

KEKET AND YAHMOSE

THE FIRST BALANCE

An Illustrated Prequel to The Lost Barge

MICHAEL D. YOUNG



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Before Amun became the mischievous guide of Celestial City, his mother
was a woman who opened doors - and his two fathers were brothers
divided by the sun.

CHAPTER ONE: THE WIFE OF THE MOON



Before anyone called Keket cruel, she was known for opening doors.

She opened the Hall of Maidens before dawn so the youngest girls could practice their letters where no one would laugh at them. She opened the garden gate for old women whose knees could no longer carry them over the market hill. During the flooded season, when the lower roads vanished beneath brown water and the Earthbound quarter smelled of wet straw and wood smoke, Keket opened the Sanctuary kitchens and fed three children from bowls painted for priests. They had been standing outside the service gate, too proud to beg and too weak to leave. The smallest boy tried to pretend he had only come to look at the blue tiles.

Keket filled the first bowl with lentils, the second with stewed squash, and the third with enough bread to make all three children stare.

"Those are holy vessels," whispered a kitchen girl.

Keket looked at the painted suns and moons around the rims. "Then they should be especially good at holding soup."

That last door brought her before the High Moon Priest.

Yahmose waited on the western platform of the Sanctuary of the Sky. Night hung above Celestial City like a blue-black canopy stitched with stars. Three silver spires rose behind him. Across the great central court, their golden twins stood dark and watchful, waiting for sunrise and for Yahmose's younger brother, Rehmosé, to claim the city.

Keket knelt. She was small enough that even seated priests looked tall beside her, but she had never learned to make her spirit small.

"You used vessels reserved for the holy orders," Yahmose said.

His silver mask showed neither anger nor mercy. Only his pale blue eyes were visible, and they studied her with unsettling patience.

"I washed them afterward," Keket replied.

One of the Moon Priests coughed to hide a laugh. Yahmose lifted one hand, and silence returned.

"That is not an answer."

"No, High Priest. It is the beginning of one. The children had not eaten in two days. Every common bowl was in use for the feast. The painted bowls were empty. I believed the gods would rather see sacred bowls filled than hungry children remain so."

"And if the gods disagree?"

Keket looked toward the eastern jungle. Somewhere beyond the walls, a Dusk Hawk cried, a deep sound like a drum heard through water.

"Then let them punish me," she said. "Not the children."

The priests shifted. Such an answer could end in the quarry, in the underground river, or on an altar beneath the pitiless sun. Instead, Yahmose dismissed the court and asked Keket to walk with him.

They crossed the moon garden, where pale flowers opened only at night and closed before the first gold touched the eastern sky. Yahmose removed his mask. He was younger than his ceremonial voice made him sound, with a long, thoughtful face and a smile that seemed surprised to find itself free.

"Do you always answer danger by stepping closer to it?" he asked.

"Only when danger is standing between me and something important."

"And were those children important?"

"They were hungry. That was enough."

Yahmose stopped beneath a flowering tree. "The law is meant to keep the city in balance."

"Then perhaps the law sometimes leans too far in one direction."

He regarded her for several breaths. "My brother would say that if everyone decided for himself when the law leaned, there would soon be no law at all."

"Your brother sounds exhausting."

Yahmose's mouth twitched. "You have met him?"

"Once. He inspected the Hall of Maidens. He asked why the lamps were still burning after dawn."

"And what did you tell him?"

"That darkness sometimes lingers after sunrise."

Yahmose laughed, softly at first, then with his whole heart. Keket had never heard a high priest laugh. It sounded wonderfully ordinary.

Six months later, beneath a sky divided equally between departing day and approaching night, Keket became the first wife of Yahmose.

The city celebrated their union as an omen. Sun and moon had shared the heavens. Morning blossoms perfumed the streets. Dawn Eagles circled far above, their golden wings catching the final light, while a lone Dusk Hawk watched from the jungle canopy.

Keket noticed the dark bird and felt an unexpected chill.

Beside Yahmose stood Rehmose, short and lean beneath robes too magnificent for his frame. His face was hidden behind a golden mask, but his dark eyes lingered on Keket as the officiating priest declared that every precious thing belonged first to the gods, then to the order, and only last to the heart.

The words troubled her.

"Every precious thing?" she asked.

He knew what she meant. "It is only language from an old ceremony."

"Old language is still language."

Yahmose kissed her brow. "Then we will give the words no power they do not deserve."

She wanted to believe him. Across the courtyard, a golden door closed in Rehmose's apartments.

Neither Keket nor Yahmose yet understood that old words could be sharpened into knives.

CHAPTER TWO: THREE BOWLS



The first year of their marriage passed in happiness.

Keket accompanied Yahmose through the night courts, listening while he settled disputes between workers, priests, and merchants. She became his quiet counterweight. When custom demanded punishment, she asked what mercy might repair. When a petitioner lied, she noticed the detail that gave him away. When Yahmose grew too certain, she raised one eyebrow and waited until he reconsidered.

"You enjoy this," Yahmose accused as they crossed the court after midnight.

"Enjoy what?"

"Being right one breath before I am."

"I enjoy being right whenever it is available."

Rehmore mocked his brother for listening to a wife.

"The moon reflects," he said over a ceremonial meal. "The sun commands."

"And yet people sleep when the sun becomes unbearable," Keket answered.

Rehmoses's gold-ringed fingers tightened around his cup. Yahmose laughed, and for a moment the younger brother laughed too. But his eyes did not.

In the second year, the elders began asking when an heir would be presented.

In the third, they stopped asking Keket and whispered to one another instead.

In the fourth, the whispers became prayers spoken loudly enough for her to hear.

She endured examinations by healers and purification rites in pools cold enough to turn her lips blue. She swallowed bitter herbs before moonrise and sweet tonics at dawn. Each month hope lifted its head. Each month it bowed again.

Yahmose never blamed her. That kindness became its own sorrow, because she saw how carefully he hid his disappointment. One night, he led her beneath the Sanctuary to a chamber lit by three suspended stones. On a low table rested three bowls: one carved with a star, one with a crescent moon, and one with a many-rayed sun.

"The proving waters," Keket whispered.

Every child knew of them. A maiden drank first from the star bowl. If her body accepted it, she might serve among the Star Maidens. The moon bowl came next, and the sun bowl last. Few could drink all three. The ritual had become a ladder: those who failed early served below, and those who endured the sun were praised as if light itself had chosen them.

"The records say the waters reveal where a person belongs," Yahmose said. "But an older fragment says something different. It says they reveal what a person can bear."

Keket studied the bowls. "Those are not the same thing."

"No. They are not."

He showed her a crumbling strip of hide copied by one of the First Fathers. Most of its writing had faded, but a sentence remained: The vessel does not make the light. It only carries what it is given.

"Rehmoses says the fragment is dangerous," Yahmose continued. "He says rank must be clear or the people will become confused."

"People are often confused when rank is clear," Keket said. "Especially those at the bottom."

Yahmose smiled, then grew solemn. "Will you drink?"

"Why?"

"Because if the oldest record is true, I want to know what else we have misunderstood."

Keket looked at the three bowls. She had spent years allowing strangers to examine her body for signs of failure. She suddenly wanted one test that belonged to her.

She drank from the star bowl. The water tasted cool and metallic. A tremor moved through her fingers and was gone. From the moon bowl, it tasted like rain and left a clean

ache behind her eyes. The sun water burned all the way to her stomach. For one terrible heartbeat she thought she would fall.

Yahmose reached for her.

Keket slapped his hand away and remained standing.

He stared at her in wonder. "All three."

"What does that make me?"

"Rare."

"I was already rare. I used a sacred soup bowl for hungry children."

He drew her close, laughing into her hair. Yet over his shoulder Keket saw movement in the passage.

A golden edge vanished into the dark.

The next morning, Rehmosé announced that all proving waters would henceforth be kept under the authority of the High Sun Priest. He praised Keket publicly as a High Sun Maiden and declared her strength a blessing upon both brothers.

The city cheered.

Then he added that a woman able to bear all three waters clearly belonged to the highest order, no matter whom she had married.

The applause grew louder.

Keket stood beside Yahmose and felt the first thin thread of a net settle over her shoulders.

She had begun to understand that Rehmosé never admired a thing without first imagining how it might belong to him.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HIDDEN RECORD



The old chamber was not marked on any map.

Keket found it because a loose mosaic tile scraped beneath her sandal during an evening procession. Beneath the tile lay a bronze ring. Beneath the ring, a stair descended into earth colder than the night.

She returned with Yahmose after moonrise. Together they followed the stair to a narrow room lined with tarnished metal plates, brittle hides, and sealed jars. Dust lay so thick that their footprints seemed like writing. A dark brown garment rested in an urn on a stone pedestal. On the wall behind it was a constellation shaped like a lamb.

Yahmose touched nothing.

"The treasury of the First Fathers," he breathed. "I thought it a legend."

Keket lifted a lamp toward one of the plates. The first symbols named Adam and his family. Later plates traced generations through Noah and his sons. Other records told of priests who served not the sun or moon, but the Lord of Heaven and Earth, from whom all light came.

"Then the sun and moon are not gods," Keket said.

"They are creations. Signs."

"Signs of what?"

"Times. Seasons. Covenants." His finger moved along the plate. "Witnesses, perhaps. Not rulers."

Keket looked upward as if she could see through stone to the sky. "Rehmosé will hate this."

"That is a poor measure of truth."

"It has been a reliable measure of inconvenience."

They searched until Yahmosé found a plate engraved with two equal circles. Its text was partly obscured by green corrosion.

"Balance was a promise," he translated slowly. "The strong were to raise the weak. Day laborers would rest by night. Night laborers would share the harvest of day. Once each year, debts were weighed, grievances answered, and stores opened so none would hunger."

Keket thought of the Day of Balance she had known as a child: gold banners, processions, sacrifices, and bowls of food too costly for common tables. "That is what the festival was for?"

"It appears so."

"Then we kept the banners and misplaced the mercy."

Yahmosé closed his eyes.

Keket moved to another plate. A line of figures showed families bringing grain, cloth, tools, and written grievances to a central scale. On the final panel, doors to a storehouse stood open.

She felt the chamber tilt around her. "There is nothing here about blood."

"No."

"Nothing about Dawn Eagles taking criminals or strangers."

"No."

"Nothing about one order ruling another because its light is brighter."

Yahmosé looked at her. "No."

A dry click sounded behind them.

Rehmosé stood in the doorway wearing his golden mask.

"You should not have come here," he said.

Yahmosé moved between him and Keket. "How long have you known?"

"Long enough to understand why our father sealed it. A city cannot be ruled by riddles and obsolete mercies."

"Truth does not become obsolete."

"Truth?" Rehmosé swept one hand toward the plates. "A list of dead men and a garment fit for dust? Our people understand the sun that warms them, the moon that measures their months, and the birds that descend when they are not fed. They understand what they can see."

Keket remembered the Earthbound children eating from painted bowls. "They understand what they are taught."

Rehmosé turned his dark gaze on her. "Exactly."

The next day the entrance had been sealed. Yahmosé ordered it reopened, but the Sentinels obeyed the High Sun Priest while daylight remained. At sunset, Yahmosé's workers found not a door but a wall of fresh stone.

The brothers argued before the six orders. Rehmosé spoke of safety and unity. Yahmosé spoke of records and forgotten law. No one had seen the plates except Keket, and Rehmosé called a wife's witness an echo of her husband.

"Then let me speak without him," Keket said from the edge of the assembly.

Several priests looked away.

Rehmosé did not. "Your loyalty is already known."

Keket almost laughed. Loyalty, she realized, was another word men used when they wanted obedience to sound holy.

The orders divided as the city itself did: gold by day, silver by night.

That evening, Yahmosé found a black feather on his prayer cushion.

"A threat?" Keket asked.

He ran his fingers along the feather's edge. "Or a reminder. Dusk Hawks appear when the sun is darkened. The old histories say they answer a whistle carried by the High Moon Priest."

"Do you have such a whistle?"

Yahmosé shook his head. "My father said it was lost."

From beyond the western wall came the low cry of a great bird.

Keket took the feather and bound it inside her sleeve.

Years later, another young woman would follow a trail of black feathers through the tunnels. She would never know that the first had been hidden by a wife who was still kind enough to leave doors open.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EMPTY CRADLE

By the seventh year, there were three cradles in Keket's rooms.

The first was cedar, carved by Yahmose before their wedding. Its sides bore tiny moons and stars. The second was ebony, sent by a southern governor hoping to win favor. The third was gold, presented by Rehmosé before the entire court.

"For the heir who must surely come," he had said.

Keket ordered them covered.

Yahmose's prayers became longer. He gave silver to the poor, then cattle to the altars, then a parcel of his own garden to the Sanctuary. He fasted until his cheeks hollowed. When Keket begged him to stop, he answered that faith always demanded a sacrifice.

"Faith demands trust," she said. "Desperation demands payment."

"How can I trust while doing nothing?"

"Love me. That is not nothing."

For a time, it was enough.

Then Rehmosé began speaking openly of succession. Without a son of Yahmose, the moon priesthood would pass to a cousin named Senbi, a pleasant man whose loyalty had already been purchased with gold, land, and a Sun Priest's daughter. The balance between the brothers would end. Rehmosé would rule day and night through a man who repeated his words.

Yahmose tried to laugh the threat away. The laughter no longer sounded ordinary.

He sought remedies in every archive still open to him. Keket watched him copy increasingly recent prayers, each demanding a greater offering than the last. He worked at night until ink dried on his fingers and his shoulders bent from hours over the table.

She noticed that the oldest lines were gentle, while the newer ones had been scraped and rewritten.

"Someone altered these," she said.

Yahmose did not look up. "Our fathers clarified them."

"Or someone taught the gods to sound like Rehmosé."

He flinched.

"You found the old records," Keket continued. "You know what balance was meant to be. Why are you searching the writings of men who buried it?"

"Because the old records did not give us a child."

The words struck harder than he intended. Yahmose's face changed at once.

"Keket -"

"Do not apologize for wanting him," she said. "I want him too. But if wanting a child turns us into people he would have reason to fear, what exactly have we gained?"

Yahmose looked toward the covered cradle nearest the wall.

That night, Keket dreamed of the sea.

A wooden barge rolled in black water, sealed tight against the waves. Stones shone inside it like captured stars. She heard voices praying in a language she did not know and somehow understood their fear. A young woman in a yellow dress reached toward Keket, but a wall of water rose between them. Behind the woman stood a dark-haired boy in a ridiculous feathered headdress. He grinned as if storms were merely another kind of puzzle.

He blew a small whistle.

The sun vanished, and wings filled the sky.

Keket woke with both hands over her stomach.

The dream had left behind an ache that felt strangely like memory. She rose before the servants and found Yahmose on the western platform, staring at the moon as if he could force an answer from its face.

"I had a dream," she told him.

He turned too quickly. "Was there a child?"

"Yes. But not as I expected."

Hope transformed his face so swiftly that Keket could not bear to describe the rest. She allowed him to take her hands and pray.

His prayer began with the old words - gratitude, patience, trust. Halfway through, his voice faltered and he added one of the newer phrases about sacrifice.

Keket opened her eyes.

Across the court, Rehmosé emerged into the final hour of his rule. He wore no mask, and in the uncertain light his face seemed plain, almost harmless.

"Brother," he called. "I believe at last I know what heaven requires."

The sun broke over the eastern wall behind him.

His shadow reached them first.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SACRIFICE



Rehmosé received them beneath a canopy of crimson cloth. The morning breeze made it rise and fall like the breast of some enormous sleeping creature.

"The old covenant is plain," he said. "The dearest offering opens the closed hand of heaven."

Keket stood beside Yahmosé, not behind him. "Which old covenant? The one carved on metal, or the one someone recently wrote on hide?"

A few priests lowered their eyes.

Rehmosé ignored her. "You have offered wealth, labor, sleep, and blood. Yet you have withheld the one thing you value above all others."

Yahmosé went still.

Keket understood before he spoke. Her body turned cold despite the heat.

"No," she said.

Rehmosé lifted both hands, a picture of injured patience. "I ask nothing for myself. The High Sun Priest may take wives from among the proven maidens, but I have many. This would be obedience, not desire."

That lie was worse than an honest hunger.

Keket looked to Yahmosé. "Tell him no."

Yahmosé's pale eyes shone with tears. "If I refuse and the moon line fails, Rehmosé will rule through Senbi. The night courts will become what the day courts are. Every Earthbound family we have protected -"

"Do not make them the chain around my neck."

"I am trying to save them."

"By giving him the person who taught you to care?"

The words landed. Yahmosé lowered his head.

Rehmosé's voice softened. "A true sacrifice must hurt. Otherwise it is only a gift."

Keket turned on him. "You have never sacrificed anything you could not replace."

Rehmosé's anger vanished, leaving his face smooth. "Then let the High Moon Priest decide what matters more: one marriage or the future of his people."

Yahmosé asked for one night.

He and Keket spent it in the moon garden where he had first laughed with her. Neither wore ceremonial robes. Without silver and gold between them, they looked almost like the young man and defiant maiden who had once argued beneath the flowering tree.

They spoke until speech became pain.

Yahmosé promised that the transfer would be ceremonial, that she would retain her rooms, that Rehmosé would never possess her heart. Keket answered each promise with the same question.

"Will I still be your wife?"

At last Yahmosé said, "In every way that matters."

"Then say it before the court."

He could not.

Before dawn, he placed his silver marriage cord in her hands. His fingers shook.

Keket held the cord for a moment, remembering the night he had promised old words would have no power over them. Then she tied it once around her wrist and cut it with a garden knife.

In return, she took the black feather from her sleeve and pressed it into his.

"When the sun is darkened," she said, "remember what you surrendered to keep it bright."

The transfer took place at noon on the Day of Balance.

The city drank morning-blossom draught and cheered as if witnessing a triumph. Keket wore white and gold. Yahmose wore his silver mask. Rehmosé shone from crown to sandals. Priests recited that every precious thing belonged first to the gods, then to the order, and only last to the heart.

This time Keket knew who had sharpened the words.

She also knew what the Day of Balance had once been. Storehouses opened. Debts forgiven. The strong raising the weak.

Now the city watched a woman become property and called it holy.

When Rehmosé extended his hand, she did not take it.

A Sentinel pushed her forward.

Keket stumbled one step, caught herself, and looked directly at Yahmose. His silver mask hid his face. That hurt more than tears would have.

The crowd saw a gracious wife become a sacred offering.

Keket felt a door close.

For the first time in her life, she did not know how to open it.

CHAPTER SIX: THE SON OF MYSTERY



Weeks passed before Keket knew she carried a child.

The healers declared it a miracle. Rehmosé ordered bells rung from all six spires. Yahmosé dismissed his night court early and did not emerge from his rooms until the next sunset.

Keket endured congratulations from priests who had pitied her, maidens who feared her, and wives who calculated what the birth might mean. No one asked what it meant to her.

Rehmosé did ask.

He came without his mask and found her sorting morning blossoms from ember blooms in the garden. The two flowers were almost identical, except for a pale ring at the base of the harmless petals.

"You should not be working," he said.

"Then you should not have followed me to the place where work is done."

He crouched beside her. Without his crown and mask, he looked younger. Keket wondered whether that was why he removed them when he wanted something. Power liked to disguise itself as intimacy.

"Is the child mine?"

Keket held a flower beneath his nose. "Morning blossom or ember bloom?"

He drew back. "You know I cannot tell."

"Neither can most men. Yet one brings sleep, and the other death. Appearances are poor witnesses."

"Is the child mine?"

She placed the harmless flower in one basket and the poisonous one in another.

"The child is mine."

That was all she ever told him.

Yahmose visited once before the birth, officially to bless the household of his brother. He wore his silver mask and spoke formal words over Keket while Rehmosé stood nearby.

"May the child walk in light," Yahmose intoned.

Keket looked at the blank metal face. "May he learn where light comes from."

Rehmosé's attention shifted toward a messenger at the doorway.

Yahmose slipped something beneath Keket's cushion.

After he left, she found a small whistle carved in the likeness of folded wings.

His father's lost whistle had not been lost after all.

"Keep it for him," she whispered.

Yahmose's breath caught. "Then you believe -"

"I believe he may need a guide when neither sun nor moon deserves his trust."

The child arrived during a moonless night, while clouds smothered the stars and rain hammered the Sanctuary roofs. Labor began at dusk and continued until even the healers stopped offering cheerful predictions.

Rehmosé waited outside the chamber because custom required it. Yahmose waited somewhere else because custom forbade him.

When the child finally came, he did not cry.

The room went silent.

Keket held him close. His skin was warm, his eyes squeezed shut, his body impossibly small after so many years of longing and so many months of being turned into a symbol.

"Breathe," she ordered.

A healer reached for him.

Keket pulled him closer. "Breathe. I did not endure seven years, three cradles, two husbands, and every priest in this city for you to arrive and change your mind."

Even the healers stepped back.

The child coughed.

Then he wailed with such offended fury that Keket began to laugh and cry at once.

He seized her finger.

"Amun," she said.

The name meant mystery.

Rehmosé proclaimed Amun a child of the Sun House. Yahmosé entered his name among the heirs of the moon. The official record used a line of ink so thick that it obscured the space where a father's name should have been.

Amun grew into the uncertainty as if it had been made for him.

Rehmosé saw mischief as disobedience. Yahmosé saw wit and tried not to smile where anyone could notice.

Keket loved Amun in secret ways.

She left sweet fruit where he would find it after lessons. She taught a gardener to recognize the boy's whistle. She loosened a window latch before punishments and scolded the guard who failed to catch him. When he asked questions the priests considered improper, she assigned him extra copying so he could remain in her rooms long enough to ask the rest of them.

In public, she was stern.

In private, when he slept, she traced the curve of his cheek and remembered the woman who once opened doors.

Rehmosé saw affection as a claim, so Keket gave him none he could measure.

The city called her hard.

It was safer than calling her a mother.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHAT THE MOON LOST



The years divided them.

Yahmose ruled the night with increasing weariness. Rehmosé filled the day with decrees. Each Day of Balance grew grander and more terrible. Debts were no longer forgiven; prisoners were offered. Storehouses no longer opened; altars did. The Dawn Eagles descended to crimson banners, and fear became proof that the rites were necessary.

Keket watched the city learn the wrong meaning of every old symbol.

She could not stop it openly. Rehmosé had spent years placing loyal Sentinels at doors she once would have opened without asking. So Keket learned a different kind of opening.

She trained High Sun Maidens because refusing would surrender them entirely to Rehmosé. She taught the approved histories, but hid small mercies inside the lessons: how to tell ember bloom from morning blossom, which tunnel reached the underground river, which Sentinels could be distracted by flattery, and why a black feather should never be discarded.

Kindness became a language spoken under the cover of cruelty.

One evening she found eight-year-old Amun atop a tree at the jungle's edge. He had lashed branches together into a platform and cut three openings in a screen of woven reeds: a sun, a crescent moon, and a star.

"Come down," Keket ordered.

"It is a sanctuary," he called. "I can see all three lights from here."

"Stars are not visible by day."

"They are still there."

The answer struck her silent.

She climbed, less gracefully than she hoped, and inspected his work. Rugs stolen from the Sanctuary covered the platform. A bowl held bright stones, bird feathers, a bent copper ring, and a bit of yellow cloth found on the beach.

"Thief," she said.

"Collector."

"Those rugs belong to the High Sun Priest."

"He has too many."

"That has never been accepted as a legal defense."

"It should be."

Against her will, Keket laughed. The sound startled both of them.

Amun studied her. "You used to do that more."

"You do not remember what I used to do."

"Father Yahmose says the moon remembers light even when it looks dark."

Keket turned toward the city so the boy would not see her face. From this height the six spires seemed almost equal. Gold and silver caught the same evening wind. Beyond them, the sea shone at the world's edge.

"Listen to me," she said. "One day, strangers may come from that water. The priests will call them Earthbound. Rehmosé will call them dangerous. You must look before you judge."

"Why?"

"Because a sacred bowl may hold soup. A poisonous flower may look like a harmless one. A law may wear the mask of truth."

Amun frowned in concentration. "That is too many things to remember."

"Then remember this: appearances are poor witnesses."

A shadow crossed the platform.

A Dusk Hawk circled above the treetops, enormous and silent. Amun lifted a small wing-shaped whistle on a cord around his neck.

Keket's heart lurched. "Where did you get that?"

"Father Yahmose gave it to me. He said it calls help when the light goes wrong."

So Yahmose had made his regret useful after all.

The hawk wheeled toward the setting sun. For an instant its black wings covered the golden disk.

Keket saw again the woman in yellow, the sealed barge, the shining stones, and a sky filled with wings.

The dream no longer felt like a promise of a child. It felt like a promise about what the child would become.

She closed her hand around Amun's.

"Keep it hidden," she said. "And when the darkness comes, do not assume it belongs to the night."

Amun looked from the black bird to the golden horizon. "What if everyone else does?"

Keket thought of painted bowls, three proving waters, a buried record, a silver marriage cord cut in two, and every door she had failed or refused to leave closed.

"Then you will have to be inconvenient."

Amun grinned. "I am good at that."

"I know."

Far out at sea, beyond any eye in Celestial City, a people wandered toward a promised land.

And in a treetop sanctuary, a boy of mystery waited to become their guide.

CONTINUE THE ADVENTURE

The story continues in *The Lost Barge*, part of the *Lost Tribes* series.

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