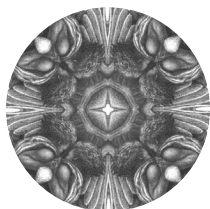


The background is a complex, textured composition. A large, dark blue, circular shape is centered in the frame, resembling a pupil or a lens. From this central circle, numerous fine, radiating lines extend outwards, filling the entire frame. These lines are primarily green and brown, with some darker, almost black, areas interspersed. The overall effect is one of depth and movement, as if looking through a kaleidoscope or a microscope.

KALEIDOSCOPE

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KALEIDOSCOPE



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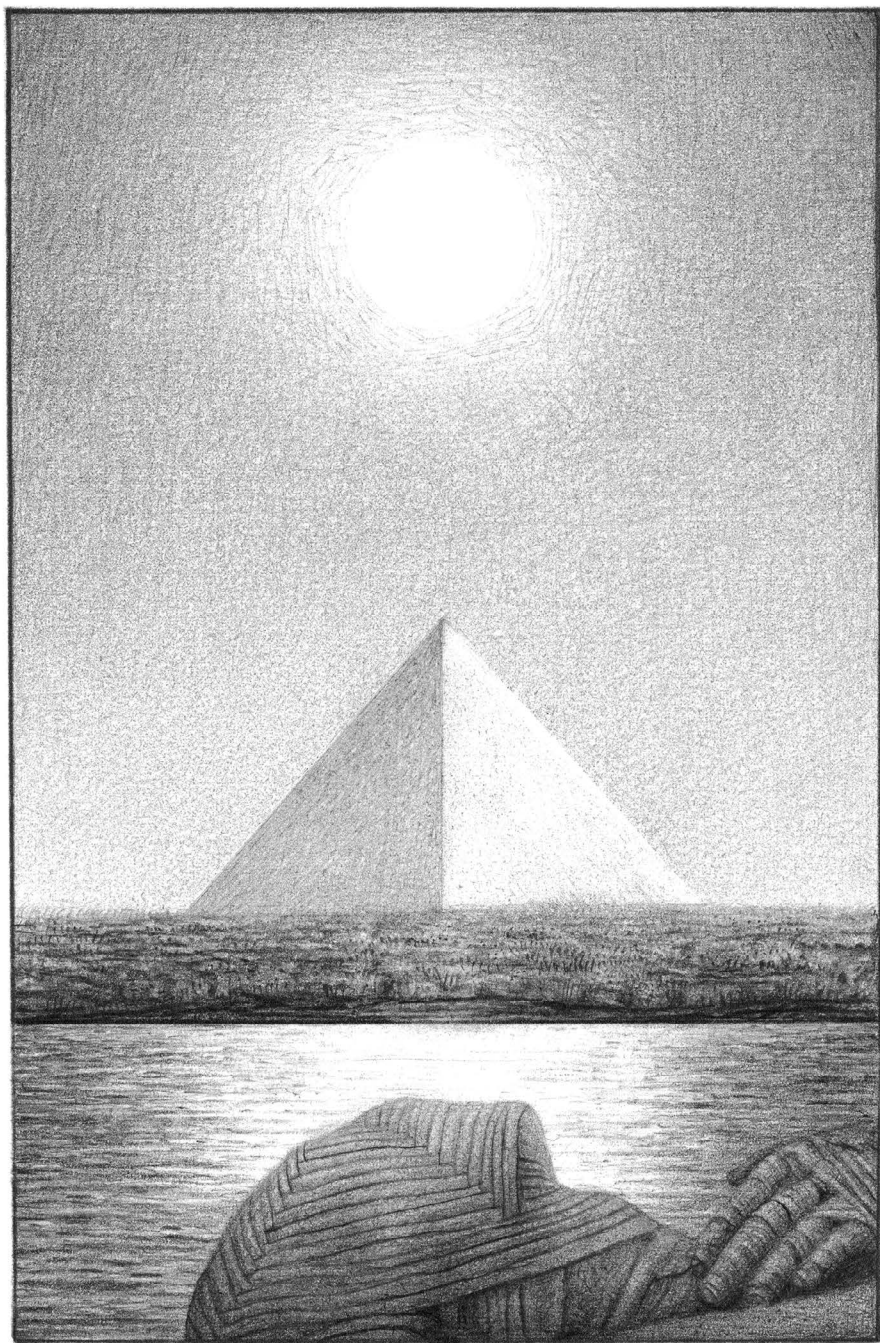
For Cathy St. Germans

To fall in love is to make an appointment
with heartbreak.

—Matthew Lopez, *The Inheritance*

Everything changes, nothing ends.

—Ovid, *Metamorphosis*



THE MUSEUM

•

We followed our teacher through the museum toward a bright room where we were instructed to sit on the floor before a giant painting of the Garden of Eden. It was almost as tall as the room itself. Peacocks, lions, sheep, and elephants wandered around enchanted green hills while a green serpent wound its way through the Tree of Knowledge, which hung with red fruit in the center of the garden. An apple, bitten and discarded, lay beneath the tree, half-hidden in the grass. Off to the right, unnoticed by any of the animals, Adam and Eve were being expelled in shame by an angel with rainbow-colored wings. A burning sword hovered in the air above him.

I was intrigued by the painting of the garden, but I was having trouble concentrating. I was thinking about the dream I'd had the night before. There had been a boy with big dark eyes who I'd never seen before.

My teacher bored me and I wanted to explore the rest of the museum on my own. Everyone was looking at the painting, so it was easy to sneak away. I soon found myself in a long dark corridor where the sounds of the museum

completely fell away. The air was still and calm. Up ahead I spotted an unmarked entrance to a dark, little room. Something compelled me to step inside.

The room was empty except for a single glass case in the middle of the floor. Inside the case, lying on its back with its arms bound to its sides, its blank eyes staring upward, was an ancient mummy. A faint glow seemed to emanate from it, like the edge of an eclipse. I knelt down. The stone floor was cold against my knees. I stared hard at the linen-wrapped body, and I imagined its chest rising and falling, rising and falling, as if it were breathing.

I knew that was impossible, but I thought I heard a sound from inside the glass. I pressed my ear against the case and listened. Yes, I was sure I heard something, a distant breath, so faint it almost wasn't there at all.

And then the mummy spoke.

"Hello," it said, and I was so startled I almost fell over as I jumped back. I caught myself and saw something on the other side of the case. A boy was staring back at me through the glass. It was his voice I'd heard.

His dark eyes shined, and there was something strangely familiar about him.

"I come here a lot," he said. "I've never seen you before."

"It's my first time."

"What were you doing?"

"Listening."

"To what?"

I pointed into the glass case.

"The mummy?" he asked.

I nodded.

"What did you hear?"

"Breathing."

"That might have been me," he said. "I have asthma."

Suddenly I realized why he seemed familiar to me.

"I think you were in my dream last night," I said to him.

He smiled.

"Why are you smiling?" I asked.

"Because I think it's magical if you appear in someone else's dreams. Don't you?"

"I don't know."

"Hasn't anyone ever dreamed about *you*?"

"I don't think so."

"I'll try to dream about you tonight," the boy said before he turned once again to the case. "Do you think mummies can dream?"

"Don't you have to be *alive* to dream?"

The boy thought for a moment. "We dream about

the dead, and it's like they come back to life. So I don't see why the dead can't dream about us."

"That doesn't make any sense."

The boy shrugged. "Maybe she's dreaming about us right now."

There was something so compelling about the way the boy spoke that for a moment I almost believed that he and I, as well as this entire museum and the universe itself, had been conjured into being by this ancient queen. Then an adult voice echoed from the far end of the corridor and I snapped back to the real world.

"James!" called the voice. "Where are you?"

"That's me," he said. "I have to go. Can you meet me here tomorrow?"

"No," I said, disappointed. "I'm on a class trip. I don't think we're coming back."

"James!" came the voice once more.

"I want to see you again," I told him.

"You will," he assured me as he stood to leave.

"When?" I asked.

"Tonight," he answered as he ran off.

That night, alone in my bed, I could still see the mummy's eyelids, thin as tissue, and the color of dust. Three thousand years ago she had seen the pyramids and the Nile. She had felt the Egyptian sun on her skin, and

as I fell asleep I tried to imagine myself three thousand years in the future. What would I be dreaming of?

I opened my eyes and the boy was there, waiting for me in the shadow of a colossal Sphinx, an apple in his hand.