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COLLEEN HOOVER

REAWAKENED

FREE PREVIEW



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#Reawakened

KEEP READING FOR A SNEAK PEEK...

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First Edition

Random House Children's Books supports the First Amendment
and celebrates the right to read.

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THE WINE OF LOVE

An Ancient Egyptian Love Poem

Oh! when my lady comes,
And I with love behold her,
I take her into my beating heart
And in my arms enfold her;
My heart is filled with joy divine
For I am hers and she is mine.
Oh! when her soft embraces
Do give my love completeness,
The perfumes of Arabia
Anoint me with their sweetness;
And when her lips are pressed to mine
I am made drunk and need not wine.

PART ONE



In the great city of Itjtawy, the air was thick and heavy, reflecting the mood of the men in the temple, especially the countenance of the king and the terrible burden he carried in his heart. As King Heru stood behind a pillar and looked upon the gathered people, he wondered if the answer his advisers and priests had given was their salvation or instead, their utter destruction.

Even should the offering prove successful, the people would surely suffer a terrible loss, and for him, personally, there was no way to recover from it.

Despite the simmering heat of the day, he shivered in the temple's shadow, surely a bad omen. Uneasily, he ran a hand over his smoothly shaven head and let the curtain fall. To quiet his nerves, he began to pace the temple's smooth, polished dais and ponder his choices.

King Heru knew that even should he defy the proposed demands, he needed to do something drastic to appease the fearsome god Seth. If only there was a way out, he thought. Putting the proposal to the people was something no king had ever done before.

A king held his position precisely because it was his right, his duty, to see to the needs of his people, and a king who could not make a wise decision, however difficult, was ripe for deposing. Heru knew that by allowing the people to

decide, he proved himself to be a weakling, a coward, and yet there was no other outlet he could see that would allow him to live with the consequences.

Twenty years before King Heru's time, all the people of Egypt were suffering. Years of terrible drought further complicated by devastating sandstorms and plague had almost destroyed civilization. Marauders and old enemies took advantage of Egypt's weakness. Several of the oldest settlements had been wiped out completely.

In a desperate act, King Heru invited the surviving leaders of the major cities to come to his home. King Khalfani of Asyut and King Nassor of Waset agreed to a one-week summit, and the three of them, along with their most powerful priests, disappeared behind closed doors.

The results of that meeting had been a decision that tipped the balance in the pantheon of the gods. Each city worshipped a different god—the residents of Asyut, which played host to the most famous magicians, were devoted to Anubis; those of Waset, known for weaving and shipbuilding, to Khonsu; and King Heru's people, skilled in pottery and stone cutting, worshipped Amun-Ra and his son, Horus. The kings had been convinced by their priests that their patron gods had abandoned them and that they should come together as one to make offerings to appease a new god, namely, the dark god, Seth, in order to secure the safety and well-being of the people.

And so they did. That year the rains came in abundance. The Nile overflowed its banks, creating fertile lands for planting. Livestock flourished, tripling in number. Women gave birth the following year to more healthy babies than had ever been recorded. Even more astonishing was when the queens of each city, who had been the most outspoken against the deity change, were appeased when discovering that they, too, had conceived.

As the three queens each gave their husbands a healthy son, they acknowledged their blessings, especially the wife of Heru, who had never had a child and was well past her bearing years. Though in their hearts, the new mothers still paid homage to the gods of old, they agreed that from that time forward they would never speak ill of the dark one. The people rejoiced.

The people prospered.

The three kings wept with gratitude.

In an age of peace and harmony, the sons of each queen were raised as brothers in the hope that they would someday unite all of Egypt under one ruler. The worship of Seth became commonplace, and the old temples were essentially abandoned.

The sons considered each king a father and each queen a mother. Their kings loved them. Their people loved them. They were the hope of the future, and nothing could keep the three of them apart.

Now, even now, on the darkest day of their fathers' lives, the three young men stood together, waiting for the kings to make a surprise announcement.

In a moment, the three kings would ask the unthinkable. A favor that no king, no father, should ask of his son. It made King Heru's blood run cold and left him with vivid nightmarish dreams of his heart being found unworthy when weighed against the feather of truth in the final judgment. The three kings stepped into the glaring sunlight that reflected off the white stone of the temple. King Heru stood in the center while the other two men took their place at his side. King Heru was not only the tallest of the three but also the most skilled speaker. Raising his hands, he began, "My people, and visiting citizens from our dearly loved cities upriver, as you know, we, your kings, have been in conference with our priests to determine why the river, which has lapped our shores so gently for the last twenty years, does not flourish as it should in this most important season. Our chief priest, Runihura, has said that the god Seth, the one we have worshipped wholeheartedly these past years, demands a new sacrifice."

King Heru's own son took a step forward. "We will sacrifice whatever you think is necessary, Father," he said.

The king held up his hand to quiet his son and gave him a sad smile before turning back to the crowd. "The thing that Seth asks this year as a sacrifice is not a prized bull, bushels of grain, fine fabrics, or even the best of our fruits." Heru paused as he waited for the people to quiet. "No, Runihura has said that Seth has given us much, and for the things we have received we must return that which is most precious.

"The god Seth demands that three young men of royal blood be sacrificed to him and that they serve him indefinitely in the afterlife." Heru sighed heavily. "If this does not happen, he vows to rain destruction upon all of Egypt."



House of Muses

"Fifteen fifty," the driver demanded in a heavy accent.

"Do you take credit?" I responded politely.

"No. No cards. Machine's broken."

Giving a slight smile to the heavily browed eyes staring at me in the rearview mirror, I pulled out my wallet. As many times as I'd ridden in a New York City cab, I'd never gotten used to the attitude of the taxi drivers; it irked me every time. Still, it was either that or our family's personal driver, who would shadow me around, reporting every move I made to my parents. All things considered, I much preferred independence.

I handed the driver a twenty and opened the door. Almost instantly, he sped off, leaving me struggling to maintain my footing while coughing in the cloud of gray exhaust he left behind.

"Jerk," I mumbled as I smoothed my cropped trousers and then bent down to adjust a strap on my Italian leather sandals.

"Do you need help, miss?" asked a young man nearby.

Standing up, I gave him the once-over. His department store jeans, I ♥ NEW YORK tee, and scruffy boy-next-door appearance instantly told me he wasn't from the city. No self-respecting New Yorker, at least none

I knew, would be caught dead in an NYC tee. He wasn't bad-looking, but when I considered his likely determinate stay in the city coupled with the fact that he would obviously not be parental approved, I surmised that any further dialogue would be a waste of time. Not my type.

I hadn't figured out exactly what my type was yet, but I figured I'd know it when I saw it.

"No thanks." I smiled. "I'm good."

With a no-nonsense stride, I headed toward the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The girls at my school would think I was an idiot for passing up a cute boy/potential boyfriend—or at the very least, a fun distraction.

It was easier not to make any promises I didn't plan on keeping, especially with a boy who hadn't met any of my requirements for the perfect guy. The list wasn't complete yet, but I'd been adding to it for as long as I'd been old enough to be interested in boys. Above all else, I was careful and thoughtful about my choices.

Even though I was very picky, wore only designer clothes, and had a monthly allowance bigger than what most people my age earned in a year, I was by no means a snob. My parents had certain expectations of me, and the money was used as a means to fulfill them. I was always taught that the image one portrays, though certainly not one hundred percent accurate, was an indicator of the type of person you were. Despite my efforts to find evidence that this wasn't always the case, among the people I went to school and hung out with, it often was.

My father, a successful international finance lawyer, always said, "Bankers trust the suit first and the man second," his version of "Dress for success." He and my mother, who spent most of her waking hours in her skyscraper office at one of the largest media companies in the city, dictating orders to her personal assistant, had drilled into me that image was everything.

Mostly, I was left on my own as long as I did what they expected, which included attending various functions, portraying myself as a dotting daughter, and getting straight As at my all-girls private school. And,

of course, not dating the wrong type of boy, which I accomplished by not dating at all. In turn, I was given a generous allowance and the freedom to explore New York. A freedom I cherished, especially today, the first day of spring break.

The Met was one of my favorite hideouts. Not only did my parents approve of the institution—a definite plus—but it was a great place to people-watch. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in the future, but this was the week I had to figure it out. I'd already been accepted to a number of parent-approved universities. Mother and Father—they hated being called Mom and Dad—wanted me to major in something that would make them proud, like medicine, business, or politics, but none of those really interested me.

What I really enjoyed was studying people. People of the past, like the ones I read about at the Met, or even just the people walking around in New York City. In fact, I kept a little book full of notes on the most interesting people I saw.

How I would turn this admittedly strange hobby into a career, I had no idea. My parents would never approve of my becoming a counselor, mostly because they believed a person should be able to take charge of their own mental health by merely willing themselves to overcome any obstacle they might face. Consorting with those they considered beneath their station wasn't something they encouraged, and yet becoming a counselor was the one career path that made the most sense to me.

Any time I thought about the future, my parents came to mind. What they had planned was a constant drumming on my consciousness, and if I entertained the idea of deviating from their plans even an iota, I was filled with guilt, which effectively choked the life out of any little seeds of rebellion.

One of those seeds was where I applied to college. Technically, it wasn't a mutiny, since they knew about it. I was allowed to apply to places that interested me as long as I sent in the paperwork to the ones my parents approved of as well. Of course they'd been thrilled when I

was accepted to them all, but there was no doubt that they were pushing me in a certain direction.

Now spring break of my senior year was finally here, a time most teens loved, and I was dreading it. If only everything didn't have to be decided right now. Mother and Father had given me until the end of the week to choose my college and my major. Starting college as undecided was not an option.

Stopping at the counter, I flashed my lifetime membership card and swiftly walked through the roped entrance.

"Hello, Miss Young," said the old guard with a smile. "Here all day?"

I shook my head. "Half day, Bernie. Meeting the girls for lunch."

"Should I be watching for them?" he asked.

"No. I'll be alone today."

"Very good," he said, securing the rope behind me and returning to help with the line of tourists. There were definitely some perks to having parents who donated annually to the Met. And since I was an only child, I was lucky enough to receive the full "benefit" of their monetary donations, wisdom, and experience. They were loving, too, if love looks like a stiff upper lip of pride and approval. But I was often lonely, and at times felt trapped.

Whenever I started to feel like I needed a real mom type to bake cookies with, I asked to visit my paternal grandmother, who lived on a small farm in Iowa, a woman my parents checked in on exactly once every two months. They visited her annually, though they stayed in a nearby city hotel and worked from their room while I stayed on the farm with her overnight.

Speaking of grandmas, a very interesting-looking older woman was seated on a bench ahead of me and staring at one of my favorite pictures, *She Never Told Her Love*, by Henry Peach Robinson. The photograph was controversial. Critics said it was indecent and indelicate for a photographer to capture a dying woman in print, but I found the photo dramatically romantic. It was said that the photographer was trying to

illustrate a scene from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. I knew the quote on the picture's description by heart.

SHE NEVER TOLD HER LOVE,
BUT LET CONCEALMENT,
LIKE A WORM I' THE BUD,
FEED ON HER DAMASK CHEEK.

TWELFTH NIGHT, 2.4.110–12

Consumption. That was supposedly what the woman in the photograph was dying of. I reasoned it was appropriate. Dying of a broken heart must feel like a type of consumption. I imagined it to be a squeezing pain that wrapped itself around a person like a boa constrictor, tightening more and more, crushing the body until there was nothing left but a dry husk.

As fascinated as I was by the photo, I was even more fascinated by the woman who sat staring at it. Her cheeks sagged, as did her heavy body. Strands of limp gray hair hung from a messy bun. She clutched a worn cane, which meant it was well used, and she wore a floral-patterned, butterfly-collared dress (circa 1970). Her feet were planted shoulder width apart in thick-soled Velcro-closed sneakers. The woman was leaning forward, resting her hands on the edge of the cane, her chin propped on her hands as she studied the picture.

For the better part of an hour, I sat at a distance, watching her and sketching her silhouette in my notebook. At one point, a tear ran down her face and she finally moved, digging into a giant crocheted bag for a tissue. What caused her tears? I wondered. Did she have a long-lost love of her own? Someone she had never shared her feelings with? The possibilities and questions swirled in my head as I adjusted my backpack and headed down the hall, shoes clicking on the marble floor. Noticing a familiar guard, I stopped.

"Hi, Tony."

"And how are you today, Miss Young?"

"I'm well. Hey, listen. I need to do some serious work. Is there a less-trafficked place around here that I can go to before I meet my friends for lunch? The people are too distracting."

"Hmm." Tony rubbed his chin and I heard the bristly sandpaper sound that meant he hadn't shaved that morning.

"The Egyptian wing is roped off," he said. "They're adding some new pieces. But they shouldn't be in there today. The boss lady is at a conference, and nothing in this museum moves without her."

"Do you think I could go in there and sit? I promise not to touch anything. I just need a quiet spot."

After a brief frown of consideration, his brows drew apart and he smiled. "All right. Just make sure you're careful. Stay out of view of the tourists, or they might get the idea to follow you in."

"Thanks, Tony."

"You're welcome. Come back and see me again when you get a chance."

"Will do," I said, and headed toward the special-exhibitions exit, then turned back, "Hey, Tony, there's an old woman over by the photography exhibit. Can you check on her in a little while? She's been there a long time."

"I will, Miss Lilliana."

"Bye."

I sped past the wall of photographs and headed downstairs to the main floor. The Medieval Art and the Hall of Cloisters, full of tapestries, statues, carvings, swords, crosses, and jewels, led to the museum store and then, finally, to the Egyptian wing.

When no one was looking, I slipped under the fabric rope. Despite the air-conditioning, the dust from thousands of years ago had a sharp enough tang to be noticeable. Perhaps the recent remodeling of the exhibit had released centuries of dust into the air, giving the effect of old things being stirred to life.

The overhead lights were off, but sun came through the large windows and lit up displays as I continued. Tens of thousands of artifacts

were housed in a couple dozen rooms, each room focusing on one era. I felt adrift in a black ocean of history, surrounded by little glass boxes that offered fading glimpses of time gone by.

Displays of cosmetics boxes, canopic jars, statues of gods and goddesses, funerary papyrus, and carved blocks from actual temples, all gleaming with hidden stories of their own, captured my attention. It was as if the artifacts were simply waiting for someone to come along and blow the sandstone grit of time from their surfaces.

A sparkling bird caught my attention. I'd never seen it before and wondered if it was part of the new display or just on rotation. The rendering, a beautifully made golden falcon that represented the Egyptian god Horus, was called *Horus the Gold*.

After finding a cozy corner lit well enough for me to see, I sat with my back against the wall, turning to a blank sheet in my notebook to list all possible majors and major/minor combinations in groupings my parents would approve of. I was matching up my top three choices with their universities when I heard a scrape.

Wondering if a tourist had followed me in, I listened carefully for a few minutes. Nothing. This wing of the museum was as silent as a tomb. Smirking at my own stupid cliché, I went back to my notes and examined a glossy college brochure.

Before I made it through the first page, there was a thumping sound, followed by the same scraping noise. Though I considered myself a rational person, not easily frightened, a chill ran from my scalp down the length of my spine, as if icy fingers were caressing my vertebrae.

I set down my pencil and notebook carefully, trying to not make any sounds of my own, and listened with increasing alarm to the scrapes, scuffs, and distinctly nonhuman groans coming from the other side of the wall. Someone or something was definitely there. Calling forth my sensible mind to dispel my fear, I considered that perhaps the sounds were being made by an animal.

An eerie moan made my hands tremble, and the sight of my shaking fingers steeled me. I was being silly.

“Hello?” I ventured quietly. “Is someone there?”

I stood and took a few steps forward. The sounds abruptly ceased and my heart stilled. Was someone hiding? A museum employee would have answered me.

Sucking in a shaky breath, I rounded the corner only to come face to face with a wall of plastic. *This must be the section they’re working on*, I thought. It was too dark to make out any shapes inside the room, so I stood there for a full minute gathering my courage.

I ran my fingers along the thick plastic lining until I found an opening, gasping when I saw a figure staring back at me, not inches from where I stood. But the frightened girl clutching the plastic drape was just me: her slightly wavy, product-enhanced, long brown hair, pale skin, and white designer blouse now marked with dust. Yep, me. The tile beneath the large artifact read ANCIENT COPPER MIRROR. I shook my head as I tried to make out what else was in the room.

The polished floor was protected by a heavy drop cloth, which was covered with sawdust, and several boards, cut in various shapes, lay haphazardly on the floor. I used one to prop open the plastic curtain, taking advantage of whatever meager light I could get, and moved deeper into the room.

Dark shapes and statues filled makeshift shelves, with stacked crates blocking every path. Now that I knew this shipment was so recent, I rationalized that what I’d heard was most likely a rat or a mouse making its home in one of the boxes. That would explain the silence since I’d come in.

I saw nothing that looked out of place in a museum. A box of tools here, a circular saw there. Opened crates filled with Egyptian treasures resting on the straw. True to my word, I didn’t touch any of the pieces, and moved through the space carefully and quietly until a golden light behind some boxes caught my eye. I let out a small gasp as I came upon an enormous sarcophagus.

The lid, resting at an angle on the lower half of the coffin, was breathtaking. As I focused on all the little details—the handsome carved face,

with polished green stones for eyes, the crook and flail he held cross-ways on his chest, the precious gold details that meant he was likely someone of importance—my fingers itched for my pencil and notebook.

Right away I noticed the patterns of three—three birds, three gods, three sets of wings, three bands on the arms. I wondered what they signified and began coming up with possible scenarios as I continued exploring. The packing slip on the coffin-sized crate nearby read:

UNKNOWN MUMMY
DISCOVERED 1989
VALLEY OF THE KINGS
EGYPT

Despite my fascination with the upcoming exhibit, I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. No rat tails or droppings that I could see. No squeaking mouse hiding in a corner. No grave robbers or cursed mummies. Not even any museum employees.

As I turned to leave, I looked down and suddenly realized two things: first, the straw-filled sarcophagus didn't contain a mummy, and second, there was a set of footprints other than my own in the sawdust, ones made by two bare feet, and they led *away* from the coffin.

An intense curiosity took hold of me, and ignoring strong reservations, I followed the footprints. They led me on a path between boxes and crates until I met a dead end. No climactic movie music was triggered. No rancid scents of decay or death assaulted my nose. No creepy monster leered at me from the darkness.

Recognizing I'd let my imagination get the best of me, I began making my way back toward the plastic curtain. I was passing the copper mirror when a hand shot out of the darkness and locked on my arm. My choked scream echoed, the shriek bouncing off relics. The golden gods and stony statues kept their icy eyes forward, remaining as still and dead as everything around them.



Stranger in a Strange Land

The hand, which was extremely warm and not covered in ancient mummy wrappings, let go the instant I screamed. I dashed through the plastic curtain and around the wall to grab the can of pepper spray I kept in my bag. I stood there, can aimed, finger on the trigger, as the bare feet that were poking out beneath the curtain retreated into the darkness.

The sound of rummaging soon became obvious as the mysterious person began cracking open boxes. Something, most likely a box, crashed to the floor, and a metallic ringing indicated that a precious object of some kind had also been heedlessly dropped.

"I'm warning you. I'm armed," I threatened.

Whoever was in there paused and said a few words I didn't understand before they went back to whatever it was they were doing.

"What was that? What did you say?" I asked. When they didn't respond, I tried another tack. "*Qui êtes-vous? ¿Quién es usted?*" The only response was a grunt of frustration and the unmistakable sound of a crate being tossed aside.

"Look, I don't know who you are or what you're doing in this

exhibit,” I said, switching back to English while I knelt and threw my papers into my bag, “but you really shouldn’t be in there.”

Hoisting my bag over my shoulder without taking the time to zip it, I kept my eyes trained on the sheets of plastic ahead while inching toward the entrance. I hid behind the displays until I reached the main walkway, still holding up the pepper spray in case the stranger jumped out at me. When the plastic sheet came into view, I scanned the area for a sinister shape, but nothing emerged from the closed-off section.

Was the person hiding? Was I being stalked? “Please come out and explain yourself,” I called bravely. Keeping my back to the wall, I waited for an answer.

What I should have done was leave and report what was happening to the security guards, but as I stood there, curiosity overwhelmed me and I couldn’t. If the person had wanted to attack me, they already had had ample opportunity.

Perhaps he or she was lost. What if it was a transient who had wandered into the exhibit and was trying to catch a nap? Maybe it was an employee. Maybe they were hurt. I lowered my aching arm and slowly walked back toward the plastic curtain.

“Hello? Do you need help?” I ventured. I didn’t sound as confident as I had hoped.

I heard a sigh as someone came toward me. Even though I was no longer pointing the can of pepper spray, I was still clutching it, nervously running my forefinger in little circles over the trigger.

“Who are you?” I asked again quietly, more to express the thought out loud than because I expected an answer.

A hand grasped the curtain, pushing it aside as the object of both my fear and curiosity stepped through, mumbling an assortment of words that sounded very much like expletives in another language. Stopping just outside the curtain, he—it was most definitely a he—let the plastic fall and faced me with an irritated expression.

Though we were in the darkest part of the exhibit, I could clearly make out the pleated white skirt that ended just at his knees and the

wide expanse of a tanned and very bare chest. His bare feet were covered with sawdust. He seemed young, maybe just a few years older than me, yet his head was bald.

Crossing muscular arms over his wide chest, he boldly looked me up and down and I got the feeling that he found me both surprising and disappointing. "Stay back," I said, raising the can of pepper spray and feeling like an idiot for getting into this situation. He just raised an eyebrow and smirked, seeming to taunt me.

Jabbing a finger toward me, he uttered something that sounded like a command.

"I'm sorry. I don't understand you," I answered.

Noticeably frustrated, he repeated himself, more slowly this time, as if he were talking to an imbecile.

I answered back just as slowly, first gesturing to myself, "I," then shaking my head, "don't understand," and finally pointing at him, "you."

Crying out in exasperation, he threw his hands into the air and kept them there. At that exact moment, the overhead lights came on. A little squeak escaped my mouth as I got my first real glimpse of the guy I'd assumed had been living with the relics. He was definitely *not* a transient.

Who are you? I wondered as I studied the person, who was not a man and yet not a teen. He seemed . . . timeless. Hooded hazel eyes, at that moment more green than brown, beneath a strong brow pinned me with a gaze that was both intelligent and almost predatory. I felt like a mouse looking up at a swooping falcon, knowing death loomed but utterly unable to look away from the beauty of it.

His physical splendor was undeniable: brooding eyes, miles of muscles beneath smooth, golden skin, and full lips that would send any girl swooning. But there was something deeper behind the beauty, something very different about him that made my fingers itch for a pencil and paper. I wasn't sure I could even capture the indescribable thing I felt when I looked at him, but I really wanted to try. As easy as I found it to put people in categories based on the things I noticed about them—

their clothes, the way they moved, the people they were with, or their patterns of communication—I thought that for him I just might have to come up with a new system. He didn't belong in any particular group. He was unique.

I blinked and realized he was smirking again. Even if the rest of him was a mystery, I could identify the expression. I'd met dozens of boys with expressions like that. International or not, they were all the same. They thought their wealth and good looks made them powerful. This guy was practically dripping with power. *Definitely not my type.*

"So what are you supposed to be?" I lashed out, heat stinging my cheeks in response to his arrogance. "Are you some international model taking photos down here and now can't find your pants?" I scoffed, indicating his costume or lack thereof. "Well, believe me," I said, using my best condescending voice and punctuating each word with a dramatic gesture for emphasis, "nobody would look twice at you, so just . . . move along."

Sighing, Model-boy mumbled a few words as he swirled his fingers in the air. Suddenly, there was a funny taste in my mouth, a kind of fizzing, like an effervescent candy had just dissolved on my tongue. The sensation quickly disappeared and I was trying to figure out what he was doing when he said a word I finally understood.

"Identify."

"Identify?" I repeated dumbly. "Are you asking my name?"

He nodded once.

Shifting my weight, I answered tersely, "Lilliana Young. What's yours?"

"Good. Come along, Young Lily, I have need of your assistance," he said, forming his lips around the words like they left a bad taste in his mouth, and effectively ignoring my question.

Presuming I'd follow, he turned and plunged back through the plastic curtain. After a brief hesitation, my insatiable nosiness got the better of me, and unable to come up with another good option, I threw aside the curtain and followed. Light filled every corner of the once-dark

room, and I found Model-boy sifting through items in a crate, tossing the discarded ones aside like rubbish.

"What exactly are you doing? Why are you dressed like that? And how can you suddenly speak English?"

"Too many questions, Young Lily. Please pick one."

He lifted a heavy jar from the box. Closing his eyes, he spoke softly, melodically, in another language. After a moment, he shook his head, put the item back, and selected another.

"What are you doing?" I asked as he repeated the chant.

"I am seeking my jars of death."

"Jars of death?" I paused. "Do you mean canopic jars? And what do you mean, 'my'?"

"No more questions, Young Lily."

"So," I mumbled, stalling as I tried to figure out what exactly was going on, "you're looking for canopic jars, aka death jars. I read about those recently in *National Geographic*. They're the kind used for mummies. The ones their organs are kept in."

"Yes."

"Are you stealing them?"

He moved to another crate. "I cannot steal that which belongs to me."

I crouched and peered into the guy's face. I was pretty good at reading people, so I usually knew when someone was lying. This guy wasn't. Which meant he either actually believed he had some claim on these Egyptian relics or he was crazy. I was inclined to go with crazy.

"Look," I said quietly. "These items belong to the museum. You're not supposed to be touching them. You can't just come into a museum and take whatever you like."

"Museum?"

"Yes, museum. As in, collection house of antiquities, displayer of old documents and art of great value."

Pulling the top off yet another crate, he squatted to examine the contents. "Ah," he said. "A House of Muses."

"A what?"

He ignored me and, after a brief perusal of the box's contents, rose with a grunt of frustration. "They are not here."

"The death jars?" I asked.

"Yes. These are replicas. They do not hold my life force."

"Life force, right." *Definitely crazy.*

Mumbling a few excuses, I stood and began my retreat, but he followed me.

"Without my life force, I am merely a walking shadow on borrowed time," he stated gravely.

His eyes locked with mine in a disturbingly determined way as I backed away nervously. "I need sustenance, Young Lily," he said while advancing.

"Sustenance, okay." *Please don't let hot foreign-model guy turn into Hannibal Lecter.* "Well, there are a lot of places where you can get something to eat. May I recommend the Roof Garden Café on the fifth floor?" I backed around a stack of crates as I gave him directions, but he pressed forward.

"Do not run away, Young Lily."

"Run?" I tittered anxiously. "I'm not running. But speaking of running, if the Roof Garden is too far, there's always the American Wing Café. It's right next to this Egyptian exhibit. You can't miss it. Well, I've got a meeting to get to. I've really got to go."

"You do not understand. Without my jars I must share your life force."

"Share my . . . Well, see, that's the thing, I'm using mine just now, thank you. Really wish I could help you, I do," I said, realizing he'd backed me up against a wall of crates. When my backside hit the barrier, he smiled. Without a second thought, I blasted him in the face with the pepper spray. Howling, he doubled over. At the same time a wind began to swirl around him, lifting little pieces of dust and construction material into the air.

Panicked, I spun and ran toward the curtain. But before I reached it, the lights went out and I banged my knee against the golden sarcophagus. Stumbling to catch my balance, I heard him coming toward me. "Come back, Young Lily," he groaned. "I need you."

Oh, I don't think so. There was no time for my eyes to adjust. Gripping my bag with one hand, I felt along the coffin until I'd skirted the massive object, and then hurried out as fast as I could. He followed me, emerging from the curtain just a few seconds after I did.

My open bag was bouncing, and pens and pencils scattered all over the floor. When my notebook fell out, I had to stop for it despite the danger. I chanced a look back.

Crazy model-boy was standing there, arms raised in the air, eyes closed. He was chanting like before, his voice echoing through the exhibit as I dashed toward the exit. A mysterious wind lifted my hair, blowing it around my face and blinding me as I ran. His words pierced my consciousness, like hieroglyphs being chiseled into stone. He chanted:

Protect me, God of the Morning Sun.

Rebuff those who work evil.

Turn aside this calamity.

With the power of my mouth,

The power in my heart,

I utter a spell.

As our forms are bound this day,

So are our lives.

Tirelessly, she will serve me

Whilst I serve Egypt.

As I wander this land,

Make light my feathers,

Make swift my wings,

Make steady my heart.

I take her strength of body,
And, in doing so,
Pledge to reward the gift given
Where I am unknown, she will attend.
Where I am alone, she will be.
Where I am weak, she will sustain,
Even unto death,
That the darkness might be locked away
And all things remain in the light of the everlasting sun.
My heart is firm.
My soul is triumphant.
My service is eternal.

I'd reached the exhibit doors, but the moment he finished, I was blasted backward onto the tile floor.

I had no idea what was happening. All I felt was pain. My heart beat erratically, and my stomach quivered with nausea when my lungs couldn't take in air.

Did he shoot me? As I tried to fill my lungs, I felt around on my back. There was no blood. No bullet hole. Carefully, I stood up. I needed to get out. Now.

Reaching the side exit, I checked my watch. Eleven-thirty-five, just a few minutes late for my date. If I missed out on the pretty much mandatory lunch, I'd never hear the end of it from my dad. He wanted me to make friends with the daughters of some very important people he wanted to "work with," meaning rub elbows with, in the future.

Darting through the foot traffic, I entered one of my favorite restaurants and was ushered to a table next to the large bay windows that looked out over the street. Sinking into the chair, I blew out a breath as three pairs of critical eyes stared me down. My classmates. Their perfectly plumped glossy lips made little O shapes as they set down their menus to study me.

"What happened to you?" Redhead asked.

"You look like something the cat dragged in," said Blonde.

"Dragged in, scratched, coughed up in a hairball, and tinkled on, maybe," added Blonder.

The girls laughed. "No, even better," Blonde said. "You look like a windblown tourist left too long on an open-top bus. Aw . . . did you lose your map?" she added in a syrupy-sweet voice.

I smiled my best nice-to-see-you-but-I-really-want-to-kill-you smile at my three "friends," but they were nowhere near finished.

"I mean, seriously, who did your hair this morning? Albert Einstein?"

"Yeah, and your clothes." Blonder twitched her nose. "I've seen fewer wrinkles on a shar-pei."

Redhead leaned over and picked at my shirt. "Is that sawdust?"

Grimacing, I replied, "Yes."

"I knew it!" Blonde gasped facetiously. "Lilliana is having a secret affair with a rodeo clown." All three girls burst out laughing.

"Well, that explains the hair," said Redhead.

"Okay, back off. I've had a rough morning, all right?" Picking up the menu, I tried to covertly smooth my hair and brush some of the sawdust from my clothes. "I was involved in a hit-and-run at the museum," I mumbled from behind the menu.

"You mean outside the museum?" Redhead asked with a hint of actual concern.

My lips twitched sheepishly. "No, I mean inside the museum."

Blonder gasped for real this time and then lowered her voice. "Were you . . . mugged?"

In an instant, all three girls became very serious at the mention of the deep-seated fear they shared, which was to be the victim of a purse snatching. The belief that everyone else in the world had designs on their money and, for most of them, their person, was almost a required understanding at my elite private school.

"You poor thing," Blonde clucked as Redhead rubbed my back for a minute, then quickly dusted off her fingers on her napkin. "You just relax. We'll take care of you."

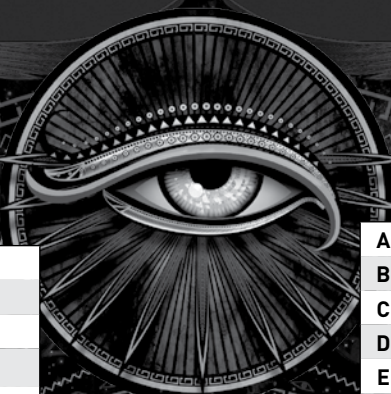
While Blonde was going on about the merits of a new designer she loved, I stared absentmindedly out the window. Immediately, I felt something. My gut twisted, muscles spasming as my breath quickened for no apparent reason. Then, at the edge of the window, a man came into view. A man who was stopping traffic. A bald man wearing a white pleated skirt and no shoes.

Though New Yorkers are used to just about anything, the man caused a stir. The crowd parted for him as he tilted his head skyward, spinning in a circle to look at the surrounding buildings as if he'd never seen one before. When he stepped into traffic I stood up involuntarily.

Then a cab hit him.

"Cassie, Christy, Courtney, I'm sorry, but I've got to go."

Picking up my bag in a panic, I ran out of the restaurant and into the street. A strange compulsion drew me toward this person who both fascinated and terrified me, and I wasn't sure I wanted to find him still among the living.



DISCOVER YOUR EGYPTIAN PHARAOH NAME

Take the first letter of
your first name,
the first letter of
your last name, and
combine to find out
who you are the
god or goddess of!

A	Anubis
B	Bastet
C	Cleopatra
D	Darius
E	Echnaton
F	Florianus
G	Geb
H	Hapy
I	Inyotef
J	Jacob-Baal
K	Khufu
L	Licinius
M	Mentuhotep
N	Nun
O	Osiris
P	Pami
Q	Qar
R	Ramses
S	Shu
T	Tao
U	Unas
V	Valerianus
W	Wasa
X	Xerxes
Y	Yakbam
Z	Zoser

A	Snakes and War
B	Baboons
C	Dwarves
D	The Earth
E	The Nile
F	Love
G	Frogs
H	War, Sky, and Falcons
I	Perfection
J	Magic
K	Scarab Beetles
L	The Moon
M	Justice, Truth, and Order
N	Vultures
O	Sky and Stars
P	The Underworld
Q	The Sun
R	Creation
S	Scorpions
T	Writing
U	Fire and Vengeance
V	Wind and Air
W	Protection
X	Wisdom
Y	Crocodiles
Z	Deserts and Storms

Write your Egyptian pharaoh name here:





COLLEEN HOUCK

is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Tiger's Curse* series. She lives in Salem, Oregon, with her husband and a huge assortment of plush tigers.

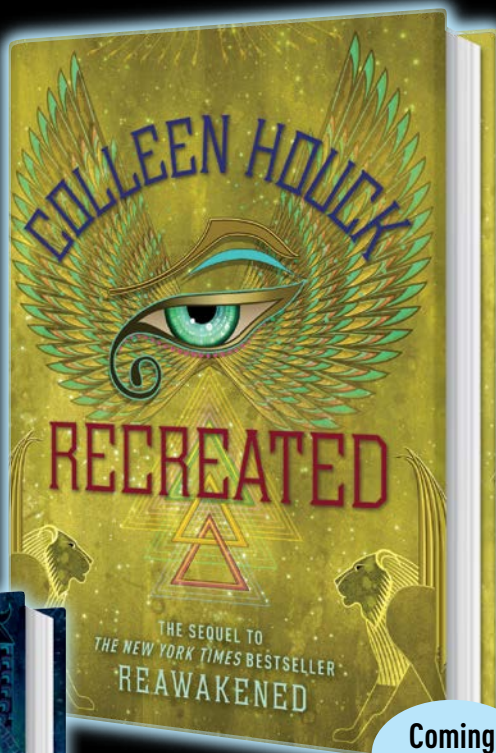
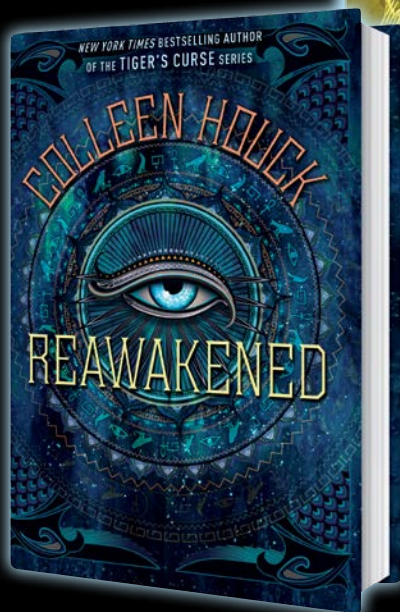
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