



Mummy Dearest

Midnight Moon Café

Cassandra Curtis

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Mummy Dearest
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Cover Artist: Silma Pagán

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I wish to thank Cora Zane for her keen eyes and rapier wit, and R.G. Alexander for her expert advice on archeology, dig sites, and mummies. No wire coat hangers ever, R.G., I promise! I want to also thank cover artist Silma Pagán for another stunning design. The problem with perfection is you have to keep topping it, Silma. I await your next masterpiece with eager anticipation!

– Cass

I hope you enjoy this Valentine's treat.

–In light, love, and especially laughter,
Cassandra

Mummy Dearest

Dust caked her clothes and clogged her pores. She'd actually thought going to a dig in Egypt would be fun. What an idiot! She pulled down the mask covering her mouth so she could take a swig of her bottled water. Sweat dripped from her brow. She wiped her eyes, and looked across the dig site at her professor. It was his fault she was here. He'd made it all sound so romantic, and exciting back in her Ancient History class at university.

Uncovering the past, looking for relics...picturing herself as some real life Lara Croft. Maybe that had been her first mistake. Gwen Patterson, Tomb Raider. *Oh yeah, real smart.*

Another stinging bite had her swing a hand to slap her thigh. Damn flies. They'd eat you alive if given the chance. You had to move fast to avoid them or become lunch. She stood, stretched her aching back muscles. No wonder she hurt. She'd been bent for the better part of three hours, brushing eons old sand off of some ancient carved stone with what amounted to a tiny paintbrush. All her efforts so far yielded a few shards of funereal pottery.

The only good thing to come of this entire trip was the weight she'd lost. She'd been in Egypt less than three weeks and already dropped fifteen pounds. Back home, her Grammy was probably baking Dutch apple pie, or her dad fixing a rack of his signature tangy barbeque ribs on the grill. Oh, and he'd have blackeyed peas and roasted ears of corn dipped in honey butter....ahh. She closed her eyes, her mouth watering. She's given up all of that for three months of misery in the desert. The food here didn't agree with her. She could subsist on bottled water, and imported boxes of crackers only so long.

Maybe that's why she felt so weak, and began to hallucinate. 'Cause she couldn't be seeing what she thought she saw. A solid gold scarab rose from under the weight of sand, and winked at her with jewel red eyes. Skittered across her section of the dig and reburied itself at her feet. Geeze-maneeze! She jumped back and fell hard on her butt.

"Help, guys! Somebody!" She yelled, looking around wildly, scooting back fast as she could in case the damn thing tried to crawl up her leg. She shuddered, felt hands grab her arms, and pull her up.

"Miss Patterson, are you alright?" Her professor asked in a clipped British accent.

"Oh, Professor Walcourt! I saw a beetle, a large beetle, and it disappeared into the sand!"

"Just step on them, Miss Patterson. Or kick them out of your way."

"No. You don't understand. It was gold and had ruby eyes and--and...it was *moving*!"

All the students stopped work, and turned to stare in her direction.

"Where?"

She pointed to a spot two feet in front of her. Professor Walcourt squatted in the sand, and dug around with his fingers, where she'd pointed.

"There's nothing here. You must have imagined it. Why don't you go back to the base camp, dear. Relax, maybe eat something? American girls always on a diet." He said the last, under his breath.

She heard a few chuckles coming from the roped off area next to her, and cringed. "Yes. Sorry, I didn't mean to cause a fuss. I think I'll go lay down."

He nodded his consent, and seemed to dismiss her from his mind, as he turned to talk with Adam, his teaching assistant.

Well, wasn't that fun? Nothing like proving you're a ditz to the entire class. She walked over to one of the guides sitting near the jeeps, and asked for a ride. She knew what she'd seen,

but could she trust her eyes? Much as it pissed her off to admit it, maybe the sun *had* played tricks on her.

The base camp sat empty, everyone else at the dig site. A rest would do her good. She shook the rough blanket and lay down for a nap. When she woke up, she decided to try and eat. She pulled a protein bar from her backpack and took a bite. Not the best tasting stuff, but nutritious and full of vitamins. After a while, she acknowledged she felt better, and promised herself to make a point of eating more often.

With nothing else to do, she decided to take out her journal and write some notes. She even tried to do a rough sketch of the gold scarab. Something about the odd bevel flickered in her mind's eye. She turned back to another sketch she'd done a week earlier. Of a cartouche with the concave shape of a scarab at the bottom. Almost as if...yes—as if a three dimensional scarab should be inset there. Some kind of a lock and key? She had to take her journal, go back to the dig site, and show this to Dr. Walcourt!

She grabbed her backpack, tossed her journal along with extra snack bars and water into it, and headed to the jeep.

* * *

"But don't you see? This means something. If we could find the gold scarab again, I just know it fits into this cartouche! Who knows what we could unlock?"

"No. This is a serious archeological endeavor, and I am not assigning a single one of my students to help you look for some animated gold scarab in the sand."

"Sir, I think this important. If you would just look at the sketch again...?"

"Ms. Patterson, I understand your excitement over what you believe is a potential find. But there was no gold scarab. You were delusional, and weak from the sun. Perhaps it would be best if you returned to your hotel in Cairo, and then home to the States."

"I know what I saw, and this drawing should be evidence. I mean—look at the details of the cartouche. This person Kemnebi must have been important in some way. Why else would he have all these paintings and carvings dedicated to him?"

"That is what we are here to find out, Ms. Patterson."

"Then you should be interested in this." She stabbed the journal with her finger.

"Sir, we may have something." The young man interrupted, excitement dancing in his eyes.

"Now if you'll excuse me?" The professor turned from her, and followed the other man.

She hoisted her backpack over her shoulders, picked her way over to the area where she'd been earlier, and squat down in the sand. So, where the hell was the damn thing? Still buried here, or long gone. She dug around the marked off square, and settled in for the afternoon. She wasn't giving up, nor was she about to fly home without a fight.

In time, her persistence paid off. The carved stone revealed more of itself. A cat-like form emerged, a panther—collared. It too, bore the cartouche on its belly, stamping it as part of the mysterious Kemnebi's property. She stroked the cat form, imagining it to have real fur, silky black and shining.

"Ouch!" Something pinched her knee. She looked down, praying she wouldn't see a scorpion. Instead, the gold beetle lay on the sand, tiny drops of her blood on it. It scurried past her to crawl onto the belly of the statue and embed itself there.

She blinked. Nope. Not a delusion. The ruby eyes glowed—watched her. She stood, heard the rumble before she felt the ground shake. Everyone was yelling, running back to the makeshift

tents and the jeeps. She thought she heard someone scream the word “Earthquake,” but a cloud of dust sucked her down into the maw of a giant hole beneath her feet. She could neither hear, nor see anything more.

* * *

Kemnebi woke, a silent scream of thick air pushed against sharp ribs. Someone had broken the spell, thanks be to Sekhmet and Bast! His body creaked as he shifted from cat form to man. His cloth funeral bindings snapped at the change, the strips hanging from a wasted torso. Did he live, yet remain mummified? Would his beloved Goddesses not show him mercy? For it was his duty and honor to both Bast and Sekhmet that had forced the duplicitous hand of Suten Anu.

The heavy door protecting the tomb rolled in a slow arc, allowing the faintest light to illuminate his final resting place. Someone had found the ensorcelled scarab and used it to free his cat form, and then used it again on the cartouche above his burial chamber, to open his prison.

The person must be a brave soul, to have willingly shed their blood to break the curse. Did the person realize they now belonged to him? And he to them? A harsh bargain, but one he’d make again, in order to live once more, and walk the land in freedom.

Slow, careful movements carried him from the room, and into the antechamber. A small figure stood in the passageway. His rescuer, no doubt. He licked bony lips, pain shooting to every new nerve, every tissue as he became flesh and blood once more. His moan of agony, mingled with the figure’s scream of fright. The human dropped to the hard packed floor, unconscious.

His body ached, sore, and raw as he reached the cartouche above the entrance to the antechamber, and pried the golden scarab from the recess. Gait stiff, he walked to the prone figure.

He breathed slow and deep, his lungs expanded, and a whisper of air escaped. A woman! Was she a follower of Bast, of Sekhmet? Large, confused, gray eyes blinked up at him. Hair the color of silver and wheat, wove in a single braid like rope, over her shoulder. Eternity with such a beautiful woman would be no hardship at all...

“I mean you no harm. I want only to thank you for my freedom.”

The female made no sign that she had heard him or understood a word he said. He took her hand in his, and ripped the cloth strips binding him, so that her hand could touch the bare flesh of his chest. Her eyes seemed to widen, alarm darkened her irises.

“Sekhmet and Bast have blessed you for your selfless act. I owe you my life.” He lifted her other hand and cupped them together in front of her. “I remain now forever in your hands. Your heart to hold for eternity. And your heart, I will guard as my own.” He leaned forward, placed a kiss on her lips.

She pushed at his chest, in a mad scramble to get away. “No...this isn’t real—not happening! Please! Somebody help!”

Her words made no sense to him, but he knew well the fear in her voice and in her eyes. He released her wrists scant seconds before she passed out once again. This time he was ready to break her fall. He carried her in his arms to a low stone bench, and hovered over her. Was he so terrible still to look upon. He raised a hand to brush his scalp. Hair sprouted from his bald head. He ran hands down his long muscled body. He was whole once more. He removed the rest of his wrappings and stood naked.

The cleansing pools were but a level below. Perhaps after a tranquil bath they would both feel refreshed, if not calmer.

He hefted her slight weight in his arms, and made his way through the secret passage. Darkness cloaked the narrow space.

“In Ra lumaya tahn!” The golden glow of candlelight chased away the dark.

His magick had returned along with his flesh. Could he return to his cat form? Later, he decided, he would try. He set the little female down on the floor, and looked at the empty pools. How long had he been imprisoned? The royal scribe had much to answer for.

Did he feast with Osiris and Anubis, or had Suten Anu cheated death, as he had?

He intoned the spell for water and watched as the pools filled once again. He removed the female’s clothing and lifted her into the water.

* * *

She had to be dreaming. The most gorgeous man she’d ever seen in her life, cupped water in his large hands, and let it cascade over her back and shoulders. Thighs like tree trunks held her in place, one leg braced on either side of her body. Lust stirred in her, as an impressive cock poked her lower abdomen.

Heat swirled in the chocolate eyes watching her. Oh my! A slow smile curved those full, passionate male lips. His skin reminded her of hot chocolate, with just the barest touch of cream. She reached out a trembling hand, glided her fingertips against his muscled chest in wonder...satin over steel.

Any thoughts of resistance melted under his sensual onslaught. She allowed him to taste her lips, and his hands to cup her breasts. He deepened the kiss, as water lapped at her hips and thighs.

Her heart drummed loud in her ears, her breath rapid and shallow. Firm hands gripped her hips, lifted her—impaled her on the hard, heavy length of his shaft.

A bubble of nervous excitement caught in her throat. If this was a dream, she never wanted to wake. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him back.

He surged into her, broke off the kiss. “One heart. One flesh. One love.” He whispered the words against her throat like a vow.

She threw her head back, relished the feel of his mouth on her—kissing, tasting, sucking, licking. He groaned, his hands sliding down...to the pool of liquid heat where they joined. His light caress, intimate and teasing.

The pleasure built into a tight ache, a spiral of need that fed upon itself. Her thighs quivered, slick with her essence, as his hands demanded complete surrender. She gasped, fought to prolong the sensation of teetering on the edge, lost and won, as her orgasm rushed over her in a wave. His hoarse cry of satisfaction echoed his own climax. He held her through the aftershocks, quick kisses, and wet shudders of deepest gratification.

With a reluctant-sounding sigh, he eased himself from her body and climbed out of the water, carrying her in his arms. She opened her eyes and raised her hand to touch the wet strands of his...hair? Her other hand shot out to run her fingers through the silky cloud. No. It couldn’t be...could it? He had been practically bald mere minutes earlier, but now his hair reached past his shoulders.

“I don’t understand?” She looked up at him in shock. She’d just spoken in English, at least she thought she had, but the words came out in what sounded like a dialect of ancient Egyptian.

She'd been so entranced by him in the pool earlier, she'd paid no heed to his words. But now she realized he'd said something about them being one flesh, one love, and she'd heard perfect American English in her mind...yet the words themselves had been in a foreign tongue.

"A product of magick. My magick." He dropped a kiss on her nose, and set her on the ground.

"Magick?" She grabbed her clothes, hurried to put them on. He'd undressed her while she'd been out of it, and then fucked her into a sensual haze of acceptance. Magick? More like some kind of drug. Even now, she could feel the gnawing ache of need heavy in her womb, the phantom fingers tweak and pull at her clit.

He took her hand, led her from the bathing chamber to the hidden tunnel.

"Where are we going?"

"I have not felt the warmth of the sun upon my skin in some time. I would have that again."

"You can't! I mean—you're naked! And I didn't imagine those wrappings, right? Won't you disintegrate if you go outside your tomb?"

"You freed me with the golden scarab of Anubis." He cupped her chin, looked into her eyes. "Your gift of blood, of your very life force, released me. I am renewed. It is a priceless gift I will cherish forever."

He bent his head, pressed his lips to hers for little more than a few seconds, before he tugged on her hand. The next corridor was narrow and they had to walk sideways to clear it. Ahead, a large slab of stone blocked their path.

She glanced around, tried to find something, anything they could use as a fulcrum.

"Ak-a-hoe-tem, sum-an ma'at!" He shouted as he pointed at the stone. The sand beneath the heavy slab shifted.

"Okay, I think I'm starting to believe you, and this magick thing you have going. Whew."

He pushed the slab into the groove made by the sand, and rolled it away from the doorway. Once more, he took her hand in his. He led her through the passageway and into the bright light of the sun.

She scanned the area and realized they were closer to the base camp than the dig site. "You have to stay here. I'll go get clothes for you to wear. Okay?"

"O-kay is yes?"

She nodded. Shame to put any clothes on the man, but he needed to blend in if she had any hope of sneaking him back to camp.

"Then I shall wait here for you."

She squeezed his hand, then turned to leave. Most of the crew were still at the dig. Now, whose clothes would be big enough to fit her mummy? Professor Walcourt was tall enough, if too narrow in the shoulders and chest.

Yes, Walcourt's clothing would do nicely for now. She darted through the encampment, and opened the flap of the professor's tent. Good. No one spotted her.

She unzipped his duffel bag, and withdrew a pair of khaki slacks, a white T-shirt, socks, and a pair of briefs. Next, she needed a pair of shoes, and spied an extra pair of work boots on a chair. She shook them out, just in case something had made the boots their home, and added them to the pile of stolen booty.

Her hand reached for the tent's flap, when she heard voices coming from outside. Where the hell could she hide in a four by five foot tent? She looked around, saw the stacked boxes of equipment by the chair, and dove behind them.

“You have to notify the authorities. The poor girl is probably dead, dropped down the hole that opened up, and broke her neck.”

“And took the golden scarab with her!”

“So?”

“Have you listened to a word I’ve said?”

“Even if she is alive and has the key, she didn’t appear bright enough to figure out how to use it. You’re worrying over nothing, Walcourt.”

“The silly fool has the curiosity of a cat. Of course, given time, she’ll figure it out, and Kemnebi will be free after three thousand years!”

“But the curse is mere superstition, pure myth.”

“Do I look like a myth, Adam?” The voice had an oily texture.

“N-no. Please, I only meant—”

“Yes, I know what you think. But you know less than a dung beetle. Do not become a liability to me, Adam. Now leave. I must think.”

She heard the muffled sound of shuffling feet, then silence. She peeked over the boxes. Walcourt lay on the cot. Her only chance was if he fell asleep. She hoped Kemnebi would wait as he promised.

* * *

His stomach growled. The sun had begun to set and his little female had yet to return. Had she been caught stealing? Or had she changed her mind? He could wait no longer. She might be in danger. He picked his way across the sand and rocks. His big body and longer stride eating up the distance.

He crouched behind the side of a metal box on strange wheels. Several men passed by, but his presence remained hidden. He wondered at their odd clothes and manner of speech. Stealth carried him to another of the metal boxes across from the tents.

The golden scarab grew warm in his fist. He looked down and saw the ruby eyes begin to glow with an inner fire. She was here, in this tent. Two silhouettes moved inside the space. One tall and male. The other shadow, female.

He called upon his beloved mother, Bast, and winced as pain lanced with the shift of his form. The cat emerged from where once crouched a man. He padded silent as darkness, and stepped through the flap, on all fours.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about! I thought you said I was delusional from dieting and the heat?” By now, her mummy had to know something had gone wrong with her plan. She looked up into the crazed eyes of Professor Walcourt.

“Stupid girl. You let him escape, didn’t you? You have no clue what he is, what he can do!”

“If you believe in curses and silly superstitions, why become an archeologist? A man of science?”

“I don’t believe in them! I believe in Kemnebi!” He leaned over her, rage forcing the veins on his neck to pop out. “I will not repeat this again! What were you looking for? Surely you didn’t come just to steal a few measly pieces of clothing?”

Gwen blinked. A long, sleek, black...*something*, moved through her peripheral vision. Too fast to know exactly what she’d seen. Her lack of attention provoked the professor.

“Stupid little bitch! Answer me!” He backhanded her.

She fell on her side, and lifted a hand—wiped the blood from the corner of her mouth. “I hope you rot in hell, you piece of shit!” Two fat tears rolled from her eyes. She flinched as his arm swung back for momentum.

A huge black paw whipped from out of nowhere, swiped at Walcourt’s midsection. He staggered, gasping. The black panther stood on hind legs, its eyes fixed on the professor. The beast shimmered, coalesced into the shape of the most delicious man, her favorite mummy dearest.

“Suten Anu! Foul creature!”

“You are the creature, Kemnebi. Walking the earth in two forms, vile offspring of Bast!”

“Your schemes shall not go unpunished. I care not what finds you at my door, only that you remember my curse, Suten Anu! And feel my wrath!”

Suten Anu was pushed from the tent by invisible hands, his body taken in a swirling sandstorm contained only by the will of Kemnebi. Her magnificent mummy stood under the open flap of the tent—naked, watching the storm carry Suten Anu to the halls of the dead.

She pulled him back inside and closed the flap. “Not that I really want to cover you up, but people were staring.” She handed him the clothes she’d swiped.

He hesitated, then grabbed them from her and put them on.

“Where do we go from here?”

“Where so ever you desire, my lioness.”

“Lioness, huh?” She stood on tiptoe and linked her hands behind his neck. “I could get used to this.” He lowered his mouth to hers.

Neither saw the shadow move across the stretched fabric at the back of the tent. Nor did they hear the contented, rumbling purr.

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Available Now!

I Put a Spell on You

by Cassandra Curtis

<http://www.amberquill.com/AmberHeat/PutSpellOnYou.html>

...Sebastian finished his search with one room left to go. The last thing he wanted was for Tess to catch him. Maybe he'd try to come back tomorrow, when she left for the shop. His hand hesitated on the doorknob. An agonized half-shout/half-moan came from inside. He rushed through the door, not knowing what to expect. The bed lay empty and her clothes were scattered over the edge of a hamper in one corner of the room. Another groan sent him to the open bathroom door. A large mirror, half-fogged from the steam, hung above the sink.

Tess lay in the bathtub, one smooth leg dangling over the rim, the other bent at the knee. The water lapped at her nipples. Those big blue eyes of hers were closed. Her lips parted and her neck arched backward as she moaned, just a little.

His heart drummed in his chest, mouth parched as he tried to swallow, his eyes glued to the image reflected in the mirror. One of her hands rose from the water to pluck at her nipples. His own hand crept down to the bulge in his slacks. He timed his strokes to synchronize with hers. His balls tightened, blood racing to his thickened cock.

She bucked once, twice, lifting out of the tub enough for him to see the glorious wet blonde curls between her legs, her hand parting the slippery folds with deft fingers. He unzipped his pants, pulled out his cock, and rubbed the glistening head, spreading the seeping pre-come over his shaft as a lubricant.

He pistoned himself in his hand, wishing it was her pussy grasping him tight. He'd lick her sweet juice until she begged for him to fuck her. He tried to suppress a groan, balls aching for release. His eyes closed, and he clenched his jaw muscles. No. Not here. He squeezed his rod until it hurt.

She couldn't know he'd invaded her privacy. That he'd seen her pleasuring herself. He forced himself back in his slacks and carefully rezippped.

The sound of splashing broke the sensuous spell.

Dammit! She was getting out of the tub, wrapping a towel around her breasts. She turned and bent to pull the stopper plug. He hurried from the room, practically tripping down the stairs in his haste. Pendragon sat at the bottom of the staircase, licking his paw, a feline smirk on his whiskered face. The cat stopped mid-motion, looked at the huge hard-on Sebastian sported, and meowed in question.

Hell, he wouldn't put it past the damn thing to attack his prized jewels. He cupped his groin and fled out the front door, feeling like an idiot...

Cup of Fate

by Cassandra Curtis

<http://www.amberquill.com/AmberHeat/CupFate.html>

“You’re dreaming again. All’s well. Breath slow and deep.” The voice was smooth as melted chocolate and reassuring.

The farmhouse faded and a new dream took its place.

The gentle scrape of an unshaven face on her shoulder finished the transition. But it was the warm male lips kissing the nape of her neck that made it seem all too real. A pair of strong arms snaked around her midriff and pulled her back against a taut, muscular chest.

It seemed so long since anyone had held her close and offered comfort. Bryn gave herself up to this new dream and snuggled, loving the warmth of his body. That didn’t make sense. How could a dream lover give off heat? She decided not to examine it closer, just simply enjoy it while it lasted.

The wet lap of a tongue licked her earlobe. She squirmed in his arms.

“Does that tickle?” he asked, whispering against the curve of her jaw.

“Yes...ahh,” she murmured as his lips kissed her throat and his hands began to wander. She gasped when his fingers tugged at her nipples, rolling them between thumb and forefinger.

She closed her eyes, savoring all the sensations he was causing throughout her body. She felt his hand slide down her hip to her thigh. He grasped the hem of her silky nightgown and slowly pulled it up until it bunched above her waist. He placed hot kisses on her hipbone and all along her thigh, before moving her so she lay on her back.

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Author Bio

Cassandra Curtis spent her formative years traveling with her parents, learning a smattering of languages—usually just enough to get her in trouble. After college, she worked as a reporter and photojournalist, while continuing her love of art. Ms. Curtis now writes fiction full-time.

An avid gardener and wildlife enthusiast, she enjoys the magick found in nature. Her interests include: art, antiques, astronomy, folklore, mythology, genealogy, music, eastern philosophy and collecting magickal artifacts.

A member of both the World Romance Writers, and Romance Divas, Ms. Curtis won the 2006 Amber Quill Press Heat Wave Contest with her novella, Cup of Fate.

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