

The Cloak Of Horus!

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Act I

The interior of a King's tomb in ancient Egypt. At rise, the tomb is in darkness. Suddenly a spotlight shines on a dead body: the corpse of a young member of the royal guard. A second spotlight reveals a second body. Spotlights continue until the stage is littered with the dead. Lights come up full, revealing the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD, quite alive and quite shocked.

CAPTAIN

Oh...oh, this isn't very good.

The CAPTAIN approaches the bodies one by one.

OK...who's alive...? Who's still breathing? Breathing's good; breathing—I'll take twitching.

He finds nothing. He looks around.

Did someone...come in?

The CAPTAIN pulls out a dagger and begins backing away, extra cautious.

No, no; we're sealed in. He'll come, I'm sure of it. But he's four days away. He couldn't have made it already....

The CAPTAIN makes it to the back wall and begins feeling a particular spot. He notices himself doing this and stops. He walks away.

No one could. We're alone for now. No one's here to attack, and that means—

As he walks, his foot hits a pitcher. He looks at it. He picks an empty cup from the ground next to one of the corpses. He sniffs.

Poison? Oh, boys...no....

He stands over one body lying on its side. He turns it over, revealing a sword sticking straight out of its chest.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Now that's overdoing it.

The CAPTAIN stands and addresses the bodies.

Now, boys...we have a misunderstanding here. We are the royal guard, here to follow our King into the afterlife in his defense. From the assignment, I see you figured "afterlife" meant getting there. The quickest way possible, with poisoning, stabbing.... All the good stuff. So yes, protect our King; that's all well and good. But there was one more step. You all know the head Priestess. You all know her son. Big guy. Currently on a mission of diplomacy and/or slaughter. He might make a good king. He certainly thinks he'd make a good king; that's why he's planning to usurp the throne.

He kneels down in front of one of the corpses.

Yeah, yeah; he's not too happy about being passed over. Our King is dead; it's his time! Forcing himself onto the throne, that's easy enough, but the real trick is legitimacy. He'll need some sort of approval. Some unique royal artifact like, say, the Cloak of Horus. The royal good luck charm—the mark of the true king of Egypt. He'll say our King gave him the cloak as a promise, as a guarantee of the throne. He'll say it, and if he has the cloak, the royal court will believe him.

Beat.

But the Cloak of Horus isn't in his hands. It's buried in here with us. And in five days' time, he's coming to get it.

He stands.

So that's our real mission, gentlemen. Not to bury ourselves alive, but to get ourselves slaughtered defending the cloak. I really, really should have told you all sooner.

He shakes his head.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

I figured you'd all ask questions first. No one else in our kingdom sacrifices themselves; why us? Why do we have our own food and water if we're here to die—I mean, a little bit of thinking would have prevented this and we'd all be a lot happier. Because now, when this very insistent Priestess's son arrives, I'll be here alone. I can't guarantee he'll be.

Beat.

Oh well; what can you do? Might as well get this place cleaned up.

He points to a soldier.

Son, you're with me.

The CAPTAIN picks a corpse from the ground and drags it off left. He returns a moment later, exhausted.

OK...OK...uh, you're next. Don't go anywhere; I'm just going to catch my breath, and....

He puts his hands on his knees and breathes.

OK....

He lifts another corpse and—slowly—brings it offstage. Another moment passes, then the CAPTAIN returns, extremely fatigued.

You guys work out. I guess it's the uniform; we've all got to fill it out. I never thought it would make such a difference.

He exhales.

Guys, really—killing yourselves, you should have done this already at your posts. Because now, what I have to do....

He bends down to lift another corpse, staggering as he rises.

I've got to...one by one....

With a cry, the CAPTAIN topples over, sprawled out like the other bodies. He stays down.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

I don't see what's so bad about staying here.

Enter the QUEEN. Dressed in her finest, she makes her way cautiously through the tomb. She sees the corpses.

QUEEN

To herself:

Well.

She spies the bottle of poison and walks towards it.

CAPTAIN

Is someone there?

QUEEN

Stopping:

Oh, I'm sorry. You aren't dead?

CAPTAIN

Weakly:

No. No, I'm defending the tomb.

QUEEN

Oh.

CAPTAIN

I'm on break right now...and hallucinating, I guess. So don't loot anything until I get up.

The QUEEN approaches one of the corpses.

QUEEN

He looks dead.

CAPTAIN

He is. I'm the only one breathing.

QUEEN

Are you going to be alive for long?

CAPTAIN

What do you mean?

QUEEN

Oh, I was going to say, if you took poison, if you were waiting for some effect to—

CAPTAIN

No, nothing like that. I heart my body.

QUEEN

Can you stand?

CAPTAIN

Oh, yeah, yeah.

He doesn't. The QUEEN approaches the CAPTAIN and the body on top of him.

QUEEN

Which one are you?

The CAPTAIN raises his hand.

You have a man on you.

CAPTAIN

I'm aware.

QUEEN

He's heavy.

CAPTAIN

Oh, yeah. Corpses, you know. You're walking for two.

QUEEN

You need help?

CAPTAIN

No, none at all; no. I couldn't think of asking.

QUEEN

OK.

CAPTAIN

For one thing, you're a hallucination.

QUEEN

OK.

CAPTAIN

And more importantly, this is a guard thing. I'm their captain. I have to look out for my boys.

QUEEN

Oh, you're bodyguard to the King.

CAPTAIN

Getting up:

Oh, yes; I'm sorry. Let me—

QUEEN

Oh, you don't have to get up.

CAPTAIN

Stopping:

OK.

He collapses again.

QUEEN

It's nice to meet you. I'm the Queen.

A beat. Then, quickly, the CAPTAIN throws off the corpse, stands, and kneels before her.

No....

CAPTAIN

Your majesty!

QUEEN

No, no. I just can't.

She crumples to the ground. The CAPTAIN looks up.

CAPTAIN

You don't want me to—?

QUEEN

That's for the throne. In here should be the one place we don't have to —

CAPTAIN

I couldn't agree more.

Getting up:

No prostration necessary.

QUEEN

That's true.

CAPTAIN

Looking down on her:

That goes for you, too. May I?

He helps her up.

So, updates...things going on. Everything's smooth. In fact, in some ways we're quite ahead of schedule....

He glances at the corpses.

My guards have crossed over with the King and have joined him in spirit, if not yet in body. Your husband is in the next room already exactly as he should be. The mask is on, the sarcophagus is sealed. His organs are across the room on the table, except for his liver which is under the table. There's also an assembly guide to show him which

CAPTAIN (cont.)

body part goes where, but I think we can leave that to my team. And that's it.

Beat.

So, I think our most immediate concern is security. I mistakenly believed we were sealed in, but obviously not every entrance is secure. If you're satisfied here, I'm willing to walk you back.

QUEEN

Back where?

CAPTAIN

From where you came in. Some secret passage?

QUEEN

He built himself a secret passage?

CAPTAIN

That's what I'm asking you.

QUEEN

I came through the front door.

CAPTAIN

This right here?

QUEEN

Yeah.

CAPTAIN

That stopped being a door about an hour ago.

QUEEN

Isn't that what's supposed to happen?

CAPTAIN

Well, yeah, but once you come in.... Your majesty. Why are you here?

QUEEN

You should know.

CAPTAIN

I should.

QUEEN

It's the same question; why are you here?

CAPTAIN

It's top secret.

QUEEN

Observing the bodies:

It seems obvious to me. I was planning the same thing.

CAPTAIN

Oh, no no. That's not what this is. That's not what you do in a tomb!
That's what I was trying to explain to them. Belatedly!

QUEEN

I am here for my husband.

CAPTAIN

No! This is not how marriage works! Burying a queen with her king?
That's old fashioned!

QUEEN

I'm a traditionalist.

CAPTAIN

You had no obligation! You were married, what, two weeks?

QUEEN

A year and a half.

CAPTAIN

To a man twice your age! It's—you didn't even like him!

QUEEN

What?

CAPTAIN

You were in love with the Priestess's s—

A connection:

Oh. Ohhh....

QUEEN

I don't know what that means.

CAPTAIN

Ohhh....

QUEEN

I love my husband. I think my very presence here proves that.

CAPTAIN

Yes. What other reason could you have for being here? None, of course. You really must love your husband.

QUEEN

Let's hurry up with this.

CAPTAIN

Right, right. So you want to be dead. Here. I'm only a little concerned about that because it's so unexpected. I'm not prepared for you. You're supposed to get wrapped up, perfumed, a nice box of your own!

QUEEN

A trip to the spa.

CAPTAIN

And there's nothing like that here. You know, people have to prepare these things! You should have told somebody. They'd make arrangements, they'd give you choices—you know, you've got options.

He looks at the door.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Well, you had options.

QUEEN

They'd ask questions, and I wouldn't want to answer them.

CAPTAIN

I understand.

QUEEN

In fact, I don't have to explain myself to you.

CAPTAIN

No, ma'am.

QUEEN

You know what I'm here for.

CAPTAIN

Sort of, ma'am.

QUEEN

So you'll help me.

A beat. The QUEEN looks around.

Tell me, these dead people. Bodyguards. How did you help them on their way?

CAPTAIN

They helped themselves.

QUEEN

How?

CAPTAIN

Poison.

QUEEN

Perfect. Where's the bottle?

CAPTAIN

Whoa, whoa, whoa; hold on a minute!

QUEEN

Hold on for what?

CAPTAIN

Well, you just got here! It's not like you can just—

QUEEN

Obviously, I missed the party. I've got to catch up.

CAPTAIN

A party? No, you've got to understand.

QUEEN

You aren't going to disobey your queen, are you?

CAPTAIN

Disobey? No, never! I'm just trying to figure out the next room. Because there's a place for everybody. You know, there's this tableau. And with one extra person—

QUEEN

Is this really necessary?

CAPTAIN

You don't spend your afterlife crumpled like dirty laundry. Now, uh, you'll want to be next to your husband, right?

QUEEN

Whatever.

CAPTAIN

No, no; it's going to look weird, otherwise. Now, we don't have another...

He mimes the shape of a sarcophagus.

...and if it's possible I don't want to throw you in there with him.

QUEEN

I'll be dead. I don't see what—

CAPTAIN

What we do have, though, are some tables. Big, heavy dealies. Like an altar. We can put one of those next to your husband and you can lay out for a while.

QUEEN

Perfect. I love it. Can you kill me now?

CAPTAIN

Well, hold on. We've got to move the table.

QUEEN

What?

CAPTAIN

I can't pick it up by myself.

QUEEN

I don't believe this....

CAPTAIN

I can't.

QUEEN

What about you? Who's going to fit you into your "tableau"?

CAPTAIN

I honestly hadn't thought about it.

QUEEN

So much for planning.

CAPTAIN

Well, with the Queen comes a certain expectation. Whatever your wishes might be, your station has it's own....

QUEEN

Yes, it's wonderful. I'm flattered.

CAPTAIN

You get the idea.

QUEEN

Poison me.

CAPTAIN

No, wait—

QUEEN

I'm not helping you with your makeshift altar, your mise en scene, anything. It's time to die.

CAPTAIN

Why?

QUEEN

I don't have to give an answer.

CAPTAIN

I know, still—

QUEEN

And I won't.

CAPTAIN

Right, OK. But I don't see why we can't wait a few minutes and—

QUEEN

What would we wait for? This is a tomb! Are you going anywhere?

CAPTAIN

There's always a chance....

QUEEN

There's not.

CAPTAIN

Even so, there's so much to do!

QUEEN

What, the tableau?

CAPTAIN

Besides that.

QUEEN

In here? What you plan on doing any housecleaning? Are there stories on the walls that need a re-write? Are you cooking something for the guests?

CAPTAIN

What guests?

QUEEN

Exactly!

CAPTAIN

So there will be guests....

QUEEN

I can't believe we're still talking.

CAPTAIN

What?

QUEEN

Why delay?

CAPTAIN

You're right. There's no reason.

QUEEN

Then let's do this.

CAPTAIN

Let's do this now.

QUEEN

Break out the bottle.

He does.

So, which of us drinks first?

The CAPTAIN fumbles the bottle.

Or should we drink together?

CAPTAIN

Wait, together? You think that I—I'm here to—?

He looks at one of the corpses.

Well, it's understandable.

QUEEN

I have been keeping you. If it wasn't for me you probably would have been dead already.

CAPTAIN

I was actually kinda worried about the opposite.

QUEEN

Of which?

CAPTAIN

What I mean is, that, with me dead, and you alive, I feel that my duties—

QUEEN

Please, no; I can take care of myself.

CAPTAIN

—To you, yes. But also to your husband—

The QUEEN stops him, takes the bottle from his hand, and pours a glass.

QUEEN

This is an order from your Queen. Relax....

She brings the glass to his lips. Instead of drinking, the CAPTAIN shouts and begins flailing his arms, spilling some of the poison onto himself.

CAPTAIN

It's on my leg!

QUEEN

Oh my.

CAPTAIN

I can feel it throbbing. Oh no....

He wipes the poison away.

QUEEN

You don't seem ready for this.

CAPTAIN

To tell you the truth, that's about right.

QUEEN

All of the endless preparation is one thing, but you don't even want to be dead.

CAPTAIN

It's a failure on my part; I know.

QUEEN

We could drink together.

CAPTAIN

Yes.

QUEEN

If that would help.

CAPTAIN

Yes. Together.

QUEEN

OK.

CAPTAIN

With you slightly first.

She pours another glass and hands it to him. She takes the other. They stand together.

Well, this is it.

QUEEN

It is.

CAPTAIN

I feel we should say something.

QUEEN

A toast?

CAPTAIN

Yeah.

QUEEN

What do you want to say?

CAPTAIN

Well, I've had a good life. I've served my King. And now I won't. Well, this one last time. Eventually. That's it.

QUEEN

Some things don't go on in this life. Luckily, we can always try the next one.

CAPTAIN

You call that lucky?

QUEEN

We'll find out, won't we?

CAPTAIN

Your majesty, considering all the ways to spend my last moments, this isn't so bad.

QUEEN

Shall we?

The QUEEN goes to take a sip.

CAPTAIN

Do you ever think about what happens? When we die?

QUEEN

We die.

CAPTAIN

I mean, after we die? Here we are in the midst of all this...iconography. Telling us that this means something. And for me, it just doesn't work. Does it do anything for you?

QUEEN

No.

CAPTAIN

But you were just talking about the next life.

QUEEN

There's no such thing. I just think it sounds nice.

CAPTAIN

Well....

QUEEN

I'm sorry, but I have to be frank.

CAPTAIN

If that's how you feel, why even come here?

QUEEN

Because I'm just as dead out there.

CAPTAIN

Yow.

QUEEN

Yow?

CAPTAIN

Well, yeah, that's bleak.

QUEEN

Of course it is.

CAPTAIN

I'm just saying.

QUEEN

Sorry if you're looking for meaning. For any proud, majestic gods to guide you through life and wave hello when you pass on. Because it doesn't happen.

CAPTAIN

It sounds nice, though.

QUEEN

It does.

CAPTAIN

Like you said.

QUEEN

Raising her glass:

Shall we?

CAPTAIN

You should sit first.

He clears a corpse off of a low platform. The QUEEN sits.

The next life is a sham, huh? You don't expect to see your husband again?

QUEEN

I don't expect to see anything again.

CAPTAIN

Yes, of course. Well, in that case there's nothing left to do. So lie back, close your eyes, and drink up. Nice meeting you, your majesty.

QUEEN

Nice meeting you, too.

She lifts her glass.

Don't forget yours.

CAPTAIN

Oh, right.

He raises his glass.

Well, here goes...nothing.

QUEEN

What a beautiful word.

They touch glasses. Their eyes meet. They raise their glasses to their lips and...they bring their glasses past their heads, spilling the poison over their shoulders. As the poison hits the ground, they notice each other's actions.

CAPTAIN

You didn't drink!

QUEEN

You didn't drink!

CAPTAIN

Oh, I was never going to, but now I know what you're about!

QUEEN

What?

CAPTAIN

You don't have me fooled.

QUEEN

What am I about?

CAPTAIN

An inside job, your majesty. An insight into your true loyalties.

QUEEN

What loyalties?

CAPTAIN

You wanted me dead!

QUEEN

I thought you wanted you dead. At least my husband did.

CAPTAIN

I am very disappointed in you, your highness. Everything you've said. You've expressed such eloquent nihilism. Queen of the nihilism!

QUEEN

All right.

CAPTAIN

But you didn't drink!

QUEEN

I will.

CAPTAIN

Right.

QUEEN

I just wanted to do it alone. I wanted you to go first.

CAPTAIN

I'm sure that would make things so much easier for you.

QUEEN

I want peace of mind.

CAPTAIN

What kind of peace of mind do you get with me dead and you only pretending to be?

QUEEN

I really don't wish to say it.

CAPTAIN

Don't. But don't expect me to sympathize.

QUEEN

It's awkward.

CAPTAIN

None of this is getting poison into my mouth.

QUEEN

I'll say it. If it will ease your suspicions. I wanted to drink after you were dead in order to protect the body I leave behind from any possibility of...corpse defilement.

CAPTAIN

What?

QUEEN

It's a precaution.

CAPTAIN

Is that what you think of me?

QUEEN

To be honest, I don't know.

CAPTAIN

I'm shocked.

QUEEN

I walked in here, you were throwing around a pile of dead boys. What should I think?

CAPTAIN

Your majesty...what an imagination.

QUEEN

What's your reason? Why won't you drink?

CAPTAIN

It'll kill me!

QUEEN

That's the point. Isn't it part of your job?

CAPTAIN

More directly, my job is security. I have to ensure the safety of our King's resting place for eternity. So there's a lot of double checking to do.

QUEEN

Security checks. How long will they take?

CAPTAIN

To do it right...to confront the problem head on...it's going to be a couple of days.

QUEEN

Days? Multiple days? To walk through a few chambers, look at dead people...and artwork?

CAPTAIN

I'm nothing if not thorough.

QUEEN

There isn't much poison left. I don't know if there will be enough to finish you off.

CAPTAIN

A few days from now I'm sure I'll be face-to-face with many interesting ways to kill me.

QUEEN

Well, I'm not waiting that long.

She goes back to the poison and pours a glass.

CAPTAIN

Wait, wait....

QUEEN

Enjoy yourself. I'm done here. Don't change my outfit.

The CAPTAIN grabs her glass.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty, you want to die? You want to die right now? Really?

QUEEN

Give me back my glass.

The CAPTAIN does so.

You have something else on your mind; I'll let you work it out.

She raises her glass:

I don't think we need another goodbye.

She begins to drink.

CAPTAIN

What's that?!

QUEEN

What's what?

CAPTAIN

In your drink!

*In the QUEEN's drink, probably put there by the CAPTAIN,
is a very large, dead scarab.*

It's a big bug!

QUEEN

Ewww!

CAPTAIN

Well, nobody will want to drink that poison now.

QUEEN

Ewww, get it away!

She throws her glass across the room. The CAPTAIN runs over and stomps the ground where the scarab landed.

CAPTAIN

Pest control. I guess that's a type of security.

QUEEN

That was the last of the poison.

CAPTAIN

Was it? What a shame; and you were really looking forward to it.

QUEEN

Give me your dagger.

CAPTAIN

No....

QUEEN

Royal request. Dagger. Now.

CAPTAIN

You don't want to do that. You'll get bloody! And that's a pretty dress.

QUEEN

I have wasted far too much time as it is. Far too much time living. Give me something I can kill myself with!

A beat. The CAPTAIN unsheathes a dagger, holding it. He looks at her.

CAPTAIN

I don't think I'm going to do this. The poison, the bug. I think this is a sign.

QUEEN

A sign? That I shouldn't kill myself?

CAPTAIN

I think so.

QUEEN

So I tell you I don't believe in the gods and now you tell me to trust fate?

CAPTAIN

No, you don't have to believe it, but it has to make you think...something.

QUEEN

OK. I'm thinking something.

CAPTAIN

Good.

QUEEN

Fate is telling me to live. "Don't take that dagger. Go enjoy a long, natural life." Well, fate, there's a slight problem. My natural life isn't long anyway.

CAPTAIN

How so?

QUEEN

You think yours is? We're in a grave! Buried alive! So spill the poison, deny me the weapons, and we'll just starve to death anyway.

CAPTAIN

No, we've got food.

QUEEN

We've got bodies. That's disgusting.

CAPTAIN

We're not eating my boys. There's a garden.

QUEEN

There's not.

CAPTAIN

There is! Over in the other room. There's sunlight, fresh soil, everything!

QUEEN

A garden with food?

CAPTAIN

Enough for a regiment of men for a few weeks. With two it'll last a long time. We even have a stream off of the canal. Running water!

QUEEN

Why would my husband want indoor plumbing in his tomb?

CAPTAIN

It's life! It's something from nature; it keeps things going.

QUEEN

Where nobody's going anywhere.

CAPTAIN

I'll tell you what. We'll make this a trial period. We'll give living our best shot for a while, say....

A glance towards the door:

At least four days. But probably more like six. Six days of gardening, enjoying some solitude. And if that doesn't suit you then go ahead, hack yourself to bits.

QUEEN

This is your plan?

CAPTAIN

No, wait; today counts as a day. Five days.

QUEEN

I don't see the point.

CAPTAIN

Wait long enough and you will.

QUEEN

We're not going anywhere. I'm not going to decide after a few days that I like living in a grave. What's going to change?

CAPTAIN

Oh, you might be surprised.

QUEEN

Why five days? Why not a year? Why not a thousand?

CAPTAIN

I want to prove a point. Please just say yes.

QUEEN

I'll give you the five days.

CAPTAIN

Great!

QUEEN

But I still think this is a waste of time.

CAPTAIN

First thing's first; let's get our boys to work.

QUEEN

Working for my husband?

CAPTAIN

You got it. Grab a body.

She gives him a look.

You want to keep busy, your Majesty, there isn't a whole lot else to do.

QUEEN

You're right.

They both grab bodies—perhaps the CAPTAIN grabs two—and drag them offstage, clearing the room of corpses. After a moment they both return, exhausted.

CAPTAIN

Breathless:

Now we fall down.

QUEEN

Also breathless:

Yes.

They do. End of scene. The next scene starts immediately afterward, the change in time indicated by little more than a change in lighting. The torches dim and a small sliver of natural light peeks in. The CAPTAIN stirs.

CAPTAIN

Well. It's one day later.

He stands and looks at the QUEEN. He frowns, kneels in front of her, and holds his hand under her nose.

Hmmm....

He holds his hand to her chest.

Anything? Anything?

He pinches her nose. Finally the QUEEN gasps and wakes.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Oh; thank goodness.

QUEEN

What?!

Orienting herself:

Good morning.

CAPTAIN

Good morning! I was worried about you. You know, you're not a very heavy breather.

QUEEN

I should be sorry?

CAPTAIN

And your heart doesn't beat much, either.

QUEEN

Adjusting her dress:

That I'm aware of.

CAPTAIN

Sleep well?

QUEEN

Not deeply enough.

CAPTAIN

We'll adjust things; you shouldn't have to sleep on the floor.

QUEEN

I like the floor. I've gotten used to it.

CAPTAIN

I was worried we'd have a lot to get used to here, but it's not taking so long now, is it? We've got this room all cleaned up. It looks very nice.

QUEEN

We hardly need to care about appearances here.

CAPTAIN

I care. Besides, it's an accomplishment.

QUEEN

Yes; got to keep ourselves busy. Keep going and going and going.

CAPTAIN

What do you want for breakfast?

QUEEN

And that's how it starts.

CAPTAIN

Yes, breakfast. Many days start with it.

QUEEN

And then they keep going. Going until we get tired, fall asleep, and wake up again.

CAPTAIN

And eat more breakfast.

QUEEN

I'm not hungry.

CAPTAIN

You most certainly are. Your highness; you haven't eaten for half a day, at least.

QUEEN

Yes; it's a habit I've grown into.

CAPTAIN

You have to eat something.

QUEEN

Do I? Haven't you heard of prisoners going on hunger strikes?

CAPTAIN

You're not a prisoner. This isn't a prison; its a tomb.

QUEEN

Not when you live in it.

CAPTAIN

Have a pear, at least.

QUEEN

You have a pear tree?

CAPTAIN

A tiny pear tree. It grows tiny pears. I wouldn't want to upset your royal diet.

QUEEN

I'll decline.

CAPTAIN

Do you want to inspect the merchandise first? Come with me; you haven't even really looked at the garden.

QUEEN

I don't feel like getting up, either.

CAPTAIN

Shall I bring the garden to you?

QUEEN

It's comfortable here.

CAPTAIN

Against the stone.

QUEEN

Getting up will do nothing for me. Eating? I'm not interested. You go ahead.

CAPTAIN

I'm not sure I should.

QUEEN

Well, I don't even feel like talking any more. So if you're hungry, you'd better take care of that.

CAPTAIN

I could never eat in peace if your well-being was in question, your highness.

QUEEN

It's not in question at all. I'm going to stop talking.

CAPTAIN

Then stop.

Beat.

Have you stopped?

No response.

Well, OK then. I'll be in the garden. Call if you need me.

He begins walking. An aside:

It's a violation of principles, but I think it would do you some good.

The CAPTAIN exits. True to her word, the QUEEN remains motionless, her eyes closed. The CAPTAIN calls from offstage:

Oh, these pears look good...! Tender to the touch. I think I'm going to have two! There's plenty.

The CAPTAIN reappears with a pear in each hand.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Look at this! Soft, delicious fruit from the garden. Every tomb should have one.

He cuts a piece from one of the pears. He eats it.

Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful.

The QUEEN does not respond. The CAPTAIN takes notice.

Is it too much? I'm pushing harder than I need to? I do that. I get carried away. But these pears; who wouldn't? I think you should have one.

He cuts another piece, crouching down close to her.

Not a whole one; just one piece. A little slice like this. That will convince you. You look like you need convincing. You see it? It looks good? Here comes the desert caravan....

He begins pushing the piece into her mouth. The QUEEN reacts, stands, and spits it out. She composes herself and glares at the CAPTAIN.

QUEEN

What are you doing?

CAPTAIN

I'm having breakfast; I guess you're not.

QUEEN

Stop treating me like an infant! I'm a grown woman. I deserve a little dignity.

CAPTAIN

You absolutely do, your highness. You also deserve nourishment.

QUEEN

On my own terms, thank you.

CAPTAIN

At least you're talking.

QUEEN

This was all a mistake.

CAPTAIN

We've got other meals.

QUEEN

I have no incentive to keep up my end of the bargain.

CAPTAIN

No?

QUEEN

To keep myself intact.

CAPTAIN

Is there anything I can do—?

QUEEN

Do nothing. Not doing. That's my preference. For the both of us.

CAPTAIN

I know that. I don't agree, but I'm aware of your wishes. I don't understand it, even, really. The mechanics of your body alone are enough to—I mean, you're hungry.

QUEEN

Am I?

CAPTAIN

You haven't eaten; you're hungry.

QUEEN

I haven't thought about it.

CAPTAIN

You have to! You have to think about it! Your gut tells you you're hungry.

QUEEN

How is that important to me?

CAPTAIN

Your body makes it important!

QUEEN

Royalty cannot be ruled by their appetites. They have to do the ruling. This tomb attests to that, all by itself. Our bodies die, however we are expected to ignore this and continue.

CAPTAIN

It's hard work.

QUEEN

It is.

CAPTAIN

Makes you hungry.

QUEEN

I will eat when I choose to. Not when my stomach growls. Not when you smother me, either.

CAPTAIN

You're an inspiration to me, your highness.

QUEEN

Please. I don't need reverence. From you it's insincere on top of being unnecessary.

CAPTAIN

I'm sorry I come across that way.

QUEEN

The things you say to me. Talk to the wall. Talk to the former door. Pretend it's me. You'll get the same response. In a few days it will be exactly the same.

CAPTAIN

Oh, don't talk like that.

QUEEN

I like talking like that. It gives me something to look forward to.

CAPTAIN

Of course, because after that you can't look back.

QUEEN

No regrets.

CAPTAIN

One way or another, that ends up being true; yes.

QUEEN

That's all I need to care about.

Beat. The QUEEN stands, satisfied.

CAPTAIN

So, does that mean more not-talking?

QUEEN

It means I will do exactly what I want to do.

Beat. The QUEEN looks around. After a moment she heads into the garden. She calls from offstage.

Should I take the pears from the top of the tree or the bottom?

CAPTAIN

Whichever are ripest.

The QUEEN returns, eating a pear.

QUEEN

You aren't concerned about sandstorms?

CAPTAIN

Hmmm?

QUEEN

Wind in general, really. Your sliver of sunlight. Where the air comes in. It's going to get covered. Sand is going to pile up.

CAPTAIN

It's rock up there.

QUEEN

There's sand around the rock. We're in the desert for a reason. It's good at burying things.

CAPTAIN

I think we'll be OK.

QUEEN

One good storm and we'll suffocate.

CAPTAIN

Then you win.

QUEEN

I don't think you chose a very good place not to kill yourself. Forget the air. That garden wouldn't feed all of your men for weeks on end.

CAPTAIN

It would get us far enough. And with two, even longer.

QUEEN

Wouldn't that be fun?

CAPTAIN

Are you done eating?

QUEEN

I'm going to make this pear last. I don't want to clean us out.

CAPTAIN

Your highness, I know you're living against your wishes. Thank you, though, for holding up your end of the bargain.

QUEEN

It is an unusual bargain, isn't it?

CAPTAIN

It has to be.

QUEEN

Was five days really your best guess? Because we'll last longer than that.

CAPTAIN

What?

QUEEN

Weather permitting.

CAPTAIN

You aren't making sense, your highness.

QUEEN

Staying here is not a sustainable way of life. We'll both die soon enough, whether from starvation or suffocation—whatever.

CAPTAIN

Oh, there are more options.

QUEEN

Like mine. Either way, you know this. You've talked endlessly about living here, so much so you must be prepared for when life runs out. And it's soon.

CAPTAIN

Not five days.

QUEEN

Maybe not for you.

CAPTAIN

Things will change.

QUEEN

My "perception" will. The sun will rise on the fifth day, I'll ignore our dead and dying surroundings, and I'll commit to living here into old age.

CAPTAIN

I'd like that change.

QUEEN

I don't know what that means for the man I came here for in the first place, though.

CAPTAIN

Oh, him.

QUEEN

There's a case to be made for his retirement plan, too.

CAPTAIN

Ah, there's something you can do. These walls are filled with the heroics of your husband. The majesty of his reign.

QUEEN

I know the stories.

CAPTAIN

Well, relive them. Check them for accuracy. Pick a wall and start reading.

QUEEN

If that's really the best you can offer.

CAPTAIN

Your husband has done so much; we had to make the tomb bigger just to fit it.

QUEEN

I suppose I could spend an hour or so before going back to...pear-eating. Or some other variety of tedium.

CAPTAIN

Good!

QUEEN

I think I'm going to start here.

CAPTAIN

That's not the beginning.

QUEEN

It's about where I came in.

CAPTAIN

Enjoy.

The QUEEN reads. After a moment the lights change. The CAPTAIN, now slumped over, speaks:

Well, it's five days later. Isn't that odd?

QUEEN

I lost my place.

CAPTAIN

Sorry.

QUEEN

What's odd?

CAPTAIN

Something should have happened by now.

QUEEN

Your expectations for this place are entirely too high.

CAPTAIN

Apparently.

QUEEN

So, five days? That means I can kill myself.

CAPTAIN

It's what I promised, isn't it?

QUEEN

Sounds right to me. I suppose you thought something would happen that would make me change my mind.

CAPTAIN

Well, yes. Some event that might make your decision for you.

QUEEN

I see your plan. I saw it the moment I got here.

CAPTAIN

What, you overheard me?

QUEEN

A few days ago, I didn't have a single duty left on Earth. Now, I'm under the Earth, and I've been planting seeds, arranging the burial room so it better suits the royal style, and reading my husband's accomplishments on the walls.

CAPTAIN

See? There you go. Even here there's always something to do.

QUEEN

But I've done all of it. Twice. You wanted me to settle into a routine; to get used to life where no one should be living. So far you haven't made much of a case for sticking around.

CAPTAIN

I'm trying.

QUEEN

You said to wait. You promised some sort of surprise. I'm not surprised.

CAPTAIN

Yes, well, I am. I thought—Well, if you want the truth....

Nothing.

QUEEN

I can wait. Whatever you want to tell me, just make it up.

CAPTAIN

I thought people would come in.

QUEEN

No one's coming in.

CAPTAIN

Obviously. Unless they've been delayed by bad weather...

QUEEN

It's a tomb. There's a big stone wall. You thought grave robbers would work that fast?

CAPTAIN

What?

QUEEN

You thought the tomb would be raided so soon? There are still a fair number of people up above.

CAPTAIN

Why?

QUEEN

The Priestess is building herself a place not so far away. There's still enough construction in the area to scare away any grave robbers.

CAPTAIN

Right.

QUEEN

And that's what you thought this was?

CAPTAIN

Grave robbers? No, no.

QUEEN

Nobody's taking anything out of this place?

CAPTAIN

Well, that's the thing. I thought there would be a legitimate break-in.

QUEEN

How does that work?

CAPTAIN

It's people who are looking for something very specific.

QUEEN

Oh? What do you have that's very specific in this place?

CAPTAIN

Well...it's you.

QUEEN

It is?

CAPTAIN

You're a missing queen! I thought they'd be sure to come looking for you.

QUEEN

A missing persons case?

CAPTAIN

Right! And that's why I said five days. The procedures we follow in the guard have us covering a lot of ground in just a few days. We definitely would have looked out here.

QUEEN

They must not have looked very hard.

CAPTAIN

I'm at just as much of a loss as you are.

QUEEN

Oh, I'm not lost at all. I'm not missing; I'm buried. I've ended up right where I said I'd be.

CAPTAIN

Wait, wait wait. You told people you were throwing yourself into your husband's tomb?

QUEEN

I didn't shout it from a tower or anything.

CAPTAIN

Right; you could have just thrown yourself over.

QUEEN

I made it clear, though, that my husband's fate was my own.

CAPTAIN

Right. And you made it clear to...more than just handmaidens, right? To members of the court...maybe the clergy...their relatives?

QUEEN

Everybody. No one cared.

CAPTAIN

Yikes.

QUEEN

Only the old Priestess said anything. She was the only one with any reaction at all. And the words she said.

CAPTAIN

What's that?

QUEEN

She listened to me—no interruptions—and when I was done, she smiled. She told me that getting swallowed up by the desert would be the best thing I could do for my husband. I was his bad luck charm. Alive, I'd ruin his legacy. She felt this would be the most discrete option.

CAPTAIN

The Priestess told you to do this?

QUEEN

I had already decided. She just thought I had a good idea.

CAPTAIN

Wait, but her son. I thought she wanted you two together. I thought she wanted to get closer to the throne.

QUEEN

You think a lot of things, don't you?

CAPTAIN

So...everyone wanted you here?

QUEEN

No one objected.

CAPTAIN

But you're the young, beautiful widow. You are a potential kingmaker.

QUEEN

They'll make their own kings. The Priestess knew the truth.

CAPTAIN

You're not a bad luck charm.

QUEEN

I'm hardly a priority though, aren't I? We're past five days and no one's come knocking. According to you, that's procedure.

CAPTAIN

Yes, that is what I said. It still might happen.

QUEEN

No, I can assure you no one with any royal authority will come here. Ever.

CAPTAIN

I guess I was wrong.

QUEEN

And I waited for nothing.

She exits.

CAPTAIN

Maybe it's only been four days. Maybe I miscounted; let's see, Day One was the bodies. Days Two was gardening. Day Three we spent touching up the paint....

He notices she is gone.

Your majesty?

QUEEN

From offstage:

Yes?

CAPTAIN

Where are you?

Clanging noises are heard.

What's going on?

The QUEEN returns.

QUEEN

Where are the weapons?

CAPTAIN

No.

QUEEN

That word doesn't mean anything to royalty. You should know that by now.

CAPTAIN

I'm not giving you a weapon.

QUEEN

I need something sharp.

CAPTAIN

Good luck finding it.

QUEEN

You still think you can treat me like a child. All your men had weapons. There isn't enough room down here for you to have hidden them all.

CAPTAIN

I didn't hide a thing.

QUEEN

You moved them to the top shelf; whatever infantile insult you—

CAPTAIN

I did no hiding, no child-proofing. You're an adult and I'll respect whatever decisions you make.

QUEEN

Wonderful.

CAPTAIN

That said, the knives are gone. So are the spears.

QUEEN

Softly, with a smile:

Where did they go?

CAPTAIN

Your majesty, I am a forward-thinking man of the kingdom. This tomb won't see any war. The corpses in the next room won't battle in any conflict. What good are their weapons?

QUEEN

What did you do?

CAPTAIN

Check the garden.

The QUEEN, still listening, exits to the garden.

That is where life in this place still exists. It's the perfect place for a new life for our old war devices. So I took action. I dulled the blades, flattened the tips, and turned our weapons of war into hoes and rakes.

The QUEEN reenters, holding a gardening tool.

QUEEN

What is this?

CAPTAIN

It used to be a knife. Now it's a trowel.

QUEEN

A trowel?

CAPTAIN

Tools of the trade, your majesty.

QUEEN

You still need something sharp.

CAPTAIN

I'm sure you think so.

QUEEN

I really don't believe your arrogance. You did this on purpose. The poison, the knives....

CAPTAIN

Oh, your highness, I would never—

QUEEN

That's why you had me wait. You wanted me to live.

CAPTAIN

I do want you to live.

QUEEN

Testing the trowel:

It's still a little sharp.

CAPTAIN

Death by trowel. It's your choice; I can't stop you.

QUEEN

I don't think I'll be killing myself with a trowel today.

CAPTAIN

Good. Dull and painful lacerations would take a while. And leave a mess.

QUEEN

You still have your knife.

CAPTAIN

Looking down:

Do I?

QUEEN

Give it to me.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty....

QUEEN

I'm surprised that you have it. According to you, we don't need them.

CAPTAIN

Well...I think we might need just one.

QUEEN

Really?

CAPTAIN

After all, there's more to cut here besides our own bodies.

QUEEN

I agree.

CAPTAIN

Underneath:

Or there will be....

QUEEN

Give it to me.

CAPTAIN

But your—

QUEEN

I've done everything you asked. Everything.

A beat. Reluctantly, the CAPTAIN hands his knife to the QUEEN.

Thank you.

CAPTAIN

Don't mention it.

QUEEN

I'll be in the garden.

She begins to exit.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty!

QUEEN

Turning:

Yes?

CAPTAIN

Are you sure you want to be alone?

QUEEN

I'm going into the garden.

CAPTAIN

You don't have to do this.

QUEEN

In fact I do. The peas aren't getting enough light. The other plants need to be cut back. That requires a knife.

CAPTAIN

The peas?

QUEEN

The trowel wouldn't quite do the job.

CAPTAIN

So you're not going to—

QUEEN

Right now I'm gardening. I'll worry about the rest later.

She exits.

CAPTAIN

Right, OK. Gardening.

Calling:

I'll need that knife back, though!

To himself:

If our guests are late, we'll definitely need it. Tomorrow—six days—maybe that'll be the day.

Lights change.

Well, it's 29 days later.

A beat. Then the CAPTAIN rushes the door, banging on it, kicking it—attacking it with everything in him. After a moment, he slumps against the door, exhausted.

Anybody hear that? Anybody want to break in? I've got your good luck charm! I've got your bad luck charm, too. It's very charming in here. The keys to the kingdom—no one wants them? You need a king out there! Inside, we're just collecting dust! Everything you need, just come in! Just change things. Give us something! Because I can't take this! Every day forever....

He begins banging his head against the door.

Ah! Ah! Ah!

He stops; it hurts.

Owww....

A beat. The CAPTAIN stands, but then holds his head and crumples back to the floor.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Ow....

The QUEEN enters. She looks at him.

I hit my head.

QUEEN

On purpose?

CAPTAIN

It seemed appropriate.

QUEEN

Walking to him:

Let me look at it.

CAPTAIN

No, it's just a—OK.

QUEEN

It's swollen.

She kisses the top of his head.

You'll be fine.

CAPTAIN

Puzzled:

Thank you.

QUEEN

Did I do that right? Sympathy?

CAPTAIN

You did fine.

QUEEN

I see mothers; they know what to do with bumps and scrapes. I don't have any children. I don't know much about caring.

CAPTAIN

You need children to care?

QUEEN

With husbands it's not such a priority.

CAPTAIN

Thoughtful:

Hmmm.

QUEEN

Tell me about your child.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty?

QUEEN

How old? Boy or girl?

CAPTAIN

You can tell? I scream "father figure" to you?

QUEEN

How many children?

CAPTAIN

I have a son. Just one.

QUEEN

He's with your wife.

CAPTAIN

He's with his mother.

QUEEN

Oh.

A beat.

I'm sorry; I'm—I shouldn't be prying—

CAPTAIN

No.

QUEEN

—This is obviously very personal.

CAPTAIN

It's OK. I could be on either side of this wall. Anywhere, any time. I'd still be the same distance from my son.

A weak laugh.

You know, your husband—he didn't want to break tradition. People who go into tombs in this country—they're dead. Their bodies have been prepared for the trip. Walling people in—live people—that's almost human sacrifice. Something you'd expect from the Persian kings, not ours. I was the one to suggest it. What difference would it make to me?

QUEEN

You didn't know it would be this way.

CAPTAIN

No, no; I did. But I wouldn't admit it.

QUEEN

That's OK.

Beat.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty? I'm sorry.

QUEEN

Don't be. I got what I wanted.

CAPTAIN

No you didn't.

QUEEN

I'm with my husband.

CAPTAIN

No; you wanted to be dead with your husband.

QUEEN

I'm close enough for now.

CAPTAIN

That's encouraging.

QUEEN

We've been here so long you've rubbed off on me. You wouldn't have just bruised and beaten yourself if either of us followed my advice.

CAPTAIN

You were going to injure yourself. I just accomplished that.

QUEEN

I never wanted to hurt myself. Just kill myself.

CAPTAIN

And now you've had a change of heart?

QUEEN

A postponement. Just as we started out.

CAPTAIN

You can stop petting.

QUEEN

Sorry.

She stands, no longer caressing his head.

I don't think I had a change of anything, really. I was right when I told you nothing changes here. The plants grow taller. The sun is still out there somewhere. That's all the change we get.

She turns to leave.

But what's different every day is how we feel about that. How do you feel?

CAPTAIN

I feel bruised about that.

QUEEN

You'll heal.

CAPTAIN

I don't doubt it.

QUEEN

Rest up. Don't try anything like that for a while.

CAPTAIN

Yes, mom.

QUEEN

That joke has just about run its course.

CAPTAIN

How you feel about motherhood: different already.

QUEEN

Rest up.

CAPTAIN

I will.

The QUEEN exits. Lights change.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

Well, it's one-hundred and seventy-five days later.

The CAPTAIN stands, a makeshift chisel and hammer in hand. He holds the chisel against the door. With one strong swoop, he hammers the chisel into the slab. The chisel crumbles into dust. After a moment, his hammer falls apart as well. Lights change.

Well, it's two-hundred and...something days later.

QUEEN

From offstage:

What?

CAPTAIN

More than that, actually—two-hundred and three-hundred days later. I have it written down somewhere; I could do the math. If you want me to.

QUEEN

I'm fine.

CAPTAIN

You're in a rush this morning.

QUEEN

Am I?

CAPTAIN

Are we flooding again?

QUEEN

No, no; it's something interesting.

CAPTAIN

Interesting?

QUEEN

If I can find it....

CAPTAIN

Take your time.

The QUEEN returns with a self-scrawled piece of paper.

QUEEN

I wrote this down the other night.

CAPTAIN

Autobiography?

QUEEN

My husband's words. Not anything from the walls. We've both read of his rout of the unbelievers, the peace he won at the—

CAPTAIN

Overlapping:

Yes, of course.

QUEEN

He had an incredible string of luck.

CAPTAIN

I can believe it.

QUEEN

All of this on display. But I never looked at the coffin. I sit with him every day. I talk. But I never bothered to read the words surrounding him there.

CAPTAIN

You talk to him?

QUEEN

Yes.

CAPTAIN

Still?

No answer.

What's there left to say?

QUEEN

Have you read my husband's words?

CAPTAIN

I must have seen them at one point. But it's been a while.

QUEEN

Read this.

She gives him the paper. The CAPTAIN reads silently. He then looks at the QUEEN and shrugs.

CAPTAIN

Geez, tell everybody, why don't you?

QUEEN

That's your response?

CAPTAIN

The guy's got confidence; I can tell you that much.

QUEEN

The message makes sense to you?

CAPTAIN

More or less.

QUEEN

I'm unsettled by it.

CAPTAIN

Don't be.

QUEEN

It's strange. "With me for all time is that which makes me the true king of Egypt." What's here?

CAPTAIN

Royal essence. Royal "oomph".

QUEEN

He was a proud man. Not that proud.

CAPTAIN

You know how it is. This was a confidence thing, to let his soldiers know they were on the right track.

QUEEN

You really think his message was for dead soldiers?

CAPTAIN

Of course.

QUEEN

Did they ever read it?

CAPTAIN

Who can say?

QUEEN

You had their bodies out here, not with him.

CAPTAIN

Location is everything, huh?

QUEEN

It still isn't "that" though. It's as if he was talking about something.

CAPTAIN

Or someone? His lovely bride?

QUEEN

Don't say that!

CAPTAIN

Sorry.

QUEEN

It's an incredibly stupid answer.

CAPTAIN

Of course. Stupid, but increasingly true.

QUEEN

"For all time."

CAPTAIN

It's what the man said.

QUEEN

A wave of dismissal:

No, no. Nevermind, forget it—

CAPTAIN

No....

QUEEN

—I'm being stupid; I'm sorry.

CAPTAIN

Never.

QUEEN

Because I'm not reading it like a statement of fact. The tone of it makes it read more like a curse.

CAPTAIN

A curse?

QUEEN

Oh, see? No, no; I know I'm wrong.

CAPTAIN

No, that's fine. A curse. I haven't heard that one before.

QUEEN

Is that even done for tombs? Some sort of incantation, something to keep people away?

CAPTAIN

No, there's nothing like that. There's no such thing as a curse.

QUEEN

See? I'm so embarrassed.

CAPTAIN

No, don't be. We also don't put living soldiers in tombs—but this time we did. That's creepy enough.

QUEEN

I still shouldn't have said anything.

CAPTAIN

How is that a curse, anyway?

QUEEN

The inscription?

CAPTAIN

"The true king of Egypt". That's a job description.

QUEEN

It was the words "With me for all time." In my mind, it was as if he was telling us we'd be here forever.

CAPTAIN

He might be right.

QUEEN

Not only that, but as if he was the one keeping us here. Forever.

CAPTAIN

Oh.

QUEEN

But I'm wrong. So that's OK.

CAPTAIN

Yeah, who needs a curse when you've got a heavy stone slab to do the same thing?

QUEEN

Right.

CAPTAIN

In fact, we could go further. What do you say we make this place a little more forbidding, a little more dangerous? Some spikes on the ceiling, booby-trapped coffin?

QUEEN

You're making fun of me.

CAPTAIN

Would I ever do that, your majesty? I only want to demonstrate that we can do just fine without curses, enchantments, or the supernatural. Forget curses; he wouldn't do that to you.

QUEEN

I would never have thought so.

CAPTAIN

How are the two of you right now, anyway?

QUEEN

The King and I?

CAPTAIN

You and the old man, yeah. You talk to him.

QUEEN

With him. Every day.

CAPTAIN

I can't imagine there's been much that's new to talk about. For either of you.

QUEEN

People said the same thing about us when he was alive.

CAPTAIN

But it wasn't true then and it isn't now.

QUEEN

There's less that's new here, but yes, we still talk.

CAPTAIN

That's good.

QUEEN

It is good.

CAPTAIN

And after all this time he can still surprise you. Still give you a jolt.

QUEEN

Sometimes I misunderstand him.

CAPTAIN

You know something? You and the King have been together longer in this tomb than you were during his lifetime.

QUEEN

No.

The CAPTAIN shrugs:

QUEEN (cont.)

I don't think that's right.

CAPTAIN

I'd need to do the math, like I said. But I'm pretty sure. Not only that, but the two of you have been a lot cozier in here than you ever were in the royal court. In those times when you were there together.

QUEEN

I don't like these insinuations. I explained this months ago.

CAPTAIN

No, your majesty, you never explained anything. I just stopped asking.

QUEEN

And now you're starting again.

CAPTAIN

I didn't want to. It's none of my business. But I won't pretend I understand. You and your husband were hardly a close couple. I was by his side for years. I don't think you spent five consecutive days together. Yet you come here ready to die with him. Those are two opposite ends of the same relationship.

QUEEN

And you seem so curious about it all of a sudden.

CAPTAIN

Throwing yourself into a tomb—why ever you did it—always seemed to me to be more about guilt than about love.

The QUEEN rolls her eyes.

Humor me; it's only a theory. You and the King were never close before, so this was your last chance to make up for that. And you did. For a long, long time. In fact, your penance has lasted longer than any crime of neglect you could have committed. Aren't you done?

QUEEN

I don't follow.

CAPTAIN

You should. I'm telling you you're free. Your sentence is up; you don't owe him anything. I don't think you ever did.

QUEEN

Listen to you....

CAPTAIN

It's what I'm asking; yes.

QUEEN

I'll humor you. My bondage to the King is over.

CAPTAIN

You're free!

QUEEN

Right! Tell that to the wall.

CAPTAIN

Come on; you know what I mean.

QUEEN

I know what you mean. But your verdict doesn't matter. This is still a life sentence.

CAPTAIN

At first you wanted a death sentence.

QUEEN

Or maybe it isn't a sentence at all. Or bondage. Or anything to do with guilt. Maybe it's love.

The CAPTAIN laughs.

CAPTAIN

No.

QUEEN

Suit yourself.

CAPTAIN

No; I've never seen a love that would make you do what you did.

QUEEN

I guess you haven't.

CAPTAIN

I've never seen a love that would explain what you did a few minutes ago! You thought your husband put a curse on you! What kind of a love is that?

QUEEN

I never asked you to understand it.

CAPTAIN

I don't think you do, either. Why else would the inscription get to you like this? Did you ever ask him, during your many talks, what makes him the "true king of Egypt"?

QUEEN

Please.

CAPTAIN

Question and answer; that's conversation. The way you talk about it I figure he'd be more than happy to give you an explanation.

QUEEN

My husband is a corpse. Conversation with him means a lot to me, but when it comes to a response my expectations are realistic.

CAPTAIN

Sounds romantic.

QUEEN

It is.

CAPTAIN

Still, to read what he wrote as a curse, that's not a sign of a healthy relationship.

QUEEN

It's a side to him I've never seen.

CAPTAIN

A clairvoyant side, if you're "that which makes me".

QUEEN

I'm not. I can't be.

CAPTAIN

...Go on....

QUEEN

I am not capable of making my husband the true king of Egypt.... I really, honestly hope that I'm not meant to be.

CAPTAIN

The curse of unattainable career goals.

QUEEN

He wanted more from me. I don't have any great lineage. I haven't given him an heir. From the way you talk, you make it sound as though I lost his kingdom.

CAPTAIN

That's succession; what can you do?

QUEEN

Something. I could have been a head of state. Instead I distanced myself from the court and wound up here. I did nothing for his legacy, nothing to live up to his words. So to read that—read about my permanent failure—that’s a curse.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty—

QUEEN

“Your accursed majesty”—let’s get that right.

CAPTAIN

You’re not cursed.

QUEEN

I believed in love. Our love was enough, and it was eternal, and it.... It doesn’t get you a kingdom.

CAPTAIN

You’re not cursed.

QUEEN

I couldn’t give him what he wanted.

CAPTAIN

He wasn’t talking about you. I know that. I can prove it.

A beat.

QUEEN

But he loved me.

CAPTAIN

Let me show you something.

The CAPTAIN brushes his hand against the wall until he identifies a particular stone. He wiggles it loose from the wall, revealing a hollow space behind it. From the hole he retrieves a small cloth. He unrolls it.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

The Cloak of Horus!

In tatters, the Cloak of Horus is not much bigger than a washcloth. It is weathered, dirty, and indistinguishable from any other ragged cloth.

QUEEN

I thought Horus was taller.

CAPTAIN

Horus wore this when he and Set—

The QUEEN rolls her eyes.

—You know what? Forget it. This is a relic from the gods. They don't exist. What makes it important is that it is the sole property of the true king of Egypt. It brings good fortune to those who rule—you can't rule without it. And it's staying here. For all time.

QUEEN

It's a rag.

CAPTAIN

All the same, it's a relic. My men and I sealed ourselves in to protect it. We were quite sure that there would be a break-in by pretenders to the throne.

QUEEN

If someone wanted to be the true king of Egypt, they could get their own rag; call it whatever they needed.

CAPTAIN

No, you see, the real Cloak of Horus has a faded gold fringe, along with a pattern—

QUEEN

It doesn't matter.

CAPTAIN

No; if you look closely—

QUEEN

No one is looking closely. It's hard to fight for the throne, but it's easy to forge the details.

CAPTAIN

You think we sealed ourselves in for nothing?

QUEEN

Don't be ashamed. I did the same thing.

CAPTAIN

Rolling up the cloak and returning it:

I think so.

QUEEN

You're putting it back.

CAPTAIN

Yes.

QUEEN

Hiding it? From invaders?

CAPTAIN

Replacing the rock:

You can never be too careful.

QUEEN

Obviously.

CAPTAIN

Still, you have a point. During our time in this tomb, the importance of the Cloak of Horus has been...lessened in our society.

QUEEN

They're content to rule without luck.

CAPTAIN

Or, as you said, they'll use counterfeit luck. But I believe in the Cloak of Horus. What's more, your husband believed. Enough to inscribe it on his coffin.

QUEEN

I see.

CAPTAIN

You're not inadequate; he didn't want you to make him an eternal king. He wasn't thinking about you at all.

QUEEN

That's meant to make me feel better, I suppose.

CAPTAIN

No; your majesty, I'm through flattering you, smoothing things over—you deserve the truth. I can't tell you when the King was thinking about you, but I can tell you when he wasn't. And you didn't factor into his burial plans at all.

QUEEN

You're right; this isn't flattery.

CAPTAIN

You say he loved you—I'll take your word for it. Believe me, though: he loved this tattered fabric just as much.

QUEEN

I can see you're the same way.

CAPTAIN

Not at all. The Cloak's a job. Everything I do for you is out of love.

QUEEN

Laughs:

Love?

CAPTAIN

Don't deny it, highness—we're soulmates.

QUEEN

We're victims of circumstance. You and my husband concocted a scheme based around that loincloth.

CAPTAIN

I don't take orders from a corpse, your majesty. I don't live this way for your husband's sake. I love you.

QUEEN

Neutral:

Thank you.

CAPTAIN

Approaching:

I mean that. As much as I can mean that. I love you.

QUEEN

Yes...thank you.

She stares at him.

You are serious, aren't you?

CAPTAIN

The only thing that's kept us going this long is love. I mean everything.

QUEEN

Excuse me....

She exits.

CAPTAIN

Following her offstage:

It's true! If it's not what you feel, fine. But I had to say it.

Beat.

So I'm going back into the other room now. Honest. You don't have to hide.

He returns.

This is how I feel. You're the only one I can love and make it mean something.

The QUEEN returns, unreadable.

QUEEN

If we had run off together to an estate on some island and spent the same amount of time we have here, we'd probably be a common law couple by now. Married in every way that matters. But this isn't an island. Two people alone in a grave aren't making a life together.

CAPTAIN

I see.

QUEEN

That's the way I feel about it, anyway.

CAPTAIN

Convenient.

QUEEN

What?

CAPTAIN

It doesn't take a whole lot of feeling to feel that way.

QUEEN

I have what I have because of you. Thank you. If you want me to be honest about my feelings. About love. I can only tell you: I don't know. Do I love you? I don't know.

CAPTAIN

I'd like you to think about it. I'd like you to decide whether you do at some point.

QUEEN

Is there a way I can decide? I don't think there is.

CAPTAIN

Let's try.

The CAPTAIN takes the QUEEN into an embrace and kisses her. They hold this position for a moment, then separate. They look at each other.

QUEEN

Well.

CAPTAIN

Well?

QUEEN

I should probably slap you.

They break apart. She doesn't slap him. Instead, she exits. The CAPTAIN watches her go. The lights change to night.

CAPTAIN

To himself:

Well it's one hundred million fagillion zillion days later.

He crosses to the side of the stage and retrieves a heavy stone.

CAPTAIN (cont.)

The Queen won't speak to me. She won't even look at me. It's worse than being alone.

He places the stone onto a pedestal that has a rope lying across it.

It's time. It's long past time.

He ties the stone with the rope, making a lasso with the other end.

Time to leave.

He takes the lasso and throws it around a fixture on a pillar. The lasso secure, he begins tightening the rope.

So, I tighten this, then give the rock a push. The pillar comes down and cracks through the slab. I don't know why I never thought of this sooner.

He steps back and surveys his machine.

OK. Bon voyage.

He moves to the pedestal and starts to push the rock. As he touches it, though, a loud scraping is heard offstage. The CAPTAIN stops. Again, the sound of stone on stone echoes. The scraping starts a third time and the King's stone tomb appears. The CAPTAIN watches as the tomb moves again. Once the entire coffin appears the QUEEN can be seen pushing it in. As she continues to move it center stage, the CAPTAIN walks around her, observing her work. Satisfied, the QUEEN stops.

Redecorating?

The QUEEN looks at him.

QUEEN

What are you doing up?

CAPTAIN

Couldn't sleep.

QUEEN

I'm sorry.

CAPTAIN

Don't be. It's nice enough to see you back in this room.

QUEEN

I've been busy.

CAPTAIN

The garden doesn't need that much tending. Neither does he.

QUEEN

What's the rope for?

CAPTAIN

That's my mechanical prowess at work, your majesty. I'm getting us out of here.

QUEEN

How?

CAPTAIN

I'm crashing that pillar into the slab.

QUEEN

That's not going to do it.

CAPTAIN

Really?

QUEEN

Really.

CAPTAIN

Why not?

QUEEN

The rope is going to pull it towards the pedestal, not the door.

CAPTAIN

But the way I have the rope, it should—

QUEEN

It will fall somewhere in between. If the pillar even goes anywhere at all; you might just bring down that dog face.

CAPTAIN

That's not supposed to be a dog, it's just a monumental—oh, wait, it is a dog. It's not a very good one.

QUEEN

It's artistic license.

CAPTAIN

How long have we been here and I never knew that was a dog? Well, your majesty, that's my new project. Freedom. What's yours?

QUEEN

Like you said, redecorating. Sort of. I shouldn't say my husband is furniture; that's wrong. So it's not redecorating.

Beat.

I wanted to come back in here. In the main room. We haven't spoken for far too long.

CAPTAIN

I don't know why you need the King here for that. Well, I do. I have a guess.

QUEEN

This is the main room.

CAPTAIN

Yes.

QUEEN

I want him in the main room.

CAPTAIN

Did you discuss this with him first? That's what you do.

QUEEN

It is what I do.

CAPTAIN

And?

QUEEN

He had no objections.

CAPTAIN

Clever. Why do this in the middle of the night?

QUEEN

Oh, really, I'm sorry I woke you. This is just something—I wanted to do it myself. If I did it tomorrow you would have jumped up, grabbed the other end, and...well, I didn't want you to have to do that.

CAPTAIN

But I wasn't asleep.

QUEEN

I didn't know yet.

CAPTAIN

And I didn't help. Is that the place you want him, though? If not I'll lend a hand.

QUEEN

Thank you, no.

CAPTAIN

To the King:

Welcome home, boss.

To the QUEEN:

You didn't wake him.

QUEEN

I don't need to.

CAPTAIN

Good for you.

He returns to his lever, making adjustments.

We've had some time apart, the two of us. I guess that's not a bad thing. We needed space, and that's hard to come by in our neck of the woods.

QUEEN

You don't have to say "we."

CAPTAIN

I don't?

QUEEN

I needed space. You can say that.

CAPTAIN

I did, your majesty. The royal "we."

He regards the rope.

How's that?

QUEEN

Now the pillar will just fall down.

CAPTAIN

Well, that's more than the dog face.

QUEEN

Why are we leaving again?

CAPTAIN

Because I thought of it. A method of escape came to mind and I feel I should try it.

QUEEN

But why think about it? Why even hope to escape?

CAPTAIN

Shrugs:

Something new.

QUEEN

You're still mad at me.

CAPTAIN

Oh, never.

QUEEN

Or not mad, but.... I made things different. I got upset.

CAPTAIN

Perfectly understandable.

QUEEN

I made it so you didn't want to stay. That's obvious. And I'm sorry.

CAPTAIN

Don't apologize, your highness. I overstepped my boundaries. And I've overstayed my welcome.

QUEEN

But I'm here now. We're talking—the way we used to talk. You don't need to leave.

CAPTAIN

Oh, that's not true.

QUEEN

It is!

CAPTAIN

Things are not back to normal in the tomb. We spent an eternity together, then an eternity avoiding each other. This is our first extended conversation in what feels like decades and you've brought your husband to chaperone. That's normal?

QUEEN

He's not a chaperone.

CAPTAIN

We have the King between us, your majesty, in every sense of the word. I'm leaving; you're welcome to do the same.

QUEEN

I have less of a reason to leave than you do.

CAPTAIN

And one big, heavy, motionless reason to stay.

QUEEN

Do you still love me?

CAPTAIN

Love requires a little understanding. I'm not so sure I understand you anymore. But my feelings haven't changed. I called that love once.

QUEEN

My feelings haven't changed, either. But then I was hiding from them. I want you here.

CAPTAIN

Approaching her:

How do you mean that?

The QUEEN kisses him. They break apart. The CAPTAIN kisses back.

Your majesty....

QUEEN

Shhh....

CAPTAIN

Are you sure?

QUEEN

I'm sure.

CAPTAIN

In front of your husband?

QUEEN

What's he going to do?

An enormous thud sounds. They stop. Another thud. They look at the coffin.

CAPTAIN

We've been cursed!

More thudding.

QUEEN

It's not coming from the coffin.

CAPTAIN

It doesn't matter; I knew this would be wrong.

QUEEN

Excuse me?

CAPTAIN

No offense, your majesty, but you're not worth the wrath of the undead.

The thudding stops.

Oh.

He waits. Nothing.

Well, that's better. Where were we?

The CAPTAIN attempts to put his arm around the QUEEN; she resists. Suddenly a huge explosion blows through the front slab. The QUEEN and CAPTAIN take cover. The explosion dies down and the dust begins to clear. Through the dust appears a figure. He is a modern-day EXPLORER, dressed as expected in khaki shorts and safari helmet. He looks around the room, then notices the QUEEN and CAPTAIN.

EXPLORER

Oh, ho ho...this is a find....

Blackout. End of Act I.

Act II

The second act begins a few minutes after the first. The EXPLORER stands alone onstage, surveying the surroundings. He approaches the rope and gives it a twang. The QUEEN enters with a bowl.

QUEEN

I'm sorry. I thought we had more.

EXPLORER

I'm sure it's wonderful....

He approaches the bowl and looks in.

Pear salad.

QUEEN

Serving him:

It's something; it's all right. They don't grow very large down here.

EXPLORER

Eating:

It's heavenly, really. Absolutely perfect. I've been living on nuts and candies for weeks. The food here in Egypt, it's not for me. There's nothing like this left in the country.

QUEEN

Well, thank you. And I'm sorry about...all of this all over the place. We're usually much cleaner.

EXPLORER

Please, I'm no one to apologize to about cleanliness. This is immaculate. Every sight in this room....

He returns his bowl to the QUEEN. Their eyes meet.

...Breathtaking.

QUEEN

You don't recognize me, do you?

EXPLORER

Should I?

QUEEN

No.

Beat.

For too much of my life, people did recognize me. Wherever I'd go. They might not have known me, but they knew who I was. What I found, from experience, is that the only way to not be recognized is to not be seen.

EXPLORER

The media. Jackals, aren't they?

QUEEN

And from what you're telling me, I'm right. Wait long enough and you can pass from memory.

EXPLORER

It's too late. I don't imagine I'll forget you.

QUEEN

You don't have to forget. Just don't genuflect.

EXPLORER

I promise nothing.

He walks around.

So, you and the Captain, enjoying an extended retreat.

QUEEN

Yes.

EXPLORER

Nice place for it.

QUEEN

It's suited us.

EXPLORER

I can see. Now, I hate to ask this; I can usually tell these things: you and the Captain...is there anything...?

QUEEN

Oh, oh no. The captain is head of the royal guard. He worked for my—

Beat.

You really don't recognize me.

EXPLORER

To my eternal regret.

QUEEN

Smiles:

I'm a widow.

EXPLORER

My condolences.

QUEEN

No, you don't need to say that. It was a long time ago.

EXPLORER

Was he anybody I know?

QUEEN

Maybe not.

EXPLORER

I have a guess....

The EXPLORER taps on the coffin.

QUEEN

Yes.

The EXPLORER genuflects. The QUEEN looks away.

EXPLORER

Your majesty.

QUEEN

Light protest:

Oh, please don't....

EXPLORER

Getting up:

You don't need to worry. You're not my queen. I'm not Egyptian. I kneel to be polite.

QUEEN

Feel free to be impolite.

The CAPTAIN appears, entering from the blasted door.

EXPLORER

The hero returns!

CAPTAIN

To the QUEEN:

I thought you were coming.

QUEEN

I was making dinner.

CAPTAIN

You have to see the sky. You have not seen the sky in an eternity. The stars—there isn't a cloud up there tonight. You can see everything in the heavens.

QUEEN

I'll see it.

CAPTAIN

Come up here.

QUEEN

We have a guest.

EXPLORER

Oh, pay no attention to me. Believe me, you've made me feel more than welcome. Do something for yourself.

Looks around:

Just....

QUEEN

What?

EXPLORER

Is there a little Egyptian's room I can use?

QUEEN

Oh. We have a little place through the garden on the other side.

EXPLORER

Exiting:

Your majesty, I am in your debt.

CAPTAIN

Calling:

Remember, use the downstream side, not the upstream.

The EXPLORER gone, he turns to the QUEEN.

Ready?

QUEEN

Should I prepare for it?

CAPTAIN

Not at all. The world's exactly as we left it.

QUEEN

I can't believe that.

CAPTAIN

Well, the immediate area is. It was sand and sky then and it's sand and sky now. And I have to say, I don't know about our guest.

QUEEN

What about him?

CAPTAIN

You fed him. You talked to him. Did you get his name? His line of work? Why he's in the neighborhood?

QUEEN

No.

CAPTAIN

But I bet he asked a lot about what's been happening in here.

No response.

Once we go outside, you'll see what he brought along. He has this huge metal cart, filled with all these tools. There's a sledgehammer right by the door, along with what seems like explosives. He's not here by accident.

QUEEN

I didn't think he was.

CAPTAIN

And he walked in, he didn't expect to find us here. This isn't a rescue.

QUEEN

You think he's a grave robber.

CAPTAIN

A little behind schedule, but yes! We can't discount that very real and frightening possibility.

QUEEN

Didn't your original plan call for the element of surprise? We didn't hide.

CAPTAIN

I am worried about that, yes. He comes looking for an empty tomb. He finds two people. I'm worried he might want to make this an empty tomb.

QUEEN

Unconvinced:

Watch your back.

CAPTAIN

Exactly.

The EXPLORER returns, drying his hands on his pants.

EXPLORER

So, it's Indian-style in the bathroom, is it? No paper; I had to make sure.... Well, don't worry. I washed. Washed well. You two have been living here.

QUEEN

Yes.

EXPLORER

I didn't believe it, but the things you have done here. Impressive.

CAPTAIN

Yes, well, I found it impressive that you came out all this way. In the middle of the night; you must be tired. We can make up a bed.

EXPLORER

No. Sleep? Don't kid me. I've seen nothing like this anywhere. You know, I've visited the neighbors. Other tombs. They don't have anything like this.

CAPTAIN

Other tombs?

EXPLORER

Believe me, you're not missing much.

CAPTAIN

These tombs aren't places to make calls. They're for death and rebirth. But mostly death.

EXPLORER

Absolutely.

CAPTAIN

You're supposed to leave them alone.

EXPLORER

I understand. This is tradition. This is something very serious. I don't do this lightly. But the visits I make are in service to history!

QUEEN

We are history.

EXPLORER

Sadly, yes.

QUEEN

To the CAPTAIN:

You knew that. You could tell, right?

EXPLORER

The Egypt of tombs and pharaohs has past by. All that's left of it is buried in these sands. I'm an archaeologist. You can see my interest in this.

CAPTAIN

Archaeology? You sure know how to make a guy feel old.

EXPLORER

Be proud. I hope to be excavated someday myself.

CAPTAIN

So, you freely confess to blowing down doors, rummaging around, and disturbing the dead?

EXPLORER

I must confess.

CAPTAIN

But it's OK, because it's all for science?

EXPLORER

Yes, you've got it.

CAPTAIN

I'm sure I do. You know, you have royalty here.

EXPLORER

I am aware.

CAPTAIN

This isn't the tomb of a commoner, or say, a high priestess; in here you have a king and queen and their royal guard. I'd hope your science could show a little discretion to that.

EXPLORER

Kid gloves, as always. I'm a gentle touch.

QUEEN

But you're not a scientist this time. Think of what you've done. You've rescued us.

EXPLORER

Have I?

QUEEN

We couldn't get out. You opened the door.

EXPLORER

Interesting...you've been here a while.

QUEEN

Yes.

EXPLORER

A long while.

CAPTAIN

Very long. But it's worked for us.

EXPLORER

I'm impressed.

CAPTAIN

I was telling the Queen, she should go up. See the stars. You've given them to us.

EXPLORER

Modestly:

Oh....

CAPTAIN

It's true.

QUEEN

How is it outside?

CAPTAIN

Balmy.

QUEEN

I think I'll take a look.

The CAPTAIN moves to take her arm.

EXPLORER

Interrupting:

Oh, no sir; please, allow me.

CAPTAIN

But—

QUEEN

To the EXPLORER:

Thank you.

He leads her off.

EXPLORER

To the CAPTAIN:

Nothing personal, Captain, but she should see the modern world with a man of the modern world.

They exit.

CAPTAIN

Calling after them:

It's the sky!

To himself:

The same sky....

He sighs. The CAPTAIN returns to his contraption. Visually, he follows the stone, the rope, the pedestal, and the pillar. Laughter from outside; he scowls. He scrutinizes the landing spot of the pillar, concluding that it will miss the doorway. He shrugs.

Deliberately:

Well, it's two hours later!

The torches dim for his benefit. A long moment passes before the EXPLORER enters, alone.

EXPLORER

She's asleep.

CAPTAIN

Alone under the stars. She's safe?

EXPLORER

There's no one around. Just us three.

CAPTAIN

I should be up there. I'm the royal guard.

EXPLORER

Good idea. You watch the Queen, and leave me alone with this guy.

The CAPTAIN looks at him. The EXPLORER laughs.

I know you don't trust me. Why should you? I'm completely alien. You and the Queen are a cozy couple, and here comes a man from another place and time to ruin it all.

CAPTAIN

I don't need your help to ruin my relationship with the Queen.

EXPLORER

Oh....

Laughs:

I won't pry.

CAPTAIN

Haven't you?

EXPLORER

I'm not here to ruin things. I promise. I'm here as a scientist. And this tomb is very scientific. I know you Egyptians like to keep fellows like him well-preserved, but I didn't think you did so well doing the same thing for yourselves.

CAPTAIN

Well, you're not sugar coating this. Obviously we're relics to you. A new regime has take the country and swept us out of memory.

EXPLORER

It's all true.

CAPTAIN

So what was it? A revolution? Foreign invaders? Plague?

EXPLORER

Laughs:

Oh, plagues! A little of all three, actually. Now Egypt is run by Arabs. Muslims. Nasty people. Intolerant. If they don't like something they blow it up. They blow up people, too. Blow up themselves.

CAPTAIN

Doesn't sound like much of a way to run a country.

EXPLORER

The Muslims here have calmed down a bit. They've let us back in to study antiquities, such as yourself. It's a good relationship.

CAPTAIN

You only blow open the front door.

EXPLORER

They'd do the whole tomb.

CAPTAIN

Right.

Beat.

Now, describe this for me, carefully. How will you go about "studying" the tomb?

EXPLORER

Amused:

No trust at all....

CAPTAIN

Absolutely none. In my time, people studied animals by seeing how many spears they could throw into them.

EXPLORER

Underneath:

Animal testing, a tragic necessity.

CAPTAIN

Overlapping:

We studied other cultures through what we could plunder from their burnt villages. So I would feel a whole lot better knowing that these objects of deep significance aren't going to be "studied" in the throne room of your king.

EXPLORER

The only King I recognize is buried in Memphis.

CAPTAIN

Memphis is a terrible place to put a tomb.

EXPLORER

Don't say that until you've taken the tour. Graceland; it's a velvet paradise.

CAPTAIN

One that you left intact when you left, I assume.

EXPLORER

You don't seem to understand who's in control here. It's not me, it's Muslims. Everything in Egypt belongs to them, and they'd just as soon sell what they can to the last brick and burn the rest, including you. My role is to prevent this. I am an impartial, outsider, scientific mediator, and what I tell the Muslims may prevent them from tearing this place apart. In this, I'm your best friend.

CAPTAIN

Is this meant to be encouraging? You've cut open your patient, doctor, but what organs are you removing? Not that you're a doctor.

EXPLORER

Of course I am. I have the student loans to prove it.

CAPTAIN

You say the new Egyptian government will just blow us all up.

EXPLORER

Barring my diplomatic help.

CAPTAIN

You intervene and what happens?

EXPLORER

A number of things. The Muslims will want some trinkets. Some museum pieces to pay lip service to the Grand Egyptian History they have nothing to do with.

CAPTAIN

This is for research?

EXPLORER

Laughs:

Oh, no. This is a permanent collection, I'm afraid. Don't worry; when it comes time to choose, you'll have maximum input.

CAPTAIN

I'd better.

EXPLORER

Now, of course my research team will be taking samples of their own. Many of them will return. Just a trip to the lab and back again. Others will also rotate, making appearances in history museums worldwide.

CAPTAIN

World tours? You're talking about years of time. That doesn't sound very temporary.

EXPLORER

Really? Well, you've waited this long.

CAPTAIN

How long is that, exactly?

The EXPLORER takes a beat, then laughs, ominously.

EXPLORER

You mean you haven't kept count?

CAPTAIN

We have. We don't like the number.

EXPLORER

Ha ha; I'll bet! You Egyptians were always good at math. Greeks were better. So were Arabs....

CAPTAIN

Still, you should take our situation into account. You have a Queen up those stairs, fast asleep and far out of her time. Think about her instead of rifling through her jewelry for your world tour.

EXPLORER

I am thinking of her, with every honest intention. You can be sure of that.

CAPTAIN

Then reassure me. Let me make the list.

EXPLORER

What list?

CAPTAIN

Anything you want from this tomb I write it down. You take what I say you can take and you return it on my say-so.

EXPLORER

God, now I need a library card to do my job.

CAPTAIN

As for the local powers that be, I don't see why you need to tell them anything.

EXPLORER

Because they get angry. Then things go boom.

CAPTAIN

I'd rather keep the Queen from going boom, and I think that's more likely if they never know. You're one man in the desert! Scientist or not, if you come out empty-handed, who's going to suspect otherwise?

EXPLORER

And the items on loan? You still giving them to me? That raises eyebrows.

CAPTAIN

You found them in another tomb. Something other scientists missed.

EXPLORER

And give another king the credit.

CAPTAIN

Somehow I doubt your people care much about which dead foreign king is which.

EXPLORER

Most can't name their MP.

CAPTAIN

I'll start right now—what items will convey the proud history of my Egyptian era?

Snaps fingers:

You're in luck. It's royal. Ah hah!

The CAPTAIN holds up a hairbrush.

EXPLORER

A hairbrush?

CAPTAIN

The Queen's hairbrush. A relic from the past used not so long ago. Not by the Queen—I used it to touch up some paint. I thought I had her permission, but, whatever the case, she doesn't want it back.

EXPLORER

A paintbrush.

CAPTAIN

I cleaned it off.

EXPLORER

No statuettes?

Gesturing above:

No monkey heads?

CAPTAIN

That's a dog.

EXPLORER

My mistake.

CAPTAIN

I blame the artist.

EXPLORER

Captain, you're a reasonable man. Do you honestly think that I can convey the mystery of ancient Egypt with one hairbrush?

CAPTAIN

It's a start.

EXPLORER

It hardly sets the imagination aflame.

CAPTAIN

You asked for something of scientific value. Something that reflects us living our lives.

EXPLORER

Lives? I came to a tomb.

CAPTAIN

Right.

EXPLORER

So what else do you have?

CAPTAIN

I've got a trowel.

EXPLORER

Try harder. There are stories associated with your friend here. He's a man of remarkable good fortune—one with a significant string of conquests any antique monarch would envy. I'm surprised his tomb doesn't contain some contributing factor to that success.

A pause. The CAPTAIN stares at the EXPLORER.

CAPTAIN

You're getting specific. I told you I'd get you something general.

EXPLORER

What fun is that? I need something unique. Something to put on the book jacket. Perhaps something I can model?

CAPTAIN

I understand your request. But you'll get nothing that can be traced back to this tomb.

EXPLORER

Well that's perfect. What I have in mind was only a rumor; you can give it to me with no problems. If anyone asks, say you never heard of it.

CAPTAIN

I never heard of it.

EXPLORER

Exactly! Say that to anyone else and they'll believe you.

CAPTAIN

What would you believe?

EXPLORER

I believe in the true king of Egypt.

A beat.

CAPTAIN

I have something you may find significant. An item that wasn't necessarily part of the tomb; unaccounted for when we were sealed up.

EXPLORER

A handy bonus.

CAPTAIN

If you think so.

EXPLORER

Does she know?

CAPTAIN

I'd hope not. The way she and the King operated, though, I have no idea. Neither of them mentioned it.

EXPLORER

Oh, I think he has. Maybe not outright, but there are those of use who've picked up on the signals. May I inspect the merchandise?

CAPTAIN

Let me get it.

Deliberately, the CAPTAIN goes to the wall and removes the stone. He reaches inside, pulling from the hole an elaborate necklace. He presents it to the EXPLORER.

EXPLORER

It's a necklace.

CAPTAIN

It is, isn't it?

EXPLORER

I was expecting something else.

CAPTAIN

The King has excellent taste. Though this wasn't for the King.

EXPLORER

There's a story behind it, of course.

CAPTAIN

Part of one; let's see if you can fill in the blanks. Supposedly, this necklace was a gift from the King to our high Priestess, given to her long ago. The Priestess immediately returned it, and the King hid it away.

The CAPTAIN returns the stone to the wall.

EXPLORER

Sordid!

CAPTAIN

Possibly. There is definitely that possibility. But it's all ancient history.

EXPLORER

Naturally.

CAPTAIN

It was years ago. Since then they both improved in station. Coronations. Court drama. Wars. The Priestess had a child. The King married. Several times. The alleged affair—not important. Still, one wonders why the Priestess's son, now grown, feels he has some claim to the throne.

EXPLORER

I follow.

CAPTAIN

Though from the way you tell it, things haven't gone well for him up there. There's no throne left to claim.

EXPLORER

No, your juvenile friend wasn't lucky. I was hoping I'd find an explanation here.

CAPTAIN

I'm sure you were. This is all I can do for you.

The EXPLORER takes the necklace and pockets it.

EXPLORER

Well, if this is the best you can do, I think I can make it useful.

CAPTAIN

Good.

EXPLORER

History, man! It's a big deal.

CAPTAIN

It doesn't stop, does it? History?

EXPLORER

No; it's great. Maddening, but great. You don't like somebody, some culture, some species—clobber 'em! Wipe 'em out; it's possible. But that's just present and future. Are they literate? That's a lot of books to burn. Once you do that, good for you. Nobody knows what they said. But these literal or figurative sub-humans had places to live. Burn 'em down! Bulldoze 'em. Kick over that anthill. A nice thorough job. But there are still bones; bones become fossils. Your natural enemies had foolish or unlucky members who wandered off into tar pits and peat bogs and the like. It's hard getting rid of that history. Everything leaves a trace. And even if the picture's never clear, we'll find it. We'll uncover that history.

CAPTAIN

And then what?

EXPLORER

We make that history part of our own.

The QUEEN reenters, rubbing her eyes.

Good morning, your majesty.

QUEEN

It's still dark.

EXPLORER

Not for very long. The sun is just over the horizon. A new day. A very new day. For all of us, I think.

Beat.

Why is it always a princess in fairy tales? The Queens, why are they always old, jealous, past their prime? Princesses become Queens, you know.

QUEEN

I was never a princess.

EXPLORER

Never a princess?

QUEEN

Not for a day.

EXPLORER

How about a wicked stepmother?

QUEEN

No.

EXPLORER

They should rewrite the fairy tales just for you. It's a blasphemy any other way. I have something for you.

QUEEN

Do you?

CAPTAIN

Do you?

EXPLORER

Something of your husband's. Something of yours.

CAPTAIN

Wait just a minute—

EXPLORER

Your captain is deeply embarrassed. The years he's spent with you. The years and years. He's never found it. It took me an hour, if that.

CAPTAIN

You're not amusing.

EXPLORER

His assistance, of course. It helped me to fill in the blanks. And now they're filled. Close your eyes.

The QUEEN looks to the CAPTAIN, who crosses his arms. She turns back to the EXPLORER and shuts her eyes. The EXPLORER retrieves the necklace and puts it around her neck.

QUEEN

Opening her eyes:

Jewelry.

EXPLORER

You've never seen this?

QUEEN

Never.

EXPLORER

It's yours. To the best I can tell, your husband wanted you to have it.

QUEEN

It's beautiful.

EXPLORER

Meant for a beauty.

QUEEN

From my husband?

To the CAPTAIN:

Do you think so?

CAPTAIN

He's full of surprises, even after all these years.

QUEEN

Do you really think so?

CAPTAIN

No. No, I don't.

QUEEN

Taking off the necklace:

Neither do I.

EXPLORER

Your majesty!

The QUEEN hands the necklace to the EXPLORER:

QUEEN

I understand flattery is a universal language, but let's be honest: my husband would never arrange for something like that.

EXPLORER

Really?

QUEEN

I was never his dress-up doll.

EXPLORER

No, you weren't....

He snickers in the direction of the CAPTAIN.

QUEEN

To the CAPTAIN:

Would you mind telling me what this conspiracy is between the two of you?

CAPTAIN

I want no part in his winking!

EXPLORER

I misspoke earlier. The Captain did know of this piece of jewelry.

CAPTAIN

I did indeed.

EXPLORER

He was hiding it. For a sordid, sordid reason.

CAPTAIN

Stop toying with her. As a young man, the King may or may not have had an affair.

QUEEN

An affair?

CAPTAIN

Long before his marriage to you, of course. He wanted it kept discrete.

QUEEN

With who?

She looks at the necklace. Suddenly, she realizes:

Oh!

She drops the necklace and grimaces.

EXPLORER

Laughs:

Wonderful!

QUEEN

I can't believe him.

She faces the coffin.

I can't believe him!

CAPTAIN

It's just a maybe....

EXPLORER

He was hiding that necklace for something, though.

QUEEN

To the CAPTAIN:

I can't believe you. You knew about this the whole time. You kept his secrets.

CAPTAIN

I'm the captain of the guard!

QUEEN

Doing your job?

CAPTAIN

Yes!

QUEEN

Your duty. Your dead King's bidding. You once told me a different motive for the things you did for me....

The CAPTAIN turns to the EXPLORER:

CAPTAIN

Oh, you're good.

EXPLORER

Naturally.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty, it's obvious. Our new guest is trying to create a rift between us.

QUEEN

Create?

CAPTAIN

Widen a rift—listen to what he's saying!

QUEEN

Better him than you.

EXPLORER

If I may, I think it would be for the best if you two spent some time apart.

CAPTAIN

Here it comes....

EXPLORER

Your majesty, I am staying at one of the finest extended residency buildings at Cairo University. I would be more than happy to give my suite up to you.

CAPTAIN

Of course he would. That's what he wants.

EXPLORER

It's an offer. That's all. But I think you and the Captain, you need some time apart.

CAPTAIN

Listen to him. As if we haven't been apart before.

EXPLORER

Not as far as I can take you.

CAPTAIN

And that's a much greater prize than any shiny trinket. Your majesty, don't you see? He wants you. Wants you for science!

EXPLORER

I am only concerned with the Queen's well-being.

CAPTAIN

Don't be fooled! He wants to examine you. He wants to put you on display, like any other relic. He doesn't care about you.

QUEEN

No. The people who care about me always have an awful way of showing it.

CAPTAIN

To the EXPLORER:

Deal's off. You get nothing. You think you can trade up jewelry for a human being? For royalty? Never.

QUEEN

Not three hours ago, you were trying to escape. You wanted to knock a hole in the wall, and here it is. So now what? You want to stay?

CAPTAIN

With you, yes! And I thought you wanted to stay.

Motioning to the King's coffin:

Things are bad between us right now—that's nothing new. And, yes, things might be touch and go between you and your husband for the moment, but...that's OK. Every marriage has a bad spot. A bruise on the fruit. You still eat it! You've showed so much devotion already. You've put him between us over and over again—the King in death was more attentive than me in life. Now, you're dropping him. For this guy?

The EXPLORER tips his hat.

Look, I'm sorry I tried anything with you. I'm sorry I can't make you feel like a queen on a throne. I'm sorry I made us a couple. In any sense of the word. But him? You go with him, you won't be royalty. You won't be a fellow captive. You'll be an experiment. A sideshow. The Greeks bring the royalty they conquer through the streets in chains.

EXPLORER

I'm not Greek.

CAPTAIN

Should I believe you're more civilized?

EXPLORER

I'll provide chains only upon her majesty's request.

CAPTAIN

He wants to charm you. But he'll deceive you.

QUEEN

I'm used to that.

CAPTAIN

I'm sorry.

QUEEN

You need time for self-pity, and I'd rather not be here to watch you go through it. Again.

CAPTAIN

It hits him:

You're leaving.

QUEEN

And you're not. Royal orders. I plan to return tomorrow night and I expect my husband to be where I left him.

CAPTAIN

Can you expect that? It's not up to me; you'd better ask him.

EXPLORER

Your high and mightiness, I can't persuade you to stay more than a day? It's almost morning.

CAPTAIN

A day isn't enough time for him to loot the place, stab me, throw you in a cage....

QUEEN

Overlapping:

Oh, please....

EXPLORER

Overlapping:

This is wonderful! Who knew I was so devious?

CAPTAIN

...You don't want to believe it'll happen, but I do. I wouldn't expect anything less.

QUEEN

Jealousy.

CAPTAIN

Never!

QUEEN

This is jealousy. Years and years and years together, and you think I don't trust you. You're right. I trust a total stranger over the man I've lived an eternity with, side by side. And you're doing nothing to change my mind.

She starts to exit.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty?

She turns.

Tomorrow night, right?

The QUEEN turns and exits.

EXPLORER

Well, you tried. You've grown accustomed to her face; I understand.

No response. The EXPLORER looks above.

Dawn. I was hoping to be out of here sooner.

CAPTAIN

Easier said than done.

EXPLORER

That's right; you were on your way out yourself. I suppose not now. Not immediately. But the world's open for business. Know what you're going to do with it?

CAPTAIN

I've still got the big guy. My job has been to see him safely on his way. Once I establish that he is safe.... Well, I'll go from there.

EXPLORER

Loyal to the last.

CAPTAIN

In my own way.

EXPLORER

No doubt. If you ever find yourself out west, and I mean way west, look me up. I'm teaching in Kansas in the fall. Kansas, man. I don't know how I got talked into that one. We all make crazy choices. Good thing we're never stuck with them forever, right?

The QUEEN reenters with a bundle of clothing—an "overnight bag."

QUEEN

I haven't been anywhere for so long. I don't know what I need with me.

EXPLORER

You'll want for nothing.

The QUEEN and the CAPTAIN stare at each other.

QUEEN

This isn't goodbye.

CAPTAIN

No. But we're getting there.

QUEEN

To the EXPLORER:

How far is the walk?

EXPLORER

You leave everything to me, your highness. Quickly now.

CAPTAIN

You heard the doctor.

The QUEEN sighs and looks at the CAPTAIN.

QUEEN

So.

CAPTAIN

So.

QUEEN

I think we set a record.

CAPTAIN

Be careful up there.

QUEEN

Why worry? Whatever we were running from, we outran it. We won.

The CAPTAIN is still dejected. The QUEEN pats him on the head, kissing the top.

CAPTAIN

The last time you kissed me, the wall exploded.

QUEEN

Don't wait up.

The QUEEN walks up to the EXPLORER and begins to ascend. Suddenly, a chorus of car horns from above.

CAPTAIN

What was that?!

EXPLORER

Running his hand down his face:

My students....

CAPTAIN

They let you teach? Standards have slipped.

A half-dozen young men enter excitedly. They chatter non-stop, shouting instructions at each other, fidgeting and tinkering with every aspect of the tomb. Aside from brief "hello"s to the EXPLORER, they ignore the trio.

QUEEN

You brought your students with you?

EXPLORER

They followed me.

QUEEN

I can't feed them all.

EXPLORER

They don't deserve it. Overeager brownnosers.

To the CAPTAIN:

It's true.

CAPTAIN

What's true?

EXPLORER

I'm cleaning house. Taking everything. We're going to photodocument, dust, and disturb every inch of this tomb. I'm not going to negotiate the find of the century.

CAPTAIN

You betrayed the Queen!

EXPLORER

I was hoping she wouldn't be here when they came. Spare you any ugliness.

CAPTAIN

Tell them to stop!

QUEEN

The cloak.

CAPTAIN

To the students:

This place is cursed!

EXPLORER

You're speaking to a roomful of people who know their Egyptian history; there's no such thing—

QUEEN

Interrupting:

Give him the cloak.

EXPLORER

So it is here!

CAPTAIN

Wait a minute....

EXPLORER

Hold on a moment, boys!

The students stop their work.

The Cloak of Horus? You do have it.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty, we can't—

QUEEN

What difference does it make? There's no more kings to fight for it.

EXPLORER

Tell me where it is.

QUEEN

Only if you take it and go. Leave us just the way we were.

EXPLORER

You won't join me?

QUEEN

I can get lied to anywhere.

CAPTAIN

This is a bad deal.

QUEEN

I know; he gets the good luck charm, you keep the bad one.

EXPLORER

OK, tell me. The Cloak will be the only thing I take.

The QUEEN goes to the wall and taps it.

QUEEN

Behind this stone.

EXPLORER

Excitedly removing the stone and reaching in:

Same place as the necklace. Clever, Captain; it would be the last place I would look.

He takes out the cloak and looks at it.

Amazing.... So well-preserved....

CAPTAIN

We're good at that.

QUEEN

You'll be leaving now.

EXPLORER

Still staring at the cloak:

I don't think so.

QUEEN

You don't?

EXPLORER

Who are you to tell me what to do?

QUEEN

I'm the queen.

EXPLORER

Laughing:

The queen. That's no concern to me. I'm the true king of Egypt!

QUEEN

Really?

EXPLORER

With this? Yes!

QUEEN

Say it again.

EXPLORER

I'm the true king of Egypt!

QUEEN

Louder.

EXPLORER

I'm the true king of Egypt!

QUEEN

Like you mean it!

EXPLORER

I'm the true king of—

The QUEEN throws the CAPTAIN's rock from its pedestal, ripping the pillar from the floor and sending it crashing into the wall—directly where the EXPLORER stands, crushing him to death. The impact of stone on stone resonates. The students stare at the spot where their professor stood, dumbfounded. After a moment, they all begin to scream and run out of the tomb. They are heard driving away. The QUEEN and the CAPTAIN are left alone.

CAPTAIN

Well that was a short reign.

QUEEN

Goodbye....

The CAPTAIN approaches the pillar.

CAPTAIN

It didn't hit the door.

QUEEN

I told you.

CAPTAIN

That was—wow. I wouldn't have thought to do that. What about his students?

QUEEN

They're not coming back. This place is cursed.

CAPTAIN

Or just a safety hazard. I should have done something. I'm the bodyguard.

QUEEN

I'm the queen.

CAPTAIN

Hard to compete with that.

The CAPTAIN comes to the entrance.

I'm going outside.

QUEEN

Why?

CAPTAIN

Perimeter check. I want to make sure they left for good. That they're not coming back armed.

QUEEN

Good.

CAPTAIN

And it's long past time for me to work on my tan.

The CAPTAIN begins to ascend.

You know, we're part of the world now.

QUEEN

Are we? We're still mostly part of the desert.

CAPTAIN

It's something. We're not buried anymore.

QUEEN

No. No, we're not.

CAPTAIN

I'll be right back.

He exits. The QUEEN watches him go. After a moment, she approaches the King's coffin. She puts her hand to it, pats it gently.

QUEEN

I don't know if the two of us can continue like this. You've changed. It's not that you're dead. It's not the affair...

She gives the coffin a big tug, back towards where she had it.

You've just put on a lot of weight.

She continues to pull the coffin back to center, getting it most of the way there, before stopping, exhausted. She stands, catching her breath, as the lights begin to fade. Suddenly—

CAPTAIN

Well, it's 365 days later.

The lights come back to full as the CAPTAIN reappears from the entryway. He is wearing a modern business suit. The QUEEN busies herself as he approaches.

One year later! Before that, every day was the same! And now....

He reaches the QUEEN, kneels, and kisses her hand.

Now we're back where we started.

QUEEN

How are you?

CAPTAIN

Wonderful. Couldn't be better.

QUEEN

You haven't been here in months.

CAPTAIN

And you've been here too often.

QUEEN

Of course. I live here again.

CAPTAIN

No.

QUEEN

Yes!

CAPTAIN

What did you do that for? What about the penthouse we picked out?
What was wrong with that?

QUEEN

Neighbors. Nothing specific. Just neighbors. I don't have that problem here.

CAPTAIN

You're isolating yourself again.

QUEEN

No. I still go out. I'm still working; I can write my gardening column anywhere.

CAPTAIN

I guess.

QUEEN

Well, if you ever think I'm being reclusive, just come here. Take me out.

CAPTAIN

I will; I promise you.

Beat.

You know, I never asked this. And I should have: what did you do with the Explorer?

QUEEN

He's tastefully buried.

CAPTAIN

In the garden?

QUEEN

What? No....

CAPTAIN

Because you say "tastefully," and I'm thinking...fertilizer?

QUEEN

That's terrible.

CAPTAIN

I know.

QUEEN

How's work? You're wearing a suit; does that mean you got the promotion?

CAPTAIN

Promotion? It is, sort of. I am a Captain of a guard again, instead of just being a bodyguard. But I'm out with the celebrities a lot less; there's more time behind a desk.

Trailing off, he returns his attention to the QUEEN.

QUEEN

Notice anything different?

CAPTAIN

Different? No...the pillar's still in the same spot; probably the safest place for it. You didn't paint.... Is it the King?

QUEEN

Yes.

CAPTAIN

You moved him back out here.

QUEEN

Yes.

CAPTAIN

You had him in a couple of different places the last few months; why have you settled him—?

QUEEN

I'm leaving him.

CAPTAIN

Oh.

QUEEN

I have to let him go.

CAPTAIN

Well, I'm sure he understands.

QUEEN

Next week I'm going back to the penthouse. I'm not coming back. I don't want you to, either.

CAPTAIN

One year.

QUEEN

We've had time to adjust. Whatever we're adjusting to.

CAPTAIN

No more tomb. Not for us. Not for the world.

QUEEN

I think that's fair.

CAPTAIN

Maybe in another few thousand years we'll find it again.

QUEEN

We shouldn't need to try.

CAPTAIN

When did you want to leave?

QUEEN

Tonight.

CAPTAIN

Wow. Before or after—?

QUEEN

After dinner. Everything I need is packed. I've potted most of the garden.

CAPTAIN

You've thought this out.

QUEEN

No. As of this morning I wanted to stay.

CAPTAIN

What changed your mind?

QUEEN

I thought about our Explorer friend. He got out of here the way we originally planned. But he gave us another way.

CAPTAIN

Guess it's one way or the other. You know what this means, though? You won't be buried with the King.

QUEEN

I've been buried with him long enough already.

CAPTAIN

Right.

An electric buzzer sounds. The QUEEN stands.

QUEEN

That's dinner.

She exits.

CAPTAIN

To himself:

How did she get an oven down here?

QUEEN

Off:

Do you want to get some plates?

CAPTAIN

Sure. It's a nice night; do you want to eat outside?

QUEEN

Reentering, with champagne and glasses:

No, if this is it, we should stay down here.

CAPTAIN

A farewell.

QUEEN

We are modern people now.

CAPTAIN

And in years to come, maybe we'll be somebody else, too.

QUEEN

Put a curse on somebody else.

CAPTAIN

Your majesty. The next time you stick yourself in the ground to die, bring me with you.

QUEEN

I will.

CAPTAIN

Let's eat.

They prepare for dinner as the lights fade.