

Nile Nail Files

written by

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INT PHARAOH INI'S BEDCHAMBER - DAWN

Open on extreme closeup of KHNUMHOTEP, a slender man with boyish features, scoops animal fat from a jar and rubs it into INI's hand in one motion and one shot.

INI
Have the army train against
chariots
Those Mesopotamians made them fast

BENNU, late teens with dark hair, messily scoops from the same jar spilling out of the side. Many cuts and scoops show quick rubbing on the palm and back of INI's hand.

INI (CONT'D)
They began using secretariats,
Strange beasts whose lightning
speed can rival Bast

Closeup wave of INI's hand. Servant feet run out of the room. A slow palm fan motion transitions to KHNUMHOTEP's smooth movements, filing each nail twice before the next.

INI (CONT'D)
And the Nubian Kings will arrive
soon
Ensure their lodgings are beyond
pristine

BENNU frantically files in one spot at a time with the energy of a toddler using crayons at a diner. Each nail and spot a different shot, with new fingers each time.

INI (CONT'D)
Our courtroom singers must not
belt but croon
And our chefs provide them endless
cuisine

Closeup wave of INI's hand. Servant feet run out of the room. A slow palm fan motion transitions to KHNUMHOTEP gingerly preparing cuticles. Raises an eyebrow at BENNU.

INI (CONT'D)
Lastly tell my advisors to prepare
I shall join them all in my throne
room soon

BENNU catches the glance, puts her tongue back in her mouth, and copies how Khnumhotep prepared the cuticles. KHNUMHOTEP nods approvingly.

INI (CONT'D)
 But royal guests demand royal
 fanfare
 And so I must come painted and
 perfumed

CUT TO THE FULL SPLENDOR OF INI'S ORNATE BEDCHAMBER

INI is tall and wide with a commanding aura. Extreme makeup
 and oils. He reclines before a golden vanity. BENNU and
 KHNUMHOTEP adorn his nails with henna. BENNU adds a
 feather.

KHNUMHOTEP
 No no no, never add these
 hieroglyphs.
 How often must I say a manicure
 Should remain simple without silly
 riffs,
 And possess the qualities of
 lacquer?

KHNUMHOTEP bows deeply to INI

KHNUMHOTEP (CONT'D)
 Nyuserre Ini my liege please
 excuse
 This pupil I thought could meet
 our measure.
 But her lapis lacks pure lustrous
 hues
 Obscured by red miniature
 feathers.

BENNU drops to the ground before INI.

BENNU
 God king Ini I am prostrate in
 plea,
 I beg divine pardon, spare me the
 Nile.
 Thoth knows my worth lies more
 with thee
 Than in the belly of a crocodile!

INI stands and gestures for them to rise. KHNUMHOTEP does
 so, but BENNU remains prostrate.

INI
 Khnumhotep I am not so fickle.
 From now to my tomb, only you
 should groom
 My nails and attend my cuticle
 Alongside your equal Niankhkhnum.

KHNUMHOTEP

Majesty of mine and heavenly sword
Infinite in your wisdom and power,
We could never ask for a finer
lord,
And we will serve until our last
hour.
INI speaks as he returns to his
seat before the vanity.

INI

Now fix whatever mess she has
painted.
The Nubian kings pay tribute
today.
I would not have my visage so
tainted,
Nor be pleased to have pyramids
delayed.

KHNUMHOTEP drops back into position with a wet cloth to
remove and redo BENNU's paint job.

KHNUMHOTEP

Bennu, fetch Niankhkhnum my
colleague.
Though you put frivolities on Ini,
As he has forgiven flaws and
follies
You could at least bring your
better to me.

EXT. PALACE COURTYARD - MORNING

BENNU gets up and runs into a courtyard tearing up. After
composing herself, she gets NIANKHKHNUM, dark leading man
features and kind eyes. He stops painting to address her.

BENNU

Niankhkhnum your partner summons
you.
Apparently my technique was found
poor.
I suppose it can be considered
true
When compared to your excellence
before.

NIANKHKHNUM

Bennu you know how Khnum can be
sometimes.
I am sure that to any eyes but
ours
Ini's manicure would be thought
sublime.

(MORE)

NIANKHKHNUM (CONT'D)
 Think yourself a bloom, not yet a
 flower.

NIANKHNUM walks to BENNU to embrace her in a warm hug.

BENNU
 Thank you, now join Khnumhotep in
 there.
 Pharaoh itches for his Nubian
 gifts.
 It would not do to leave single
 your pair.
 Oh, to be there when his spirit
 lifts!

NIANKHKHNUM exits, BENNU waits in the courtyard. She
 practices etching a small stone. With her erratic energy,
 she carves a flower. Loud Nigerian voices echo.

BENNU (CONT'D)
 I hear loud voices from a foreign
 place.
 The kings must have found favor on
 the path.
 I'll listen back here, perhaps to
 save face
 And prove to Ini I do not deserve
 wrath.

BENNU hides behind a pillar to eavesdrop. The Nubian Kings
 PIYE and SHABAQA, in gold jewelry and patterns, stop. AYA,
 dressed in drab neutral tones, trails behind them.

PIYE
 Every time we see these grandiose
 pillars
 I wonder why they drain from our
 coffer.
 PIYE leans against a pillar and
 spits on its base.

PIYE (CONT'D)
 They demand we scar, ravage, and
 drill earth
 With no opportunity for proffer.

SHABAQA
 It is just to flex their
 unmatched strength.
 They have bound and chained their
 gods to their will.
 In any other land flooding is
 death,

(MORE)

SHABAQA (CONT'D)

Here it renews bounty beyond fair
fill.

PIYE

One day they will grow complacent
and plied,
And then our sons will claim their
fertile land.
But that is not to say that as we
bide,

PIYE harshly grabs at AYA.

PIYE (CONT'D)

We cannot take petty vengeance in
hand.

SHABAQA

Piye you are far too wry and
witty!
We will take our fingernail hold
by force.
How could we not, when gifts bear
enmity
And generosity belies our course.
Come Aya, as our archers hone
their aim,
You have mastered the manicurist's
trade.
You will usurp those pompous
painters fame
To curry favor with Ini the
strayed.

AYA brandishes her tools like an assassin.

AYA

Yes my lords, I know my secret
mission.
Every brush stroke, a strike to
demolish.
Nubia will rise above derision,
And it starts with perfect coats
of polish!

Kings and AYA walk towards the throne room. BENNU emerges
from behind the pillar.

BENNU

The Khnums must be warned of this
new snake.
To think kings would plot in such
tedium.
I doubt this Aya will remain
opaque,

(MORE)

BENNU (CONT'D)

Or start even some small delirium.
Ah, my mentors come, they must
have finished.

NIANKHKHNUM and KHNUMHOTEP return from the Pharaoh's
quarters laughing while holding hands. NIANKHKHNUM waves at
BENNU and KHNUMHOTEP straightens his posture.

BENNU (CONT'D)

Listen, I have news of a grave
nature.
The Nubians wish your roles
diminished
And have sent a scorpion of hate
pure.

NIANKHKHNUM

Bennu my dear whatever do you
mean?
What scorpion encroaches upon us?

KHNUMHOTEP

I'm sure she makes it out worse
than it seems.
She was shamed and now wants to
make a fuss.

BENNU

I had thought you knew me better
than that,
But clearly you lack self-
preservation.
If I were you I would listen more
rapt
When your students share their
consternation.

NIANKHKHNUM

Sweetie I am sure she has news of
worth,
She always takes our lessons to
her heart
And practices with devotion and
mirth.
Now please, what grave news have
you to impart?

BENNU

The Nubians brought a manicurist.
She intends to usurp your
position.

KHNUMHOTEP

Absurd, he would not accept some
tourist,
Let alone one from their
coalition.

INI walks from the throne room with AYA trailing behind him followed by the Nubian kings. Extreme closeup of an intricate manicure with gold hieroglyphics on top.

INI

By Amun Ra, you must see this fine
paint!
The Nubians have brought this
prodigy.
Aya has mastered the subtle and
faint,
She adds layers of iconography.

INI waggles his fingers.

AYA

I am humbled that you love my work
so,
I did not think it anything
unique.
All manicurists from Nubia know
These fundamental and basic
techniques.

INI

(heartbroken)

Why couldn't my two best painters
combined
Reach this high level of artistic
skill?
This whole time I believed you two
refined,
Now I discover you run of the
mill.

KHNUMHOTEP steps forward speaking brazenly.

KHNUMHOTEP

(outraged)

Pharaoh Ini I swear she is a
fraud,
There is none who exceeds our
aptitude.

INI

I can't believe you contradict a
god!
I suggest you alter your attitude.

NIANKHNUM steps forward to hold KHNUMHOTEP's shaking hand.
He calms him and pulls him back to where they had been
standing together.

NIANKHKHNUM

My god-king you know Khnumhotep
dear,

(MORE)

NIANKHKHNUM (CONT'D)

So surely you know he meant no
insult.
He merely means we must meet this
new peer,
And learn from her much lauded
glyph results.

INI

Niankhkhnum you do well to
protect,
But as you say I know Khnumhotep.
His fiery passion impedes his
respect
And causes his poorly worded
misstep.

Having regained his composure, KHNUMHOTEP once again wears
his rigid posture and stony face.

KHNUMHOTEP

Sir I apologize for my rancor,
The notion of your dissatisfaction
Gnaws on my soul like a rancid
canker.
That pain spurred me to my
thoughtless action.

BENNU

Oh Pharaoh of our most mighty
kingdom,
I beg you extend the same grace
you showed me.
My masters love you as the giving
sun.
Might I suggest an avenue to thee?

INI

Tread carefully Bennu, but
continue,
A student is entitled to defend
Her masters role as my close
retinue.
What course do you propose and to
what end?

BENNU

Thank you, truly your vast wisdom
inspires.
If you believe my masters to be
less
Than any artist outside your
empire,
Let us hold a manicurist contest.

AYA drops her demure act and steps up.

AYA

(confidently)

If I may speak, I welcome the
challenge.
The renown of your partnered
attendants
Spread far without anyone to
balance.
I would love to win and make
amendments.

KHNUMHOTEP

(poised)

You may have bewitched our beloved
king
With juvenile flashy glyphs and
dumb tricks,
But proper application technique
wins
Over whatever Sigil you may stick.

INI claps his hands together.

INI

Haha, it seems you are all willing
now.
Very well, clean my nails, we can
begin.
Then each artist an icon will
endow
And the best paint with glyphs
will win.

KHNUMHOTEP

Glyphs! Have you been so enchanted
by dreck?
Gods should only be adorned with
varnish
Pure like their Ba without a
single speck
How could you consider her cheap
tarnish?

NIANKHKHNUM is more firm than usual, and raises his voice.

NIANKHKHNUM

Khnum, do not speak so brazenly
here!
Ini, we welcome this new chance to
flaunt.
As our skill cannot be matched we
lack fear.
If glyphs are what you now want,
choose your font.

INI
 Glorious, I will leave you to
 design.
 You have until the sun sets in the
 west.
 That should give you enough time
 to refine
 And prove to all, Egypt's artists
 are best.

INI, the Nubian Kings and their respective processions walk
 away, leaving only the manicurists.

AYA
 Come tomorrow, I will be at his
 side,
 You will have lost all your
 reputation
 As I rip away at your feeble
 pride.
 This palace needed an amputation.

AYA leaves. When the footsteps fade, KHNUMHOTEP turns to
 NIANKHKHNUM without addressing BENNU, throwing his arms up.

KHNUMHOTEP
 Glyphs! Images! Ini has lost his
 mind.

NIANKHKHNUM
 Lovey though your backside is, it
 now speaks.

KHNUMHOTEP
 You would have us sully art with
 designs!

NIANKHKHNUM
 No, I would have us adjust to
 critiques.

BENNU steps into the conversation.

BENNU
 I know it is a style which you
 abhor,
 But this more modern technique is
 my niche.
 Perhaps honor I can rightly
 restore
 By helping you defeat this foreign
 witch.

KHNUMHOTEP crosses his arms and looks away like a petulant
 child.

KHNUMHOTEP
 Absolutely not, I will not be
 swayed.

NIANKHKHNUM unfolds KHNUMHOTEP's arms, steps in close, and
 cups KHNUMHOTEP's face tenderly.

NIANKHKHNUM
 My lotus lipped lover, we must
 adapt
 I too prefer work without
 appliqués,
 But time and fashions are fluid
 and fast.

KHNUMHOTEP closes his eyes and nuzzles into NIANKHNUMS's
 hand.

KHNUMHOTEP
 Only for you my sweetest starlight
 beam.

KHNUMHOTEP pulls himself away from NIANKHNUM and addresses
 BENNU.

KHNUMHOTEP (CONT'D)
 Bennu, we would be... receptive to
 that.

BENNU
 Then follow me, it's harder than
 it seems,
 And we must please our picky
 autocrat.

Hard cut to cheesy montage:

INT.KHNUMHOTEP'S ROOM - MIDDAY

BENNU rolls out a cloth with carving stones, styluses,
 henna, and blood.

KHNUMHOTEP sighs, then NIANKHKHNUM steps forward to pick up
 tools to practice. BENNU nods approvingly.

Parallel to the intro, we see frantic scratches from BENNU
 and smooth movements from KHNUMHOTEP. This time though,
 BENNU's art is clearly better.

NIANKHKHNUM starts to use BENNU's technique and gets much
 nicer results. They keep drawing and drawing and drawing,
 NIANKHKHNUM's got it.

KHNUMHOTEP throws his stone on the ground and storms off. BENNU starts to go after him, but NIANKHKNUM stops her and shakes his head. She nods, they resume.

End montage.

EXT. AN OUTDOOR FEAST - NIGHT

A bonfire surrounded by tables. Processions sit at long tables, kings sit by the fire. The manicurists have their own table. INI steps to the fire before a throne.

INI

Welcome to those from the
reception feast!
Now manicurists, my nails are laid
bare.
On my mark your pigments will be
released,
The position goes to those tips
most fair.

The manicurists all get up from their table and each stand to one side of INI.

AYA

Good luck fossils, enjoy the
street side sand.

KHNUMHOTEP

I pray to Ra that upon your sure
loss
Your kings abandon you in our
great land,
And vultures pick your carcass
left for dross.

INI puts on a blindfold and raises a large hourglass in a pose that can only be compared to lady liberty.

INI

This hourglass shows your time to
paint. Begin!

The hourglass is flipped. AYA kneels to one side while the KHNUMS work on the other with BENNU hovering over them. She whispers.

BENNU

Khnumhotep, remember what I did..
No no no, you need to use the fine
pin...

(MORE)

BENNU (CONT'D)
 If you are banished I too am
 forbid!

KHNUMHOTEP
 Bennu I am painting as you showed
 me.
 If I seem so grossly inadequate,
 Then by all means, please, come
 here, take a knee.

BENNU
 So move, there is no time to
 hesitate.

BENNU somewhat forcefully pulls KHNUMHOTEP up and kneels by
 NIANKHKHNUM who is focused and does not look up.

KHNUMHOTEP
 Ugh, the cheek of this
 overstepping student.
 Does sarcasm not read in
 competitions?

NIANKHKHNUM
 Love of mine you may find silence
 prudent,
 Bennu is saving both our
 positions.

The artists finish their work as the hourglass drains. An
 attendant tells INI time's up.

INI
 Stop! We now conclude this
 painting contest.
 I shall remove my blindfold for
 judging.

INI removes his blindfold and casts it into the fire. He
 turns to face the fire and admires his nails in the light.

INI (CONT'D)
 Oh! These Ankhs and Crooks remind
 me I am blessed,
 But this side bears rich base and
 less smudging.

There is a long pause as he considers. Tension mounts in
 the manicurists, kings, and onlookers waiting for the
 verdict.

INI (CONT'D)
 I declare the cleaner hand the
 winner!

The Egyptians all burst into cheers. They run up as a mob congratulating KHNUMHOTEP, NIANKHNUM... but not BENNU.

KHNUMHOTEP

Pharaoh as always your judgment
rings true!
We knew we'd defeat any beginner.

NIANKHNUM pulls BENNU into the jubilant throng.

NIANKHKNUM

Love of my life, do not exclude
Bennu.
It was her fine line painting you
admire.
I suggest we promote her in
station,
And welcome Aya as manicurist
squire.

INI

Niankhkhnum you honor our nation
As you suggest Bennu will paint my
queen
And Aya will remain in your
employ.
These glyphs will enter my
grooming routine,
For 'frivolous' art should still
be enjoyed!

THE END