

# T O M B

the

S . A . B O D E E N



FEIWEL AND FRIENDS  
NEW YORK

A FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK  
An imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

THE TOMB. © 2018 by S. A. Bodeen.  
Printed in the United States of America  
by LSC Communications, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Our books may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational,  
or business use. Please contact your local bookseller or the Macmillan  
Corporate and Premium Sales Department at (800) 221-7945 ext. 5442  
or by e-mail at [MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com](mailto:MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-1-250-05555-2 (hardcover) / ISBN 978-1-250-29651-1 (ebook)

Book design by Erin Schell

Feiwel and Friends logo designed by Filomena Tuosto

First Edition, 2018

# 1

**Kiva sensed Seth before she saw him.**

Uncomfortable on the rough sycamore bench, she bent low over a lengthy scroll. The fingers of her left hand gripped the stylus and she bit her lower lip, concentrating so hard, as usual, that she didn't even notice one strap of her pale yellow kalasiri slip off her shoulder.

Suddenly, the equation in her head vanished.

The air flowing in the room seemed to cease.

Startled, she swept her gaze down the long table.

The others in her class were still absorbed in their own studies. Ada's nose nearly touched the table as she pressed figures onto the papyrus, her eyes hidden behind a curtain of

dark, glossy hair. The twins Rom and Rem murmured over the work in front of them, heads so close together that it was hard to tell where one's curly black hair ended and the other's began.

There was no reason for Kiva to be aware of the prince of Alexandria.

She turned.

Her eyes confirmed what her gut already knew.

Seth was a bit taller than when she last caught a glimpse of him, six months ago at the festival of the moon. His chest, bare beneath the gold ram's head amulet strung on a chunky strand of lapis, was more filled out; his arms, the right bicep wrapped several times by a silver, red-jewel-eyed viper, more muscular. A strip of leopard fur lined the waist of his blue knee-length shendyt, and his dark head was completely shaved in the style of his father the Pharaoh, which made him seem older than fifteen.

But those brown eyes, their size accented by the thick rim of jet-black kohl, had not changed from when he was a child, playing hide-and-seek with her in clumps of bulrushes at the river's edge. His chin dipped ever so slightly. "Kiva."

Out of habit, Kiva's fingers drifted to the red woven bracelet on her arm, tracing the soft, worn ridges she knew so well. "Seth." After so long, his name sounded strange when she said it aloud.

The stylus fell out of Ada's hand and her eyes widened.

The twins straightened up when they noticed the prince, then turned their attention to Kiva.

Annoyed at Seth for catching her off guard, especially in front of the others, part of her wanted to turn back around, start writing again, pretend she hadn't seen him.

Or, perhaps, pretend that she didn't care.

Neither seemed like an option at the moment, particularly since her peers seemed to be breathlessly awaiting her reaction to his presence.

*Gods.* She stood, smoothed the sheath that fell to her ankles, and held her head high. A few quick strides erased the space between them.

He stepped back a foot, as if not wanting to stand too close.

Kiva was near enough to tell she'd been off; the prince had grown more than an inch or two. Her voice projected far greater confidence than she felt. "This is a surprise."

Seth didn't answer. His gaze drifted slowly around the room, paused on the others.

Ada blushed and buried her head in her scroll.

Rom raised a hand halfway in a wave, stopped short by Rem's elbow to his ribs.

A corner of Seth's mouth turned up, as if amused.

"What?" Kiva asked. "Is something funny?"

He gazed down and bent forward, as if to share a secret.

She held her breath.

Every part of her tried hard not to care, but failed. She still held out hope that he would offer words, a medicine to heal the hurt, answers to her questions of the past three years.

She longed for him to call her by the nickname only he used. That would be all it took for her to know he still cared.

*Please say it, please please . . .*

His voice was deeper than she remembered, but quiet. “Your world—”

Two giggling girls from the class below them entered the room, interrupting. They stopped when they saw the prince, and stood there openmouthed.

Kiva grabbed Seth’s arm and pulled him out to the courtyard bathed bright by the midday Egyptian sun.

The prince stared at her hand with disdain.

“Sorry.” She let go. “Please. Finish.”

“Prince! There you are.” A woman rushed across the manicured plaza, her ebony, chin-length hair bouncing, a red cape draped over her white kalasiri—official uniform of the palace’s royal vizier—that flowed out behind her.

Kiva frowned. “What is my mother doing here?”

“Sabra’s here for me. Thought I lost her, but she’s faster than I expected.” He winked. Then, he casually slid her strap back up on her shoulder.

In that moment he became the prince Kiva used to know, her best friend from the time she was four.

Her heartbeat sped up.

Had he slipped away from the palace to give her a message? Why seek her out after avoiding her for so long? Her long-slumbering hopes roused, dampening the slightest bit as her mother continued to bear down on them.

“Finish what you were saying,” Kiva spoke fast. “My world what?”

“Prince!” Her harried mother was almost upon them. “We need to return to the palace.”

“Your world”—Seth pointed at Kiva, then gestured at the door, as if to include the others—“is as you see it to be.” He bent down, his head close to hers, then whispered, “Until it isn’t.”

She wanted to ask what he meant, but her mother reached them before she had a chance.

Seth said, “I must return to the palace.”

“What?” Kiva stared up at him. That was it? He was leaving?

Kiva didn’t want him to go. She wanted more than anything to believe that he had come to see her, that he *wanted* to see her. “You could stay.” She pointed inside. “Our class would be happy to see you.”

Seth’s laugh was not kind. Once again, he was a stranger. “That’s not a good idea.” The prince turned his back and strolled across the courtyard.

Kiva’s stomach clenched.

Had he come only to bother her?

Hot tears threatened.

Sabra took her daughter's hand. "What did he say to you?"

Kiva stared at Seth's back. "Nothing." The lump in her throat made the word hitch as it came out. "He said nothing."

Sabra pressed her lips to Kiva's forehead. "I'll see you at home." She followed the prince around the row of low sun-dried brick buildings.

Kiva stared at the green hill that bordered one edge of the school grounds. It seemed like yesterday that she and Seth rolled down the mild grade, laughing when they ended up a tangled heap at the bottom.

The lovely setting grew blurry through her tears.

*No. Not yesterday.*

"Another lifetime." She wiped her face and avoided looking at the others when she went back inside and rolled up her scroll.

Ada asked, "What did he want?"

Rom said, "No one cares what the stupid prince wanted."

"He used to be our friend," said Rem.

Rom said, "And now he's too good for us."

"He didn't ever *have* to be our friend," said Ada.

Kiva felt anger swell. "He was always *my* friend."

"Until he wasn't." But Rem's words were not unkind, simply honest. "Better to forget that we ever knew him as anything other than the prince."



Kiva slammed her scroll on a side table and headed out the doorway.

“It isn’t time to leave yet,” called Ada.

Kiva ignored her.

Outside, past the buildings, the river sparkled in the hot sun. She removed her sandals and let them dangle by their straps from a fingertip. Her bare feet scuffed the rough path, dust puffing up with each step.

She knelt on the grassy riverbank and leaned over, starting into the water. Inside the blunt frame of her dark hair, her face was a vague oval. She touched the surface, then brought her wet, cool hand up to her cheek.

Quiet moments gave her too much time to think.

Not a welcome thing.

How could she believe, even for a second, that Seth actually cared enough to want to see her?

It was time to stop thinking of him as her best friend.

He was nothing but a former friend.

The sooner she dealt with it, the better.

Kiva tossed a stick in the water. Her reflection broke into ripples.

If only it were as easy to break her train of thought. She desperately needed something else in her head besides the prince.

She got to her feet and leaned down to wipe a bit of dust off the bottom of her dress. An overturned beetle caught her

eye. With flailing appendages, the insect struggled to right itself. "Someone else is having a bad day." Gently, Kiva tipped the bug over and watched it skitter away before she headed toward home.

First, she stopped at a small dwelling, identical to the one next door that she shared with her mother. She wiped her sweaty face on her sleeve and stepped back into the sandals before pausing inside the doorway. "Fai?" She moved farther into the dim, cool interior. "Are you here?"

Fai, Alexandria's physician, was also Kiva's willing mentor. The elder woman's voice came from another room. "You're early."

Kiva considered a lie, perhaps that school was let out early. But Fai had a sixth sense about such things, leaving truth as the better choice. "I had enough for the day."

Fai appeared in a looser fitting sheath than the girl's, silver hair nearly glowing, smile raising deep lines in her dark, weathered face. As always, she neither judged nor scolded. "Some days are like that. I'm glad you're here." She held out a laundered but bloodstained apron. "You'll need this."

Kiva followed Fai into her laboratory.

Flaming torches lit the windowless, low-ceilinged room. The walls were lined with shelves on which rows of preserved, coiled cobras floated in large glass jars full of clear liquid, a sight that always sent a shiver down Kiva's spine. She squinted

at the pink belly of a tiny dead pig on the rough wooden table in the center of the room.

“Stillborn this morning,” said Fai.

Kiva poked a finger into the pig’s stiff, cold hide.

“You need to focus,” said Fai.

“I will.” But as soon as she tried to make her mind blank, Seth’s words echoed. *Your world is as you see it to be. Until it isn’t.*

For nearly three years her former best friend doesn’t speak to her, and when he does lower himself enough to actually acknowledge her existence? He offers nothing but nonsense. And laughs at her when she asks him to come inside the place where they used to spend hours together.

Why wouldn’t he want to take a few moments to speak with the others?

With her?

“You need to put aside your troubles, Kiva.” Fai cleared her throat. “One day your patient will be alive. Probably human.” The wrinkles in the older woman’s forehead deepened. “And I suspect they won’t appreciate crooked stitches. Or a thick scar.”

“I know.” Kiva tied the apron at the back of her neck, then picked up the blade in her left hand and steadied it.

The Pharaoh’s son wasn’t worth another thought. Yes, it was maddening that one sentence from Seth could affect her

this way, especially since she thought she'd gotten past the way he'd changed. Despite the different status of their families in the community, their class of five had been friends from the time they started school.

But Seth's mother died of an illness when they were twelve.

Soon after, he stopped coming to school and became a recluse in the palace.

Kiva understood that Seth had been grieving. She wanted to be there for him and waited patiently for him to reach out to her. But he never did. As the years passed, her sympathy waned. She couldn't help feeling he had abandoned them.

*No.*

Kiva bit her bottom lip.

He'd abandoned *her*.

"Start here." Fai set a finger along the pig's throat and drew it straight down to the belly. "You'll be able to practice many stitches."

Kiva set the blade on flesh and pushed, drawing it down the corpse, opening up a neat, expert incision.

Fai clicked her tongue. "Your hands have grown so steady."

Kiva reached the end and lifted the blade, then wiped it on her apron. She tried to focus on the task, the thing she loved most. Medicine.

Still, Seth's face, now almost a stranger's, lingered in her

head. Three years had passed since his mother died and he no longer spoke to anyone his own age.

The others appeared not to mind as much, if at all.

Rom and Rem had each other. Ada had her younger sister.

Kiva had Seth.

Until she didn't.

His sudden appearance at school, a reminder of what she had lost, only made things worse.

His words, his cruel laugh, his sudden exit made Kiva feel deflated. She longed for a connection with him; a sign that he was back after the last three years.

Instead, he muttered pointless, condescending words that did nothing but make her scold herself for wasting time on the absurd belief that their friendship could be salvaged.

“Kiva?”

“What?” Her gaze lifted.

“I said you can start stitching now.” Fai pointed at the open belly. “Remember, tight and even. And keep in mind your future patient may be awake for the process. Do your best not to tug.”

Kiva nodded.

“I'll go make some tea.”

Kiva threaded the needle with sinew, then poked it through one edge of the skin, pulling it tight on the other

side. She did another stitch and another, methodically sealing the pig's belly back together.

If only all things in her life were as easy to mend.

Suddenly, the floor shook.

She dropped the needle and grabbed the edge of the table to keep from falling, breaking the longish nail on one index finger in the process. "Fai!" A glass jar fell off a shelf and exploded at her feet. Slimy liquid drenched her legs as the freed cobra uncoiled and, as if still alive, slid over her feet.

Kiva shrieked and jumped away.

Part of the ceiling fell and clipped her shoulder. She dove under the table, edging farther away from the expanding snake.

Fai ran into the room and crawled under to join her.

Debris continued to crash around them as they huddled together. Kiva rubbed her shoulder as her heart seemed determined to pound a path out of her chest. "What's happening?"

Fai gripped Kiva's trembling hand. "An earthquake. It has to be an earthquake." But there was little conviction in her words, and her hand was as unsteady as the girl's. "We need to get in the open." She pulled Kiva toward the door.

Outside the ground still trembled, but there was less danger with nothing to fall on them.

Kiva stared up. The sky remained cloudless and blue, the sun still shone.

But screams seemed to come from everywhere.

Kiva touched her shoulder and winced. “I think that I hurt—”

“You’ll live,” said Fai.

Kiva didn’t have time to consider the physician’s lack of empathy, because her grip on Fai’s hand tightened. “My mother!”

“The palace is strong.” Fai smiled faintly. “No worries there.”

Kiva remembered the other member of their household. “Sasha!” Kiva turned to run to her house, but Fai held tight to her hand.

“Wait until it stops.”

Tears filled Kiva’s eyes.

“Cats can take care of themselves. You’ll see.”

As if to prove her right, a black cat streaked out of Kiva’s house.

“Sasha!”

But the cat kept going, around the corner of Fai’s house. Kiva started to follow, but then the rumbling ceased.

“Sasha will come back,” said Fai. “I need to see if anyone is hurt. Run back and get the black bag from my laboratory.”

Kiva hurried. But inside Fai’s house, she moved slowly as she picked her way through the rubble of furniture and things that had tumbled from shelves. In the lab itself, the ceiling had fallen in, breaking the table. The pig’s legs stuck out from a slab of stone and she squatted beside it.

The ceiling could have crushed her just as easily.

A bit of red in the debris caught her eye and she plucked it out. "Oh no." Half of her bracelet, the one she wore day in and day out. The one Seth had made for her twelfth birthday, a few weeks before his mother died.

When the chunk of ceiling had hit her, the bracelet must have been torn apart. In the chaos, she hadn't even noticed.

She sighed and dropped the ruined bracelet onto the dead pig.

Maybe it was a sign.

And, thanks to the prince himself, she suspected it would be quite easy indeed to never cross her former best friend's path again.



# 2

**Fai sent Kiva home, where Sasha waited** at the front door, a dead mouse at her front paws.

Kiva made a face. “Nice.” She scooped up the cat and went inside, fingers crossed the place wouldn’t be in ruins. A clay plate lay shattered on the floor, and one of the chairs by the table tilted, as if lame in one leg. But other than a few things askew on shelves, the place was not nearly as damaged as Fai’s laboratory.

Kiva cleaned up the plate and straightened the things on the shelves. She righted a vase with blooming white narcissus flowers she’d picked that morning and set it back on the table. Her stomach growled and she grabbed a handful of

dates. She knew it was selfish to hope that her mother would go to the market and bring home a chunk of fish. Sabra was late, and probably had far too much to manage in the palace to worry about Kiva's favorite meal. Childish, she supposed, to be searching for comfort after the day she'd had.

The cat jumped onto the large blue-striped cushion near the window. Kiva plopped down, snuggling Sasha in her lap as she stroked her sleek fur. Seth had always loved the cat.

Kiva groaned.

Again, the moment her mind had time to wander, who did she think about?

But it was hard not to think about Seth after seeing him. At one time, he'd spent more hours in Kiva's home than his own. He told her the palace was too big and he liked the smaller houses better. His mother, Nell, had been close to Sabra. Best friends, in fact, and the children often had sleepovers. Never at the palace, which was fine with Seth.

Kiva didn't mind. She only wanted to be with her best friend, she didn't care where.

Then, about four months before Kiva turned twelve, Nell became ill. Kiva's twelfth birthday was the last time she saw her. Kiva insisted on wearing her new blue sheath that day, even though it was slightly too big and the straps kept slipping from her shoulders. She also convinced her mother to line her eyes with kohl, and rub ochre on her lips.

Sabra had invited Fai as well. That day, Nell looked

beautiful and healthy. But the adults spoke unfamiliar words in hushed tones when they thought the children weren't listening.

Kiva asked Seth, "Is something wrong with your mother?"

His hair was shaved but for a side-lock, which he tugged. "She's sick."

"But she looks fine."

Worry showed in his face. "She stays in her room a lot. I only see her a little each morning."

Kiva touched his arm. "Maybe she'll feel better soon."

"Maybe." He reached into the waist of his shendyt and held out a small package wrapped in a slightly crooked palm-frond bow. "Happy birthday, Keeves."

"But your parents already gave me—"

"I know," he interrupted. "This is from me."

Kiva undid the stiff makeshift ribbon. The palm fronds fell apart, revealing a bracelet woven from bright red linen, a delicate trail of white chevrons lining the edges. She smiled. "It's beautiful."

Seth shook his head. "It's just a small thing. I made it, but the pattern got a little crooked on that end and—"

Kiva squeezed his hand. "It's perfect. I love it." She held it out. "Put it on me?"

Seth concentrated so hard on tying the bracelet that he stuck his tongue out.

Kiva grinned.

He frowned. "Too tight?"

"No." She circled her wrist in the air. "Just right. Thank you." She leaned forward and pecked him on the cheek. Her lips left a red smear, which she tried to wipe off with a finger. "Sorry."

"You're pretty without it." Seth's gaze dropped to her arm, where one of her straps had fallen. He slid it back up, and his finger lingered on her shoulder.

"Kids," Sabra called. "Time to eat."

Less than a month later, Nell was gone.

The school closed down for a week, and Seth was absent after it reopened, which seemed only natural. He'd lost his mother.

But he didn't return.

The others grew used to his empty seat next to Kiva's at the long classroom table.

Kiva could not.

Seth's scroll remained there, next to hers. One day she came to school and it was gone. "Where is it?" she cried.

"We moved it out of the way." Ada pointed to the side table.

"Don't ever touch it!" Kiva moved the scroll back to Seth's place.

When they came back after summer break that year, the scroll was gone.

She didn't ask where it went.

Because that might make it seem like she cared. And she didn't want anyone to know that she still did, because by then, she hadn't seen or spoken to her best friend for over a year.

Only a fool would keep hoping after that much time had passed.

Occasionally she saw Seth at community celebrations and state dinners that she was forced to attend with her mother. The first time, she had been excited, waving at him to try to get his attention.

But he didn't wave back, even though she was certain he noticed her.

The next time, she didn't bother to wave. Fortunately, there were often many people, and it was easy to sit at opposite ends of the massive table.

In all that time, they hadn't come face-to-face.

Until today. The day the earth shook for the first time Kiva could ever remember. "It's a sign, Sasha." Kiva tapped the cat's warm pink nose. "A big sign."

She kept busy as she waited for her mother to come home. Finally, near sunset, the door creaked open.

"Kiva?"

Kiva pushed the cat off her lap and stood. "Mom?"

"Oh, I was so worried." Sabra embraced Kiva, holding her far longer than usual. "Are you all right?"

Kiva nodded. "I was with Fai. We hid under the table."

"I'm so sorry I wasn't here. The palace was a mess and—"

Her mother sounded odd. The day had been a strain for everyone, but there was something else. Sabra sat on the cushion and stroked the cat.

Kiva's shoulders tensed.

Her mother was not a fan of Sasha. In fact, she never touched the cat except to boot her outside when she bestowed one of her rodent gifts upon them.

So she asked, "What's wrong?"

"I have news." Sabra patted the cushion next to her.

Kiva sat down, not taking her gaze away from her mother's. "It's bad?"

"Well, it's . . ." Sabra let out a long breath. "Yes. The worst."

Her mother seemed more anxious than stricken. Sabra put an arm around Kiva's shoulders. "I need you to be brave."

Kiva's hands balled into fists. "Tell me."

"The earthquake caused . . . damage at the palace."

"Was anyone hurt?" She didn't understand why her mother wasn't just telling her.

Sabra nodded.

"Bad?"

Sabra took a deep breath and blew it out. "Seth was killed."

Kiva drew back. "What?"

"I'm so sorry." Sabra set a hand on Kiva's face. "I know how close you were and—"

"No." Kiva shook off her mother's arm and stood up.

"I know it's hard to hear, but he didn't suffer and—"

"No!" Kiva's face grew hot and her hands clenched once more. "I mean we're not close anymore, we're not even friends, and I never wanted to see him again anyway. This makes it that much easier!" Kiva took a big gulp of air that turned into a sob on its way back out.

Sabra swept her into her arms.

Tears filled Kiva's eyes. An invisible hand clutched her insides, making it impossible to breathe.

Why did it have to happen today?

She had just seen Seth again, after so long. She was so close to being able to not care about him anymore. And now . . . she couldn't help it.

Finally, between sobs, she said, "I missed him . . . so much . . ." She shuddered. "Today . . . I thought . . . he came back . . . to be my friend." She broke down again, unable to finish.

*But he didn't want to be her friend. And even if he did change his mind, it doesn't matter. He's gone forever.*

Sabra stroked Kiva's hair. "It'll be all right."

"No it won't," she muttered into her mother's shoulder.

"Just give it time and you'll see. It's not as bad as you think."

“How can you say that?” Kiva wiped her face on her sleeve and sat up, staring at her mother. “He’s dead.”

Sabra looked down.

Kiva didn’t understand. She didn’t want to. “I’m going for a walk.”

“You should eat, sweetheart.”

“I want to be alone.”

Outside, Kiva sprinted along the riverbank, parallel to the crimson setting sun. A group of voices rose, panicked by the aftermath of the shaking. She paused at the shadowed edge of a dwelling and crept forward, panting, hands on the rough bricks.

She listened.

“There’s destruction all over.”

“There’s never been a quake before.”

“Was anyone hurt?”

She waited for someone to mention the prince’s death.

No one seemed to be aware of it yet.

She wished she wasn’t.

Kiva ran farther along the river, stopping at a bend beyond the cluster of houses. There, she knelt beside a clump of reeds, out of sight from anyone coming from that direction, and caught her breath.

She didn’t think she could miss Seth any more than she already did, but this was worse. This was so final.



At least, for the past three years, there had been some optimism.

Even after today, with her anger and subsequent decision not to care, there always had to be a tiny sliver of faith that he would come to his senses.

But now?

All hope died along with the prince.

Kiva's throat grew thick, her eyes warm, and she began to cry again.

She couldn't believe he was gone. Had he thought of her before the end? Maybe he even wished he had said more to her that afternoon. Been nicer.

Been her friend again.

"No." She didn't like picturing his last moments being filled with regrets.

Even though she'd been mad at Seth for a long time, and he hadn't been the best friend to her, she wanted his last moments to be full of peace and good memories of his life.

At least he didn't have to miss his mother anymore.

She sniffled.

Where was Seth at that very moment?

Probably in a quiet, candlelit room in the palace.

The palace priest, Natron, would have been called in as the chief embalmer. She pictured him wearing the jackal head of the god Anubis as he regarded the prince's body.

She wiped her eyes on her sleeve.

The process was nothing new to her; she'd been pretending to make mummies since she was a child, Seth often her willing play victim.

The memory brought a wan smile to her face.

First, there would be an epic battle in which the prince would meet a fitting heroic and dramatic end. Kiva would then arrange his body as she assumed the role of priest and chief embalmer.

But somewhere, that very moment, Seth was not pretending.

This time, his end was real.

Still, it hurt less to focus on the anatomical aspect: the concrete skin and bones that remained, rather than the weightless, abstract mind and soul that did not.

Natron would insert a hook through a hole near the nose and pull out part of the brain. Then he would use a flint knife to cut on the left side of the body near the stomach, and all the contents of the abdomen would be removed. The priest would then wash the cavity a first time using palm wine, a second with various spices. Then the body, Seth's body, would be filled with pure myrrh, cassia, and other aromatics.

The lungs, intestines, stomach, and liver would be sealed in canopic jars carved from limestone. But the heart . . .

Seth's heart would be placed back inside his body.

Perhaps, at that very moment, Natron held the prince's heart in his hands.

Kiva's face crumpled and more tears leaked out.

Thinking about Seth's heart hurt her own far too much.

"Be a doctor." Kiva spoke the words aloud and rocked back and forth as she rubbed the rough edge of her broken nail. "Focus. What comes next?"

After rinsing the insides of Seth's body with wine and spices—the most precious, befitting his royal stature—Natron would cover the corpse for at least forty days. After about seventy, the body would be wrapped in linen strips and placed in a wooden sarcophagus inside the burial chamber.

The tomb.

Some of them were huge.

The Seth she knew, her best friend, wouldn't have liked that. If he found the palace to be echoing and lonely, imagine how he would find a massive tomb for all eternity.

But he wouldn't even know he was in a tomb, he wouldn't have a chance to be lonely.

The loneliness would dwell with her, because she was the one left behind.

Kiva hugged her knees to her chest.

In the time she'd been sitting at the shore, night had fallen. Lights twinkled from the small homes along the river. She couldn't stay there forever.

When Kiva returned home she crept in the window and lay down on her bed. She would go back out later and enter through the front. Sabra meant well, but Kiva didn't feel like talking.

Voices came from the front of the house.

Her mother.

And who else?

She didn't care to listen.

Until her mother's voice rose. "Who decided this?"

Kiva opened the door a crack.

Fai was speaking. "We didn't expect it to happen this way. But our hands are forced."

What were they talking about?

"Fai, I don't understand why this is the only way. Seth is already gone."

Fai cleared her throat. "He can't go alone. You of all people should know that."

"Fai, you know it could easily be one of us, one of the adults. Is this the right thing to do?"

"This is the only way. It will satisfy—"

"Who?" demanded Sabra. "Who will it satisfy?"

"You know who! The ones that will cause trouble if Seth is not accompanied. The dissenters demanded this."

Kiva frowned.

Seth was dead. Why did anyone need to be sent with him?

Kiva sucked in a breath. Did they mean a retainer sacrifice?

Some believed that royals must be accompanied into the afterlife by servants to care for them. Kiva heard stories about the practice, but no royal had ever been entombed in her lifetime. Seth's mother's mummy was in a family crypt, awaiting the Pharaoh's death.

Kiva had never seen a sacrifice, and until now she didn't believe it to be something that actually occurred.

"But a child?" Kiva's mother was talking once again. "Why must it be a child?"

Kiva exhaled. If the retainer sacrifice was going to be a child, then it had to be someone she knew.

She braced herself as she ran through the list of people she cared for. Ada, Rem, Rom: she'd feel terrible if it was any of them. Anyone else, of course she'd feel bad for them and their family.

The whole idea was too awful to even consider.

Sabra asked Fai, "Tell me the truth. Are you part of it?"

"I argued with them for hours. You know that!"

"It could be anyone else." Sabra sniffled.

Was her mother crying? She didn't know when she'd last seen her mother cry. The day had been hard on everyone, and maybe her more than most.

“Sabra.” Fai’s tone was quiet, comforting. “I care for her as much as you do.”

Kiva froze.

“But in the end, she’s my child.” Sabra sobbed. “Kiva is mine.”

*Oh Gods*, thought Kiva. *It’s me.*

She closed the door and leaned back against it.

The sacrifice is me. Her legs gave out and she slid to the floor.

“No. I won’t do it,” she whispered.

But why was she chosen?

Was it because she and Seth had been close? Had the Pharaoh made the final decision in his shock and grief? She was Sabra’s daughter—surely it meant something to spare the child of someone so important to the royal family.

Kiva longed to burst into her mother and Fai’s conversation and beg them to find another solution. But she couldn’t let them know she’d heard.

Quickly, she rose and slipped out the window. She thought about drying her tears, but realized they would attribute her sadness to Seth.

She walked to the front and pushed the door open.

The two women froze when they saw her. Sabra’s face was tear-stained, her eyes red.

Kiva shut the door behind her. “Sorry I was so long.”

Her mother forced a small smile. “Are you hungry?”

Kiva caught her breath. Her mother had just been discussing her death, and she wanted Kiva to eat?

Food was not a priority for Kiva. “I’m tired. I’m going to bed.”

Sabra stood and gave her a long hug. Too long for a simple goodnight.

That hug was definitely of the sorry-you-are-going-to-be-sacrificed nature.

Fai called, “Good night, dear.”

But Kiva couldn’t even look at her.

In her room, she shut the door and fell into bed.

She was heartbroken over Seth, and sorry that he was gone. But she did not intend to go with him.

Kiva needed a plan.

Fortunately, the traditions and protocols of entombment would give her roughly seventy days to make one.

# 3

**Kiva woke and jerked upright. Sasha lay** curled at her feet.

Events of the previous day rushed back.

Seth at school.

The earthquake.

Seth *dead*.

And she was to accompany him.

As a sacrifice.

But she had to act normal, not let on that she knew.

There was plenty of time to come up with an escape plan.

Kiva slipped out of bed and padded into the main room.

Sabra sat at the table, sipping tea. Her eyes were red.

“Good morning.”



Kiva sat down across from her, hands clasped together on the table. “You’re not at the palace.”

“No work today.”

“Because of the earthquake yesterday?”

“No. Sweetheart . . .” Sabra set a hand on Kiva’s. “The earthquake was the day the prince died.”

Kiva frowned. “Which was *yesterday*.”

“It was over two months ago.”

“That’s impossible.” Kiva stared at the vase of narcissus flowers that she had picked the morning before. But they were wilted to ugliness. She touched one and it turned to dust. *Wasn’t it?*

Sabra shifted in her chair. “Kiva, you’re confused. Maybe you’re upset because today is Seth’s funeral.”

Kiva yanked her hand back. “What?”

“Losing Seth was traumatic. But you’ve been dealing with it all so . . . admirably.” Sabra smiled a little. “I’m so proud.”

Kiva’s mind raced.

Was her mother delusional?

There was no way so much time could have passed.

Out of habit, her fingers went to her wrist. Failing to find the bracelet, she rubbed the rough edge of her broken nail.

She froze as she gaped at her index finger.

The nail was still as short as when she broke it in Fai’s lab the day of the earthquake.

Yesterday.

Her mother was lying.

“Kiva, I know this has been a terrible time for you. And I hope all the rest has helped you deal with Seth’s death.”

“Rest?”

“Fai insisted the sleeping medicine would help—”

“Sleeping medicine?”

Her mother nodded. “You were so upset, it was the only thing that got you to sleep. I know you’ve slept far too much these past weeks, but—”

Kiva needed to get away from the lies. “I have things to do before the funeral.”

“I thought we could spend time together, talk about—”

“Talk about what?” snapped Kiva. “I heard you and Fai.” She held a hand flat on her chest. “Maybe we should talk about me being dead in a few hours!”

“But you won’t be—” Sabra stopped.

“Are you saying I’m not going to be the sacrifice?”

“True, it is you; you’ve known for weeks.”

“No I haven’t. You’re lying.” Kiva rubbed the edge of her fingernail to remind herself that she wasn’t imagining things. The flowers were dead, but there was no explaining that broken nail.

Her mother swallowed. “I want to make more memories today, while we have a chance.”

“Haven’t we had *over two months* to do that?”

Sabra's eyes widened. "Yes." She stared at the table. "You're right."

"I'll be in my room." There, Kiva quickly dressed and put on sandals. She didn't know what was going on, but she did know that her mother couldn't be trusted.

She went over to the window. There was no way she was going to let them take her.

When she was younger, she often snuck out to meet Seth after bedtime. They often did nothing but sit beside each other on the moonlit riverbank, throw sticks into the water, and watch them spin in the current.

A lump grew in her throat and tears welled up.

Her grief for him was so fresh.

"There's no way I could have been feeling this way for over two months." Kiva hoisted herself up onto the sill and dropped to the dirt outside. She jogged along the path with no extra clothes or supplies, no clear plan as to a destination.

What she needed most was to find someone who would tell her the truth.

Ada's house was nearby.

Her friend sat under a date palm, crying into her hands.

"Ada? Why are you crying?"

Ada looked up, her eyes swollen, face blotchy. "Why aren't *you*?"

Kiva plopped down on the ground beside her. "Will you tell me what's going on?"

“What are you talking about?” Ada wiped her eyes on her hand. “Today is Seth’s funeral.”

“I know. But . . . doesn’t it feel too soon?”

“It’s been over two months.”

Kiva sighed.

That again. Why was she the only one who didn’t think so much time had passed? “Right.” Maybe she should test Ava. “But . . . what have we been doing for the last two months?”

“Doing?” Ada frowned. “We’ve been going to school. You’ve been helping me with Maxwell’s equations.”

“What? You have no idea how to do that.”

“Yesterday you told me I was getting it! I think it was yesterday. Now you’re just confusing me, Kiva.” Ada scowled. “I’m already upset and sad enough.”

“*You’re* upset?” Kiva was about to lay into her about how being the retainer sacrifice gave her the upper hand on emotion for the day, then wondered why Ada hadn’t mentioned it. She scratched her arm. “So, have you heard anything about a retainer sacrifice?”

“A what?”

“Never mind.” Kiva stood up. “I have to go.”

“See you at the funeral?”

Kiva needed to think.

Ada was as foggy about the supposed passage of time as she was. And why hadn’t she heard of Kiva’s fate?

“Ada, where’s the funeral going to be?”

“Where else would it be?”

“Oh, right.” Kiva prodded. “It’ll be at the . . .”

“*Tomb*. What’s wrong with you?” asked Ada. “It’s at the school.”

At the school? Why not the palace?

Kiva hurried down the path and around the row of sun-dried brick buildings. She took three steps onto the school’s courtyard and froze.

Yesterday, at least what she thought was yesterday, there had been an empty hill.

But there, in front of her, lay a series of limestone brick mastabas built up on three graduated platforms, several dozen steep steps leading up to the wide, dim opening.

The tomb. How did that happen in one day?

Kiva trembled.

She didn’t believe any of this.

If the funeral was to take place within hours, where was everyone? Mourners should have been gathering.

Kiva ran to the steps and took them two at a time.

She paused at the mouth of the tomb, wondering why there were no guards. Then she stepped inside a brick hallway, the floor lit by clay pots of oil, burning wicks floating inside. Heart pounding, she moved toward the flickering brightness ahead.

The passageway ended in a rectangular room, a

sarcophagus displayed in the center on a raised dais, surrounded by more of the oil lamps.

Kiva slowly ascended the three steps and stared at the sculpture of Osiris. The green skin of the human-faced god of death and resurrection nearly glowed in the low light as gold strands entwined in his braided beard glittered. His unseeing eyes appeared to track her, and she shivered as she moved closer to the casket.

Was Seth really inside?

Then Kiva noticed a low table on which lay a linen-wrapped body. Her legs threatened to give out, but she made her way there.

She didn't believe her oldest friend was dead until that moment.

"I'm sorry." Kiva ran a trembling hand down the side of the body, skin crawling at the shriveled hardness. "I'm sorry for making you not want to be my friend anymore.

"Whatever I did wrong"—she lowered her head—"I would take it all back." Her eyes closed.

Maybe, if she never opened them again, this wouldn't be true.

Maybe, if she wished with all her heart, this would all turn out to be a bad dream.

Maybe.

She held her breath. *Please please please.*

She couldn't bring herself to open her eyes.

If this was Seth's end, hers wasn't far off.

What would it be like?

Would they kill her beforehand?

Or simply seal her inside and let her starve or die of thirst  
or lack of air?

*"This is pointless."*

Her eyes popped open. She whirled around.

No one was there.

"Hello?"

There was no reply.

She turned back to Seth.

*"The others will be there soon."* The voice spoke again. *"If  
your plan is to keep this going, get her out now."*

"Who said that?" Again, Kiva saw no one.

She set her hand back on Seth. "I wish that we—"

Before her eyes, that hand began to disintegrate.

Mesmerized, she gaped as infinitesimal pieces danced in  
the torchlight like dust.

Kiva could no longer move.

Her body seemed to be shedding itself one cell at a time.  
Fingers, hand, half her arm and up . . .

Kiva could no longer breathe.

Her body continued to disappear, one insignificant frag-  
ment at a time, a floating mosaic of all her parts.

Was this *her* end?

She was the retainer sacrifice.

Piece by piece, the gods were taking her.

Her eyes no longer focused.

In front of her, Seth's body wavered, as if under water.

Odd, but she felt more peace than panic. Death was far kinder than she expected.

She felt herself falling, falling, but she landed nowhere.

After one, final breath, Kiva of Alexandria simply ceased to be.



# 4

**The lamps were extinguished.**

There was no sound.

The tomb was a hush, pressing from all sides, stifling.

Kiva was dead.

This was death.

She shivered.

Along with the chill air, she became aware of a dull hum.

Perhaps that was the sound of eternal silence. What one heard when there was no sound at all. The sound of death itself.

She swallowed. Her throat was dry.

And she was breathing.

This wasn't what she expected from death, not at all. But then, she was certainly no expert.

Cautiously, she curled her fingers.

They were sluggish, yet still obeyed.

She wiggled her toes. Same reaction.

At least she seemed to be in one piece again.

She opened her eyes.

Darkness.

She blinked once, twice.

Utter darkness.

Was she blind?

She had always been afraid of the night. Her heartbeat sped up.

Panic, for certain, was not something a dead person felt.

Did that mean she was . . .

"I'm alive! I'm still alive!" She sat straight up. "I'm—"

Lights, brighter than the sun, popped on overhead.

She was not blind.

And this was no tomb.

She covered her eyes with one arm, her clothing soft and fragrant against her face.

Blinking as her eyes adjusted to the glare, Kiva glanced down.

She was on a bed with a colorful red-and-blue-striped cloth. Two separate pieces of clothing—black, and snug but

stretchy—covered both her top and bottom, bands of it tighter at her wrists.

She traced raised letters on one of the cuffs.

*SV.*

She lifted her arm and pressed her nose into her shoulder and inhaled.

The scent was new and lovely, something she had never smelled before.

*Like flowers.*

But she knew what flowers smelled like, didn't she?

She slid sideways on the bed and stretched out her stiff legs. For as long as she could recall, she'd only worn sheaths, never anything that allowed her to move so freely.

Or anything so soft.

Funny that clothing in the afterlife was to her liking.

She pushed up and off the bed, landed on her bare feet. The blood rushed to her head, prickles of white in front of her eyes. She shut them and leaned on the edge of the bed, legs wobbling.

Why did it feel as though she hadn't stood, let alone walked, for a long time?

Or was this what death was supposed to feel like?

In an effort to get the circulation going, Kiva held on to the bed and squatted a few times as she took note of her strange surroundings.

The slick, cool floor under her feet matched the shiny

white walls, neither like any of the walls or floors in Alexandria.

Kiva pondered for a moment.

This was not entirely unfamiliar: the artificial lights that lit the space like day, the soft material against her skin, the glistening walls and floors . . .

They had learned this in school.

This was all part of the future.

But the future only existed in the minds of the soothsayers, the future seers . . . the dreamers.

She had never truly believed any of it.

Was she dead?

Was she dreaming? A dream that seemed so real she thought she was awake?

Or was the afterlife meant to be the future?

*Whoosh.*

Kiva jumped as a rush of fresh air came out of a gray slot above her head. She stood there a moment, breathed in the warmth. The flow blew hair into her face. As she went to push it back, she froze at the light brown curls.

Not black and straight.

She pulled a length of hair out straight and stared. A burial wig of some kind?

She tugged sharply and winced. Definitely attached.

So, she was to be another person in this death dream? A retainer sacrifice wasn't even allowed to be herself?

A chunk of hair held up to her nose revealed fragrance that, again, was pleasing and made her nearly weak with the sensation.

And then a chirping began, a faint, steady rhythm that came from nowhere and everywhere all at once. After a moment, it stopped, but her attention was drawn to a tall cabinet on the far side of the small room, only about ten steps away. A mirror attached to the side showed her the Kiva of this place.

She stared at the girl.

Brown curly hair fell far past her shoulders, except for a light fringe that brushed her eyebrows, beneath which bright green eyes blinked back at her. A spray of freckles dotted her nose and cheeks.

Something flashed at her neck. She pulled a slippery gold necklace out from under her shirt and studied the tiny pendant, an unfamiliar symbol of three intersecting circles.

Kiva took a deep breath and watched as the girl in the mirror did the same. "I guess you're me."

Behind her in the mirror, a tall panel interrupted the smoothness of the wall. As she turned around and stepped closer to examine it, the panel slid to the side and disappeared.

An open doorway lay before her, exposing more darkness beyond.

Apparently this dream was to not only be one of the future, but also one of her nightmares.

She didn't want to go. But how long could she stay there, in that room by herself, wondering what would happen next?

Kiva held her breath and stepped into the black.

More lights flickered on overhead, as bright as the others.

She sighed in relief, then waved a hand in front of her.

Another set of lights turned on.

She took a step. More light.

Another. Still, the illumination kept pace with her motion.

It was either magic . . . or a dream.

She knew magic wasn't real. Death was real, and apparently it felt like a dream.

Kiva stopped and looked behind her.

A short white corridor, with the same slick walls and floor and ceiling, led back to her room.

One option.

She twisted back around.

A dark corridor.

The other option.

"Dreams aren't real."

Hesitation halted her progress, and the lull in motion made her aware of a pulsing underfoot. She squatted and set a hand flat on the floor.

A rhythmic beat; a distinct cadence that repeated, changed slightly, then began once more. She stood back up,

more curious than frightened. If she was already dead, then there was nothing to fear.

With the darkness behind her, Kiva had to trust the lights to guide her way. She took a deep breath and moved forward, the pulsing sensation underfoot becoming more pronounced with each step.

After only a few more paces, the lights revealed an end to the brief corridor: a double panel in the shape of a door, like the one in the room she'd left, only larger. Would it open when she reached it?

And what would she find?

Her hand went to rub her wrist. Her empty wrist.

She had forgotten that her bracelet was gone for good.

She missed it.

Was the afterlife supposed to bring such a feeling of loss? There was so much emptiness, so many things that she missed. Her mother. Her cat.

*Seth.*

Was he there somewhere? That large door . . . did it contain his final resting place?

Was he also in this dream? Or did he have one of his own, a dream that didn't include her?

Maybe she was supposed to have died, but the sacrifice didn't work and she was going to wander these halls of the future until she starved to death or died of thirst or . . .

An especially heavy pulse from beneath her feet spurred her on.

Kiva forced herself to take a step. As she got closer, the panels parted automatically.

A hammering racket blasted her eardrums, the beat a concussion in her head as raspy male voices mingled, yelling words at a rapid tempo, their cadence contrary, almost fighting the beat.

She pressed her hands to her ears.

It turned out death was loud after all.

But there was no time to focus on the sound because the sight before her . . .

Once again, she was overcome with the feeling that this had to be a dream.

The semicircular room in which she stood embodied everything they'd been taught about the future.

A steady line of lights ran from the perimeter of the straight wall behind her, all the way around the arc, before concluding at the edge of the wall to her right; a glowing border between the bare white walls and low ceiling.

Slick and shiny metal cabinets lined the curve on either side. The one on the left was a long, empty counter, but the one on the right had a silver spigot. Everything appeared to be made of materials not found in nature.

Kiva's attention turned to the very front of the room, and



the open space where two large black leather chairs with sturdy armrests bellied up to what appeared to be identical gray tables.

One of the chairs was not empty.

Kiva dropped to a crouch, wanting to stay out of sight until she figured out this dream. At last, she was glad for the noise because it concealed her presence.

The person in the chair was dressed in a shirt and pants identical to hers and had dark hair that fell directly above wide, muscular shoulders. Arms stretched up, overhead, with large hands that appeared strong.

Kiva's legs were still weak and unsteady, and she had to rise before she lost her balance.

But she was too abrupt.

Her vision swam for a moment before clearing.

Her stomach growled.

What a strange dream, that she could be weak from hunger.

Her throat was so dry.

The clamor ceased, the abrupt silence nearly as concussive.

Kiva coughed and quickly covered her mouth.

The person stilled, arms slowly lowered. Shoulders slumped a tad, then one hand gestured to the silver faucet on the right. "Water's in there."

The voice was familiar, but not. So close to someone she

knew, but off in some way. Like they were spoken through a tub of water.

The person in the chair swiveled around to face her.

Kiva's legs gave out and she dropped to her knees.

This person . . . was an impossibility.

Except that in a dream, anything was possible.

Because, to Kiva, there could be no other explanation for how she found herself staring into the eyes of the dead prince of Alexandria.