh. "Me!" She was going to save herself. "Azure will have the vision of the dragon and her own eyesight. I give up mine for her."

"You really might want to think about that." Seto Kaiba's voice came from the back. "There is no going back on one of these deals. Once you agree, that other card is dead set to play."

Blindness in the world. It wasn't fun and it wasn't easy. The thought did scare her, but the thought that a baby of hers would never experience anything else? It scared her more. "I am sure, Atem."

Atem nodded. He paused. "Masika said the goddess' have thanked you for participating. Azure can wait, they will substitute power in place for her, but they want the other part now. Sekhmet is coming with a card."

As soon as he said it, a large lion landed right in front of her with a card in her mouth. Oh boy. As long as it was good? She took the card from the mouth as well as a gold pen hiding beneath the card. "Read it and sign it," the beast commanded.

Serenity read the card. Yeah, it sounded right. Balance. ///Serenity: I guess I get to make the first act of 'mom' before it's even born./// Weird. ///Serenity: I am going to hate every minute of this.///

"Sign already," Sekhmet said. "You decided this, Human."

"Sorry. I just never pictured being settled down, becoming a mom, and . . ." Never seeing the world. Never leaving the home. Never accomplishing anything again. No. There wasn't time to think about that or regrets. The other her, needed her. As she started to sign, she heard the predictable desperate mutters of her brother and boyfriend, but she also heard Kaiba mutter something under his breath. She didn't know what it had been, but she did it.

Before she even gave the pen back, the vision was gone, and she felt two people by her sides predictably.

"Finally. Someone finally came through with what they need to do. Keep it up."

Understanding Bakura's Spot

"Téa?" Bakura called calmly to her. "Are you feeling better now?"

Téa opened her eyes. Bakura was there interrupting on her bed. "What is it?"

"You almost collapsed, so I put you on the couch," Bakura said. "Are you better enough to reach your bed this time?"

"No." No. "How am I ever going to be better?" She looked around. "Yugi should have took me up."

"They need to wait," Bakura said. "I can help."

"Yeah, but? I don't?" She groaned. "I have enough problems, I don't want this too."

"You don't want what?" Bakura asked her. "What else is wrong?"

"You," she said. "Anyone else that sees 5% of anything would be like 'definitely not much' and back off. You see it and you want to be father of the year, and I don't want it, because you are a . . . reminder."

"Reminder?" Bakura said. "I'm not Bandit King, I don't know Ancient Egypt."

"Yeah, but some you do. It stayed with you," Téa insisted.

"No, it didn't. I've lived a completely different life, I don't know about any of that," Bakura insisted. "Honestly. All I know is what Bandit King reveals. That's all."

"It's not in your memories." Téa propped herself up. "You love games, Bakura."

"Uh huh."

"You are friends with all of us. Especially with Yugi. Even when I disappeared and Joey was out at tournaments, you apparently stayed friends and shared game ideas and played beta games together."

"Oh yes," Bakura smiled. "It was very fun."

"I think you're a closer friend than even Tristan to Yugi honestly," Téa reckoned. "Tristan hung out with Joey first, and they just sort of became friends due to approximation."

"Perhaps?" Bakura moved closer. "I don't understand the point, Téa?"

"If you were such a good friend, then why weren't you around us more often?" Téa asked him. "We'd see each other at Pegasus', but you didn't hang with our party. We just bumped

into each other. Kaiba's tournament. Didn't see you an awful lot."

"Don't . . . remember an awful lot." She was hitting a sensitive area. "I was run by Zorc, Téa. A lot."

"You were always there, in the background, but you were never really there. It was more than Zorc or Bandit King," Téa told him. "You always wanted friends, but you had trouble making friends. When you had friends? You didn't . . . you still backed off a lot."

"Well, evil spirit inside, Téa."

"You didn't know there was an evil spirit," Téa reminded him.

"I just prefer smaller settings. Less people. I prefer playing with Yugi than anyone else I guess," he gave in. "I am sorry that I remind you of your past."

He wanted to hang out all those years ago. He wanted to get closer. "You really want to be part of little Hikaru's life, don't you?"

"Yes." That was obvious. "I don't want anything else though, I promise. You and Yugi have a strong connection together that is probably more than friendship. I don't want to interrupt that. I want my . . . I want my family though."

"Yeah. You do." Sure, it was the ancient past, but he was haunted and cursed by the very ones who loved him. Who had grown up with him. When he made friends, he made them small. Not many. Certain things lingered between. "Hey, if we survive, I'll bet you would be a great dad." ///Téa: I hate it. It's still true, Masika. If someone came in and threatened my life, I'd still run to Bakura. I'd hate it though. I don't want to remember, but I can't help it when I see him.///

///Yugi: Sure, great, he'll be absolutely fantastic!///

Huh? Téa knew the feel of that connection. ///Téa: Yugi?///

///Yugi: Sorry. I didn't mean . . . Atem got linked to Masika, and they linked us. Sorry.///

Ugh! Yugi.

///Yugi: Of course you like Bakura.///

///Téa: Not like that. Look, Yugi. Ugh! He's like our superhero, okay?! I'm sorry, I do like Bakura. I want him around, but it doesn't mean I don't want you around, so I always tell myself I don't want him around! Ugh, I hate this, why did they link us? Yugi, I don't mean that you haven't helped in the past, because you have. You're a really great friend.///

///Yugi: Sure, fine, friend!///

"Are you okay, Téa?" Bakura asked. "You look very pained. Should I get someone?"

"No. Yugi can hear my every thought." ///Téa: Worst nightmare ever.///

///Yugi: Double for me. I did what I could. I always did what I could. You went from falling from Atem, to falling for Bakura, but you barely ever fell for me.///

///Téa: That's not true. You don't get it./// She watched as Bakura headed downstairs. ///Téa: Bakura is coming. I just wanted rest./// It wasn't easy to hide feelings with the connection though.

"Yugi?" Bakura came straight over while Atem was trying to make contact about Mai's card. "Are you linked to Téa?"

"Yes!" Yugi didn't look good. "The goddesses did it. Atem's linked to Masika now and she is linked to Sekhmet."

"Oh. That's not good," Bakura said.

"No, Bakura, it's not good," Yugi said miserably.

"I? Yugi, I don't mean any harm to your relationship with Téa at all," he assured him. "Really. She doesn't even like to be around me, I remind her of her past too much. I just, I want to help how I can. I don't want to lose Hikaru."

"Well, too bad you can't switch with Atem, he'd probably gladly take the five percent 'do you even count percentage' over Silhouette, she's already been born and he's really not good with-"
"Then, he thought about how that sounded. To everyone there. "Sorry." He looked toward Atem. "Sorry."

"Get it together." Yeah, Atem didn't look good. "Go see Téa and talk it out with words."

His feelings got the best of him. He didn't even know what he said. "Sorry."

"That's a command, Yugi, go and talk it out between the two of you with physical words. We have enough to deal with down here," Atem told him. He crossed his arms.

Yugi went upstairs. He saw Téa sitting up on the couch. "Sorry."

"You just don't get it," she uttered to him. "Did you just yell Silhouette was already born?"
Oh, those shining eyes. He couldn't have seen that from that far away. "Yugi. I love you, not Bakura."

What? ///Yugi: You love me?///

///Téa: Silhouette's already born. I don't have time to hold things back anymore. That's why I was dealing with Bakura. That's why I'm telling you./// "I don't know how much time I have, and I don't want to have regrets when I leave."

Oh. ///Yugi: I'm so stupid. I get bogged down in details when I should be working on figuring out that sacrifice card!///

"It's your feelings, they are gonna shoot everywhere," Téa told him. "I need to explain something to you. I don't have romantic feelings for Bakura. Not now, and I didn't in the past either. He helped us through some things . . . but that's not the same."

Yugi nodded. "I know. You were young. A slave even. I understand that."

"When I was younger, I did get superhero mixed up with romantic feelings. A lot of girls do that. So yeah, I did crush on Atem," she said, dredging up the past. "If I were younger again, and all this came back to me, maybe I would think it's romantic love. But? It's not." She smiled. "I love the guy who waited for hours for a game to come out anxiously. I love the guy who was there for me, no matter what, even if he just played the friendship role. The biggest one though? I loved the guy who understood I had some big dreams that he wouldn't be able to follow me for, but still let me try for them anyway without ever saying 'don't go'."

New York. Dancing. ///Yugi: It meant the world to you.///

///Téa: Still does. It's not in my top ten things to worry about right now.///

///Yugi: So. Bakura?///

///Téa: Do you ever watch superhero movies? Not like the main heroine, just any old sequence. A girl walking home with a guy or something, someone attacks them, the hero takes care of it and then what?///

///Yugi: Usually a sequence like that is with a small time villain that has info on a bigger boss, so they stop and try to squeeze it for information.///

Téa just smiled at him. "That's right, Yugi. The couple are always forgotten. She doesn't break up with her boyfriend and go for the hero. They are both thankful they had them at that minute in their lives. They'll always be thankful, but they are going to go home, eat, watch a movie, and probably just go to bed together still. The hero doesn't always take the girl. Bakura isn't taking me away. Do you get that yet?"

"Yeah." It was starting to really sink in. "You love him . . . but not romantically." She loved Yugi romantically. "What was all that talk about with him and us being friends?"

"Eavesdropper," she teased him. "Bakura isn't always there around us. He wanted friends, but he didn't want friends. Something inside still tickles him, and, he's afraid to get too close to anyone. He's polite and friendly on the surface. Not many will ever get him to his core."

"Bakura doesn't remember the past . . . but something about it stayed with him?" Yugi asked.

"Yeah. I just wanted him to know that."

Yeah. Yugi always noticed that too. The curse apparently went on a very long time, and, it must still have had some effect on parts of his souls. "One hundred percent, I have no worries about Bakura with you?"

"Right," she agreed. "Atem might have worries with Dark Bakura, I dunno for sure, but that's Masika's area. I'm not messing with it. Not enough time." She stood back up. "I just hope? I mean I know they can't but, dang. Forget it. Let's head to my room, Yugi. I hung out with my hero for a little while, but now I just want to relax with my boyfriend."

Yugi smiled. Probably goofy, and he didn't care. He helped her to her room's bed. "I need to remember to apologize to Atem later." His mind just absolutely blabbered about anything that came to it, too overwhelmed to think. "I need to apologize to Bakura too. Five percent is still family."

"Everything later," she insisted. "Just hang out with me for now. Uh? I know it's weird, but do you want to play a game with me?" She winked.

An 8 and Eternity

Border Between The Afterlife

"Masika?" Bastet was actually at the entrance this time. She looked like she was fairing stronger. Masika moved closer with Silhouette. "Toss your cape over here. The other dimension will need it, and when things are borrowed, the original dimension will get it back if it is needed. It ticks just a little bit quicker than this dimension. I have given what time I could."

"Understood." Masika undid the cape and tossed it outside.

"This makes things messier," Bastet told her. "Help cannot come for you until the other Masika's presence is gone. Without the cape? Even with her sacred power, Silhouette might lose all her power in protecting you."

Masika held Silhouette closer. "Will I still be considered the sacrifice if I expire here?"

"Yes," Bastet said. "Atem can still use the card before you perish here." She looked extremely sad though. "You will move on to your afterlife empire. Silhouette will be trapped, drained of power or not, she is still a goddess."

"Trapped here for eternity?" Masika had to ask. If Silhouette expired.

"Yes, sadly." That is why Bastet was upset. Death was not something a goddess would get upset about. Being trapped in a small space for eternity? That would upset them.

"May I choose to stay here with her instead?" Masika asked. "She will be lonely and cry for eternity in here, with no one to comfort her." Once again, like Heba. "I want to stay trapped with her instead of leaving."

"It is a choice." Bastet seemed to cheer up a little. "If you expire, then you shall stay with her. I always knew you were the right choice. Ask Atem how his Seto Kaiba's path is doing. As soon as it is clear to come again, they need to be ready to come for you."

"I have more questions, but Sekhmet isn't answering," Masika told her.

Bastet just smiled. "She's just going through some issues like you. She will answer you now."

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Game Shop

///Masika: Atem?///
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Oh, finally. ///Atem: What did Sekhmet say for Mai?///
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///Masika: The card Sekhmet threw was made in anger just to get everyone to call you out for being a jerk. They have no worries.///

Good. That was another thing solved. "The card was just an anger card. You don't have to sacrifice Mai," Atem said to Joey. He watched as Joey got a little too happy and hugged Mai on the side. She gave him a slight pat on the back.

"Yeah, I figured it was something like that," Mai said. "I'm good, Joey."

"Sorry. Yeah. Good." Joey let go. "We are good. So?" He looked toward Atem. "All that's left is Téa and Masika now with their kids."

"I suppose so." They were down to it. Figuring out the sacrifice for the rest.

"It don't come to everybody," Joey said to Atem. "Don't worry too much about how you deal with your daughter. You'll learn. I have to learn too. I guess we'll be learning together."

Nice words from Joey.

///Masika: Atem, you must ask Seto Kaiba if he has a special cape for the other side. Is he still there?///

Right, the cape. He still had to ask about the other side. Seto Kaiba wasn't busy, he was casting a few looks toward Tristan who was next to Serenity, probably thinking of his own plans, but nothing else. "Seto Kaiba?" Atem called toward him. "Do you have a machine that you have tried to create to make it into the afterlife?"

He didn't give him a pleasant look. Kaiba never liked to talk about his failures. "What about it?"

"Did you make a special cape for the other side?" Atem asked him.

"I couldn't even penetrate one barrier. Magic or something was holding me back," he said. "Without getting anywhere, I wouldn't do anything about any clothing to survive."

///Atem: He never made a cape.///

///Masika: That's too bad. Mine was taken. Silhouette will expel more power now.///

///Atem: Taken?///

///Masika: They had borrowed it from the other dimension. There is a rule Bastet said about only being able to borrow when not in use. Something has to be there, if it should be there, and someone needed it on that side.///

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Swiftly. They needed to move quicker. ///Atem: We are coming to get you very soon, I promise.///

///Masika: You can't. You cannot come until the other Masika is retrieved.///

Blast! ///Atem: Then we will be ready./// "Kaiba, where is your machine?"

Seto Kaiba just gave him a look. "It didn't work."

"It will work now," Atem assured him.

"Okay. Let me paint a picture for you. If it had worked, and I could get across? I would then have made a way to transport across, with something to wear across it. It didn't work. There is no transportation, and no way across." Kaiba stared at him. "That's it."

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Right but he had to try anyhow. ///I'm sorry, Masika.///

///Masika: I understand.///

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"Atem, Man?" Joey asked. "You okay? You aren't looking so good. Isn't there anything for Téa and her spirit besides the millennium items?"

"Even the power of the millennium items wouldn't work for Masika and . . . Silhouette." It felt wrong. It felt all wrong. In less than a day he went from playing a game to scare Masika, finding out he was having a goddess with her, met Silhouette, and she would be trapped with Masika for eternity. ///Atem: Ask Sekhmet for any help at all. Silhouette is hers, she cares deeply, ask for something.///

He watched as Yugi came back downstairs, grinning. Perfect, his former host was joyful, he had finally attained Téa probably. Yet, it didn't take long for Yugi's smile to come down.

"What's wrong, Atem?"

///Masika: Atem. Please come see me?///

"A moment. I'll explain." Atem closed his eyes and found his way to the sanctuary. Without a cape, Masika would have no clothing. If he had real Egyptian memories, that wouldn't bother him. Still.

///Masika: The promise I wanted from you?///

Right. ///Atem: What is it?///

///Masika: It's voided./// He heard Silhouette cooing again in the background along with the sound of a horse again. ///Masika: It's something to keep in mind though. Dark Bakura isn't evil. You both hate each other for reasons, but neither of you can understand the other. If somehow we do get a way out, I want you two to be amiable in the same area.///

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Kaiba's Move

Same pattern. Same go around. While Kaiba was definitely interested in the conversation, it also wasn't going anywhere. Everything was at a standstill, and he hated wasted time. Right now, Tristan was hanging onto Serenity tighter than she was to him. She may have been blind, but she looked practically dead, like she just gave away her own soul.

He left the area, no one was going to bother him for a little while. He just went over to his car and called Mokuba while bringing out his blue eyes white dragon card.

"Hello?"

"Mokuba. I'm going to be later coming home with Serenity. There are a lot of things going on tonight," he said. Yes, there were many.

"Oh, okay. Was Tristan okay?"

"Yeah, he'll live, but he won't feel well for too long," Seto admitted.

"Why?"

"I'm stealing his girl."

Mokuba just laughed. "I'm sure she'll say yes one day, Big Bro. At least she moved in. When do you think you'll be home?"

"It might be awhile, it might be days," he said. "I'll come back when all deals are secured."

"Does that include Skeezy? Your special employees are already saying they see him bringing in a huge number of his best fighters. He really wants Mai back."

"They can handle the little things right now. I have something bigger to tackle with Serenity."

"Seriously? You are on a different level tonight, Bro. It'll be weeks before I see you."

"Nah, probably a couple of nights. I found her weakness." He flipped the card over. "I know what she wants."

"Joey safe? You already gave her that, that's why she moved in."

"That's what her brother wanted, and it's what she needed. I know what she wants for her own, selfish desires. I'm going to expose it, and win." He caught it, right before she signed that card. "See you soon."

He left his car and went back again. No one had really moved, nothing new had happened. He couldn't make his move yet. ///Seto Kaiba: Just wait, Tristan. You aren't holding Serenity,

just a big chunk of slippery ice. Enjoy it while you can.///

—

Border Between the Afterlife

Sekhmet lied beside the entrance. ///Sekhmet: You need to convince him. This is bad. Everything is out of time.///

"Let me tell him the truth," Masika said. "He is waiting for something. They are all waiting to know all the options. If after knowing the options this is what they choose, then so be it."

"None of it will help you," Sekhmet spoke to her. "That damn Seto Kaiba of yours never finished building anything."

"I can explain the best I can, before it's too late," Masika encouraged her. "They need to understand why it has to be us. Please?"

"I will visit here everyday that I can," Sekhmet promised. "I will not abandon Silhouette. I will see her everyday, I will talk and visit, I will be good. I promise, I won't even have any human meat on my breath the day I visit. Not strongly at least." She pulled herself up. She couldn't stay long. "Tell him. Make him see why, and let the Pharoah's choose the right course of action. Everything that has happened, that has been given, has been for a reason. Remember that."

Masika watched her disappear. ///Masika: Atem.///

///Atem: Any options?///

///Masika: I have to tell you several things going on in the other dimension, and why the choice is always between us and the millennium items.///

Atem held himself strong as Masika filled him in on many facts in the other dimension. ///Atem: It all makes sense now. Thank you. Masika?///

///Masika: I am here still.///

But it wouldn't be for long. "Yugi." He walked towards him. "I understand fully our choices, and the reason for them."

"How do we save them all?" He asked.

Oh. This was hard. "Zorc was in the place Masika was at. Both Masika's. He possessed the other Masika, and he drew Téa in with her. Téa is no more and neither is Masika on the other side."

"Oh. That's bad," Yugi admitted.

"When the other us in the other dimension win, one of two things will happen to break them apart. The first option. The goddess' left some power in each of them. Not to create a god." Oh Yugi, he did not want to say this. "When they are fused to the original Masika they no longer exist. You would have to cut and fix the souls at just the right points to receive them back. This is impossible without knowing where to do that. Only Zorc can do it."

"Oh." Sympathetic but it wasn't clicking yet with him.

"That's what the millennium items are for." Joey picked it up some. "He has to be lured to help or they can't be separated."

"Yes, Joey. If he doesn't, the winners either lose them forever. Or?" Atem stared at Yugi. "We are the payers, Yugi. They need an exact blueprint of where they break."

Some. A little denial that he was getting it right. Then it hit him. "They are taking ours away to cut them out like sewing fabric?! Then what happens to ours?"

"Living beings from one dimension to another do not mix well. They would not have survived." Atem did not want to share the rest. "That option is with both of them, Masika will expire before it happens at this rate."

"Then? What about the children?" Yugi asked.

"Just an aggressive tactic to make us listen. If we gather the energy of the millennium items, or if we agree to sacrifice them all now, they will leave Hikaru. They would have with the other but they are trapped."

Oh, that look. Atem felt that look too.

"Sorry. Oh, sorry." Joey wasn't doing well in the corner. He clinged to Mai. She didn't say anything as she comforted him.

"Talk to Thoth." Seto Kaiba interrupted. "He's the one who writes and sees everything. We need to get past the cats, and go to the real person who knows what can and can't happen."

Thoth? "You don't pick and choose who you can reach," Atem told him. Especially someone like Thoth.

"Sekhmet is the mother to a goddess who is just about to die," Kaiba said coldly. "Hit it where it hurts. Have Masika beg to her that Thoth might be the only one to know a way. Get tough. Get mean, Pharaoh! Or you're gonna be left with nothing but the sting of being a loser."

It was strange that Seto Kaiba was actually helping, he must have been in a good mood. It was a crazy idea, but perhaps? ///Atem: Masika. Please. Before it's too late, ask Sekhmet if she will let Thoth talk to us./// No answer. ///Atem: Sekhmet cares about Silhouette greatly, if anyone could see any way out of this, it has to be Thoth. You must ask. Masika?///

///Sekhmet: Too weak.///

Sekhmet. ///Atem: We must talk to Thoth, please! Seto Kaiba does not have anything built on this side, there is no way to reach them.///

///Sekhmet: Thoth will not respond anymore.///

///Atem: Why? Please, tell me why.///

"Sekhmet: Thoth. Eh? He's a geek with a grudge."

A geek with a grudge? ///Atem: What is the grudge?///

///Sekhmet: All dimensions are similar, and we chose the dimension to pay where we could influence with a cat instead of the one he wanted.///

///Atem: It . . . did not have to be us?///

///Sekhmet: All are similar. He foresaw a dimension where Seto Kaiba had green hair, and there was another very close member to your group called Miho. It's still similar enough.///

///Atem: Maybe not, because our Seto Kaiba does not have the way over!/// Okay, he had to try and stay calm. He was talking to a goddess. Yet? ///Atem: Admit that he was right, so that we can get some real help./// All he heard was the sound of groaning. ///Atem: Are you really going to let your daughter die just because of your pride?///

///Sekhmet: Oh, don't even. You are a Pharaoh, you could have thousands of kids and never see one a day in your whole life. You see children every day in the streets, see so many different ones all the time. Have you any idea how long it's been since there's been a trace of a new goddess?///

///Atem: A very long time I imagine, and we can continue this important discussion if you would like, if you just contact Thoth to try and save that new goddess you claim to wish for?/// Pride. Pride was many people's failure. It was his oftentimes too.

Sometimes We Just Need Ice Cream

"Any luck?" Yugi was just standing there. Not crying. Not getting angry. Just, there. "Atem?"

"I am trying to break through, Yugi," Atem promised. "I really am."

///Sekhmet: Thoth says you have a way to reach Masika and Silhouette, but it will involve you and your other self taking a risk. If you fail, your soul will be devoured by Ammut.///

///Atem: I am sure we will take whatever risk is needed.///

///Sekhmet: You have said that before. Did you regret that decision?///

///Atem: No, and we will do this for my friends too./// Still, Atem would ask. "Yugi. There is a way to reach Masika. We have to put our soul at risk with Ammut."

"A sliver of hope," Yugi said. "I'll believe in it. Whatever is asked of me, I'll do it."

Of course. ///Atem: We will do it.///

///Sekhmet: I am coming.///

Atem watched as she showed up in front of them.

"This doesn't change the fact you need to make the millennium items still to save any of them, but it will rescue the new little goddess and her mother. Both are fading fast," she warned him. "Much more and even with Téa's sacrifice, it may not be enough to pay the price. Lives will be added from this dimension."

"What do we have to do?" Yugi asked.

"You will be taken to the other dimension, the one that fights," Sekhmet said. "You will swiftly use Kaiba's machine and not be seen by one living being there. If you are seen, your soul will be devoured instead of the dimension being destroyed. It will take the power of the Pharaoh's soul to reverse the damage."

Only them. "Masika isn't a Pharaoh, how will she fair?"

"No two forms of the self should exist in a dimension. She is whole with Téa there, she is not the same. It should be fine," Sekhmet reasoned. "No one is there right now, but it will be swarming with investigators soon so hurry!"

"Only I need to go," Atem said to her. "Would Yugi-"

"Yugi must go, the price is an entire Pharaoh's soul to be even. Besides, you can't just carry Masika by yourself, you need someone to carry Silhouette."

Right. "Yugi? Clothing does not survive in that area for long without protection." A small warning so the embarrassment won't trip them up.

Yugi glowed a little but he shook his head. "It's fine, I get it. Let's just get them before it's too late." Yugi looked at Joey. "If Téa comes down, just tell her we'll be back with Masika." Then he groaned. "Nevermind. She knows. Sorry, Téa, we have to go!" He called upstairs. "Let's go."

"Hit a blue button," Seto Kaiba said helpfully. "Call it a hunch, if I made something personal no one else would know about, it would probably be a blue button to start it."

"Thanks, Kaiba," Yugi thanked him. "You've been a huge help today."

"Think nothing of it." Kaiba looked toward Serenity. "I'm just someone to count on when things get tough."

Yes. He would need a ton of goodwill to end up with Serenity. So, it was being selfishly helpful, but they would take it.

"Good luck, Guys," Joey said. "I really hope this all works out for you like it did for me and Mai."

DIMENSION: MANGA

Yugi and Atem both found themselves at Kaibacorp. They had never been up there, so they had no idea if it looked any different. "Did we move to the other dimension?" Yugi asked. He headed toward an area that looked like a rollercoaster that went nowhere. "This must continue into where Masika is trapped."

Atem headed to the panel. It did look complicated, but Kaiba said to look for a blue button. It wasn't just blue, it was a blue eyes white dragon button. No one was there yet, but they didn't have much time. He hit the blue button and watched the lights start to dim in the room while lights on the rollercoaster machine started to light up. Flashy, definitely Kaiba made. He got into the machine with Yugi. "This will probably be a bumpy ride, most likely those other buttons helped." Probably with cloth survival and duration, but they would have to go with what they had.

Border Between the Afterlife:

Atem stepped out, feeling sand all around. It was just like what he envisioned.

"To the right." Tarewet's voice. "She is alive but unconscious. You'll be able to hear Silhouette's cries when you are closer."

Right.

"Sounds like we are cutting it close, Other Me," Yugi said. "I don't see anything up ahead at all." Yugi started to run.

Yes, they were so close, they couldn't risk messing up now. Atem ran beside Yugi. ///Atem: Masika, are you there at all? We are very close, just hang on./// In the distance, they could finally make out a structure. "That's it, Yugi, I know it is."

"I can hear your daughter crying, that has to be it," Yugi agreed.

Yes. Silhouette was really hollering. Without a mother to comfort her, she would continue. Probably into eternity as she passed all alone, if Masika hadn't said she would stay with her.

"We're almost there." Yugi and him arrived about the same time at the door to the Sanctuary.

Masika was on the ground, her body downward except for her face that was staring out to the side. Her eyes were closed. Not too far away was Silhouette, crying up a storm. The only color was the red in her face, her skin was almost pure white.

Yugi went for Silhouette. "You carry Masika. I'll carry Silhouette out first." He tried to hold her, but her power kept pushing him back. "Big temper tantrum. She still has power."

Atem could see the eye of wdjat start to glow on her head. He went toward her and put his finger near her head. "Calm down. We are here to help." She actually stopped crying and reached out to him. "Yugi?"

"I got her." Yugi picked her up. "You get Masika now."

Atem went to see Masika. Great. This? ///Our souls are at stake. Her life is at stake. So many things are at stake if I don't get her./// He ignored any blushing that occurred on him as he picked her up. ///Egyptian Pharaoh. She was Egyptian. This would not bother her./// But? His modern day mind dominated any memories of Egypt.

Yugi was long gone. Atem ran out of the Sanctuary with her. This part was almost over. "Yugi, warn Téa to have some clothes ready and to be out from where Sekhmet is."

"I did. She's already ready," Yugi said as he reached the machine first. "This'll be a little crowded. Make sure you don't kick anyone with her."

Atem sat down. It was almost over. Relief started to set in, they now had a chance to save everyone. "You wouldn't have to worry about being kicked if you opened your eyes."

"We just saved Masika, I'm not getting murdered by Téa," Yugi pointed out. "She's my girlfriend."

"Yes, I guessed that." They couldn't read each other's minds for too long without having to confront that.

They appeared back in the Game Shop.

"Oh, she's safe." Sekhmet rubbed against Silhouette with her head.

"Yugi!" Téa's voice sounded mad.

Yugi glowed when he saw her. "Hey, there weren't clothes in that place, I warned you."

Téa covered her eyes. "You said to be ready for Masika, not you guys naked too!" She grumped. "This isn't the next thing I see after agreeing to be a girlfriend, Yugi." She uncovered her eyes and refused to look at Yugi.

Instead, she was coming straight for Atem. "I saved your spirit, you must show mercy."

"Nothing's showing for you," Téa muttered. "Everything's covered by Masika." She didn't sound pleased by that either. "I'll take Masika's baby. Atem, put her in our bedroom and you and Yugi better go upstairs and get some clothes on."

"You bet!" Yugi gave her Silhouette. ///Yugi: Oh, thank goodness, if we had failed, Téa wouldn't have shown us any mercy.///

///Atem: True. Though it was impossible to save them any other way, Téa would be the type to hold that against us./// Atem could hear Yugi's thoughts again.

///Yugi: Oh, thank goodness that is fixed Atem! It wasn't easy to pair with Téa's mind, I love her, but it was very hard.///

///Atem: Only the same soul mixes well, Yugi./// Atem took Masika upstairs, placed her on the bed and quickly went to his room with Yugi.

///Yugi: Okay. Masika and Silhouette is safe. Now we have some time to relax to figure out the situation, right?///

///Atem: I don't know. Sekhmet said that people would be coming toward Kaiba's machine soon on the other side. There's no reason lots of people would go there, it was a top secret project. Their Masika and Téa have also joined into one.///

///Yugi: I knew it would be different, but the fact that Masika could actually be in a different dimension and be considered so different that she safely made it through? Yeah, there's some big things going on.///

///Atem: Everyone is eager to get their cards. Masika may be here now, but-" Atem had just about walked out of the room when Téa held Silhouette out toward him.

"Masika is really weak. You need to take care of her," Téa said. "Hold out your hands."

Atem held out his hands.

"Inner arm facing up," Téa said.

Atem brought his inner arms facing up.

Téa's eyebrow twitched. "You're holding them like you are about to give blood." Téa looked toward Yugi. "You hold her. You better know how to hold, Yugi."

"I do." Yugi took Silhouette from Téa.

"Great." Téa smiled. "Then, let Atem take a turn holding her. Then let Bandit King Thief."

Atem and Yugi both looked at her.

"He is her father too. Where do you think the cool white in her hair comes from?" Téa pointed out. "You guys . . . Yugi said that Hikaru isn't going to be sacrificed. It was just a ploy to make us go for the millennium items, right?"

"Right," Yugi agreed.

"Hey, Yug!" Joey's voice outside. "Are all the naked people not naked so we can come back in?"

"In a minute Joey!" Téa said hotly. "Grr. It's just like him to interrupt when I'm talking."

Yugi just blushed. ///Yugi: She's the best.///

"Anyway. Now that Masika and Silhouette are here safe and sound." Téa patted Silhouette's head. "I have a request, and I know you guys aren't gonna like it, but I don't care, because if things don't work out, then I'm not gonna have any regrets."

///Atem: She has clearly thought through whatever she wants to say, Yugi.///

///Yugi: Yeah. I can tell./// "Follow your heart. It's what we've always done. There's no regrets when you follow that."

"I like living with you, Yugi, but I also want us to live with Bakura and the Bandit King."

Yugi just stared at her. "Huh?"

"But not just them, you too, Yugi. I want all of us to live in one spot together."

" . . ." Yugi couldn't really make any words. A small sound of 'uh' squeaked out.

"Oh no." Atem groaned. "Masika said you would say that, but I didn't want to believe her."

"It's either that, or Masika and I can switch between where we stay each day?" she said.

"What? No, that's dumb." Yugi couldn't help himself. "No way."

"Hey! You two were always the one going on about 'following your heart'," Téa said. "I want everyone to be able to parent equally. Also?" She gestured to Atem. "If we don't get another deal except the millennium items, then . . ."

///Atem: Yugi. You told her about her other selves coming together?///

///Yugi: I think it was just too emotional, I must have spilled it./// "We will get through, Téa."

"No one knows that for sure," Téa said. "And if Masika and I are gone then I don't see either of you sharing the responsibility correctly with the other two. Bakura clearly always wanted a kid. It's not fair to keep them away. I know Dark Bakura cares too, he's been slinking around here undetected by you guys for awhile."

"What?!" Atem wasn't happy about that. "Where are you hiding then?"

"He's not a spirit anymore, he's literally been sneaking around," Téa said to him. "And see? With that attitude, I can tell you won't share the responsibility properly. Before we go, you guys are going to become more friendly!"

"I'm already friends with Bakura," Yugi muttered.

"I meant Atem mainly," Téa said, "but you need to share the responsibility between you all."

"I respect that you are following your heart," Atem said gently. "That is the best way to live your life, and not regret your decisions."

"Then you'll do it, Atem?"

"No."

That didn't please Téa. She grabbed Silhouette from Yugi and thrust her at Atem. "Fine then, you take care of your daughter all by yourself until Masika starts to stir!" She pointed a finger at Yugi. "Don't help with anything. If something happens to Masika then he can prove he can take care of her fulltime without anyone else! Don't even try a bottle either, I'm sure Masika's been nursing her so that just wouldn't be nice. We won't get that kind of thing unless it takes awhile for her to wake up. It won't though. I know she'll wake up soon. I'm going to go spend some time with her," Téa said gently. "Prove your worth, Atem!" Then she left and slammed the door.

Oh man. Yugi looked toward Atem. "That was bonkers."

"For her situation, that was actually normal," Atem told him. ///Atem: She doesn't want to break down so she's yelling instead. She is scared that she will go, she has little faith this time around we can beat this. She is doing what she can while she can./// Atem looked at Silhouette who grabbed at his nose. "Don't." She didn't let go and he tried to move away without hurting her. She grabbed at it again.

"We should go get Joey and the others again," Yugi said. "This problem is fixed. It's time to figure out the most difficult one left."

"Yes. Figuring out how to save Téa and Masika." Atem caught Dark Bakura in the corner. ///Atem: Dark Bakura is here.///

///Yugi: He wants to see his daughter too.///

"Oh, did I hit the jackpot!" Grandpa announced as he came through the front door. Yugi watched him head in. "I had such a string of great luck, it was practically a miracle! I had the time of my life, I couldn't have . . .?" Grandpa tilted his head. "Why are you holding a little girl that looks like relation? She's even giving me the same odd look you give."

Atem looked back at Silhouette. She looked back at Atem. They both looked at Grandpa.

Grandpa came closer to them. "Does it have to do with a bunch of your friends loitering outside asking if you're naked or not?"

"Well? I'm glad you had a great time," Yugi congratulated him. "You've missed a few things though since you've been gone."

Kaiba's Limousine

"It feels like we should have been at your place by now," Serenity said dully.

"I have business to take care of first."

What business? "Skeezy?"

"Later. I have something else to deal with."

Serenity felt a nice breeze on her face. He must have rolled down the window.

"What's your favorite thing in the world to eat?"

Favorite thing? "You mean like ice cream or something?"

"Sure. Ice Cream. Driver? Drop us off at the nearest ice cream outlet."

Ice cream? Serenity felt the door open next to her a few minutes later. She heard Kaiba get out.

"You going to be a bump on a log? I thought you didn't want to be a bump on the log?"

Hmm. She felt for the top of the door, and tried to be careful with her feet as she emerged outward. "What are we doing here?"

"Showing you what money can do. Come on."

She felt him bump her slightly. She remembered last time he did that, he said to just grab however. She did.

"Your next to a curb. Step up first."

Serenity stepped up and proceeded with him. She heard him on the inside, talking to the owner. ///Serenity: You've got to be kidding me. This is the sweetest thing anyone could ever do.///

"There you go."

She felt the spoon in her hand.

"You want me to guide you around, Miss?"

"No, she's got it. It's all yours, Serenity. Reach your hand in, feel and taste."

Serenity had a little trouble navigating, but she could feel the cold areas. She reached in with her spoon and tasted several flavors. She moved downward and soon ran into the toppings. Sprinkles. The messiness of cherries and the cherry sauce on her hands.

"Whipped cream is on the counter after everything." Seto Kaiba's voice again.

"Yes, please enjoy." The owner still sounded thrilled. Serenity didn't exactly know what happened. She didn't know if Kaiba bought permission to use it that night, or if he flat out bought the shop. All she had heard was a little frustration, and then nothing but happiness from the owner. "Oops." She bumped something.

"I got it, no big deal. Here's some more syrup for you," the owner said as he picked whatever she dropped up. "You deserve a new syrup anyhow."

"Thanks." Her bowl was a decent size and her ice cream and sprinkles, it was all the right flavors. She would never be able to take this long to get everything right. "Thank you so much, Seto Kaiba, this is really too much."

"Seto is fine," he said to her. "It's not too much. It's helpful. Next time we go out to eat, everything will be read to you, and sampled by you, before you are stuck with any decision."

"Seto." Was this really the person that Joey despised so much? "You don't have to keep doing nice things for me just because I'm blind now."

"I'm not," he said. "I'm doing nice things for you because you fucking blinded yourself so our future daughter could see. Also, I'm not just doing nice things. You are going to survive in

this world like that for the rest of your life. If you think you are staying inside all the time, memorizing where everything is to get by, your sadly mistaken. I don't live like that. You are coming with me."

With him? "To where?"

"Wherever I go. You are going to be part of Kaibacorp. I'll still get you nice things, but you'll be able to afford your own things too. Depending on your position and how involved you get."

Afford? "I'm going to work?"

"Yes. You can mother however, but to be sure, we will definitely have nannies. We can't be stuck with an infant all day, we'll have work that needs done."

She was going to work! She would go wherever he went. Earn her position. Earn her way.

"Your ice cream is melting."

"Sorry." She took a bite, still amazed. "Thank you, Seto."

"Don't mention it. Now? What's your favorite place in the world?"

A Child Gives No One Claim to Another

"Bastet, it will begin soon. We must start this," Sekhmet tried to encourage Bastet again. However, Isis decided to tag along since nothing had happened yet, there wasn't time to spare. Isis was not someone to fool with! Bastet and the humans, just a bad combination.

"It is all set to go off," Bastet pleaded once more to Isis. "The chain reaction. They didn't want to help, but our involvement will ensure they will, please Isis?"

"They have not built it," Isis said toward Bastet. "Either way? These actions will be the last chance of defense too."

"This is more involved than warning Bakura that you just complained about," Sekhmet muttered. "We can save them."

"If all is lost, it is the last step we must take," Isis said with a warning. "They will all be honored with statues and their memories and accomplishments preserved."

"They will build it! We are already starting a chain reaction, it will enforce it, please!" Bastet meowled as she curled on the ground.

"Sekhmet, I do not believe I am saying this. Do the fetching," Isis said. "Take Bastet away again. I give you permission to try whatever you want in this dimension. If it succeeds, and the winner's win, then maybe it will end good. No promises, but you must fetch them regardless."

"Yes, Isis." Sekhmet picked up Bastet again. "After this, it's another thousand years before we should come back to Earth. It hurts you terribly, you feel too much for them the longer you are here. Let's go."

Game Shop

"Masika?" Téa tried to calm. ///Téa: I wish you would wake up.///

///Téa?///

///Téa: Masika, you're there!!!! Thank goodness. ///You're back safe and sound with Silhouette. Everyone's okay. You know Yugi and the Pharaoh, they always figure out the impossible.///

///Masika: That doesn't sound super triumphant.///

///Téa: It should be. They went to another dimension to get you, how epic was that? I should believe in anything right now.///

///Masika: The goddesses do not want another deal. I'm sorry. Silhouette is safe now. We will have nice afterlives, it was promised to us.///

"I don't want that. I want to keep living." Téa used her voice again. "As soon as you and Silhouette were safely back instead of crying and shouting to them in thanks, I let myself get mad over all the nudity."

Masika started to open her eyes. "Why would you ever care so strongly about that when they were saving us? We've been nude several times in the middle of saving with Bakura."

Téa blushed. "A different kind of life. I think I did that, so I didn't get . . . hopeful. It's the millennium items or us. Even if the guys had the audacity or will power to make it, they would need 99 people. Ninety nine recorded badly terrible awful people. No innocence, no redeeming, no nothing. And? That's not gonna come easy. It's not right to sacrifice 99 people just to save two."

"It all depends on your point of view," Masika reminded her. "I am glad Silhouette is out of the trap."

"You should make Atem swear not to drag you into another shadow game," Téa insisted. "I know he might not have that power anymore, I don't know, I don't care, but it's not happening."

"It is easier to face the afterlife with someone by your side," Masika agreed. "I would have liked to have that last time."

"It's easier with a friend by my side," Téa corrected her. "I told the guys I want the Bakuras to live with us."

"Yes, I foresaw you would want that silly thing. I warned Atem. He didn't seem to believe me."

"He told me no outright." Grr. "I know they have a bad history, but there was a lot of evil influence between. Before I leave this Earth, they won't be bosom buddies, but they will tolerate each other!" Téa insisted. "I became Yugi's girlfriend too."

"You've always been Yugi's girlfriend," Masika said knowingly. "You just spoke it out loud to each other."

"Not always," Téa said.

"Always. Even when you were far away and tried for relationships, that part of the Pharaoh was always in your thoughts," Masika told her.

"Oh please." Not true. "If you thought that, you never would have had a thing with Dark Bakura," Téa pointed out.

"I don't."

Téa stared at her. "Yeah, you do. You left with him from the store often."

"I just led you to believe that," Masika admitted, "since at the time you were keeping me in a Game Shop working with someone I thought brutally murdered me, killed our cat, and hurt our precious Bakura."

"You never had a thing with Dark Bakura at all?" Téa asked again. "Never?"

"Really? I figured by now you would have realized that. After all our experiences in the past, Téa, why would I ever want something like that?" Masika shook her head. "Honestly."

Oh. "Do you have any feelings for anyone? What about Atem?" Yeah, that was a strange look. "I'm making girl talk. It's a modern day thing. I missed you and I'm trying to make girl talk."

"You pick strange subjects for 'girl talk'," Masika said. "Let's see? Do I have feelings for the mighty Pharaoh who trapped me away with my unborn nearly killing us?"

"Look, Atem gets a lot of things wrong with you for some reason," Téa said. "It was just him trying to find my secret. He's really good at what he does. Any of the other guys could justify his stupid plan, he didn't mean it, it was all a bluff. Talk it out and he could tell you that."

"No!" Masika's voice raised higher than she thought. "I really do not want to see anyone else except you and Silhouette to be honest."

Boy, that was loud and rude. ///Téa: Are you okay, Masika?///

///Masika: We lived our whole lives being owned, Téa. Every morsel since we were but the smallest of children!///

Oh. "I get it." Yeah. "I'm not letting this get in the way. We only have so much time." Téa headed to the door. "I'll be back." She was going to have to talk to Atem.

"My. I missed a lot," Grandpa admitted. "I need a better phone I guess."

"Yeah, we should upgrade that." He needed texting at the very least. Yugi called him once when Tristan was in the hospital, but the call must have dropped. He hadn't bothered to set up voice mail either.

"I just don't see the point, I get most calls," Grandpa said.

"It's a good idea to stay up with the times," Yugi pointed out to him.

"Oh pish posh, I don't need to be 'up with the times'. It's a phone, Yugi." He groaned. "Not staying up with the latest thing never killed anyone. Nothing happens all week, I take a little time for myself and the whole place turns upside down. Tristan almost dying, goddess grandkid coming, Atem's already got one in his arms awkwardly." Grandpa sighed and went toward Atem. "Why are you letting her do that?"

Atem raised his eyebrow. "She keeps trying to chew on my jacket."

"So letting her suck on your finger is better?" Grandpa asked. "You need to go get a teether for her, or a pacifier. She's definitely bigger than a newborn. Let's check and see if this little miracle's got some teeth coming in."

"Téa said not to help him," Yugi said, "but what are the teethers for? Do they stop her slobbering all over?"

"Ha." Atem looked proud. "It seems you will need some practice of your own, Yugi."

"It's not a big deal with newborns, they like to suck a lot so a pacifier might help," Grandpa said. "This little one isn't your typical newborn. She's got a full set of hair and she's almost as big as I'd say a six-month-old or so. That means if she did grow faster, she might be teething. Sorry for disobeying Téa's very strange rule, I didn't know it, but just leaving someone with no knowledge of taking care of an infant isn't right. Where is she?"

"Well? She's sort of . . . out of sorts," Yugi reminded him. "The whole being pregnant with a god thing still and being the next sacrifice card. It's really warped things on her."

"Oh. You've always been able to figure out a way out of trouble," Grandpa suggested. "It can't be that hopeless. You need to cheer her up and give her some hope."

"The only hope we have right now is if we recast the millennium items." Atem tried to move his finger from her mouth, but he got a response. "Yes, teething, it's teething. I felt something sharp on my finger."

Grandpa helped him remove his finger while she started to cry. "How much goddess compared to normal baby again?"

"Not much," Téa answered as she came down the stairs. "Hi Grandpa."

"Oh, Téa." Grandpa watched her come toward Atem. "I'm sorry about everything happening to you."

Téa came over to Atem. "I know, let's not dwell on that. I can take her for you." Atem easily handed her over. She put her in Yugi's hands. "Here you go. You can get some practice too. Everyone sticking around needs practice." She grabbed Atem's hand and dragged him upstairs. "You, come with me. We need to talk."

"I'm not a fan of when you grab me and drag me around, Téa." What did she need? Téa had not been so aggressive since she was a teen. Even then, she usually didn't get that bad.

"Yeah, I know." Téa gave him a strange look. "It's easier getting through things, if I can just stay aggressive about them," she revealed to him. "This is hard enough, last thing I should do is cry on someone. So, unless you want me crying all over you, then you just have to deal with it!"

Right. She was going through some interesting steps to get through her life troubles right now. "What is it you need, Téa?"

"I need you to do me a favor. I am not letting Masika keep this up," Téa said. "You have to talk to her."

Talk to her? "She is conscious again? That is good. What do I need to talk to her about?"

"Something really personal." Téa looked around her. She looked back down the stairs. "Let's take yours and Yugi's room."

It was something she didn't want Yugi to overhear. He went to his room with Téa and closed the door for extra privacy. "What is it?"

"Look." A little aggressive. "Just?" She stuck her hair behind her ear. "I have to do something, I can't let it go this way between you two. I'll regret it."

"Like the Bakuras?" Atem was already understanding something important. "I understand that you are scared, Téa. No one can guarantee your safety, and no one is making any new deals. I understand that fear. You are trying to make sure if the worse does happen, that you have no regrets at all. That everything will still tick normally," he explained. "The world will continue to tick with or without you. You should be living for yourself, and keeping up hope for yourself that you can make it through."

"Shut up." She didn't want to hear that. "I'm just doing things the way I need to do things, and fixing you and Masika is important."

"Even those words. Fix," Atem warned her. "We aren't broken."

"You aren't, but I was!" Téa's voice rose too high and she covered her mouth. She opened the door, left the room, and looked back downstairs. "Sorry for yelling. Everything's fine. Just talking to Atem."

Everything wasn't fine. Atem watched her come back to the room and close the door.

"Masika wants to stay in her room and not see you, or Bakura. For the rest of her time living, I think she just wants to see Silhouette and me," Téa explained.

"She doesn't want to see the Bandit King?" Now, that actually meant something different. "Why?"

Téa was starting to tear up. She shook her head and tried to hide it. The more she covered it up, the worse she got. "The past was really, really, really bad. So, she has a lot of really, really bad memories of her masters which were her master husbands. The only time she wasn't owned was when we were really really small, just a small kid."

Atem noticed more than her sentence structure getting lost, she was going from she into we again. He listened closely.

"You and Bakura both have a child with her. Her best friend, that pulled her out of harm's way all the time from our- her - stupid masters, is actually the master. So are you."

No. "I am not her master," Atem said.

"Exactly! You aren't, that isn't the way it runs today. Even if you were Pharaoh, you don't own anyone. So? Can you please go and tell her that?" Téa asked. "That no matter what, you won't claim her as yours or anything?"

Oh! ///Atem: That is what Téa wanted./// "I understand, Téa." He never even thought about it. He was more focused on figuring out how to get through this payment, how to pull everyone out of danger's way, it never even hit his mind. "I will go see her and quench any fear she has about it."

"Thank you. Thank you, really!" Such a simple gesture, yet Téa looked like she might start crying. "Okay, let's go then." She backed away quickly.

///Atem: Yugi, you need to take some personal time with Téa. It's important./// He continued on his way to Masika's room.

Téa knocked on the door briefly and came in. "Hey? So? Atem wants to see how you are doing."

Masika didn't give her very cheery looks, and Atem could see a certain amount of fear in Masika's facial expression. As if all the good will he had tried to build up never existed. No, he had to take care of this before things got worse.

"Thank you, Téa. I think Yugi wants to talk to you for a bit." Atem watched her leave quickly and looked back toward Masika. "I am glad to see you are feeling better."

"I . . . am . . .?"

"Atem," he encouraged her. "Yes, I know that we share a child together, and I certainly should be putting some claim on you as my wife. That will not happen," he assured her. "I would never do such a thing unless there was a drastic need for it." She didn't look any better about that either. "We are friends. Just because we share a little goddess doesn't mean anything else."

"Oh." That still didn't sound good. "Okay, fine. That's fine and good."

Fine and good? "That doesn't seem fine and good, what is wrong?" Atem asked.

"Nothing. Um? I was hoping I would get some sway as your wife as to not piss you off later with an action I needed to take with the Bandit Thief King," she said slowly.

Ah. "Bandit King is going to try and make the millennium items, isn't he?" Atem could tell. "You want to help him so you and Téa stay safe."

"I can't let anything . . ." She didn't know how to continue. "I'm sorry, but I must protect her. I can tell there is no time, and there is no other deal coming. I will help my new master husband, and after the deed is done, we will take Silhouette away. I'm sorry," she apologized oddly. "I must be the villain to save Téa, but it's not the first time I've killed someone obviously."

Uh? This was not what he was expecting. "You can't do that."

"I know, it's evil, and I am an evil person underneath it all I guess, but I will sacrifice 99 people to save our skin." She tried to look at Atem's eyes. "This is just the way it must be, I am sure Sekhmet will help once we discuss our willingness."

What? "No, I . . .?" Atem gestured out the door. "If you put together the millennium items with Bakura, I can't cast judgment against that. I would still be friends with you. But? You can't just take Silhouette away."

She looked confused. "I don't understand? You aren't casting yourself as the master husband, ergo I must live with my master husband and the child."

"I?" Oh, this was a tough spot to be in. "I am not very good yet with Silhouette, but she is my own blood, and I do not want her taken away."

"You want us to visit the Game Shop?" Masika was still confused.

"Not just visit." Oh, this was infuriating. "It is true, I make no claim for you, but Silhouette is also mine."

"You lay no claim on me, but you are laying claim on Silhouette?" Masika asked. "Truly, a Pharoah wants . . .?" She paused. "Nevermind. Everyone is different, I have learned at least that much."

"You also do not have to have a master husband at all," Atem reminded her. "You don't have to go to him at all." Something. He saw something shine in her eyes for just a second. He remembered Téa's words. Owned since she was young. "A child gives no one claim to another."

I Will Make Them!

Masika opened her mouth briefly, then closed it. "Do I really have the right to not be the Bandit Queen Thief?" Her eyes bordered between wanting to cry, and holding it back, like she didn't know what she should do or say.

Atem sat down next to her bed. "No one holds right over each other just because of Silhouette. Whether spirit or human, no one can force anything on another." Those eyes again. "You know? When Yugi was younger and I was having a hard time deciding on what to do about my own future, Yugi forced me to spend a day with Téa. It was an odd time, but it was in a way fun. I think? It'd be nice to go out as friends with you one of these days. Instead of playing inside, we should play outside." Something different than Connect Four.

She looked oddly at him, a tendril of hair drooping down between her eye with no bounce. So unlike Téa. "You would like to be my friend, without any motivation? No keeping Téa closer for Yugi or anything?"

"Right."

"There must be some reason?" She tried to guess. "Is it to keep Silhouette in your life, Atem? We can all work something out if you want to be involved in her upbringing."

"No."

"Is it . . .?"

Atem almost wanted to laugh. She was still trying to figure it out. "Haven't you had any real friends before? Did all you ever have was the Bandit King?"

"Well . . . some master husbands pretended to make things smoother, but everyone eventually showed their true colors. My only friends have been Bakura, and Téa." She grinned. "Téa is a friend. I will kill 99 evil people for her."

"Well, now you have a new friend. Eventually, you will probably make others." Knowing how Yugi's group held together, she would probably be friends with them all.

"Okay. One day, we will have a friend outing," Masika agreed. "But just to be sure, if anything else ever happens, I am . . . I am not doing anything else that creates another Silhouette."

Oh? "I thought you and Bandit King-"

"-I just annoyed Téa with a relationship tease, I've only hung out as a friend with Bandit King," she revealed. "He clearly wanted more but . . . I . . ." She shook her head. "I am claimed by no one."

Right. ///Atem: She's getting better.///

"Even with Silhouette, nothing else." Her voice was getting more confident. "And you, or anyone, if anyone wants to be a boyfriend that is my choice, but I will not do anything else above kissing! I belong to no one, my body is no one else's!" She was grinning. An absolutely radiant grin, almost a smirk. "Thank you, Atem." She pulled herself out of the bed, now wearing some pajamas Téa must have got on her, and headed out the door. She headed downstairs.

Atem followed after her. It felt like she was finally making an important turning point.

He watched her head straight to Yugi, Téa, Grandpa and Silhouette. She looked around. "No one from this day forth shall lay any hand upon this body without my say so! Even if I kiss or let someone cast their gaze across my naked body, no one shall ever get anything else!"

"Uh? I could . . . handle that," Grandpa said awkwardly, while Yugi scolded him.

Téa just gave Atem the oddest infuriating look. "What did you say?"

Atem just shook his head with a small chuckle. "She's 'modernizing' herself how she wants, Téa."

"What the hell are you going on about?!" Bandit King showed up looking down from upstairs.

"We are friends. If I want more, it will be on my own say so." She pointed at him. "I will never have sex with you though!"

"Okay Miss Thing," Téa said strained as she went toward Masika. "Calm it down already."

"I am free, Téa. No one can ever be a master husband unless I agree." Her face was so joyous, even Téa couldn't be mad. "I must talk with Bandit King now. I am going to kill everyone I have to, to save you, Téa. I won't wait for someone to decide that you and I are worth it. This is not Ancient Egypt. We are worth it! You are my friend, and I want to live too."

"You're gonna make the items?" Téa looked horrified.

"It's okay. I am evil, but Atem still wants to be friends." Masika smiled. "I must talk to Bandit King now."

Atem noticed a very deep glare come across Bandit King's face as he walked past him.

"Woman?" Bandit King's voice was strained. "What the fuck?!"

"I am creating the millennium items and saving Téa and myself. I am hoping you will help me?"

"After yelling that out?" Displeased. "The hell was that all for?"

"If you don't want to help me because of my declaration, then I will figure it out myself," Masika told him. "Téa, please help Atem and Bandit King watch over Silhouette. Atem also wants to be a part of her life, so he will need help too. Oh? And. You need to show me the diaper thing. The crib thing. I will need many modern lessons too from you. I am going to seek out Sekhmet now. I will see you later my friend Téa."

Téa just sighed as she watched her head out the door and looked at Atem. "You just had to tell her you would never lay claim as a master husband. Not that hard. You had to give an inspiring speech to her, didn't you?"

Atem did not admit fault. He told her what needed to be said.

"Fucking millennium item making! Those fucking things shouldn't ever exist again!" Bandit King was struggling.

"Hey!" Téa called him out. "You need to start watching your mouth around Silhouette, one day she is going to start to speak. You want her to hear and say nice things, not things like that, BK."

"Eh." Bandit King seemed strange. "I'll . . . try. Fuck."

"Try harder," Téa warned him.

Collecting the Sacrifices

Joey's House

Trying to enjoy his time. Mai was safe. Everyone was safe. It was good for now. Story of his life. ///Joey: Okay, Joey. You are finally going to get some time to relax with Mai.///

Mai went straight to her room instead and closed the door.

///Joey: And it's gone./// "You're off to bed?"

"Do you have any idea what time it is, Joey Wheeler?" She cracked her door open. "Thanks for the help, although it's really all your guys' fault I am in this mess." Still, her eyes looked a fraction softer. "I had a feeling it was more like a dream that I was gonna be ended by a card. Thanks for standing by me while we got it sorted out. I need to get some rest."

Right. "Right, you're going to be a mom, you'll need plenty of rest."

"Don't remind me," she muttered. "This all feels like one big dream or nightmare. Still can't decide which. Night, Joey." She closed the door.

"Night, Mai." Okay, not a big talk, but some progress. There wasn't a real rush. She was there to stay for awhile. Maybe even? Maybe she could eventually . . . ///Joey: Nah, Joey. Don't think about possibilities right now. Keep her and Mana safe, that's the only thing you should be thinking./// Crack jokes. Make her relax. Be her Joey, that's all he needed to do right now.

He headed toward his room when he felt his cellphone ring. Duke's number? "Hey, what is it? You got some new news to tell me?"

"You know, goddesses can get numbers, but they can't make people pick up a phone to a number they don't recognize," Duke said. "Hey. Joey. So? I have to be careful how to say this, and I only get a call to Yugi. I really need you to call Yugi and tell him to pick up when my number calls him."

"Sorry, Man, you know how many spam calls are always on phones," Joey said. "You got news about the goddesses?" He looked toward Mai's room. "You get one call to Yugi, but can others overhear that call?" He really wanted to know if they found something to save Téa.

"Yugi can tell you later, just let him know?"

"Okay, okay." Joey already knew he would be on extra alert tonight. ///Joey: Sleep with the gun close. Keep the door open. Be ready./// He hung up and called Yugi. "Hey? Duke Devlin is trying to call you."

"Duke Devlin? Grandpa, don't let her do that." He was clearly busy, probably helping with the baby. "Sorry. Yeah, I'll answer if he calls again."

"Having fun with the new member?" Joey asked. "Everyone doing okay?"

"Well? Silhouette's okay. Atem's . . . learning. Busy time. I'll call you after Duke Devlin. I really hope it's some good news. Did it sound like good news?"

"I heard he only gets one call to you," Joey said. "It doesn't sound like it might be the best news. Let me know soon, okay?"

"Okay, Joey, I'll talk to you afterward."

Game Shop

Yugi picked up the phone when it rang again with an unknown number.

"Yugi." Yep, that sounded like Duke Devlin's voice. "I need to talk about something with you."

"Then I want to hear what you have," Yugi answered. "I'm going to put you on speaker so Atem can hear to, is that okay?" He got the okay and flipped to speaker.

"Okay. So, I've got a goddess who wants to eat me if I share too much. I honestly just got permission to call you, this wasn't even required, but I already feel like I heel. I'm going to do my best without giving away everything and ending Duke Devlin. You know?"

Yeah, Sekhmet. "I understand that fear, it's a real fear. Yeah."

"Okay. Things are coming together, you don't have to search for the 99 people. None of them are going to be redeeming, trust me, these guys are all around the worst. Besides, you won't have much choice, you'll want to save-sorry! Um, went too far!"

"Duke!" He sounded injured.

"So, do you know where Seto Kaiba is right now?" Duke asked. "He might be kind of a cool person to talk to. You know, current events of life and whatnot. Maybe it's a little bigger than you . . . hey, so, gods and stuff, pretty rad!" Poor Duke definitely got threatened again.

"Seto Kaiba is most likely trying to win Serenity Wheeler," Atem answered.

"What?" Duke sounded surprised. "I thought he'd be all over an alert."

"He doesn't let things get in his way of a win," Atem told him.

"It's kind of a big thing, currently, with a deal?" Duke pointed out.

"He doesn't let things get in his way of what he defines as a win," Atem said in a better way. "When he sees something he wants, he doesn't stop in his pursuit."

" . . . huh. That looks like it might ruin the plan." Duke sounded like there was a bit of joy in his voice. "Guys, I'm going to say this as plainly as I can. There is no other deal, and things are heading your way, but I didn't tell them what was heading their way!"

"Don't hurt Duke Devlin, he didn't reveal what was coming!" Atem tried to save him.

Sekhmet's voice. "You have more than enough. You have had more than enough. This will end one way or another sooner than you think. One of you will crack first. Seto Kaiba's strange . . . action messed things up, but everything will still fall into place."

The phone was hung up.

Masika did not have to go far before Sekhmet met with her. She bowed. "I will put the millennium items together, I want to save myself and Téa. I want us to see and raise our children. How do I get started?"

Sekhmet didn't look pleased. "Satiah. If there was a human that I would refuse to ever eat, it would probably be you. I am sorry that no one else was as brave as you."

Satiah? "No one has called me that in thousands of years. I would have gone with it, but when I first met Mokuba-

"You were drawn to give him your real name, and he gave that name to others for addressal. Actions beget actions, which beget other actions." Sekhmet came closer. "You want to live? You will have to do more than build the millennium puzzle. Stay strong, I know you are strong. Masika is strong. You will feel pain and power, but you have to stay on the side of the pain. Close to Zorc's surface. To live as you want, do this! Try your best, mortal! Make it to the ending!"

Masika disappeared while Sekhmet roared into the sky.

Game Shop

"Worried about Masika?" Yugi asked Téa. "I'm sorry about what she . . . I'm sort of sorry? I'm glad that it will let you live."

"She's following what she thinks she needs to do." Téa still didn't sound good.

Yugi reached over to pat her on the shoulder, but she wasn't there by the time his hand reached. Just, poof. "Téa?" That wasn't a good sign.

"Téa!" Atem definitely agreed, especially since she'd been holding Silhouette.

"Atem." Yugi gestured on the couch where the millennium puzzle, now whole again, resided as well as the millennium necklace and the millennium ring.

"They are borrowing from the other dimension again." A full millennium puzzle?

Téa found herself on a random street somewhere. Nowhere near the Game Shop. "What happened?"

"Just try. Just try to stay on the side of pain and not power," Sekhmet said as she approached her. "You can't forever stay in the pain, and you don't have to go in deep. Just make sure you don't fall into the power side of Zorc."

Téa watched as Taweret showed up behind her. Everything about it was giving her the chills. "I'm not ready to die, I'm really not, please!"

They all left, leaving only the echo of Téa's scream.

Joey's Place

"Joey!"

That sound snapped him out of his sleep pretty quick. "Mai?" Was that a dream? He grabbed his gun he had ready, left his room and headed to hers. He wouldn't leave anything to chance. "Mai!" He opened her door.

Three people were there trying to get her out the window. He had to move back to avoid a bullet. So much for Kaiba's bodyguards! He aimed and shot one that was grappling her the best.

He heard a strange chime when he did that, but ignored it. "There's no way you are taking her."

The other one tried to cover and aim, but the aiming was way off. He shot the other one struggling with Mai again. He heard another chime.

One more. He held his gun tight, as the guy missed him by a mile again. He shot him. He heard a third chime.

Mai was stunned, just standing there. "Joey?"

"It's okay." He went over toward her right away. "Nothing wrong, Mai, you're safe." He looked out the window. No one else was coming. "Looks like they took out Kaiba's bodyguards."

"Skeezy's relentless. Professional bodyguards that Seto Kaiba trusted can't even beat his goons." Scared. "I can't turn back and go 'sorry, Skeezy, I messed up'."

Those bodyguards had been around them all the time since they came. Most times, no one even saw them. "They couldn't have such bad aiming skills and take down Kaiba's guards." He picked up his phone and called Yugi. "Hey."

"Téa and Silhouette just disappeared, Joey!" Yugi told him first.

"Mai almost got nabbed out of the room. People who are good enough to take down Kaiba's bodyguards weren't good enough to escape me. Wish I could take full credit." He tried to lighten the situation. "Yug, get out of there." He started to hear glass breaking. "Yug!" He heard a tussle, definitely fighting, and then some chanting. "Yug?"

"Joey, they disappeared," Mai said from behind him.

Joey turned and looked behind at the unconscious bodies on the floor. They were gone now. "Bodies of Skeezy's gangs disappeared. Yug?"

"They sort of did here?" Yug was answering again. "After they were smoldered. There's still more coming! Joey, watch Mai closely." He hung up.

Atem and Bandit King were both glaring at each other while Yugi started to drive. They had tried to reach out to the goddesses, but all they got was a dropped slip of paper from the sky with an address. "Okay, God's Brew factory location is in California? That's several hours away."

"You shouldn't have messed with Masika's mind," Bandit King finally spoke up. "This is not tradition, what you caused!"

"She does not have to follow tradition. Silhouette was made by the goddesses," Atem reasoned.

"And people were married off or taken as slaves, what's your point?" Bandit King came right back at him.

"It isn't Ancient Egypt," Atem reminded him.

"If you didn't want her, that was fine. She still had me," he continued to complain. "It was still ours. That makes her mine."

"Silhouette is Masika, mine and yours," Atem said once again. "Something will be worked out on how she is taken care of. The mother does not come along as a free gift with the situation. She is your friend, Bandit King. Trying to pressure her for more if she doesn't want more will not bode well."

"There is no security in this situation!" That seemed to be what aggravated him the most.

"Hey?" Yugi tried. "You don't have to try and use this to secure Silhouette and her. She hasn't said no to anyone not being with Silhouette."

"She is feeling out her territory, learning how to live in this era, and the choices she makes are hers," Atem added. "If you want more, you have the right to pursue. You have no right to actually get her."

"Yeah, nothing's official without papers and things," Yugi agreed.

"And if somehow you manage to trick her into that by bribing her somehow? There is divorce too. Give it up," Atem told him again.

"Working with the crown. This is so disgusting," Bandit King complained again.

"Ah, some warning!" Yugi stopped the vehicle as it suddenly ended up next to a factory. "Just skipped a ton of hours."

They each left the car and headed to the factory. It was all lit up with doors unlocked.

Atem went in first, heading to the area that was glowing. Rashid was there along with . . . "I see. We didn't really get a choice in making the millennium items, did we?"

"There is choice," Bastet told him, in her full form. "Téa and Masika have already been taken. They are already in peril and at death's doorstep. Their souls will forever spend eternity with Zorc. Every single one of you took too long, this is on all of you!"

Bastet crossed her arms. "They will not last long, and they are not guaranteed back now because Isis does not believe you will make the items. Whether they live or die is now left up to chance."

"Chance?!" Yugi yelled. "What do you mean chance?"

"They are joined with their other selves. Isis decided if Zorc won, they would be the last line of defense. Once the god's game is over, if Zorc wins, he will be destroyed from the inside."

"And if he loses?" Atem asked.

"If he loses, then they will have a chance to be safe if Isis believes that you will build the millennium items."

"A chance to be safe?" Yugi complained.

"How dare you." Bastet hissed at him. "You knew, you all knew. If you had made the millennium items so long ago, your dear ladies never would have been in danger. They are now in great pain, trying to stay alive to last through the battle. God's cannot interrupt the battle. If they are still alive at the end, if Isis is convinced the millennium items will be built, and the other you's have won, then they will be safe."

"But . . ."

Bastet gestured to the bodies. "You have over 100 of the worst people with the best skills after each one of you now. Joey has already done his part."

"You can't just-!"

"-This means when Zorc comes back to your dimension he cannot possess and/or use any magic against him. Mai is also protected, it was her presence that lured this incident all together." Bastet licked her hand. "It's time. There is no more time for this, the battle is happening. Will you make the items and protect your wives, or sacrifice them?"

"You can't sacrifice Téa, she has-"

"Hikaru, I know. We still have Silhouette to pay the debt, and we'll just take 15 million lives." Bastet said. "There was no time to collect, Isis' commands come first."

"Téa and Masika are saved as much as we can do!"

Bakura's voice? Yugi looked to his side and saw the power button turned on.

"I turned on the power button," Bakura said to them. "Well? I didn't want Hikaru to grow up without a mother, and I rather didn't want to kill physically." He rubbed his arm. "They gave me the easiest job since I'm the light side."

"The power button?" Yugi asked.

"Yes, I am protected from Zorc too. That's really nice," Bakura pointed out. "Okay. Can we get them back soon? Please?" Bakura held out his sacrifice card. "It's a very nasty spot they are in, and I would like kindly for you to get them and my unborn out now?"

"The game has to be won, and the items have to be made in full." Bastet gestured to the dead bodies. "Three were from Joey Wheeler. Ten were from Bandit King. Thirteen is a long way from 99 and none of them are even in the solution. It's not enough to convince Isis, I can't take the card yet."

Atem rubbed his face with both hands. "If Zorc comes back, he will want to fight to possess someone and gather the items all over again."

"You've seen his best tricks. The more your loved ones are protected? The less he can do. He cannot put magic over any of them you know, so magic won't work." Bastet came closer to Atem. "Honestly, the best idea? Is just to protect the items. He has to fight to attain the last

one, but if you keep those items from any would be hosts knowledge? Then it will be past your time before he even has a chance to find them."

"And the Ishtars are all protected, so we could hide most of them, and he could do nothing." Rashid spoke up.

Sekhmet showed up with Mokuba in her teeth. "I'm here. Masika would want him protected. After what Isis made us do, I had to do this. Sorry." Mokuba fussed. "I'm going to drop him off far away and I will be back."

"I told you not to play around," Bastet warned her. She disappeared and then reappeared. "Any news from Seto Kaiba yet? We really need more power to crank these numbers up."

"Thoth is upset he didn't foresee Seto Kaiba's actions. He's busy calming down, he won't answer," Sekhmet stated.

Atem noticed Yugi's look at him. ///Atem: I know. I don't think we had much of any choice, Yugi. Zorc is destined to come back to this dimension. Try and take something very light like Bakura did.///

"Already intended for the light, you can redirect the pipe a little," Bastet recommended. "Just askew it a bit."

Yugi went over to a loose pipe and moved it just a bit. "There?"

"Good, you are covered. Now? The big ones who do the heavy lifting. I see one here. Potentially two if Atem accepts he will be killing very bad guys."

"You had Duke Devlin betray Mai, creating a scenario that sent out Skeezy's best men after us, and even told them we could be found here, didn't you? That means each one coming will be his best men. They already hurt many people, and Téa and Masika are already in peril with no guarantee of success," Atem reasoned. "If I don't join and kill who is coming." A bullet went off from outside. "Then they kill us, and our friends are dead without even a chance. Goodness, do gods really like to make sure you play their games, whether you want to or not!" He carried the millennium puzzle, but heard chanting behind him.

Masika was standing there.

"She might not be able to communicate. She is in pain, straddling the line, so she can be kept between dimensions. It is the best chance of her survival," Bastet informed him. "Eventually she will move to the power side when she succumbs to it. Téa is also around there. She is straddling closer to the other side."

"Téa!" Yugi called out. "Téa, are you there too? Can you hear me?"

It Was Fate

Téa briefly appeared a little. She looked terrible though, like she was bearing some kind of pressure in front of her.

"Communicating brings them closer, but it puts them in more pain," Bastet warned him. "It's best not to push too far. They are the pair close to the surface of Zorc."

"Téa." Yugi reached out to her form. She just cried as she looked at him. She moved her mouth, but he couldn't hear her. "It's okay, get back, we are going to get you out soon," Yugi assured her as she disappeared.

"You have to hang on," Atem said toward Masika. "Please, if you can hear me, just hang on. We will get this treacherous thing done, but you have to put everything into staying as much as possible."

Masika seemed to look toward him. Maybe? Her directions changed how she looked.

"It hurts worse to stay so close," Yugi told Atem. "They need to go."

"To leave puts them more at risk," Atem fired right back at him. "Life, to live, is going to be painful."

"Just get the millennium items made and appease Isis," Bastet said. "They cannot straddle for long, no one can survive that."

Masika looked like she was moving closer. She was saying something. Chanting maybe?

Bastet held out some cards to Atem. "No need to chant. Call them out like you are playing duel monsters, and let them claim their prey." Bastet looked toward Masika. "Move back more. Stay alongside Téa, your Pharaoh can do this."

Masika bowed, still in pain, and walked backward until she disappeared.

"Let's just hurry," Yugi said. "Let's just get this over with so we can save them."

Atem called out for the Red Eyes Black Dragon card on the top of the deck, just like he would call out any other duel card. He watched as the dragon came from the card and blew fire through the entranceway into the building. Several sounds of people in torturous pain was heard, as well as several strange chimes.

"Good, another ten. That is 25," Bastet congratulated her. "Nice job for a spirit turned man."

"If that's all it takes, I can do far better," Bandit King complained. He picked up his own ring, and a deck he had already been carrying. He summoned his own monster card while he easily missed a bullet. "These people have the worst aim."

"They all had God's Brew," Bastet smiled. "Your welcome. Go slaughter them please."

"Can I help?" Sekhmet wagged her tail toward Bastet. "I won't use any magic, just my teeth and my own claws. Please?"

Bastet was unconvinced. "Sekhmet you take permission to the extreme. We talked about this." She looked toward them. "Last time Sekhmet tore and killed humans with her own might and not magic? She sort of, almost wiped out the entire race of humans."

"I can keep it together" Her voice trembled, but her mouth was salivating. "Atem doesn't want to do the dirty work. Without Kaiba, they can't get 99 in time, I can help. I can? I can really help? Please? Please? Please? There's a lot more humans this time, I can't carve out a billion. Oh, there's more than a billion now. Please?" She looked toward the entrance and sniffed. "They are marinated in God's Brew!"

"No, Sekhmet, you!" Bastet called her out, but she bounded off.

"Just the ones marinating, I promise!"

"Sekhmet, get back here!" Bastet scolded her. "Sekhmet, so help me, if I have to waste more magic just to bring you back here." Sounds of tearing, cracking, roaring, and screaming were heard. She groaned and wasted her own magic bringing Sekhmet back. "Naughty."

Sekhmet was deliriously happy, licking on a new arm. She was covered in blood and the definite insides of humans. It made each of them nauseous looking at her.

"That should hold her over if she keeps licking that like a sucker," Bastet said to them. "You don't have much time. I did the other work for the last millennium items we needed. I don't have enough in me to do more, and I do not attack physically. Sekhmet is and was a part of me. I do not want to end up like that, so I can't risk it. Do you see now? You do not have much time. I cannot keep her back again. Kill everyone with God's Brew in them and do it now."

///Atem: That is the reason, Yuugi, they always needed us to do it. Bastet is afraid Sekhmet will try to wipe out mankind again. Even her own sister barely stopped her.///

"I just need 25 more," Sekhmet said as she stopped licking. "I can help the humans divide the pieces up to go into our gold solution."

25? "They are surrounding this place." Atem moved forward with the millennium puzzle and his cards. It took a bit to get back into the area Sekhmet hadn't struck. They diverged another way until they could hear the enemy.

Bandit King left his own way.

Yugi waited with Bakura. "Didn't foresee this happening tonight."

"Neither did I," Bakura agreed. "So you are officially the boyfriend of Téa now?"

"Yep," Yugi said. "Official."

"Great. That's great." Bakura patted all of his five fingers together. Not in a clap, but more in a manner of waiting to think of something to say next. Anything to take their minds off of things. "So Hikaru is straddled between dimensions inside of Téa. Hard to believe that's even possible. I'm guessing that is somehow saving her and Masika from completely blending with the other half? Maybe."

"Maybe. I don't know. Those goddesses don't give much time. I don't think Bastet would have done it if she could help it." Yugi stroked his cheek as he heard the sounds of torture again. "So?"

"So." Bakura said it right back. "I hope Téa is okay."

"I'm sure she will be. No, I know she will be," Yugi insisted. "So will the new one. The son of ours, and yours." He watched as the machine started to work in the back.

"Oh, the smelting part is below. I just turned on a track to put the people on and dump them off below in it," he said. "I thought that would work better."

"Yeah. Yeah." Yugi scratched his eyebrow as he heard more screams. He watched as Bastet showed up in her true form and started to gather pieces on the track. The pieces started to head downward.

Yugi didn't feel like looking down.

"Oops?" Bakura said as he heard a torturous scream from the track. "One of those blokes still had life in them. That must have been unpleasant."

"Yeah. It probably was," Yugi agreed. "I guess? I mean, you are part of the baby too, and you did help save them. So? Téa recommended we all live together, or we share custody equally."

More torturous screams. "I want to be part of Hikaru's life, Yugi. I don't have a very close family. I don't tend to stay very close to many people. I'm not a real social butterfly. But. I want to be there for him, all the time."

"I don't like the idea of Téa leaving back and forth," Yugi said. "The Game Shop isn't real big, and if she keeps leaving back and forth, she might eventually want to move back and forth in New York."

"The Game Shop doesn't really make a ton of money," Bakura pointed out. "It's only going because you are keeping it going. When's the last time it made any profit for your grandfather?"

"Oh no, please no, please!" More torturous screaming.

"Umm . . ." That was a good question. "Grandpa loves the Game Shop. I do too." But? "New York has some really good game shops, great suppliers, and ample customers. I want Téa to

have anything that makes her happy after all this."

"If she makes it, then she deserves it," Bakura agreed. "Can Bastet rescue Hikaru? She didn't seem disturbed by his death, yet she and Sekhmet had been beside themselves over Silhouette."

Bastet came back over dragging a string of about thirty dead bodies attached to each other. "Yay for this conveyer belt." She put on one and let them lift up bit by bit. "Joey ended up striking another two. We got the rest out of his area since everyone is cooperating nicely now. It turns out we may have more than 99. That God's Brew made Skeezy ultra possessive. We will take care of any extra bodies."

"Could you perhaps . . . just take care of Skeezy too?" Bakura asked.

"Hm? Oh yes, we already did that," Bastet told him. "Probably wasn't such a good idea, got Sekhmet in the wrong frame of mind. Great idea on the conveyer belt, human. Nice job." Bastet held her thumb up toward him awkwardly. "This is how you do the good job?"

Bakura matched her. "Yes. Thank you. Is Hikaru in real danger too?" She walked away again. "Okay, no answer. Where were we? I got sidetracked. I don't want to stay sidetracked, I'm in a place people are murdering each other and my only ever son is stuck in another dimension. Another subject please. New York! Téa loves New York."

Yugi understood exactly what he was saying. They were trying to distract themselves as much as possible. "Téa loved her job. I know she misses her dancing. Maybe I should bring Grandpa and the Game Shop to New York?"

"I don't like a whole lot of bustle, and New York has a lot of that. Yet? I guess. If I'm not too far from family?"

"Houses next to each other? Or?"

"If we get a great big house it wouldn't be much different than people living in an apartment complex. So, very similar to home," Bakura pointed out. "The only real problem is . . . well, what about the dark energies and their daughter goddess?"

Atem came back toward them with a proud look on his face. "Done."

Bandit King also emerged. "99 at least."

Yugi moved out of the way as Bastet brought another huge load of mainly burned body parts this time. ///Yuugi: I can't believe we really did this.///

///Atem: We didn't do anything. You messed with a pipe and I had a monster do the work. It's okay, Yugi. I never wanted Zorc to come back, but it's obvious fate would not let it be that way.///

///Yugi: We worked so hard to get rid of Zorc, and we had to be the ones to bring him right back.///

"There was a chance Zorc might not come," Bastet said as she lifted the train of bodies through the conveyer belt again. "He will now though. The winners will want their wives back, and without sacrificing yours, then it is what must be done."

That again? "Why do you keep calling them wives?" Yugi asked.

"They are," Bastet told him. "The whole of Atem was once married to the whole of Masika. Not only that, they each did marry in the other dimension."

"What?!" Bandit King screamed. "They did not, not without some motive!"

"Yes, very good motive. They wanted them to stay out of the wretched hands of that Pharaoh. It was your other side that thought of the lie claiming ownership that led them to really claiming them as their wives." She smiled. "The god's game is almost done, so we can reveal these things to you now."

"Then . . . Téa?" Yugi pointed out.

"We'll see, we still need to get these bodies in the solution. I need everyone to give me their millennium item card that participated."

Everyone handed over their cards.

"If he comes to threaten this world, I will beat him in a game again," Atem assured her. "Zorc will never win, no matter how many tries he gets."

"Fine." Bastet looked irked, but didn't dwell on it. Her expression changed. "Zorc is gone now from the game. I hope this is far enough for Isis, the game won't last much longer. Thoth is communicating again too. Tell Seto Kaiba that he now owes us the Azure card."

Yugi sighed. "Tristan and Joey's not gonna like that. One night?"

"Yes, he won her hand in a night too, he's a very good gamer. I mean, persuader," she corrected herself.

"Oh, Tristan and Joey's really not gonna like that either," Yugi said as he looked at Atem. "He made moves on Serenity in a night. How did he manage that?"

"Thoth said he bought an ice cream outlet for her, took her to her favorite place in the world, bought her a favorite pet that she told him about in her childhood, rented out a dance hall for her, showed her where she would work and how, let her pick the ring that felt nice on her, let her pick the wedding dress that felt the best against her, and I believe Azure came when it came to her favorite kinky activity she always wanted to try."

"And we went from not enough information from gods, to too much information," Dark Bakura complained. "Just smelt the rest of the bodies, make the cursed thing, and then leave!"

"Actually? We need to discuss the future," Bakura told him. "Yugi and I think getting a big house for all of us in New York might be a good idea. Maybe a couple."

"What? When did you ever have time for that casual conversation?" Bandit King looked confused.

"Now," Bakura said. "It helped to distract."

"But, you guys have your own lives now," Yugi helped explain. "It's all up to you."

"Don't mind me, just dragging along more bodies," Bastet said as she indeed dragged along more bodies. "I need to move fast before Isis summons us. The more we have the better the chances they-."

Bastet and Sekhmet had both disappeared.

They left, with the bodies still not on the conveyor belt.

"Was that enough?" Bakura asked skeptically. "She wanted all the bodies dead and in the solution. There's at least 30 short."

"If it's not." Atem looked around again. "Téa, are you there? Masika, can you hear me?" No answer. "Both of you! Do your best, it's almost over! Do your best for us! Just hang on." Atem looked at the line of bodies and looked toward Dark Bakura.

Stay or Go?

"The next battle."

Yugi looked around himself anxiously. That was a voice they were all waiting for. Bastet. He had went back and grabbed any terrible bits Sekhmet didn't chomp. Atem and the Bandit King managed to get the number even higher than it had been. Even Bakura had tried to carry some arms and legs he found.

They weren't going to lose anyone just because the numbers didn't get high enough! It would be something that Yugi would probably have nightmares about later in his life, but they couldn't risk this being enough. If they didn't get it, in the short amount Bastet made it clear they had left? Then, that was it. The end of Téa. The end of their potential . . . boy. The end.

There was no hope, no heart of the cards, no nothing extra to save them. They had to put in their own will, physically and emotionally, to get this done. Second chances were long over.

With that sound though, hope rose into him. He had never been so happy as to see Bastet appear before him with Sekhmet.

"The next battle, will be yours alone," Bastet finished her thought. "We tried but we didn't make the number. You are close, but I convinced Isis to believe you will finish. If you do not-

"

"I will definitely come and eat all of you, alive, slowly," Sekhmet threatened.

"We will handle Zorc next time," Atem said to her. "He will not win, and no one needs to pay to help us."

"Maybe so, we'll see," Sekhmet said back to him. "He is up to you though, or your children, or your children's children. It will stay on the responsibility in your family line. If your line ends before he is defeated, he will win, and for the rest of your afterlife you will suffer through immeasurable pains for making us have lied to Isis that you could handle it."

"We will take on whatever's coming!" Yugi said confidently. "Whatever fight we have to face in the future, we'll do it." Just let them have them back.

"For a turn, Bandit King had used his demon Diabound. It had a side effect, bringing a different form of Masika back for just about a minute," Bastet said to them. "The ones closer to the surface of Zorc would have been used, but since Téa was with child, the order messed up. In fact, we made sure they stayed safe by having Hikaru with her."

"It wasn't a perfect soul match that way," Sekhmet agreed. "It would make it harder to blend together."

The full Masika. "Then if Téa wasn't used, what happened?" Why were they telling them this?

"This dimension's Masika, and the other dimension's Téa, had actually formed into one, creating a Masika of two different dimensional selves. It was the first time it had ever happened," Bastet said to Yugi. "The only reason it was permitted to happen was because it was a demon and a gods game that caused the outcome."

Oh no. "There is an even bigger price to pay now for that, isn't there?" Yugi asked.

"We don't know," Bastet said to him. "It's never happened before, I just felt that I should warn you. There may be consequences later in the future for two pair joining that never should have. As far as we can tell, everything is fine."

"Hikaru's presence helped to keep each part, of each part, of Masika safe," Sekhmet added. "Now that the battle is over, and you have earned them back, we safely took it out."

Took it out? "Now?" Already?

"Bearing it the old-fashioned way isn't as easy as you think," Sekhmet warned him. "Bastet will take you to see her. She is resting after the ordeal."

"Yes, please, right away." Yugi was anxious to make sure she was okay. "Is the boy really fine?"

"His power is nearly gone, he is just like a useless human now," Bastet said to him. "Come." Bastet whisked Yugi and Bakura away.

Atem waited there with the Bandit King. They watched Sekhmet as she disappeared. She came back in her full form, holding Silhouette. "This is yours. I may check up with her every once in awhile."

Silhouette's wdjat was now gone on her head. She looked about the same besides that. "Most of her power is gone now, as per the deal," Sekhmet said as she flung new cards toward him and Bandit King. "Sign."

The card's sacrifice was much simpler, it was easier to sign. Although, it did mean, without much doubt . . . "Children or children's children."

Sekhmet handed Silhouette to the Bandit King. Atem watched him easily know how to hold her right away. Where did he get that knowledge? Why did she have to hand her over to him instead?

"One day, a fight will occur for this lineage," Sekhmet said. "However? It may be in the near future, or distant future. Thoth won't tell. Yet, since it was us who . . . created some of this conflict between both dimensions, some leniency is granted. If you wish, you may have your simple eternity back, Atem."

Oh. Yes, the steps they took to help ensure someone paid for the other dimension. "I have no recollection of it."

"We wanted to make sure you felt extremely close to Yugi still and reverting your memory to when you first left seemed to be a good spot," Sekhmet explained.

Oh. Maybe then, there was a crowd. ///Atem: It would be better that way, I don't exactly belong./// Neither did Bandit King, why would he stay? Sekhmet gave Silhouette to him, like he was the one that would stay. ///Atem: I fought Zorc before. I will have an easier time against him.///

Sekhmet took Silhouette back from Bandit King. "Good." She handed her to Atem.

Atem took her, holding her close. He knew how to hold her too, he had learned. That, and . . .
///Atem: I was not the best father for the short time I knew you, but I also wasn't a bad father./// He watched her expression. ///Atem: I wonder how you will grow up./// She was way too young to see any potential or interest in anything. Her only interest right now was mainly shoving things in her mouth and . . . just beginning.

Bandit King signed his card and gave it back. "So? Am I the one paying the price then with Masika?"

"No," Sekhmet declared. "You may rest in peace as well. From what I have seen of Masika, she will stay with the fragile broken goddess." Sekhmet reached toward Silhouette again.

Fragile broken goddess? "Those are terrible words, human works better." Atem did not want to hand her over. Neither Sekhmet nor Bandit King held his full confidence.

"Until you beat your test, that is what she is, but you'll have to have your Yugi soul with you for that one," Sekhmet said. "Don't falter, make sure you beat it or you'll never be a god, Pharaoh." She transformed herself back into a lion. "Decision. Stay or go."

Stay or go, now? It should be go, he was able to go. He didn't see Yugi anywhere though, he would want to see Yugi before making that decision. These were the goddesses that had tricked them for so long, just deciding something quickly without help wouldn't be smart. He also didn't know what Bandit King would choose, or Masika's fate. "I want to know Masika's fate, why isn't she here yet?"

"Joining as the full Masika left her in a tough state," Sekhmet said. "She will be . . . coming soon."

Sekhmet moved closer to Atem and looked toward Silhouette. "I love you, you be good, and I will see you when you naturally perish!" She rubbed up on her like a pet with her head. "If anyone hurts you, I will kill them if your parents do not."

She disappeared.

No one had come back, he was left with Bandit King, just holding Silhouette. Was everything really okay?

"Téa?"

Téa opened her eyes and saw Yugi and Bakura over her. She was resting after that whole unexpected event. She saw Yugi holding Hikaru. "Oh, that's where I put him. Good place."

She propped herself up some.

"Téa? Do you want to go back to New York with us?" Yugi asked her.

New York? "Yes!" Absolutely. "I really do, and especially with you two."

"We were thinking of splitting up payments to either one huge house, or two houses close to each other," Bakura said.

Téa couldn't stop nodding her head. "How's Masika?"

"She did fine. We all kind of did fine," Yugi said oddly. "Everything's okay. You were taken away, we did our part, and now you are here."

"Oh. So, we're safe?" Téa asked. "With Hikaru, and us? All of us?"

"I just need to talk to Grandpa. He might go for New York," Yugi said. "He might not either, I don't know. Atem isn't thrilled about being near Bandit King, but he wants to stay near me."

"I want Masika near me too," Téa admitted. "They might need some direction on finding what they want in their life. They are all still kind of new to all these concepts. Like? I know Masika can take care of Silhouette, but she's going to . . ."

"She will need some modern day guidance," Bakura insisted as he smiled and played with Hikaru's little hand. "A little big like Silhouette."

"Maybe, but his hair is even cooler." It puffed up like Bakura's but it still had that same mixture of color like Yugi's.

Téa started to rise from bed. "It takes a long time to make all of that though, doesn't it?"

"I think we're safe," Yugi assured her. "We've got the uh . . ." He scratched his head. "Raw ingredients? I think the goddesses have it from there."

Safe. New York. "Are you okay with New York, is everyone okay with it?" she asked. "What about the Game Shop?"

"Might move locations to New York if Grandpa wants to run it," Yugi answered.

Oh yeah. She was so used to Yugi being so regular that she forgot. He made an exclusive game that made a lot of money. He made way more money than her. Bakura himself wasn't shy in the money department either, he had traveled around a lot to show off his beta games. "I don't have many words, you guys. I was happy if we could all just share Hikaru, I can't really believe you are considering New York."

"As long as we can build our games, I think Yugi and I will be fine anywhere," Bakura smiled at her. "You though, need someone special."

"Your home is New York, and with me. Us, I guess," he corrected himself. "Since Masika is sort of like you, and Atem admitted once that she really isn't good at accounting at all, maybe

there will be more opportunity out there for her too?"

Yeah. Masika could find what made her happy. She looked at Hikaru patting Yugi's shirt. He was wearing his blue shirt that she had seen so long ago when she came down the stairs with the necklace on her. Round and round again. "It gets colder. You'll be right at home with your sweaters, Bakura."

"Well? Then I am especially sold," he agreed. "For now, until we find a place and make this big move, I'm probably going to come back and forth from the Game Shop with Bandit King. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, I think so," Yugi agreed. "I think Atem will still want to be there. The way Bandit King treats her like she's the same person all those years ago really irritates him."

"Bandit King is just scared." Téa didn't even need to ask for details. "The lady he's always been obsessed with, now shares a baby with the Pharaoh and him. It's gonna take a little while for it to click that he doesn't have to be scared of Atem taking them away." It was another reason she wanted them all in one house. Atem wasn't seeing the right side of Bandit King, and if he started limiting time against him, things could get bad.

"Yes, I agree," Bakura told Yugi. "Bandit King is nicer than he portrays himself."

God's Brew Factory

Téa looked around and noticed they had been thrown out of the nice hotel into a factory with an absolutely terrible smell. She felt Yugi cover up her eyes.

"Oh, and not a nice sight for you either," Bakura said probably to Hikaru.

"I'm a big girl, Yugi." He had no idea the things she remembered. She removed his hand. Most of the bodies were gone, there was mainly a lot of blood all over the floor. She saw Bakura holding Hikaru in a way he was looking over his shoulder. A good idea, he probably shouldn't see this mess.

///Masika: Téa!///

Téa heard Masika but didn't see her. "Masika?" Oh, there. Téa saw her start to appear. She stepped slowly toward her so she didn't slip on the blood probably.

Oh. But, not slow enough. Atem had seemed to be worried though so he was right beside her to catch her. Silhouette was in Bandit King's arms too? Ooh, maybe Atem was building some trust with him. At least he was letting him hold her. "Masika."

Atem helped pull her up better. "Are you okay?"

Hm. That didn't sound good, what was he concerned about? "Are you okay, Masika?"

Masika didn't answer as she looked toward Silhouette as Bandit King came closer to her. "I am not who I think I am, and that is not what you think that is."

Oh, Masika would never change, she still spoke nonsense. "It's a baby."

Masika looked toward Bakura. She went over to the other side, looking at Hikaru. "He has your hair."

"He has my colors though," Yugi pointed out. "He's a little bit of everyone."

"It's more than you think." Masika looked glum. "It's so much more than you think, and it's nothing that you think."

"You are the reason for this," Bandit King glared at Atem. "She used to be a lot more quiet, bowing, serving, and obedient unless she had to speak up. Back then, she made sense! You've unleashed the freedom of a real Egyptian woman in this time, and she's gone bonkers."

"Making sure she feels free had nothing to do with her actions now," Atem said. "Masika was formed into the whole again. There are ramifications of it."

Still too little trust. Masika seemed odd too. "Is anything wrong?"

"Masika has just returned," Atem told her. "She was joined with the other Téa for a minute. Bastet said it may affect her later on." Atem looked concerned himself at her. "Bandit King and I have been given permission to leave again."

"You can return back to the afterlife?" Yugi asked. "Well. It would be fair, they created this whole mess just to make us pay. We also have to deal with Zorc in the future too. Masika's pupils keep dilating back and forth."

"I might stay," Bandit King admitted. "I don't like what's happening to her."

Téa moved toward Masika and gave her a hug. "I am sure it'll be okay." She felt Masika wrap her arms around her. "You are going to stay, aren't you?" She didn't hear an answer right away. "Masika?"

Purpose of the Little Gods

"They aren't babies, they aren't human, they are conduits," she said to Téa. "They weren't just making something for a bet or to help, they are goddesses and gods, they have so much more planned!" She grasped onto Téa tightly and shook her. "We are all going to die, and be used like puppets through them!"

What? Téa tried to stop her with Yugi's help. "Calm down, it's okay. We aren't going to die."

"They aren't babies!" She yelled again.

Atem felt odd as he looked at the expression on Masika's face. It was terrifying. What had she picked up on? Why was she speaking of death so terrifyingly? Something wasn't right.

"She's delirious." Bastet came toward her. "Ignore her, she is just confused."

"They aren't babies, they are us!" Masika yelled, keeping her eyes on Atem. Desperation to be believed. "I saw the truth in the exchange of me not being me, and I saw you through her eyes!"

What?

"She is a conduit for the future, she is an avatar for you to come back when needed as a backup, if you fail the god test with Yugi, and you are taking that test very soon!" Masika was getting pulled toward Bastet.

Atem stepped forward. "Wait." Avatar? Conduit? "Cease and listen!"

Bastet tried to place her hand on Masika's head but she was struggling. "She will get better, no worries. A lot of her memories might be a little spotty, but she will remember that Silhouette is hers and that -"

Atem moved her hand away and held onto Masika. "Do not do anything to her." He looked at everyone around him. "Listen to her words, don't just assume." He came closer to Masika, while trying to hold Bastet back. It would only work until Bastet got mad. "Continue."

"They are fusions of us, but they are *not* our children, they are copies of us. Our dna, our exact dna, so that we can come back in the future to help save the world through them. Probably in a fight with Zorc, where one person is actually four plus a goddess!"

What?

"I saw you through her eyes," Masika said again. "The unbalance allowed me to see what they don't want."

"They are babies," Bastet countered her. "They can't be conduits." She gestured toward Yugi and Bakura's boy. "A conduit doesn't breathe and blink and live, and no one is running it."

"You are a goddess that doesn't want to be together again, but you don't mind splitting apart," Masika said to her. "You gave some of yourself to be reborn. That child is another version of you. I almost got stuck in eternity just for another version of you!"

It sounded farfetched, but at the same time, it didn't. Gods and goddesses had the ability to split and infuse. "Silhouette is Sekhmet reborn."

"With room to spare inside and the dna of three humans to wield," Masika stated. "Don't you all remember how much we all believed they would fuse us into one body? All of us?"

Bastet was using her strength against him now, not liking his defiance. "You have earned your eternities, be grateful, and keep it at that."

"If we get our eternities, then why do we have an avatar to possess?" Bandit King asked her.

"It's . . . for the future," Bastet said clearly. "Instead of worrying about any of you having to come back to life, those that die, will have a way to come back easily. No more disturbance, you may rest in peace this time."

She was telling the truth. "You lied." Atem pointed at her. "You said we were fathers and mothers."

"You are, in a way?" Bastet looked uncomfortable. "It was better this way."

"No, it wasn't." Yugi's voice joined in. "You made Téa and Masika go through birth, just to give some part of yourself a body?"

"It will solve any problem that will come up. Two bodies, can have six players. Isn't that better to take on Zorc?" Bastet couldn't hide it, she looked ashamed. "Sekhmet and I knew you wouldn't want to hear this, but they are technically just useless humans now. Nothing is their fault. Just raise them so you can take over and handle Zorc when the time comes."

Yugi held his hand over his eyes.

"It's not our son at all," Bakura said slowly. "The dna that is ours, is actually ours. You . . . duplicated us three times in one body?"

"Like, cards." Atem could see it. "We were all taken in by a white light, and you used your powers to break your own selves off into a new body, nurtured by my friends!" He felt his jacket sleeve and tossed it back. "That was low."

"That was the deal, and it fulfilled your deal. You wanted something, and you needed something, and it worked by definition," Bastet told him. "Otherwise, your friends would have died for the power to be given."

Atem looked toward Téa. She looked so confused about her baby.

"Is he an illusion?" Téa asked Bastet.

"No. No, he's just a division from me. He has no memories of me, or of living. He's still just a baby that needs raised," Bastet told her. She stretched her arms out slightly. "Would it make you happier if he was a backup? If something unfortunate happens to your Yugi, we can give him control of it right away. That's fair?"

Téa was absolutely disgusted.

"It is still so similar," Bastet said so confused. "You get a new baby, something the whole of Masika was never able to have, and you get a bonus of prevention against Zorc. You also get a new god, eventually, when the whole of Atem becomes a god. All good things."

"At least I'm not really splitting a child with you after all," Bandit King said to Atem. "Good. I'm taking my eternity. Masika, *you* may handle the new Sekhmet yourself. If I am needed, at least I'll know where I'll fit in."

"They are still just babies," Sekhmet tried to explain to Téa and Masika. "They can't walk or talk, they have no memories, they are just new little people." Their looks didn't change. "They won't be useful anymore if you give them up." She stood up straight. "You can also be the ones to figure out how to kill them, because I'm not doing it."

"I don't want that," Téa said to her. "No one deserves to die."

"It is still living," Masika agreed. "Even if it was made to be more of a weapon than a person, it's still important."

Perhaps joining with the other Téa had actually done Masika good? She had never dared to speak that bravely toward anyone, let alone the goddess.

"I will raise it with Téa, if she so wishes to stay near me?" Masika looked toward Téa.

"Yeah," Téa agreed, "and I can still raise mine with you."

"You'll need someone to babysit when you are out in the spotlight?" Yugi said to her. "New York, here we come? Still?"

Téa didn't seem to know what to say. "It's not yours, Yugi. It's not Bakura's. It's not even mine. It's just a part of Sekhmet she used us to create, that is going to need someone to care for it."

Masika went toward Atem. He gave Silhouette back to her. "I want to stay behind. I want to learn more of this world, and I will teach this future goddess to respect humans."

"I think that's a good idea. What it will become isn't set in stone." Atem would return where he belonged. "If Zorc comes, I will be here."

"Perhaps we will have a better meeting next time, Atem." She only gave a slight bow.

"Babysitter?" Yugi was still near Téa, figuring out his own role. "You don't even have to pay me. You and Masika shouldn't be any more responsible than anyone else."

"Saying stuff like that, isn't going to be easy on Hikaru," Téa said to Yugi. "He's going to be his *own* person, even if he was a piece of Sekhmet."

"Yugi can learn," Bakura said to her. "I think you both would be happy in New York with Masika. I think, considering the circumstances, I would probably just stay here."

"If Masika had not joined with the other Téa, this path would have gone differently," Bastet said slowly. "Fine, I will return the two of you back to your eternities."

"Wait," Atem stopped her. "Could we delay until tomorrow? I would like to have one more day to spend with my friends, before I say goodbye."

"Yeah, one more day before we do anything," Yugi agreed. "We can take time with our decisions. Make sure they are the right ones."

Bastet nodded. "Yes, I will give you another day."

The Next Day

Joey met everyone on the bridge near where he left for Duelist Kingdom a long time ago on his first tournament. It looked like it was a big day. Lot of surprises. Some good. Some bad.

Most were bad. "Um?" He looked toward Mai. She'd been a little nicer that day, probably from the understanding they seemed to reach. Which was good because . . .

"I think it's . . . it needed to happen, so it happened?" Mai at least didn't tease him. "Um?"

"I know that it was really awkward," Serenity said. "I made a lot of hard decisions, so you just have to accept it too."

"It was needed for the gods," Kaiba dared to say to Joey. "Don't be shallow enough to cast blame."

"Shallow?" Jerk. "The only reason you got anywhere with my sister is because of the gods. But hey, the gods are gone now, you got your little . . ." *Don't say spawn, don't say spawn!* "You got the thing in her, so you can leave her alone now."

"I don't do things half-assed, ass," Kaiba responded. Then Serenity shoved him. He rolled his eyes. "Joey."

"We are going to take real good care of her," Mokuba assured Joey. "It'll be okay. It's not much different than with you and Mai. She's gonna be okay."

"But, you just did that to Tristan?" Joey reminded her. "That was cruel, Serenity."

"He already knew way before we left what had to happen," Kaiba reminded him. "Nothing personal. Following gods."

"Yes, we had to follow, Joey," Serenity agreed. "I know it was tough, but we were already on thin ice. I saw him already, so I won't stay long. I know today is some other people's last day."

Right. "You didn't get to visit too long without things getting whacked out," Joey said to Atem. "I'm guessing they are taking back your body?"

"They were being accommodating, to get us into this spot," Atem told him.

"Yeah. Well, we will be missing you," Joey said to him. "Serenity?" Serenity was already turning to leave.

"You get it, Joey," Mokuba said to him for her. "You guys celebrate your last day with your friends."

"Keep yourself prepared," Kaiba said as he followed Serenity away with Mokuba. "We might have something else to fight one day."

Yeah, and dealing with what else he heard. Joey looked toward Téa and Masika holding . . . babies. Avatar babies apparently. "So those are actually not yours, just an avatar to control from the great beyond or something?"

"If things go awry," Atem agreed. "It's best to treat them like humans though. Everyone deserves a chance."

Sure, sure. He should be nice. After all, Yugi was getting up out of there too. He wanted to go to New York with Téa and Masika to 'help with the little god babies'. Joey would miss him, but it was a good idea. He finally got Téa in girlfriend territory, and if he wanted to keep her, he'd have to go. "At least Skeezy is taken care of."

"Yeah, they came in clutch there. It's good to be free again." Mai stretched. "Yes, I'll be sticking around Domino City for a little while."

"When you leave, I'll make sure Grandpa is alright," Joey said Yugi. "Until he's off to New York too." Yugi wanted to get the shop ready there first before his grandfather tagged along.

"Thanks, Joey. I appreciate that," Yugi said. He looked toward Atem. "This has been a crazy time since you came back. I hate that when things stop getting out of control, it's when you have to go."

Atem nodded. "I know. It was good to see you, but I need to find where I belong."

"Yeah, I know," Yugi agreed.

Joey looked toward Bakura and Bandit King. "Here to say goodbye too?"

"I earned a good eternity. I am leaving too," Bandit King said. He looked toward Bakura. "Go find a wife already."

Bakura blinked at him. "What?"

"You don't like anyone around here, but you clearly want family, so stop goofing around and get one. You're a catch, but don't get stupid with them either," Bandit King warned him.

Joey just watched Yugi smile at the idea. Maybe Yugi was getting some thoughts of his own? "Hey, maybe Hikaru will get a baby brother or sister soon too, huh?" Yeah, that smile fell off Yugi.

"Don't tease right now," Yugi said with the smallest of blushes, but Joey still recognized it. "I hope you and Mai work together to figure out your own situation."

"Yeah." Tristan walked up toward them. He looked around. "This is it for the going away party?"

"Yeah," Joey said to him with a light pat on the back. "This is it; this is everybody." You know? At least Serenity decided to call him and break it off before anything happened. Not that anything should have happened. His sister felt way too much responsibility. On the other hand? Kaiba was pretty obsessed with taking care of family so, his sister was probably in . . . okay hands. For now. "So what digs are we going to?"

She Had this . . . Presence.

Chapter Notes

There is a note at the end not to be missed. I hope that I wasn't the only one who enjoyed this story.

Nice Restaurant

It was almost over. Soon, he would be heading back to where he had once been again. The afterlife that he hadn't been able to remember. It had been quite a journey, with a huge change for each of his friends. Some good and some bad.

Silhouette sat in Masika's lap, trying to get at her food. She had acted like a normal baby so far. Hikaru was with Yugi right now, probably to show that he could be a good babysitter in New York. Old memories and new conversations were being distributed around the table as they enjoyed the meal.

At least Yugi, this time, seemed to have put himself in a better situation to end up with the one he always wanted. That was one of the few good things he could think of. Everyone paid a price that was at that table, even Tristan who hadn't even been involved. He had lost his girlfriend.

Atem noticed Silhouette staring at him. *Are you being Sekhmet's avatar right now?* He wouldn't be thrilled about that. Instead, she tried to grab at his jacket sleeve again to chew on it.

He tried to move it and bumped hands against Masika, also trying to get it away from her.

"No, no," Masika warned her. "No jackets. That isn't yours."

Hmm. Atem had a strange feeling about Silhouette. She wasn't being Sekhmet, that was clear. She never actually seemed like Sekhmet the whole time he had been with her. *I know the truth of what she is, but . . . the hair was flat, but the colors. Strange DNA of three total people, but those colors. Avatar. The gods creation.* He looked towards her again. Not one ounce of Bandit King. Which genes influenced her appearance?

After the meal, Bastet appeared outside in her cat illusion again. "All goodbyes have been said?"

"Yes," Atem agreed. "We are all ready." He looked toward Yugi. "I will be waiting, for the day we take the test together, Yugi."

"Right," Yugi joked. "Wish there was an answer sheet for passing that one."

Atem felt himself fading away. It was time to return to where he belonged. They had signed and given all of the sacrifices. There was even a way to come back next time things got bad with Zorc in the future.

Silhouette waved. "Bye bye."

That voice didn't seem like Sekhmet's at all. Her eyes never seemed like Sekhmet's. Not once had he felt even one ruthless thing from her. Not a smirk of Sekhmet. If anything, she had a touch of Masika in her, but also this . . . presence. *She is a goddess. That must be it.*

That must be it . . .

Yugi held Téa's free hand. A free quick trip to New York would be appreciated, but he still had to get the items boarded and some furniture taken, and a . . . a house. Grandpa was more than ready to go too, as long as they had the card shop. It would be exciting to see how the business went in New York.

Téa and Masika had decided to use the free quick trip, so they could be ready when Yugi and Grandpa came. They also wanted to go out and get things for Hikaru and Silhouette, as well as a decent sized home for them all.

"Ready?" Bastet asked as she returned.

"I'll see you soon," Yugi promised to Téa. He was rewarded with a kiss from her. He was definitely not going to take long. He watched as they faded away the same way Atem had. *At least all of that payment is finally over. I hope Zorc isn't something we have to deal with for a long, long time.* He was ready for a nice and quiet life with Téa.

Taweret approached Bastet as she came to check on Sekhmet. "Are you proud?"

"The humans are secured. The debt is paid." Sekhmet changed from a lion to her original form. "It could not have gone better."

"I am. Taweret," she said to them. "I helped with the birth and children as I could."

"Yes, thank you very much." Bastet changed into her original form as well. "We needed so much help. We could not have done it without you."

"Isis helped too. So did Horakhty." Taweret noticed their stares as she said that.

"Horakhty bothered with the payment world?" Sekhmet asked. "Why would Horakhty?"

"What did Horakhty do?" Bastet asked. "We've been watching the humans for a long time. I didn't see any interference from Horakhty."

Taweret would not mess around with that. "You made your move to distribute people quite quickly. Too quickly."

"Did we do something wrong?" Bastet asked.

"Téa and Masika have their children together for convenience. I will remain to make sure they stay living together," Tawaret insisted. "Thoth has spoken, and so has Horakhty." A very close bond should be kept between them. "If they break apart because their reason for being close is removed, you will be sentenced to Earth for a thousand years being a plain cat and a plain lion, for moving them too quickly. You will be unable to die, but have no powers to bear."

They were understandably upset.

"It was a payment world, to the one who dealt with Zorc. No one should have even wanted to bother to check it," Bastet answered. "Now, we are to stay here and watch over the broken gods, to make sure they stay together? Yet, not intervene?"

"Yes. You should have told them to stay together, before you took them away," Tawaret said.

"We still can."

"No, you can't. No more involvement," Tawaret reminded them. "Do not interact anymore. Lives of those directly involved in events that are in danger? Are the *only* reason you should ever make known contact with any of them as yourselves," Tawaret warned. "Horakhty's orders."

"May I go check up on the little dears just one more time?" Bastet asked Tawaret. "It would be good to make sure they are safely-"

"No need," Tawaret assured her. "Horakhty's decree starts now. Everyone is fine. If there is any emergency, I can look in on them for now." Bastet didn't seem pleased. Sekhmet licked her hand but didn't say a word.

They both seemed to understand.

They weren't needed anymore. Or more to the point?

They were not *allowed* to be needed anymore.

That would be the end of these two messing around in these humans lives anymore. No more interference with cats or hate or death to split apart. All of the shenanigans were over. It was time for everyone to live their lives in a peaceful state.

For now.

Author's Note: Thanks for reading my story. I know that there isn't nearly as many Yugioh fans out there, but I hope you enjoyed the ride. There is a last part to this story, but honestly, it's hard to tell from the hits or the kudos whether anyone really reached the end. I don't want to waste time copy and pasting the last book in the trilogy if no one wants to read it, because I am retiring out of the fanfiction community soon.

If you want me to add it, then just let me know in the comments. You don't have to make a grand speech. I don't need a gigantic audience to post it, just one person saying 'I'm here' is enough. It is also posting over at webnovel if you want to read there instead. I won't be hurt either way because the amount of readers I have over there is awesome, so I will be finishing it over there whether anyone made it through the story or not.:)

Description of Concrete Gods (The last story in the trilogy): Having faced Ammut's trial, Yugi and Atem has ascended into almost being a god, but when their omnipotence sees their actions had cursed their wives and children to an Egyptian afterlife where Bakura rules, or everyone to damnation with Zorc? They stop the process of ascension and keep one version of themselves alive, intent on saving their own eternal happiness.

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