

Agatha Christie

Akhnaton

Summary

A delegation of Syrians arrive at the Great Courtyard of the Royal Palace of Amenhotep III in the City of No Amon bringing the shrine of the goddess Ishtar of Nineveh with them in hope that it cures Pharaoh Amenhotep of his illness. The High Priest of Amon, Meriptah is loyal to himself, his polytheistic religion of Amon, his country and his Pharaoh, whereas Horemheb a young soldier has equal loyalty to his country and his Pharaoh and through him his religion. Meriptah reveals that Amenhotep has died and that Akhnaton is now Pharaoh, Queen Tyi his mother is regent of Egypt until he comes of age.

In conversation with another priest, Ay, Akhnaton realizes his destiny and that he is the son of Ra. He gives orders that his barge be prepared for a voyage down the Nile to a spot where he will build a new city to the glory of Ra. Tyi warns Nefertiti Akhnaton's wife that she must persuade her husband not to oppose the cult of Amon to any great degree, knowing the danger that such a move would present to him.

Eight years later in the City of No Amon the populace of the old city are revealed as being angry with the changes that Akhnaton has brought to their country with his attack on the old religion. Meriptah's plan is the restoration of the old religion and his own power and riches.

Akhnaton rules in his own right, and Horemheb commander of the armies of Egypt is worried at the signs of dissent that he sees in Egypt but Akhnaton brushes these worries aside, obsessed with the perfection of the beauty of his new city. Tyi is deeply concerned about the feelings of the people and particularly the way in which Akhnaton's tax-gatherers rob them of their money. She tries to warn her son of the spies in his midst but dies before she can do so.

Meriptah is attempting to sow discord over the new religion. News is brought of rebellion in the vassal states of Egypt and riots within its cities. Akhnaton is convinced that the religion is Amon is to blame. Horemheb who begs to be allowed to deal with the insurrectionists across Egypt and its provinces, but Nezzemut Nefertiti's sister tries to convince Horemheb that the Pharaoh is mad. Horemheb, for the best motives, tries to persuade Akhnaton to allow Tutankhaton to rule with him. Akhnaton is now set on a course of monotheism and is determined to obliterate all trace of all gods except Ra from Egypt. This persuades Horemheb that Nezzemut is right and that Akhnaton has lost his sanity.

Six months later Meriptah, Horemheb, Tutankhaton and Nezzemut plan Akhnaton's overthrow. Horemheb obtains a promise that Akhnaton's life will be spared and that he will be allowed to live with honour for the rest of his life in Horizon. However Meriptah and Nezzemut plan separately: Nezzemut will arrange for Akhnaton's death but tells Meriptah that Nefertiti – who she truly loves – must be unharmed.

Akhnaton after hearing that Tutankhaton has turned against him and that the supposedly finished cult of Amon has risen again falls into a hysterical fever. Nezzemut suggest that Para make one of his famous brews (i.e. poison) to calm him. Nefertiti has been tricked into poisoning her husband, and she also drinks the brew.¹

¹ "Akhnaton (play)", **Wikipedia**, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhnaton_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhnaton_(play))