

1. Port Jaffa

Year 158, Season 9

Abram sat beside Baalat listening to their teacher discuss the nature of death. The fire cackled in the cool night sky as its flames reflected off Middlesea; a good time to discuss the unknowable.

But not for the thirteen and eighteen-year-old. Death was far away, an abstraction. For them, there were bigger, closer concerns. They preferred discussions on the Way of Horus which addressed real issues faced by real people, them especially.

Abram carried the weight of the world in his head. Horus had exposed him to too much, too soon. There was no easy reconciliation for all Abram believed to be true – knew to be true – even if these truths might be mutually exclusive.

These contradictions did not concern Baalat; she was too busy practicing her virginity. Baalat remained almost a virgin except for selected talkative Urfa Missionaries to whom she provided her spy reports and might prove useful to her in becoming a Living God. Oh, yes; and except for occasional liaisons with a priest of Horus who brought her warmth and affection and a temporary overwhelming feeling of belonging. Her time as a child church prostitute did not count -- she was forced to do that. She knew that people made sex complicated and sexual exclusivity seemed to be sought after in many quarters and if she were going to become a Living God that followed the Path of Horus, she would need all of her resources.

That, plus a plan.

Abram's plan, as was commanded by Teacher Horus, was that Abram would someday return to his home and, with his acquired worldly sophistication, become an influential leading citizen of Urfa. He would take over his Father's idol-selling business and redirect the ultra-conservative thoughts and actions of Urfa's citizens toward a more liberal civilized worldview.

"Good luck with that," Baalat had told Horus. Her comment angered Horus, confused Abram, and brought a smile to Azazil.

Horus: "Baalat, I plan on you helping Horus liberate the minds of those in Urfa."

Azazil: "Neither of you will be *commanded* to go to Urfa, of course."

Horus: "But you will go!"

Abram: "Yes! I will go back home and teach them!"

Baalat: ~ *Save people that don't even want to be saved? – Ha! ~*

Her silence did not go unnoticed.

~ THE NEXT DAY ~

The Port Jaffa women of power sat on the dock patio enjoying their Highsun meal while being appreciatively observed by a Greek, a Crete, and a Canaan sailor enjoying their Highsun beer.

The women bantered among themselves.

Serket: "Those sailors are staring at all my beautiful friends."

Polydore: "Staring at your friends and you in your cute little Oceanid outfit, Serket."

Astarte: "Don't be jealous, there are enough sailors to go around."

Anath: ~ *Not one throat worth slitting in the bunch.* ~

Baalat: "Mother Serket, maybe you shouldn't wear an outfit that revealing. Some men might think you are inviting them."

Serket: "My appearance brings them peace. Plus, it's good for business and it does not displease my husband."

Phoenicia: "You couldn't displease Horus if you danced naked on the table for them."

Serket: "Perhaps, but my husband has changed since he crowned the Pharaoh. He doesn't hold me as tightly or as long. He's more at peace but it's not a peace I bring him."

Baalat: "He lost his soul!"

All: "What!?"

Baalat: "He had to defeat God Set in that disgusting contest over Anath to gain the right to crown King Djoser as Pharaoh. My teacher won, but it cost him his soul. I thought everybody knew that."

Serket: "My husband?! No! What happened?!"

Anath: "Come on Serket. You know he plowed me in front of Set and everybody else. He plowed me real good!"

Serket: "He never told me! But it must have been the right thing for him to do."

Anath: "He *wanted* to plow me, Sweet Serket. He really, really wanted to."

Baalat, angrily: "Don't be a bitch, God Anath! Horus told us what happened. Not in detail, but it was obvious what he did. He did it to preserve Ma'at. But it cost him his soul."

Anath: "You don't tell a god what to do, Baalat. I can have you killed!"

Baalat: "I, Baalat, student of Horus, the greatest of all Living Gods, *do* tell God Anath what she won't do. Obey me, God Anath, or I will have my teacher spank your bottom."

Anath: "Promises, promises."

Astarte: "What's a 'soul?'"

Baalat: "Horus teaches us that it's what's left of you after you die. At least, that's what he says it is."

Serket: "My husband is very learned. That must be what one is."

All: Banter, banter, banter.

Caanan Sailor: "You think any of them women want to know what I got hard between my legs; ready to go?"

Greek Sailor: "Hey, friend. Don't let the older one hear you talking like that. She's an Oceanid. If you disrespect a woman around an Oceanid, then the only female you will ever have again will be four-legged."

Crete Sailor: "That's true. Be sure to respect women around here. At least talk nice to them. Don't call them names and you will do all right."

Caanan Sailor: "Talk nice to bitches? They need to know who's boss."

Greek Sailor: "Friend, where are you from? You won't make it working this job with that attitude toward women. The one in the little white outfit can tell a ship captain that if *you* are sailing on their ship, they can't port here.

Crete Sailor: The mean-looking one will let you plow her on a table in front of a crowd just so she can cut your throat and watch you die while your blood drips on her face.

Greek Sailor: The Oceanid? Don't even ask. There are a lot of good wine houses around here. Let's go. You can get all the plowing you want. Just show the women respect."

Caanan Sailor: "I'm new at this sailorin' and that idn't how we do it in Tophet, but I like the sound of the rest of it. You boys show me around and learn me. I'll buy the first round of beer."

The three men rose and walked past the table of powerful women.

In passing, the Greek sailor nodded to Polydore, and said, "Good Highsun, Oceanid Polydore. It's good to see you, again."

The Greek sailor was favored with an Oceanid nod and smile.

~ IN THE HOUSE OF SERKET ~

Serket's was the finest house in Jaffa. The sweet innocent child from Rusalem had blossomed into a worldly woman of sophistication and taste. She had once walked westward along the beach until she found a small rise away from Jaffa activity. The powerful Portmaster of Jaffa had a large and inviting home built there befitting her rank. The house was large enough to have an interior courtyard with strategically placed doors and windows to ensure a constant breeze from the sea. The second floor contained six guest bedrooms plus a large one facing the sea for her and

her sometimes-there husband, Horus. Her sister and sister's consort, Phoenicia and Rocky, were permanent guests. A bedroom was reserved for her mentor and friend, Assistant City Chief Oceanid Polydore. It was always available when Polydore reached her limits of consorting with Chief Jaffa and needed time alone with the sea. Two bedrooms were maintained for Horus's followers which always included Azazil, Abram, and Baalat.

Serket's bed was opulent; a large mattress made of fine Egyptian linen stuffed with reeds and palm leaves. Her two headrests were made of fine leather. She needed no headrest when Horus came to her; he was her headrest. When she undressed for his pleasure, she always put on the beautiful gold and turquoise necklace Horus had given her when they were in Memphis. He had ceremoniously removed it from the neck of High-Priestess Hathor and presented it to Serket as a gift of marriage.

On this night, under a full moon, she lay contentedly in his arms. He held her close and tightly. Peace washed over her as the sea washes over an Oceanid. He was troubled but Horus was usually troubled.

She whispered, "Whatever it is, Husband, will pass. Do what you must do. Peace will come."

"Peace is but a moment, Wife. And only when you are in my arms. I will leave you and peace tomorrow. Abram's training must be completed, soon. It will be months before I return. Maybe many months. My love remains here with you. I will do what I must do because it is my duty to do it, but my love of doing it is gone. Hope is gone. Still, my words do some good in this world; still help a few who will listen. It is my disciples and priests who still believe. My words are for them."

His embrace suddenly became intense. He half-sobbed, "I am broken, Serket! I am broken!"

She half-laughed, "You are whole, my husband. It is the world that is broken!"

Serket mounted Horus.

~ SUNRISE ON THE BEACH~

The next morning before sunrise, Serket and Horus walked to his traditional gathering place on the beach. They were followed by Azazil, Abram, Baalat, and three local docent-priests. Townspeople and followers were already gathering when they arrived. The Jaffa Way-of-Horus senior priest stood beside a welcoming morning fire.

He and Horus chatted until the broaching of the sun was imminent. Horus then extended his arms toward the appearing sun and began, “Welcome, Osiris, bringer of life; bringer of love; bringer of all good things. We, your people, love you as you love us. Travel fast and safely to your High-Priestess waiting at the Great River to call forth life into you so that you will become Ra, the Living Sun. We are your disciples. We travel the path you have set us upon. We love everyone, even those who despise us. We rejoice!”

The crowd responded, “We rejoice!”

Having completed his welcome, Horus asked, “And now, knowing that life is sometimes difficult, what problems shall we solve?”

The problems of his people rained down upon him.

~ HIGHSUN GOODBYES ~

After his morning service was complete, Baalat walked with Horus and Serket to a secluded part of the public gardens.

Baalat said, “Here, I brought some fruit and nuts and a little wine. I and Azazil have everything packed and ready to go. I will bring them here after our Highsun meal. Is there any more you need of me?”

Serket touched Baalat’s cheek. “No. You have prepared everything, Baalat. My husband and I must pack many months of visiting between now and when he returns. Take care of my husband, Baalat. If his time of abstinence grows too long for him to bear, I ask that you relieve him of his burden. It is my wish.”

Baalat laughed. “He spurns my lasciviousness, Serket Your husband will be my greatest conquest if I can ever seduce him. But for now, take this time to wear your man out. I will be slow to return.”

Serket giggled, “He is already well-worn, Daughter. But still, be slow.”

Baalat left them.

They found their favorite tree and he sat leaning against it. She nestled into his arms.

He said, “My Father asked me to free the people of Urfa from the abomination of the teachings of Teumessian. My quest is simple. All that remains is how do I do it.”

“Abram is so innocent. Making him an instrument of love will not be difficult. Use him as a sword to cut off the false teachings.”

“He remains a sheep. An intelligent, dedicated sheep, but a sheep still. He follows me and learns my words but once cut free; I fear who will become his next shepherd.”

“Then use Baalat as your sword. She will never have a master; not even you.”

“I trust Baalat without question up to her next bed. She is a spy for Kyrios-Olon, you know. It was the condition of her release. She tells everything she knows to the Urfa Missionaries about what I am doing. They will know that I was well-worn when I left you. She beds the important ones along with my most influential priests in each city. No one knows this, not even me. It’s her secret because she is ‘saving her virginity.’”

“Well, my broken husband, use the sharp edges of your soul to lovingly cut their throats.”

“I could use my once-lover Anath for that. Everyone wins.”

“Anath is mean-spirited. Don’t give her the satisfaction.”

“Anath wronged me. That she lay with other men was not a concern. That she gleefully went to Set as I watched was of no concern. But it affected me badly that they rejoiced in constantly describing the intimate details. If I am away too long, Serket, lay with whomever might bring you peace. But, please, not to hurt me, but because you wish it for yourself. I won’t be angry.”

“I don’t wish to lay with any man but you, my husband. You are my peace.”

“Woman, you bring me peace in a world without peace.”

She snuggled closer.

Horus became lost in thought. ~ *It seems easy enough with Serket in my arms - My weapons of war are a faithful, intelligent, dedicated sheep and an innocent, opportunistic, ambitious collector of debts -- How hard can it be? ~*

After Highsun, Azazil and the students found Horus and Serket. After stoic goodbyes, Horus and his group departed Port Jaffa to travel into the rough-hewn lands of Canaan.

There to spread the teachings of Horus to the oblivious, turbulent children of Ra.

2. Baalat and Abram

Abram and Baalat walked behind Horus and Azazil along the road to Sur.

Horus suddenly stopped, turned to his two students, and asked, "Student Abram, what will you do when we arrive at Sur?"

Abram, taken aback but knowing not to appear unsure, answered, "I will do as you command, Teacher."

"Neither Azazil nor I will be with you. Only Baalat. And Baalat, I command your subservience to Abram while you are in Sur. Do as he commands. Don't offer suggestions. I again ask you, Student Abram, what will you do?"

Abram, stalling for time, answered, "I shall teach those that I meet 'The Way of Horus,' Master."

"Very good, Abram. Do that -- but before you do, find four hungry people and feed them. Once fed, if they wish to hear your words, then speak to them. I will find you tomorrow in Sur and you will tell me what you accomplished. We will then go and stay for a while in Byblos. When I leave Byblos, you and Baalat will no longer be my students. You both will have graduated and will be free to go your own way or follow me as a disciple. This will be your decision. But Abram, until then, I advise you to turn your thoughts away from what Horus desires to what Abram desires. Go. I will find you tomorrow."

Horus turned and walked away, signaling Azazil to come with him.

Azazil looked at Abram and shrugged, then at Baalat and rolled his eyes.

Abram was panic-stricken.

Baalat feverishly worked through what had just happened and why. Understanding, she said to Azazil, "Don't worry, Azazil. We will do just fine." And to Abram "Don't just stand there, Abram. Command me to do something."

Abram readjusted his thinking and his role. He commanded, "Let's go to Sur!" With newfound authority, he bravely turned and began walking toward Sur. Baalat obediently followed.

They walked.

Finally, Abram said, "I was to remain his student until I became a man."

"Well, you are a man."

"I am still a child. I have no idea how to conduct myself as a man.

She walked on in silence.

“I mean, not *really* a man.”

She made no suggestions. She walked on in silence.

“I mean, I know the words. I know ‘The Way of Horus’ and he has shown me the world and all the hopeless people in it. I know what should be done when something needs doing. But either Teacher or Azazil – or you – have always been around to command the doing. I didn’t have to be the one to command it.”

Silence.

“I mean...”

Abram went through many ‘I means.’

Finally, Abram said, “He is throwing me into the deep, isn’t he? Teaching me how to become a man. No, not teaching me – forcing me to become one when I’m not. I don’t like it. I like being a follower. I don’t want to be a man. It will be too hard. You were a whore, weren’t you? -- when Teacher asked you to follow him – A whore to Teumessian and the others. Teacher saved you when they were going to throw you away. But you were already a woman even before you became one. You began as a woman, and I have not even become a real man. You didn’t want to become a woman, did you? You were a child when they took you to make you into a whore. I will never know what to do. I will never be a man – a leader.” Tears came into his eyes.

Baalat did not speak nor take his hand. There was a grove of trees in the distance. They walked on.

“They called you a whore to belittle you, but it wasn’t you they belittled. It was themselves. No matter what word they said you were -- you remained Baalat, doing what Baalat had to do. My home, my city, my people, everyone in Urfa call the other half whores. It’s not right! Teacher taught me these things without once saying it! That’s why he will return me to Urfa when I am a man! To teach them! To change them! But they will kill anyone who does not believe like they believe or say words differently than how they say the words. Teacher knows these things, but he will send me back anyway! I should run away! Run away while I can! They will not learn. I cannot change them. They will kill me!”

He was quiet for a while.

“I know what to do, of course. I was well taught. I will do what’s right.”

They walked on.

They came to the trees. She took his hand and led him into the grove. She stood facing him -- staring at him -- as she let her tunic fall to the ground. He stared wide-eyed at her naked body. She did not speak.

“You were my sister, but now you are just a whore!”

He turned and ran from the grove back to the path that led to Sur.

Her eyes followed him as he ran away.

~ SUR ~

Abram came to the village of Sur. Baalat followed far behind.

Abram waited at the outskirts for Baalat to catch up. Upon arriving, he quietly said, “We must find the local temple.”

The temple was one of the few buildings in the village and not hard to find.

Abram approached the priest. “Greetings, Great Chief. I am Abram of Port Jaffa, and this is my sister, Baalat. We travel to Byblos but wish to visit the great village of Sur. Are we welcome here?”

As he eyed Baalat, he replied, “My name is Marqat and we worship Heracles in this village. Your sister is a comely wench.”

“Yes, she is. I have already castrated three men who tried to take advantage of my sister’s innocence. She keeps their testicles somewhere. Are there poor nearby where we might find lodgings in exchange for food?”

Marqat snapped out of his fantasy and officially replied. “Yes, we have an abundance of poor people in Sur. Walk the trail toward the east. You will find your choice of lodgings.”

They bantered on, admiring the temple and the carved idol of Heracles in its center.

Leaving, Abram asked, “Will my sister be safe, or shall I keep my hand near my dagger?”

“Our village is poor. A blade nearby is always advised, Lord.”

~ *Lord! He called me Lord!* ~

Abram and Baalat took the trail toward the East.

Abram asked, “Did I sound all right back there? I was afraid my voice would crack.”

“You were fine, Abram.”

The huts appeared, as did the people. Abram commanded Baalat to cook a stew with their remaining food rations; it would go farther. As the villagers ate, Baalat told the women how to retrieve more edibles from the surrounding land and Abram told the men how they could build simple rafts and catch fish from Middlesea. Around the dying fire, after the food was eaten and the tellings told, Abram taught them the gospel of Horus. The appreciative poor then showed them to an abandoned hut where Abram and Baalat could safely sleep.

They entered the hut and began preparing for bed. He said, "I'm sorry about what happened back there in the trees, Baalat. I guess I'm just not ready."

"I see your shadows in the night, Abram. I hear your sounds. You are ready!" With that, she bedded down and turned her back to him. "I will be asleep soon enough. You can do it then!"

~ SUNRISE ~

Abram and Baalat built a small fire on the beach at Sur. They issued no invitations, but the fire and their activities attracted the attention of nearby early risers. Abram's greeting of the sun interested the watchers; the braver of which inquired into which god Abram was worshiping. Discussion ensued. Baalat passed out the little bread she had remaining. The Way of Horus was mentioned. Three people were interested enough to stay and talk.

~ HIGHSUN ~

The two found a small trading market where they traded coins for food. They retired to the village park to eat bread.

"Teacher did not tell us what we will do after we leave Byblos. What do you think we will do?"

"I am under your command until Teacher arrives. I was told not to make suggestions."

Her coolness toward him since the grove was suddenly colder still. He tried again. "I'm sorry, Sister. Too much is happening. I'm too confused. I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

"I am not your sister."

"Are you still my friend?"

"We are both students of the great Teacher Horus and will remain so until we leave Byblos. After that, you are on your own!"

“I don’t want to be on my own. I want to be with you and Teacher.”

“Poor little boy.”

“When we leave Byblos, he is going to Urfa, isn’t he? We will no longer be his students. We can go with him or not.”

“Yes. ‘Or not’ sounds good!”

Abram’s world was crumbling around him. He stood. “I will go find some poor people and give them some bread.”

“Good boy. Command me to stay here and wait for my teacher.

Soon after Highsun, Horus and Azazil entered Sur and, soon enough, found Abram talking with several people. The gathering excitedly made way for Horus and Azazil to join them. Abram had just been telling them the gospel of Horus and here he was. “This is so exciting, Master!”

Horus visited with them, adding gravitas to Abram’s previous words. Abram puffed with pride.

As Horus and Abram talked, Azazil looked around for Baalat, and, not seeing her, wandered off into the village. He bypassed the temple and went straight to where he knew a city park would be. She was there, sitting under a large tree, fondling a leaf from a nearby plant.

Azazil sat down beside her without speaking; nor did she.

Finally, he said, “Are you concerned about what to do after Byblos? You know that Horus fully expects you both to continue to follow him.”

“Where is he going after Byblos?”

“You know where. To Urfa.”

“Yes. I figured it out as he was saying it. And everything is perfectly clear, now. Sitting here. Under a nice tree. Touching a nice plant. Feeling it. Nephthys told me about weapons of war. He forged me and Abram, too. He is a sweet boy, isn’t he? Not so much a weapon of war, but, still, a sweet boy.”

“If you want to talk about what happened, I am here.”

“I don’t, but thank you. I will go with you to Byblos, but I will not follow you to Urfa. His quest is not my quest; his war, not mine. I am well taught, well trained, and a student of the strongest women in Canaan and Egypt. I paid attention. I am prepared. I will miss you, Azazil. You are a good man.”

He reached to touch her but decided not to. “Whatever it is, will pass away, Baalat.”

She laughed a gentle laugh. “Do you not listen to Teacher’s words? What he leaves unsaid between his words? Nothing passes away. Everything is forever.”

Azazil stood. “We will pick you up on our way out.”

“I’ll see you then.”

~

Azazil returned to find Horus and Abram in the temple talking to the priest.

Abram was exuberant. His teacher had praised him for his actions last night and this morning. He was talking to a village priest as an equal and as a valued asset that had helped alleviate the suffering in Sur. Abram felt as if he were becoming a real man in good standing among men. He was beginning to feel like he was ready to return to his home city – with or without the support of his best friend, Baalat. Seeing Azazil arrive, Abram greeted him as an equal.

Azazil responded, “Well everyone, let’s be on our way to the big city.”

As the men passed through the village, Baalat quietly joined them.