

Hunters of the Nile

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration in an ancient Egyptian style. It depicts three figures in a tomb-like setting. On the left, a woman in a dark, patterned dress holds a large golden chalice. In the center, another woman in a similar dress is shown in profile, holding a small object. On the right, a third figure, possibly a man, is shown in profile, holding a large, ornate object. The background is filled with various hieroglyphs and symbols, including a lotus flower and a small figure. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of brown, gold, and red.

Ellie Unleashed

Erotica by Ellie Moonwater

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

Lyrical Press, Inc.

www.lyricalpress.com

Copyright ©2009 by Ellie Moonwater

First published in 2009, 2009

NOTICE: This eBook is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution to any person via email, floppy disk, network, print out, or any other means is a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment. This notice overrides the Adobe Reader permissions which are erroneous. This eBook cannot be legally lent or given to others.

This eBook is displayed using 100% recycled electrons.

CONTENTS

[HUNTERS OF THE NILE](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About Ellie Moonwater](#)

[Lyrical Press](#)

* * * *

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

Lyrical Press, Incorporated

Hunters of the Nile

Copyright © February 2009, Ellie Moonwater

Edited by Pam Skochinski

Book design by Emma Wayne Porter and Renee Rocco

Cover Art by Renee Rocco

Lyrical Press, Incorporated

17 Ludlow Street

Staten Island, New York 10312

www.lyricalpress.com eBooks are not transferable. All

Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

Published in the United States of America by Lyrical Press,
Incorporated

First Lyrical Press, Inc. electronic publication: February
2009

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

HUNTERS OF THE NILE

by Ellie Moonwater

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Dedication

To Egypt, for being the land you are, and possessing the richness of history, myth and legend that you do.

To my husband and my son who put up with 'the crazy writer in the corner room', and loving her anyway.

To Lyrical Press, for giving me a home.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 1

The Hunt

Callista—What a name to be saddled with ... and speaking of saddling...

Callie pulled the girth tight on Romaney's saddle and gave him an affectionate pat. "See, you behave yourself," she instructed playfully, leading the big bay out into the mounting yard. "Be nice today."

It was a vain hope and she knew it. Once Romaney Prince took a dislike to someone, it tended to last—and Romaney had taken a grand dislike to Steven O'Sullivan. For once, Callista couldn't fault the horse's taste. Mr. O'Sullivan was a prat.

Unfortunately, Mr. O'Sullivan was a well-paying prat, and the stable couldn't afford to lose his patronage. Why couldn't the man have taken her advice and accepted a different mount for the day?

Running a hand through her reddish-brown hair, Callista sighed as she walked into the yard. Mr. O'Sullivan was dressed for battle, and his grey eyes seemed to sparkle with anticipation at the idea of a difficult ride. If Callista hadn't known better, she would have thought he'd picked a fight with Romaney on purpose, but that was ridiculous. Why would anyone deliberately pick a fight with a horse? It wasn't as though they'd get anything for winning.

Taking in the man's tight-fitting cream jodhpurs, black riding boots, impeccably laundered black riding jacket, and the riding crop he impatiently tapped against one thigh, Callista forced a brief smile to her face. "Here he is, Mr. O'Sullivan. He's raring to go today." If she was lucky, he couldn't read the worry that shadowed her blue-green eyes.

"Oh please, Callie, you can call me Steve." The man paused, glancing over Romaney's upraised head and flaring nostrils. "Well, he certainly looks the part. Let's see how he behaves, shall we?"

Hiding her reluctance, and ignoring the way Romaney's ears flattened against his head as they approached, Callista led the bay over. Romaney snorted as Mr. O'Sullivan's hand snapped out and Callista laid the reins in the man's leather-gloved palm. The rider hesitated once his hand had closed over them.

"Have you ever been the fox, Callie, in a hunt with hounds?"

Callista felt her shoulders tighten in resentment. She hadn't given him permission to use her nickname—hadn't even told him what it was. And she didn't approve of hunting, not even the sort that used human runners instead of a real live fox. Choking down her anger, she raised her chin and surveyed him coolly.

"No," she said, her voice declaring an end to that line of conversation.

"A pity," he replied. "You've the look of a runner about you." He said no more, but swung the reins over Romaney's head and rose quickly into the saddle. Before Callista could

respond, he jerked the horse's head around and kicked him into a fast trot barely within the stable rules. The pair was galloping by the time they'd reached the edge of the trees marking the beginning of the Forest Ride.

Heart in mouth, Callista watched as Romaney disappeared into Velici's Copse. Was it only hope that made her imagine a slowing of their pace? With any luck, she hadn't imagined it, and Mr. O'Sullivan had shown the sense to ease back to a trot.

The Forest Ride wound through the copse for a good two miles before reaching the summit of the Morrisman's Knoll. The trail wasn't designed for a gallop. The top of the Knoll, however, held a broad expanse of grass where there'd be room to give Romaney a good run.

Callista shivered, thinking of the tricks the horse might try at a slower pace beneath the trees. In some ways, Mr. O'Sullivan's rapid exit had avoided much of the big animal's mischievous antics. Despite that, she dreaded seeing Romaney's condition on the man's return.

For the next hour, she readied horses for Mr. Inskip's riding lesson. The children came only to ride. Much as she disapproved of the policy, they were not expected to either tack up before, or care for their mounts after, the class.

The lesson was well underway when Mr. O'Sullivan returned, triumphantly riding a steaming and blowing Romaney through the gate.

Like the children, Mr. O'Sullivan came only to ride, so it was Callista's duty to walk the horse until he was cool enough to stable. All that time, she raged inside. *That arrogant*

sonofa ... She bit back a growl and patted Romaney's neck. He'd been ridden hard, and she could see where O'Sullivan had used the crop on his neck, rump and shoulders. If Mr. Inskip didn't ban the blackguard now, then ... Callista paused. Then, well, what *would* she do? She couldn't afford to quit.

Once the children were gone and their ponies cared for, Mr. Inskip looked over Romaney. He didn't say anything, but the thoughtful frown he wore as he walked away surely meant the horse's condition had him thinking.

It was just turning dusk when Callista racked the last saddle and hung the last bridle on its peg.

"See you tomorrow, Mr. Inskip," she called as she passed his office.

"Good night, Callie."

"Yeah, good night, Callie," another voice echoed as she stepped into the dark outside.

She had barely registered it when an arm coiled around her chest, and a hand covered her mouth and nose. Her cry of shock never made it past the bitter-scented cloth held to her face as she was dragged into deeper shadows.

* * * *

Nausea was the first thing that filtered into her consciousness. Nausea, great thirst, and the discomfort of bare ground beneath her. When she opened her eyes, she stared up at starlight. No, she blinked, trying to clear her vision. She moved her head from side to side. No, she was staring up at the leaves of a great many branches arcing

overhead and shifting in the night breeze. The starlight was really moonlight, reflecting off the foliage.

Rolling onto her side, and then into a crouch, she noticed two other things.

One: that she was naked. *Naked.* She groaned. *That can't be good.*

And, two: there was a note. Or rather, an envelope taped to a tree.

It was a silver envelope, and taped beside it was the oblong outline of a flashlight. Callista reached for them both, her hands trembling, the nausea she felt no longer the sole result of the drug she'd inhaled. With the help of the torch, she could read the single word printed on the outside,

Callie

It was *her* envelope. She took it down and carefully unsealed it.

The envelope was heavy and contained two things. The first was a watch face with a large crack across its middle. It was from a man's watch, silver and black, with luminous numbers and glowing hands she could detect in the dark. To her surprise, it was only ten o'clock. The second item in the envelope was a sheet of good-quality paper, creamy-yellow in the torchlight. The message was ominous.

Have you ever been the fox, Callie? Well, now's your chance. If the clock reads 10 pm, you're running out of time. We left the kennels at 9:55. The hounds have your scent, and you've a long way to run. If you can make it over the river, we might never catch you. If you can't, your tail is mine.

Callie almost dropped the letter and its poisonous words. Her heart beat faster with panic. What did it mean? Forcing down the bile that rose in her throat, she read the note again, but it wasn't until she heard the faint barking of dogs that she understood.

She was the fox! Those were dogs, and she was the fox! She had to run. She had to outrun the dogs. The words in the note leapt to mind. She had to make it to the river, or...

Her tail? She wasn't sure she wanted to understand what that meant. Foxes had a tail; she didn't—well, not a fox tail per se. *No, I really don't want to know that last sentence means.* And there was only one way to make sure she didn't find out.

The sound of barking dogs drifted faintly to where she crouched. She had no idea how far away the kennels were, or how long it would take them to reach her. She didn't want to be anywhere near here once the dogs, the hounds, started casting about for her scent.

Using the shafts of moonlight as her guide, Callista rose to her feet and took stock of the country around her. She was in a forest, an open forest, she noted with relief, with not many bushes to block her path, at least, not here. She was also standing on an incline, which meant she was on a hill. From the top of the hill, she might see the river.

Moving now, Callista began to hurry up the hill. She dared not run. Her feet were too tender, and her eyes weren't fully adjusted to the dark. Clutching the note, the flashlight and

the watch face in one hand, she scrambled towards the summit.

If I can see the river, I can run towards the river. If I can reach the river, I can cross the river. If I can cross the river, I can be safe. The words ran through her head like a mantra. *If I can see the river, I can run towards the river. If I can reach the river, I can cross the river.*

Her determination took her to the top of the hill, and the moonlight showed her an outcrop of rocks that might give her a vantage point over the trees. Hurrying across to it, and using the moonlight to light her way, Callie began to climb. *If I can cross the river, I can be safe. If I can see the river...*

Behind her, the barking grew louder. Now she could hear the sound of horses making their way through the forest and the low murmur of voices. Surely there weren't women in the pack searching out her trail?

Forcing herself not to panic, Callista reached the edge of the outcrop and looked out. She was on a hill, all right, and one that descended into a series of valleys and undulations. Halfway to the horizon, she could see the gleaming silver ribbon of a river. It was the only river in sight.

"If I can see the river, I can run to the river," she repeated to herself, scrambling quickly back off the rocks. Moving quickly around the outcrop, she picked out another series of boulders and began to jog towards them. Running was out of the question. If she ran, she might fall. This shuffling jog was the best she could do. She could only hope it would be enough.

If I can run to the river, I can...

Behind her, a dog raised its voice in a yelp of victory. *No!* It couldn't be happening already! Picking up her pace, she lurched forward. The torch dropped from her hand as she reached out to fend off an oncoming tree trunk. The note followed it a short time after when she ran full tilt through a tangle of bushes.

Dammit! There goes the evidence! Callie thought, deciding not to go back for the piece of paper. She slid on a thick carpet of leaves, flailing for balance. The boulders she'd set her sights on loomed closer, and she slithered around their red granite bases, using one hand to steady herself.

Behind her, another hound raised its voice, and another, until there was a chorus of baying yelps echoing through the forest in her wake.

Only madmen would do this, Callie found herself thinking. She glanced skyward. *Oh yeah? Well, did you notice the moon? Full-moon lunacy. And might I ask you what brings you out tonight, my dear?*

She couldn't quite stop the hysterical giggle that escaped her lips, and then had to stifle a yelp of pain as she stepped on something that bruised the sole of her foot. Not now! Christ, that hurt! Callista limped two or three steps before the pain faded enough for her to go back to her shambling run.

Hounds started to bay. Closer now, so close. Callista sighted on another rocky outcrop and plunged downward. All her energy was devoted to keeping upright as the slope grew steeper, and she left the more open forest for the wilder foliage thriving at the base of the hill.

It's hopeless, she began to think, but she didn't want to give up. *If I can cross the river, I can escape.* Surely the undergrowth would slow the dogs. It would certainly hinder the horses. It was definitely slowing her! Perhaps if she could find somewhere the dogs couldn't reach, and the horsemen couldn't get to her...

With renewed interest, she began scanning the moonlit forest before her, her eyes taking in the looming shadows of another outcrop of rocks with hope. What if there were caves? What if there was a whole network of caves? She could find a cave and push rocks across the opening and...

The sound of crackling leaves and snapping twigs came from behind her. The sound of the dog's baying changed in pitch as though it had caught a glimpse of her pale skin and waving arms. Callista could not stop the sob of fear that wrenched itself free from her chest.

They couldn't catch her like this! It wasn't fair. Forgetting her fear of hanging spiders, and trying to ignore the sharp-edged rocks and twigs beneath her feet, she lunged towards the outcrop. Praying that there would be a cave, or a crevice, or something in which she could shelter, she began to really run.

The dogs sounded bare meters behind. The outcrop was bare meters ahead. It seemed like forever. A branch caught in her hair, but she didn't stop, didn't notice what had happened until there was a sudden pain on her scalp, and then a crack as the twigs gave way, releasing her. With another sob, Callista stumbled to the base of the outcrop, her vision momentarily stolen by the darkness of their shadow.

Using her hands to feel her way, she frantically patted at the side of the towering formation. Behind her, the dogs' baying changed note as they lost sight of her.

"Please, please, please," she whispered, moving around the outcrop, her hands searching for a place to lay hold of, or for a hole to hide in. "Please," she sobbed, as she reached its lowest point and had to choose between searching the other side of the outcrop, or running further down the hill and then following the valley around, or climbing the next hill.

"Oh God, please," she begged, as she made the choice to keep searching the formation for a place to hide.

She came face to face with the dog, and a closely following rider as her hands met empty air and her eyes registered the blackness of a deep hollow in the formation's side. For a moment, they stared at each other as she decided between the possibility of meeting a spider or snake and what might happen if the rider caught her, and he—for it was most definitely a he—obviously rejoiced at his unexpected luck.

* * * *

There'd been a wager that she would reach the bottom of the hill. If she did, then he'd have to share her. If she didn't ... He lunged, just as the dog jumped towards her. She stumbled sideways with a shriek, and disappeared into the darkened hollow between where two massive boulders reached for the sky.

"She's mine!" he exulted, and called the dog away.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 2

The Hunt Continues

Callista fell for a long time. Her hands flailed but she touched nothing. Her shriek was swallowed up in the darkness and the roiling mist. *Mist? Why is there mist in a cave? How is there mist in a cave? At least there doesn't seem to be any spiders...*

It was the last thought she had for what might have been an age. It was, in fact, several ages.

The sun woke her, and the wind-carried sand stung her skin. From somewhere nearby she heard the roar of a lion and the scream of a horse, intermixed with the sounds of baying dogs and shouting men. Callista couldn't make out the words.

The sound of the dogs galvanized her. The hunt was here! There was a man on a horse ... and a dog, and ... She raised her head, pushing off the sand before she registered the fact that there was no moonlight, that she stood under a midday sun, and that her skin already had the tightness of a vicious sunburn. She was still naked.

The lion's roar came again, but this time it ended in a choking growl and the men's cries took on a victorious note. The dogs quieted.

Looking around, Callista realized she stood at the edge of a desert. The barren gully where she had lain was full of pebbled rocks, bare earth, and eddies of dust and sand. The

sand kicked up in flurries, threatening to take the skin from her back.

She was still debating whether or not to go towards the cries, or to go away from them, when the wind rose in pitch. The sand did more than sting now, and she drew her arms over her chest in an attempt to protect herself. Perhaps she'd be able to find another cave where she could escape from the wind and sun. She could wait for the men and dogs to go away, too. Come dusk, she could find the river. *Find the river and I can be safe.*

Squinting against the glare, Callista looked around her. There were plenty of boulders, and the walls of the gully rose into short cliffs that didn't look too difficult to climb. Inspecting the walls on either side, she noted occasional straggly bushes that sheltered near clumps of rocks, and wondered what had happened to the forest.

Her throat felt parched, and she hoped the river wasn't far away. *Reach the river ...* The world was incredibly white, she decided. Each rock and pebble was thrown into stark relief, the sky an incredible blue overhead. Swallowing against the dryness, Callista stumbled forward. *The ground was so hot!* And those rocks were sharp. She took another couple of steps and looked around desperately for a patch of shadow. Where was that cave?

It wasn't long before the brightness and the heat began to take their toll. Callista's head pounded and she had difficulty keeping her eyes open against the glare. She forced herself to look for the cave. *How could it be midday?* With no shadows in which to rest her burning feet, she stumbled on. Stubborn.

That's what her father had called her. A sob caught in her throat. Would she see him again?

Callista found the end of the gully and stumbled forward, each step a relief and an agony. The heat of the stones had her desperately looking for a place to put her feet where they wouldn't be scorched. She could find nowhere that might help. She couldn't see anything resembling a cave, either. Where had the trees gone? Where was the night?

From somewhere to her left came a cry, and she lifted her head, scraping a loose strand of hair out of her eyes. *What was that? Who was there?* Something screamed at the back of her mind, but she couldn't be sure why it urged her to run. The thunder of hooves reminded her.

The hunt. Horses and men. Hunters. Dogs. She couldn't hear any dogs, but that might only mean they'd been called off. What she saw didn't make sense. There were no men on the horses racing toward her. Sunlight gleamed off two chariots speeding in her direction instead. No dogs ran beside them. The shouts of the men driving the chariots were directed at her. Hunters!

Callista turned back. Her mind was still clawing after facts and trying to mesh impossibilities together as she limped into a run. It was unbelievable. She'd only gotten a glimpse, but she could have sworn those were chariots. Real live Egyptian-style chariots.

The thunder of hooves and wheels grew louder, hammering at the ground. She looked frantically about, and headed up the sloping side of the gully—they couldn't follow her up there. With one hand tucked across her breasts, and

the other held out in front of her to steady herself as she climbed, Callista headed upwards.

A shout of consternation followed, but the thundering subsided. Good. At least they weren't going to run her over. The sound of running footsteps behind her meant they hadn't given up. Well, neither had she. Despite her pain and confusion, she scrambled toward the ridge top.

Her feet protested the stony ground, and now she could make out the sound of two pursuers. Shouts from farther back meant they had an audience. Callista blushed as she thought of the view they were getting of her derriere.

The arm swooped out of nowhere, coming as both a shock and a relief. Callista yelped as she was scooped sideways and pressed against the white-tunic-covered chest of a strange man. A second arm wrapped around her, lifting her feet from the ground. A cheer came from the bottom of the gully. From nearby came what sounded like a begrudging compliment.

She was held so that her arms and hands were pinned by one strong arm running like a steel band across the small of her back. Another arm looped around her shoulders. She couldn't even push him away, and her feeble attempts were met with a breathless chuckle and a tightened grip.

Her own sob of frustration caught her by surprise, and she let her head rest against his broad, firm chest. The scent of him filled her nostrils—a mixture of sweat, pure masculinity, and ... perfume?

He said something but she didn't understand it. When she didn't respond, the words were repeated, and, when she still

did not respond, the grip on her was cautiously loosened and she was held at arm's length.

He was a handsome man, she decided, if somewhat strangely dressed. Looking into eyes the colour of rich chocolate, and a face of suntanned copper, she watched as he repeated the phrase once more. At the sight of her incomprehension, he sighed, set her down, and took her by the hand.

Turning partly away from her, he said something else. Callista frowned. Her head hurt. Why couldn't he just speak English like everybody else? The tug on her hand was understandable, though. She followed where he led.

Her foot came down on another sharp stone. Without the adrenaline of fear to numb it, she stumbled. Her ankle twisted and, with a cry, she crashed to her knees, jerking her hand from her captor's grasp. With a growl of impatience, he grasped her wrist, and towed her to her feet. When she cried out again, he stopped.

A single stride brought him beside her, lifting her feet to examine them, as though she was some prized pony. The exclamation that fell from his lips did not sound pleased.

Callista hoped she wouldn't be punished for the state she was in. She was entirely unprepared when he picked her up and draped her over a shoulder, walking down the rocky slope as easily as he'd run up it.

Why is he wearing sandals? What is it with the skirt? He's not Scottish. And then the world spun. She closed her eyes, but that didn't seem to help. The movement as he walked set off some very unsettling currents in her stomach. She opened

her eyes and saw the ground passing beneath his feet. That was a mistake. With dismay Callista realized she was going to be sick.

"Put me down." She'd meant the words to come out as a shout, but instead her voice was a hoarse croak. The command sounded more like a groan. Callista pounded against his back, trying to ... trying to what? She didn't want to fall, so she cleared her throat and tried again. "Please put me down. I'm going to be sick."

Now she realized he didn't understand English. That last phrase should have been enough to see her dropped on her ass in the dirt in double-quick time. She opened her mouth, but this time no words came out. Instead, she vomited on the ground behind him.

"Oh, God," she groaned, feeling another heave coming.

Ra, Set, and Isis were the only words she understood as she was dumped unceremoniously onto the white stony earth. Not far away, someone laughed.

Callie would have protested, but there wasn't time. Using one hand to hold her hair out of her way, she propped herself up on her knees and got rid of the last of her lunch.

"I'm sorry," she whispered to the sandals standing a cautious two steps away. "I am so very, very sorry."

Obviously, sorry was enough, for as she went to stand, she found a hand on her arm, supporting her, and a waterskin pressed to her lips. Wow—a waterskin! Was that thing really made of leather?

Ignoring the thought, Callista drank deeply and then tried to take a step. Only to fail. With a soft exclamation, the man

lifted and carried her again. This time, she wasn't flung over a hard-muscled shoulder. Instead, she was lifted like a child and carried across his chest.

Unable to struggle, and well aware she was in no shape to run, Callista stopped fighting the urge to close her eyes and give in to oblivion.

Maybe, when I wake up, I'll find I've tripped over the stable steps, hit my head, and this is all one bizarre dream. She considered the strong arms wrapped around her and the well-defined chest against which she leant her head. *A very nice bizarre dream,* she amended, and let the darkness take her.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 3

After the Hunt

The dreams of being chased subsided. Callista lay quiet, trying to take in what had happened. She remembered running from the hunt, looking for a cave, and then the bizarre dream. Settling on the most reasonable explanation, she decided she must have found a cave. She peeked out at her surroundings. A nice comfortable cave with a bed, nice white sheets, a big earthenware bowl, a wet cloth on her forehead, and a woman sitting on a stool to make sure she was okay. A great cave.

Her eyes fluttered closed again.

When Callista woke again, to the calming light of dusk and birdsong, the woman sitting beside her wore an expression of part relief and part consternation. As she struggled to sit up, the woman's frown cleared into what might have been a welcoming smile. She reached over to a nearby tray and offered Callista a mug of water. Struggling to hold herself upright, Callie took the water and sipped, noting how the woman's hand steadied her own.

When she had managed to empty the mug, Callie let the woman take it and tried for a smile of her own. This time, the woman spoke slowly, pronouncing each word with care, but it made no difference—Callie couldn't understand a thing she said. From the tone of voice, however, she gleaned the woman's intent.

When her hostess took hold of both her hands and gently pulled, Callie reluctantly rose and followed. At first Callista worried about wandering through a strange household naked, but looking down, she realized whoever had put her to bed had also dressed her in a light-weight shift. She let her companion guide her two doors down to another room whose white-washed walls were broken by murals.

Their destination was a small alcove on one side of the room. Inside the alcove stood a slab of what looked like cement surrounded by a number of jars. Using hand gestures and instructions, Callista's guide indicated she should stand on the slab. The woman tried to explain what she was going to do next, but in the face of Callie's incomprehension, she gave up, sighing as she picked up one of the tall jars.

With one swift movement, she upended the jar, pouring cool water over Callie's head. Callie gasped but the woman ignored her. Instead, she lifted Callie's shift over her head and then picked up a smaller earthenware container.

Scooping out a sweet-smelling grey paste with one hand, the woman dipped her other hand into a water jar, then she dampened the paste and worked it into a lather. After rinsing her hands in more water, she offered Callie the jar containing the paste.

"Swabu," she said. "Swabu."

For a long moment, Callie just stared at the container in the woman's outstretched hand, balking at the idea of smearing that stuff over her body. For a long moment, she contemplated running from the room, the house, and away...

But she didn't know where she was, or what kind of people she was amongst, and despite being cold, wet and naked, no one had hurt her yet.

Dipping her hands into the paste, Callista rubbed it on her skin. Swabu. *Soap*? The lather smelled of herbs and open paddocks.

It was clear *swabu* was soap. But in what language? Nothing the woman had said had sounded remotely familiar. Shutting down that line of questioning, she kept soaping until it was time for another jar of water over the head. After that, she concentrated on getting through this strangely disturbing bath ritual.

The 'bath' consisted of several more dunkings before the woman seemed to be satisfied that she was clean. Callie was sunburnt all over, and the merest touch burnt like fire. When she cried out, her assistant, keeper, or whatever the woman was, had tut-tutted like a concerned grandmother as she patted her dry. The still-damp nightgown seemed to cause her consternation. After a game of frustrating charades, Callista understood she should stay where she was. The woman disappeared, only to return moments later with another gown. This she gently lifted over Callie's head before leading her guest back to the room.

All would have been well if *he* hadn't been waiting inside.

Callista stopped at the doorway. Only the grandmotherly presence at her back prevented her from reversing out the door—that and the hand that wrapped around her wrist as swift as a striking snake. She gasped, but stepped towards

him, surprised into another gasp when her escort's palm came down to slap his hand away.

His word of protest was met by a shrill scolding. Callie watched with interest as his skin flushed a deep red beneath the copper, and he hurriedly backed out of the room. She wasn't oblivious, however, to the heat in his gaze as he glanced her way before leaving.

The woman followed him to the door, shaking her head and still scolding, but her tone had softened as though she were reassuring him even as she sent him away.

When he was gone, the woman shooed Callista toward the bed, and gestured that she should sit. Her hostess's hands flapped in rapid motions to help Callie understand her words. Conscious that her body felt as though it had been set alight, Callie sat gingerly on the edge of the bed. Her companion sat on the stool beside it and took a small, stone bowl from a niche in the wall.

Dipping her fingers into it, she reached over and gently smoothed the clear gel from within onto Callie's forearm. The sting of her burn eased and Callie sighed. Handing her the pot, the woman spoke and signalled that Callista was to apply the gel all over. Again, she was assisted out of her shift.

Finding refuge in the familiar motions of smoothing the unguent onto her skin, Callie let her mind begin to tease at the reality of her situation. She was obviously no longer in Australia, and certainly not in Tasmania. She doubted that the land she had found herself in had anything to do with the Gibson Desert, or the farther reaches of the MacDonald Ranges. She was elsewhere...

And as for the people...

No, Callie shied away from the reality suggested by those thoughts.

She wasn't stupid. She'd seen pictures of chariots driven by mostly bare-chested men in white skirts who wore sandals on their feet. She'd also seen pictures of women like the one who sat watching her now. Women who wore long white dresses that draped from the shoulder, and a wig. Because the woman *did* wear a wig. From the pictures Callie had seen, the wig was typical.

A brief wave of dizziness washed over her, but she sat still, one hand holding the stone bowl in her lap, the other resting on her thigh, until the dizziness passed. She couldn't just faint every time something didn't go her way. Opening her eyes again, she made herself think about other things as she tried to reach her back with the ointment.

There was an annoyed 'tut' and the woman took the bowl from Callista's hands, giving her impatient instructions and turning her guest so that Callie sat with her back in easy reach. Seating herself behind Callie, her keeper began to smooth the lotion into her skin. It allowed Callie time to close her eyes, to breathe slowly, and gradually let the information from her eyes and ears begin to assimilate.

The language was unlike any Callie knew. She'd only had a little brush with French in high school, and that for no longer than she'd had to. No, Callie didn't know the language, couldn't even begin to place it—except by the costumes of its speakers.

The dress she did recognize, though, and the thick, green mascara lining the woman's eyes.

Egyptian.

The sensation of soothing hands stopped, and Callie became aware that the woman was speaking again. She still didn't understand a word, but the sound of her companion's voice was comforting. With any luck, it meant that her brain would put the noises together soon. It would be nice to be able to understand what was going on about her.

Again, it was through a pantomime of gestures that her hostess communicated what Callista should do next. An undercurrent of anxiety in the woman's voice and gestures indicated that not all this activity was for Callie's benefit. The woman wanted to please someone—and, more importantly, wanted Callie to please someone.

As she allowed herself to be pulled onto a second stool, Callie watched the woman take a small white jar from the same niche that had held the unguent.

"Udju," the woman said, indicating the jar and taking what looked like a metal pencil from the niche.

She put her hand on Callie's shoulder and said something. Her tone was that of a mother telling an errant child to sit still. Callie watched as the woman dipped the pencil into the green paste in the jar, and with swift sure movements delicately outlined Callista's eyes.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 4

An Evening Stroll

Callista's first meal in what she had come to think of as Egypt—at least until she found out differently—consisted of cucumber and slices of unexpectedly sweet onion, as well as lettuce leaves, which her host took great delight in showing her how to dip in oil and salt. These were accompanied by a spicy meat dish and red wine, followed by bread sweetened with honey and dried fruit.

She ate warily. The master of the house wasn't alone and, in spite of the comforting presence of her grandmotherly escort, Callista felt uneasy.

Apart from her host, she recognized the other man who had pursued her. These men seemed to be about her own age. The other guests were people she hadn't seen before. All of them regarded her with barely concealed interest as the meal continued, and she was the subject of some good-natured verbal sparring between the two hunters.

It was after the last of the bread had been cleared away that the other man said something that made all conversation still. With his eyes on Callie, he slapped the table, and his tone of voice became demanding. Her host frowned, and the woman that had accompanied the man blushed, bowing her head and turning her face so that her eyes were hidden. The grandmotherly woman sitting at Callie's side became tense.

The silence continued for a long moment until her host said something conciliatory, and nudged his guest with an open hand. Even though she didn't understand what passed between them, Callie knew it pertained to her. She watched as her host filled his guest's wine cup and turned the conversation somewhere else.

As the party began to relax again, Callie became aware of the older woman's hand on her thigh. Her escort was absentmindedly patting her knee, as though she needed comforting.

In spite of her host's efforts, the tension brought by his guest's words remained. Callie could sense it flowing beneath the seemingly light turn of the conversation, and the glances she received made her fidget.

She wished she knew what they were saying, but their language remained a mystery in spite of the attention she paid. She didn't have the words she might need to defend herself, didn't know what she needed to defend herself from, or who she could trust. Instead, she continued to smile and remained attentive until, at some unknown signal, the party broke up and she was left alone.

After seeing his guests out, only the man who'd captured her and the woman who'd been with her when she woke remained. The woman clasped Callie's hands and turned her so they faced each other. She seemed hugely pleased and spoke in an approving tone.

Callie managed a tight, nervous grimace in return. It was meant to be a smile, but she knew it probably didn't make it. The nearness of her *rescuer* was disconcerting.

She could smell the perfumed oil that made his skin gleam, and was still having trouble accepting the wig covering his head. The fact he was still wearing a white skirt didn't help her any either—although the beautifully muscled chest rising above it was something she could get used to seeing. She followed the lines of his chest up to his face to discover he was returning her gaze with a look of faint amusement.

With a faint tutting, the woman who'd chaperoned her throughout the meal placed one of Callista's hands in one of her host's and gave them a gentle push in the direction of the torch-lit garden. When neither of them moved, she prodded them again, repeating her instructions with a soft smile and a twinkle of mischief in her eyes.

All Callie could catch from her words was what sounded like a name—Horem. And from his protest, she thought she caught the word Miu. It seemed too cute a name to be addressed to her guardian. Callie was still pondering this when, with an expressive roll of his shoulders, Horem led her along a path to a small stand of trees.

Beneath them, Callie saw the gleam of water, heard the croak of frogs, and the sound of something moving furtively in the shadowed bushes. She stopped. What sort of wild animals did they have in Egypt anyway? What might be waiting to attack her under those trees?

Beside her, Horem, or whatever his name was, stopped also, but Callie got the impression his attention wasn't all on her. Perhaps he'd heard the noise, too. She looked up at him and disentangled her fingers from his hand. The rustling sound came again.

Horem called out, and the sound abruptly stilled. He called again. A name, Anubis, fell impatiently from his lips. The presence in the bushes growled, and Horem repeated the name, this time following it with a command. The growl became a whine, and something large and sandy-coloured separated itself from the shadows to approach them.

Callie grabbed for Horem's hand and took a step back, endeavouring to hide herself behind his body. She'd seen big dogs before, and liked them, but this one was enormous by comparison, and it didn't look friendly.

Horem didn't seem to notice. His voice took on a querying tone as the dog came nearer. The creature stalked towards them, its eyes reflecting the lamp-light from the house or, perhaps, the light of the full moon overhead. Its attention shifted from the man to Callie, and back again. Again, Horem asked it a question.

The dog's ears pricked, and it tilted its head. Horem frowned at it, as though puzzled by its behaviour. Callie shifted closer to him, finding comfort in his scent and the aura of warmth from his body. Something had upset the creature, and she was beginning to think it wasn't her. What was it doing out here, anyway? Shouldn't it have been tied up in a kennel somewhere?

For that matter, did they have kennels in ancient Egypt? Did they tie up their dogs?

Her first question about what it was doing was answered when the dog leapt past them with a loud bark.

Callie startled in Horem's grip, but stayed by his side.

He turned to follow the dog's movement and, with a word of surprise, leapt forward. Callie's hand, clinging to his own, stopped him. With another word, he stopped and turned back to her.

His movements this time weren't patient or slow. He dragged her into the shadow of a palm tree, pushing her down so that the darkness concealed her in spite of the white dress she wore. With a sharp gesture of his hand, and an equally sharp command, he whirled away from her and began to run.

Callie seethed. What did he think he was doing? First his dog nearly attacks them, and then Horem sticks her under a tree and tells her to stay? What sort of madness was that? There could be anything out here—spiders, snakes. Yep, she definitely knew Egypt had snakes. There was that thing about Cleopatra committing suicide with one. And what about scorpions? Didn't they have a thing about scorpions?

She shuddered. Where did he think he was going, running off like that? She wanted to get up and hurry after him, or to make her way to the house and her room, and the friendly woman who had insisted they go walking in the garden. It was then that a series of loud crashes came from inside the house.

Someone shrieked—in anger or fear, Callie couldn't tell. A man shouted. There was another loud crash and, this time, the sound of crockery breaking, a growl, and the sound of running footsteps. Callie tried to make herself smaller in the shadow, aware that, even in the dark, her dress would be visible.

The shadow briefly silhouetted against the house ran towards her. She was thankful when the runner sped by without even glancing in her direction, seeming completely intent on avoiding the dog, and the soldier who followed it waving a sword.

Callie watched, eyes wide, as the figure streaked past her. The dog was closing the gap in a scurry of paws and blur of pale fur. Whoever the intruder was, they didn't even look at her hiding place, but ran straight past.

The dog didn't pause, either. It was intent on catching its prey.

Callie shuddered, glad those gleaming teeth weren't meant for her.

She flinched seconds later when she heard an abrupt cry followed by a loud splash, and the startled quacking of disturbed ducks. The dog barked, a sound that varied from frustration at not being able to reach his prey, to outraged joy at having it trapped.

Horem raced past, accompanied by two other kilted men. Where he carried a short sword in his hand, they carried spears. He ran bare-chested after his prey, while the chests of the other men were crisscrossed by thick bands of material. Behind them, carrying a lamp, came the woman he'd called Miu.

Callie heard splashing, shouted orders, shouts of denial, then more splashing. Shortly afterward, the two spearmen marched past her, dragging someone between them. All three men were soaked from head to foot. Frightened by the stern

looks on the spearmen's faces, Callie huddled closer to the tree, hiding her face against its trunk.

When a hand closed around her bicep, she choked a scream into a gasp and looked up to see her host. His words were soothing and, even though they sounded like the gentle gibberish she'd say to a frightened horse, Callie relaxed, letting him help her to her feet. She didn't even protest when he tucked her against his side, although the weight of his arm across her sunburn made her flinch.

He misinterpreted her motion for one of fear, and took his arm from about her shoulders, sliding his hand into her own, and leading her back towards the house. The dog padded after them, coming to walk with its head under the man's other hand. No words were spoken until Miu met them at the edge of the house.

She reached out to take Callie's free hand, glancing uncertainly at Horem and asking a single question as she did so. At his grim reply, Miu asked another question, one that made Horem look at his guest and reach out gently to cup her chin in his hand.

It was an oddly affectionate gesture that made Miu's eyes widen in surprise. The words that came with it were soft-spoken and tinged with approval. They were followed by a change of tone and what sounded like stern instructions.

Miu nodded as Horem let go of Callie's hand and turned away. Callie wasn't surprised to see him leave the house and follow the path his guards had taken. What did surprise her was that his departure was accompanied by an acute sense of loss.

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 5

Garden Delights

The next day came with a gradual brightening of light in her quarters. Callie woke alone, and in sore need of the bathroom. She remembered from the night before where to find it. It still seemed odd, however, to be sitting on a frame over a sandbox much like a cat, and then using scraps of linen to dry herself.

Tiptoeing to the door of her room, she looked out. A sudden movement to her left made her gasp with surprise as she noticed the soldier standing outside.

He shifted to a more alert stance, and then looked up and down the corridor. Glancing at her, he raised a hand and spoke.

Callie glared at him and continued to cross the threshold of her room. His tone turned pleading. Sighing, she relented and sat on the edge of her bed. Her eyes roved along the niches in the wall until she saw a hair brush. Lost for anything better to do, she ran it through the tangled strands that fell about her face. At least they were still clean from the dousing she'd had the night before.

Movement outside drew her attention and again she went to the door. This time she ignored the guard's words and remonstrating hand, to follow the sound of horses to the front door.

They were magnificent—unmatched in colour, but standing proud in front of the chariot waiting outside. So enthralled was she in trying to work out what breed they were, that she failed to hear the hurried slap of sandals in the hall behind her.

A well-muscled arm encircled her, turning her away from the horses, as the smell of her host's perfumed skin surrounded her. Before she could protest, he'd stooped and covered her lips with his own. It was only a light kiss but Callie got the impression that he was laying his claim on her nonetheless.

Miu's exclamation of mock outrage only made him smile. He stepped back, then swooped in for another kiss before hurrying to the chariot.

"Horem..."

He gave no sign of hearing her soft cry. His hands claimed the reins and urged the horses into motion. Miu's quiet presence at her side made Callie look down. The woman watched Horem's departure with something like concern in her eyes.

"Horem," Callie said, staring after his dwindling figure. She turned to the lady by her side.

"Miu?"

The woman's answering smile was a reward in itself.

* * * *

Horem was away for almost two months. In that time, Callie learnt the names of most of the household staff, what to call the food on her plate, and the correct word for each

household item. And Miu had taught her the rudiments of weaving.

The older woman encouraged Callie to help prepare the meals, and showed her what to do in the kitchen garden. The only downside was that Callie went nowhere without a soldier trailing behind her. There were times she wasn't sure if she was a guest or a prisoner.

When Horem returned, he greeted Callie by placing his hands on her shoulders and looking at her before drawing her into his arms. He smelt great—all horses and sweat, overlaid by scented oil and good clean dust. Releasing her, he'd disappeared into the house, his valet at his heels.

Later, while the sun set and Miu prepared the evening meal, Horem led Callie into the garden. She walked uncertainly beside him. She enjoyed the touch of his hand on her own, and, remembering his kiss, felt her breasts swell at his nearness, the peaks of her nipples pushing against her linen dress.

He'd bathed and applied fresh oil and scent, making her painfully aware she'd been too busy with Miu to freshen up. When they reached the soft shadows beneath the date palms surrounding the house pond, Horem turned her to face him.

Now Callie felt the first frisson of nerves tingle across her skin, felt her stomach tighten and her pussy ache. She'd been in Egypt for two months. Two months without a man or the companionship she'd shared with her friends.

Without the pain of the sunburn to distract her, and with an established routine, her mind had begun to accept her situation. How many times in the last few weeks had her

thoughts turned to the night Horem had chased the intruder through this garden? How many times had she imagined him looking back as he drove away the following morning? Callista had many questions about that night, but was still trying to grasp the words needed to frame them.

She had some of what she needed, and more words were untangling themselves in her mind every day. Even though she still had trouble framing questions, she could now understand most of what Miu and the household servants were saying. Sometimes Callie would surprise them by adding a comment to their discussion.

But this man ... Callie licked lips gone dry and swallowed. This man was an Egyptian warrior, a commander of men, and probably a member of the minor nobility. She raised her head, letting her eyes take in the way his tunic fitted the breadth of his chest and spanned his shoulders, noticing the heavy gold arm bands entwined around his biceps.

Tonight he also wore a collar of flat, rectangular stones, and a carefully set wig. The black makeup lining his eyes had been freshly applied, different to the green udju that she wore. His lips curved faintly as Callie looked into his face.

"You look lovely, tonight," he said, and the timbre of his voice made her tremble. He took her other hand, until their hands interlocked between them. The meaning of his next words stretched just out of reach, but his tone was sincere.

"Thank you," Callie whispered, and was rewarded by the look of delight that crossed his face. It was then that she registered, tucked amongst the other words, the Egyptian

term for 'wife.' Her eyes widened in surprise as Horem bent his head and again claimed her lips with his own.

Part of her wanted to resist, to deny she would be here long enough for a relationship, let alone the forever implied by marriage. But his mouth felt so good, his tongue ... She moaned. His kiss made her weak at the knees.

With one swift movement, her Egyptian warrior released her hands so he could cradle the back of her head in one large palm, and fondle her ass with the other. Callie melted against him.

The sound of rustling in the bushes made him pause, raising his mouth from her lips. The hand on her ass lifted to curl protectively around her waist before tucking her behind him. Callie was glad of the solid tree at her back, as his other hand dropped to the hilt of the short sword belted above his skirt.

His skirt—for a minute Callie wanted to giggle. He still didn't fit her mind's ideal of a warrior. He wasn't a knight in shining armour. He didn't have a helmet with a visor to frame his dark, dark eyes. And he wore a skirt.

Her amusement died as she made out a dark shape crouched in the bushes nearby. Still crouched, it moved towards them, shook itself free of the grasping twigs that sought to restrain it, and wagged its tail.

"Anubis!" Horem exclaimed, and the shape resolved itself into the hunting hound she'd met the night of the intruder.

Within seconds she felt forgotten as Horem sheathed his sword and ruffled the dog's ears, then rolled the creature

onto its back and rubbed its belly. When he was done, the warrior patted the dog once more and stood up.

Looking at Callie, he said, "Gods-cursed animal! Now, where were we?"

He reached for her, one hand cupping her breast, and the other sliding up under her dress to fondle her ass cheeks before trailing its way down the valley between them.

Callie felt a moment's hesitation, then slid her hands under his tunic, running them beneath the fine material, tracing the planes and ridges of his chest, circling his nipples with her fingers. Again their lips met, and she felt him taste her. It sent a jolt of desire straight to her core.

With a whimper, Callie let her hands roam across his back. So much perfection. How many nights had she thought of his chest, glistening in the sun, and of his back? How many nights had she thought of her fingers kneading his taut muscles as she traced kisses down his spine to the cleft of his cheeks?

His fingers feather-touched the inside of her thighs, breaking the chain of her thoughts. Fire heated her pussy as he explored the soft rise of her mound, and gently pinched those lips apart, feeling the heat there. For a moment, Callie froze, all thought lost as he squeezed her breast through the linen of her gown and slid a battle-hardened finger inside her.

"Horem..." she whispered.

"Nefer," he murmured back.

The word made Callista tense, until she realized he was referring to her. Then she relaxed and enjoyed the feel of his lips nibbling across her jaw line towards her ear. The proof of

his desire for her was pressing against her stomach as he gently circled his finger in her depths. The sensation made her lean against the tree for support, her hands momentarily still.

His free hand raised the front of her gown, lifting his skirt with it. His finger circled within her once more, leaving her protesting as he withdrew it. She shifted her palms to his ass, feeling the play of muscle as he leant against her. The heat of him seared across her belly as his fingers pinched her clit and gently eased her legs apart.

Bending his knees slightly, he rubbed his length along her pussy, teasing her, until she pushed against him. Already her muscles were tightening in anticipation. He felt so, so big, the head of his shaft wide and firm against her nether lips.

His fingertips played with her folds, teasing their sensitive flesh until it ached.

Callie kneaded his ass, pulling him against her, arching into him. "Please Horem," she whispered, sliding against him.

He glided against her again, moistening himself with her juices as he drew downwards, stopping when the head of his erection rested again against the entrance to her womb.

Callie pulled on his ass again. "Please," she begged.

With a husky laugh, he slid his fingers into her. Gasping, Callie felt her inner muscles clamp onto him, and she moaned in frustration when he teasingly withdrew.

Horem laughed again, softly so that she almost felt his happiness humming against her ear. His slick fingers found their way to the tightly-closed bud between her butt cheeks and swirled around it. As they started to tease their way in,

he thrust forward with his hips, pushing his cock into her passage, filling her so that her walls rippled around him and made him groan with pleasure.

All that existed for that moment was the long, slow drive of him, the gradually building fire threatening to consume her, and the warmth of his backside beneath her hands. When he had filled her as much as he could, Horem stilled, lowering his face to hers and nibbling along her lips until they parted, then stroking the inside of them with gentle dips of his tongue. As he did so, he slowly drew himself back, the movement making her cry out, her sensitivity heightened by the single digit he thrust in and out of her ass.

If he'd continued with the agonizing pace, Callie would have screamed with frustration. But instead he abruptly drew his finger out and settled his hands on her hips before he slammed back into her with a suddenness that made her gasp. He stopped then, a look of concern crossing his face, until she arched against him in protest at his idleness. Smiling, he placed both hands on her hips and rocked her against his body, before settling into a steady driving rhythm that sent her to new heights.

Her muscles gripped his length as his hands moved from her hips to the shoulders of her gown. Playing with the folds there, they exposed her breasts until he could engulf first one engorged nipple, and then the other, with his mouth. Callie felt his release arrive just as hers exploded over them both. He let go of the breast he was suckling and captured her lips, mimicking the motion of his hips with his tongue, stroking the inside of her mouth as her body pulsed around him.

They stood, locked together, until the world steadied once more, and then he withdrew. Keeping one arm protectively around her waist, Horem helped her stand without the tree for support. She shifted her grip from his ass to his waist and stretched up to him for another kiss.

He helped her straighten her gown, rearranging the folds of linen until she was decently covered, then they walked further into the trees. Beside the pond, on a bench made of carved sandstone, they sat. Callie stared into the star-filled water and wondered what she had done.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 6

Land of Grapes and Honey

Miu watched them all through the evening meal until, smiling contentedly, she brought in dessert. Pleading tiredness, the grandmotherly woman shared a not-so-grandmotherly wink with Callie and retired to her quarters. When she had gone, Horem drew Callie onto his lap and dipped a grape in the jar of honey.

Leaning against the curve of his arm, she could feel his biceps ripple as he reached for the fruit bowl. His chest was a wall of warmth against the cool breeze that blew through the windows.

"Do you like these?" Horem asked, touching a grape to her lips and teasing her with it. He laughed as she nipped at it, taking it neatly from his fingers and crushing it between her teeth.

Before she could swallow the pulp, he kissed her, tasting the juice. Smiling, he took another grape and dipped it in the honey. "Do you want to see what else we can do with these?" he murmured, mischief in his eyes as he waved the sweetened fruit in front of her.

"There's more?" Callie managed, the gears of language clicking into place.

Horem's smile deepened, and a sense of mystery seemed to veil his eyes. "I can show you much, much more, wife of mine."

His use of the word *wife* broke the mood, making her tense and unsettled.

"Wife?" she repeated.

Instead of answering her, his smile became a grin as he dotted her on the nose with a grape.

"Hey!" she grumbled, unprepared for the blob of honey that stayed there afterwards.

Seeing her eyes cross at the sight of the honey, Horem touched his forehead to hers before licking the offending smear away, then he popped the grape in his mouth and chewed it to pulp. Catching one of her hands in his palm, he drew her slowly to her feet and tugged her after him.

"Come," he whispered. "Come and see the master's bedroom."

"Master?" Callie queried, putting enough doubt in her voice to challenge his assertion.

His answer was another sudden grin as he pulled her through the door to his beautifully tiled room and swung her past him so the bed caught her behind the knees.

"Master," he said, towering over her as she abruptly sat down. Without more ado, he peeled his tunic over his head, taking the wig with it to reveal the short dark stubble covering his head.

"We'll see about that," Callie replied, trying to push herself to her feet.

Horem grinned when she realized he was standing too close for her to get up. Already his skirt was tented out of shape by the erection growing beneath it.

Callie eyed it thoughtfully before looking up at the warrior. Did he have to look so pleased with himself? He was, she decided, far too confident in his ability to make her melt. Well, she'd see about...

His hand, curling itself in her hair, distracted her.

"Horem," she whispered, and his hand slid around to cup her jaw.

"Wait here," he replied, planting a light kiss on her lips.

Pouting, Callista shuffled back further on the bed and surveyed the room. Tiles formed elaborate murals on the walls, and the alcove to one side was where she and Miu bathed—although Horem had never been home when they'd done so. Callie wondered what the servants did when they wanted to bathe. Surely they didn't all use the master's *en suite*?

The thought brought a smile to Callie's lips. *En suite*. She giggled, but that was what it was—an ancient *en suite*.

"Complete with valet," she murmured to herself, remembering Horem's personal servant. *And where is that young man now?* she wondered, before deciding he was probably having a well-deserved rest.

Shaking herself free of the picture of a naked Horem standing on the raised stone block having water dumped over his head, Callie focused on the tiles decorating the room. Calming blues and greens dominated the scenes around her. They depicted some sort of oasis. Fantastical fish swam beneath the water, and a hippopotamus roamed above them, unmolested by the huge crocodile that lay on the river bottom.

Callie shuddered. She'd forgotten there were crocodiles in Egypt. It was almost like home, except there she'd lived in the south of the country—a long way from where the crocodiles dwelt. Now, she was living right near their river home. She could never go swimming again.

Determined not to let that thought spoil her evening, she let her eyes take in other parts of the scene. There were birds nesting in the reeds, and date palms on the river banks. There was even a man and a woman ... *What are they doing? Surely they're not* ... She stared harder at the depiction. Oh, but they were!

Contemplation of what the man's hand was doing with the woman's breast, and what the woman's mouth was doing to the well-proportioned cock protruding from his crotch, brought a smile to her face. Trust a nobleman to have erotica on his bedroom wall, she thought.

Warmth pooled in her stomach, and heat lined her pussy with dampness. Her fingers drummed an impatient tattoo on the covers. What was taking Horem so long?

Callie glanced at the door, but it remained stubbornly empty. The picture of the lovers drew her gaze once more, and she felt her nipples tighten. Horem's footsteps alerted her to his return, and she looked up to watch him enter.

He was carrying a small tray. On it rested a bowl of grapes and a small jar. Beside them was another bowl of water and some cloths. Seeing her gaze settle on him, Horem smiled.

Setting the tray on the stand beside his bed, he sat down beside her. "I was going to show you what else we could do

with these," he said, and his smile grew wider, "but you're overdressed."

Callista widened her eyes in mock horror. "Overdressed?" she teased, then ran out of words. What was Egyptian for "Surely not" anyway?

"Oh, yes," Horem murmured, picking up a grape and tracing it across her forehead. "Very overdressed."

The grape travelled along her cheek bone, then brushed the edge of her mouth as it dipped to her chin. It smoothed its way over her jaw line and left a cool path as it descended her throat before stopping, tantalizingly, at the cleft of her collarbone.

"See? We can explore no further," he said and lifted the grape to his mouth, where he ate it in one satisfied crunch. With the grape gone, his hands were free to slip the gown from Callie's shoulders, leaving her bare to the waist.

"So much better," he purred, his eyes taking her in like some great cat observing its prey. The intensity of his gaze made her shiver, and the vibrating tone of his voice travelled to her core. "Let's see how the journey goes now."

This time, as the grape descended towards her forehead, Callie stretched her hands out until she felt the solid wall of his chest. Magnificent. She sighed and let her fingertips start their exploration on the broad flat planes of his pecs, smoothing them down across his nipples and letting them wander over the ripples and valleys of his ribs to his well-muscled flanks.

The grape mirrored her downward journey, reaching the cleft between her breasts as Callie's hands met the top of his skirt.

"Now who's overdressed," she grumbled, running her fingers along the waist band.

Horem laughed at her frustration, and covered her lips with his mouth. The grape formed a cool counterpoint to the heat of him as it circled its way around one breast, and then spiralled upwards to the nipple. Strong fingers mirrored its movements on the other breast, causing a moan to rise in Callie's throat.

It felt so good! The warmth of his hand, the cool, cool grape, those insistent lips covering her own, and that tongue. *That tongue needs to be licensed*, she thought, as it parted her lips and stretched delicately into her mouth to curl against her own. Electricity jolted all the way down.

Frustrated, Callie ran her hands along the top of the skirt, trying to find a way to loosen it.

Horem laughed, his amusement fluttering against the inside of her mouth, increasing her awareness of what his tongue was doing, what his lips were playing at. He drew her into one deep kiss, the grape and his fingers momentarily still as he deepened the kiss. For a long moment, the sensation of his lips and his tongue formed the boundaries of Callie's world—and then he lifted his head.

"You're still overdressed," he said, and tossed the grape into his mouth, biting on it as it followed the path of the first. His hands smoothed their way down her back until they found the gown pooled at her waist. Sliding them beneath the

material, he pushed it back, sliding it from under her buttocks and then out beneath her thighs.

"Much better," Horem murmured, his gaze travelling over her body. Reaching up, he brushed her hair away from her face and drew her onto his lap.

"Now," he said, with soft satisfaction, "let me show you what else we can do with grapes and honey."

Taking another of the small, purple fruits, he dipped it in the honey and raised it to her breast. Callie gasped. The fruit was still cool, but the honey warmed to the heat of her skin. This time, instead of drawing on the grape so that it slid against her skin, Horem dotted honey around the aureole of each nipple, swirled it once when he was satisfied, and then brushed it against her lips.

The sweetness of the honey trembled before her, until she opened her mouth and darted her tongue out in a delicate lick. When she went to bite into it, Horem pulled it out of the way, waiting until she had subsided before touching her lips with it once more. This time, when Callie licked it, she caught his eye and made each dab of her tongue a promise of what she intended to do later.

When he was captivated by what she was doing, she seized the grape gently between her teeth and pulled it from his grasp. With an evil grin, and a sudden nip, she took the grape from his fingers and bit down hard. It was fun to watch him wince.

Settling himself beside her, Horem reached for another grape with one hand as his other hand dabbled in the stickiness at her breasts. The grape went into his mouth, and

he squeezed it between his teeth before stooping to engulf her nipple between his lips.

Callie gasped at the sensation of his tongue swirling the grape pulp over the honey, spreading it across her flesh and sending an arc of desire straight to her pussy. She smoothed her hand across the fine fuzz that covered his scalp, shivering as he suckled, cleansing the honey from her skin. When he moved his mouth to her other breast, the jolt of cold air sent another shaft of pleasure through her.

With a sigh, Callie spread her palms over his shoulders and stroked the firm, broad planes of his back. The way his tongue teased at her breast made it hard to think, but she wanted to please him.

Horem's mouth lifted clear of her nipple and touched on her lips, then his arms scooped her up and positioned her higher up the bed. Before she had fully settled, the cheeky warrior had pushed her gently onto her back and plucked another grape from its stem. Dipping it in honey, he held it to her lips.

Callie took it gently between her teeth, letting her tongue dart forward to savour the honey before chewing to mix it with the grape pulp. Delicious. But he was still wearing his skirt. She tugged impatiently at it. When Horem only laughed that husky laugh that meant he found her amusing and wasn't about to cooperate, she changed tactics.

Instead of pulling down on the skirt, Callie pulled up. Her hands found the hard muscles of his ass and explored them, kneading until he groaned. Watching him tremble above her

made her wonder whether making him weak at the knees, right now, was such a good idea.

She stroked downwards, following the curve of his rump, teasing the cleft between his cheeks, and finding the sensitive path to his balls. His hiss of indrawn breath was satisfying as she ran delicate tracers around them. Leaning up to reach his face, Callie kissed him tentatively on the lips.

Her touch broke whatever spell he was under because, with a fierce growl, Horem returned her kiss, leaning into her as he pulled his skirt free and flung it across the room. The grapes forgotten, he took her mouth with his lips, then worked his kisses down past her breasts and across her stomach. His tongue dipped briefly into her belly button as his hands slid under her buttocks, raising her hips towards him.

Drawing his knees beneath himself, Horem paused, then lowered his head and swept his tongue from the back of her folds to the raised peak of her clit. Sipping briefly at the little mound, he worked his way back, dipping his middle finger in the honey and holding it to Callie's mouth.

Slowly, she took it, swirling her tongue around its tip, drawing it in, undulating her mouth along it in the way she wanted to mouth his cock. Horem paused. His tongue lapped thoughtfully at her until she thought he'd taken her suggestion. He hesitated, then speared his tongue into her channel, making her temporarily forget what she was doing.

She felt the heat building along her walls, knew he was feeding on her, enjoying her taste as her need grew. When he raised his head, she whimpered at the loss, her hands plucking at his hair, running across his shoulders. He moved

his body upward, giving her more access, spreading his knees so that her hips rested again on the blanket.

She felt the heat of his shaft come to nestle between her thighs and moaned partly with desire and partly with disappointment. His hands tweaked her nipples as he took her mouth again. As his tongue plundered her, Callie tasted herself, the honey, and Horem, and cried out with desire.

Horem needed no further encouragement. He placed the head of his cock against her entrance and struck deep and hard.

Callie thrust up to meet him, feeling her slickness welcome him inside her, registering the sudden tightening of her walls around him as he began to move. She reached for his ass, feeling the ripple and flow of muscle beneath her palms as he took her. Reaching lower, she stroked his sac, then moved upwards to explore the tight bud nestled between his cheeks, thought of the honey, and then lost all direction as Horem's lips closed over a sensitive aureole and his fingers sent flickers of lightning through her clit.

Callie felt the need crest and roll over her, causing her walls to spasm around the length of his cock, drawing it in and milking it, massaging it in firm pulsing waves until Horem echoed her cry.

The honey would have to wait.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 7

Night Marauders

It seemed as though Horem had only just pulled the blanket over them and curled around her in sleep when a rough male laugh brought them fully awake. "What an interesting pair!"

Horem's hand reached for the sword propped against the bedside table, but was stopped when the tip of a spear intervened.

Blinking, Callista looked over the top of Horem's arm to see that three men had entered the room. The sight dried her mouth in a rush of fear. Who would attack Horem's estate? The intruders were big men, not Egyptian, although they were dressed as such. Bandits? Something about them was familiar, and it took her a moment to realize that they reminded her of the intruder Horem had captured by the pool.

"Take him!" the first man, and obvious leader, snapped.

There was a rush of movement, and the two other men seized Horem and dragged him over her and off the bed.

Suppressing a squeak of fright, Callie pulled the covers back over herself.

"Who..." he managed to say as he was manhandled towards the door.

"Never you mind," the rough voice answered. "Your people thought we were guests—until it was too late. Their lives are in your hands. Take him outside."

The two men took Horem away, although he struggled when he reached the door and realized Callie would be left alone with their leader. It took a solid punch to the head to bring him back under control.

The bandit leader turned towards Callie with a sneer. "You should stay calm," he said. "You're not spoil for me to take."

His words, and the fact that he tossed her discarded gown onto the bed, reassured her, even if his eyes did not. Brown as chocolate, but hard as stone, they offered no comfort as he studied her, as though assessing her for market.

"Your master would not share," he said, "and we needed the oasis. You bring an extra bonus—if you're alive."

Callie licked her lips as the realization hit her. These men were bandits, or raiders, or soldiers or something. Didn't Egypt have enemies? What were they called? They had some biblical name, something 'tites.' She sat up and arranged the linen folds of her gown around her before scrambling back against the wall and hugging her arms around her up-drawn knees.

The bandit shook his head. "Oh no, my dear. You're coming with me." Stretching out a hand, he beckoned for her to follow.

Callie hesitated. He couldn't be serious. She didn't want to go anywhere with him. She wasn't going anywhere with him. As though reading her refusal in her face, the man lunged forward and seized her round one wrist.

"Come. With. Me." He accentuated each word before dragging her from Horem's bed and out into the corridor. His grip made her bones protest, and Callie stumbled after him.

She would have to escape later. The thought made her soul quail. Escape and go where? She had nowhere she could run to, nowhere she could hide. She hadn't even seen the outside of the estate.

Miu had focused on making her feel at home, and helping her recover and get used to the strange food and stranger surroundings. The old woman had never forbidden her anything, and Callie had been content to yield to Miu's gentle care. As a guest, she hadn't needed to venture outside the estate's walls. And she hadn't wanted to, either. That had been an adventure she'd set aside for another day.

Now, Callie regretted her decision and the weakness that had made her stay behind Horem's walls. She had no idea where she could run to, or where she could go for help. She didn't even know what *oasis* the raider was talking about.

It had to be important. Seeing how dry it was out there, it was easy to understand that whoever controlled the water controlled the land. The thought troubled her. What had the raider meant when he'd said they needed the oasis? Who exactly were They? She had only seen three of them. An entire army would have been much more noticeable.

Cheers of bawdy appreciation greeted their entrance into the dining hall. Pulled from her thoughts, Callie found herself staring at a roomful of men. Before she could quite make sense of their dress, their leader pushed her toward the kitchens.

"Prepare us food!" he ordered. "And you pair," he snarled, gesturing towards two men. "Make sure they don't escape."

Miu was already in the kitchen. She was tight-lipped and pale, her hands shaking as she cut vegetables for a stew. Her lips twitched in what might have been relief when she saw Callie, but she didn't stop working.

Pushed towards the kitchen bench, Callie hurried over to her guardian. Struggling to contain her need for human contact and comfort, she paused when she reached the woman's side. Miu said nothing, but pushed leeks and onions towards her. In matching silence, Callie began cutting.

As she worked, her eyes strayed to where the two guards watched them. One lounged against the kitchen door, his eyes alternating between gazing down the corridor, glancing towards the door that led into the kitchen garden, and observing the two women working. Every now and then, he would shift from one foot to the other and reposition his back against the white-painted clay.

The other guard roamed the kitchen, inspecting what he found there. He'd stop idly at a bench, take a piece of fruit from a bowl, shuffle the plates stacked on a shelf, or peer over Miu's shoulder. Once he ventured a swift hand across the older woman's cutting board and snatched half an onion from the edge.

Miu growled something at him, but he just bit into the stolen onion and grinned around it. Mouth still full, he blew the old woman a kiss. Passing close to Callie, he spread his free hand against her bottom, feeling her through the gown's folds.

His companion muttered a warning, and the man grinned again. This time, he squeezed Callie's ass appreciatively, and

then moved on. By the door, his fellow guard uttered a soft curse and returned to his roving perusal of the kitchen, the outside door, and the corridor.

Callie helped Miu cut the vegetables and then make bread. Together, the two women piled fruit into bowls, and took out clay jars of honey in preparation for dessert.

They served the raiders by taking the pot out and standing it on the dining room table. The raiders had bowls of their own, and the women were soon dismissed to their quarters under the watchful gaze of another set of guards.

They shared Miu's room, where there was only one door for their captors to watch. Callie sat on the bed and scowled. Why would the gate guards have thought these men were guests? Surely it was obvious that they weren't anyone's friends? How had they gotten in without the alarm being raised?

When they were called for again, it was to clear away the remains of the meal. A guard had been put on the kitchen, but this time it wasn't to guard against the women running away. It was to guard Horem's jars of wine. The raiders were still on duty, and their leader didn't want them drunk.

It also meant that the household servants would be untouched—for that night, at least. Callie trembled when she saw the guards watching her. She felt the heat of their gaze touching her, resting on the half-hidden curves of her breasts and her ass. It made her feel glad when she and Miu were escorted back to Miu's room.

Of Horem, there was no sign.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 8

Unexpected Tryst

Callie woke to the sound of raised voices. She and Miu were curled together in Miu's narrow bed. The older woman had insisted on sandwiching Callie between herself and the wall. Horem, she'd claimed, would never forgive her if Callie fell and hurt herself.

It was a blatant lie, and they both recognized it, but Callie refused to argue. If Miu wanted the illusion of protecting her, then Callie would allow her to have it. They both knew their captors could come and take what they wanted, no matter where the pair slept.

Expecting to see daylight, Callie was surprised to find the house was still in darkness. There wasn't even the grey illumination that came before dawn. So why were there men shouting? Had Horem escaped and brought help?

Listening, she felt her hopes subside as she recognized some of the words. No, Horem hadn't escaped, or if he had, those arguing knew nothing about it. They were too busy discussing her.

One of them was demanding the right to claim her now. She was payment, it seemed, for gaining the raiders entrance into both Horem's home and the small garrison stationed near the oasis. And he wanted his reward before the sun came. His voice sounded vaguely familiar, although Callie couldn't place it.

The other voice she easily recognized. The leader of the raiders was refusing the request. Payment would be given, he was explaining, once the army had arrived. There would be no exceptions. The men weren't allowed to run riot amongst the maidservants, or take the loot they'd earned, and neither would Zef. The name scratched at Callie's memory. Somewhere in the not too distant past, she had heard that name spoken.

Poking tentatively at the memory, she tried to get it to surface. In her mind, it was associated with a meal, with sitting down with guests and good friends. For a moment, she thought of the stables and their end-of-year dinner—apart from the fact that she hadn't been dipping lettuce in olive oil back then. Lettuce and olive oil and guests...

It took her mind a few moments of rifling through what she labelled her 'Egyptian' memories, before she found it.

Dinner, followed by a walk in Horem's garden and the first time he'd held her hand. The man and woman attending their home as guests in what was meant to be a celebration—and the bitter words spoken. Callie understood them now. Zef had not thought the lion a good exchange, even though Horem had killed it and given him credit. Zef had wanted her, but Horem had refused to yield her. He had won her fairly in the race to capture her.

Now she understood Horem's remark as he'd given Zef's shoulder a companionable slap. "At least the lion didn't vomit down *your* back!" Callie blushed remembering it. It was one of the few things she did recall about her capture. Why Horem

had decided to keep her after that was beyond comprehension.

Zef had laughed at that, and let his protestations subside, but Callie remembered how the tension had remained as an undercurrent to the rest of the evening. She remembered Zef's beautiful companion and the woman's embarrassment at Zef's desire for Callie. Glad that Horem had stood by his claim on her, Callie lay still and listened to the argument.

"You cannot take her until the rest of our forces arrive."

"But you promised she would be mine!"

"And such promises are kept, in their time."

"There was no mention of such a time when the bargain was struck."

"You were promised her when the oasis was secured..."

"The oasis is secured!"

"Not until we are able to place a garrison here."

"What do you call this force, then?"

"Forward scouts. Occasionally they take a place, but they are never meant to hold it. That is what the army is for."

"Set's Eyes!"

"Are still in his head," the raider retorted. "As are yours. If you wish them to stay there, you will stop disturbing my men's rest."

"Are you threatening me?" Zef's voice was low with disbelief, and much more like the voice Callie remembered from the dining table. This was the voice he had used when implying that the lion was barely enough of a prize after the race to capture the stranger.

"I am not threatening you," the raider replied, his voice even and carrying the unmistakable edge of authority. "I am reminding you that you are one man, and a traitor at that, in the camp of his country's enemies, and that only by our grace will you see the agreement honoured."

"That *is* a threat!" Zef exclaimed, and Callie had to agree.

She rolled her eyes in the dark. He was more of an idiot than she'd thought—and not a nice one at that. She wondered what Horem had seen in him to keep the man as his friend, but perhaps Zef had given him no choice.

"No, it is a statement of fact," the raider said. "Now, go with Gadeus and Ashri and get some sleep. You will need it, if you are to be fit for travel tomorrow."

"Travel?" Zef exclaimed. "But I explained I could go no deeper into Egypt. I would be taken for certain, and my family..."

"Your family is of no concern to me!" the leader snapped, and then his voice took on a soothing tone. "But you won't be asked to travel further into your country. I was merely referring to the road out of Egypt. We will be sending you back to Qadesh with the captives."

There was a sharp intake of breath, followed by the leader's soft laugh. "You will be safer in their company than journeying on your own, especially as you'll be travelling with the woman. She is well worth the price. Many would try to take her from you if you travelled by yourself. Now go. You will need your sleep." This time his laughter held an entirely different meaning, and Callie felt herself blushing in the dark.

Footsteps followed. Some became softer, as those who made them moved further away. Others came closer, until Callie knew they were headed for her door.

"Shh," Miu murmured. "Pretend you are asleep."

Surprised that the older woman was aware of her wakefulness, Callie closed her eyes, glad Miu's shadow hid her face. When the footsteps came into the room and lamp light flickered beyond her eyelids, she was gladder still.

For long minutes, the lamp light stayed on them. It was as though the person carrying the lamp was studying them. Finally, she heard a man grunt and the footsteps resumed, moving away from where they "slept."

"Do you think he suspects?" asked a young man's voice.

"Perhaps," the leader replied. "But he wants to believe he'll succeed, and that will be his downfall." There was a satisfaction in his tone that made Callie's blood crawl.

She tensed as she heard the leader speak once more.

"He has reached the end of his usefulness, and we have no place for traitors. If he'd betray his country for a woman, even one as lovely as that, what else is he capable of? We can expect no loyalty from him. The caravan detail will overpower him two nights after he leaves us. He will fetch a good price at the markets."

"And the woman?"

Yes, Callie thought. What about the woman?

"She'll fetch an even better price," the raider replied. "I only wish I could be home to bid for her. She'd warm my nights well."

There was lust in their laughter, and they said nothing else as their footsteps faded into the distance.

"We have to leave," Callie whispered. "We have to go before the army comes."

"Hush, child," Miu replied, and crept out of bed. She'd settled herself on the chair above the sandbox just as the guard stuck his head around the door. "Tsk! Have you no manners?" she snapped. "I'm old. I get up in the night. How many times I need to piss is not your business!"

There was an abrupt shuffling and the guard disappeared. Now that she knew what to look for, Callie could see the shape of his arm outlined against the doorway. There was at least one lantern burning in the corridor.

Frowning, Miu finished and shuffled back to bed. The guard at the door shifted and Callie imagined him glancing her way. Miu grunted as though in disapproval at his nosiness, and lay down again.

Callie sighed. Getting out could prove difficult. In spite of her worry, she closed her eyes and drifted back to sleep. She was entirely unprepared when Miu shook her awake much, much later.

From the coolness of the air, she thought it might be almost dawn. That time before the grey light and the first touch of the sun, when things seemed most dark.

She watched as Miu lifted back the covers and shuffled across the room. The guard outside didn't move. Miu paused before continuing her progress. This time, she ceased her shuffling and turned, moving on silent feet towards the door.

Suddenly alert, Callie watched the older woman slide her hand into a dark niche in the wall. Other such niches held Miu's personal belongings, her makeup and brushes. This one held a sturdy knife that reflected the pale light from the lamp. Before Callie could protest, Miu had drawn her arm back and then punched the dagger into the guard's side.

He didn't make a sound as he collapsed against the wall, and Miu struggled to slow his slide to the floor. After settling the guard on the floor, she turned her head to Callie.

"Gods, girl! Aren't you up yet? We have to hurry!" she whispered. "We need to find Horem and get the pair of you gone before they wake."

Still Callie hesitated.

Miu ignored her, tilting the guard's head forward so that it looked he was sitting on the floor asleep. When she saw Callie still in bed, she hurried back and dragged the girl out.

"I said we had to hurry," she hissed. "My son's life and the country's safety hangs in the balance, and you stare like a gazelle stalked by a lion? I thought you had more strength than that!"

Miu's mention of a son puzzled Callie. Her son?

"Horem?" she asked.

"My son," the older woman affirmed, taking an unlit lamp from another niche in the wall. "Now hurry up and follow me."

Using the light of the lantern placed on a ledge in the corridor, they hurried away from the room. Miu's quarters were close to the dining hall and front entrance. At first, Callie wondered why the woman would avoid the back door and kitchen, then she remembered the guards who'd been posted

to guard Horem's wine. The rear exit would not provide a safe way out.

Miu didn't hesitate. She crossed the dining room quickly, pausing just inside the front door to peer across the yard. Once she was sure no guards lurked on the landing, she turned away from the path to the garden and took a more shadowed walkway around the side of the house.

Glancing towards the gates, Callie noticed that, although the gates were shut, no guards could be seen. She wondered at that. Horem always made sure there were guards. He had his livestock inside the compound by dusk, and the gates secured as soon as the last animal was counted. Perhaps the raiders thought they were the only danger in the area—or perhaps they *knew* they were the only danger in the area.

Frowning with worry, Callista crept after Miu into an area of the complex she'd never visited. A familiar scent assaulted her nostrils and made her smile. Horses! She'd never thought to find out where Horem stabled them, since he always took the beasts with him when he travelled. Thus, there'd been no incentive for her to find the stables. Miu took her into the building, making soothing sounds to the beasts within. Again Callie wondered at the arrogance of the raiders in posting no guards.

When they were inside, Miu grasped her by the hand and led her through the pitch darkness with the sureness of one familiar with the inside of the building. Callie followed cautiously behind. Hearing them, the horses shifted in their stalls. Miu paused, but the horses soon settled, and the old woman hurried forward once more.

At one point in their strange journey, Miu grasped Callie's free hand and placed it on a wall. Feeling the roughness beneath her fingertips, Callie's sense of unreality began to fade. When Miu stopped to open a door, Callie obediently waited behind her, breathing in the scent of horses, straw, leather and dust.

When Miu pulled her into another room and secured the door behind them, Callie heard the sound of two stones being struck together. Within seconds, a spark lit the lamp, and the room filled with its warm glow.

Callie blinked, trying to get used to the sudden light, and then looked around to see where she was. It was a storage room, or the ancient Egyptian equivalent of one. There were large urns and pitchers arrayed in neat rows and around the walls. A small, sturdy table stood against one wall, accompanied by a wooden stool. Writing tools and materials were stacked neatly on its surface.

Callie saw what looked like a bridle hanging from a peg above the desk, and frowned. Did Egyptians actually ride their horses? She'd never heard of it, but the thought made a small spark of hope light her heart. Maybe Horem...

Miu cleared her throat, interrupting Callista's thoughts.

"Nefer," she said, making Callie look around for the third person in the room. She startled when Miu touched her shoulder. "Nefer," she repeated, looking right at Callie.

"It's time we rescued my son. This will be hard for you, but it is harder for me because I will stay behind."

She held up a hand when Callie started to protest. "Hush now. We don't have time to argue about it. I cannot ride a

horse, but you, I think, can. If you can ride, you can both leave. It will be the only way you can outrun them, and Horem will not leave without you."

"He will not leave without you, either, Miu," Callie assured her. Her protest was met by a small smile of mischief.

"He will leave if he cannot find me and believes you are in danger," the woman retorted.

Callie couldn't argue with that. While she wasn't sure that Horem loved her, she wasn't sure he didn't, either. He was certainly possessive of her, and he had defended her from his friend, and the intruder, and he had ... She blushed, remembering their time in the garden and, afterwards, in his bed. Oh yes, he had. The memory of it sent a flicker of heat curling through her belly.

"So what makes you think I can ride?" she asked.

"You talk in your sleep," Miu replied. "And you had a fever when Ra's touch burnt your skin. You have travelled a long way."

Miu's words brought a stab of sadness to Callie's heart. All the thoughts of home, and the fact that she would never be able to return there, came back. Whatever power had drawn her through the rocks and time, had to be like lightning—never striking the same person twice. There was even a small part of her that feared it might strike again. Having found Horem, she had trouble thinking of reasons why she might want to go back.

And speaking of Horem...

"He's being held in the foreman's office," Miu explained. "I can take care of the guard."

"No," murmured a deep voice from the back of the room. Ignoring their startled gasps, it continued, "I can take care of the guard."

They watched as the head stableman and gardener cautiously emerged from behind a large earthenware jar and some sacks of grain. Callie had seen him around, but didn't know his name.

"Japhet!" Miu exclaimed, but softly, so that her voice didn't carry. "I thought they had captured you all."

"They captured most," Japhet replied, "but I ducked in here without being seen. The boys slowed them down, and the horses caused some turmoil when they escaped from their stalls, so they didn't search well." His brow darkened. "We have to get the master free."

"I can handle the guards," Miu insisted, and Callie watched Japhet smile.

"Mother," he said, although he looked like no relation Callie could imagine. "Mother, I know you can handle the guards, but you would then need to open the gates, and that's where you would be seen. With all respect, Mother, you couldn't outrun the pursuit. They didn't bother too much with this room when they searched the first time. You could stay here in safety, and he and Nefer could ride away. They might capture me, but I have a better chance of surviving it. Please, Mother," he added, when she hesitated. "The master needs you safe as well."

Whether it was his words, or the plea in his voice, Callista couldn't tell, but Miu finally nodded, laying her hands in her lap.

"I should have you flogged for your cheek," she murmured, "but you always have our best interests at heart."

He moved, like a ghost, to the door. Looking back at Callie, he said, "I'll send the master to the stables. You should have the horses ready when he gets here. I'll create a diversion and take care of the gates."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 9

Escape

Japhet was as good as his word. Callie barely had time to coax one of the horses into letting her near it, before Horem slipped through the stable door. He took one of the bridles and slowly approached the other horse. It whickered, snuffling in his scent, before letting him approach.

"We must hurry," he said, keeping his tone soothing. He reached out and looped a rein about the horse's neck.

"How much time do we have?" Callie asked, just as gently, as she slid the bit into her beast's mouth and pulled the bridle over its head. Of the two animals, this one had been the most skittish, shying at the shadows cast by the lamp and then dancing away from her until she'd produced a handful of grain.

"Not long. Where's Miu?"

"She said not to tell you," Callie replied, saddened by her obedience to the old woman's wishes, when Miu was only yards away. She'd never forgive herself if this was Horem's only chance to say goodbye.

Horem snorted, causing his horse to prop and snort in return. "The four of us will discuss this when you and I return."

To Callie's relief, he didn't argue any further, but his movements became shorter and sharper as he pulled the bridle tight.

"Follow me," he ordered, leading the way to the stable door. "Now wait," he said. "Japhet will signal when it is time."

While Callie was still wondering how Japhet would signal them, there was a sudden outcry from the other end of the house.

"Douse the lamp," Horem ordered.

Handing him the reins, Callista hurried to where the lamp sat. When it was out, she felt her way back to where Horem waited impatiently by the door.

"Stay as close to me as you can," he ordered, pushing the door open. Leading his mount through it, he waited until Callie followed, then he slipped onto the horse's back and steered it quietly through the shadows to the gates.

More shouts followed the first, and Callie glanced towards them, expecting to see guards heading toward the stables. The guards charging through the kitchen door didn't even look their way. They were heading for the servants' quarters, which lay in the opposite direction.

Callie held her breath until they rounded the opposite end of the house. It seemed as if only a short time had passed since she and Miu had crept along the nearby walkway towards the stables. There were still no guards on the front of the house, and none on the gates, although, as they reached the open portals, Callie saw movement at the front door. With shouts of anger behind them, she and Horem swung their horses through the gates and kicked them into a gallop.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Epilogue

Zef had escaped.

After the uprising had been quashed, it seemed he'd masqueraded as a prisoner and taken off while the raiders were still being sorted out.

Horem brooded about it for days, taking men into the desert and searching for him. It was only when one of his fellow commanders told him that his once-friend had been listed as a traitor and an alert had been put out on him that Horem began to relax. His anger took time to cool, though. His home had been invaded, his mother threatened, and his wife almost taken by another.

And Callie *was* his wife. She hadn't known about the little Egyptian tradition of marriage. There wasn't a ceremony. The bride simply moved in with the groom, and they set up house together. Once she'd started learning the household tasks from Miu, it was thought she'd agreed to take on that status. Her time with Horem in the garden had only sealed the bargain. She didn't know whether to be disappointed, or just happy to have been able to claim him.

Their relief in discovering that Japhet had survived was immense, and they'd laughed when he'd described how he'd managed to get himself in amongst the other slaves during the little uprising used as the diversion for their escape. They didn't laugh as they called in a physician to treat the injuries from the beating he'd received for being part of that uprising, but he'd lived and the horses flourished under his care.

Miu had managed to remain hidden, even though the raiders turned the house inside out looking for her. They might have moved on to the stables as part of their next phase in the search, if Horem and Callie's reinforcements hadn't arrived and attacked while they were trying to work out where the older woman might have gone.

To Horem's embarrassment, his mother didn't wait until his colleagues had left before she started fussing over him. She fussed over Callie, as well, but that was what women did. It shouldn't happen to a man when the other men were around.

His colleagues took it with good humour—especially as they benefited from the extra sweet bread and cakes she made. Horem hosted them at the estate until they'd made the garrison habitable, an activity that brought more curses down on Zef's head. From the guards' description, Zef had arrived at both places masquerading as a friend and guest.

At the estate, it had been a simple matter for the 'caravan guards' to overpower Horem's house guards and secure the already sleeping servants in their quarters. Zef had taken part of the force from the estate to the garrison and, on his word, they'd been allowed in as merchant travellers seeking protection. When most of the garrison had fallen asleep, the raiders had struck. Aware of a fighting man's sale value in the markets back home, they'd captured as many soldiers as they could, but killed those they had to without remorse.

Fortunately for the prisoners, the raiders had fled on seeing Horem's reinforcements reach his estate. If there'd been more time, Horem and his men would have slaughtered

the raiders, one by one, as revenge. The desert hid them until the Egyptians lost their tracks, and Horem returned home despondent.

He was still brooding on his return, oblivious to the peace that had descended on his estate, or the meal Callie and Miu had prepared to celebrate his homecoming. Callie watched him throughout the meal, trying to find a way to break his mood, and failing. She snuggled as closely to his side as she could, and made sure he ate.

Miu looked worried, but gestured for Callie to stay beside Horem as she cleared the plates and brought wine and fruit for dessert.

"We missed you, son," the old woman said, placing a platter of fruit and cheese and honey before them. "It's good to have you home."

Callie saw how Miu's words brought a small smile to Horem's lips. Her husband looked around the dining room, as though only just noticing that the servants had left them alone. She saw how Miu's concern brought the frown back to his face.

Callie watched as he forced the frown into a smile and said, "It's good to be home, Miu. It's good to have you safe."

Leaning against his shoulder, Callie realized he'd been using it as a barrier to her presence. It wasn't his fault the raiders had taken the estate. She'd learnt that Zef had been his friend since childhood and the household guards knew it. If Zef gave his word for some strangers, then of course the staff were bound to let them in. She only hoped Horem would realize it, too, but he sat so still beside her that she thought

his brooding would continue. Sighing, she pressed against him, sliding her arms around his waist.

Perhaps Horem had come to the same conclusion about where the blame lay, for he raised his arm and looped it round her. With a sigh of contentment, Callie snuggled closer, stretching out a hand to pluck a grape from the platter.

"So, tell me," Horem said, "how have things been while I was away?"

Their answers appeared to ease some of his tension, and the evening deepened into night. All too soon, Miu was pleading a need for rest and disappearing down the corridor to her room. Callie took another grape from the platter.

This time she dipped it lightly into the pot of honey and raised it to his lips. Her free hand slid under the linen folds of his skirt and stroked the length of his cock.

"So," she said. "Want to see what *e/se* we can do with grapes and honey?"

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

About Ellie Moonwater

www.lyricalpress.com/elliemoonwater.html

Hmmm, what can I say—ask me about one of my characters or their worlds and I've got plenty. Ask about me, and everything dries up. I write pretty much anything. Show me a writing style I haven't tried and it's like Christmas as I try to work it out—actually, I never work it out because I tend to get lost in the story, so writing is always like Christmas for me. At the moment I write romance—it's fun, and you meet the nicest people. Playing with the paranormal, fantasy and science fiction genres is what I do best, but the occasional contemporary tale creeps in, too—and then there are the mainstream novels. Personal stuff? Well I live in Australia, with my husband and son, and like to bounce ideas of my writing friend, Angel Waterman. Angel's writing has a streak of darkness running right to the core, and her worlds inspire me, so as well as working in my own corner, I'll sometimes explore hers as well. I like making her blush.

Reader email: elliemoonwater@gmail.com

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Hunters of the Nile
by Ellie Moonwater

Lyrical Press

Where reality and fantasy collide

www.lyricalpress.com/

* * * *



* * * *

Lose yourself in an ebook and discover a new wave of
reading.

Just click, buy and read. It's as simple as that!