

HALLE EAVELYN

RED GODDESS
RISING

a spiritual travel memoir

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INTRODUCTION

Under everything in Egypt runs a current of energy, powerful and implacable. It's as if the Nile is calling to you no matter where you are, singing to you from beneath the land. Egypt changes people. It changed me. This is the story of my first trip down the Nile and the spiritual awakening that I, like so many before me, experienced during that journey. I am literally no longer the person I was before I heeded that call, and it is Egypt herself I have to thank for that.

In telling my story, I have structured this book to follow my first visit to Egypt as an unwitting tourist, although it includes moments from other experiences that have since made their way onto Spirit Quest Tours' itineraries. Every person in this book is real, though I have changed many of the names and made some of them amalgams. Every story in this book is true, but in some places I have changed the chronology in order to create a cohesive tale. Please indulge me; the experiences themselves were all as I have written them.

A note on the spirituality: I don't think religion and spirituality have much in common, and I am not trying to get you to change your religion as you read my story. From my own experiences, I can now say without reservation that we reincarnate to learn our life lessons. And that believing or not believing in reincarnation, or in any particular religion, has zero effect on the process. In any spiritual descriptions in this narrative, I have tried to give my best impressions and memories of exactly how I felt, vague or specific, and not embellish in any way.

Some people have asked me how my partner Greg and I started Spirit Quest Tours, and why this is not included in the book. All I can say is, that's a different story but Spirit Quest Tours came from a deep desire we had and from the suggestions we received from our Egyptian partners, who you will meet in these pages. It evolved into a company without us really intending for it to do so. The call of Egypt is unmistakable, and this was our way of sharing what happened to us there, in hopes that others might experience their own openings of spirit.

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PRELUDE: AWAKENING HATHOR

2011

The crowd is getting restless. It's almost 9am and the throng at the entrance to the Cairo Museum is jockeying for position. Our group has made it past security and the tourist police, their machine guns at the ready. Ignoring the sculpture garden with its precious statues commissioned by the pharaohs, we now stand at the head of the line, waiting for the doors to open. Behind us, the cacophony of voices from Italy, Germany, America, and Japan grows louder as the minutes tick down.

An Egyptian woman comes to the top of the stairs, her head modestly covered in a bright scarf but wearing modern slacks. Polyester in this heat? We must have different genes. She nods to the ticket takers below. The surge is on. Though we had been first in line, our group is suddenly swamped by a gaggle of excited Japanese tourists. We're buffeted on all sides but push through as best we can, still trying to be reasonably polite. Like salmon rushing upstream, we burst past the marble steps, submit to another security check and then pass into the cool lobby.

Our group follows orders, sticking like glue to my partner Greg and our Egyptologist guide, Shakky. All except me. I need to get to the rear of the museum, an irresistible urge that hits me every time I'm here. With an acknowledging nod from Greg, I peel off from the group and turn down a corridor into a separate wing. The babble of languages fades behind me as the tour groups scuttle off to see the museum's biggest draws: the King Tut exhibit and the Hall of Mummies. Vaulted ceilings soar above me, and my soft Egyptian slippers glide quietly along the marble floors as I make my way past silent galleries. I've already seen all of the museum's big exhibits more than a few times, so I'm not missing anything as I steal this time to explore alone.

I pause at a side room that holds a statue of a pharaoh receiving a benediction from two Egyptian gods. It is an outstanding work of art, beautifully rendered from a single massive block of speckled granite, the three figures nearly life-size. Falcon-headed Horus, god of the Sun and husband of Hathor, stands at the pharaoh's right; the god Set, Horus' sworn enemy and the god of Chaos, is on his left. My heart lifts as I look at the statue: both gods hold their hands to Pharaoh's temples, as if supporting him, but neither actually touches him. They are "activating" the king, sending him the energy of the divine so he can do his work on Earth. Like most Egyptian art, the piece speaks on many levels. It tells of the juxtaposition of light and dark, of good and evil, of man balancing the two and mastering both. I can see this hidden message now—I know what to look for—but I am sure there is more beneath even these layers.

In the main wing, I'm abruptly drawn up short, struck by a statue I've never noticed before. It is a sculpture of the goddess Hathor, six or seven feet tall, carved from a single piece of white granite. The body of the statue is a sculpted pillar called a djed, or the "backbone of Osiris," thus named because it resembles a spine. Representing stability, it's another symbol and tool of activation, like the hands of the gods blessing the pharaoh. A bust of Hathor sits atop the djed. Associated with the image of cows, Hathor is the goddess of love and motherhood, health and prosperity, the goddess of joy. She has become my totem—her cute cow ears, her long thick hair. Shakky, our guide, saw me come down to breakfast one day with my red hair

tucked behind my ears, and shouted happily, “Hat-hor! You are Hat-hor!” (Being Egyptian, he pronounces it as a hard “t” instead of a “th” sound.) And ever since, I am “Hat-hor” in Egypt.

Hathor’s face is heart-shaped, her head the same outline as the ancient hieroglyph for “heart.” That symbol also looks like a jar—Hathor’s cow ears could easily be a jar’s handles—there is poetry in this image, I think as I walk slowly around the statue. The heart, after all, is a vessel for holding love—another example of the Egyptians’ unique genius, their ability to nest symbol, meaning and form together.

I didn’t notice these nuances the first time I came to the Cairo Museum. Like most museum-goers, I was overwhelmed by the sheer mass of sculptures, paintings, pottery, jewelry, funerary artifacts, canopic jars, spears, shields and mummies, cheek-by-jowl in a crazy jumbled collection spanning almost all of recorded time. I also didn’t know Egypt, about the way it can work on you until it’s in your blood, your bones, your canopic jar heart. In those days, I was half-awake, living mostly on autopilot, aware only of the vaguest notions of spirituality, none of which I related to. I am no longer that person.

I am so taken by Hathor’s statue that I pull out my journal and sketch her: the only time I have ever added a drawing to my notes. Hathor, goddess of music, of childbirth and all things domestic: if Aphrodite and Demeter had a baby, it would be Hathor—except that Hathor existed centuries before those usurping hussies emerged to refashion the older goddesses. Joy is Hathor’s gift, and I have made it my own.

Gazing at my little cow-eared sketch, I recall my first visit to Egypt as a tourist, before I came to lead other visitors on journeys through this amazing country. That was before Hathor’s land taught me simply to live, to move past fear into love. My own natural set point for joy had always been quite high. But over the years, that set point was challenged, sometimes terribly. I have now learned to make deliberate choices to be happy no matter what my external circumstances are, and in returning to that natural place of joy, I have felt all my burdens ease; it’s become easier for me to meet whatever challenges come up. And it’s made me more adventurous, more willing to face my fears.

Down the hall, I hear approaching footsteps and a rising swell of voices. It’s time to close my notebook and rejoin my group. I turn away from the Hathor statue, carrying my goddess with me.

MOMO AND SHAKKY

In the fall of 1997, Greg came to me. We were working a hundred hours a week (each) on a project, and we were exhausted. Greg had recently become a Rosicrucian, which these days is a home study program based on the teachings of an ancient mystery school. In it, you learn all kinds of esoteric techniques, like energy healing or reading auras, and perform experiments designed to teach you a rational basis for faith. If you're interested, the program's open to anyone, and you can sign up for the home study course, which is how Greg got involved. But since it is a private mystery school, the secrets of which are only taught to initiates, you'll have to find out the rest for yourself. I was not that interested in the Rosicrucians—the idea of a spiritual system of study was intriguing, but academic approaches had a tendency to make my eyes glaze over, and to be honest, I was lazier in those days and more likely to ignore something I might have to work at.

“There's this trip. To Egypt. I want to go,” Greg says.

I blink, confused, overtired. “Egypt? Why?”

“I saw it in a magazine.” He comes over, holding a copy of the Rosicrucian magazine open to the last page. I see a drawing of a cruise ship. *Sail the Timeless Nile*, it invites me. “You want to come?”