



Praise for the writing of Lyn Cash

Kinky Kruising: Mistress Mine

The sensual elements of the story show the explosive heat that occurs between two strong people who have an immediate attraction and all that's needed to feed the attraction is time. I will be reading this book again and again and again. I recommend it to everyone.

-- Ellen, *The Romance Studio*

Mistress Mine is an entertaining premise with a lighter BDSM flair. It's a welcomed first effort by Ms. Cash.

-- Ann Lee, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Ms. Cash has penned a tale of love, lust, and BDSM that many are sure to enjoy. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys stories of dominance and submission. *Kinky Kruising: Mistress Mine* is most definitely a keeper!

-- Susan White, *Coffee Time Romance*

Mistress Mine has that perfect blend of love, laughter, and sadness that keeps you engrossed in the pages and leaves you with a sense of awe and light-heartedness.

-- Chrissy, *Euro-Reviews*

Kinky Kruising: Mistress Mine is an outstanding love story that has humor, explosive passion, and rewarding characters: this is definitely worth the read and worth a place on your bookshelf. Lyn Cash has done a wonderful job and earned 5 Angels in the process!

-- Jessica, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

Kinky Kruising: Mistress Mine is now available from Loose Id.

THE PROMISE: STREAM OF TIME

Lyn Cash

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This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (ménage).

The Promise: Stream of Time

Lyn Cash

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-29
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

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ISBN 978-1-59632-235-6

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Sherri Lynne
Cover Artist: April Martinez



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Chapter One

What I Did On My Summer Vacation: Well, my ex-husband escaped from prison yesterday. Considering I narrowly avoided assassination because of him and his lame-brained scheme to collect insurance money on me, I suppose I should be worried. Tom is inept and crazy. He has no friends, no one else to pull the trigger this time, and Tom couldn't hit the toilet when he pissed, so I doubt he'd manage to pull a good bead on me.

It's disturbing to think that someone I once cared about wants to kill me. The fact that he could even attempt such a thing makes me shudder. What did I ever do to him? Was I that desperate for romance when we first met that I bought into all his bullshit about thinking I was so wonderful? He must've seen me coming a mile away, someone so gullible and ready to believe in the happily-ever-after that she was ready to believe whoever told her what she wanted to hear. My parents had that sort of relationship, the forever kind, and I suppose that's what I was after. I just should have looked beyond the moment. Maybe I'd have seen that the only "tomorrow" Tom envisioned was one in which he was alone with my estate.

As an early birthday present, Mimi talked me into vacationing in Luxor with her -- rather, the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas. We're more like buddies with a huge age difference

than grandmother and granddaughter, and we haven't spent much time together since I moved to Oklahoma to work for the University Institute, so this will be great.

Oh, yeah, some idiot archaeologist I met in the casino wants me to take a trip to the desert with him to check out some prehistoric rocks that he says hold magical powers. I have no clue how he found me, unless it was through Corey -- my secretary has a big mouth, but considering she's a Work Study student, I'm lucky to even have her.

And once I return home, my boss at the Institute has me assigned to check out some damned sarcophagus that NASA is helping to recover from the Atlantic Ocean. Raise the Titanic again, Clive Cussler. Betcha we don't find near the stash those folks did. But what if... just what if there really was something of interest in the bowels of that old ship that would be worth discovering and examining? I mentioned it to Mimi, considering she used to do this sort of thing for a living, only with more primitive tools than I have. She was more than a little intrigued when I told her which ship. I know nothing about The Athenia, but she seems to think it'll be an adventure and even asked if she could go with me!

I feel strange keeping a journal again, like I'm in elementary school once more. I know that females are famous for their diaries, from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf, Anne Frank to just about every celebrity in Hollywood and New York, but it's been so long since I've taken the time to express how I really feel about something that I feel out of place. I've been so busy having a life that when I look back on it, there doesn't seem to be much to say about it. I grew up, went to college, worked ... What else is there to say other than how I feel? That alone is scary.

If I did as my co-worker, Kathryn Blum, at the university suggested, I'd never write anything at all. She said that journals have a two-fold purpose, to record for the owner and to reveal to the reader. Hell, if I wanted to do that, I'd just lie. I'd make up shit that would confound Einstein if all I wanted was to say something. It's not saying something that matters anyway -- it's having something to say. Besides, I've heard too many girlfriends over the years bitch because somebody found their diary and read what was meant to be private.

Considering I barely knew my mother, much less had to worry about her snooping, I have a hard time identifying with them.

So if it's meant to be private, why record it? Are we afraid we'll all wind up having Alzheimer's? Do we just want to revisit the past? Gimme a break. If my present was worth recording, I wouldn't feel the need to make up anything in the first place, and if I was afraid someone might actually read my dreck, why the fuck would I tell the truth and incriminate myself?

Perplexing situation. Maybe I'll just buy a dream journal instead and record the crap that pops into my head when I'm sleeping. Kathryn has a theory on that as well. "We don't remember because we're afraid to recall what our 'spirit guides' tell us." Again, Big Fucking Deal. If they're so powerful, let the spirits manifest and send me a memo I can look back on when I'm feeling in need of enlightenment.

Although that good-looking archaeologist does seem strangely familiar ...

So how do I feel? I feel confident in my work -- my work and Mimi are my life. I feel secure that my relationship with my grandmother is on solid ground. She's the only family I've had since I was a small girl. I hate it that I'm too busy (or too picky) to date. I love it that I can go home, kick off my shoes, and do as I wish, whether it's to eat a quart of my favorite rum raisin uninterrupted on my new Italian leather sofa or watch re-runs of Law & Order. I feel frustrated as hell that I have no one special to share the non-television and ice cream moments, not even a dog or a cat.

Nora stared at her leather-bound journal, a gift to herself the last time she'd shopped at her favorite World Market Treasures in Union Square, St. Louis. She'd taken the city bus rather than a cab, against Mimi's wishes, soaked up the colorful scenery, and acted just like a sightseeing tourist, rather than someone who had spent her youth in the city.

The journal was one more attempt at recapturing her childhood, before her parents were killed in an auto accident, and she wound up staying with her maternal grandmother. Nora had always loved the quirky old bird, even if Darcy Blanco was eccentric to the extreme. And Nora had been sad when Darcy chose to stay in St. Louis rather than accompany her to Oklahoma City when the job with the University's forensics department more or less fell into her lap. She'd missed her grandmother, but even the three days prior to their trip had been traumatic. St. Louis was where her parents had died that winter evening when they were all on their way home from a New Year's Eve party. Too many memories. Nora hadn't been able to travel by car since without panicking, though her grandmother had mastered their shared fear of automobiles.

"One thing's for certain." Nora ran her fingers over what she'd written. "Your penmanship certainly hasn't improved over the years." Years of using computers had weakened her writing skills. She barely recognized her own handwriting.

"Did you say something, dear?" Her grandmother's voice rang over the sounds of water emitting from the shower.

"Just talking to myself." Nora shook her head. The old girl still had 20/20 eyesight and exceptional hearing for a woman her age.

Some idiot archaeologist ... The words she'd written made her smile. Ken Turner didn't look like an idiot -- he only talked like one. With that sinfully delicious shock of black hair and dark eyes that practically stripped her when he looked at her, he appeared more sheik than shyster, but Nora suspected his motives for wanting her to travel ninety miles north with him. If he'd just been some hunk in a bar, she'd have probably connected with him, but finding out he'd tracked her across country gave her the heebie-jeebies.

Just thinking of his swarthy appearance, snappy dark eyes, and shocking behavior made her twat twitch. She'd bet he was a good lay, even if he did act stuffy.

Nora looked up from her journal as Darcy opened the door from the bathroom, cinching a white robe at the waist. Rubbing her hair vigorously with a fluffy monogrammed towel, her grandmother sat on the bed across from her and crossed her legs. "I see you're already recording some of your adventures. Did you include the part about that young man?"

"What young man?" Nora blinked innocently.

Darcy snorted. "Okay, be coy if you must. I thought he was charming. Maybe it's because he read and quoted something from my old articles on Alexandria and Luxor -- even we old girls have our vanity. Besides, he went to a great deal of trouble to find you, to track you here. I'm betting it's his first time in Las Vegas, because he seems lost."

"Yes, and my secretary back home has a lot to answer for once I return. I thought he was obnoxious."

"Persistent." Darcy wrapped the towel about her head and demanded a cigarette.

"Mimi, you should quit smoking. You've already had two heart attacks."

"And you should never have started, but we're in a city known for vices, so don't bust my balls." Darcy held out her hand and waggled her fingers insistently.

Nora bit her lips as she handed over a pack of menthols and a lighter. Her grandmother's language had always been colorful; not likely that it'd change just because she was approaching her late seventies. Having grown up in Chicago and then having traipsed all over northern Africa in the company of men, Darcy had learned how to swear, smoke, and saunter like a man, which was saying something, considering she'd been born in the thirties.

"What was your father like?" Nora couldn't help but ask. She'd been thinking of the old geezer for the past two weeks, and somehow being in a luxurious hotel depicting Egyptian artifacts had only served to heighten her curiosity.

"Dad was a big man. Scared the shit out of everyone but me, I think." Darcy took a deep drag off of the cigarette and chuckled. "Of course, I never knew Mom ... she died right after I was born. But all the women we encountered seemed to think he was handsome. The

men on the expeditions liked him, but they seemed wary of him, too. He was always moving, restless, never sitting for long or standing when he could be walking.”

Darcy narrowed her eyes and studied her granddaughter shrewdly. “Oh. You mean his work, not him.”

Nora blushed. “Of course, I’m interested in him as a person, not just ...” She paused, relented. “Okay. I’d like to hear more about that last trip. Right before he died.”

Darcy stood and walked about the room, sniffing the roses in the vase on the dresser, her fingers picking through a newspaper as she talked, staring out of their hotel window onto the view of the grounds below. “I wondered when you’d get around to this. You’re referring to the curse, right?”

“If you want to call it that.”

“I do. Everyone scoffed when Dad and the others found that sarcophagus and everyone involved started dying. But Dad knew ... he told me right before he died that Hatshepsut hadn’t wanted to be disturbed, that some treasures were never meant to be found. That’s why he insisted that I return her to her home, that I reunite her spirit with Senmut’s.” The older woman’s voice trailed to a whisper, and she dropped the newspaper back onto the table by the window. “Seems I failed them both.”

Nora noted her grandmother’s trembling hands and was immediately ashamed she’d brought up the subject. “It’s not your fault!” She rushed to comfort Darcy.

“Isn’t it?” Darcy offered a sad smile.

Nora shook her head. “How could you possibly have known what would happen?”

“Because Dad told me he’d never reach New York, that the boat would sink.”

“And what were you to do, once it did? Not like you could plumb the depths of the Atlantic yourself, searching for ...” Nora’s voice drifted. She’d almost said *for your father’s remains and that of the sarcophagus*.

“Mimi, Germany declared war, the ship was torpedoed, and all aboard became the first casualties of war. There was nothing you or anyone else could have done to prevent that happening, even if you and your father had the most psychic connection of all time.”

Darcy withdrew her hands from Nora’s and sat on the bed again. “Do you know why I never talk about this? Because you’re so much like your mother. Even my own child refused to believe in the curse. She read the newspaper clippings, heard me discussing the event with her father, but ...” Darcy’s voice became breathy. “You just had to be there.”

Nora could only imagine the horror Darcy and her new husband had endured. One minute they’re standing on England’s shore, waving goodbye to Darcy’s father; hours later they’ve received news that another world war had begun. Artemis Shade, young Darcy’s father, had died on the voyage that would have united Hatshepsut’s sarcophagus with the most prominent forensics specialists of the decade in New York.

“It’s not that I don’t believe you, Mimi.” Nora searched for the right words. “It’s just that, as a scientist, I find it too fantastic to believe that some centuries-old mummy could wreak havoc on all who touched her or saw her.”

“You haven’t studied Hatshepsut as we did. She was that strong, that powerful, the only woman to hold the title of king in Egypt.” Darcy smiled knowingly.

Nora nodded. “I see. That’s why you want me to have dinner with Ken, because he claims to have some artifact from the New Kingdom dynasty.”

“Ah-ha! You do know his name. I thought so.”

Nora growled in exasperation. “All right ... for you ... I’ll talk to him, but I’m not having dinner alone with him -- if you can call it dinner at this hour, and I’m certainly not traveling to those stupid rocks he claims have magical properties ... ley lines or whatever.”

At her grandmother’s expression of disbelief, Nora relented. “Okay, so I’ve heard of them, too -- some type of energy matrix where people claim to have transported through time and space. But where’s their proof?”

“Who needs proof when you have faith?” Darcy countered. “Just like your mother. If you can’t touch it, taste it, smell it, or hear it, you don’t think it exists.” She moaned. “If only I hadn’t lost that trunk. It contained so many photographs ... some of them of what they now refer to as ley lines -- only of the outside, of course. We had no idea back then what they were, but he’s right -- they do hold some form of strange power. My journals were in that trunk, too, not to mention an entire wardrobe I loved.”

“You journaled?” Now Nora’s interest piqued.

“Where do you think you get it from?” Darcy smiled mysteriously. “That’s why I was hoping you’d written about this new man -- I find him quite intriguing. You’ve spent so much time alone since ... the Tom incident.”

Nora snorted. “Incident? He tried to kill me.”

“Well, not all men are assholes. Give this one a chance. He seemed bent on showing you something ... he says it will help your research, remember?”

“I don’t see how. He didn’t claim to be into forensics or even as good an archaeologist as you.”

Darcy folded her arms across her chest.

This time Nora chuckled. “I give up. I’ll phone him -- that make you happy? We’ll all have dinner, we’ll let him discuss his theories, and then I’m coming back up here, and I’m going to sleep. You can spend all the time you like downstairs in the casino, but I’m cashing in early.”

“I know you said that you won’t have dinner alone with him, and while I hate to make a liar out of you, I won’t be joining you, I think.” Darcy walked to the table again, this time picking up the menu for room service. “Long talks bore me, so this one’s all yours. I’d like to order something, then go downstairs.”

Sneaky. Nora almost laughed. “Want me to join you later for drinks?”

Darcy shook her head. “No. I think I prefer to be alone for a while. Too many memories, I suppose, and I’d like to try my hand at roulette.”

Nora placed her hands on her hips. “If you’re not back in the room by midnight, I’m calling security and telling them that you’re a demented old bat who has delusions of mummies chasing you.”

“Old bat? Bah! Worry about yourself.” Darcy pointed to Nora’s purse, a white leather Gucci. “Make sure you take everything you need.” She chuckled. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you without your little kit of picks and knives. Poor Ken has no idea what he’s in for, does he?”

Sadness crept through Nora’s veins. Her grandmother looked tired, despite the shower. “Wouldn’t you rather stay in tonight, both of us? We could go downstairs first, if you like. I know you’ve wanted to visit that bath and body place, the one that has the sea salt and minerals.”

“No, thanks. Maybe tomorrow.”

“How about visiting the spa, getting a massage?”

Again, Darcy declined. “You’re trying to get out of having dinner with that young man. Go on -- have a good time. We can do the spa and shopping tomorrow.” She smiled indulgently. “You’re overworked. You really need this vacation, don’t you?”

“You’re talking about the phone call?” Nora smiled. Her grandmother had been ribbing her ever since they’d reconnected, telling her emphatically that they’d spoken on the phone the previous week.

Nora chalked it up to her grandmother’s declining years. The old dear had imagined that Nora had phoned her from work and that they’d had a strange conversation in which Nora had seemed almost tearful.

“You’ll miss me when I’m gone,” Darcy said, going back towards the bathroom.

“I miss you already.”

* * * * *

Once Darcy left, Nora viewed herself in the bathroom mirror. She had “city girl” written all over her, from her artificially bronzed skin, thanks to her local tanning salon, and artfully applied make-up, to the beauty parlor-enhanced blonde streaks placed judiciously throughout her sable brown hair. Why did Ken Taylor even hazard to think she’d make a hiking companion, someone who wanted to delve into Mother Earth, sift through sand, or climb into crevices that only a wild animal would find comforting?

Unlike her grandmother, Nora’s interests in artifacts lay in examining them once they’d been recovered, not doing the actual discovery.

A cocktail dress would have given her dinner companion the wrong idea. Besides, it was still mid-afternoon, way too early for such a thing. An evening gown would definitely have been over the top. And she avoided anything of a color that would set off the blue of her eyes. She didn’t want Ken thinking of anything but business during their dinner.

She eventually settled on a cream-colored camisole topped by a chocolate cashmere cardigan and a matching pair of slacks. The white Gucci was the only problem, but it was her favorite purse, so rather than switch bags, she donned a pair of white leather pumps that matched the bag.

As for what was inside the purse, Nora knew precisely to what Darcy referred. The “kit” contained a small, platinum set of instruments in a black velvet case that she’d received from her mentor at the university once she’d completed her doctorate. Bruce Champion’s words had been: *You never know when you’ll need to cut through cloth or tape, delicately open or suture a wound, or pick a lock.*

As for the other contents, minimal cosmetics, her cell phone, credit cards, some change, a Monte Blanc pen, and some business cards.

Nora eyed the journal as she prepared to leave. Wouldn't hurt to take her journal in case Ken Taylor bored her shitless and she wound up nursing a drink alone in the bar. If she looked busy enough, maybe others would take the hint that she preferred her own company.

A feeling of trepidation swept over her, and she glanced at her feet. "Fuck." She kicked off the pumps and pulled on her walking shoes. They were leather, they matched the Gucci, and they were serviceable. "Why are you doing this?" She chastised herself as she laced them. "You know you're not willing to go hiking in the moonlight with this dumbass."

Nevertheless, that is precisely how she would present herself ... a woman ready for anything. The caveman was gorgeous enough ... maybe a bit overzealous, so let him think she was adventurous, only with a little luck he'd take her to bed rather than Bedrock.

* * * * *

While waiting on her date to meet her in front of the Giza Galleria, Nora perused the merchandise, her keen eye noting the magnificent detail of the replicas on the other side of the glass separating her from the inside of the Treasure Chamber. She made a mental note to revisit before they left and to stock up on a few books and videos so that she and her grandmother could have some entertaining reminiscences about their vacation. Nora wished she'd spent more time reading up on her grandmother's passion for Egypt before they'd left for Las Vegas.

"The biography on Hatshepsut is especially good."

Nora glanced into the glass before her to see the reflection of her dinner date. Like her, he'd dressed down a bit and was wearing similar attire -- shirt, slacks, jacket, and slip-on shoes in solid colors and complimentary browns. Nora bit her lips to keep from smiling broadly. *We look like a Banana Republic advertisement.*

"Do we have time for me to buy it?" Nora edged closer to the doorway, hoping he'd acquiesce.

“Of course.” Ken ushered her through the entrance and guided her towards a section of books, then browsed, letting his fingertips play against their spines before claiming one.

“Here it is.”

Nora flipped through it, her eyes lighting on a passage with a quote by one of the Egyptian potters who had sculpted for the queen. *I will make you to be the first of all living creatures, you will rise as king of Upper and of Lower Egypt, as your father Amon, who loves you, did ordain.*

“King ... not queen. Interesting.” Nora clasped the book. “Thanks for the recommendation. This will be my reading material tonight after we return.”

The look her companion gave her seemed to hold amusement, almost as if he doubted she’d have time for reading. “At least the book is small enough to fit into your purse. It’d be a shame for you to lose it tonight, to leave it in the car.”

“Car?” She panicked. “I thought we were having dinner in the hotel.” Nora nodded in the direction of one of the ground floor restaurants.

“With your permission, I’d like to take you some place nicer. I’ve made reservations across town.” Ken’s dark chocolate eyes caressed her skin.

“Okay, okay ... I can do this.” This one wouldn’t have to work too hard to get her to agree to anything, even if it meant she’d have to conquer her fear of metal death traps. She just hoped he was a good driver.

Nora wet her lips self-consciously and nodded. “I need to be back here by ten o’clock, though. My grandmother needs me.”

“I understand.” He placed a hand at her back and guided her out of the hotel and toward the parking lot.

This is nuts. Nora’s heart thumped against her chest, and her breathing became more rapid the closer they came to his car. What if he was some pervert, only luring her to her

doom? He could be a rapist, a thief, a would-be murderer like her ex-husband, for all she knew.

She halted before they reached the vehicle. "Wait. I don't feel comfortable about this." Ken was definitely intriguing, as Darcy had suggested. His manners were impeccable, his speech polished, his demeanor unthreatening. Nothing sinister, yet she felt uncomfortable. He'd never initiated sexual moves, but his eyes held an ocean of mysterious, unexplained depths of passion. Maybe it was just for his work, some passion that didn't even pertain to her.

His hand was still gently touching her back. Now he moved it upward to cup the back of her head, his fingers threading through her hair, drawing her face closer to his. "I was hoping you wanted this, to discover what I have to show you."

"I thought you were taking me to dinner."

"I am -- but there's something important you need to see first."

Nora swallowed, frightened, wanting him to kiss her, afraid he wouldn't. Longing to plumb the secrets he held, yet appalled by her own desire. "You must have wanted desperately to see me if you followed me over a thousand miles."

"Actually, I wanted to meet your grandmother -- I hadn't given much thought to you until I arrived in Las Vegas."

Startled, Nora stepped back, forcing him to release his hold on her. "*My grandmother?*"

"Come ... we're almost there. Part of what I have to show you is in my car."

Car -- there was that word again. Nora hesitated.

"Come closer." Ken beckoned with a hand.

"No."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't like cars."

“But I have the key -- it won’t move unless I turn on the key.”

“I don’t like strange men either. Okay?”

He seemed to chuckle. “I won’t hurt you.”

He didn’t look like the type of man who’d suffocate her and haul her into his vehicle. He hadn’t threatened her in any way. She still held back. “I’ll stand at the nose while you get whatever you have inside of it.”

He nodded. “Fair enough.” He pointed to a bright red SUV. “That’s it.”

When he walked towards it, she followed, stopping a couple of feet in front of it while he unlocked a door and retrieved a well-worn leather satchel that looked like some prop for an Indiana Jones movie.

Ken reached inside and pulled out what appeared to be a book. Upon further inspection, Nora noticed the gold-embossed lettering on the front. *Gwendolyn Shade*.

She blinked. Shade ... her great-grandfather’s last name, Darcy’s maiden name. But who was Gwendolyn? “I don’t understand.”

“Your grandmother’s diary, no?” He looked at Nora expectantly.

“No. Her name is Darcy.”

“Read the first page.” He handed her the book.

Gwendolyn Darcelle Shade, June 15, 1939, for her 16th birthday. Love, Poppy. “But ...” Nora studied the journal in her hands. “That would make her ... no. My grandmother is only in her seventies. This can’t be hers.”

“Have you ever seen a copy of her birth certificate?”

“What? No ... but ...”

“Driver’s license?”

“She doesn’t drive anymore. She has a chauffeur ... or she takes a taxi if he’s off work.”

“Then how do you explain this?” Ken opened to a page in the middle, where someone had attached a faded photograph by means of triangular-shaped, glued-on frame holders. The scene was obviously somewhere in a desert, with ...

Nora squinted and peered more closely. Pyramids in the background? Then she studied the people, a tall, reed-thin man with blond hair, in shirtsleeves and trousers, sporting a wide-brimmed hat reminiscent of the thirties. The woman next to him was only a couple inches shorter, wearing similar attire, including the hat.

“I can’t tell who they are by this.”

Ken pulled the photograph from its secured holders and flipped it over. In the same flowing handwriting as the rest of what Nora could see on the journal were the words *Max & Darcy White, September 10, 1944, Luxor.*

Nora shook, from her pedicure to her mascara. “Max ... he ... was my grandfather -- that is, Max Blanco was. But this can’t be!” She grabbed the photo and scanned it. “Mimi claims that she’s only seventy-six, not eighty-six! If this is true, then she was born in the early nineteen-twenties!”

“What is it you’re having the most difficulty believing?” Ken took the photo from her trembling fingers and placed it securely back into its place within the journal. “That she’s older than she says she is, or that you’re viewing something of hers from her past?”

“Both!” Nora’s hands flew to her face. “I just can’t believe this.” But it was evidently true. “Why would she lie to me?”

“Has she actually told you her age?”

“No-o-o.” Nora thought a moment. “Well, yes. I mean, I saw her marriage certificate to Grandpa Max -- it said she was twenty-six when they married, not sixteen.”

“Did you ever question this?”

“Of course not!” Nora felt ten different kinds of fool. Darcy hadn’t lied to her specifically. But why the subterfuge?

“Climb into the car.” Ken’s words were more command than request, but Nora did as he said, wanting to know more of her grandmother.

“If you’re tricking me ...” She buckled her seatbelt, still having misgivings.

“I’m not. You need to see this.”

Nora’s mind raced. Max White? How did they ... aah. They married in Mexico. Blanco ... white ... White. What manner of quirky game had her grandmother been playing during the past half-century? Nora winced as the Lincoln Navigator lurched, and Ken stomped the brakes none too gently before easing onto the highway.

“Been driving long?” She couldn’t suppress the sarcasm.

“Not really.” His eyes darted from the dashboard to the rearview mirror. “Give me a horse or camel any day.”

Oh, shit! Nora’s eyes widened. “You’re not from around here, are you?”

“Right again.”

The situation called for nicotine. She fished in the Gucci for her gold cigarette case. Opening the item, she offered him a cigarette, but he shook his head.

“I took you for a smoker.” She rolled down her window and fumbled for her lighter.

“I do -- just not ... those things.”

Okay, so maybe he rode twelve-foot high animals and smoked pot ... or worse; plus he had tracked her to Nevada to rendezvous with her grandmother, yet she was allowing him to drive her into the desert, far past city limits. *There had better be a restaurant within the next couple of miles!* And here she thought he was the crazy one -- she was as nutty as he was evidently, if she could suspend her disbelief to the point that she’d even leave the hotel with him.

“How did you find me?” She had to ask.

He waited until they were outside the city limits before he seemed relaxed enough to talk while driving, which gave her little comfort. "I found a large suitcase filled with your grandmother's personal items."

"Uh-huh. Where?"

He cut her a glance. "Where ...?"

"Were you in the States when you stumbled across this ...? It was a steamer trunk, by the way."

"I was in Alexandria. The trunk, as you call it, was being stored." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I was trapped ... that is lost ... and the people who found me had it in one of their facilities."

Nora demanded clarification. "This is all so vague. Can you be more precise? You were lost? *In Egypt?* What sort of facilities?"

"You'll see."

"Not if it means hopping a flight to Egypt tonight."

Ken looked at the sky and smiled. "We have plenty of daylight left before we arrive, so tell me about yourself."

"Well, I don't ride camels; I've never been to Egypt; I've just discovered that my grandmother is pushing ninety; and I hate cars, so what else do you want to know? You seem to know more about me than I do you. You talk."

"As you wish." His shoulders were tense, as if he was unsure of the path they traveled. "I was born in Greece, not Egypt, and I've only been in America a few months."

"Have you been to this place before?" Nora's concern was rapidly developing into panic. "Because you don't seem too sure about anything other than yourself."

At that, he smiled again. "You think I'm self-assured?"

"Don't dodge the damn question. How did you find out about this place, and where the fuck are you taking me?"

“Fuck. I’ve heard that word often here.”

“Okay, so we’ve established that you aren’t American.” Nora turned in her seat as far as the seatbelt would allow so that she could watch him as they talked. “You’re evasive as hell, and you don’t like chit chat. *Who are you?*”

“My name is Khuamen, nephew of Senmut.”

She glared. “Never heard of you.” *And how quaint that he gives his name followed by that of another relative!*

He indicated the book in her purse. “You can read about me in there.”

Finally ... something concrete. “You wrote the book?” She pulled it out of her bag and flipped through the table of contents, dedication, and acknowledgments. “I don’t see your name.”

“Inside ... a few pages.”

Puzzled, Nora continued browsing. “Did you contribute? I still don’t see your name.”

“Damn it! There seems to be someone following us.”

Alarmed, Nora whirled to look over her shoulder. “What? Are you sure?”

“The car is white, shorter than this one.” Ken studied the rearview mirror. “I don’t see them now.”

“Turn around -- go back. This was a bad idea, anyway.” Nora reached for another cigarette almost as soon as she had disposed of the first. “I don’t want to do this. It’s just too creepy.”

“No.”

She stared at him, shocked. “*No?*”

“We should be there within an hour.”

Of all the nerve! “So you’re kidnapping me?” *I knew it -- I mutherfucking knew it.*

“Do you wish to discover your grandmother’s secrets or not?”

"I'll ask her when we get back to the hotel. Turn the car around."

"No."

Now she was frightened. If she didn't think he'd wreck, killing them both, she'd have burned him with the lighter or hit him, but at seventy miles-per-hour with no one around save some stalker behind them that she couldn't see, the thought wasn't palatable.

"I've crossed oceans, time, and two deserts to find you," the stranger behind the wheel confessed. "I'll not lose you now."

"I thought you said you came for my grandmother."

The growl in his voice deepened and seemed to waft into her. "I did, until I saw you."

Christ, he *was* crazy. She was the captive of a madman who thought he'd time-traveled. Nora's vision blurred as she sought a reprieve, anything to keep them from reaching their destination. Her suddenly dry throat and mouth gave her the incentive for a plan.

"We need to stop for something to drink -- I didn't bring anything, and I tend to dehydrate quickly."

He thumbed towards the back seat. "There's a thermos of tea behind you. I haven't drunk from it, so you're safe from catching any germs. Your people seem to have a great fear of them."

Not germs so much as vermin. Nora, nevertheless, sought the thermos. Maybe she could bang him on the head, bash his nose, give herself a head start once they'd stopped.

"Drink. You'll feel better." His words were more of a command than a suggestion or request.

"Why not?" Her trembling hands poured a couple of ounces of the liquid into the cap that secured the container. "Too bad it's not laced with Jack Daniels."

"Who?"

“Not who. Oh, never mind.” She sipped, surprised at the sweetness, and then took a good, long swallow, the act of doing something mundane in extraordinary circumstances calming her somewhat.

“What’s in the tea?” She recapped the thermos, feeling suddenly drowsy. “It’s ... soothing ... yet ...” *Oh, God!* “You ...?”

“I studied with an herbalist before coming for you. He assured me that it’s harmless. It will only make you sleepy for a short time. Relax -- we’re almost there.”

Chapter Two

I've been taken prisoner by a sheik-like shit with mesmerizing eyes and a bad attitude. He walked on an ocean or swam a desert or something to get to me. He still hasn't fed me dinner as promised.

Dear God, I'm not writing in my journal; I'm dreaming -- I have to be.

Nora tried looking at her hands through her dream, searching for some tangible validation that she existed and hadn't imagined the fuzzy recollections her brain flashed. When she realized she was still sitting up, she reached for her seatbelt, only to find that she was no longer in Ken's Lincoln. "What the fuck?"

"There's that word again." His voice taunted her somewhere to her left.

"Where am I?" Her hands connected with sandy rock on either side of her.

"We're at the entrance to the ley lines." He chuckled. "I had to learn a lot of English before I could find the right words for them."

Nora was pissed off to the max. "Did you happen to learn a few other words during your studies, such as *prison*, *green card*, *purgatory*? Because I'm sending you straight to hell as soon as I get out of here!"

“Lower your voice -- we’re still being followed.”

Nora’s eyes finally focused, and in the moonlight she could see him standing in relief against a large boulder, looking into the distance like a hunter waiting on his prey. Only he had no weapons that she could see. “If you’re so certain someone is tailing us, why not just stay in the car and drive to the nearest police station?”

Ken turned to face her. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you? You still think you’re in danger ... from me.”

“Well, gee, Sherlock, I wonder why?” Nora couldn’t help but raise her voice. “Do you have any idea of the legal ramifications of your actions today? I could have your ass in a federal prison, with you locked up so tightly that even Anwar Sadat rising from his grave couldn’t spirit you away.”

“Who is Anwar Sadat?”

“You’ve never heard of the Islamic Conference? The Arab League?” The anger and bile rising in Nora’s chest nearly exploded. “You’re not from Egypt or from another place or time -- you’re from another fucking planet!”

“That word again ... you must help me understand its many uses some time.”

She screamed in frustration, and he was immediately before her, clamping a hand to her mouth and jerking her body to his. “I told you to keep your voice low!”

Nora jerked free, with barely enough time to tell him to kiss her ass, when he crushed his lips to hers in an embrace that threatened to ignite every cell in her body.

“Do I feel like an alien?” His hands cupped her breasts as he leaned against her, with her back against the rock. “Would an alien find your flesh so engaging that it tormented him every time he looked at you?”

Ken kissed her again, this time with a punishing lip-lock that rendered Nora senseless. One of his hands reached to grip the back of her head as he’d done in the parking lot at the

Luxor, while the other slid smoothly between her belly and her trousers until his fingers dipped into her pussy, causing her to gasp in alarm.

"I know you better than you know yourself," he said, kissing her again. "You are wet, like other women ... but your sex smells different." He pulled out his hand and licked his fingers. "You taste differently. Sweeter. Which means you don't eat meat."

Shocked by the events of the past few seconds, Nora stammered, "What do you want from me?"

"Not from you ... with you." The timbre of his voice deepened with each syllable. "You were meant for me. This *khat*, your physical form, appeals to me, but it's your *sekhem*, your corporeal spirit, that I recognize and cherish most. I saw it before I left home, and I've seen it since finding you here. That never changes."

"You're insane!" This time her voice was low, breathy, nothing that could possibly enrage him or make him feel she'd compromised their position to whoever Ken thought was following them ... but once the words escaped her lips, Nora was sure she'd said the wrong thing.

"You don't believe me, but you will." He lifted his face skyward and gazed at the stars for a brief moment. "Just a few more minutes, and then you'll see. You'll believe."

She refused to cry, no matter how badly her body shook, and her mind screamed for release. Nora knew instinctively that pleading with him would be futile. Whatever it was that sent him to her, he firmly believed in his purpose here, so trying to discourage him would be a waste of her energy. "Y-you've met my ... spirit before?"

"Many times, but only in passing. My uncle may be your mother's lover, but you are still royalty, not for me."

Ah. So now she was not only Egyptian, but royalty? From what Arab asylum had Ken - or Khuamen, as he'd referred to himself -- escaped? Where had he seen her photo or read about her? How had he tracked her? All of the publications she'd written were for trade

magazines, high-brow affairs, nothing that would wind up in a nut ward, no matter how educated the inmates or their keepers.

“You think I’m of royal blood?” She hated to speak to him only in questions, but for the life of her, Nora couldn’t formulate a conversation that made any sense.

“Not purely. I suspect you are my uncle’s daughter, not Thutmose’s.”

If Mother Earth hadn’t been supporting her, Nora would have fallen. Good God Almighty, somehow she’d become a royal bastard in his mind, *and* related to him? How incredible, incestuous, and inexplicable. She stifled a bubble of hysterical laughter. He couldn’t be serious.

“I have one other piece of information that should clear up any misunderstandings.” Ken reached into a jacket pocket and produced what looked like an artifact made of clay. “A *shabti*, the physical embodiment of a spirit to assist the dead once they’re buried.”

“Please tell me that’s not mine.” Nora knew that her mind was about to snap. Royal, she could handle. Related to him was iffy. But dead?

“It was your grandmother’s.”

“That does it.” Nora shoved against him, struggling to push him on his ass so that she could stand, babbling as she strained to free herself. “My grandmother may be a few years closer to the grave than I’d first imagined, but she’s *not* dead!” She snatched the Gucci from the ground beside her and hugged it against her ribs, shaking the index finger of her free hand in his face. “First, I’m gonna walk to the highway and hail the first Rattle-ac Cadillac that passes by, and then I’m phoning the police. And you are in big trouble, buster. I’ll teach you to fuck with me. You’ll be sipping tea through a straw next time I see your sorry ass!”

Ken grasped her shoulders and shook her gently. “This was in the suitcase ... the trunk. It was one of her possessions.”

“You still haven’t explained ...”

“I’m trying! You must listen, though. Once we’re in the ley lines, we have to orchestrate our thoughts, join them. We both must think of the same thing. Egypt.”

“I’m not thinking anything except that you’re out of your fucking mind!” She laughed hysterically. “And if you want me to conjugate the word, go ... fuck yourself! I don’t have time for this shit!”

“Well, well.” An all-too familiar voice rang through the night air.

Nora looked into the glare of a flashlight, unable to see more than his form, but she knew who stood a mere ten yards from them. She gouged Ken in the ribs hard with an elbow. “You’re in this with *him*? You *led* him to me?”

“I’ve never met him!” Ken defended himself.

“That son of a bitch tried to kill me!” Nora’s anger overrode her common sense. For all she knew, Tom Warren could have a gun. At this point, she really didn’t give a damn. Cursing herself for even getting into the Lincoln with Ken, she tried to run. Ken’s quick reflexes stopped her.

Spinning her around to face him, he narrowly missed the slap across the face she attempted to deliver. Hard. The force with which she swung nearly landed her on the ground again.

“Who is this man?” Ken asked, recovering as Nora regained her balance.

“As if you don’t know. Were you cellmates or something? Is that how you met?”

Ken pulled her behind him, facing Tom menacingly. “I’ve never seen him before today. I told you in the car that we were being followed.”

Nora peeked around one of Ken’s massive shoulders, muttering. “Right. Whatever. Fucking assholes, the both of you.” Then her voice was practically a shout. “The hotel has security, even in the parking lot, Thomas!”

“So?”

“So they’ll catch you, scumbag! That insurance policy no longer exists, anyway, so you’re doing all of this for nothing.”

Her ex-husband seemed to find the situation funny, because he laughed. “That is so like you, Nora, never seeing anything but artifacts and facts, never taking into consideration emotions.”

“Like love?” She knew she was goading him but couldn’t help herself.

“Like revenge, sweetheart. Pure, simple, sweet revenge.”

Now she was clinging to Ken’s arms, not avoiding them, shaking as she heard the madness in Tom’s voice. “You put yourself in jeopardy, Tom -- nobody forced you to attempt murder.”

“You were so easy.” Tom’s words mocked her. “Poor little rich girl, nobody understood how lonely she was after her parents’ deaths, how desperate she was for some man to rescue her from her miserable, solitary life of Starbucks every morning and Pizza Hut every evening. You didn’t even have a life until I came along, so who will miss you? Your grandmother? That old bat has one foot in the grave already.”

Nora heard the distinctive click of metal sliding into place, followed by a menacing growl. Tom indeed intended to kill her, purely as revenge for having helped send him to prison. Once he killed her -- and Ken -- he’d probably go after Darcy. Well, fuck that. If this was to be her last moment on earth, she’d go down fighting, not begging for her life.

“First you -- then your new boyfriend.” The pitch of Tom’s voice indicated that he indeed intended to kill them both. “With his prints on the gun afterwards, I’m free of you at last.”

Nora shrieked, despite her resolve to remain calm, not give Tom the satisfaction of knowing he’d finally succeeded in frightening her. She nudged Ken from behind as one of his hands snaked out to grasp hers. “You gonna just stand there and let him shoot you?”

Ken knocked her sideways, still clutching her hand as the first shot exploded near them. When she started to go around him, Ken pushed her aside, clasping one of her wrists and locking it to his chest. "When I tell you to inhale, breathe deeply."

"What?" She struggled to free herself, fully intending to run.

"Do as I say!" He held up the artifact, the *shabti*, as he'd called it, and blew against it, the air in his lungs whooshing forth with a force strong enough to stir up dust particles that must've collected within or on the object. An odd, small tornado of a fine, glittery substance flew from the object's nostrils. "*Now -- inhale!*"

Nora gasped, more out of reaction to Ken jerking on her body than from obeying his instructions. The dust tickled her nose, and she felt as though she would sneeze. When she tried to call out to him, her voice was mute, without so much as a whisper escaping her lips. She heard him call, as if in a distant fog, *Think of Egypt*.

The earth beneath them trembled. *Fuck. An earthquake? At this hour, in this place?* Nora lost her balance, but instead of falling to the ground, she felt herself dangling, then tumbling, as if in a vacuum, with air rushing past her even as it seemed to cushion her, holding her suspended.

The only certainty was Ken's hand clasping her wrist, his fingers working their way to lace with hers, his eyes locking with hers during a tornadic kaleidoscope of desert pastels that enveloped them. Nora tried focusing on her hands, as she had when she thought she was dreaming. She felt Ken's flesh pressing against hers, but she couldn't lift their joined hands upward -- it was as if they were suspended ... in time and place.

The realization that she could think was comforting, even if her body wouldn't obey her thoughts. Was this a ley line? Was this the energy field he'd tried describing to her when they first spoke? There were no enclosures, and this was no tunnel. The landscape seemed to change rapidly, and she couldn't feel her feet touching terra firma, but she knew they had to be in the same place they'd been moments before the earth shook.

Then she remembered his last word before all sound save the wind ... *Egypt*. She looked into his eyes and knew he was willing her to focus on the same thing he was. Although she couldn't close her eyes, she concentrated, blotting out the colors and the wind, and soon her field of vision only held Ken's face. For all she knew, it was their only hope of escaping a madman ... but at what price?

A soft, golden light seemed to surround him, and the same light must've shone on her, because her eyes were dazzled by the brilliant, growing intensity. He was the only rock she could count on, evidently, so she steeled herself not to lose sight of him. Her body grew hot, as if she was in a sauna, with the air entering her lungs so dry that it hurt to breathe.

Every cell within her seemed to melt into a comforting peace. Was she dying? Had Tom shot them? Why couldn't she focus any longer?

* * * * *

Suddenly the colors melded into azure, and the temperature of the air dropped considerably. Her body still felt warm, but the air about her was definitely chilled. Nora's eyes adjusted to the quicksilver vibrancy of desert pinks, rose, peach, and browns to that of blues that surrounded them like a canopy. She glanced at her feet, and there was still nothing but blue, as if they were walking on air.

"Don't let go!"

Nora jumped. Had Ken spoken? She stared at him intently. He was the only solid entity around in a swirling mist of blue, and the blue was in constant motion, making her dizzy. Let go? Was he insane? She didn't care if he was the Butcher of Baghdad. Fuck that.

Then Ken grinned, as if he'd heard her thoughts. Nora jumped again as she felt more than heard him say *There's that word again*. She blinked. Telepathic thought? Impossible.

Her lips parted to form words, but none came out. How could he possibly know what she was thinking? Did he realize what he looked like, with three dimensions of color

surrounding him, as if his physical, ethereal, and astral bodies were all present at once, glowing with his energy?

She glanced at their arms, outstretched, and she thrilled to see that her own body held the same distinctions ... same colors, only different, vibrating, shimmering, as if she, too, was some entity other than herself.

He tugged on her hand, and she seemed to float rather than walk closer to him. When they were side by side, he bent and looked into her eyes. Then she realized that there were no sounds around them, only silence. She was locked into some form of mental telepathy with him, and as they moved smoothly together, his body heat was the only thing grounding her.

The lights she'd first seen became more distinctive ... orbs, some pale, others brilliant. Then they came more clearly into focus, and Nora shook as they took on familiar celestial shapes, those of moons and suns that seemed to drift over them like so many days, months, years.

Fucking hell. George Orwell was right, only this time machine wasn't constructed by any man.

All sense of time and place escaped her as they traveled, but Nora caught fleeting glimpses of scenes that splayed across her mind like so many frames in a movie. *National Geographic* couldn't have done a better job of reacquainting her with the world. For the first time in her life, all of her senses peaked, each absorbing the places they appeared to inhabit, even if only briefly. It was like being able to breathe underwater, to transform, to modify, to adjust to whatever social climate and physiological stratosphere presented itself.

Some of the sights appalled her, those of war and destruction. Others were peaceful, calm, enticing. All were fantastic, too fleeting for her to grasp and hold. When she slowed, Ken pulled her along.

Nora recognized modern day architectural structures ... those of the Twin Towers of New York City! Her brain quickly surmised that she was either hallucinating or they'd traveled back in time prior to the catastrophe that spiraled her country into another war.

Big Ben! The Eiffel Tower! Nora's eyes misted. Notre Dame, the Blue Mosque! How ...?

Her heartbeat quickened when they approached what appeared to be a narrow, dusty street lined with tall, sandstone structures with open windows and billowing curtains. The air shifted from cool to warm, then hot. Nora gasped as the blue beneath and above them altered radically into tans and browns with a glaring white light whose heat beat upon them unmercifully.

Voices crashed against her ears, the first sounds she'd heard since the little shabti's nostrils had flared, and the gold dust had swarmed about them. Her addled mind searched for meaning in the words. Arabic -- she didn't understand a word of it. She was well and truly fucked now. Foreign country, language barrier, nothing but a Visa and Master Card to help her communicate her desires in order for her to get whatever she needed.

Well, Dorothy. You're no longer in Kansas. There are no red shoes, and Oz is in another part of the world ... if that world still even exists!

Ken's fingers clutching hers tightened. Nora flinched as an invisible sheet of warm air seemingly entered the front of her body and exited her back, leaving her reeling as if she'd just been struck. Every nerve ending in her body came alive, reawakened from the peaceful lull of the journey she'd just traveled, via ... what had Ken called them? Ley lines?

"Sorry." This time his voice was distinctive, absolutely, positively emitting a sound she could hear rather than sense. "I didn't have time to warn you about that first step once we were back among Earth People."

Earth People? What the fuck did that mean, that he thought they'd just descended from outer space? Nora sucked in a huge gulp of air, her stomach doing somersaults while her mind reeled from the shock of new sensations ... spicy aromas in the air, a sun so hot she

felt it in her pubes, much less her bones. She'd have doubled over laughing if she wasn't so scared.

Nora's hands quickly covered her eyes as a wave of displacement washed over her, shattering her equilibrium. Her knees buckled, and Ken's arms were immediately around her, cradling her body to his while he walked ... somewhere ... she really didn't care where, as long as he got her out of the blistering sun.

"I'm killing you." She clutched the front of his shirt and moaned into it as he clasped her. "Just as soon as I get my bearings and can stand on my own -- I'm kicking your sorry ass until your goddamn nose bleeds, and then I'm murdering you."

Nora felt as well as heard the deep, rumbling laughter from Ken's chest. She thumped him weakly with her fists. "I mean it. Where are you taking me?"

Did he just kiss the top of her head?

"I told you I had dinner reservations." His voice was tender, teasing, treacherously sexy.

"Oh. Ri-i-i-ight. Mind if we take Continental, Delta, Qantas, whatever airline next time? I'll even fly with the naked people ... Nude Air."

He shifted her weight in his arms and bound her snugly against him. "You've just made a journey few have lived to mention."

"Somehow this does not thrill me." Finally, the world about her stopped spinning, and her limbs tingled with life as the numbness or shock or whatever had slammed into her wore off. "No. Next time, I want first class treatment -- I want my extra packet of nuts, the mystery meat dinner aboard the plane, and several rounds of drinks to take my mind off of my trip. I am a lot more high maintenance than I thought I was -- thank you for showing me the truth. Now I can die a happy, pampered princess. No more roughing it in the ethers for me."

Ken stopped walking and peered down at her. "I think you can walk now -- we're almost there."

Nora settled uneasily onto her feet, searching for balance in her ever-shifting surroundings, still unsure she'd even made the trip. She blinked against the harsh light above. "We're ... where exactly?"

"Alexandria. My friend's house is only a few blocks from here."

Nora swooned. "Oh, God. I'm sick."

Once again, he caught her, this time, propping her wilting frame against his. "It's only a few more blocks."

"I'm sitting."

"There is no place to sit."

"Then I'm sitting in the street, and I'm having a cigarette."

Ken jerked her by the arms, as if scolding a child. "You must realize where you are. Leave the cigarettes in your purse, and walk with me. I promise, it's not far."

"Screw you, Kermit ... Kenmut, you and your little Sha-la-whatever-it-was that put dirt up my nose in the desert."

He sounded exasperated. "My name is Khuamen, nephew of Senmut, and that object is a shabti."

"Whatever. Shabti, swami, shiatsu, I don't give a damn. You're both toast for putting me in this predicament, and I *will* have a fucking cigarette!"

"Lower your voice, Nora, before you get us both arrested! I *don't* want to hurt you!"

"Fuck you!"

She saw his cocked fist coming at her, but her motor coordination was off, and by the time he connected with her jaw ... it was too late.

* * * * *

“She does not look too well, that one.” A strange man’s voice hovered nearby.

Ken’s baritone was soft, low, rumbling. “She will adjust. When we arrived, she put both our lives in danger, but I doubt she’ll forgive me for that last attempt to silence her.” He stroked her cheek, his face twisted with regret.

Attempt? Nora flexed her jaw, wincing with pain. Who was he kidding?

Her eyes slowly opened. *He knocked me out! That mutherfucker hit me!* She pushed herself away from the knobby-textured material beneath her, groaning as she sat up.

Ken and his companion stared at her, surprise etched on their faces.

“Ken ... whatever your name is ...” Nora sat up and rubbed her temples. “I want a cigarette, and I want it now. And if you tell me to shut up or hit me ever again, I swear to God and all that is holy to make you pay dearly.”

Thankfully, he complied, handing her the Gucci, then stepping back and watching her. “Forgive me -- I truly meant no harm. But you were drawing attention to us -- to yourself -- and I didn’t want you harmed. Simply shouting at a man as you were me could land you in a lot of trouble.”

Nora lit her smoke, inhaling deeply and crossing her legs. “Where the fuck am I?”

He smiled indulgently. “Alexandria, in the home of my friend, George.”

“George.” Nora nodded and offered their host a weak, insincere smile. “Arabs with Americanized names. I’m buying this. Right.”

She surveyed the room. Middle Eastern artifacts, cotton and silk pillows tossed against the long, narrow seat where she’d been reclining when she awakened. A laptop computer and a depressingly dark wooden chair in some corner workstation. At least Ken hadn’t tried convincing her that they were back in time. She cocked her head, returning her gaze to access his stony stare, smoking fiendishly. “Care to enlighten me?”

"There is no need for sarcasm." He looked at her sternly. "You are in a different country, a different set of circumstances, and you will remember to keep your eyes and voice lowered outside this room if you value your life."

"I see. Do I at least get a phone call, to let my grandmother know I'm alive? I might be missed, you know."

Ken shook his head. "Your grandmother isn't aware you're gone -- in her time, it is still the moment you met me for an early dinner."

"A dinner I still haven't eaten. And what do you mean she won't miss me, that it's still the same time? We've surely been gone for hours!"

George snapped his fingers, and a portly woman wearing a plain, sand-colored hijab entered the room, displeasure clearly etched on her face until George said something to her in Arabic. Then she nodded and scurried back to wherever she'd been.

"You are hungry," he told Nora. "Lunch should be served within the hour. We didn't know when to expect you." His last words were apologetic. "We haven't mastered the rudiments of traveling the ley lines well enough to judge distance and time yet."

"Lunch?" Nora couldn't help but giggle. "Because of the time zone?"

Ken looked from George to her. "Because you've been sleeping the past twelve hours. It's after two o'clock."

"You're really playing this out, aren't you?" Nora chuckled. How dare they try duping her like this?

Ken seemed puzzled. "Pardon me?"

"You really expect me to believe that we're in Egypt instead of ..." She waved her hands around the room. "Oh, it's convincing -- I'll give you that. But c'mon! Egypt?"

"And where do you think you are if not North Africa?"

"It's still the fucking desert, obviously!" Nora stood and, upon standing, wished she hadn't. Her legs felt wobbly, as if they'd buckle.

Ken rushed to help her, against her wishes, back onto the couch. “Don’t be foolish. You saw ... you were there with me inside the ley lines.”

“Was I really? Or was I simply doped up somehow, what with that fairy dust or whatever that you blew into my face?” She sunk into the cushions tiredly. “All I know is that I want to go home. NOW!”

“Impossible. You must come with me.”

“I *am* with you, twit! You’ve got me -- I’m here! But you still haven’t told me why you kidnapped me!” *This borders on the ridiculous.* Whatever it was he intended, he’d better explain himself before she snapped and did something foolish, like scream.

Ken clasped his hands and bent his head towards her, peering into her eyes. “First, we eat. Then I’ll show you -- I’ll prove to you that you are in Alexandria. In return, you must promise me that you’ll hear me out and consider my proposal.”

Nora’s body was weak and her mind verging on hysteria, but she nodded, and her usual smartass flippancy surfaced. “You’ll propose? Then what? Tom will appear to save the day? My deranged ex-husband will spirit me away?”

“He never made it into the ley lines. I’d have sensed him if he’d traveled with us.”

Nora was out of repartee and hadn’t a clue on how to escape. So what if he offered lunch instead of dinner? A meal was a meal, and she could formulate a plan of action once her blood pressure lowered, her glucose increased, and her emotional batteries recharged.

Chapter Three

Not that I believe anything he says, but according to the recipe Ken translated for me, lunch was Asabi' gullash bi-l-lahma, some form of dry pastry fingers with a meat filling. Tasted like a spicy goulash wrapped in a Hot Pocket to me, but what the fuck do I know? I'm just a tourist. He and George seem intent on convincing me that I'm in Egypt, so they've promised me something that will irrefutably prove where I am, once the meal has settled and the sun isn't so hot. I'd have packed a bag if I'd known I'd be gone this damn long, but I wasn't given an option. Will try recording what I see and hear in hopes that the FBI can catch these bastards once I'm safe. Still, I do wish I had the recipe for our dessert, some form of blackberry meringue.

They know I have this journal and that I'm writing about what's going on, yet they don't seem alarmed in the least, which surprises me. What kind of criminal allows his captive to take notes during the abduction??? Weird.

Ken is sleeping, but George is keeping watch over me, so I don't dare act like anything is wrong. If I so much as dart my eyes towards the window, he stiffens, alert, ready for whatever I might try. His wife obviously hates my guts -- the woman does nothing but

frown and stare at me with contempt. She probably knows that she's aiding and abetting, since she's fed me and helped them keep me here.

Oh, dear God! What if I'm part of some Middle East slave trade deal and I wind up being a Sheet Slut for some sheik?

And to think that I thought Ken was good-looking. Sexy. The SOB still looks good, and if it weren't for the fact that he's a lunatic, I'd still fuck him.

What I don't understand is what happened when I passed out in the desert. I must have passed out. What other explanation is there other than that he somehow drugged me and that he's in league with Tom for whatever reasons? Mimi has money -- maybe Tom hopes to ransom me to her. I mean, not like his first plan worked.

What a story I'll have to tell her once this is over -- if I even make it out of here alive.

I've always envied my grandmother her adventurous childhood and young adulthood as the daughter of a famous archaeologist who worked with Howard Carter, no less, the man who discovered and excavated the tomb of King Tut. Mimi had all manner of collections in her home, everything from masks and pottery to clay figurines and jewelry. Those years during the early nineteen-hundreds when her father researched Egyptology and archived so much information must've been preposterously dangerous and exciting.

And the biggest chills and thrills I had? Riding a roller coaster and dodging the mad antics of a husband who wanted me dead. Some exciting life, huh?

Nora slammed the journal shut, almost dropping her ink pen, when Ken stirred. She wet her lips, sucked in a deep breath, and tried quieting her thoughts. Once he was fully awake, they were taking her somewhere. To kill her? Would they dump her body in some shallow grave? Maybe they were taking her to Tom.

Don't be stupid. Tom has nothing -- no money, no friends, no way of paying them if they're helping him. She mentally shook herself. Her grandmother would never agree to such plans if ransom was the issue. Or would she?

Ken rubbed his eyes, then flexed, making Nora shiver. Damn, what shoulders. He looked like he'd worked out every day of his life. No man had a right to look that good in just slacks and a shirt.

"Attend to your needs in the bathroom," he said, pointing to a door.

"I know where it is. Been there a couple of times while you were out." She hoped her voice sounded indifferent, that it masked her fear.

"Go again. It's not far, but you'll be glad you did once we're there." With that, he rose and once again spoke to George in Arabic.

* * * * *

Fucking Philistine. What was it about him that both sent chills of desire throughout her body and grated on her nerves? He was bossy, arrogant, self-assured, demanding. How dare he treat her like she had no brain, no will, no mind of her own?

The Mercedes she entered was definitely not American. The streets were like something off of a movie set. Okay, so maybe they'd flown her somewhere.

She peered out the window, tremors reverberating throughout her entire body. Everyone was dressed differently from home ... mostly men in tunics, women in long, flowing hajibs or ankle-length tunics belted at the waist, their heads covered. There were several men in business suits, even a few touristy-looking people with cameras slung across their necks or in their hands. Shops ranged from definitely modern to quaint ... *foreign!* Nora knew her mouth was agape. She almost howled with laughter when she saw a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant.

There were areas they passed that had huge hotels, chains she recognized, tall buildings set against ... what could only be the Mediterranean Sea. The brilliant, sparkling turquoise waters almost matched the sky in hue, and what had at first seemed a dream materialized.

Nora wasn't sure how long George drove her through the city or how long either man waited for her to speak, to confirm what they apparently already knew, that she was indeed halfway around the world from her own country.

Suddenly, she clutched the seat in front of her and nearly screamed. "*The Pillar of Pompey? That's impossible!*"

Yet there it stood, tall and proud, the most prominent remaining Greek landmark in Alexandria! Which meant that the amphitheater wasn't far away ... and the remains of Roman baths and houses -- she'd seen photos of them in her grandmother's books back in St. Louis!

She clamped a hand over her mouth to keep from screaming. *Oh ... my ... God. It's real -- it's all real -- I'm really in Egypt!*

Ken and George stopped the car, and Ken got out with her, supporting her by allowing her to lean against him and clutch his arm. "Now do you believe me?" He turned her to face him, seeming to search her eyes for proof that she didn't think he was crazy.

"This can't be happening!" Nora's voice shook. Tears sprang to her eyes. "I don't understand any of this. Why did you bring me here?"

"Because your grandmother holds the key for something very important to me. The shabti that I showed you -- it was hers."

"No. I -- I'm sorry. If it was hers, then how did you come by it?"

"She left it in the suitcase I told you about. The large ... trunk. It had her diaries, the shabti, and some clothes."

Nora giggled, unable to control herself. If she couldn't laugh, she'd collapse. "My grandmother was in Egypt, yes, and she did leave behind some of her things. I don't doubt that you found ... that is ... I just don't understand the rest of it. Any of it."

"Get back into the car." Again, it wasn't a suggestion, but a directive. "I have more to show you before we head back to George's home. He has the rest of her things. Perhaps if you read some of her words you'd understand and be more willing to accompany me."

"Accompany you where?" Her heart all but stopped. He wanted her to go with him somewhere else? Wasn't Egypt far enough away?

"In time." He indicated the car. "Please."

From there they took her to the catacombs of Kom al-Shoqafa and drove by the tombs of Al-Anfushi.

"I am sorry we don't have time for you to spend more time examining the ruins." Ken almost sounded sad as they journeyed towards George's. "We don't have much time -- we need to get back to the ley lines."

"To go home?"

"Back to Egypt -- for you to meet your mother, the pharaoh."

Goddammit, just as he seemed to make sense, as much as possible, considering he'd taken her across continents in mere minutes, here he was talking irrationally again.

* * * * *

Their evening meal was served and eaten in virtual silence, and the men didn't seem to mind that Nora was still reading, even while eating. By then, Nora had adjusted to her surroundings physically, no longer fatigued, but her mind was still doing backflips, unable to concentrate on facts. One fact was that she was most assuredly in Alexandria. Another was that the diaries she read were written by her grandmother, over half a century earlier.

Some of the leather-bound books were written prior to the discovery of Hatshepsut's tomb; others were written afterwards, and it was plain to see how alarming the events of the day had been to a young Darcy, who had then called herself Gwendolyn.

Artemis Shade, who had always remained a shadowy ancestor with whom Nora never felt connected, sprang to life under his daughter's pen. She talked of their conversations, their days' work, the discoveries, and how exciting yet frightening their finds and the legalities and moral issues that arose with each discovery.

Father says that we shouldn't have come, that we should have left Hatshepsut alone. Every time he speaks of her, he gets fidgety, almost like he's afraid the rumors are true, that she's haunting and murdering all who come into contact with her, even so many centuries later. So far, two Turkish workers who helped uncover her have had mishaps -- one falling from the scaffolding, another choking on a piece of meat that night at dinner. The museum is demanding her sarcophagus be shipped immediately, as soon as Poppy can get her to shore. But few are willing to help him. They say she's cursed them all and that she will exact her revenge for disturbing her. But Poppy doesn't believe it's her -- he thinks that the fact of only one body proves it isn't her, that she'd have somehow managed to be buried next to her lover, Senmut.

Nora read the words again. Who was this woman, Hatshepsut? Why was she so feared? That name ... Senmut ... she'd heard it before. She glanced up and found Ken observing her. *My name is Khuamen, nephew of Senmut.* That was how he'd introduced himself. Maybe Senmut was a common name. Had to be. No way ...

She lowered her gaze and went back to reading, aware that his eyes were still trained on her. She couldn't deny that she was still attracted to him, but she'd be damned if she'd

give him the satisfaction of thinking she actually believed this nonsense. He was no more the nephew of an ancient Egyptian than she was a pharaoh's daughter.

Max has asked me to marry him, and I've said yes. Poppy would kill us both if he knew what we'd been doing. He says I'm still too young, that he wants me to attend Cambridge when we accompany the sarcophagus to England. But my place is with Max. He's promised to settle down, to get a legitimate enterprise, and to let others do his dirty work for him.

Christ, her grandfather sounded like some type of mobster. Darcy hadn't talked much about him except for romantic stories of dinner under the stars with pyramids in the distance. He'd died long before Nora was born, yet to hear Darcy, he was alive somewhere, out of sight but definitely not out of mind, waiting for her beneath a canopy of stars over the Mediterranean.

"You'll know exactly what I mean when you're older," Darcy had told her. "Some day you'll find him ... your man, and you'll know that love never dies. Ever. The separation will be the worst thing that could ever happen, but you won't give up hope, and you won't stop believing that he's out there, waiting for you, and that you'll soon meet again."

Nora closed the diary. Mimi was wrong -- no such man existed for her. Love was an illusion perpetuated by fools and dreamers.

"What do you think now?" Ken's voice was quiet, calm.

"I believe that you indeed found my grandmother's trunk."

"And?" The question was pregnant with possibilities.

"That's all. I'm sorry -- I just don't believe that you and I are the reincarnation of royalty, or whatever it is that you believe. I think *you* believe it, which is scary enough."

“Not reincarnated!” He sipped his wine, then wiped his lips with the napkin beside his plate. “Time and space are a continuum, coexisting. The past, the present ... they’re all the same. The ley lines have proven that!”

“The ley lines again.” Nora was tired of hearing about the magical matrix that supposedly brought her from the United States across the globe, even though she had to admit that the possibilities for other modes of their transportation were thin.

“You were there. How can you not believe how we arrived?”

“Because I just don’t. I don’t mean to insult you or make you out to be a liar, but I just don’t buy it, okay?” She glanced at her watch. “What time is it here?”

Ken checked his own timepiece. “Eight p.m. Why?”

“Because I want to phone Mimi. She must be worried to death.” Nora rose to get her handbag. “Will my cell phone work here?”

Ken stood from the table and followed her, grasping her arm and turning her around. “Don’t ... please. You must not call her.”

“And why not? Don’t you think she’d like to know where I am?”

“You can’t call her, because she’s not in Las Vegas -- she’s still in St. Louis.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Nora jerked her arm from his hand. “Didn’t you tell me that this is the present day? Haven’t I seen for myself that we’re still on planet earth, among modern civilization?”

He looked at George and spoke in Arabic. Then he turned back to Nora. “He’s bringing you something.”

When George handed her a newspaper, Nora scoffed. “So? It’s an American newspaper, but this is over a week old.”

Ken picked up the remote to George’s television and turned on the set. “Watch.” He flipped through the channels until he came to a news broadcast that was time and date stamped. “See?”

"I don't read Arabic." Nora brushed him aside and went back for her purse. "Unless I'm truly a captive, I'm making that call!"

"Okay. Just be aware so that you don't shock her. She still thinks she's at home in St. Louis and that's it's the week before."

"Whatever." Nora tried dialing, but she couldn't make the call from her cell. "I need to use his telephone, but I don't speak Arabic."

"I'll dial for you. What is her home number?"

Nora laughed. This was becoming ridiculous. "She won't answer there."

"She'll answer. It's only around ten in the morning."

"If my grandmother picks up that phone at her house, I'll go back to these mystical ley lines with you, pal, but if she doesn't, you're putting me on the next flight out of here. Understand?" Nora gave him the number, a smirk forming on her face. Arrogant bastard. While the day had been unusual, to say the least, she was tired of his games. She held out her hand for the phone as soon as he'd placed the call. Fuck him, fuck Egypt, and ...

Fuck me!

"Hello?" Darcy's voice sounded surprised. "What are you doing phoning me from work? I thought you had a big meeting this morning."

Nora almost dropped the phone. "D-d-do I?" She could barely speak. "Mimi?"

"Who else would it be?" Darcy laughed. "You know I'm not leaving the house until next week. I've even started packing -- I'm almost finished. Darling, I can hardly wait to see you!"

This was too much! Nora stared at Ken, feeling faint. For some reason, she felt as though she were saying goodbye, not hello, to Darcy. The sound of the older woman's voice brought tears to her eyes.

":Mimi, I -- that is, it's just so good to hear your voice."

"Nora, is everything all right?"

Somehow Nora managed to continue the conversation, assuring her grandmother that everything was just fine, that she only wanted to hear her voice.

This explained everything Darcy had said about the strange phone call that Nora swore never occurred. *But it had!*

Her lips quivered with unbidden sobs, and her body felt weaker than ever. Ken took the phone from her and cradled it, his voice soothing her, whispering something she didn't understand.

"Omigod!" Nora slumped against him, feeling his arms slide beneath her legs as he lifted her.

She had no idea where he was going, but somehow she felt irrationally drawn to him, like he was the only solid thing in her life.

"I expected this, but did not wish this for you -- this fear and uncertainty." He lowered her body.

Nora looked about, the world spinning from her comprehension. She cried softly, deep sobs building in her chest and escaping in short bursts, the air in her lungs refusing to allow more than brief gulps in and short spews out.

They were on a bed, with Ken's body lying alongside hers, his hands brushing hair from her face, his eyes like soft black coals glistening down at her.

"If I could have handled this better, I would have." He dropped a kiss on her forehead. "If I could have taken care of the matter without you, I would have."

"H-h-how can I be in two places at once?" Her brows puckered in a frown. "I was in Oklahoma City last week ... I'm there now, right?" She giggled hysterically. "My God, I'm even starting to talk like you! But I'm here as well?"

Ken's arms tightened about her as he settled beside her. "You are Nora ... you are Neferure, Pharaoh Hatshepsut's daughter, the Queen of the Nile. You are many things and many people, but the mind cannot conceive of how and why. Nobody really knows."

“So what are we? Dust particles that blow about, landing wherever and whenever, never forming a cohesive body? This is absurd!”

“Do you really want to discuss physics?” Ken’s lips touched hers briefly. “Or do you want to simply accept what is, even if you don’t understand it?”

“I want to feel grounded!” Nora’s fears surfaced. “I don’t want to think of not being alive, or worse ... of waking up tomorrow and not knowing who I am, where I am. I want to feel something *now* that assures me I exist!” Her voice broke, and the unshed tears rushed forth. She giggled nervously. “Goddamn theorists were right -- all of them -- Hawking, Einstein, Gödel, Kerr.”

“This is what you want?” He teased her lips with his tongue.

She sobbed, clinging to Ken’s lapels, moaning from a pain and fear so deep that it felt bottomless, all-consuming. “No, I want more. Make love to me!” she whispered, pulling him downward, her lips searching for the touch of his once again. “Fuck me, Ken -- now!”

His body seemingly hesitated, but he nevertheless claimed her voraciously, kissing her, molding his body to hers, passionately whispering things she didn’t understand. “You have been mine through the ages -- yes, this is my right, your right!” One of his hands threaded through her hair while the other sought her garments, pulling them from her.

“What about George?” she asked, remembering their host.

“He left when you collapsed.” Ken continued undressing them both feverishly, his shoulders granite hard beneath her hands as she lay writhing beneath him.

“This is n’t happening is n’t happening is n’t happening!” Nora’s cries mingled with laughter. For the first time in months, she felt completely alive, even though her mind told her otherwise, that she must be dead or dreaming.

“There is so much I need to tell you!” Ken’s voice in her ear sounded pained. “How to adjust, how to travel safely through the ley lines, that your body will feel shocked, your mind disoriented.”

“Too late!” She lolled her head onto the pillows and almost screamed as he lifted her hips to meet the hard heat of his cock.

He probed her pussy with his fingers, making her gasp as he searched, sliding in and out, preparing her. “This *fuck* as you call it -- you and I have not done this before. I just thought you should know.”

“Why?” She almost resented him pulling her out of the reverie her mind sought.

“Because you are a virgin!” He groaned as his cock entered her, and he shoved himself inside, his flesh as hard as steel, yet soft as silk.

Nora lost all rational thought, not giving a damn. She could easily imagine herself a virgin whose maidenhood had just been breached by some golden sentry. He was ravenous for her, and she for him.

The physical mechanics of their union blazed into something entirely sensual. Nora was aware not only of his cock driving into her, but also of his taste and scent. His lips were spicy, salty, sexy, a blend of the unusual and the familiar. The hands that gently caressed her face tasted of caramel and cloves when she leaned to suck on his fingers and thumb.

“I like fucking you!” His voice alone could coax an orgasm from a stone, and Nora was anything but -- her flesh was completely malleable with his touch.

He seemed to penetrate a long-forgotten part of her, a cell memory that had never surfaced. A wild longing assaulted her, and her mind begged him not to stop, to drive her completely insane if he wished. The entire time she’d spent with him had been crazy. Why not the rest?

Then she looked at him, really looked at him. He was a stranger, yet a welcome sight, a man who had no part in what was to Nora her past or future, but one who completely dominated her present. His eyes haunted her, his body thrilled her, and the secrets he seemed to possess called to her like nothing she’d ever known.

What little she knew of BDSM surfaced, and she foggily recalled something she'd read, that in the right circumstances, a woman could orgasm with simply a word from her lover, one special word or a phrase that meant something intimate. She knew before she asked what he would say, as if he'd said it to her a million times, and she knew that once he did, her cunt would clinch and spasm, her juices sluicing between her legs and down her thighs.

"Who am I?" Her body tensed with anticipation, her clit already pulsating, waiting for the out-of-body release she knew would occur.

Khuamen did not disappoint her. "You are Neferure, my queen."

Nora's mind snapped, her body finally able to shatter in his grasp, and she cried out his Egyptian name in a tortured whisper. Waves of emotion rocked her, ebbing and flowing, finally allowing her a bliss she'd never before experienced.

She kissed his throat that glistened with sweat, kissed his cheeks, his lips. He'd fucked her as if she was a goddess ... his queen, and she knew that the term had been one of possession, not endearment necessarily. His. He'd told her that he wasn't of royal blood, but that she was. Perhaps it was the young queen and not the modern-day scientist that he truly craved. How would she ever know?

Chapter Four

This could very well be my last journal entry for this century. What if we don't survive the ley lines? I stayed up late after Ken fell asleep, and I skimmed the book I purchased in Las Vegas next week.

Nora smiled broadly at the last two words she'd written. That she even felt comfortable writing with Ken and George looking on surprised her, much less that she could refer to the past as having happened in the future.

What I read about Neferure scares the shit out of me. She supposedly died when she was about fourteen years old. I'm pushing thirty! I don't see how I can return to a place I've never been, much less as a married virgin child, especially after the sex we had last night!

I'm frightened of meeting "mother," a woman so powerful that no man could intimidate her, no woman befriend her. What must it have been like, too, to know that a member of your own family wanted to murder you?

What if I can't understand a fucking word they say? Ken says that time travel makes allowances, that we adapt to whatever environment we inhabit at any given time, that since I already exist there, I'll know all there is to know.

He also says that if he could time travel, it's also possible that others have done the same thing from that particular dynastic period! Like time travel enough isn't a shaky thought? Now I have to wonder if I'll be the only Okie on the block?

Dangerous times ... that's what he said when I asked Ken what is happening at the palace where we'll be living. King Thutmose, Hatshepsut's stepson, wants her dead; some weird dwarf they snatched from his home in Punt is suspected of spying for Thutmose. I won't be able to trust anyone, yet I'm expected to help find a way to protect the pharaoh, to keep her safe. Is this how I die? Was Neferure killed when her uncle -- dear God don't let me screw up and jokingly call him King Tut -- tried to murder his stepmother?

Ken, or Khuamen, as I probably should get used to calling him, promised me that George would mail Mimi's things to my Oklahoma City address, just in case something happens and I am unable to return to this time. I still don't see how that will do me a helluva lot of good if I'm not there to receive it, but I do appreciate the thought.

We're leaving within the hour, going back to the portal we entered when we first arrived. I still don't understand the logistics of this mode of travel. All I can do is pray that the unknown doesn't kill us.

"Ready?" Ken touched her shoulder.

Nora nodded, closing the journal. "I'd like to take this with me, plus my grandmother's diary that you first handed me in Las Vegas."

"You should be able to fit both into your purse -- it's quite big." He pursed his lips. "What else are you taking?"

“Damn if I know. The cell phone will hardly come in handy. Let’s put it this way, if it does, the roaming charges would eat my lunch.” Nora shrugged. “I think it would be best to take what I came with. Everything. I’m afraid of changing *anything* for fear that I’ll either need it or that it will alter my ability to get back home if the time space continuum is upset. Probably makes no sense to you, but work with me.”

“As you wish.” He helped push back her chair when she rose, then tucked it under the table again. “Is there anything else you’d like to ask before we embark?”

Embark. Like they were boarding a cruise ship. “No. I understand the memory loss, which accounts for why I couldn’t remember much about the ley lines until ... last night.” She blushed at the thought of his body grinding with hers. “I can hardly ask questions about what to expect, since this was your first time coming forward. No wonder you’re such a shitty driver. I guess we’ll just take things as they come.”

They started toward the door, and Nora stopped cold. “I do have one more question. How did you recognize me?”

“I didn’t. I followed the trail that led to your grandmother. I read her words, and when I arrived here, present day, I traced her through her own publications and those of her father.”

Nora shivered. “Okay, then that means that I don’t look *there* how I look *here*. Right? I mean, you did know Neferure prior to meeting me.”

He ran his hands over her shoulders, as if bracing her. “You will be fourteen, a virgin, and an Egyptian woman of royal blood. You will not look as you do now.”

Fucking hell. A whole new body?

“Am I a dog?”

He frowned. “Like Sirius? You will be a woman.”

Nora wanted to scream. “No, not the constellation. I mean am I ugly, deformed, demented?”

Then he laughed. "Women are vain, no matter the century. No, you are quite beautiful, *then and now.*"

"So do you look the same? Will I recognize you?"

"You will know me when you see me."

How fucking cryptic. "You really do need to improve your communication skills," she told him. "When we get back, I'm signing you up for a seminar."

Ken placed his hands on his hips. "What makes you think I'd attend?"

"Same thing that makes you think I'll help you save your pharaoh. Nothing. But it's a thought that keeps me from smoking every time I see you. Which reminds me, I need to pick up tobacco before we leave town."

Ken shook his head. "There are no cigarettes there."

"I know, which is why we need to stop on the way."

He studied her purse. "Modern day tobacco would look strange there. Besides, there isn't enough room for you to take a carton. You'll have to give them up."

"Like hell! I'm not growing a hymen, facing another husband, protecting the ruler of Egypt, and giving up the English language without my *fucking* nicotine! Next you'll be asking me to give up sex and chocolate. Forget it!"

"You really must help me with the declensions and conjugations of that word."

Nora groaned. "You understand the word declension, but not a four-letter word that crops up a helluva lot more often? You've been around how long?"

"According to modern physics, about thirty-five-hundred years."

"Fuck off."

"Ah. Another use of the word."

“Let’s get this show on the road. I have a grandmother waiting on me, a job and people who depend upon me, and I don’t want to get stuck in some time warp waiting for a relative I’ve never met in the past to kill off me and my ... mother.”

Ken’s eyes darkened. “There’s one more thing. You’re married.”

“Say what?”

“Don’t worry -- he despises you and has other women.”

Somehow that wasn’t much comfort, but it had to do for the time being.

“One more question, sorry.” Nora was puzzled about the spelling of the pharaoh’s name. “Sometimes it’s listed as Hapshepsut and others as Hatshepsut -- which is it?”

“How should I know?”

“You came from that time period!”

He cocked his head once again and gave her an indulgent smile, and she could tell by the way he answered that he knew he was pissing her off. “I didn’t read, write, or speak English, and I have no way of knowing how to translate a language that ancient into one today. I’ve only been *here* approximately two years. Most of my time was spent learning to speak *your* language and tracking your grandmother.” Then he relented. “The pronunciation as I know it is with the T, as in Hatshepsut.”

“How did you meet and befriend George?”

“I’ll tell you later.” He hustled her towards the door.

“Tell me now. And do they have toothpaste?” Nora grimaced. “I can’t imagine not being able to brush my teeth. Yuck. Another thing, what about tampons?”

“In the car -- now!”

“Don’t give me orders.” She gave him a mock, condescending stare. “I am a queen, after all, right?”

She knew very well that toothpaste, tampons, and toiletries of her time weren't around three-hundred-fifty years or so before the birth of Christ, but she couldn't stop babbling. The closer they drew to the ley lines, the more apprehensive she became. Her grandmother's passion for the female pharaoh had become her own. Then there was the time travel issue. While racking up frequent flyer miles wasn't on her agenda, discovering a means to communicate with the past was intriguing as hell.

If only it didn't kill her in the process.

This had better be worth it. She clutched her purse, her life raft to the present, and allowed him to escort her to the waiting car. Ironical, she thought, that the one mode of transportation she didn't trust would be her last ride towards the unknown.

* * * * *

This time she wasn't as afraid. The seismological aspects at the beginning didn't panic her as badly, and the kaleidoscope of colors weren't alarming, but that whoosh of air that made her feel like she was both coming and going still threw her off balance.

Her thoughts ran a cacophony of jumbled, indistinguishable, and unrelated melodies racing through her brain, a collective, haunting sound that pulled at some deep part of her she hadn't even known existed until now.

I hear you. She looked at Khuamen, reading his mind, hearing him soothe her soul, sharing something bigger than the both of them. She knew he was concerned for her safety, but she also sensed that he'd have managed to talk her into the trip no matter her reservations.

You're a fourteen-year-old virgin whose mother is married to your uncle, but fucking the hired help. How very Mandingo.

Nora tried releasing her thoughts, not letting them control the sensations this time. Maybe, she thought, if she opened her mind more, her body would feel less tired after the trip and not curse her with a twelve-hour hangover.

She didn't sense the passing of suns and moons during this journey. The colors weren't as bright once she and Khuamen were inside the matrix either -- they were muddied, muted. She listened as he told her with his mind that each country and each destination within that country had its own set of colors, its personalized stamp much as a human had an aura. Even decades and individual years were colored by the events that took place, which really gave rise to speculation as to what the Great Depression, the Crusades, and other eras looked like.

Nora was also more aware of Khuamen's hand on hers than she was before. He seemed to squeeze, as if reassuring her, when they'd pass long periods of time that smelled of dried blood and urine -- even chaos, it seemed, had a particular smell, not just a look. She sensed priests and nuns flying southward from rooftops, heard screams and wails, smelled burning thatch ... the Inquisition, perhaps. Then there were moments of pure delight with wildflowers, spices, cool breezes, and raucous laughter, sensual delights that made her want to stop before they reached the unknown.

Before the birth of Christ. She could only imagine what lay ahead. Not a godless people -- hell, they had plenty of gods they worshipped, and history revealed that many civilizations were better for it. Times of singing and dancing and celebration. Why weren't modern fundamentalists as joyous in their beliefs?

You're doing it again. Nora could hear his thoughts. She was focusing on belief systems rather than their destination, whatever it may look like.

How will I recognize you? Her heart seemed to jump into her throat with the fear that she'd be alone, with no one to talk to, no one to trust.

I found you once, he replied. *I'll find you again.*

He squeezed her so tightly that she could feel his pulse quickening by placing her thumb on the inside of his wrist. He echoed in kind and smiled.

Then it happened, that all-consuming rush of sensation. Voices growing louder, smells of ginger, cinnamon, and vanilla, overpowering emotions, the feeling of silk against her naked skin.

Nora screamed silently, panicking as the lights swirled into a blazing burst of golden yellow, then faded to black.

* * * * *

I gotta pee. Nora stirred. She felt as though her body had been slammed repeatedly onto a block of concrete. Every bone, muscle, atom in her body ached.

She felt a cool breeze of some sort and cocked one eye.

“My queen!” An ebony-skinned girl of about fifteen stared, wide-eyed, and the breeze grew stronger.

Nora jumped when she saw the two half-naked savages, one at either end, fanning her with huge feathers that looked as if they’d been plucked from some prehistoric bird. Whatever the source, they made great fans.

Then she nearly passed out when she tried to sit up -- she was stark, bare-assed naked. Screaming, she reached behind her, beside her, anywhere for a covering. The dark young woman who attended her brought forth a soft, linen sari of some sort and belted it at Nora’s waist once she stood.

“Holy shit -- pleats.” Nora fingered the fringed sash and stifled a giggle, shaking her head in disbelief. “I’m starting out in fashionista hell -- first naked, now this.”

She held onto the arm of her companion, standing unsteadily while two other women wiped a damp cloth over her body and combed her hair, making her feel extremely self-conscious. *You are royalty -- you will have servants. Get used to it, because once you’re home, this ain’t happenin’, Nora.*

Not sure how to ask where the bathroom was, Nora let them fuss, listening as the black girl chanted some mystical charm or spell, while one of the men who'd fanned her waved a small metal cone of incense around her body and over her head.

"I, Hebeny, lowly slave, call on You, Lady Isis, whom Agathos permitted to rule Egypt. Your name is LOU LOULOU BATHARTHAR THARE'SIBATH 'SICH ATHERNEBOUNI E'ICHOMO' CHOMO'THI Isis, SOUE'RI, Boubastis, EURELIBAT CHAMARI NEBOUTOS 'RI AIE' E'OA O'AI. Protect Queen Neferure and her mother, the great Wife of Amon, Pharaoh of Egypt ..."

Nora waved them plus the seemingly endless litany of titles aside and turned to the black girl, a conspirator's whisper on her lips. "I need to use the bathroom."

At the girl's frown, Nora tried again. "Lavatory, bathroom, loo, shithouse ..."

Hebeny. Interesting name. Nora accepted the girl's arm, but waved aside the others who would help. *And Isis.* Nora could go with Isis, an archetype of Mother Earth. Not a bad goddess to have on her side if the shit hit the fan.

The girl walked her from one corner of the room to the opposite, then paused, helping Nora up a small flight of steps that stretched the width of the room.

She stared at a large basin perched in the center of a large corner of the room and blanched when Ebony stopped walking. For all intents and purposes, it seemed that this particular bedpan was hers.

"Oh, no. No-no-no-no-no." Nora faced the one attendant with whom she felt comfortable and shook her head.

Hebeny looked at her expectantly, frowning. Then she brightened and snapped her fingers. One of the other women rushed outside the room and returned with the damp cloth they'd bathed her with.

Nora sighed and motioned for Hebeny and the others to turn away. Embarrassed, she was, nonetheless, not spending precious time explaining herself. Why hadn't she considered this mundane daily function prior to coming here?

Definitely no privacy, much less the usual accoutrements she was used to having around her. She took in more of her surroundings while she did her business, noting the large Romanesque pool that she assumed was her private bath, the bed from which she'd risen, a throne-like chair with a footstool, and a long, low dressing table of some sort that held bottles, flasks, combs, and a curious looking linen bag or sack of some sort. Before the table stood another chair, smaller, resembling a headrest she'd seen in an autopsy room.

Khuamen had been right -- she could understand the language. Her greatest fear now was whether or not they could understand her. What would she say to them? And where was Khuamen?

She completed her task and decided to take the initiative, ordering everyone to leave her alone. Hebeny was the only one who resisted.

"Have I displeased you?" The girl seemed genuinely concerned.

"Not at all!" Nora felt torn. Should she invite the girl to stay while she got her bearings, considering Hebeny seemed to be the only one with whom she had any form of intimate relationship? "I just prefer being alone for a while."

"Do you not wish to ... that is, you've been asleep for so long."

"How long?" Nora held her breath after asking.

"Two days."

"What?"

Hebeny nodded. "Senmut's nephew found you wandering outside the palace and brought you inside. When you left on your own after ... after the disagreement with your mother, you fled, and she sent him after you. He found you and brought you and the linen bag you had with you back to the palace."

Nora glanced about. What bag?

“I shall tell your mother, the king, that you’ve awakened from your deep sleep.”

Panicked to the point of fearing she’d throw up, Nora merely nodded, unable to talk. Gesturing for Hebeny to leave, she turned toward the low-slung table and the odd chair before it.

The chair stood on two pedestals that rested on a small platform base, and the seat was scooped, like it had been carved for a small bottom.

Nora cupped her own ass, remembering that Khuamen had said she would be inhabiting a different body. Felt like the same ass.

Then she stared at her hands and examined the darker, bronzed skin. Angst rode high in her mind when she noted the small, child-like hands that had replaced the ones she’d been so used to seeing.

She batted her lashes, gasping. Then she saw the mirror on the dresser and approached it, wondering what she’d find when she stared into it. Parking herself onto the chair in advance, she still almost fell when she saw the young girl’s face and body.

With one hand, she held the mirror, and with the other, she touched first her forehead, then eyes, nose, lips. Then she examined her profile and the long, dark hair that glistened and felt silky soft as she ran it through her fingers.

“Oh, wow!” She looked at the young, supple, unbound outline of her breasts and then opened the robe, instantly appalled and delighted to find herself whittled from a solid 36C to a nubile 32A at best. “Who needs liposuction or reduction when you’ve got the ley lines?” she murmured. “Jesus!”

If she didn’t recognize herself, if she had changed so much, what must Khuamen look like, and how the hell was she to know him when she saw him?

She shakily set the mirror back onto the dresser and reached for the bag, wondering what was inside it.

Oh, thank God! The Gucci, her grandmother's diary, her own journal and pen, and the cigarettes and lighter! She wasn't quite in hell after all.

Chapter Five

I feel like I'm a teenager, sneaking pot into my room, praying the adults don't find me and ground me. Wonder how a pharaoh grounds her daughter? Probably any damn way she pleases. I have yet to meet Mother. The thought terrifies me. What do I say to her? Oh, hello, I'm from the future, and the guy who brought me here thinks I can somehow keep you from being murdered, like I'm a catalyst who will somehow alter history?

Not that there's much recorded about Hatshepsut and her bizarre reign. She's practically myth, legend, like the Lone Ranger, King Arthur, and Camelot.

Well, if nothing else, I've discovered some interesting things about Mimi. Seems she led a life most women of her age only dream about, one of traveling to exotic lands, meeting and falling in love with a mercenary of sorts, a soldier of fortune who was hired to lead her and her father through Egypt. She had sex with him before they married, too. Who'd have thought the old girl was such a wildcat? And what granddaughter other than I would thrill to read some of the passages I've read? I must be a chip off the proverbial block, because I see nothing wrong with anything she's done. I just wish I knew what her obsession with Hatshepsut was all about. Why was she so important to Mimi, other than the superstitions that surrounded finding the sarcophagus?

Archaeologists search for tombs, find tombs, unearth sarcophaguses, fight over treasures. Nothing new in that. But I see why she was so concerned for her father's safety. So many deaths. But still ... so much controversy, so many fears. These were civilized people -- Americans and British subjects, educated men and women. Why were they so terrified that they were cursed? Makes no sense to me at this point. So what if it was or wasn't Hatshepsut that they found? Maybe I'm just lacking in the Agatha Christie gene that predisposes people to love a good mystery.

I've had that kind of intense passion for my own work, discovering some pathogen, a new strain of viral infection, uncovering the secrets of a mummy or bones found abandoned in some railway station that are nearly a century old. I've never, however, been willing to give up more than a month's time working on a dead body, though. Not like an archaeologist.

Maybe I've just learned the value of a second or a minute. If Khuamen hadn't whipped out that little shabti, Tom would have killed us for sure. If I'd not gone with Khuamen to begin with, Tom would most likely have shot me in Vegas. Probably my grandmother as well.

I'm already missing Mimi, blown away that she doesn't even know I'm gone and that she won't know at all unless I miss my ticket back into the future. She told me a story when I was a little girl about a man asking God for money to bail him out of a jam, and God asked him how much he needed. The guy countered with "How much can I get?" God replied that quantifiable possessions meant nothing in the grand scheme of things, so a penny was same as a dollar to Him. The man then asked for a million dollars, and the Almighty said, "In a second."

Feels weird that I've had to travel back in time to really get that stupid pun. I laughed when I first heard it -- now I'm sweating bullets that it's not a joke.

I asked for water last time Hebeny knocked and asked if I'd like any nourishment. Wasn't Evian, but it helped, as did the wine. Guess when I'm back home I can brag that I've

sipped a wine older than any of my friends, huh? Right now I'd rather be at the Whine & Cheese parties that the University threw, than going through this.

I've had a devil of a time keeping others out of my room. Seems every time I turn around, someone is offering to bathe me, feed me, or comb my hair -- Hebeny went so far as to "remind" me that it was time I shaved my head! As if! Yeah, it's hot as Hades here, and I found several wigs to wear, lined up along what looks like a bookshelf or pregnant curio cabinet that bursts and flows across an entire wall. But me, go bald? Not hardly.

That I'm even here is miraculous. How is it that I don't remember ... in the future ... that I've been here, though? Khuamen said that we suffer memory loss going through the ley lines, but I still remember that life, my grandmother, my work. I remember how I got here.

Scary, to think that someday I might wake up back in my own time and find this journal in my own handwriting, yet not remember the events I'm recording now.

Nora paused in her writing, thinking. There were a few fuzzy details she couldn't recall, though. She couldn't remember what was in the food she'd eaten at George's or the conversation she'd had with Khuamen at Pompey's ... what was it called?

Nora flipped through her journal until she found the notations she'd made at George's home. *The Pillars of Pompey*. That was it.

So what did all of this mean? Once she was reunited with Darcy, would she even remember her journey to ancient Egypt or the ley lines? A jolt of fear zapped her. She *hadn't* remembered! Otherwise, she wouldn't have minded getting into the car with Ken Taylor, aka Khuamen, to begin with, right?

This was getting her nowhere. She closed the journal and placed it back inside the large cloth bag that was more of a knapsack or gunny sack than anything else. Finishing her cigarette, she searched for a place to store the ashes she'd accumulated. She'd pulled a small figurine, some deity, no doubt, from the same shelves that housed the wigs, and she'd ashed

inside the pot-bellied, Gorgon-looking creature's open mouth, praying she wouldn't piss off some archaic god or goddess in the process. No matter what else was inside the sucker, she was positive it wasn't the ashes of a Philip Morris or R.J. Reynolds product.

Her room seemed sequestered, in some remote part of the palace where no one could possibly climb through her windows. Whenever she looked outside the one side of the room that held a view, she saw a vast landscape, dotted with a few trees set against an indeterminable expanse of sand.

On the opposite end of the room were three wide arches that overlooked an empty courtyard that held a large pool and a few chaise lounges.

Nora swung her glance towards the massive door that barred her from the rest of the palace and it from her. She'd avoided looking at the door ever since the others had left, fearing what was beyond it.

Before she could work up the nerve to venture outside her room, the door creaked, and an exotic creature entered, wearing yards of aquamarine-colored pleated gown and a gold-encrusted headdress that towered a good foot above her head, followed by an entourage of half-naked men, women in plain tunics, and ... a dwarf with a dark, reddish complexion.

My mother, the God's Wife, at once Queen, King, and Pharaoh of Egypt. Nora arose, her throat dry, her palms sweaty, and her heart beating so fast she feared she'd faint.

"Neferure." Hatshepsut walked up to Nora, placing her hands on either side of Nora's face and studying her with intense, dark eyes. "I suppose we should be thankful Khuamen even found you. What possessed you to run away like that without your guards?"

Nora blinked, searching for an answer. "In truth, I -- I don't know. Where is Khuamen?"

"You wish to thank him, of course. So send for him. I'm surprised at your lack of concern that you haven't done so already."

The king kissed her on the forehead, then stood back, as if waiting expectantly. When Nora didn't move, Hatshepsut pursed her lips, frowning. "What? No kiss for your mother?"

Eager to have something to do besides become the object of the ruler's scrutiny, Nora leaned forward and obliged. Her mother's skin was soft as silk and smelled faintly of spices.

She would expect a greeting, but nothing overtly emotional, Nora thought to herself. *This is the greatest female ruler of the ancient world, after all.*

Hatshepsut snapped her fingers, then flourished the others, as if banishing all in the room save Nora, and within seconds the room was cleared. "I wish to speak with you. Your husband is away. The armies are gathering near Punt, and Thutmose is preparing them to protect our northern borders. I wish you to accompany me to Luxor. Are you well enough?"

Oh, dear, moving already? Nora searched her mind, grasping for what little history and geography she could remember of the area. *What if there are no ley lines there and we can't get back in time for ...?* Nora's thoughts jackknifed. In time for what? She'd failed to ask Khuamen how long this trip through time would last. This could take weeks, even months! What was she to do? How was she to respond to such a request?

"Tell no one save your most trusted servant," Hatshepsut cautioned. "Hebeny must prepare enough necessities for three days."

Now Nora was flabbergasted. Three days? Was she insane? "Three ... only three days?"

Hatshepsut touched Nora's cheeks again, then her forehead. "You don't appear to be feverish. Yes, I think you can do this. Why do you hesitate?"

Oh, gee, I dunno, maybe because I don't belong here? Because I just want to do whatever it is I have to do and then leave? Because I know that while you live, I'm supposed to die soon?

Tears welled in Nora's eyes. For the first time since she'd arrived, her Inner Smartass deserted her. Where the hell was Khuamen? Why hadn't he come to her or sent for her? *Could* he send for her if he wasn't royalty? She shuddered, doubting it.

“You have secrets, daughter?” Hatshepsut peered at her more closely, her eyes seeming to strip away every shred of Nora’s self-confidence and bravado. “Does Khuamen have anything to do with this?” Her nostrils flared, indicating a suppression of emotion while she waited expectantly for Nora to answer.

“I would love to go to Luxor with you.” Nora hesitated before addressing her specifically. What did she call this woman, anyway?

“Then it must be your health that worries you.” Hatshepsut turned and paced, letting her fingertips rub the bones just behind her own ears.

Nora knew that piece of body language well -- she often got tension headaches, and that particular stress reliever was usually the only action that worked to loosen the muscles connecting her cranium to the rest of her body.

The pharaoh’s gown swished as she walked, the light from the open window to the west catching the shimmering gold filigree, and through it casting a calliope of color racing across the distant walls in time to her footsteps.

Nora studied Hatshepsut’s tiny feet, shod in sandals, beneath her skirt. The hem grazed her ankles with every step. The woman was fascinating, regal, quick, all movements fluid and precise, with both the haughty presence of a woman used to being obeyed and the decidedly feminine softness that Nora was sure few would ever see.

“How ... how are you?” Nora finally found her voice. She was genuinely interested and not in a morbidly fearful way. She wanted to know what made Hatshepsut tick, what kind of mother she was behind closed doors.

Hatshepsut stopped pacing and stared at her. “How am I? You never ask that.” Then her face softened. “Not since you were a child. You’re ... still a child in many ways.”

Fourteen going on forty. Oh, sweet Lord. She ticked off distances in her mind, numbers she recalled from reading the book she’d purchased in Las Vegas. If Cairo was to the north and it was approximately one-hundred-thirty-five miles between there and Alexandria, and

if it was over four-hundred miles distance between Cairo and Luxor, then ... that left about three-hundred miles to travel ... in three days?

Nora squeaked, an unnatural, shrill sound, a cross between a kitten's mew and a parakeet's chirp. Three hundred miles riding on the back of a camel? Was Hatshepsut high? Had she managed to secure a bag of Mexican Red Hair to smoke?

"Three days?" Nora looked at the king, hoping she'd misunderstood, fearful that it might be three months. "Will that allow us time, you think?"

Hatshepsut's frown deepened. "You have journeyed with me many times -- you are acting very strange." She clapped her hands, and the massive doors opened. "Hebeny, bring the oils -- you know the ones." Then she focused upon Nora. "*You* are to lie and be waited upon."

"I need to see Khuamen."

"Khuamen can wait. I command you to do my bidding, Neferure. You have been ill, and you need sustenance and pampering. Tomorrow, we leave, so have your servants prepare."

With that, she turned, head high, and left, leaving Nora floundering for a comeback of any sort.

"Oh, God!" Nora lifted her head skyward and wailed. "What now?"

Hebeny was soon at her side. "You wish to pray?"

"Pardon me?" Nora recovered and stared at her companion.

"You called on the gods -- do you wish to go to the Temple?"

Nora blinked. "No -- it was ... an expression. Forget it. Just tell me what I need to do, and find Khuamen and send him here."

"Your mother ..."

"I don't give a damn if it harelips the fucking congress -- I want to see Khuamen." Nora knew she was about to lose all semblance of control if she wasn't obeyed immediately.

"Now!"

Hebeny jumped, as if Nora had slapped her. Then she bowed and backed out of the room, while four young women entered the room and set about doing various things. Nora watched as one brought in a diaphanous gown of blue linen and spread it carefully across the massive bed while two others rearranged the pillows and fluffed them. Another beckoned to two men outside who entered, each bearing two huge containers of something steaming, while a third carried in a small wooden table, and two other women followed carrying various metal cones and jewel-encrusted boxes that looked like jewelry cases.

When yet another girl entered with a clear, amber container that held liquid and had three or four thin cords that snaked from the center, Nora gasped. *A bong?*

"A-a-a-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Nora doubled over with laughter.

The others were immediately concerned, and Hebeny came back into the room, racing towards her. "My queen?"

"I'm fine." Nora wiped her eyes, still laughing. "Just tell me ... why are all these people in here?" She tried righting herself, but a sudden dizziness threatened to throw her off balance.

"You are frail!" Hebeny clapped her hands and called to one of the men carrying the urns. "Ahmed!"

One of the bronzed brutes rushed forward and started to lift Nora when she waved his assistance aside. "I'm fine.

Hebeny seemed perplexed. "The king ordered me to attend to you, to administer the bath and balms." She pointed towards the other man, who was emptying hot water from the massive jugs into the pool, then indicated the table being set up with various bottles that contained Lord knew what.

“And that thing?” Nora indicated the bong.

“The queen’s indulgence before retiring.”

“I’m not retiring.” Nora shook her head. “I want to be fully conscious when Khuamen arrives. You did send for him, right?”

“I instructed Kyky to find him.”

“Kyky?”

“The dwarf from Punt.” By now Hebeny’s expression held clear concern, as if she thought Nora had lost her mind.

Nora was inclined to agree with her. “What sort of name is Kyky?”

At that, Hebeny snorted. “It means monkey, my queen.”

Nora couldn’t believe it -- apparently, bigotry’s roots ran deep if such an ancient culture would name a dwarf after a primate and a servant girl a derivative of the word ebony because of the color of her skin. “Well, I’ll be damned.”

“We should begin your bath. Your royal face is pale.”

Hebeny’s voice was hesitant, and Nora had the feeling that the poor girl was quaking, wondering if the task would go as Hatshepsut had instructed or if Nora would give her problems.

She sighed dramatically and threw up her hands. “I haven’t been myself lately, Hebeny, so I’d like you to talk me through every thing we do here, as if it was the first time. Understand?”

Hebeny nodded slowly, warily watching Nora as she led her towards the pool. Then Hebeny instructed the others, save one man, to leave the room and wait outside. “First, the bath. I will bathe you myself, then prepare you for the others to take over.”

Nora’s legs buckled. *Prepare me?* She tried keeping pace with Hebeny, but the recent shocks to her system rendered her weak, almost helpless, and this time the man who towered over her scooped her into his arms and carried her towards the water.

When Nora protested, Hebeny touched the man's arm and motioned for him to set Nora down gently. "Ahmed is a eunuch. He will do you no harm and will help me." She looked helpless. "I cannot lift you, and the other women would be of no use."

Nora slowly nodded, frantic with worry that she might pass out before Khuamen arrived. She'd have to take it on faith that this was a normal part of living for royalty, to have someone help bathe and clothe her. *But strangers?*

Once Hebeny shooed the others from the room, Nora sucked in a deep breath and stood as still as possible, considering her legs threatened to give way again, but she could feel her heart racing and her muscles quivering with fear and anticipation. This was a tad different from going to her usual spa back in Oklahoma City. These were not only strangers, but people who had been dead for thousands of years before she met them. The thought gave her the giggles again, and she struggled to maintain a sense of decorum as Hebeny undressed her and helped ease her into the pool.

Both Hebeny and Ahmed remained clothed, not that there was much to say for Ahmed's couture. A loincloth and a placid face was all he had to offer by way of presentation, and Hebeny wore only the thin, linen tunic, still belted at the waist. Nora was butt-naked, not that the other two seemed to notice.

The water was incredibly warm, soothingly so, and as it crept from her ankles, knees, and thighs to her pussy, Nora began to relax. By the time they'd entered the center of the pool and she was able to sit on the marble floor, tense muscles gave in to Ahmed's thumbs circling her clavicle and shoulder blades. Hebeny quietly told her once they were settled that she was going back for the oils.

"Let's see," Nora murmured. "Mostly naked, strikingly good-looking savage male behind me, someone else to do the work while I get a bath and a shampoo, warm water all around, and something naughty to smoke afterwards? I could get used to this."

Her hands trailed the water, and when Hebeny reentered the pool, Nora reached for the pool's floor to brace herself and make room for her, only to find her hands firmly planted on Ahmed's solid thighs. Was it her imagination, or did she feel his nipples against her back tighten and bud?

Jerking her hands back from his thighs, Nora blushed furiously. What must he think of her? Then she caught Hebeny's amused smile.

"Ahmed is here for your pleasure, my queen." Hebeny bowed her head briefly before adding, "As am I."

Well, that certainly holds a lot of connotations! Nora felt her body go even more limp at the thought of what could happen with only the three of them in the room and one of them totally nude.

"Have ... we ...?" Nora hoped her eyes said what her lips couldn't, didn't dare. Had Neferure and Hebeny and Ahmed indulged in a ménage before? Her mind had been intrigued by the thought of having sex with a woman, but her body had never responded until now. Nora hoped her burning curiosity masked her physical response.

Hebeny nodded slowly, the smile increasing, the unasked question in her eyes. *Did* Nora wish to partake of a little extracurricular bathing ritual?

Holy shit, my first threesome, and it's with people who have been dead for over three-hundred centuries! Nora nodded in return, wondering what the hell she was letting herself in for, what Hebeny could possibly have on her mind. Was she as nervous and excited as Nora? Had Hebeny enjoyed the previous encounters, or was she only doing this because Neferure would have expected them to all engage in an orgy?

Hebeny didn't keep her waiting long. "We need to move towards the side of the pool so that I might ... serve you better."

The sensual curl to her lips zapped Nora straight between her legs, and she could well imagine the black girl's tongue thrusting inside her pussy.

Nora noted the small row of sponges, vials, and miniscule containers lined alongside that end of the pool and nodded as her excitement built.

Ahmed held Nora firmly in his arms and scooted backwards until they were at one of the smallest areas of the rectangular structure. Then Hebeny joined them.

She picked up a sponge from the poolside and started soaking it, then dribbling water over Nora, from head to breast and back, repeating the action several times, each time her hands drawing closer to Nora's body until finally ... finally, they touched Nora's breasts lightly.

"Your nipples are so pretty." Hebeny's voice sounded trance-like. "Your body is that of a goddess, my queen." She bent and kissed Nora's nipples, tonguing her lightly.

"What is in the bottles?" Nora glanced at the vials suspiciously.

Hebeny reached behind Nora and Ahmed and produced a small glass, waving it gently under Nora's nose. "I think we shall start with kyphi, which means *welcome to the gods*. The priests of the City of the Sun, where I was when you first found me, burn this every sunset as we pray to the sun god Ra." She dabbed some of the oil on her fingers and rubbed it against Nora's chest.

City of the Sun ... Heliopolis? Nora inhaled deeply, and immediately a sense of euphoria crept over her. "I thought this was merely a scent, not a hypnotic."

"Kyphi is many things. It can lull us to sleep, alleviate anxieties, and increase dreaming. Now that you're recovering from your last fever, perhaps it will give you more pleasant dreams and help keep evil spirits away."

Why hadn't she paid more attention during her years at parochial school? Nora scoured her mind for references to oils and incenses used in the Bible. Something in the book of Exodus about myrrh, cinnamon, and calamus, mixed with olive oil. And in the book of Proverbs, "ointment and perfume rejoice the heart." Why couldn't she remember the exact

scriptures? Her mind raced as her body's responses took control, rendering her powerless to stop what was happening.

"The oracle priestesses at Delphi across the big waters used to sit over smoldering fumes of bay leaves to inspire their trances." Hebeny leaned forward and inhaled near Nora's nipples. "The ancients all used oils, herbs, and spices."

Nora giggled. *Ancients*. Oh, brother, if only Hebeny and Ahmed knew what she did as to who was truly ancient.

Then her giggling stopped abruptly when Hebeny's lips closed over one of her breasts and suckled, her tongue pulling at the tight nipple, ripening with each lick for more of the same. Next, Nora felt Ahmed's arms pull her more firmly against him, and while Hebeny continued to suck at Nora's breasts, his hands lowered and explored her stomach and waist, kneading, massaging, traveling southward until he found her pussy and inserted first one then two fingers, like two slim penises double-fucking her, sliding them in and out, in and out, with a determined yet gentle rhythm.

Nora writhed in his arms, resting her head against his chest, with his lips so close to her throat that she could feel every hot breath he took.

"Kiss me!" Nora's voice was weak with desire, anxious with need.

Ahmed leaned closer to her face and did as requested, his lips a hard, firm pressure that held no love, but plenty of eager searching. He wasn't Khuamen, but he was, nonetheless, an expert kisser, as if he'd kissed her a thousand times and knew just when to suckle and when to lick at the insides of her mouth.

Before she knew it, Nora was deep into the throes of an orgasm, with four hands and two pairs of lips on and inside her body, fingers pumping her pussy, tongues caressing her breasts. First one shock then another slid throughout her entire torso, and the source seemed endless. Nora cried out and clung to Ahmed's arms, begging for release, dreading it to be

over, praying it would never cease. Her clit's hard nub felt as if it would burst and ached like so many flames were licking it, tormenting her into submission.

"My beautiful, magnificent queen!" Hebeny's words floated up to meet her face.

Nora looked down at the girl, whose nipples had pebbled beneath the wet gown. She was so lovely, with eyes as pure as black coals beneath which lay diamonds. Nora bent to kiss her on the lips, savoring the subtle hint of cloves and cinnamon.

"Where did you get that?" When Hebeny's eyes held curiosity, Nora tried again. "That taste on your lips ... what is it?"

"A balm." Hebeny set the bottle of kyphi back onto the pool's rim and picked up a small pot. Dabbing her fingers into it, she placed a dot of moisture on Nora's lips and rubbed it in gently.

A slight tingling sensation ... that same delightful smell. Nora was enchanted.

She looked from one to the other of her partners in perversion, then leaned towards Hebeny to kiss her, but when the girl realized what she was doing, she shrank back in horror.

"The queen doesn't ... no ... never. I serve you -- you do not serve me."

"But ... you have needs, and Ahmed ... why won't you let me reciprocate?"

Hebeny backed away, obviously panicked.

Nora motioned for the girl to come back. "I won't touch you, but you must touch one another. For me -- I command it." She hoped she sounded properly authoritative. Three people in the orgy, and only one gets to come? Not on her watch.

She was pleased when Hebeny obeyed and took her pleasure with Ahmed. At least Nora would have the satisfaction of knowing Hebeny's efforts had been sufficiently rewarded, not to mention the delicious voyeurism that came with watching another woman's face enraptured by a gigantic orgasm, which was something Nora had never seen.

She watched, fascinated, as the big man explored Hebeny's cunt with his fingers, then his mouth. Hebeny gripped the side of the pool as Ahmed cupped her ass and brought her pussy into alignment with his face, parting her soft folds with his tongue, then diving in voraciously, flicking her so fiercely that the young woman cried out and went so rigid and then limp that Nora feared she'd fainted. Her own fingers had crept downwards, and she'd finger-fucked herself as she watched, not realizing until it was over that she'd kept time with their love-making and had climaxed simultaneously with Hebeny.

The three of them looked at one another in silence, then began washing themselves, bathing, as if no one was watching. Slowly, a tentative smile formed on Nora's lips, then on Hebeny's, and finally on Ahmed's. Soon they were done, and they were all three laughing and exuberantly completing their baths. Before Nora knew what was happening, she took the initiative and demanded a repeat performance, with herself on the receiving end of Ahmed's tongue.

He was an expert at pleasing a woman. His tongue was long, hard, and rough as it dragged across her clit, inciting a riot of emotions within her. She held no love for this man, yet his forceful and tender spearing of her flesh left her feeling vulnerable, a quivery mass in his hands. He tongued her relentlessly, stabbing into her with continuous, determined thrusts, grabbing her ass and manipulating her position against his mouth as if he'd done so a thousand times.

When she climaxed, he sucked at her juices, his nose rubbing against her nub, his head beneath her hands moving deliciously with each suckle, as if he could stay between her legs forever without coming up for air.

Nora's pussy tightened, then convulsed, giving, receiving, in a never-ending spasm.

Chapter Six

I'm sitting without undergarments in a silk robe, wearing a frighteningly blue wig made of real human hair and dyed with fruits to get this azure color. I'm told that this is one of my party wigs, for lack of a better term -- I can't remember what Hebeny called it, but it's evidently one that I wear to celebrations at the palace.

I've just had mad, passionate, unbelievably pagan sex with a beautiful black girl and an Egyptian eunuch. I'm thousands of miles and a zillion light years away from home, and I don't really give a damn -- because I'm high as the proverbial fucking kite.

Have no clue where Khuamen is, but he'd better get his ass in here before this horniness wears off. I'd hate to take advantage of the other two again after they've been so kind and thorough in pleasing me.

Promised myself that I would record everything pertinent to a time traveler, the where and how and what, but somehow sex among friends has become of utmost importance to me tonight. I haven't had sex like this ever, and I want to share it with Khuamen. Where the fuck is he?

And what does this private orgy have to do with my being here? If I hadn't come ... no pun intended ... would Hatshepsut be as big of a mystery? What am I to record about her?

What details, what glimpses of the past in order to better understand the mystery surrounding her sarcophagus? I still have no clue how I'm to help her, only that my presence seems important to Khuamen.

We smoked ... ah ... what the hell was it? Something with cloves and a mild cinnamon taste. Those spices seem to be included in everything from bath oils to lip balm to inhalants. Ancient wacky weed is what this stuff is, pure and simple dope for the soul. The sixties have nothin' on these people.

Tomorrow, I return to Luxor -- according to "Mother," I've been there before, but this Luxor doesn't have a casino or floor show that I'm aware of. I have this fear that I'll be walking through the Valley of the Kings like some futuristic corpse, totally brain-dead, not absorbing a damn thing, and unable to remember or describe any of it afterwards.

I catch the two of them glancing over at me in between their numerous bodily encounters, probably wondering what in hell I'm doing. I have the pen and notebook hidden behind a couple of flasks of wine. Yeah, I'm drunk as well. What the hell, ya know? A girl only gets to visit ancient Egypt once in a lifetime if she's lucky.

So bring it on, Ra -- let's dance, Isis, because I may never pass this way again. I want to explore everything. I'm just shocked that I find myself included in the surprises that have revealed themselves since I've been here. Uptight, anal retentive, bookworm scientist participates in strange sexual rituals replete with bong and wine. Who'd have thought it possible?

Nora hurriedly completed her journal entry as Hebeny and Ahmed left the pool and reached for towels. Wouldn't do to have them wondering about the futuristic writing utensil and notebook.

"We're going to Luxor tomorrow." Nora was glad she'd remembered to notify Hebeny as the king had instructed her. "I take it that you know what to do?"

When Hebeny nodded, eyes wide with evident surprise, Nora muttered under her breath that it was a good damn thing somebody understood, because she sure didn't.

"You and I have taken this journey before?" Nora inquired.

Hebeny nodded, seemingly surprised. "The queen's memory has changed since her last fever."

"As well as a few other things." Nora stared ruefully at her chest. *I qualify for a training bra, I've just had my first ménage, and the last two men I've fucked are both nearly four millennium old.* "Instruct Ahmed to wait outside while you and I talk."

Once they were alone, Nora assured Hebeny that she was fine, but that she was definitely having memory lapses. "Just explain to me what will happen tomorrow so that I might think about it tonight and be prepared. I don't want my mother worrying about me."

Hebeny nodded and proceeded to outline the day's events. First they entered a cave a few miles outside of the city, and then they stepped into a small shaft of light, which somehow transported them to their destination.

Ah-ha! The ley lines! Nora's foggy consciousness might be clouded with drug and drink from the bong and wine, but she definitely understood the light. So Khuamen wasn't the only Egyptian who had known about the ley lines centuries before anyone in her own time thought that they'd discovered them. "And what does your king call this light?" *I've got to get all of this down pat, or Hatshepsut will think I'm ill and possibly refuse to take me. The worst thing that could happen would be for Khuamen to leave me here alone!*

"The light is known as the Gift of Amon, my queen."

"Oh, that!" Nora snapped her fingers as her memory latched onto what little history she'd read of Hatshepsut's reign. Supposedly, she was the daughter of Thutmose I and Aahmes, and one night the Theban god Amon-Re was reported to have approached Aahmes in the form of Thutmose I, thereby making Hatshepsut's birth divine and she the child of a god.

“How many people know of the Gift of Amon, Hebeny?”

“Oh, very few!” Hebeny looked as if Nora had smacked her. “The king would never permit us to breathe a word -- we’d surely die if we did so!”

Now Nora wanted to go to Luxor, had to see what none of her contemporaries would ever witness -- the majesty and grandeur of the Valley of the Kings; Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple in *Deir el-Bahri*, built on the site where Aahmes had been visited by Amon during her pregnancy; and the splendor of a palace full of living, interacting people of its time.

“My queen?”

“Yes, Hebeny?”

The girl seemed hesitant but finally blurted out what was troubling her. “Your husband doesn’t even know about the Gift of Amon. Neither, I think, did his father.”

Nora searched for recognition. Thutmose I was Hatshepsut’s father, Thutmose II her half-brother. That meant that Thutmose III, the son of Thutmose II by one of his mistresses, was Neferure’s husband, the one who ultimately destroyed much of Hatshepsut’s work after she was gone.

“Who constructed my mother’s temple?” Nora asked.

“Why, her architect, Senmut. He has many titles.”

Now it all gelled and made sense. *Khuamen’s uncle was Hatshepsut’s lover and probably my own father*. Nora jumped at the realization that she was thinking of herself as Neferure. God, what a convoluted mess!

Then her thoughts interlaced, and she focused on Amon, Theban god. Where had she heard of this place? Theban god ... Thebes. Greece? *Thebes, as in birthplace of Hercules?*

Nora yelped as the air in her lungs seemed to whoosh out all at once. “Oh, my God! Hercules, from Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* fame? I’m about to visit ... history in the making.” Granted, Hercules was from yet a different time, but the thought that she would soon walk upon sand trod by one of the supposed immortals both chilled and thrilled her.

Hebeny lowered her head, looking at Nora with a quizzical expression. “Who is this Hercules?”

“Did I say that aloud?” Nora clapped a hand to her mouth.

A knock at the doors startled her, but Hebeny quickly reassured her that it was probably Khuamen.

As long as it's not my husband! He was the one visitor Nora had no wish to see. She had the weird feeling that if she and Khuamen were back in time, Tom might be as well, and that she simply couldn't handle. She could barely tolerate knowing the man was alive in the future.

“My queen?”

Nora stared at Hebeny, wondering why the girl didn't immediately answer the door. “Yes?”

“Since your memory is ... faulty, I caution you to beware the dangers around you.”

Nora's spine stiffened. “What dangers?”

“There have been many deaths here recently. You have been extremely ill yourself.” Hebeny twisted her hands, a worried frown on her face, her lips trembling as if she might cry. “Just be careful of who you let close to you.”

Dear Lord, she surely didn't mean Khuamen, did she? He could have killed her in Las Vegas, if that was his purpose.

Another rap at the door. Nora didn't care -- he could wait. “Who has died?”

Hebeny looked perplexed. “I'm not sure how many deaths are related, but several of the king's closest guards, mostly poisoned we think. Two of her personal servants, both women.”

This time the knock at the door was louder, more insistent.

“I see. Let him in.” Nora mentally prepared herself to meet Khuamen. Maybe he could shed light on what Hebeny had just told her. “Then you may go to sleep.”

“But, my queen, I sleep here.” Hebeny indicated a rug beside Nora’s bed.

“Then wait outside, go get a drink, shop for sandals -- that’s what I’d do in my time, do something, only leave us alone a while.” She gasped, then giggled. Before Hebeny could question what she’d just said, Nora motioned for her to leave.

Nora tried keeping the excitement from her voice and the gladness from her face when he entered. He looked the same, and she almost cried in relief. After the door closed behind him and they were alone, she rushed to meet him, throwing herself into his arms.

“Where have you been?” She leaned against him, tears springing to her eyes despite her best attempts. “I’ve been so worried and frightened!”

“My uncle told me that the king is worried about you, that you’ve been ill.” He kissed her lips and studied her face.

“Hangover from time traveling, I think.” She laughed nervously as she said it. “Does this ever get any easier?”

He walked her towards the bed and sat down beside her. “When you’re in your own time, yes. When we travel outside our dimension, it’s worse. Memory problems, fatigue. Are you sure you’re all right?”

Nora licked her bottom lip. “I’ve been naughty, but it’s your own damn fault that I started without you.” She told him about her tryst with Hebeny and Ahmed.

“Oh?” Khuamen seemed intrigued, but not upset. “How is this my fault?”

“The last thing we did was make love; then you drag me across deserts and oceans and seas only to dump me. I wake up to being pampered, then fondled while being bathed; they give me wine and dope ... and you wonder why I got horny?”

She tackle-hugged him and threw him on his back against the bedding, straddling him. “You have a lot to answer for, my friend. You’re the only real thing I know in this world, and you weren’t here when I woke up!”

Khuamen laughed as he undressed her, setting aside her sheer garment. “You are truly of royal blood, my fiery queen, if you demand sex like this from all of your subjects and expect to be obeyed upon command.”

“Only from you.” Nora kissed him, relieved at last to know he was safe and that they were together. “Just don’t leave me again.”

“I take it that you’re pleased to see me.” He stroked her thighs, his words light-hearted, but his eyes darkening with what she hoped was desire.

“Do you have any idea what it’s like to wait for an eternity?” Nora unbelted his sash hurriedly.

“Trust me, I do.” With that, he rolled her over onto her back and disrobed completely.

Nora stared at his magnificent shaft and all but drooled. “I need you tonight, Khuamen. For this moment in time, wherever we are, *whenever* we are, I want you.”

“Then you shall have me, my queen.”

Nora remembered the first time he’d used those words and recalled that it was her submissive phrase, the one that would always render her his slave, whether Khuamen realized it or not. And by the dark, knowing gaze he shot her, he was on to her and knew quite well what he was doing and saying.

For some reason, the way he used her title was different from Hebeny’s rendition. His held possessiveness, despite their stations in life at the moment. Nora saw it in his eyes that she was his, despite all differences, no matter their unusual circumstances. It was if he’d crossed the sands of time to find her, and by the fathomless gaze he gave her, he had no intentions of letting her go.

She moaned in ecstasy as his hands caressed her, as if remembering a long-forgotten, much-missed pleasure, a timeless melody that played in both their minds. She’d felt the earth shift, her world turn upside down, but nothing like this. His body was hot and ready for her, and her pussy was wet, primed to accept him.

When his granite-hard rod pierced her, she cried out in surprise, vaguely remembering that he'd said she was a virgin and at this point not caring. What a joy to be able to give him entrance to the heat he'd begun so long ago, to finally move beyond fucking and to consummate their relationship as if they were preordained to mate.

And this was mating, pure and simple. His skin shone with a fine mist of sweat that felt like velvet-encased steel. He was her warrior, her prince, the one she'd ached for long before they even met.

"Your face is that of a goddess!" He rode her fiercely, with determination, like a man possessed, searching for something and finally having it within reach. "I have dreamed of you like this, your body tight and wet, quivering in my arms."

Nora leaned upward until she could fasten her lips around one of his nipples and suck. He tasted salty and sweet, sweat mixed with some form of delicious aphrodisiac oil. She could barely believe they were together, without interruption, without impending doom, or anything else to threaten their separation. It was if they'd been together forever, and she wanted the moment to last.

Tears sprang to her eyes as she felt her body screaming for release. *No-no-no!* She didn't want him to stop. Clinging to him as he pushed them into oblivion, she bucked beneath him, seeking all he could deliver.

"My queen!" His voice was a whisper, a cry, a shout all rolled up into one blissful proclamation, the final thrust she needed to shatter in his hands.

Before she could recover, she saw one of his hands snake past her head to grab the fabric he'd removed from her body.

Still inside her, he dragged the cloth across her face and started moving inside her again. "You started without me."

She laughed weakly. "Well, you weren't here."

"I told you that you are mine." His eyes gleamed.

Nora was shocked as she watched him twist the material in his hands until it formed a rope. What did he intend to do, strangle her?

Khuamen pulled away from her and flipped her onto her stomach, threading the material of her gown beneath her and ordering her to take it in her hands.

She did as he requested, having to draw to her knees in order to reach what was beneath her stomach. When she did, he yanked on it, and her ass flew a few inches upward. Khuamen clasped a hand at her pussy and finger fucked her, leaning down to bite her buttocks.

“You are still wet for me, but I have another idea.” He withdrew his fingers and inserted them into her anus, causing her to gasp and cry out.

“Khuamen ... no!”

“You may be my queen, but I am your master in the bedroom, love.” He slipped two fingers in and out of her asshole, preparing her.

Nora’s heart lurched. What did she do? How could she refuse him when he was obviously in control more than she was? Quivering, she knew the answer. She wanted to feel him, to experience all he had to offer. She nodded slowly and could almost feel Khuamen’s smile as he bent over her, his hard, slick cock ready to breach her final defense.

With both hands splaying across her back and hips, he edged the tip of his manhood into her opening and pushed ... gently ... firmly ... insistently. Then he bent over her and grabbed her pussy, opening its lips with one hand while thrusting the other inside of her, all the while continuing to ride his cock into her ass.

By the time he was fully inside her, Nora had practically ripped the dress in her hands to shreds. He tugged at the material from behind her and urged her to hang on. When he pulled and she pushed, she found it gave him better leverage, and now they were set for him to take her from behind, to completely control her. She thrust her arms upward and bit back a scream as he fucked her, his cock sliding in and out of her ass with long, smooth thrusts,

pumping his hardness as deep into her as possible, touching nerve endings she hadn't even known existed.

"You are mine!" He held the reins made of soft, sheer fabric, trailing them across her back as he rode her. "Do you enjoy it?"

Nora nodded, unable to speak. She was mindless, breathless, completely at his mercy as he fucked her. Muscles she'd never used seemed to sense his ever-growing length and girth, every fiber of her body aware of not only his movements but the involuntary spasms his cock emitted as he searched and destroyed her last vestige of control.

He shoved with one last, mighty roar, and Nora felt his seed spilling inside her, outside of her, running down her thighs like a hot, quenching blanket.

Khuamen kissed her ass and laid his cheek against it. "You give me great pleasure."

* * * * *

Having one's own bathing pool a mere few steps from the bed was definitely a plus for a girl. Nora delighted in sponging Khuamen's back and shoulders, his stomach and groin. This was a guilty pleasure she wanted to experience again, in this lifetime or the next.

She handed him the sponge and turned her back so that he could minister to her. "Tell me what to expect tomorrow. What should I wear? What will my mother wear? What provisions do we take with us?"

Khuamen seemed to be deliberating before answering. He washed her in silence for a few moments before answering. "Your mother will dress in the traditional garb of male rulers. She will wear the *shendyt* kilt, the *nemes* headdress, and, of course, her false beard."

"Say what?" Nora turned to face him, not sure if he was joking.

"Only overshadowed by her claim that she was her father's favorite child, her manner of presenting herself to the public is one of the most effective methods she could have used

in order to convince the people of her divine right to the throne.” He seemed to think the entire matter one of no consequence, nothing out of the ordinary.

Nora turned once again to face the windows, allowing him access to her back and neck. “Is she bald beneath all that hair and her ... what did you call it? Headdress?”

“It has a *uraeus* and a *khat* head cloth. The *uraeus* is the symbol of the sacred serpent, an emblem of sovereignty. The *khat* is a shrub, an evergreen that grows here. We chew the leaves for medicinal purposes and make tea from it for its stimulating effects, but we also wear it as an adornment. You will most likely have a wreath of it placed with your own headdress.”

“I’m not wearing anything on my head.” Nora was adamant.

“Yes, my queen, you will, and you will like it -- it smells delightful.”

Nora’s pussy twitched in response to his term for her. “Anything else? What clothes should I wear?”

“A linen gown with gold filigree seems to be your mother’s favorite on you.”

“And yours?” She leaned against his chest.

Khuamen nuzzled her neck and nipped her ear, his hands crossing in front of her with the water-filled sponge. “I like you as you are, of course, but I doubt that would be prudent until we are alone again.”

Nora reluctantly agreed.

“Your mother must dress like a man to quell the fears of her people.” Khuamen continued his speech. “They are fearful, even though we are not at war. Your husband hates her, you know, and nothing would please him more than if she had the misfortune to die. He pretends that nothing is wrong, but there is talk.”

“Is that why so many of my mother’s servants have died recently?” Nora held her breath, wondering if she should let him know everything Hebeny told her.

Khuamen's arms tightened possessively around her. "I see your own servants have already discussed this with you. They're right. You have been quite ill off and on of late, and I've wondered if the same murderer hasn't tried poisoning you."

"How could you bring me here, knowing you would be placing my life in danger?" Nora pushed aside his arms and turned to face him.

"Because I knew that I could protect you."

"What if you hadn't shown up when you did?"

"But I did arrive, and we are here now discussing the matter." His handsome face once more seemingly turned to granite, this time not with passion, but with anger. "My people will suffer if anything happens to your mother. *I will suffer should anything happen to you.* You have been my life since we first met. Nothing will happen to you in my care!"

Nora still wasn't convinced. "What made you step into the ley lines and search for me? Had something already happened to me? Was I dead in this lifetime or something?"

"Of course not." He seemed angry with her now, not just at the situation. Then a sheepish look crossed his features. "I hadn't planned on finding you."

"Oh. Right. I forgot, you came after my grandmother."

"I made a mistake one day -- I entered the ley lines, as your time calls them, and I meant to go one place and ended up another." He shrugged, as if to let himself off the hook.

Nora couldn't help but laugh. "You took the wrong trip?"

"I misjudged."

"I'd have given a quarter to watch you at baggage claim once you arrived." She could well understand how such a thing could happen. "How long have your people known about these ley lines?"

"Centuries, I imagine. Few know, fewer still would understand, so the lines are only for the pharaohs and their families. According to my uncle, the king's father introduced her to

the ley lines at an early age, but whatever his reasons, he never shared the information with his mistresses.”

“Meaning ... my husband doesn’t know about them.”

“Precisely.”

No wonder the ley lines were such a phenomenal “discovery” in modern times. If only royalty used them for eons, no one would even know about them unless they stumbled upon them, and then they’d have no guide, no instructions, no way of knowing how to use them.

“You asked what else we would take on our journey,” Khuamen reminded her. “My people are fond of ivory, exotic animals, spices, gold, and aromatic trees, so those things will travel with us.”

“Where do these things come from, anyway?”

“Many came from Punt, where your mother secured the dwarf, Kyky. Strange land. I was there when they captured him. Their people live in beehives on stilts, some strange thatched house above water.”

She laughed. “They still have that type of house all over the Caribbean and Hawaii, not to mention other islands in the South Pacific.”

Nora could tell the way he’d said the name that Khuamen didn’t think much of Kyky. “What is it with that little man? He has shifty eyes.”

“Kyky was taken against his will, like many of the treasures that came back with our soldiers on that expedition. I’m sure he has personal reasons for being ... unpleasant.” Khuamen took a deep breath. “He gives the performance of acting like he’s her servant, her slave, but don’t trust him. Never let him give you food or drink.”

At that, Nora gasped. “You think he’s the one responsible for all those deaths?”

“It’s possible.”

Now she was more than intrigued. She had to know everything Khuamen thought. “Tell me more.”

“Two of the guards were found lying in the hall outside your mother’s chambers. The only marks on them were small puncture wounds behind their knees.”

“Blood ... arteries ... whoever pricked them knew that the poison would travel to their heart. What makes you sure that they were poisoned?”

“They foamed at the mouth, and their skin turned an unusual reddish blue. Besides, they were healthy just prior to their demise.”

“That’d do it.” Nora chewed her bottom lip thoughtfully. “And the women who died?”

“The same tiny marks, only on their necks and thighs.” He touched his femoral and carotid arteries.

“Why hasn’t Kyky been arrested?”

Khuamen shrugged. “No proof. No accusations, only speculation on the part of me and my uncle. Senmut asked your mother why she kept the dwarf around, and she said because he amused her.”

Nora shivered. So this was how the trip would be, with a murderer most likely present, since so many of the royal slaves had died, and numerous men and women walking like pack mules through time and space.

“Come.” Khuamen motioned for her to rejoin him. “I will protect you.”

“Were you invited by my mother to join us?”

“I was invited by my uncle, who rarely travels without me. We’ve hardly been separated since my mother died, years ago. He raised me as his own son.”

“And this will be good enough for my mother?”

“She trusts and respects me, I think. I’ve carried out many of her wishes on my own, have traveled to many lands for her in search of the treasures she covets. I’ve earned a place at her side. Now ... I have you.”

Nora couldn’t help but wonder how well having a male companion who wasn’t a eunuch would go over. “Do I have the right to demand your presence with me at all times?”

Khuamen nodded slowly, a smile spreading across his handsome face, which was all she needed to know.

Chapter Seven

First Tom, now Kyky. Seems I've traded one psycho son of a bitch for another. Maybe it's my karma -- I'm doomed to have men like this around me at any given time. Is there some universal law that says assholes can't have their own country? Why can't they all simply converge upon some snow-encrusted corner of the Ukraine or Siberia or in Bumfuck, Ethiopia, or something?

I've managed to avoid Kyky for the most part, but the little bastard still manages to find me for a tête-à-tête. Smarmy little creep. He acts so polite, but his eyes tell me he'd like nothing better than to slit my throat. He tells me I seem different. Well, hello, jerk.

I don't understand why I'm here, really, why my presence is vital. If history is to be believed, Neferure ... I ... died around age fourteen, which is how old I am right now. (I feel like such a little slut to be having kinky sex at my age, even though the ménage was only the one time.) If we somehow screw with time and what is to occur, won't that throw a wrinkle into the time continuum or something?

Brought Mimi's journal with me -- in fact, the entire bag, wrapped inside the linen to protect it from prying eyes. Mimi's words give me hope that somehow I'll get through this. She writes of how Hatshepsut's supposed sarcophagus was found, how she never really

believed it was the ruler. Then there's the part about how WWI started, and the ship carrying the corpse sank, with her own father aboard -- that must have been traumatic as hell. Later she talks about her promise to Artemis to reunite Hatshepsut with Senmut. Finally, she talks about her marriage and how much she loves Max, the plans they've made to have a family. It made me sad to hear of her pregnancy, because I know that her firstborn won't live past her twenties. Yet it gives me hope.

I mean, I exist somewhere in the future right now because of Mimi. She and my parents obviously lived, or I would never have been born, would never have transported back to this era. I just don't understand the connections between one world and the next.

I do know that Khuamen and I were meant to be together. Considering that I have no desire to die young in ancient Egypt, I'm hoping he'll be willing to move forward in time and settle with me back in the States. Securing papers for him will be a bitch, but there's always Plan A, where he can claim amnesia. Plan B would entail the military, and I don't want them hounding him the rest of his life, dissecting his body or mind to suit their own purposes. Plan C is evasive -- I have no clue what that would be.

My remaining here is out of the question, one I hope he never poses to me. What do I say? How can I give up the love of my life, but on the other hand what do I do about Mimi, my work, the only life I've ever known?

Here I am royalty, soon to be deceased. There I'm a working schmuck with debts, family, and friends. Both of us have but one remaining relative we're close to, but ... the thought of him leaving Senmut or me saying goodbye to Mimi is unthinkable.

We've been here two days. Yesterday, I saw the magnificent temple my mother has been building. On one wall are the words of Khnum, a potter whose sculptures of the gods blow the mind. One particular slab reads "I will make you to be the first of all living creatures, you will rise as king of Upper and of Lower Egypt, as your father Amon, who loves you, did ordain." I'm pretty sure that Hatshepsut or Senmut told him what to say, but it's still pretty provocative and powerful. She has a lot of charisma and an elegance like none I've

ever seen. The people, for the most part, don't read or write, so they're steeped in superstition and are easily led by anyone with the will and power to bend their minds.

There's a feeling of awe and wonderment that never leaves me. It's almost as if I can hear the voices of the entities that linger in the tombs, as if their embalming rituals involve spirits, not just bodies, and that no one ever really dies here. Sand and limestone buildings as old as time with colossal obelisks and towering columns, on which are innumerable stories and drawings. It boggles the mind that my mother is the chief ruler of the most civilized people of their century.

The sanctuary of Mother's temple lies within the mountainside, with two ramps connecting three levels, and on either side of the two inclines lie T-shaped papyrus pools. On the ground level are sphinxes and exotic trees with delightful fragrances. I can't help but wonder how a culture can spend so much time, energy, and money concerned with their afterlife. But then, I suppose things now aren't so different from my own day and time. How much money from the thirteenth century forward has been spent on churches and propaganda?

As for the temple priests who reside here -- they're a scary lot, and I don't trust many of them. Their robes are made of animal skins, like those of giraffe, cheetah, and panther. Two of the men have huge snakes and monkeys that go everywhere with them. Even Senmut has a family of apes that live within the palace, and he has a large collection of horses, the largest I've seen since I've been here. One fierce black stallion seems to be his favorite. He's promised to take me riding tomorrow.

I doubt I'll be able to record much more. Mother keeps me with her most of the day, and her nights are spent with Senmut and mine with Khuamen. He doesn't mind that I write and smoke, but the others would be alarmed if they saw the contents of my bag or viewed me puffing away at something not connected to a bong.

I'll try to write more later, but for now, this is it. I am oddly calm, even though I know the events that should soon take place, that somehow I will die or disappear, that all of this

may soon feel like just a dream. I wonder how much of it I will remember once I'm back home with Mimi. I am torn between wanting to return to her and wanting to remain with Khuamen, and I dread the moment that we must say goodbye, or when I have to choose between him and the grandmother who raised me.

Nora did as she did every night, tucking the journal and pen back inside the Gucci within the linen bag, checking to make sure nothing was missing, and both eagerly awaiting and cautiously avoiding each opportunity to delve into the contents, wondering which time would be her last.

She looked up as someone knocked at the entrance to her room. Nora glanced at Khuamen, who was sleeping peacefully, and decided to answer the door herself rather than call out to whoever waited on the other side. It was Hebeny.

"Your mother wishes to see you on her balcony."

Nora was restless and eager to comply. Her conversations with Hatshepsut of late had been quite interesting. The older woman seemed to need the mother-daughter chats, something Nora had never been able to hold with her own mother.

When she reached her mother's quarters, Hatshepsut beckoned her to step onto the balcony and to view the night's circumpolar constellations from their vantage point. For a moment they were both silent, each admiring the array of stars in the cloudless sky, with the moon bright and full almost directly above them. Nora couldn't help but wonder how often she'd stared at that same sky with the same patterns, never realizing their significance to ancient astrologers or star-gazers, never giving a thought to how many men, women, and children had wished upon them or studied them.

"We spend our lives trapped between *Asar* and *Heru*, the kingdoms of yesterday and today." Hatshepsut's voice was wistful. "I yearn to escape, to be free to travel where I wish, not to remain a prisoner of *Maat*, the way things must be." She continued staring up and

beyond, almost as if she weren't looking at the present, but somewhere distant that only she could see. "You must promise me something, daughter."

"Of course." The peace she'd felt upon entering her mother's chambers dissolved, and an air of foreboding swept over Nora.

"Should something happen to me, I want you to leave with Khuamen. I want you to make your way through the tunnels to the Gift of Amon. He has traveled through the light even more often than I, or Senmut. I know he loves you, so he will protect you."

Nora started to protest, but Hatshepsut waved her hand, dismissing the potential argument that nothing bad would happen to her.

"Take Khuamen, Hebeny, and no other. Go wherever you like, but it is my wish that you return with him to Greece, home of his mother. My stepson, your husband, wishes to kill me."

"He won't!" Nora couldn't repress her anger and the desire to reassure the king. "Mother, you must trust me on this. *I know* he won't kill you." *At least not for a very long time.*

Hatshepsut turned and touched her daughter's face, just as she had when they first met in Neferure's chambers, the day after Nora arrived. "You've been changed ever since your last fever. Is it possible that you are able to see into the future now?" She smiled indulgently. "My temple priests tell me that it's entirely possible for someone other than them to practice divination." She snorted. "You won't find them telling anyone else that, of course. They're much too frightened of those who would usurp their positions."

Nora turned her face into one of Hatshepsut's palms, an incredible feeling of sadness and longing lacing her thoughts. Here she was with a mother lovingly caressing her face, speaking openly of dreams and desires, fears and consequences, something she couldn't remember ever sharing with a maternal figure other than Mimi. She kissed her mother's

hand and clasped her arms. "I know, just trust me. You will be safe. You will rule for many years and be known throughout the world as the greatest female pharaoh of Egypt!"

"And you?" Hatshepsut's eyes filled with tears. "My priests also tell me that you are in grave danger, that soon we shall part, never to see one another again until we meet my father."

Nora knew she meant Amon-Ra, not Thutmose. "I will live on, as will you." Nora prayed her words were true, that neither of them was in danger, but she knew in her heart that there was no way of assuring it as fact.

"There will be a feast tomorrow night in honor of your birthday." Hatshepsut lowered her face and stared brightly into her daughter's eyes. "We were unable to celebrate before because of your illness, but tomorrow night there shall be a feast, dancing, the animals, and whatever you wish."

Nora jerked with *déjà vu*. It really was her birthday! It was the reason she and Mimi had gone to Las Vegas!

Excitement raced through her veins, and she giggled. She couldn't remember the last time she'd had a birthday party. Never at a palace, for sure. "Wonderful!"

"I'm glad you are pleased." Hatshepsut walked back inside, telling Nora to follow her. "I have a present for you."

She reached into a jeweled box lying on her bed and handed two necklaces to Nora. One was a black scarab with gold stripes outlining its back; the other was an ankh. Both hung from thick gold chains.

"Senmut crafted them for you. The scarab is like the one he made for his mother." She lifted the other from Nora's upturned palm. "Do you remember the story I told you when you were a little girl about the ankh?"

Nora shook her head.

“Look closely. Although it is a symbol of divinity and eternal life, it is no more than the depiction of a sandal strap, a reminder that we must travel unbound in order to reach joy.” She clasped Nora’s hands. “And you, child, have been, and always will be, my greatest joy.”

* * * * *

I’m dreaming this entire adventure. A mother’s love, something I’ve longed for, a handsome lover, the excitement and splendor of being royalty, the fear of death. Nora allowed her servants -- she refused to call them slaves -- primp and pamper her. Her heart was pounding so hard that she could practically hear the blood rushing throughout her body, could practically feel her hair growing, despite the hot pink wig covering it.

My Rock Star Days. She could see the journal entry now.

The whole palace was abuzz with anticipation of the coming event. The party would start as soon as the king and her daughter arrived, and Hatshepsut had given specific instructions as to when and how they would enter. Trumpets blaring as they walked down the steep staircase, surrounded by their servants, on the arms of their lovers, the gala of all Egyptian galas, by all accounts. Nora hadn’t even attended her high school proms; she had no idea what to expect or how to act, regardless of the numerous instructions she’d received from her mother and the hints and suggestions from Hebeny and Khuamen.

The feeling of butterflies in her stomach kept her equilibrium off-kilter. The very thought of possible assassination weighed heavily on her mind. If she died in Egypt as Neferure, would she still be alive in North America as Nora, or would she simply cease to exist? Why weren’t there any damn records of Neferure’s demise?

Nora had never been overly religious, but now she called on every saint, god, and metaphysical belief she knew to help her. For some reason, she knew that tonight would be the catalyst that propelled her one way or the other, into the future, further back in time, or into the great unknown from which there was no actual proof of life after death.

From the moment Khuamen met her at her door to when they met her mother and Senmut at the top of the steps, Nora felt panic. There were so many people below welcoming them, and their presence threatened to suffocate her.

“You are beautiful.” Khuamen’s voice near her ear warmed her, yet made her jump. What if she made a mistake? What if, like Kyky, someone discovered she really wasn’t the same *queen* they’d known prior to her arrival in Egypt? Granted, the little bastard could do nothing about it other than maybe kill her. Who would believe him? Even Hatshepsut accepted her.

Their ceremonial procession seemed to last forever, and the noise was deafening as Hatshepsut’s subjects hailed and praised them, welcoming them to what promised to be an event worth remembering.

Senmut’s apes were caged so that onlookers could gaze, but they were sectioned off by long lengths of rope to prevent anyone getting hurt. Men swallowing swords and others twirling sticks on fire; women dancing, their bodies lithe and seductive; servant girls and boys ferrying food and wine from one table to the next ... all brought with them a surrealistic aura of madness and magic.

No epic book or movie could ever capture the timelessness and dazzling beauty of Hatshepsut’s palace or the gigantic catacomb of tunnels and tombs they’d passed to bring them there.

Nora questioned herself fleetingly as to what her own government or even those belonging to the United Nations would do if they could harness the powers of the ley lines. Most likely the various Departments of Defense would use them against their enemies, and scientists fronting technology would battle war mongers for their use.

Like any other form of technology, the governments would get first usage, and only after the new had worn off and something better had been found, would Joe and Jane Everyman be allowed its use.

“What are you thinking?” Khuamen reached beneath the table at which they were sitting and closed his hand over hers.

“I’m wondering how the ley lines were kept secret for so many centuries, whether or not modern times are ready for them.” She gazed at him thoughtfully. “And I’m wondering if I’ll be able to say no if you ask me to stay.”

* * * * *

Nora lay on her bed, staring at the ceiling, remembering the night’s festivities. Khuamen had gone with his uncle to check on the horses, her mother had retired for the night, and she and Hebeny were alone, waiting on one of the servants to bring up a bottle of wine.

“You are happy, yes, my queen?” Hebeny stood beside her bed, smiling.

“I am deliriously happy. Yes!” Nora hugged herself, feeling truly at peace for the first time since her journey. “I never dreamed I could be this content.”

She sat up and motioned for Hebeny to sit beside her. “I know I’ve worried you and made you uneasy because of my memory problems, and for that I am sorry. I’ve been so wrapped up with my own thoughts that I’ve failed to thank you for everything you do for me.”

“The queen doesn’t need to thank me!”

“I know -- I know, but just accept it.” Nora looked about, searching for a talisman. “Look, I’ve never had any close girlfriends, and even though you haven’t a clue what I’m talking about, I need a ritual of some sort right now, something to commemorate this evening, this birthday, this entire fucking trip!”

She leapt off the bed and went for the linen bag, then lifted the two matching shabti from the shelves and brought the entire lot over to the bed. Pouncing back onto it, she opened the bag and revealed the contents.

"The journal won't mean jack shit to you, but work with me." Nora took out the meagerly number of cigarettes she had and pulled out two, placed them both in her mouth and lit them with the lighter. Handing one to Hebeny, she showed her how to smoke it.

"Don't inhale deeply." She laughed as Hebeny stared at the fag as though it were a snake. "Small puffs, like this." She took another drag. "We'll use these as ashtrays." Nora tapped her own cigarette into one shabti and Hebeny's in the other.

Hebeny shrank in horror. "Oh, no, my queen!" Then, eyes wide, she gasped ... and laughed. She laughed so hard that she started coughing, and Nora whacked her gently on the back.

"What?" Nora waited expectantly.

"The shabti -- they are sacred. They have been blessed." Hebeny burst into a fit of giggles. "They contain dirt from The Gift of Amon's tunnel ... and ... and ashes from the incense your mother burns there!"

Nora could tell that she'd just committed a major *faux pas*. "Oops." She struggled to maintain a severe expression and hoped it was authoritative. "We'll not tell anyone else of this."

Hebeny nodded. "As you wish."

Nora smiled, remembering when Khuamen had said those words to her in Nevada. "I wish."

"Now I want to know something about you. Where did you live before coming here? Where are your people?"

Hebeny's bottom lip trembled, and she looked as if she would cry.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Nora rushed to comfort her.

Hebeny sniffed. "No one has ever asked me before."

Then Nora brightened and snapped her fingers. "Heliopolis! You told me when you gave me that scent ... the kyphi!"

“Exactly!” Hebeny seemed pleased that Nora remembered. “The City of the Sun.”

“Do you miss home?” Nora felt foolish for asking, considering the girl was most likely taken against her will at some point.

“Terribly. My parents are both dead, but it was home.”

A knock at the door alerted them that their wine had probably arrived.

“Finish your cigarette. I’ll take care of it.” Nora motioned for Hebeny to remain seated. “I hope they brought two goblets instead of one, because I want you to join me.”

At the last minute, Nora remembered her own cigarette and quickly deposited it inside one of the vases lining the walls before rushing back to the door and opening it.

A grim-faced guard with a small scar above his right eyebrow handed her a tray, then left. Nora caught a glimpse of what looked like a child’s robe vanishing around the corner just down the hall and frowned. Some parents needed to manage their children better. This was no time of night for a young girl or boy to be roaming the palace looking for mischief.

She set the tray on the table near her bed, then paused. “I’ll be right back.” Nora went back to the door, opened it, and peered out. Nothing. She ventured further, taking quiet, furtive steps, thinking she might sneak upon whoever might still be nearby. None of the guards were in sight, which was unusual. She’d never opened her door and not found at least two of them standing sentry.

Then she remembered what Khuamen had said ... never accept food or drink from Kyky. That wasn’t a child she’d seen -- it was the dwarf! Nora flew down the hall, racing towards the last place she’d seen him.

At the bottom of the steps, the dwarf and the guard who had served her turned at the sound of her footsteps and stared, alarmed, at her face. Nora screamed and pointed at them when other guards appeared. “Stop them!”

Her throat went dry, and she didn’t wait to see if they’d been arrested. All she could think about was Hebeny.

“Hebeny! Don’t drink the wine!” Nora shouted the words over and over as she fled back towards her bedroom. *Please, God, let her be alive! Don’t let her drink!*

Crying hysterically, Nora knew what she’d find before she even got there. Her friend and companion lay dead on the marble floor of the bedroom, one arm outstretched and the goblet from which she’d drunk still rolling a short distance from her. Hebeny’s other hand clutched her throat, and a sickly white foam issued from between her lips.

“No! No!” Nora wailed uncontrollably. *Not this woman!*

Soon a flurry of armed guards burst into her room, followed closely by her mother. The pharaoh looked horrified, then sad. Her eyes met those of her daughter’s, and she shook her head. “I should have listened to Senmut.”

“It was Kyky, Mother -- I saw him and the guard, the one with the scar above his eye, running away right after they’d served us.” Nora burst into a fresh bout of tears, angry that such a thing could have happened. “She was so sweet and gentle!” Her voice cracked as she wept. “She was my only friend other than Khuamen.”

Hatshepsut clapped her hands and gathered her guards, placing four of them with Nora and taking the rest with her, ordering them to capture the two men who had dared attempt murdering her daughter.

Then Hatshepsut reentered the bedroom. “I have sent for Khuamen. Remain here until I send for the two of you.”

Hebeny’s lifeless eyes stared blankly back at her when Nora bent over her to hug her. She could do nothing but hold her friend’s body close to hers and weep.

Chapter Eight

The palace has gone from one of gaiety and laughter to one of somber politeness. Everyone is speaking in hushed tones, and a quiet desperation has settled over the entire complex. Kyky and one of the guards poisoned Hebeny -- the death was supposed be mine, not hers. I'm too numb to say what's in my heart. I barely knew the girl, but I felt as if we'd been friends forever. She knew me better than anyone else here outside of Khuamen.

He and Senmut left a few minutes ago to conference with my mother. Evidently Khuamen and Kyky fought, and Khuamen killed him, but not before the evil little bastard stabbed him in the thigh with a dagger. I finally got to use my little forensics kit ... on a thirty-five-thousand-year-old man with a knife wound. After I sutured the wound, he and his uncle left with Hatshepsut.

All I know is that I was told to pack everything I want to take with me, so it looks like this is goodbye.

For a brief moment in time, I've had a mother again. I had a birthday party, I met the love of my life, and I had a friend whose memory will last me a lifetime. Tragedy, it seems, has no respect for time and place -- it can occur anywhere, anytime.

Hebeny saved my ass when I arrived, and now it seems she's saved my life, quite literally. If she hadn't drunk first, and if I hadn't figured it out in time, it would be me lying on the floor. Khuamen said that they're bringing a carpet for her, and once they've rolled her inside, they'll take her some place to bury her. He promised me that they will give her a decent resting place, not some obscure hole in the desert.

I know nothing about caring for dead bodies. All I could think to do was wash her and place some of the oils she loved on her skin. She was Egyptian and held the same beliefs as my mother, so surely they'll do some sort of preservation on her. My knowledge of ancient cultures isn't strong enough for me to really know, though. Maybe mummifying is something saved only for the wealthy or for royalty.

Saying goodbye to Mother will be difficult enough. I'm not sure if I'm strong enough to say goodbye to Khuamen, should the need arise. Maybe his uncle will insist that he go with me to make sure I'm safe. Could be that Senmut will wish him to remain with me. Probably just wishful thinking on my part.

The pages of my journal have become wet with tears. I can't stop crying. So much sadness. I feel like my heart is breaking. This parting is different from just saying goodbye to the Grand Canyon or to college classmates after a reunion. This will be a true separation, one that will most likely sever all ties with Egypt for me ... and one that will always haunt me.

Sadly, Nora put away her pen and journal, checked twice to make certain she was leaving nothing of importance behind, and then sat waiting for Khuamen to arrive.

She didn't have to wait long. He and his uncle came in without asking permission, after giving her a short, quick knock on the door to let her know they were entering. They carried a carpet just big enough to hold a body and set about moving Hebeny on top of it.

"Wait!" Nora lunged for the two shabti still on her bed. With an apologetic I-have-no-clue-why-I'm-doing-this glance at Khuamen, she placed one shabti within Hebeny's

hardening fingers and left to insert the other one into her handbag. She wasn't sure which was the original they'd arrived with in Egypt, but it didn't really matter, did it? All she knew was that the two little statues held valuable memories for her, and she wanted to share them with Hebeny's remains.

When they had her wound tightly within the carpet, Khuamen motioned for Nora to follow him and his uncle. Placing an arm about her shoulders, he asked if she was ready.

"I think so." Nora sniffed. "Where are we going now?"

"To the Valley of the Kings."

She frowned. "At this time of night?"

"Just keep up with me. We have one more package to take with us."

When they got to the bottom of the stairs, Nora understood. There lay Kyky's body, a spear sticking out of his torso. She turned her head in disgust as Senmut retrieved the weapon.

Once more, the men rolled a body within a rug, securing both ends with rope. When they were finished, Hatshepsut entered from what Nora called the Grand Ballroom, where they'd held her birthday celebration.

"What about the guard who helped him?" Nora looked at Khuamen once he and Senmut had each hoisted a dead body over their shoulder.

"He's been captured. Your mother's guards have him sequestered for questioning." A corner of his mouth lifted in a sardonic smile.

Nora didn't have to be told what sort of questioning was taking place, and she really didn't want to dwell on it. "Mind telling me why we're taking Hebeny and Kyky with us to the tombs?"

Hatshepsut linked an arm with Nora's. "Only a few guards will accompany us. Once there, you and I with Senmut and Khuamen will enter my tomb. I think it's time to bury the pharaoh." She nodded towards the two dead bodies.

Nora was shocked. "You're burying them together?"

"What better way to deceive those who would dig up my bones and treasures later and think that they've had the better of me?"

So that was why so many of the rulers' sarcophaguses, including Hatshepsut's were unidentifiable! Nora stared in amazement as a sentry of guards and the two men she loved best led their procession towards the tombs.

Hebeny would indeed have a royal burial, the best that her country knew, that of the greatest female pharaoh the world had ever known. It was fitting -- a regal resting place for the best in womanhood that Egypt had to offer.

"Can you carry my belongings?" Khuamen indicated a linen bag much like her own lying at the foot of the stairs.

So this was it. They were leaving, and he was coming with her? How far? Panicked, Nora turned to Hatshepsut.

"We have a long journey ahead of us." The king squeezed her shoulders. "The sun is our only protection today, so we must race to meet it."

* * * * *

Nora laughed, even knowing the somber fact that they were taking Hebeny to her final destination. The book she'd purchased in Las Vegas had talked about Hatshepsut's cartouche. Hatshepsut's full name, according to an account by one of the earliest and brightest Egyptologists, Swiss-born Henri Edouard Naville, was composed of four parts. The first, her "standard" name, was *she who is rich, powerful through her kas, her doubles*. Hebeny was indeed the ruler's double. What a joke on the archaeologists who eventually discovered her. Nora doubted anyone would catch the double entendre for decades ... if then.

But if Hebeny was to substitute for the king, what then would happen to Hatshepsut?

The ride from the palace to the Valley of the Kings was a short one, too short. Nora sorted through the events that had occurred during her stay in Luxor, ticked off items she prayed she'd remember later. The mighty beast on which she and Khuamen sat was powerful, and the horse's energy sent a surge of hope through her. Maybe she was riding towards something thrilling, not frightening, even though the journey involved her saying goodbye one last time to Hebeny.

Across from them rode Hatshepsut on her mare and Senmut on the great black stallion. Both seemed determined not to waste any time.

Nora had been woozy with fatigue and memory loss when they first arrived from Alexandria, and she hadn't noticed the outside of the caverns that held the ley lines. This time, she was coherent and completely awed.

The pylons that greeted them in the dark could be seen by the bright light of the moon. Two columns that looked to be at least seventy feet high were graced with the figures of women. Nora instantly recognized the first as her mother, the pharaoh. The second was obscured by shadow until she stepped away from Khuamen and stared.

She touched her face with both hands, feeling the contours as she mapped out the scene before her in her mind. "It's me!" She gave a small cry, half joy, half dismay. Of course, it wouldn't exist thousands of years later, or she'd have surely read about it. But there she was, as Neferure, bigger than life. The sculptor depicted her standing, her left column facing the right of her mother, both women seeming to gaze into one another's eyes. Two colossi stood just behind and outside of the two pylons. On those were scenes depicting the female king's divine right to rule and her exploits into Punt.

My mother built a tribute to me at the entrance to a temple? Nora could barely believe what she was seeing. She glanced back at the party ahead of her and found Hatshepsut smiling at her sadly, as if she knew that they were about to part forever. All the love and fear she'd ever felt seemed to reflect in her face.

Nora choked on a sob. *I can't do this. How can I leave her when she needs me?*

Then she saw Senmut, who towered over Hatshepsut, looking at her, his head tilted towards hers, as if wanting to kiss her, despite the carpeted burden on his shoulders.

She doesn't really need me -- she has him. Senmut will never leave her.

Just past the entrance, on the pink granite steps leading into the cavern, Hatshepsut ordered all but two guards to remain behind. One led their funereal procession while carrying two torches, and the other held a torch behind them, carrying two more.

The room they'd entered was spacious, with the occasional carved relief celebrating the exploits of Hatshepsut's father and the divination of her birth, but there was no door that Nora could find. The king dismissed the other two guards after having them secure the torches, and after they were gone, everything became clear.

Senmut and Khuamen divided, one going to one relief, the other to another, and simultaneously they pressed on something within their respective pieces of art. A great grinding noise filled the empty room, and the entire panel of wall before Nora gave way to yet another large room. This one held furniture, animal skins similar to the ones she'd seen the temple priests wear, and chests overflowing with jewelry, huge slabs of pink granite, weapons, and various urns and boxes. Senmut and Khuamen left two torches burning, but grabbed the other two and handed them to the women.

Then they moved towards the furthest wall, this time standing before two large columns that appeared to be bolstering the ceiling. Once again, they looked at one another and nodded as they simultaneously pressed against a relief. An ominous looking door appeared on each column.

Nora gave one last look at the room she was in, certain that this was her last glimpse of civilization.

Khuamen whispered her name, and she turned and proceeded him, as her mother led Senmut. Within four or five feet of the narrow corridor leading from the doors on the

columns, the two women came face to face. Hatshepsut stepped aside, allowing Senmut access to the wall that wrapped around them, and Nora did the same for Khuamen.

What a convoluted mess! Her trepidation at the ominous methods they'd used to enter the site was overpowered only by her curiosity at what lay behind the next door. *Let's Make A Deal, Monty.* She tried focusing on an old game show she'd watched on television with her grandmother, hoping that would squelch her fears.

Nora still didn't recognize her surroundings. This new room was smaller than the other two, and there wasn't much in it save two funeral biers. The air was musty, and the stones around them were a fitting décor for death.

The two men set aside the rug-encased bodies and lifted the heavy stones from one rectangular, stone encasement.

"I shall send three of my temple priests here tomorrow and have them tend to the bodies." Hatshepsut kissed her fingertips and rested them against the lid once Hebeny and Kyky were laid inside. Then she turned to Nora. "Your friend shall be treated as though she were the pharaoh. Senmut and Khuamen tell me that you placed something with her."

"A shabti."

"Then she shall be buried with it."

"Are you really going to bury him with her?" Nora looked at the bier anxiously.

Hatshepsut nodded. "She will be empowered by the grace of Amon. Now let him squirm, unable to escape her wrath."

Nora took a shuddering breath. "I hope she curses that little bastard throughout eternity." The ground beneath their feet seemed to tremble, shocking Nora into complete awareness. Startled at her own words, she realized what she'd uttered.

The sarcophagus her great-grandfather and Mimi had discovered! The curse! It wasn't Hatshepsut after all -- it was Hebeny bestowing hate upon the criminal who had murdered

her, and there she was, to be locked for centuries next to the despicable dwarf. Superstition or not, the curse Nora gave voice to was the one Mimi and Artemis spoke of in their journals!

"It's all my fault!" Nora turned to Khuamen. "I did this -- I'm the one who started this death and destruction my grandmother will encounter in the future!"

He steered her toward the entrance. "We must go."

"But don't you see?" Nora wrestled her arm away. "I did this -- it's my fault she's in there, and I see how this all ties together, finally!"

"Come. It is almost dawn." Hatshepsut led the way back to the corridor, and Nora grudgingly followed.

Once the men had secured the vault, they all followed Hatshepsut back to the entrance of the second room they'd encountered.

"Your priests know how to get in here?" Nora was curious as to who had access to the king's tomb.

"They will be blindfolded, for their own protection." Hatshepsut smiled knowingly.

Of course. The brilliance of their ruler in Amon's midst might render them sightless. Nora answered with a smile of her own. She'd seen *baffle them with bullshit if you can't blind them with brilliance* in her own time.

"You are not responsible for Hebeny's death." Khuamen grasped one of Nora's hands.

"That's right." His uncle agreed. "Kyky is, and he paid the price for his misdeed."

"Thutmose will stop at nothing to destroy me." Hatshepsut's voice was murderously calm. "I am sure Thutmose is behind Kyky's treachery, but this is the end of it. I shall trick him -- he won't use you to hurt me. That is why you and Khuamen must go."

Senmut touched his nephew's arm. "Are you ready?"

Khuamen nodded solemnly. "Goodbye, Uncle."

The two men hugged one another, and Nora stood helplessly, unsure why they were saying goodbye now. Where would she and Khuamen possibly go in such a small corridor?

Hatshepsut grabbed Nora and clutched her fiercely, kissing her cheeks and whispering in her ear. "Never forget that your mother loves you, that you are and always will be the light of my life, my heart." She touched the ankh that lay against Nora's breasts. "My greatest joy."

"I love you!" Nora meant it from the depths of her soul. "I will never forget you!"

Hatshepsut sighed deeply and nodded. "And that is how all gods are given strength, through the remembrance of those who loved them."

She opened the door in one of the columns in the great entrance. A sliver of light shown down from above, and when Nora looked up, she saw the sunlight filtering through. A hazy, colorful beam she recognized shone directly onto her, and when Khuamen stepped in beside her and reached for her hand, Nora barely had time for one last look at her mother before she was on her next journey.

Chapter Nine

I am no closer to Nevada than I was when I entered Egypt. If anything, I am further away, but I do recognize the landscape here somewhat. The sky is the same, but the browns, pinks, and oranges of the desert have given way to the mystical blue waters of the sea and the blinding white sands.

There are no sphinxes, no edifices with my likeness. I feel as though I've just left home for the second time recently, and I already miss what was. My only consolation is that Khuamen is with me. He sleeps so peacefully.

The grotto overlooks a hill high above us. Since Mother suggested Greece, like an idiot, I searched for landmarks as soon as I slept off my jet lag. There are none, of course, because the Parthenon, Acropolis, and their contemporaries weren't constructed until several centuries from now.

If we stay, Khuamen tells me that we can make our way to Athens, in which case we'd better learn a trade rather quickly. Seems that Greeks of the Bronze Age only have three classes of people -- citizens, slaves, and foreigners, who rank somewhere in between. They have few rights, but are allowed to work for themselves.

Or he says we can go to Sparta, in which case he'll have to kidnap me to prove to everyone that I'm his wife, some of his savage friends will shave my head, and I'll spend the rest of my days weaving and learning how to defend myself with a bow and a quiver of arrows. The Spartans, as luck would have it, only have two classes -- men and women. If you don't have a penis, you're shit out of luck. However, there's a perk. Women are allowed to read and write in Sparta, so I wouldn't garner much attention. And, oh, joy. The Spartans are also polygamists. Some fucking decision.

Khuamen, male that he is, has only the one kilt to wear, and he packed nothing but his dagger, his sword, some bread and wine, and one tunic. I on the other hand have my Gucci, a couple of gowns, and books. A girl needs her priorities.

He says that we'll try the ley lines again in a couple of days, after we've rested and formulated a plan. I don't think he thought this through when he kidnapped me -- I really don't. To him, things were simple ... grab Nora, save the king, send Nora back to Nevada with a darker tan and a better appreciation for Egyptian culture. I know he loves me. He hasn't said as much, but I know he would have gone with me had it been my suggestion.

I'm recording as much as possible in order to share what I've learned with Mimi. Maybe what I've studied and learned in Egypt will help reveal some truth about the sarcophagus she and her father discovered so long ago in the future. I know, for one thing, that Hatshepsut did not cause all those deaths. I still have a difficult time believing in the myth and superstition anyway. Hebeny was too kind, too gentle a soul, to waste herself damning Kyky for over three thousand centuries. The metaphysicians would heartily disagree with me, but I just can't see her spirit wandering restless, killing those who disturb her, when she could just as easily make the choice to take another path, assuming we have choices in the afterlife.

Not exactly a mystery that intrigues me too strongly at present. I can wait to find out on that one.

Nora turned as she heard Khuamen stir in his sleep. They'd lain in one another's arms the night before, using their bags as pillows and one of her gowns as bedding on the sand, both too tired from their trip to do more than find a place to camp for the night. Their temporary home in the mountain, with white sand and blue sea all around, had been perfect, but now she wanted to explore, to throw the events of the recent past to the wind and escape for awhile.

She tossed the journal and pen into her bag and crept quietly towards him. Tickling him lightly on the nose with her hair, she could barely repress the giggles when he made a face and swiped at her.

When he awoke, he looked at her solemnly, but she noticed the corners of his mouth turning up as he rose and grasped her shoulders, quickly spinning her and pinning her to their sandy bed.

Nora squealed as he tickled her back, and she twisted away from him and stood. Daring to do a striptease in front of him, she looked over her shoulder at the beckoning waters and licked her lips. "Care for a swim?"

Khuamen watched her as if fascinated. "I'd rather dive somewhere else."

Nora ripped off the rest of her clothing and acted like she was about to settle beside him on the ground. At the last minute, she pulled away and ran, laughing, towards the beach.

A nude swim in perfect weather, with no one around for miles that she could see. Plenty of incentive to be naughty.

The water lapping at her ankles and thighs was warm, the sand beneath her feet a soft pillow that squished between her toes. She threw her arms over her head when she reached waist level and dove. When she emerged and looked towards the beach, Khuamen was nowhere in sight. Just as she started to panic and swim back to where she'd left him, she felt

a tug on one of her ankles -- Khuamen's hand securely dragging her towards him, dunking her.

They both resurfaced, playfully splashing water at one another and laughing.

"Do you know, this is the first time I've heard you laugh like that?" Khuamen slicked back his hair and squinted against the sun. "Maybe we need to stay here and not return to your time."

"Maybe you need another soaking!" Nora shoved another handful of water towards him. "I guess this means I no longer get the royal treatment, huh?"

He crooked a finger and beckoned her. "You will always be my queen."

Even in the water, Nora could feel her pussy grow wet with desire at the endearment. She swam towards him, unashamed, uninhibited, totally free of all ghosts of the past and fears of their future.

"I want you!" She threw her arms around him and pressed her lips against his.

When he finally broke from the embrace long enough to talk, he walked them to a more shallow part of the water. "You're not sorry I forced you to come with me?"

"I wouldn't have missed this for the world." She shook her head. "I was attracted to you from the beginning, you know. I was just too uptight and afraid to let you know."

He gripped her ass and dragged her body through the water until their hips met. "Are you saying you wouldn't stay with me if I asked you?"

"Don't tease about something like this!"

"I'm not teasing. This is my time -- that is yours."

"Hypothetically?" Nora felt as if her heart had leapt into her throat, and she couldn't speak for fear of crying.

"Would you stay if I asked you to be my wife?"

Nora felt his hard heat against her body and shuddered. She punched him in the chest. "How can you joke at a time like this?"

"Who is joking?"

She shook her head. "That's not a proposal -- that's a supposition, and I have no way of knowing right now."

Khuamen's traitorous hands molded her flesh, insistently driving his will into her, so it seemed, but Nora resisted, twisting in his arms, trying to free herself.

Then he laughed, and it was her undoing. "Are you or aren't you asking me to marry you?" She locked eyes with him, daring him to make a move one way or the other.

"Haven't I said from the beginning that you are mine?" He met her bravado measure for measure. "Don't you think we'd make quite a match, no matter where we are?"

"Khuamen, damn it!"

His arms wrapped around her more tightly, and he kissed her with a fierce passion. He slipped one hand behind her neck and the other between her legs. Breathing heavily, he left no room for doubt with his next words. "I have only existed without you -- you are my world, my life. This!" He kissed her again, this time letting his fingers invade her moist sheath that had housed his staff so many times the past few nights.

"This!" He lifted his lips from hers and placed both hands on her head, letting his fingers thread through her hair. "Your body, your mind. This." He touched her chest. "Your soul. I want all of you."

She shivered when he stepped back. "And what do I get in return?"

"My undying devotion and several lifetimes of love, my queen. Only for you, because for me, there is no other and never will be."

Nora's heart swelled with love for him. "I love you."

"Then you'll marry me?"

"I'll do anything you ask."

His hands reached for her, and once again she joined him, this time with a resounding, passionate, complete willingness for whatever befell them.

"I have one request." Khuamen's eyes glittered with mischief.

Nora gulped. *Oh, shit. Here it comes. He's gonna ask me to shave my head and become some Spartan Amazon.* "What?"

"Back in your time, everyone wanted to go to Las Vegas and get married by Elvis." He frowned. "I thought Elvis was dead."

Nora howled with laughter. "The King never dies."

He lifted her until his cock was in alignment with her pussy. "Neither will you, my queen. Neither will you."

Each time he thrust into her, Nora was tempted to laugh, to shout with joy. They'd survived so much together. She couldn't imagine growing old with anyone else, and now that she knew where they would be, the pieces of her life seemed to fit perfectly.

"I love you!" She cried the words over and over as he brought her to climax.

They'd found a new freedom of expression since first meeting. He'd helped clear up the mysteries of her family's past, and she'd managed to somehow ensure the safety of his world.

Once they crawled weakly back to their sandy bed, Nora dragged out the remaining gown she'd brought and donned it as if it were her wedding gown, lovingly arranging the sash and straightening the folds.

The little shabti that had helped start their adventure tumbled from her bag and fell onto the sand beside her feet, and she picked it up.

"Why is this thing always so dusty?" She brought it to her lips and inhaled just as Khuamen shouted.

"Whatever you do, don't blow on it!"

THE END

Lyn Cash

Lyn Cash is the author of over fifty published short stories and confessions as well as co-writer of two nonfiction books under her alter ego's name, Bobbie Cole. She sold her first novella, *Mistress Mine*, to Loose Id LLC in April 2005. She has one son and two rescued canines who take very good care of her. Her homes on the Internet are at www.lyncash.com and Kinky_Kruisin-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, as well as www.loose-id.com.