

## LEWIS REED AND ROLLAND HENRY

Outside of Cairo, Egypt – Autumn of 1871 – On the Eve Before Rolland's Transformation

*One-page excerpt from a novel by Isaiah Everin*

*...but perhaps Lewis's findings may be of such significance that he won't be forced to marry Audrey on our return. Just maybe he shall be considered an archaeologist of such repute that only the Queen herself could besmirch him. Then he would not be forced to abandon—*

Lewis's reading was interrupted by a heavy thud of the door closing. He looked up and pulled away his spectacles to see Rolland—somber face in deep shadows cast from a lantern, sand particles from the desert outside pattering on the floor one by one from his clothing. "Have you just read my journal?" Rolland inquired. Lewis looked down at the leather-bound book in his hand. "If there is something I wish to say to you, do I not say it?" Rolland asked.

Lewis's mouth opened and closed once, and he shook his head. He set down the journal and began to clean a lens of his glasses with his shirt. "These...things you write of...I warned you not to let your hopes fly so high."

Rolland's brow furrowed. "You are all that I have. What else could I hope for but you?"

Lewis stared into his reflection in the small lens, hoping it could reveal something of his nature that he could not put into words. "You want everything of me, but there is only so much that I can give," he finally responded. "This future you want is something that cannot be—not back in England, not anywhere." He knew he had implied as much many times.

Rolland squared his shoulders, but his voice remained calm and low, almost casual. "Since when were you a man to settle for what others say can or cannot be?" This phrase rang of their past, conversations in Rolland's loft tenement, brief moments free of trouble.

Lewis could feel his cheeks growing hot. "You forget my position. Look at me," he said, gesturing to his dirty clothes and the bare room. "This work is all that I have! I left London up to my neck in debtors, and still I found a way to bring you with me to Egypt—*Egypt*, Rolland!"

The dark eyes of Lewis's old friend took on that uncanny quality which made Lewis's gut churn, made him want to give the man anything he asked for. It hinted at that part of Rolland that Lewis secretly considered not all-together human. "You came here on a promise that you cannot keep," Rolland said.

Lewis turned towards the desk and put his face in one hand to hide from the man's ever-piercing gaze. "I *will* marry her. You know that I must."

"You cannot love her," Rolland said, his voice just above a whisper.

Lewis stood up, forcing the strange emotions inside of him to turn to anger. "Are you to join in the chorus of voices that insists that my future is not my own?" His expression unapologetic, Rolland muttered that he didn't mean it that way. "Do I *belong* to you, Prince Rolland the stable-boy? I brought you up from nothing, but is it because you *control* me?"

Rolland's composure seemed to slip. "Lewis..."

All of Lewis's fury towards life surged within his chest as he continued, his voice rising in intensity with each word while the corners of his eyes began to sting. "No matter where your dream of our friendship goes, it ends in a prison, my life's work ruined, my family name made a mockery. I've risked everything for just this little bit," and he held his hands apart as if cradling the fragile object of his contentment. "Would you have me lose it all for nothing?"

"I am *not* nothing," Rolland said, taking a menacing step forward.

Lewis ignored the gesture. "This endless dalliance you hope for most certainly is." He waved a hand to toss the thought away. Darkness drained from Rolland's eyes, leaving only a look of stunned betrayal. This wrenched at Lewis's heart, made him feel as if the floor were falling beneath him. He looked down to assure his composure, suppressing pity with more anger.

Rolland took a deep breath, turned around, and left the room before anything could be said. A terrible emptiness filled Lewis's body, but he gritted his teeth, ignoring it along with a sudden unassailable sense that something terrible was about to happen.