



WHO LET THE DOGS ... IN?

Aria stretched tall, sending a whisper up toward the pointy ear of the Egyptian statue that towered over her. There were two statues: large, black and gold, dog-headed men. Aria had been plotting a way to get close to them since she'd learned their exhibit was coming to Chicago's Field Museum.

"Is he your new boyfriend, *Scaria*?"

Aria jumped as if she'd been caught stealing money from Grams' purse. But it was just Jake, the biggest bully in Ms. Yazoo's sixth grade social studies class. "Better him than you," she shot back.

"Ooohh! Feel the burn!" Cooper yelled. A bevy of boys laughed at the retort. Cooper was Jake's best friend, but that

didn't stop him from relishing the way Aria put Jake in his place.

Aria's best friend, Sunaai, rolled her eyes. She grabbed Aria's hand and yanked her toward their teacher, who was droning on about the museum's nearby mummification exhibit to the four students who were paying attention. Jake glowered at Aria as if he wanted to mummify her. But really, if he didn't want Aria to keep making him look stupid, Jake should bully someone less ... well, less Aria-esque.

"Ignore him." Sunaai soothed Aria. "We should tell Ms. Yazoo."

Aria stifled an eye roll. She adored her best friend, but Sunaai was a dedicated rule follower who tattled to the teacher anytime Jake stepped out of line. Aria didn't need Ms. Yazoo's help.

Last year, Aria and her big brother, Jagger, were magically transported thousands of years back in time to the court of Amarna, Egypt. Compared to giant crocodiles, murderous generals, and killer scarab beetles, Jake was as intimidating as a fly.

"I'm fine, Sunaai. Jake's not worth us wasting our energy on." Aria pulled away from her friend and glared back at the statues, willing them to do something. Anything!

The good news: they were alive. They looked like cold,

dead statues, but Aria could *feel* her friends' presence. She could feel anyone as long as she knew them and they were within a one-mile radius, straight down to exactly where they were and, sometimes, how they were feeling, if their feelings were intense enough. She'd been cursed with this superpower when Jagger's magical God's Light flew into her body and revived her after that snot-ball High Priest, Herihor, murdered her with a magic spell.

The power sounded way cooler than it was. At first, Aria was excited about her ability. But then she lived through months of feeling Gramps' life fade away and, eventually, disappear altogether. Even now, Aria could feel Grams aging and sometimes Mom stressing or Jagger sulking. She didn't always feel people's anger, longing, or jealousy. When she did, she felt guilty, like she was somehow cheating at being a person. But it was pretty handy that her magical abilities enabled her to feel Hemet and Mutef. It was a relief to know the statues weren't just dead heaps of metal now.

"If you stare at those statues any longer, you might put a hole in them. Then we'll never get to go on another field trip." Sunaai laughed at her own joke. She loved explaining the rules of public school to Aria, who'd been homeschooled until late last year when her mom gave up her travel-writer lifestyle so she could stay in Chicago and take care of Aria

and Jagger. And look after Grams, who wasn't herself since Gramps died last spring.

Aria pulled a curl to her mouth and squeezed her eyes shut tight, counting silently to ten in ancient Egyptian: *wiyaw, sinway, hamtaw* ... In addition to her superpower, her trip to the past had magically gifted her with a perfect understanding of the ancient Egyptian language. Chanting the numbers in her head helped her shut out the sadness that overwhelmed her when she thought about Gramps.

"I mean, you've been to Egypt. You must have seen loads of statues like those." Sunaai brought Aria back to the moment. Sunaai's words were tinged with envy over Aria's globetrotting past.

Aria shrugged. It's not like she could explain that these ancient Egyptian statues were really three-thousand-year-old men. Men who'd volunteered to be turned into statues so they could rescue Aria and Jagger from a tomb and guard an Egyptian princess for millennia.

The Egyptian government had claimed credit for the tomb Jagger had discovered last year, letting Jagger and Aria off the hook—apparently messing with relics was frowned upon. And really, who would believe their story anyway?

Jagger and Aria hadn't even told Mom the truth, which was a lingering problem since they'd disappeared from the

Egyptian desert one morning only to return ten hours later. It had been ten *days* to Jagger and Aria. They never had come up with a believable excuse, and Mom could see through a lie like an X-ray machine through skin. From time to time, Aria caught Mom staring at them like she could find the truth they hid from her if only she glared hard enough.

Aria sighed as she released the curl from her mouth. She was trying to break the habit, but it was hard when she was stressed. Like now. She *needed* to find a way to communicate with Hemet and Mutef. But they'd never commune with her with all these annoying kids around. Maybe she could hide in the bathroom until the museum closed, then she could sneak out to see the men-turned-statues when the place was empty. The sound of blaring alarms filled her imagination at the mere thought.

Wandering back to the statues, Aria reached up to stroke Hemet's arm, or maybe it was Mutef's. She could tell them apart when they were alive—Hemet was bald—but they'd been turned into identical statues. She gazed into the statues' cold eyes. She wanted to tell them both how sorry she was that they'd ended up as chunks of metal and gold.

"DO *NOT* TOUCH THAT RELIC, MS. JONES!" Ms. Yazoo's croaky voice shot across the room.

Aria froze, ready to yank her hand back.

But before her fingers could disconnect from the cold metal, Mutef-Hemet's hand opened. The golden fingers, which had been closed moments ago, shot straight out, silently beseeching her to hold on.

Aria didn't care if she got detention for the rest of sixth grade. There was nothing Ms. Yazoo could possibly do that would stop her from holding onto her old friend's hand.

"STOP!" Ms. Yazoo yanked Aria's shoulder. Her eyes swirled with anger like a cartoon character. Aria half expected steam to shoot from her ears.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Yazoo," Aria said quickly, trying desperately not to smile as she shoved her hand in her pocket, hiding the small, hard object Hemet-Mutef had just slipped her. "Really, Ms. Yazoo. I don't know what came over me."

Even with Aria's gift for acting, it was hard to look sorry when she was having such a very, very good day in the midst of a very, very bad year.



Aria raced up the stairs of the South Side Chicago two-flat she lived in with Mom, Jagger, and now Grams, who'd moved in after the funeral, leaving her own flat next door empty. It was like Gramps had his own tomb next to their house. Aria was the only one who went in there now. She felt closer to Gramps when she was cuddled up in his old chair with her tablet or a good book. She longed to *feel* Gramps when she did this, but unlike Hemet and Mutef, Gramps was just gone, no matter how hard she tried.

But, she *could* feel her brother in his room.

Jagger felt people's whereabouts too, and at a much greater distance than Aria, but only if he wore his Isis Knot amulet. While Aria could only feel people, Jagger's amulet enabled him to feel anything he was familiar with, which was pretty handy when Mom lost her keys or Jagger lost his phone ...

"Did I say come in?" Jagger growled when Aria shoved his bedroom door open. He was all about his privacy lately, and he threw a fit anytime anyone stuck a toe in his room. It stunk, anyway. His walls were lined with bookshelves, filled with more books than Aria would read in a lifetime. Yet Jagger had studied every page. "What?" he barked.

"I saw Hemet and Mutef." Aria had to lean her head back to look him in the eyes. He was almost as tall as Mom now,

especially since he'd refused to cut his 'fro, which added a good inch.

Jagger stared at Aria like she was speaking Greek. (Knowing her brother, he probably did speak Greek.) They'd talked about Hemet and Mutef a million times: Aria knew the statues would communicate with the two of them when the exhibit got to Chicago, but Jagger argued they'd be regular old stacks of metal now.

In spite of their disagreement, he'd promised to take Aria to the museum—he said a museum day with his sister was a small price to pay to shut her up. But her class field trip was scheduled for the exhibit's second day in Chicago, so Ms. Yazoo beat him to it.

"They're still in there. I told you they would be. And they gave me this." Aria held up the amulet she'd shoved into the pocket of her jeans at the museum. She couldn't hide her smile. Aria relished outsmarting her know-it-all brother.

Jagger's eyes pulsed as he reached a hand toward the gold amulet. It looked like a tall flame shooting out of a small, horizontal rectangle. The precious metal hung from a simple leather strand.

"*Wedja*," Jagger muttered the word reverently. "That can't be a coincidence."

"Prosperity?" Aria's recent interest in all things ancient

Egyptian hadn't motivated her to learn to read hieroglyphs. After all, Jagger had studied the ancient script for the past year like it was a competitive sport. There was no need for Aria to learn it, too. So she hadn't recognized the symbol. But the spoken word was as clear as if Jagger had said it in English.

"Yeah, prosperity," Jagger mumbled. He held the amulet up and watched it spin; light streamed through his bedroom window, bouncing off the gold. "Ancient Egyptians used the symbol, right after the *ankh* symbol, when they uttered or wrote a pharaoh's name: *ankh, wedja, seneb*. It's a blessing. It means: 'May you have life, prosperity, and health.'"

A blessing! She rubbed her arms, suddenly cold, then shook herself and leaned toward her brother. "You know why Hemet-Mutef gave it to me."

Of course he knew. But Jagger was naturally opposed to anything that hinted at adventure. Aria would do what needed to be done even if Jagger refused, but his expertise had saved them last time they were in ancient Egypt. Far better to go back with him in tow.

Jagger dropped the amulet to his side with one hand and yanked Aria deeper into his room with the other. He slammed the door behind her with his foot then slumped to the floor next to his dresser. Tossing out his neatly organized

shorts and T-shirts, Jagger rummaged through the bottom drawer and pulled out the *ankh* amulet he kept hidden there. The Egyptian authorities did not know that Jagger and Aria held on to two amulets: the *ankh* amulet that had taken them to the past and Jagger's magical Isis Knot amulet he never took off. If they found out ... well, Aria wasn't sure what would happen, but she suspected it would involve a deep, dark dungeon.

And now, a third amulet had been given to them.

Jagger held the *ankh* in one hand and the *wedja* in the other. The magical gemstones attached to the *ankh* twinkled like crazy, as if a family of colorful fairies was having a glitter fight inside. The magic had always made the stones sparkle, but they'd never seen it shine like this.

Jagger shot back up, eyes glued to the gemstones. "What else happened? Did Hemet or Mutef say anything?"

Aria raised an eyebrow. Neither of the men had ever uttered a single word in the kids' hearing. What were the chances they'd be chatty now that they were statues?

"Right," Jagger rolled his eyes, acknowledging that his question was lame.

"Tatia needs our help."

Jagger frowned, then he gasped as the green gemstone in the middle of the *ankh*, the largest stone that had once

housed the *Ka* of the dying princess Mek, vanished.

The stone instantly reappeared on the *wedja*.

Small lights twinkled around the room. The smell of eucalyptus and mint filled the air.

Jagger Jones!

Aria Jones!

A familiar voice rang out.

“You heard her this time, right?” Jagger asked, his eyes shifting from the *ankh* to the *wedja* and then to Aria. The last time that princess Meretaten—Tatia to Jagger and Aria—summoned them to the past, only Jagger had heard her. And since Jagger was opposed to anything not easily explained by science, he’d been convinced he was losing his mind.

Aria nodded, her belly squirming with excitement. She’d been aching to go back and visit their old friends ever since she and Jagger had returned, safe and sound, to the modern world. Aria was haunted by the vision of the small, chipped *shabti* girl who’d appeared in the tomb, smoke at her back, just as Aria and Jagger were thrown back to their own time. Something had gone wrong. She knew it.

“It’s happening again.” Jagger licked his lips. “We should put both amulets away and think about this.”

“We don’t have time to think, Brainy.” Their ancient friends were making this happen. The princess, Mut, and

Babi wouldn't summon them again if they didn't have an important reason. "We're not doing your analysis paralysis thing today—"

"We need a plan, lil' sis. By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

"Let me guess. Einstein?"

"Benjamin Franklin."

Aria rolled her eyes. "I learned about him. Old Ben would never have turned down a chance to visit ancient Egypt. Besides, we might not get another chance. You know the *Meseneh Rek* spell is hard for them to cast. Just make sure you have your phone and all three amulets. And don't go without me. I'll be right back."

Aria rushed out of the room. Jagger yelled her name as she sped into her room across the hall and grabbed the oversized pink striped bag she'd stuffed under her bed in case this moment ever came.

"Aria."

This time it was Grams' voice. She was coming down the hall but Aria didn't have a moment to spare.

Feeling guilty for ignoring her grandma, Aria burst back into Jagger's room and slammed the door shut behind her.

In the seconds it took her to grab her bag, the nine stones had attached themselves to the *wedja* amulet in Jagger's hand.

Wind whipped around him, creating a tunnel. Her brother was fading, like he was about to blink out of existence ... or into another existence ... or whatever happened when they moved through time.

Aria threw her body into the colorful lights twirling around Jagger and wrapped a hand around his wrist.

“No,” he yelled, dropping the amulets on the ground at his feet.

The second the amulets hit the ground, the wind paused and the lights winked out.

“Oh yes, we are!” Aria scooped up both amulets and threw her arms around Jagger. The wind tunnel materialized around them, lights dancing in glee just as Grams opened the door and everything disappeared.

Had Grams seen them disappear? Aria hoped not: Grams wasn't in great health since Gramps' death. What if she saw her grandkids disappear and had a heart attack, or a stroke, or thought she was losing her mind? A thing like that could push an old woman over the edge!

But there was no time to think about that now, not with their bodies falling through time.

Down.

Down.

Down.

Aria didn't cling to her brother this time like she had twice before. She released him, holding only to his wrist, and focused on the sensation of falling—a sensation so intense that no rollercoaster could mimic it. Jagger was yelling something, but the space between time was utterly, eerily silent.

Thump.

They landed. Again.

But the sight that greeted them wasn't what Aria expected.