



MYTHOPOUCH

RETELLING

COMING FORTH BY DAY

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD (PAPYRUS OF ANI)

VOL. 3 JUDGMENT AND THE FIELD OF REEDS

Chapters 9-11

A modern educational version for readers aged 15 and up

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CHAPTER NINE: THE HALL OF TWO TRUTHS: THE CONFESSION

The word went ahead of them across the plain.

Now. Ani came down off the black ridge with it still in his ears, and the Hall grew as he walked, and there was no moment when it stopped growing. The roof ran longer than any temple in Thebes. The cobras along its ridge stood taller than granaries. Beneath the fringe of white feathers the near wall waited, blank and pale, and in the middle of it stood two doors, and close up he saw they were a pair, right and left, and not the same door twice.

He had come to the place his book could not walk for him. The scroll lay sealed in the tomb. Names had carried him past twenty-one guardians, and names lived in his head still, but the Hall wanted the other thing, the thing the Lake of Fire had only begun to read. His life. Spoken. True.

Anubis stopped a stone's throw from the doors, and Ani stopped beside him. The air here smelled of hot lamp oil and old linen, and under both of those, faint and dry, the dusty smell of feathers.

"Two doors," Ani said.

"Two truths," said Anubis. "The right door is Neb-Maat-heri-tep-retui-f. The left door is Neb-pehti-thesu-menment. Men give the hall a shorter name, and it has a longer one, and the hall answers to either, because the hall does not care what it is called."

"Which do I go in by?"

"The one that opens."

Ani spoke both names, evenly, the way he had spoken the names of the gates. The right door opened. Cold air came out of it, stone-cold, the cold of a room that had been waiting a long time, and it took the warmth off his feathers as he stepped through.

The Hall of the Two Truths received him the way deep water receives a stone.

It was vast beyond the wall's promise. Rows of small flames burned in stone cups along the columns, and the light of them did not reach the roof; the roof went up into the dark and kept going. Down either side of the hall, in two long ranks, twenty-one and twenty-one, sat the assessors, one judge for every province of Egypt, one for every sin a man could be accused of. They had the shapes of men and the patience of furniture. Forty-two pairs of eyes watched him come, small and steady, like coals seen through smoke.

At the far end stood the scales.

He saw the beam first, hung level from a dark pillar, and the two pans beneath it, and on the nearer pan, small and white and impossibly bright, a single feather. Behind the scales rose a shrine, and in the shrine a figure sat wrapped and still, green-faced, crowned. And beneath the

beam, low against the floor, something crouched in the shadow the scales made. It did not move. It did not need to.

Ani looked at it once. Then he put his eyes on the stone between his feet, and breathed, and stood still.

“The confession,” Anubis said beside him. “You know it. Speak to each by name. Say what is true. No more.”

The god stepped back then, out from beside him, and Ani stood alone before the forty-two. No one could speak this for him. That had been the first law, given in the dark of the tomb before any of the rest of it, and the Hall was only the place where the law came due.

He drew the cold air in and began.

Homage to thee, O great god, thou lord of right and truth. I have come to thee, my lord, and I have brought thee right and truth. I know thee, and I know the names of the forty-two gods who are with thee in this hall.

He turned to the head of the first rank.

Hail, Usekh-nemmt, thou whose strides are long, who comest forth from Annu: I have not done iniquity.

The words left him and landed, and the hall took them the way it took everything, and kept them. They stayed in the air, standing, as though the air had shelves. Nothing answered. Nothing needed to. The declaration was recorded by the listening of the hall itself, and Ani understood that if one of them came back refused, he would know it at once.

Hail, Neba, thou who comest and goest: I have not uttered lies.

He waited for that one to be sent back to him. The harvest accounts rose in him as he spoke it: the flooded farm, the short measure written full, the kind lie. But the Lake of Fire had read that entry already and burned the telling off the deed, and what walked out of the flame owed no more on it. The hall kept the words. He went on.

Hail, Am-khaibit, who comest forth from Qernet: I have not slain men.

The vizier’s lists came up with that one: the court’s findings, the names of men the law had finished with, column after column in his best book-hand. His pen had served the sword and never wielded it. He had written every name true and softened nothing, and on the nights after he had read them back to himself, so that someone in the world would still be reading them. The declaration stood. The hall kept it.

Hail, An-af, who comest forth from Maati: I have not snatched away the bread of the child.

His nephew, the year the flood failed, the same boy who had laughed over the wet paint of the ushabtis. Ani had cut his own ration in half for six weeks and never told him why the bread on his plate came thicker than his uncle's. Some declarations were like that, he was learning: light ones, spent gladly.

Hail, Ari-em-ab-f, who comest forth from Tebu: I have not stopped the flow of water.

A farmer upstream had dammed the channel in the night to steal his neighbor's share, and the man was kin to Ani by marriage, and the village brought the matter to the scribe because the scribe wrote findings straight. Ani wrote it against his own kin. The water ran clear again within the month. He had cupped that water as a boy, cold, tasting of silt. Nobody's water. Everybody's.

Hail, Nekhenu, who comest forth from Heqat: I have not shut my ears to the words of truth.

The widow's petition. A temple steward had taken her field on a forged boundary, and she had nothing but the truth of it, and the truth was the one coin the steward had not thought to buy off. Ani carried it up past the men who would have buried it. It cost him a patron's favor. The widow got her field back, and Ani kept her copy of the finding in his own chest until the papyrus went soft.

Hail, Hraf-haf, thou whose face is turned back, who comest forth from thy cavern: I have made none to weep.

That one cost.

The gold ink came back to him. He had bought it dear for the falcon page, and money was short that year, and when Tutu asked what page could deserve such ink he answered past her, sharp, and the words came out cruel: you grind ink; you do not pay for it. She wept once, in the courtyard, where she thought he could not see. He saw. He went out and sat beside her until the weeping was done, and it was mended between them, mended for good. But the tear had been his, caused, and as the declaration left his mouth he waited, cold, for the hall to refuse it.

The hall kept it. Somewhere far away, down a thread of natron-scent in a sealed room, his heart lay under green stone and said nothing. It was keeping its counsel for the scales.

Hail, Uamenti, who comest forth from the chamber: I have not defiled the wife of any man.

Thirty-one years. One house, one bed, one woman who ground his ink and stole dates off his plate and was the first thing he looked for coming home at evening. The declaration weighed almost nothing, one of the lightest he owned, and the hall kept it as it kept the heavy ones, with the same stillness, and Ani was glad of the sameness.

Hail, Ahi, who comest forth from Nu: I have never raised my voice.

He had never raised it to her. She had raised hers for both of them, at the tax clerks, at the donkey dealer, at the neighbor's goat, and the memory of her in the doorway in full voice warmed him

here, in the cold heart of the cold hall. For a moment the forty-two, the scales, and the crouched shape all stood at a small distance, and the distance had Tutu in it.

Hail, Neb-abui, who comest forth from Sauti: I have not multiplied my words in speaking.

He nearly smiled at that one. The fourth gate had collected the debt already, and in voices.

After that the confession went the way a long column goes at the year's audit, once the clerk has found his rhythm. He had not stolen grain, nor carried away the cakes of the dead. He had not eaten the heart. He had not terrorized. He had not been wroth without cause. He had not blasphemed. He had not slain the cattle of the god. He had not snatched the milk from the mouths of children. Name by name, province by province, he gave each assessor its due, and the declarations went out of him and stood in the air, and the air grew full of his life, line by line, until all forty-two had been answered and the hall held everything he had ever done, kept, spoken, spent.

Silence came back. The forty-two had not moved. His heart, far away, had said nothing at all.

Then, from the far end of the hall, the bolt spoke.

"I will not let thee enter in over me," it said, in a voice of wood sliding on stone, "unless thou tell my name."

Ani knew the hall's own litany. He had copied it more than once, marvelling that even the architecture had to be answered, and now he answered it.

Weight of the place of right and truth is thy name.

The bolt slid. The inner door opened a hand's width, and its parts began, one after another, each as exact and incurious as a warder at a granary. The right doorpost demanded its name and he gave it: Weigher of the labours of right and truth. The threshold: Ox of Seb. The socket of the bolt: Flesh of his mother. The lock: The utchat of Sebek, the Lord of Bakhan, liveth. Each answer opened the door a little wider, until Ani stood before the gap with the floor beyond it pale in the lamplight.

Last came the warder of the inner door, tall, with the face of a man who had heard every answer there was. Ani did not wait to be asked.

Discerner of hearts, searcher of reins is thy name.

The warder studied him for a long moment. Then it stepped aside.

"Enter," it said. "Thou art known."

Beyond the warder the hall opened to its far end, and nothing stood between Ani and the scales.

Anubis came and stood beside him, and they regarded the scales together.

“Now the heart,” the god said.

CHAPTER TEN: THE WEIGHING OF THE HEART

The scales stood taller than Ani, and everything in the hall leaned towards them.

He walked the last length of the floor with Anubis beside him, and with every step the apparatus of judgment took on more parts. The pillar of the balance was dark wood shod in bronze, and the beam hung from it on a pin, and from the beam's two ends the pans hung down on cords so fine they were nearly invisible, so that the pans seemed to float, waiting to be told what they held. A plummet on a thread hung beside the pillar, motionless. The floor under the scales was pale stone worn smooth, and the lamps here burned lower and steadier, and the air smelled of hot oil and cold metal and, close now, the dry dust of feathers.

On the near pan lay the feather.

Ani had seen it before. A white plume among the funeral gear, laid with the offerings by hands he could not watch, and it had caught at him then and settled in him like a word at the tip of the tongue. Here was the word. Maat. Truth and order and the way things stand when they stand right, the law the river keeps and the stars keep and the grain measure keeps when the clerk is honest. It lay on the pan weighing nothing at all, and it was the heaviest thing in the hall.

Behind the scales, in a shrine of dark wood, sat Osiris.

He was wrapped close as any mummy, and his face above the wrappings was green, the green of black soil after the flood goes down, the green of things that rise again. The tall crown stood on his head with its two plumes, and his crossed hands held the crook and the flail. He did not move. He did not look at Ani, and Ani understood that this was not coldness. The lord of this hall had died and risen, and everything that came before him now came to be weighed against the one feather. Kings of the living grew old with their judgments. This one had made his once, and it was resurrection, and he sat inside it like a seal in its ring.

To one side of the scales, at a small sloped lectern, stood Thoth. The ibis head bent over a palette with two ink-wells, black and red, and a reed pen trimmed to a fine point lay ready across the scribe's fingers. The scribe of the gods had come to work. Ani knew that posture. He had held it for forty years over contracts and accounts and the long pages of his book, and seeing it here, on a god, did something to him he could not have named. The being in this hall whose trade was nearest his own would write down what happened next, and would write it true.

Anubis went to the pillar. The guide who had led him by the hand across the whole of the dark now took up his other office, the one the vignettes in Ani's own scroll showed: the keeper of the balance. He crouched, and took the plummet's thread between two long fingers, and watched how

it hung, and shifted the beam by a hair, and watched again, and his whole long face was work. Nothing in him was casual. Ani thought that nothing in him had ever been casual, in all the thousands he had brought to this floor.

And beneath the beam, where the shadow of the pans lay darkest, Ani saw her whole at last.

The head was a crocodile's, long-jawed, the teeth showing in rows along the shut mouth. The forequarters were a lion's, maned, heavy-pawed, the claws sunk into the stone. Behind them rose the broad dark bulk of a hippopotamus, the three great takers of life from river and desert and marsh bound into one body. She crouched with her jaw on the floor. She did not lift it. She did not turn her head. She did not look at him, or at Anubis, or at anything; she waited, and waiting was all she did, and all the moving in that corner of the hall was done by Ani's fear.

He thought of the cavern on the Duat roads, the shapes hanging head-downward in the gloom, finished. Their hearts had spoken against them at the balance. The crouched thing under the beam was what finished looked like when it had a shape.

"It is time," Anubis said.

The tether pulled taut behind Ani's heart.

He felt it go tight, the thread of natron-scent and gravity that had run back through all the dark to the sealed room where his body lay, and something came up it, pulled along the whole length of the road, out of the cedar and the stone and the dark. It came to rest in his cupped hands, and his hands knew it before he looked down.

His heart.

It lay there small and red-brown and warm, beating slow, the same steady time it had kept under his ribs through fifty-two years of Thebes. The one organ the embalmers had left him. The seat of his memory, his conscience, his whole true record, everything he had done and everything he had meant. He had carried it his entire life and never once held it. It knew him. That was the terrible thing. It knew him all the way down.

He heard the priest's voice again, dropping low over the green stone at the funeral, half-heard through the coffin's cedar wall. He heard Tutu breathing somewhere beyond it. He had kept those words in him through every gate and every fire, and now he set his own voice against the silence of the hall and spoke them whole, to the warm weight in his hands:

O my heart of my mother! O my heart whereby I came into being! Do not stand against me as a witness. Do not oppose me in the tribunal. Do not make thyself hostile to me before the keeper of the balance. Let there be no parting of thee from me in this place.

The hall kept the words, as it kept all of them. Anubis held out his hands, and Ani gave his heart up into them, and the god carried it the two steps to the scales and laid it in the empty pan, gently, the way the embalmer lays anything that belongs to a man.

The cords took the weight. The beam moved.

The heart-pan dipped, and rose, and dipped again. The feather-pan rode up and settled and rode up. The beam swayed on its pin, seeking, and the swaying would not stop, and Ani stood with his hands empty and watched his whole life swing.

Because the heart was remembering. He could feel it happening. Everything was in it: the harvest lie, burned to ash in the fire, but the heart kept the ash. The cruel words about the ink, mended, but the heart kept the sound of her weeping in the courtyard. The favors taken, the findings written soft for men who could help him, the small cowardices no fire had found. It had all been true in the confession, every word spoken straight, and the hall had kept every word, and still the witness on the pan was weighing its own testimony, and Ani could not coach it.

The beam dipped. Rose. Beneath it the crouched shape waited with its jaw on the floor, and did not lift it, and did not need to.

Ani could not breathe. The ba-body had no need of breath and demanded it anyway. Thoth's pen hung poised over the palette. Anubis watched the plummet and did not move, and nothing in his stillness told Ani anything at all.

The beam slowed.

The dips grew shallow, the way a pendulum comes home. Plea or choice or stone, he was not meant to know which. The swaying settled. The cords went still.

The two pans hung level.

The heart and the feather, even. The beam lay flat across the pillar's pin, balanced, and the plummet beside it hung straight down the line of truth and did not waver, and the hall was so quiet that Ani heard the small tick of the pin taking the beam's rest.

Thoth's pause stretched over everything.

The ibis head stayed bent. The whole hall, the forty-two, the shrine, the lamps, the crouched thing beneath the beam, held inside that pause the way a house holds inside the moment before a birth is announced. Then the reed pen dipped into the black ink and scratched across the papyrus, a small dry sound, the sound Ani had made with his own hand ten thousand times, and the record was made, and what was written could never be unwritten.

Thoth raised his head and spoke, and his voice was the voice of a clerk reading a finding into the record, exact, final:

Hear ye this word in very truth. The heart of the Osiris Ani hath been weighed, and his soul hath stood as witness for him. He is righteous upon the great balance, and no sin hath been found in him. Maa-kheru.

Maa-kheru. True of voice. The verdict of the justified, the two words his whole book had been written to buy. Down the long ranks the assessors took it up, one after another, forty-two voices repeating the finding into the hall's keeping, until the word came back off the far wall and stood in the air with all the rest of him.

Anubis was still looking at the beam.

Then the god's shoulders, which Ani had never once seen anything but level, settled. His breath went out slowly through the long muzzle. His hand came and rested on Ani's shoulder, warm and heavy through the feathers, and stayed there.

"You may stop counting," Anubis said.

Ani laughed. It came out of him cracked and enormous, and the hall kept it too, along with everything else.

When he looked again towards the shadow beneath the beam, it was empty. She had gone as she had waited, unremarked. No god marked her going. Her hunger went with her, unmet, elsewhere, not his, and Ani understood that she had never once been his. His heart had spoken for him, and she had no business here.

Movement came from beside the shrine.

A figure stepped down out of the stillness there, tall and young and bright in the lamplight, with the fierce hooked head of a falcon and eyes that held the high sky. Horus, son of Isis, the presenter of the justified. Ani had worn that shape once, for an hour, over the Duat roads, borrowed gold, emerald wings. This one had been born to it, the way Ani had been born to a reed pen.

The falcon god came to him across the worn stone and stopped, and looked at him, and there was nothing in the look but welcome.

Horus took Ani's wrist in a warm sure grip, the grip of the living taking hold of the dead to bring them home, and turned him towards the throne.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: VINDICATION AND THE FIELD OF REEDS

Horus's hand was warm around his wrist, and it did not let go.

The warmth of it carried Ani the length of the worn floor, past the empty shadow beneath the beam, past Thoth's lectern, until the shrine filled his sight. The green face waited inside it, the tall

crown, the crossed hands holding the crook and the flail. Close now, Ani felt that the god's stillness had weight, the way deep water has weight, and that it leaned towards him in welcome.

Horus stopped before the shrine and raised his voice, and the hall that had kept every word Ani spent in it kept this one too:

I have brought unto thee the Osiris Ani. His heart hath been weighed, and no sin hath been found in him. He is true of voice.

The Osiris Ani. He had spoken that name over himself all through the dark, at every gate. He heard it now spoken as a fact.

The green face did not change. The wrapped hands did not lift. But Osiris looked at him, the first time the god had looked at anything, and the look rested on Ani as the beam had rested, level and final. The lord of the West spoke once, in a voice like water arriving in a dry field:

"Come in, Osiris Ani."

The words went through Ani and took root. No gate had opened so quietly, and none had opened so far.

True of voice. The words held now, everywhere: every name spent, every confession kept, every spell written true stood in Thoth's black ink, never to be unwritten.

Anubis stood back from the shrine, where guides stand. Ani turned to him; everything he wanted to say came up at once, so he said the truest small thing he had: "You led me all the way."

"It was your road," Anubis said. For one breath his long face held something that was not work.

"There are others in the dark. I go back for them."

He went out the way they had come, unhurried. The guide's work ended here, at the boundary of the living-again. He had never once left a traveler short of it.

The door Horus brought him to stood on the far side of the throne, and it opened east.

Light came through it. Real light, the first since the seam of gold had closed behind him over the necropolis. Ani stood in it with his eyes streaming while the falcon whose shape he had once borrowed waited kindly beside him. When his sight came back, it came back to green.

Barley to the horizon. Emmer seven cubits high, twice a man's height, whispering in a wind that smelled of crushed reeds and river. Blue channels cut the fields in straight lines, water chuckling over stone, going somewhere useful. Along the banks the perfected dead were working, ploughing and sowing and reaping and singing at it. This was the country his book had promised all along. No cloud, no dream. Egypt, without the death in it.

He had copied the words a hundred times and never believed them the way he believed them now, ankle-deep in warm irrigation mud. Let me plough there. Let me reap there. Let me eat there. Let me drink there, even as they are done upon earth.

A boat of eight oars carried them along the canals, each end shaped like a serpent's head; the god within her was Un-nefer, the beautiful one risen. On the farther bank grazed the seven cows and their bull, the herd that feeds the dead forever. Ani named them as he had named the gates, and they lifted their heads to their names, and the naming cost him nothing here.

Then the summons came.

A voice went out over the fields, calling names to the labor, to the dykes and the furrows and the carrying of sand. Ani's name was in it, and he stepped forward, old habit, ready to answer for himself.

And the answer came without him.

Small voices, far off and near at once, down the long thread of the tether from a sealed room under the Theban hills: Here I am.

The ushabtis. Baked clay, the height of his hand, his nephew's careful paint, each little figure lettered with its promise. He had stowed them almost as an afterthought, and someone had laughed over the lid, and the laugh had been good. Now the little workmen stood up in the dark of the tomb and answered in his place, and would answer tomorrow, and tomorrow, and forever, so the scribe could keep the day. Ani stood in the sun, bowing to the smallest provision of his own funeral.

Down the tether, past the answering, he felt the body resting: cedar and stone and the green scarab, kept and keeping, decay refused. His heart had gone home down that same thread to its place beneath the stone, and it beat there easy, his again, the witness returned to the body it had spoken for. The stake that had held him through the whole dark now held the world still for him. The ba was free, and the free ba had somewhere to come home to.

They were waiting at the landing, under a sycamore beside the water, at Qehqenet, the place of meeting.

His father and mother stood in the tree's shade, old and not old, themselves and better. His mother put her hand to his face, as she had when he was a boy with ink on his fingers. His father only looked at him, as he had looked the day Ani first brought him a clean column, and the looking was enough.

And behind them, at the door of a homestead with linen on the line and bread on the board, stood Tutu.

How she had crossed, and when, Ani did not ask. Time is counted differently in that country. She was here. Her hair was grey, because she had liked it grey. She looked him over the way she had looked over his scrolls, checking for errors, and found none worth mentioning.

“You took your time,” she said. “The bread’s fresh.”

He took her hand. It was warm, whole, and it did not come to him through stone, and it did not rest on papyrus over his heart, but in his own palm, holding. Thirty-one years she had set bread beside his elbow while he wrote. He had crossed the whole of the dark to stand here holding her hand in the sun, and nothing on the road, not fire, not gates, not even the balance, had been as hard as the first moment of believing it was real.

They ate. The bread tasted of barley and salt and morning, and the beer was cold from the channel, and his father told him about the harvest, which had been good, which would always be good.

In the evening Ani went down to the river, and the east was waiting.

On a black ridge, when nothing was promised, he had spoken a vow: I will rise with the dawn. The spent word came back to him now with interest. A place had been kept for him on the barque that moved through the night like a river of gold. Now he stood at its side, and the hymns he had copied all his life came up around him like a tide, and his lips moved with them.

The book’s name was his condition now. Coming forth by day. He had carried those words from the first red letters of his own scroll, heard them spoken over his sealed body, walked them through fire and gate and balance. As for him who knows this book: he shall come forth by day, in every form he desires, and he shall not perish. A true word, a million times true.

It was true. He was the proof of it, a scribe whose morning was coming.

The sky in the east went gold, and the barque turned towards it, and breath came to Ani the way the flood comes to a dry field, and he went out with the light, into the day, and the day went on forever.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The Egyptian Book of the Dead is not a book the way this one is. Nobody wrote it from beginning to end. It is a family of spell collections, copied onto papyrus and coffins and tomb walls over fifteen hundred years, and its real Egyptian name is *Per em hru*, “the spells of coming forth by day.” Every copy was different: the family commissioning one chose the spells it wanted and had the dead person’s name written in. None of them tells a story from first page to last.

Ani’s copy is real. The Papyrus of Ani, made at Thebes around 1250 BCE, is the most complete one that survives: some twenty-four meters of spells in a fine hand, painted with scenes of the funeral, the gates, and the judgment. It sits today in the British Museum (catalogue number EA 10470), and the woman painted beside Ani is his wife, Tutu. Nearly everything in this book that comes from the ancient text comes from that scroll.

The quoted spells follow E. A. Wallis Budge’s English translation of that papyrus, published in 1895 and long out of copyright; where the ritual wording sounds old-fashioned, that is why. The scholars’ numbers (Spell 1, Spell 25, Spell 125) are a modern filing system, which is why nobody in the story ever speaks of “chapter 125.” To Ani they were simply the words, and he knew them the way you know songs.

Everything else, I should confess.

The first invention is the road. The collection is a toolkit, not a map; its spells come from different centuries and different needs, and none of them says to visit the Lake of Fire before the gates, or the gates before the judgment hall. The single journey of this book, tomb to horizon to dark roads to fire to gates to hall to field, is my stitching. Every stop on it is real. The order is mine.

Second, the gates. The spells themselves disagree about the underworld’s doors: one counts seven, another fourteen, another twenty-one. I chose the seven gates of Spell 144 and stayed with them. I also left out two other ancient works, the *Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*: royal texts sealed in kings’ tombs, with their own twelve-hour night journey. Ani owned the *Book of the Dead*, not those; his glimpse of Ra’s barque comes from his own scroll’s hymns, and nothing here is borrowed from the royal books.

Third, the working parts: the rule that a word of power, once stolen or spent, does not come back; the tether tying the *ba* to the body in the tomb; the heart climbing that thread into Ani’s hands; the scales swinging visibly before they settle. All are mine. The old paintings always show the balance already settled. I let it waver, because Ani’s fear had nowhere else to go.

Fourth, the people. Anubis really does lead the dead by the hand in the old paintings, and he really does tend the scales, but his character, his patience, his one unguarded moment at the balance, and every word he says along the road are invented. So is Tutu as you meet her here: she is a real

person, painted beside her husband, but the sources give her no voice, so her grief, her humor, and her grey hair are mine. So are the facts of Ani's life: his age, the length of his marriage, the quarrel over the gold ink, his nephew's paint on the ushabti box, the harvest lie he carried to the fire. And where the real Opening of the Mouth rite touched the mummy's face, here the touch falls on the statue in the chapel and breath travels down to the body through the likeness.

Fifth, the judgment's staging. In Spell 125 the traveler names the floor, the bolt, and the doorposts of the hall first, then confesses to the forty-two judges. I reversed the order so the confession could build towards the weighing, and I let Anubis speak the doors' names rather than test Ani on them. Ammit's going, once the scales balance, is mine; the old texts never show her leave. Osiris's single spoken line is mine as well: in the sources he is silent on his throne, and I could not bring Ani all that way to a closed door.

Sixth, the ending: the reunion with Tutu, her crossing unexplained, the bread and beer, the parents waiting under the sycamore, the ushabtis' small voices answering from the tomb, and the last image of breath arriving like the flood. All invented. The spell for the Field of Reeds really does show the dead ploughing, reaping, and meeting their parents at Qehqenet, and the ushabti spell really promises that the figures will answer. But the spell gives geography and duties, not feelings. The feelings are mine.

What I did not invent matters more. The spells set in italics throughout are real, from Ani's own scroll in Budge's translation. The names of the gates and their guardians, the forty-two judges' names, the feather of Maat, the verdict *maa-kheru*, true of voice: all real. The Field of Reeds as farmland, canals and wheat twice a man's height, is the ancient vision, not my improvement on it. And the promise in the title is the oldest thing in the book: that the dead might leave the tomb, walk in the light, and come home again. Three thousand years on, that papyrus still sits behind glass in London, and the scribe's name is still legible in his own ink. Which was, after all, the entire point.

NAMES AND HOW TO SAY THEM

Ancient Egyptian was written without most vowels, so every English rendering is a careful guess. These are approximations, offered so you can read aloud with confidence. There is no wrong way to welcome Ani home.

Name Say it like Who or what it is -----
----- Ani AH-ni The
scribe; our traveler

Tutu TOO-too Ani's wife

Anubis ah-NOO-bis The jackal-headed god who guides the dead; his old Egyptian name is Anpu, IN-poo

Osiris oh-SIGH-ris Judge of the dead, lord of the West

Horus HOR-us The falcon god who presents the vindicated to his father

Thoth THOHTH, to rhyme with "both" Scribe of the gods, who records the verdict

Maat MAH-aht Truth and right order; both the goddess and her feather

Ammit AH-moot The devourer who waits beside the scales

Ra RAH The sun god, crossing the night in his barque

Isis EYE-sis Mourner and protector, the wife of Osiris

Nephthys NEF-thiss Her sister; the two stand at the head and foot of the mummy

Nut NOOT The sky, named in Ani's litany of members

Ptah puh-TAH The craftsman god, named in the litany

Seth SETH The storm god, named in the litany

Hathor HATH-or Goddess of love and of the western horizon, named in the litany

Neith NEETH The ancient weaver goddess, named in the litany

Nu NOO The first waters, named in the litany

Seb SEB The earth god; the hall's threshold is his ox

Sebek SEH-bek The crocodile god; the hall's lock is named for him

Un-nefer oon-NEH-fer "The beautiful one," a name of Osiris risen; the god in the canal boat

Sekhet-Aaru SEK-et AH-roo The Field of Reeds; paradise

Qehqenet keh-KEH-net The meeting place in the Field of Reeds

Thebes THEEBZ Ani's city, on the Nile

the Duat DOO-aht The underworld; the dark country of the road

Per em hru PAIR em HROO The spells' true title: "coming forth by day"

maa-kheru MAH-ah KEH-roo "True of voice"; the verdict of vindication

heka HEH-kah Magic; the neutral force the spells work with

ba BAH The soul as a human-headed bird, free to travel

ka KAH The life-force, fed by offerings

akh AHK The shining, transfigured spirit; the goal of the rites

ushabti oo-SHAB-tee The small servant figures who answer "Here I am"

Apep AH-pep The great serpent of chaos, enemy of the sun

The names of the seven gates' doorkeepers, watchers, and heralds, and of the forty-two judges of the hall, are written as Budge transliterated them in 1895. Long ones like Sekhet-hra-asht-arū resist tidy English syllables; say them slowly and they will do. The shorter ones, such as Unhat (OON-haht) and Hu-kheru (hoo-KEH-roo), are easier friends.

A SMALL GLOSSARY

akh: The transfigured spirit, the state the whole journey aims at: a person made shining and effective after every rite is done and judgment passed. Ani first hears the promise on the ridge above Ra's barque, where the spells speak of making the akh excellent.

ba: The part of a person that can travel: personality with wings, shown as a bird with a human head. Ani spends the journey in this shape, free to fly but tied to his body in the tomb.

Book of the Dead: The modern nickname for the *Per em hru*, "the spells of coming forth by day," the family of spell collections buried with the dead. Ani's copy is the papyrus sealed beside him in Chapter One.

Duat: The underworld, the dark mapped country of rivers, caverns, and gates that the dead and the night sun both travel. Not a place of punishment; a road with dangers on it.

Field of Reeds (Sekhet-Aaru): Paradise as the Egyptians imagined it: a perfected Egypt of canals, green fields, and wheat twice a man's height, where the dead plough, reap, eat, and meet their own. Ani finds it smells of crushed reeds and river.

heart scarab: A green stone beetle set over the mummy's heart, carved with a plea asking the heart not to testify against its owner at the weighing. Ani paid the stone-cutter himself, and he remembers the inscription when his heart goes onto the pan.

heka: Magic, understood by the Egyptians as a neutral force of the universe, a tool rather than a sin. The whole Book of the Dead is a manual of heka, and using it is never cheating.

ka: The life-force, the vital double that stays with the body and is fed by offerings of bread and beer from the living. It is why Tutu's side of the work, the offering table and the statue, matters.

maa-kheru: "True of voice," the verdict spoken when the scales balance; the one word Ani spends the whole book earning. Thoth speaks it first, and then the forty-two judges take it up.

Maat: Truth, justice, and the right order of things, imagined both as a goddess and as a single ostrich feather. The heart is not punished for sin; it is weighed against her feather, and it must balance.

Negative Confession: The long declaration before the forty-two judges of the hall, in which the traveler names each judge and denies a specific wrong: "I have not stolen," "I have not caused tears." Forty-two declarations, and in this book some of them cost Ani a memory.

Opening of the Mouth: The funeral rite in which a priest touched the face of the dead with an adze to restore breath, sight, and speech. It is the hinge of the whole story: no voice, no spells, no road.

second death: The only damnation this world knows: not torture, but ending. A heart devoured, a name erased, a body decayed. The spells against it are the ones that say “for not dying again.”

ushabti: A small servant figure buried with the dead, lettered with its promise to answer “Here I am” when the owner is summoned to work in the fields of paradise. Ani’s were painted by his nephew, and they keep their promise.

weighing of the heart: The judgment itself: the heart in one pan of the great scales, the feather of Maat in the other, Anubis tending the beam, Thoth recording, Ammit waiting beneath. The old paintings always show it balanced. So does this book, eventually.

SOURCE NOTE

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