

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A hopeless dreamer, passionate about mythology and travels, I started writing during the pandemic 2020 lockdown, when only dreams and hopes could walk you through the day. Throughout my life, I developed a very deep connection with nature and animals, especially with my horse, the love of my life. I've started writing to share my story with as many people as possible, wishing to make them dream like I did while writing it. What if, being able to create a parallel fantasy world inside your head, could be another way to escape the already too surreal reality we are living in?

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

THE
OBSIDIAN
DRAGON

Angel G. T.

The Obsidian Dragon



Vanguard Press

VANGUARD PAPERBACK

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If you really believe, you can do it.
Stand up and make it happen.

None of this would have been possible without the two most important people in my life: my parents, who always give me the strength to do more in life, allowing me to chase my dreams with a heart full of love. Thanks also to all my closest friends who believed in me and pushed me to follow my dream, especially my dear friend Fabiola who was the first one to read the book, and also Leti, Maddy and Dany. A huge thank goes also to the Russo family and the auction house Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG, always making me feel part of this big family. I'm truly thankful for your support in this project.

1

I was standing right in front of the main gate of the ancient city of Memphis, Egypt, through which cramped alleys, filled with any sort of colourful stand selling different kinds of items, could be seen. Brimming with gaudy silk cloths, aromatic incenses, and several arrays of local food delicacies, the marketplace was kissed by the autumn colours of manifold spices and roots.

Colossal, white walls surrounded the city, gathering all the mud huts, small houses and stalls at the foot of a majestic temple, embraced by tall, trapezoidal towers soaring into the blue sky. In the distance, only the pyramids were towering over the surrounding landscape and the Nile, luxuriant source of life and prosperity, flowed peacefully through the desert.

The hot air was soaked with the typical scent of sandalwood, patchouli and dates. Sometimes too pungent and vile when mixed with the odour of spicy food coming from the grocery stalls. Papyrus reeds and tall palms were scattered around the sandy city, but the main greenery belonged to the richest houses and their courtyards.

The temperature, at that time of the day, was awfully hot and the heat, penetrating under my long, white gown, was piercing my body like hundreds of burning stakes. The wind, blowing full speed, forced me to wear a headdress with a veil to cover up my mouth and nose. A handy shield against the biting sand. Beads of sweat were rolling down my forehead, through the hole that allowed my sapphire blue eyes to be half-seen.

Pushing my way through the crowd, I spotted a male figure moving through the horde and heading into a secondary narrow alley. He was huge and draped in a long, black cloak with the hood thrown up.

Without hesitation, I launched myself in pursuit of that mysterious creature that caught my attention. Once I turned around the corner, I saw him in the shadow taking off the black tunic and chuck it on the floor. Hiding myself behind a pile of brown, shabby boxes, I lurked in the darkness at that enchanting body.

He was around six feet tall and very well shaped. His sculpted body was a heap of muscles and manliness, wrapped into a pair of black trousers and a black cotton shirt. Criss-crossing his shoulder blades there were two small scabbards, containing two shining Sais, the traditional Okinawan sharp metal tine, with two curved side-prongs jutting out from the handle, typically used for stabbing or blocking an attack.

He suddenly turned around, walking into a cone-shaped ray of light filtering from a crack in the dark orange tarpaulin hovering above his head. I went stiff in my spot,

mesmerised by the view. My blood froze and so did every single cell of my body. He was beautiful, astonishingly beautiful, one of those rare beauties that could be seen in a movie or pictured in a book.

A mane of long, wavy, raven black hair cascading over his shoulders, and behind on his back in thick strands. A chiselled square jaw was theatre to his pulp, dark pink lips, perfectly drawn on a pale skin. He had prominent cheekbones and angled arch brows, making his almond midnight blue eyes stand out.

Who was he? Where did he come from? And most importantly, what was such a mysterious creature doing in a place like this? What was I doing in a place like this?

I stood still in place, without moving an inch to avoid being caught peeping at a stranger, but I had to know him. That was my purpose for the day.

Giving his back to me, he worked his hair into a loose ponytail that turned into a bun a second later. An ocean of perfectly shaped muscles contracted and waved on his arms. Not to mention the line of his back diving into those impeccably moulded cheeks hidden by his trousers.

Feeling lightheaded from the overwhelming sight, I forgot for a moment about being in disguise and pulled down the veil from my face. In steadying myself, I stepped on a small piece of wood, or so it seemed from the creaking sound that broke the silence, spreading immediately in the air.

I stopped breathing.

Shit.

Mister Handsomeness tilted his head back and put his nose up in the air, as in sniffing a danger. As fast as humanly impossible, he turned around and looked straight at me. Like he knew I was there. Like he knew the exact spot where the gazelle was busted.

Our eyes met, locked, and I felt a heat wave crushing down upon me, from my face to the tip of my toes. I knew I was blushing but couldn't move away from his alluring gaze. A lopsided grin curled up his lips as he paced towards me like a true predator, slow yet lethal. As soon as he approached me, I stood up very still, admiring the mesmerising beauty in front of my eyes. But once I was finally able to move and step back, I felt the ground leaving beneath my feet. I was about to plunge into a black hole that wasn't there a second before.

The male figure promptly launched himself forward and grabbed my wrist with enough strength not to let me fall any further, but as much gentleness not to hurt me either. The moment our skin touched, a flash of white light blasted off and we both fell down.

Then, it was magic.

Freeze-framed in mid-air, we were both shot into a dark forest at night, where the cool air coated our bodies, far away from the heat of the desert.

The midnight spring breeze caressed my skin, sending shivers down my spine. I slowly opened my eyes, adjusting the sight to the darkness, but I felt smothering. The reason was just lying on top of me. His steel body was weighing on mine. Nonetheless, I grabbed his upper arms

and tried in vain to move him off me. His skin felt flawless and soft under my fingers and his light cologne looted my senses. His head was dropped right next to mine. His face so buried in the crook of my neck that I could perceive the spicy, musky perfume of his hair.

Without moving an inch, I did the only possible thing in that moment. I breathed in. The raven-haired man flashed his eyes wide open and propped himself up on his elbows immediately, leaving me free to breathe properly.

“Are you okay?” he asked in a deep voice, thick with doubts and worry. His hair went loose, falling around my head like a dark curtain. I looked him in the eyes and whispered a ‘yes’ over his lips, but I wanted to say so much more, ask so many questions. I felt his body stiffening and mine reacted to that, but that alone triggered the unexpected: the man above me writhed in pain and a growl escaped his mouth.

“Not... now...” he roared to himself.

He clenched his fists on the ground, fetching the hard soil beneath like it was smooth sand. His shoulders hunched, his back arched and his hips plunged down on me while he pressed his forehead on mine.

“Don’t... do... that...” His breathing was ragged and, when I locked my eyes on his once more, I saw the inexplicable. One of his dark blue eyes lightened up into a pale icy orb, while the other turned crimson red, making his gaze even deeper. A pair of long, black horns jutted out his head, curving and lightly spiralling backwards.

I was supposed to be scared of that display, but I couldn't. I was simply amazed, and I didn't know why. The only thing I could do in that moment was stare at that fascinating creature, longing to lay a hand over his horns and check the texture, and the feeling, and... who knows if they were rough or smooth. Hey, wait a second, what was I thinking?

His voice was low and hoarse when he spoke, somehow seductive, cutting the deafening silence.

“Fear not, milady, I am here to protect you...”

His lips were almost touching mine and I wanted to close the gap so badly. I didn't even have time to reply when the ringing of a bell startled me up. I wanted to speak, to reply, to lay there in his arms for a very long time, but a force stronger than my will, pulled me away from that place, from his scent, from his eyes and, in a blink, everything was dissolving into a cloud of white smoke.

2

“Miss Mitchell...” A voice in the distance was calling at me.

“Miss Mitchell...” I couldn’t open my eyes.

“Miss Aribeth Mitchell!” Suddenly, I was back on earth, and I jumped up on my chair, startled and highly embarrassed. I was standing right in the middle of the great hall during the morning archaeology lecture. Every student was looking back at me while I was trying to apologise to the professor for my tiredness, or better, trying to make up a credible excuse of my falling asleep during class.

After that embarrassing moment, in which I was hoping to turn into a grasshopper and jump away, the lecture went on smoothly and, in a blink, it was already time to head back to the dormitory.

Cambridge was a lively city, packed with university students in every corner, street or park. I really loved that city because it was built around the university, its buildings and campuses, giving you the idea of a Las Vegas for academic education. You could breathe knowledge in the air everywhere you went.

The river Cam, winding through the city, was sometimes host of rowing races, which my college won a couple of times, but it was mainly used for boating. The most peculiar and characteristic one was the punting. I sometimes enjoyed it, especially in springtime. The punt is a narrow, flat-bottomed, wooden boat with squared ends where the punter stands and guides the boat along the river by pushing a long pole on the bottom of the riverbed. You could try and do the punting yourself, but it was always a riveting iconic experience being sailed around by those nice-looking guys, wearing straw boater hats and dark waistcoats. Not to mention punting is not as easy as it seems.

I was walking back from the History faculty to the Selwyn College, along with my best friend Marika. She was very beautiful, average height, with a tiny, slim body that would have made a top model look fat. She had long dark thick hair framing her lovely Japanese features. Dark arched brows were highlighting her black almond shaped eyes, where pupils could not be seen in contrast, making her look really intense. Her mum was Japanese, but moved to England for studies when she was young and met her husband-to-be in college. Marika was born in London, but she had never studied in a Japanese school, so her Japanese was only verbal, she couldn't read it nor write it.

My life, instead, has always been an adventure. I'd never known who my parents were and lived with my aunt and uncle, or better two people, who I called aunt and uncle my entire childhood, or at least since when I was

eight years old. Before that, I didn't have any recollection of where I came from or if I'd ever had a home that was not my uncle's farm, settled in the golden humps of the Yorkshire. When I turned eleven, I was sent to Wycombe Abbey School, a boarding school for girls, and after that I easily entered Cambridge University, going back to the farm only during Christmas holidays.

"Why do you always fall asleep during morning classes?" Marika asked in a mom-like you-are-grounded-little-girl tone and I rolled my eyes at her.

"Because I'm having troubles sleeping at night," I sighed.

"Still having those dreams?" Her voice was more concerned than I was.

"Yep. Same dream each night since a while. That man is giving me a headache!" I said while walking through the gardens, next to the college's chapel, and entering the courtyard from the gate defining the school ground.

The Selwyn College was really close to the department of history, which was highly convenient in the morning, allowing us to sleep in longer compared to those students staying at central colleges. We were staying in one of the three courts, the old court, built in that late Victorian style with Ketton stone and red bricks. The old court's main gateway, with its tower, the master's lodge, the chapel and the dining hall, surrounded a nicely cut grass field, where several 'Keep off the grass' signs reminded you about the chance of being stoned, in the unfortunate event that a finger was laid on it. The garden

keeper's motto was 'Don't step on the grass or I'll step on your face' and trust me when I say that nobody had ever dared to actually try and challenge fate, or him.

We were about to pass the stone stairs that led to the main hall when Marika pulled on my hand and stopped me abruptly.

"Have you talked to someone about it?" Marika asked me. The concern in her voice was increasing by the second.

"Nope. You are the only living being to know the whole story," I said, reviewing the dream in my mind.

"His eyes, his scent, everything about that man is so vivid and real," I sighed.

A group of guys stepped out the main hall, walking down the stairs with books in their hands and smiles upon their faces. Among all, there was Brian Foster. An eye-catching, tall Adonis, with broad, buff shoulders and athletic body. A blonde comb-over cut, with blue eyes and pinkish skin. Let's say the typical British beauty splashed on the cover of a fashion magazine. He really looked like a model and, of course, he was the most popular boy of the campus. And maybe of the entire town.

Brian was the strongest and most skilful rower of our team. Thanks to his ability, we were able to beat the King's College team for three years in a row. I still remembered last week's competition. A guy of the Eight was forced to drop out during the race because of a cramp and, in order to avoid being a dead weight, he jumped off the boat a few seconds after the start. Brian sweated his ass off to keep

the boat at a steady speed, encouraging his team to increase the rowing and give all they had. Hunky arms pumped sweep oars at a higher rhythm given by the cox, and they won by one length. I was so excited for them that I went straight to greet the team, at the after party. That was when Brian got his claws on me. He wanted to collect me like one of those trophies, but there's always been something evil about him and I've always turned him down.

When he saw me passing by the stairs, he displayed his most dazzling smile, giving me that kind of wink as an invitation to fall at his feet. I had never planned for that to happen and never would have.

I returned a sarcastic smile and Marika nudged my side.

"Be nice. He's such a beauty," she said and waved at the boys.

"He is, but he gives me the creeps and, to be honest, I'm not interested in such a guy. Too full of himself," I pointed out.

"Anyway... Do you think I'm going nuts?" That was my most frequent thought lately.

"About being infatuated by a man you've never met. Or by the fact that he gets on your mind every single moment of the day? Or because you are turning down the most attractive guy in the college and girls would kill to be in your shoes?" she giggled. "No, you are not, but I start to think that maybe you should have studied engineering instead. Too much history is getting to your head lately," she snorted, and I crossed my arms at her.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked while climbing up the stairs to our room in the old court dormitory.

“It means that you can’t dream of being in the Ancient Egypt and bump into a Japanese man that easily.” She kept laughing, but soon she apologised for it.

“I’m sorry, Aribeth, but this is way too peculiar not to laugh and it’s a dream anyway, so you shouldn’t give it too much importance,” she admitted and went to open her wardrobe.

“By the way, we have been invited to a party in a very cool place in London tonight,” Marika informed me while skimming through her closet to find a suitable outfit to wear for the evening.

“You should wear something catchy,” she giggled and winked at me.

“As long as Brian won’t be there,” I sighed. “I’m not sure I have anything resembling something not gothic or dark, as you say.” I moved closer to her wardrobe, but she blocked me with her arms spread in front of me.

“I can’t tell you if he will be there or not, but try for once to look normal and not scare the hell out of those poor guys who always try to approach you. You are not going to one of those metal bands live concert, you know? I mean, come on! You are tall, blonde, with blue eyes and a rocking body. Try to make the best out of it, for once!” she said and I huffed and puffed, nudging her out the way, with a fake grimace.

“Maybe I can try one of your dresses? A black one though... please, don’t ask me to wear any other colour.” I could feel her challenging gaze on me, but she soon burst out laughing.

“I know you just too well. You can pick up whatever you like, even if I would suggest the short one, and yes, it’s black.”

I quickly picked up the dress, laid it out on the bed and blew a kiss out to her. “Thanks!” I rushed to the shower.

It took me half an hour to convince myself about wearing that incredibly skimpy dress, well, incredibly skimpy for me at least, but once I got my mind set on it, I was pretty happy with the image I saw in the mirror.

The fabric was soft and clingy to my chest, highlighting every single curve and shape, before falling down over my hips in soft creases. Knowing Marika was a shopping gig, she had probably spent a lot of money on it and the Armani label on the back was confirming my supposition. So Marika.

It was one of those backless dresses with a V cut that said, ‘Look at my back, but don’t touch’ reaching the small of my back and a high neck on the front. It was simple and it was black, but I had to add an impeccable *me* touch with a pair of irregular tear holes stretchy leggings, giving the refined dress a bit of a gothic look. Yes, definitely more me.

Marika got closer with a huge grin splashed upon her face.

“You look stunning, Aribeth! Let’s go or we’re going to be late!” she hurried and dragged me out of the room.

I was not entirely sure about being in the right mood for partying, but Marika was right, I couldn’t spend too much energy on that dream. It was but a dream and dreams tend to distort the way you look into what is real. Deep down I knew I was building up too many castles in the air, but I had that tickling feeling, in the pit of my stomach, that was telling me to carry on.

3

The Madison in London was a cool pub facing the chapel of St. Paul's cathedral, and when I say 'facing', I literally mean 'face to face'. Yes, because the pub was on the rooftop terrace of a nearby building and you could almost touch the chapel from there.

It was around nine p.m. when we got there and the place was already packed with people. It's one of those rare places in the city, less known, but with great flair and no 'kids' around, if you know what I mean. You could always find businessmen and businesswomen chatting over a drink after a busy day in the office, or the most stylish urban lads sharing the latest gossips on their favourite football team or subject they previously studied at the university. Some sort of mash-up but always nice to the eye, as my friend Marika would say.

She went straight to the bar to greet her friends and get our drinks. Despite her being so upper class, her friends were really easy-going and funny to talk to.

Meanwhile, I moved silently to the far eastern side of the terrace to admire the cathedral from the only isolated

spot of the entire place, away from the conversations and noise, while my mind reviewed that dream in frames.

The warm summer breeze had my long blonde hair fluttering aside and it was nice for once not to have my mind set on school duties. The full moon, shining upon me, was unbelievably soothing and its icy light was like a beacon, lighting up the chapel.

I still remembered his perforating blue eyes looking at me, his musky perfume, his hands and his body on mine. Suddenly, the wind changed direction and a cold shiver ran down my spine. Something inexplicable was in the air and, by the time I wrapped my mind around it, the hair on my arms rose.

I turned around to see if I could spot Marika but, instead, my eyes fixed on a tall figure standing in a corner, leaned on the dark woody wall, with arms crossed over his chest.

My heart skipped a bit when I recognised those eyes.

That couldn't be possible. It was *he*.

Standing there, waiting and staring at me. His clothes were different from the outfit I remembered in the dream, but there was no doubt.

Darting towards him, I almost stumbled on my feet, but I kept going. I had to reach him, I had to make sure it was really *he*.

The crowd didn't help my marching through and, once I was in the middle of it, blinded by the lights and dazed by the noise and music, I lost the sight. He was there a second before and then, he was gone, gone as in

dissolved. Was that even possible? Was I losing my mind? Ghosts don't exist. I was sure about that.

Marika approached me with a shining smile on her face and two glasses of white wine in her hands.

"Here you are!" she exclaimed, but soon that smile faded.

"Hey, are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost..." she babbled, in a wary tone.

My eyes were still trying to adjust to the sparkling lights, but I was back on earth in a blink.

"Yeah, I guess so. I think I saw someone familiar, but I'm sure I'm mistaken." Was I?

She offered me a glass and I simply drank it up in one shot.

"Oookay girl, you need to take it easy. Here, let's take a sit and you can tell me all about it." So, we did.

We found a small, rounded table away from the crowd and sat down on the only available couch there. I told Marika about the dreams and the male figure and what happened a few minutes before she came back.

"Are you entirely sure it was the same man? I mean, what you had could have been a premonitory dream yes, but maybe you simply watched a catching movie and had a huge crush on the main character?" she snorted, but soon apologised for the reaction, probably caused by too much alcohol.

"It's okay, silly, I know you think I'm probably crazy." I waved her off with my hand and got up quickly.

“I shall pop to the loo very quickly, be right back. Shall we have another round? It’s on me this time though.” I winked, giving her ten quid before running off to the ladies.

While I was walking to the restroom, my mind kept playing the same scene over and over again and all my efforts, to keep him out of my head, went poof in a heartbeat.

As always, the queue to the ladies’ room was never-ending and who knows why in hell girls are always so slow in the toilette.

I leaned against the wall while waiting and, after only a few seconds, I got slapped by that feeling again. The perception of being watched had my head turning sideways and my eyes drifting around, skimming the dark narrow hallway to see if I could spot anything weird and, there he was. Again.

I moved quickly and reached the far corner where he was standing, as beautiful as a Michelangelo statue. His dark, wavy hair was loose and framed his facial features like in a painting.

Every girl, waiting in line, was mesmerised by his figure and I knew exactly what kind of thoughts they were having and what sort of fantasies their minds were projecting. They kept giggling and staring at him, try to draw his attention, but his eyes were only for me.

When I stopped right in front of him, he cocked his head and a small smile curled up his pulp lips. I was about to utter a word when he anticipated me.

“Greetings, milady, how can I help you?” he formally enquired.

He was wearing a black t-shirt and his arms, crossed over his chest, were shaped with muscles, giving off so much power and manliness. His midnight blue eyes were fixed on mine, but soon darted to something behind me.

Before even being able to open my mouth, I heard someone calling my name. That familiar voice coming from behind me had my head swirl around immediately.

Brian was right behind me, looking at me with those full, pale blue eyes and that smile of his. An almost empty glass in his hand and that god-awful smell of alcohol coming from him let me know that he was probably far ahead in being drunk.

“Hey, Aribeth, why don’t you join us for a drink?” he babbled and a snort escaped his friend’s lips.

“No thank you, I’m here with Marika,” I said and was about to turn around to face the mysterious man, when Brian grabbed my wrist and pulled me to him.

“Come on, how can you deny me a drink?” He spat on my face and I had to move it back to avoid his stinking breath.

“I said no!” I raised my voice over the music and tried to pull my hand back. His grip got stronger and the pull he gave made me almost fall.

Strong arms caught me just in time before I bumped into Brian. My body was being held tightly with a powerful arm around my waist and that spicy scent permeated the air around me. I couldn’t believe how much

I've dreamed about it. His pores were releasing that spicy wooden fragrance I longed to perceive since I first dreamed about it.

"Fear not..." he whispered into my ear before a growl rumbled in his chest.

"You heard the lady," the man holding me thundered and, as fast as a viper, he fetched Brian's wrist.

I could tell from the shock on my fellow student's face that the message had sunk in. Brian let go of my arm and stepped back. Why he had that dreadful look on his face, like he had seen a ghost, I didn't know. Or maybe I did, but smirked, nonetheless.

When the gang left, I felt my heart was still hammering in my chest and the explanation was the man's arm still around my waist. I swallowed and turned around, gently pulling back.

"Thank you..." Those were the only words I could say before he let go of me.

"You are very welcome, my..." He trailed off when he saw me stepping back.

I put myself together in a blink and bowed my head to him.

"Thank you, but I... should probably go back to my friend, she might be looking for me..." I couldn't look him in the eyes and just like that I turned on my heels and fled.

I wanted to stay there and have all my doubts clarified, but for the first time, I got really scared. Scared of what might have happened if I had indulged in that moment, in his arms, in his gaze.

Once I reached the table where Marika was eagerly waiting, I looked back and... he was gone. Maybe I was harsh, but maybe it was for the best. Maybe I was only dreaming, but dreams must come to an end sooner or later and I knew that those electrifying feelings bring nothing but troubles.

*So many humans around and we cannot touch anyone,
such a waste.*

I want to kill.

I want blood.

*That's a mere human, an alluring piece of woman, but
she's nothing but food.*

*So tempting and blood warming and you are so
pathetic.*