

Nafereti-Iti

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Thus Was The Girl-Child

In lands alit by th'Aten's flame,
Osirid marsh, 'breast barren red,
bears lush papyrus banks awash
in life by th'river bled
upon 'n o'er her floodplain fields –
their soil suffused; the wet-sand womb
gestates the formless seed, absorbed
'mongst rushsome reeds, securely moored
within the bed; subsumed.
Ma'at, from Issfet's void, is birthed.
The Sun Disk crowns the waking earth.

Two lands long joined 'neath falcon's flight
between horizons – dusk 'n dawn –
of eastern climb, western descent,
and Nut's night-curtain drawn:
the Mansion Of The Soul of Ptah!
Iteru paints her deltas dark
with riches vast, whilst valleys ring
her riv'ring course, 'long which she brings
her primordial spark
to gift a jewel unto the world.
Along the river, ran a girl.

On bount'yus banks in th'Upper Realm,
south of Narmeric Abydos,
the City of the Sceptre sings
its gold 'n grand chorus!
Since th'Foremost of Noble Ladies –
Hat-Shep-Sut – had Wa-Set flourished
to peaks of tow'ring monuments,
voyages to the shores of Punt,
and conquest accomplished!
Amun-Hotep upon the throne;
the girl stood 'mongst the reeds, alone.

Her back was t'ward the colossal
pylons, pillars, 'n obelisks
of Amun-Ra's greatest temple –
Most Select Of Places!
Her feet? Planted within the silt.
Her legs, scaffolded either side
by columns of papyrus, shone
their sun-soaked brown. Her kilt, upon
her hips, was linen-white.
Her belly rose 'n fell. At rest,
her arms crossed o'er her naked chest.

Thus was the girl-child. 'Midst the dawn's
chill, she watched the night-time passing
westward as she felt the tide of
heat fall on her bare skin.
It broke in 'lluminating throes
'n crashed against the city's stone
to flood the sphinx-lined alley through
Ipet-Re-Shyt, Ipet-Isu,
shrines, courtyards, paths, 'n homes –
on o'er 'n t'ward the Nile 'n b'yond,
in time to watch the past abscond.

She turned about. Her feet held firm.
Her hands moved to her bony hips.
Adorned with turquoise symmetry,
a band slid down her wrist
to settle half-way up her palm,
its lapis-laden metal cold
against her thumb. A tambourine
of beads in carnelian, green,
amber, ox-blood, 'n gold
swayed – jingle-jangling – in the breeze
that moved th'woven papyrus reed.

Tucked well behind her right-side ear
in spiralled strands, her braid of youth
spilled deep-brown locks through th'golden clasp –
an unwritten cartouche
that held the hair at origin –
to cascade from her shaven head.
She saw, in sun-backed silhouette,
a cobra rearing – now erect;
its uraeic-hood spread.
Within the Aten's haze, it merged
with fire that lit 'n fed 'n purged.

"Nafereti-Iti!" Silence
rent – the voice ranged vicious, for to
find those little ears adorned with
fashion foreign 'n new.
As sure as was the god-king's rule,
her moth'ring wet-nurse, whom she'd known
for seven years thus far – Her whole
life's song! – in each 'n ev'ry role
(it seemed) as she had grown,
would know she'd snuck back in to fake
that she'd just now begun to wake...

Hymn To The City Of The Sceptre

The crown of Khemet's upper reaches! 'Breast
Iteru's riv'ring course, 'pon th' eastern bank
you stand in prosp'rous glory to Amun,
who's hid beyond the tall papyrus reeds!
The fertile mud makes abundant off'rings!
Shu soothes your stone that's soaked in Ra's heat-grace!
Your shrines 'n courtyards – life 'n health to all
who walk your courtyards; who attend your shrines –
adorn the alley where the ram-head sphinx
is legion, either side, 'long th' city's length!
Your wealth extends to awe all foreign lands!
Your pious worship deeply pleases all
our divine hosts, who bless our lives with Ma'at!
Re-Shyt; Isu – you guard your city's ends!
Strong Bull, the Majesty of Horus, Who
Establishes the Laws of the Two Lands
and Pacifies, Beloved of Amun,
Neb-Ma'at-Ra, the Heir of Ra, the King:
Amun-Hotep doth favour you o'er all!
Khemet-Nesut-Weret, Great of Praises,
Mistress 'n Lady of the Two Lands: Tiye –
she honours you with her regal presence,
presenting beauty by her husband's side!
Wa-Set, eternal is your sceptred name!

The Tale Of Two Sisters

T'was in another lifetime – when
the Earth's unknown was vast;
when held the land in sway the forms
that took, as their repast,
offerings of fear, obeisance, of
terrawe, love, 'n hate
from Pan's sapient descendants,
placed 'pon the stone they'd shaped;
when yet nature's omnis'yunt whole
was split, personified,
'n given anim'listic force
by th'future deified;
when th'east 'n west were seared with th'throes
of Ra's unending river –
that, between bloodied birthing blocks,
two daughters were delivered...

“Bes protect her...”

“Pass the soiled linen!”

“The sharpened flint?”

“Make the heart of the deliverer strong...”

“We are with you!”

“Yes! With Hathor 'n Taweret at our backs!”

“The knife?!”

“Lay cloth upon the brick!”

“?where'sAh! Come...”

“She will not cry!”

“She will.”

Without th'one whom they'd grown within,
they grew without. In slings
around the necks of nurses they
would rest 'tween wanderings
upon all naked fours on floors
of wealth, where felines lazed
with ears at watch for th'sounds awash
in tumultuous waves
cresting with calls of primate bonds
'n crashing down in cries.
The daughters of Khemet – the Fertile
Land – did set 'n rise
rejuvenated, grown, growing,
'n passing b'yond the west
horizon of their earl'yest years;
out b'yond the palace creche...

“Ben-Ben! Looooook!” She points toward the glist’ning gleam of the water rushing past the reeds, calling to her other half under the canvas shade.

With the skin of a date stuck to her lower lip, its colour on her thumbs ‘n fingers, Mut-Beneret turned ‘round to heed her yelling sister. Clad in kilt ‘n sidelock, soon she saw the reason she’d been summoned so: Nafereti-Iti stood before a hippos herd.

Gleefully approaching primal power – Bulls who bare their war-worn tusks! Young rivals with th’ambition cowed! – she didn’t wait for her sister, who, now, came – drawn to the dazzling brightness.

The waves of mass displacement...
Ricochets of rolling, thund’rous
momentum that mergereach;
tumblecrash.
Against her legs, they lapped.

“Naffy!”

Catching up, the girl in the date-debris dredged mud from the bed of the bank as she ran through the rushes ‘midst the guard’yun grass that marked the meeting of two worlds. Amphib’yusly they stood, not side-by-side but in the same space – sparse delineation spoke of the dis’prate forms, as-yet uncut.

The sun glistened off the dazzling son – heir to the herd, ‘n regent.

The great bull glared at the girls as one glared back.

Down to The Dazzling Aten’s sprawl,
the zigzag of the mud-brick quarters
ricocheting ‘round that Atenpolis,
sojourned the rising daughters.
The city’s seeds had germinated
fast upon their sowing – now,
late in the years of the Sun-God-King,
it flourished! Th’canopic bough
of artindustrolific life, led
large between the palaces,
spread – Reaching! – its urbanic claim, as if
fed – Fertile! – on Iteru’s grace!
The fierce, exploratorive itch –
a restless flame – innate within
the ba of the human ape, e’er led
our sisters on, searching...

“Naffy, look:” (A pointed arm.) “that’s where it’s coming from.”

Jump – latch arms; legs. Wraparound – hands about their opposite wrist; ankle over ankle.

“Pfffaauhh!”

With her face smushed fast against her sister’s cheek, hanging off her naked torso, gigguhling at her almost-toppled kin, th’other whispered best laid plans.

T’was dark in the mud-brick bayk’ry – baking dough that lay entombed/enkilned, at rest, made missives with their spirit-scents to the world that waited for their spell-bound rise. In his kilt, unwigged, ‘n wiping brow, was he when he heard the sound – a querulous command with a trembling voice that tried to keep its birth-right strength.

“Baker! Help me!”

Turning from the burning heat-haze, hands at rest upon his fatless hips, the man stepped for to see her more through the light-lit door – a girl-child.

The grump of the pout on her face – a fleeting funniness until he registered the bangled ankles, braceleted wrists, 'n the gilt kilt-skirt that dug into her belly folds. Her arms across her yet-androgynous chest, the child scowled, her eyes entitled.

"I don't know where I am. Tell me."

A lowered gaze 'n a humbled pose.

"May Sehk-Met, Before Whom Evil Trembles, grant her fierce protection! You are not far from the palace, yet still you mus"

"Come out and speak to me beneath the Aten of Amun-Ra!"

Grov'ling forward; grovuhlingalong – the man, in his noon years, stepped beyond the entrance shade. Cowed 'n bowed, he didn't see the glint of the jew'll'ry pass behind him.

"Where. Should. I. Go. ?."

"Down there, where the glassworks' sounds mingle with the salted-smell of meat made lasting. You'll see the racks that dry the freshly butchered."

"Hey! You're here!"

He looked; she looked, grinning – yet another girl-child clad in status called from a distance down the street, her hands behind her upright back.

"You may return to your work."

Dismissed, he missed the smirk – derisive – dancing 'bout her down-turned mouth.

Mut-Beneret was busy picking gravel from the loaf's insides. The moment that the man had skulked inside, she brought her hands around; holding the bread, they chose to not wait for the sister.

"Hey! Give!"

Snatching over; fighting; sharing – walking 'long the city's routes, they m'yandered. They coursed past the other 'n the wretched 'n the meek. Their bellies drooped, full with the food they'd stolen.

'Gainst the zigzag brick sat kids, their hip-bones stretching out the snare of their skin, pressed tauttight, telling of the sinew o'er their abdomen – made pow'rful with a desp'rate strength.

The girls gazed.

They threw the remaining bread upon a heap of waste.

Grooming the two for the harem – Hail,
the fate of priv'leged girls! –
took a sprawl of forms o'er years til blood-
red light flowed through their world
at the dawn of their destined duty
t'bring the divine rays of Ra
to soar, horaic, heralding
th'royal infant's new-breathed ka.
But children were they still, instilled
with all which that entails.
Consternatalation over-
whelmed th'one who'd regaled
them time, 'n time, 'n time again
with prep'ratory speech
which flooded o'er with teaching feminine,
that did obedience beseech...

Lived On The Woman Lost

"Menat! I've only just..." She trailed
to silence as, through th'threshold, came
the risen Tey – her rage unmasked;
her ochre eyes untame.

"Again!" She yelled, sweeping her hand
to d'rect the child's avoidant gaze
unto the proof of quick-paced feet
in sand-soil tracks. Their eyes did meet;
she fiddled with her braid.
Within Tey's eyes? Th'lament well-versed:
My child, your gifts gestate your curse.

Her pleated dress a sweep of blue
'mongst white, fringe-trimmed with yellow-gold;
her unfinished eyeline blackened;
her perfumed wig sat, bold –
thus was the girl-child's moth'ring guide,
as th'sleeping sister woke (her braid
was floating 'pon her ear 'n cheek,
its damp end anchored 'tween her teeth,
where tass'ling-tips splayed frayed).
Through haze, one girl watched 'nother curse
th'now distant back of their wet nurse.

Voices – awake 'n waking – spoke:
"Why'd you go out?" "Why do you stay?"
"I go with you most times!" "Would you,
without me, disobey?"
"I can do both!" "I can't..." "You can!
Just hide it better; do it less."
She crawled 'cross to her sister's bed
'n shuffled t'where her sister's head
did shun the carved headrest –
at the bed's foot, as in the womb,
they lay 'n silently communed.

Within the hour – up; groomed; dressed.
Proclaimed their tutor: "Good! Come sit,
my dazzling rays of Amun-Ra,
by whom my morning's lit!
My Sweet One Of The Mother, Mut –
Thoth stakes, increasingly, in you
his" "Seshat!" "Ah yes! Seshat! She,
in you, stakes pride increasingly
for th'wisdom you accrue!
Palm-stem in hand, to futures far
you write the sky's eternal stars!

And you! When I say Beauty's Come...
Shall I compare to summer's grace,
or – p'rhaps – with winter's wond'rous night,
these features of thy face?
Were Sekh-Met, at Iteru's side,
to see her reflection transform
into your visage, child, she'd scarce
see eyes less luminous; less fierce!
She'd see, Sun Disk adorned,
a matching pow'r 'n equal might
to stalk the black, African night!"

Delighted thus by Tutor-Dad,
the sister 'n the sister learnt
their lessons. Ay felt blessed; adored
those girls – though sons they weren't.
Within their striking intellect
lived on the woman lost, who now
existed in their uttered thoughts
'n in th'ways they agreed 'n fought.
The long horns of the cow,
atop the vulture headdress, loomed;
Hathor 'n Isis bore their womb.

A voice heard – trace of syllables
clearing the mistsome dawn – that calls
the call of one yet guarded;
of one still rapt, enthralled,
'n taken with the dist' approach
of adulthood, its freedom clear
acrest the waves of mirage meant
to lure 'n spur them on 'n tempt
abandon rushed: *Come near...*
Now, look back at – e'er lost; far flung –
that which to which you should have clung!

"Yes, my lioness?" And, as he
lived on within his daytime-dream,
the future approached, pastward-bound,
so charged; with envy, green.
For soon, the dusk, with twilight grip,
of lingering childhood would pass
to Duat and the Atef crown.
Adolescent night soon abounds.
When th'chapt'ring morning asks,
as dawn breaks – red – o'er th'east: *Who's come?*
Sekh-Met 'n Seshat rise as one.

The Dialogue Of Ay & Tey

My own Queen Consort;
my own Great Wife;
Mother-Muse where once was naught!

Quit quiet now your blasphemy –
though favoured you are not a king!
Your daughters might not speak so highly...

Our daughters do not need
to speak it, f' they know that
they are yours in full!

No. Not mine. Nor –
Stay that objection! – are they yours.
We are theirs.

*The smell of dates 'n figs
in heaps decreasing o'er the eve –
flitfitful flies dispersed.
'Pon lengths of woven reed they lounged,
propped up against the moon-led night.*

Nafereti-Iti...

she...

She does.
Yet still she needs your words.
The princes... They'll not be patient.

I fear that by
the moment she see's sense
her sister'll be lost!

Mut-Beneret does
follow where she leads
with whole-heart bounds...
Though, as you say, we may
be theirs, they are our future, too.
They must be prosperous.

They will be.
They'll soon profess their readiness
in stains on reddened sheets...

That is not all th

Is it not?!

*A trembling tremolody turns
upon the lyric breeze,
breaking 'gainst th'apartment.
O'er bass-lyre beatburst,
th'treble dances sound.*

*Sweat pooled 'tween
prosp'rous flab to fight
their ailing perfume-scent.
The music travelled, borne
by th'wings of Isis.*

They may fashion king's sons
out of the primal waters, but
there is still more that they might gain.

Trained to fashion son's
'n bear man's light...
What more? For whom?

Influence!
For us!
For them!

Our station is high!
We could not wish,
no nor demand,

Your station is high!
You might not wish for more!
I can. I do.

But not without the means, yes?!
Not without your daughters,
or your "own Great Wife"...

*Terse-tension
takes the space between them,
newly lain –
their skin unstuck;
their hands left fumbling.*

I love them.
I love you.
You are not "means".

I know.
They know.
We know.

*B'yond the dist' southern horizon,
a hyaena howls derisive.
Forepaw upon the ruin
of a termite mound,
she bristles 'cross her bulk.*

*Th'lone lion,
mane of deepest black,
growls dominant pow'r.
Standing on the heat-scarred earth,
he burns prophetic.*

Words Of The Wet Nurse

The beginning of the Teaching
made by Tey, Nurse to the sisters
Nafereti-Iti and Mut-Beneret,
Wife of Ay, who is God's Father,
Tutor to the sisters
Nafereti-Iti and Mut-Beneret,
Acting Scribe of the King, Beloved by Him,
Fan-Bearer on the Right-Hand Side of the King,
Overseer of the Horses,
Troop Commander,
in the time of Neb-Ma'at-Ra, the Heir of Ra,
Amun-Hotep – Life! Prosperity! Health!

And thus she said,
to the daughters of the elite:

“On the decorated stelae of my mind's eye memory –
a waking dream, e'en as I see you as you are today –
there dance the dazzling depths of eyes,
the brown of the branches of the sycamore,
set within your faces – black
with the fertile soil; white
with the fear of two young children
who had strayed to play
on the banks of the netcher lands,
facing, ne'er too soon/too soon,
the lessons of the winds 'n the wilds 'n the water...

You, the girl-children with Hathor's lust for life;
with Sekh-Met's prowling pride that seeks unending dangers;
with Wadj-Et's fierce, protective eyes e'er placed 'pon one another;
with th'loyalty of Isis burning t'match the fire of Amun-Ra:
you must become obedient!

Do not let fly your thousand questions!
(Though I weep for your unanswered minds...)
Do not follow the paths of impulse!
(Though I wept with joy when you first walked...)
Make obeisance! (As I unmake
your essence with these teachings...)
Become the ones desired for their def'rence!

Mut-Beneret – you must no longer take your sister's lead!
(E'en though she is a beauty in her thoughts 'n words 'n deeds...)
Nafereti-Iti – you must quell your cobric tongue!
(Yet though it hides – a serpent charmed – may it remain fearsome...)

Within the palace harem, you must excel!
Do so with compliant acts.

Do not seek elevation with your wilfulness!
Khemet-Nesut-Weret, Great of Praises,
Lady of the Two Lands, Tiye – Life! Prosperity! Health! –
will know you:
she will know that beautiful ones have come;
she will know that, as Hathor bears the sun,
your hips will bear the sons to maintain all that's good!
You must make it such that she will know,
as consort and as wife, that you will uphold all traditions,
all your duties, sacred rites, 'n that you'll act
to honour, manifest, 'n strengthen ev'ry word 'n deed
of the Living Horus whom you live to honour!

Is there more?
The Crown Prince – May he reign! –
Thutmose will know you, too...
With minds at rest,
your bodies shall be his."

To Be A Woman

Of a forceful mind,
suppressed in tutelage
to rest in hidden chambers –
painted o'er –
behind subdued space, soon
dedicated/
decorated
to her new obedience –
in gilt adornment –
Nafereti-Iti learnt
to be a woman.

The deeper bedrock –
undisturbed.
There rests her wilful essence.
The pride of a predecessor
feeds her ba...

Her golden mask of decorum
(Raise up, Uraeus – high!)
lay placed upon
her face – a song of
gracef'ly hidden pride.

A virginescent river
begins to shift its sediment...