

Excerpt from Lily of the Nile by Stephanie Dray

My mother fastened upon my neck a small jade frog pendant. I squinted, for my brothers' amulets seemed so much more impressive. Curious, I read the words carved on the frog's green underbelly, and I arched a curious brow.

"Read it aloud," my mother said.

My words came out bold and strong. "I am the Resurrection."

In that moment, a power surged through me that I had never known. Magic.

The Nile's green waves lapped at my consciousness, drawing me into the marshy reeds of a waking dream where life teemed. I saw the frog and the minnows, the life-giving silt settling onto the fields beyond, and everywhere I turned in the water, the birds flocked and water lilies blossomed. With my fingers, I traced lazy circles into the dream river bringing fish leaping to the surface. I passed dried brown foliage as I made my way to shore, and it sprouted green with life again. I gazed upon the washed up carcass of a snake and it arose, coiled and shimmering.

It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, but the intensity was too much. My knees buckled under me. My mother's guiding hands caught me to stop my fall. "Cleopatra Selene, I entrust you with my spirit, my ba. You are the Resurrection."

I trembled, my mouth aquiver. "I don't understand."

"Which is for the better," she said. "Because the Romans aren't above torturing children for information. Your father would tell you to live as long as you can do so honorably. I tell you to live so long as you serve Isis. Worship her and follow her dictates. Be charitable to the poor and the sick. Help the helpless and those in need. Be kind when you can and fierce when you must. Remember that Egypt and our very faith lives in you."