

# Iset's Pharaoh

*Book Two*

By

Mira Brooks

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# Dedication

To the memory of my Grampie, who always called me his Angel...

And now he is mine.

# Chapter One

Iset smiled at her deliberate defiance. She flipped her cell phone to silent and climbed into Elise's car without a look back at the penthouse. She fingered Ari's Black American Express card. She still couldn't believe he'd forgotten it in his haste to get to the office. But his loss was her gain.

She had never gotten used to carrying currency or cards. Usually it didn't matter, as Ari was with her to make purchases. Sometimes he would give her cash for outings with the girls, but his card was something she rarely had need for.

As she thought about the Gala tonight, she realized that she would need something extra special. She would need a dress unlike anything she already owned, along with a new amazing pair of Jimmy Choo or Christian Louboutin shoes to match, of course. Elise was her personal stylist tonight, and Iset didn't care one bit about the price for her Gala outfit.

Elise had been more excited about the final outfit.

Iset was smugly thrilled that said perfect outfit came at the obnoxious price of \$12,000.00. The royal blue pantsuit and heels needed for their night out on the town was only an added bonus of another \$3,540.00. It was clear as the cashier took Iset's card that she was envious. Iset knew very few people had ever seen an AmEx Black. When her obscene total tallied on the digital display waiting for her signature of confirmation, guilt trickled into her consciousness.

"Oh, just sign already," Elise whispered. "You are Mrs. Ari Ramsey, and you have to look the part. The Gazette would just rake us over the coals if you didn't."

Iset didn't give much credence to what the papers wrote, but since she so rarely had the opportunity to go out, she intended to make the splash worthy of the front page. Unlike many old-money Texans, she knew better than most that some people needed to work long and hard to make the money she was so frivolously blowing. Under normal circumstances, she didn't concern herself with such trivialities, but today, obnoxious wealth assaulted her senses.

Ari always hired people to come dress her, and do her hair and makeup. She never knew how much anything cost. It was just the way her life with Ari had been, ever since she'd become his mistress so many, *many* years ago.

She knew most of her friends had lived the same lifestyle, as they were the richest members of Texas— or Enlightened. She also knew how much Elise enjoyed shopping with her. But she rarely indulged so extravagantly. Yet, as much as her conscious pricked her, it was liberating to do exactly what she wanted for a change.

If Ari saw fit to ignore her and treat her like his forgotten concubine, then so be it. She would take full advantage of that position. Narrowing her eyes, she scrawled her name as elegantly as the electronic device would allow. Then collecting her packages, she strode out of the store. It was therapeutic to be on her own, doing what she wanted, without someone to answer to, Iset realized as she slipped back into the limo. She smiled.

The next stop was Elise's elite hair salon. Iset knew the royal treatment they showered upon her was based solely on her friendship with Elise. The other woman was a well-known regular, and always an excellent tipper. Iset luxuriated in being treated like a Queen.

If they only knew.

Iset closed her eyes as her stylist massaged her scalp. Only a handful of people knew her identity from being members of the Enlightened. Though they all treated her with the respect dignified by her title, Elise was her only friend. She wasn't intimidated by Ari, and really only answered to Illiot on occasion.

"So, what can we do for you today?" they stylist asked, drawing Iset back to the present.

She didn't know what to say. She fingered her tresses. If only she could dye it, or cut it. However, since she had his blood coursing through her veins that was impossible. Nothing changed. Nothing. Not since she took her first dose of the elixir mixed in Ari's blood. Even if she cut it, her hair would grow back within a few hours. Sometimes she wished she could alter her appearance like other women, just to piss him off.

Elise saw her melancholy attitude reflected in the mirror as the stylist offered opinions, and she jumped in with her take-charge attitude and carefully instructed them through the process. To Iset's surprise, Elise's command kept her safely within the confines of her comfort zone. Ari had taken care of the details for so long, Iset realized that she suddenly didn't know how. She was completely lost at how to give specific orders when it came to herself.

After it was washed and blown dry, Elise once again instructed the stylist to have them do a touch of curls for the night on the town. She also made an appointment for her favorite stylists to come to the hotel they were staying at for early the next afternoon. Iset was relieved to not have to do it.

It felt so odd having her hair down in public. Iset shook her head slowly as the stylist worked. Elise had insisted on having her hair pulled into a partial side braid, with the rest flowing loose and free.

“I just can’t get over how long your hair is,” the stylist exclaimed. “And it’s so *healthy!* I’ve never seen such beautiful real hair.”

Iset flushed under the honest praise. In the age of weaves and hair dye, she couldn’t name a single one of her non-Enlightened friends who still wore their real, natural hair—besides herself. She left the salon felling on top of the world with her limited freedom.

“Oh, Darling,” Elise gushed. “It’s so beautiful! That half-up hairdo is just perfection. You really should wear your hair like that more.”

“Thank you, Elise,” she said. She was suddenly fighting a silent battle with herself.

Ari despised press. He even avoided the red carpet at the Gala, and she well knew it. The idea of splashing out in society seemed like such an ingenious plan while they had been drinking martinis, safe in the country club lounge.

Now, however, Iset wasn’t so sure. She glanced at her reflection in the glass of the Willow Tree Pub as they approached. A lump formed in her throat as she realized that this was actually happening. Her tits were clearly on display in the extreme plunge of her neckline. Her hair was loose and free, her makeup flawless.

She hardly recognized herself.

Elise’s little black dress, with her boobs just as exposed, left precious little to the imagination. Iset knew that Illiot was much more relaxed when it came to his wife’s appearance. He seemed to enjoy showing her of, and as a result, Elise seemed far more comfortable in her own skin. Iset wished she had some of that natural confidence that Elise exuded from every pore.

“Wow, Mama!” Hassana cried, approaching quickly. She kissed Iset’s cheek before holding her back to take in the whole picture. “You look amazing!”

Just then, Iset glimpsed Jason Price. He was a big celebrity. She felt her hand tremble as she reached for her cocktail. She tried to look happy while she drank, but underneath, she felt so self-conscious that she could barely stand to just sit.

Elise grabbed her hand, squeezing encouragingly.

The next few hours were a blur for Iset. She was amazed how drunk she got! She had done pretty well, she thought, until they started doing shots. That's when things went foggy. Elise hardly let her leave the dance floor, and it was easier to get caught up in the hustle of it all. The last thing Iset could recall was the thunderous deafening hum of the loud music pulsing in her veins.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Gala Day**

Iset awoke with what felt like cotton in her mouth, and the blazing mid-afternoon sun pouring through the blinds.

“Good morning,” Elise sang, far too alertly, when Iset stumbled into the main room of the hotel suite. “I arranged for a masseuse to treat us all before our hair stylists arrive.”

Iset pressed a palm against her temple. There was no hangover, thanks to Ari's elixir flowing in her veins, but with the smudged makeup and runaway bedhead, there was no doubt as she caught her reflection in the mirror, that they had been out late. Reaching for the martini Hassana proffered, Iset was surprised to realize her foggy memory. She reached for the olives on the counter and consumed half the bottle trying to eliminate the foul taste of stale booze from her mouth, and she watched Elise bask in the ambiance of the masseuse's strong strokes. It only somewhat worked. She chastised herself for her over indulgence and rubbed her head.

A little while later, she was playing with her phone, which was still off, but charging, waiting for the masseur to finish with her friend. She really should check messages, she knew, but fear butterflied in her stomach.

Suddenly she was overwhelmed with anxiety. Maybe if she just deleted their dance floor selfies, Ari would never know just where she had been while he thought she was having a quite girls' night.

The makeup artist was applying the 3D extension when Elise rudely interrupted. Flinging a newspaper in Iset's lap, she tried to maintain a level of calm in the presence of strangers.



Iset stared in dismay. Her heart sank. Their picture—*her* picture—was plastered across the main page, just behind Justin Price. The only things that registered on the page were her face and her tits.

“Oh my fucking God!” she exclaimed. A guilty flicker of satisfaction smiled in her subconscious.

Elise gave a slight smile. “Well, at least you look amazing.”

Iset turned a horrified glance toward her friend.

The smile on Elise’s face melted. “Ari might not even see this,” she said in a vain attempt at comfort. “Your name is not mentioned, and...”

Iset bolted upright. She paced frantically. Just how in the hell would she explain this! She shook her head furiously. “Ari reads the goddamn paper every day, Elise. I think even without my name in bold print, he will know his own wife.”

She rubbed her temples. She wasn’t furious with Elise, all though her tone implied that she was. But in reality, she wasn’t angry at Elise, but rather herself. She was furious with herself for being so stupid. Despite her anger at Ari and his treatment of her—or rather, his *lack* of treatment of her—still, nothing justified such immature behaviour. Allowing herself to be photographed so publically was inexcusable.

Hassana was chuckling in the corner. “Well, you did say go big or go home,” she reminded.

Iset’s fingers twitched, just itching to walk over and wipe the smile off Hassana’s face, but Illiot’s abrupt arrival diverted her attention.

All three women whirled towards his looming figure when he appeared from behind the closed entrance. Iset struggled not to flinch when she noticed the folded paper in his hand. He was dressed in head to toe black, his usual suit of choice.

From out of nowhere, a smile teased Iset’s lips as a memory of Elise teasing sprang up. Elise liked to say that he owned three hundred suits all eerily similar—which she considered a major faux pas.

The look on Illiot’s face made her smile evaporate. So much for careful. They had paid for the hotel suite with cash and registering under aliases. She should have known that the MI&B would always be able to find them any time they desired.

Illiot was silent for a few, breathless heartbeats. Finally, he spoke. “Would you all please excuse us,” he asked the makeup artist and hairdressers without looking at them.

Iset longed to be amongst their ranks as they exited quickly, knowing that they all felt unnerved on some sixth-sense level. Not one person questioned this man, and as the click of the door echoed, Iset felt as if she was being led back to that auction block once again.

Illiot pinned his wife with his cold gray eyes and threw the paper so that it landed face up. No one needed to see it though. “I assume this was your idea,” he spat, hitting the proverbial nail on the head.

Elise had the decency to lower her head and remain silent.

Then Illiot turned his flashing anger to Hassana. “You,” he barked. “Well, you tried to keep it low key. It took me a few minutes to track the location, but for one of my agents, I am deeply disappointed. Once I ran a trace for your weapon and card, the GPS zoomed in quickly.”

Iset swallowed hard as Hassana refused to break eye contact and maintain her defiant attitude in the face of her superior. Though it had always been this way—Illiot and Hassana seemed to be at odds more than in agreement—it never made Iset feel comfortable.

“It won’t happen again,” she hissed.

Illiot lashed out and grabbed her by the throat. He was not a man who dealt with defiance well, and while he didn’t squeeze, he did get the reaction he clearly intended.

Iset knew that Hassana was immortal, but she also knew that pain was not something that immortality eliminated. They were all stronger than a normal human being, but they still felt pain in the same way. She had seen members lose limbs, and scream with the same haunting howl of pain that humans made under similar circumstances. The only difference was that all a member needed to do was connect it back to their wound and the flesh would reattach.

However, the pain was still there, despite the miraculous recovery. Iset had once overheard Massimo telling Ari about the lingering pain he felt for years after his arm had been severed fighting in the fourteenth century. Since that battlefield injury, one of his favorite sayings had become, ‘It’s amazing what the body can live through.’

Right now, Hassana’s face was flickering panic.

Iset’s stomach clenched.

Illiot leaned in to whisper something that instantly had tears forming in her eyes and falling slowly down her cheeks. Then he released her.

Iset didn't know what to think when Illiot tilted his head to focus on her. She desperately tried to maintain eye contact, and thus, control of the situation. After all, he held no real authority over her.

But his cruel smile had her quivering when he said, "I expect you are almost ready, Your *Highness*."

Fear congregated in her breastbone. Illiot knew he didn't need to reprimand her. He knew as well as she did that nothing he could say would come close to the wrath of Ari. She knew he was enjoying her discomfort.

"The limo is downstairs. All three of you are to be in it within five minutes." Then he pinned Elise with a hard look. "Do not make me come back here to collect you."

His exit was as eerily silent as his arrival.

No one breathed a word as they scurried to dress for the Gala, heedless if their actions destroyed hairstyles or half-finished makeup. They scurried into the elevator and pushed the button for the lobby.

As the floors descended, Elise pressed a comforting hand to Iset's back.

Iset knew she was trying to share her strength, and she was touched by the gesture. But the trembling in Elise's fingers defeated her attempt at comfort.

Illiot was waiting as the doors cracked open. Iset noticed him pocket his phone when they came into sight. Three other men, all also in black suits and easily identified as bodyguards, surrounded him. They formed an odd circumference as the women followed Illiot to the waiting limo and matched pair of dark Escalades parked outside the main entrance.

A soft puff of warm Houston air blew Iset's hair, as if gently warning her that perhaps she should have piled it all up and out of the way. Inside the limo, she claimed a window seat and struggled to dissipate her nerves. She needed a drink. Badly!

No one spoke, but the air crackled with the tension inside.

Tonight was off to a hideous start.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **5:53 pm**

Iset sat at the bar with Elise, trying to avoid mingling with those who she knew would inquire where her husband was. She really had no desire to face their accusatory glances about why she'd been on the cover of the *Houston Gazette* with Justin Price, or why Ari and she had

arrived separately. Everyone would be buzzing with their version of the gossip, all offering different takes on the situation.

Tossing back the last swallow of her cocktail, Iset was surprised to realize her glass was empty again. She tried to do a mental tally of the liquor she'd consumed in the last fifteen minutes. A tingle of apprehension—or maybe excitement—pulsed to life between her legs. If Ari realized how much she'd had to drink, he would only have one more reason to be furious with her. He hated when attention was focused on them, and a girl her size drinking like a fish would certainly cause some speculation.

Glancing to her partner in crime, Elise was knocking back shot after shot. They toasted silently, both guzzling down some liquid courage.

Iset knew that Ari was near. The elixir made them more in tune with each other. It also attacked any foreign entity that entered their system. This was the reason that they could neither age nor get sick. Alcohol and drugs gave a small high if it was consumed fast enough and in steady repetition. But it would take her seven cocktails to feel the same buzz of a normal person's one. As she felt the liquid enter her system, she kept downing cocktails in attempt to feel something soothing.

But Iset never considered things like quantity unless Ari was close.

Elise tipped her glass to her lips once more as her eyes came to focus on a smiling Ari making his way through the sea of people. She whispered, "He's here."

Setting her glass back on the bar top, Iset realized how lightheaded she felt. She worried her lip at the sheer magnitude of what exactly she had done. Ari would be *insanely* furious when he finally reached her. She just didn't know if he would be so out of his mind with rage that he would react publically.

Surely, he wouldn't. In all his years, he had learned that patience was a necessary evil at times. But if would that be to her advantage, or not, remained to be seen.

"Can you see his face," she asked Elise. "Does he look angry?"

To her dismay, Elise turned completely, clearly not caring if he saw her stare as she took in his stance. "He's talking to Harry Paris and glancing back to us." Suddenly, she spun around and gasped. "Shit! He just waved. What do I do?"

Iset desperately wanted to look. Would his normally soft brown eyes be turning black yet? Or was his jaw firmly set? She knew his facial cues so very well. He could freeze her in her

tracks and make her beg for forgiveness with nothing more than a single glance—even if he only suspected indiscretion.

“Wave,” she fumbled, trying to focus.

“He’s coming towards us!” Elise whispered, trying to take another sip of her martini.

Iset set her shoulders. She was determined not to show fear—even as her hands started trembling. It was an annoying defiance of her artificial confidence. She could feel his eyes on her, undoubtedly sizing all the things he disliked about her appearance. Knowing that he would be at her side in seconds, her courage abandoned her. She closed her eyes, trying to steady herself as her stomach flipped.

It might be strange in today’s world, but in all except the last century, women had to obey their husbands without question. It was still a desperately difficult mindset to free herself of. Especially since Ari never failed to remind her that he would never been a modern man. She could remember when the women’s liberation movement began, just as clearly as it had been yesterday. As the movement continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ari had actually become stricter. It wasn’t as if she could suddenly burn her bra and demand that he treat her differently now that women in *this* age were liberated.

Similarly, as women’s fashion changed throughout the years, so did his ideals of appropriate clothing. They were not Muslim. They were not any religion, really, besides the ancient one they had practiced. But like clothing, they had adopted some fashions to mimic ones that they believed. Under any normal circumstances, Iset wore a traditional hijab—because for them, uncovering their hair was considered immodest. She wore dresses, or skirts, with modest tops in public. Only in the seclusion of their own private home, would he allow—encourage, even—that she wear the newest lingerie trends, and bikinis. They were for his eyes, *only*, which suited Iset, just as well. It just felt wrong to prance about showing her body when others were around.

And that was what made her behavior today just so hideous. Ari had dared her more than a few times to act like those women being broadcast all over television, but they both knew that no matter what else changed about them, they would remain constant. He would always be the man—her man—and she would always be his woman. She just couldn’t understand how those feminist types resented the innate instinct of this, or how men could slowly condone their behaviors.

She had given in to Elise's temptation for fashion only once before, in the late 1960s. She'd come home in jeans and a hippie top that Elise had picked. Elise had always enjoyed the things she should (or couldn't) be part of. Iset had overheard Illiot justifying his lenience to Ari.

"If I forbade her, she would only want to do it more," he rationalized. "I could fight and argue, or allow her to experience it, and get it out of her system."

It was odd, but he was right. Iset had seen it firsthand. Elise never actually stuck with anything for long.

And that was where the hippie outfit had come from. Elise had convinced her to attend a peace rally.

"You can't wear that," Elise proclaimed, tugging at Iset's hijab. "You'll embarrass the hell out of me. Please let me take you shopping. Please!"

Iset relented.

Ari and Massimo were at the table discussing business when she attempted to leave for the rally. It was as if the world stopped turning. Everything immediately halted. His eyes locked on the outfit, honing in on Iset's exposed bellybutton, just above her bellbottom jeans. Then his gaze raked over her whole ensemble. He focused instantly on her braless top.

She didn't need to be brilliant to know he didn't approve. She fidgeted. In truth, while she loved the outfit, it was more uncomfortable than the dresses she was used to wearing.

Standing slowly, Ari stalked towards her, completely disregarding their friend.

Massimo glanced at her briefly, and then rethought any pity he might have given to someone who held the King's displeasure. Iset could see his quick assessment of the situation and knew he felt that she should have known better than to appear dressed in such a manner before Ari. Massimo was every bit as old school as Ari. He wouldn't take kindly to his sister, or wife—if he were ever forced to marry a woman—dressing *like a man*. He returned to his duties as if Iset weren't even there.

Iset shivered, suddenly feeling incredibly alone.

Grasping her arm, Ari dragged her from the room in a deliberate march back to the bedroom. She knew better than to resist, but a whimper escaped without thinking. "Ari?"

He kicked the luxurious double doors open.

Iset tripped on a stair. She propelled into the center of the extravagant space, scurrying to put any distance and objects between them.

Ari closed the doors with one swift slam, then whirled towards her, his eyes black as coal. They always turned black when he was intoxicated with emotion. And he approached her like a lion stalking his prey—slowly, deliberately, wordlessly.

He was angry. She had seen it so very many times. Her innate instinct had her backing away.

“You are not some hippie *whore*, Iset!”

Her tears fell unconsciously as she shook her head violently. She *hated* that word.

“What made you think exposing your body like this would, at any time, be okay?”

She could only shrug her shoulders, lost for words.

“Take it all off, *now!*” He was stern, but controlled.

Iset stripped. She placed both the top and jeans on the bed. She stared at her feet, covering her bare breasts with her arms, terrified of what his next command would entail.

“Give them to me.”

The order startled her. She snatched them quickly from where she had just laid them, and walked obediently to deposit them in his outstretched palm. As his fingers closed, he spun and hastily moved to the fireplace. She felt a pain of regret as he tossed them in, lit a match, and watched the fire engulf them.

She *had* liked the outfit. It made her feel outrageously sinful. But she still regretted it in her current position.

Then she watched him turn purposefully towards her—her eyes fixed on his belt. He was slowly undoing it.

“Across the bed,” he ordered, backing her into the side.

Her eyes flew up, pleading silently for the mercy she knew would not come. Sobbing, she did as she was told and turned over the bed, waiting for the snap of the leather, and the burn of her naked flesh.

She didn’t have long to wait.

It snapped down before she was finished adjusting. She stiffed in the normal reaction. The next lash bit within a second. She grasped a nearby pillow and buried her head. It gave her hands something to grab, so they wouldn’t reach behind and earn her a greater punishment.

Ari didn’t utter another word. He let his belt speak for him.

\* \* \* \* \*

**6:00**

Thinking about that day caught Iset unconsciously wiggling in her chair. That day was subtle compared to the outright defiance she had exhibited yesterday. Vomit burned the back of her throat. Her perfect, long, dark brown hair looked amazing draped down her back in the rich, silky curls. The side braid brought out her high cheekbones and eyes, just as Elise promised.

Through the years, she had often wondered what it would look like with shades of gray peeking out as she aged. As Queen, she was forbidden to have her hair down in public, a practice that had stuck throughout the years. She felt more than a bit exposed without her normal hijab. It was just more comfortable to wear after being so accustomed to the practice for so very long.

Despite her true age, her honey-glow skin and huge brown eyes made her features highlight by the dark fabric that purposely fit her body like a glove. Many men over the years had found her tanned skin and petite size inviting. She just reached five feet, which was normal for women born in her time. Even men were shorter back then. Ari was the exception, not the rule. This was one aspect that he found particular hilarity in, considering that the mummy on display in the Cairo museum was so much shorter than he. History denotes that he was only about 5'7" in his actual prime, a calculation made off the mummified figure that was now notoriously displayed beneath glass.

Ari had visited once, when it had first gone on display.

Iset had refused the trip, with his understanding blessing. It was only to be a quick overnight while they were in Italy. But Egypt was not a place she wanted to visit again. Ever.

He had described it as surreal when he returned. At the time of his actual reign, his physical appearance alone could make people shake with fear. She knew from experience that it was far more intimidating to face a man who towered more than a head above you. He personified the image of a god, in body and in spiritual presence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ari took the stool beside her, placing a warm hand on her upper back. "Good evening, ladies." His deep voice was a warm purr.

He would never make a public scene, Iset assured herself. His greeting only confirmed her hope. Her stomach dropped to her knees when his expensive cologne filled her senses. She deliberately tried not to look at him, knowing his intense eyes would lock into hers.

"Ari," Elise and Iset said in an oddly robotic unison.



Elise sounded welcoming.

Iset could hear a notch of fear in her own, despite her best efforts. She exchanged a glance with Elise and chuckled, more from nerves than anything else.

Elise was her safety net at the moment, and the only thing that was keeping it together. It was a constant battle in her mind to act normal, while her brain was swirling with scenarios. Gone was the confident woman of last night who threw caution to the wind. She could sense Ari's eyes burning holes into her, but he just rubbed her back. His touch was hot, deliberate, and just enough pressure to ignite her senses. Ignoring him was only further fueling his temper, and she could sense it in his fingertips.

Yet she couldn't bring herself to say anything.

There was no explanation, so she just sat and waited.