

Solace in Serapis
for Celdredge
by Lýkos

The Serapeum at Menouthis was a sight to behold.

A site of healing and oracle, it was a place most befitting of the worship of Isis and Serapis - and although it was second in popularity to its sister site at Canopus, famed as the center of the faith of the Ptolemies, it could not be said that it was any less spectacular to step foot into the témenos, to enter the hierón, to find shelter from the world outside, and be subject only to the will of the gods within.

Marble inscribed in the many scripts of the Kingdom lavished the many arcades of the temple, columns reaching high into the sky, praising the gods with their very erection and persistence in holding up the great roof of the sacred temple. Incense bowls rested across the complex, slow-burning throughout the late night, the sky itself alight with the beauty that the kosmos encapsulated like no other thing in existence, second to Aphrodite herself. The pillars of the inner tetrástōion held many of those same markings. Hieroglyphics, Demotic, and Greek, all united under the dual faith of this thriving land.

The courtyard within, often filled with the sounds of discussion, contemplation, and prayer, now laid silent. The temple was empty but for a few caretakers, whose main concerns were protecting the relics within, and preparing the temple for the next day, when yet more adherents would flood beneath the propylaeon to begin their worship anew.

One sound, however, did make it through the dark night. A sound which would not seem to befit such a place of splendor and glory.

It was the sound of haggard breath, and rapid footfalls. Running across the témenos, blood dripped onto the sacred stones that had been laid so very long ago. Frantic eyes looked around the holy place, and - even knowing that they had found sanctuary from those who might pursue them - continued to search for an escape, a place to run, a place to hide. A brief consideration was made to run up into the main temple itself, to seek help from those who stewarded the poserapi, that they might take pity on him and allow him to find refuge here, at least for the night. However, fear and doubt won out, and, instead of seeking the embrace of the caretakers, lest they strike him down as an interloper, young Nakht-Neb'ef gave flight into a nearby opening in a wall, with stairs that led down, down, down beneath the grounds of the holy temple of Serapis.

The lighting became more scarce, as did Nakht-Neb'ef's hold on his own senses. The wound he had sustained was more serious than he had thought, and he only prayed that he would make it unto the morning, lest he catch his death as an intruder in a most holy place, unwelcomed by its priests, uncherished by his fellow faithful. He was no thief, only accused of the very crime, and chased over at least a dólichos. He was exhausted, leaning on the wall at the bottom of the temple's underground steps, and blindly finding his way forward, stumbling himself deeper into these underground tunnels, the purpose of which he was not of the mind to ascertain, even as he reached the next lit lantern - his only concern in this moment was the fact that the lantern was, indeed, lit. This meant that someone had been here relatively recently to refuel it, which in turn meant that his chances of meeting an inopportune and blasphemous fate had all but increased his anxieties. Still, the ache in his side from the knife that had pierced him was an ever greater concern than meeting another who may yet have the possibility of being merciful and understanding.

In fact, as his mind turned back to the injury which he had hours ago been inflicted with, he realized just how weak and faint he felt. His breathing was shallow, his panting having lessened from when he had been actively sprinting for his life, but not as much as it usually would have. The shortness of breath was resistant, refusing to go away. A touch of panic began to set in, but the man was able to resist its takeover. He, at least, would not be pursued. He was not faring well, but he needed to keep his thoughts straight, or else he surely would die here. He had not been paying enough attention to the moon when he was outside to ascertain what time it was, and so he could not have any reasonable idea how long it would be until he could get medical attention from the priests that managed this temple. He sighed, and leaned against the wall for as long as he felt he could before he wouldn't get back up from it. He had rested enough. He needed to find something to help him until the morning. Then he could work from there.

He stepped deeper into the dimly-lit caverns beneath the serapeum, scanning his surroundings. Finally being cognizant of his surroundings, Nakht-Neb'ef realized that he was within underground catacombs - all the more blasphemy for him to atone for another day, he figured...but he needed to survive. The man stumbled through those narrow graven walls, making sure to keep track of his turns as best he could. There was a staircase carved into the underground chamber, moving deeper into the underground. He could see light there at the bottom. If he could get to the area where the priesthood prepared bodies for interment, he may just be able to find clean cloths and sacred oils with which to treat his wounds. It wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that such things were stored down here, and none of the other winding corridors contained any signs of distinctness from the others - this staircase was the only unique thing he could find. He closed his eyes and uttered a prayer which was intended to be silent but came out in a quiet whisper instead; he didn't notice. He took his first shaky step down the passage, unsure, but determined.

The stairs were, to him, a greater challenge than the race he had run to get here, his body failing him slowly, but still doing just well enough to make his way down and continue walking forward. A hopeful feeling washed over him as he took that final step down into the second level chamber. It looked entirely different to the rough rock walls of the catacombs above. The walls here were almost completely smooth, carved and embedded with hieroglyphs, just as the pillars outside had been, although the ones down here were quite different from the ones above. Nakh-Neb'ef couldn't make heads or tails of them; only the priesthood and scribes had the honor of learning the sacred script. Still, the fact that there was no Greek down here made him shiver slightly. The temple above was holy, yes...but something about these chambers just felt even more so. And yet, the dread that he knew he should be feeling did not come. Instead, he was awash with a feeling of warmth. Perhaps even comfort? His hand fell from his side, his wound no longer burning with pain, instead just a dull throbbing that hardly pulled his attention at all. There were a few openings in the walls - entrances to rooms. All but one laid dark, dormant, the gods within sleeping or not called to active attention. The one that still burned with lamp light, however, beckoned to him. It was almost like a voice that called out to him in his head.

He stepped towards it, feet steadier than they had been since he had been but a child. Just the same, a lightness took over his being, the heavy trials of life fleeing his body, same as his tiredness, his exhaustion, his muddled, swimming mind. Everything was still hazy and unclear, just as they had been, but now, instead of being dreary, confusing, disorienting, the feeling was floaty, empty, flighty. He almost let out a thoughtless giggle, this strange levity filling his mind and his soul as he stepped through that doorway.

What he found on the other side was not a mildly decorated burial preparation chamber, but an ornate shrine to the patron god of this temple, and its namesake, Serapis Himself. Nakh-Neb'ef could hardly stand as he felt the weight of the god's presence all suddenly crash down upon him. It was not an oppressive feeling, however, he realized, but a fatherly one. He was not being brought down, but surveyed, looked over, uncovered and seen, inside and out. He was on his knees before the altar to the bull headed god. He felt no influence over his thoughts or actions. He could flee from this feeling if he decided to do so. This place, he thought, was not for him, but for a priest or a Pharaoh. However, he felt that this shrine willed him to stay. It desired him to rest within its embrace. The dull throbbing in his side had gone away, and he couldn't feel nearly anything anymore. Was this his salvation, or his end? He could not tell. He made the choice not to care. Whatever it was, he was where he needed to be. As he looked up towards the shrine, his vision hazy, he began to pray.

"O, Userhapi, great protector and guide of every dormant soul, your humble servant beseeches you, seeks Your sight upon his simple form...I am sorry to trespass into Your shrine, alas I was without another choice. I was made to flee for my life, and I may yet suffer the fate that was

intended for me. I ask for Your mercy, and Your grace, that I may spend the rest of existence in Your service, doing Your works, whether this must be in this world, or in...A...Aménthēs...”

The last word of this prayer was stalled by an overwhelming sleepiness overtaking Nakh-Neb’ef’s form. He fell first to his hands, from his knees, and then to his uninjured side, laying on the ground as his vision faded out. And yet, in this last moment of clarity and consciousness, he felt as if he were entirely and completely safe. There was something watching over him. Maybe...just maybe...

His eyes opened. He was in a dark void. He was almost unable to think, not for lack of clarity, but for just how clear his mind was. It was as if everything was empty. Had he perished? Was he in Aménthēs? He thought he should be in a hall, for the naming of the Assessors, the listing of uncommitted sins, the weighing of the heart with the feather. But none of that was here. It was just...darkness...incorporeality. Even so, he couldn’t bring himself to feel panicked or distressed. Indeed, it was as if he was in the arms of a doting parent. He gave a breathless sigh, his lungs containing no air, and his body containing no lungs. At least, not that he could feel.

His idle musings were cut off by the sound of a booming voice in his thoughts, which overtook all his senses and demanded his absolute and rapt attention.

“Child. You have sought me, and here I present myself to you. I am, as your folk call me, Userhapi-Serapis, protector of the distressed, healer, steward of The Underworld and The Field of Reeds. I have heard your plea. I have gazed upon the depths of your heart, and I have seen the truth in those words which would have been your final ones. You shall enter my service. You shall protect my temple, and you will heal those who seek your aid, just as I will heal you. You shall be the emissary of my image. And when the time comes for your just end, I will meet you in the Halls of the Duat. And should your service on the sands and grasses of Kemet please me, I shall permit you to serve me just as faithfully in upholding and maintaining maat. Be reborn in my image, and do my works.”

Nakh-Neb’ef felt a warmth in his soul that was indescribable. It was buzzing with energy, both that of gratefulness and eagerness, and with the power of his patron, his savior, and, now and forever, the one to whom his loyalty was eternally pledged.

All at once, he was back in the sacred chamber beneath the great poserapi, however, not in the same way as he had once been. He was outside himself, gazing upon his own body, which was limp within the walls of the shrine’s room, but floating just above the ground, hanging vertically in the air. Even though he was disconnected from his own body, he could still feel everything that his body felt, down to the tingling energies that ran across every portion of his skin. It was so blissful, in every kind of way. His body twitched with the stimulation, as, just at the bottom of

his detached line of sight, he saw wisps of divine energy, coursing around his legs. The pleasure was almost orgasmic in its own right, his rebirth being sounded by a cacophony of bliss within his mind.

He saw himself transform, unable to defocus his vision from wherever he was, his body changing right before his eyes. His legs lengthened, and deformed, the flesh growing dark, nightlike fur as his feet retracted and formed into hard, sturdy hooves. The changes kept spreading up his legs, the tired muscles and bloodstained skin all being morphed into something more powerful, something more animalistic and fearsome. His thighs bulged with the power of several horses, looking and feeling vastly oversized for the rest of his yet unchanged body. Then came the transformation of his crotch, the most blissful time of them all. His half-turgid length sprouted into something more grand and imposing, growing out and forward as the inhuman throbbing stiffness took over the entirety of his mind. The way that he churned with virile, heated seed, and the way that his overlong length bounced in the air as it hung off of him. It was animalistic and beautiful. He almost came just from the very transformation itself, but it seemed as if something was just hanging him barely away from that release by a thread. He was being coaxed and teased, but he couldn't even conceptualize displeasure with the idea. In fact, pleasure was the majority of what he could conceptualize, at the moment. This only redoubled as the transformation spread to his glutes, the muscles of his ass becoming firm and strong, covered in thinner fur which provided a pleasant tingling warmth, the thin, wispy tail that grew from the bottom of his spine flicking and wagging with heat and overexcitement. This also began the internal changes, his body rearranging inside and outside, befitting the will of Serapis, sculpted into His image. The midsection of Nakh-Neb'ef's body now began to change, his not inconsiderable muscle being doubled and tripled in strength, firm abdominals able to carry tons at his Deity's behest. His upper body fared no worse than below, his chest becoming large and heavy, strength pervading his entire form - strength enough to carry ten men and more with ease. Down his arms, those same changes spread, his fingers twitching from the pleasure of it all as they shifted, one of the few parts which was not entirely redesigned. The sensitive flesh on his palms and fingers, however, did not exactly discriminate the major changes from the minor, feeling just as good in their metamorphosis as every other part of him, even if it did last for less time. Finally, the neck and head of his form started to morph, this being the most inhuman and extensive of all the transformations that had taken place so far. His neck bulged with newfound power as the muscles of his shoulders grew. His face began to extend out, gaining depth which a human face could never achieve. The skin on his face browned, and the hairs of his beard darkened as slightly lighter brown fur spread wherever regular hair was not. His head became wider, his nose thicker and becoming moist on its exterior. Horns extended out from his head, near his temples, and stretched out horizontally, before curving upwards, pointing towards the sky with a gleaming white which nearly shined and shimmered in the flickering light of the lamps surrounding him, all of which seemed to glow all the brighter in the presence of the divine who was changing him. His newly transformed body floated there, every preparation made. And

yet, he still lay on the outside. He wondered idly - unquestioning, full in his trust of Serapis' Will - how he would get back into his body, and what it would feel like. Though, those idling thoughts mostly lay between his legs, with the powerful pulsing and throbbing of the bullish cock that lay there. His question went unanswered, but clues began to make themselves known.

From outside his vision, a pair of metal greaves floated towards his feet and shins. They were a deep black shade, with golden trimmings and ornamentations zipping up and around their being. They affixed to the bull man's lower legs. He could feel tingles of divine magic against his flesh as they locked in place, the next piece of armor soon to follow, the one which would cover his thighs and hips. He did not know why, but he felt a heavy sense of anticipation as it neared him. He soon figured it out, as his bull cock was pulled neatly into the piece of armor, almost seeming to disappear into a non-existent space within as it affixed to him. Whatever that space was, it was the most pleasurable place he could ever imagine having his length slid inside of. Even his vacant body began to pant as it experienced the pleasure that had been so generously ascribed to it. And just at the same time, the back piece of that armor was brought to bear, something filling his backside as it slid into place, tingling with the love and pleasedness of his Deity, almost feeling as to vibrate within him with every pious thought he had - which were both many and few, at this current point in time. Was this his reward for serving Userapi? It must be. He was so thankful. He was so gracious. The chest piece affixed itself next as the bull was transfixed by the pleasure running through the form which he himself was not quite fully connected to. The symbol of Serapis, emblazoned on his chest, was all that he could process before the arms were covered, hands left free to do the work of Userapi, and his neck, protected by that same beautiful armor. Then, at last, Nakh-Neb'ef's field of vision started to move, and he understood at last. He was the mask that would be put upon his own face. The armor and him were one, both united in their purpose of serving his perfect Deity. To be rebuilt and remade in His image, to do his work in Kemet. He would guard His temple, he would heal the weak, he would console the inconsolable, he would protect the unprotected, he would give sanctuary to those who would find no quarter elsewhere. The unending pleasure, it was his reward, his eternal, blissful reward.

He was to be Userapi-Serapis' very own messenger upon mortal sands.

As the mask slid onto the bull's face, fused to it for the first and last time, never to be removed, he was reborn, made anew, given new purpose beneath the Steward of The Underworld.

No longer would he walk as Nakh-Neb'ef, but as Userapimose-Serapion.

Userapi is Born. He of Serapis.