

Jewel of Niveka



Adrianna Dane

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...He was hers and she planned to use him fully. Her hands gripped him, sliding up and down his length. She dropped to her knees and consumed him with her mouth, dancing across the surface of his skin, relishing the flavor of him. So very different from the others. He was masculine fire in her mouth. Although he allowed her to do as she wished, she knew at any moment he could try to take control. But she wanted him like none of the others through the ages.

She skipped her tongue along his rigid staff, swirled it over the full, mushroomed tip, sliding beneath the cap, playing him like a fine instrument, sipping at him like a rare wine. She wanted to savor him slowly, remember the taste and smell that waltzed through her, but she needed him inside her now.

His fingers were tangled in her hair as he gripped her. She felt his desire rising fast and furious, his energy blending with her own. There was no time to take it slowly as her pussy dripped with her juices, pulsed with her own desire. She couldn't wait.

Swiftly rising to her feet, she shed her panties. His arms circled around her, lifting her. She grabbed his shaft, easing it toward her entrance. Wrapping her legs around his waist, she slowly lowered herself onto the burgeoning rod.

He was so big and she felt the walls of her sheath expand as he penetrated her, each nerve ending clutching at the stiff flesh as it entered her. His mouth descended to claim her lips, pushing his tongue deep inside just as his cock claimed her pussy, so his lips claimed her mouth...

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JEWEL OF NIVEKA
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*To my husband, who understands my need to write
and encourages me each and every day.*

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*Old as the sands of time, potent as life itself,
an ancient relic reaches out from the past
to tempt adventurous hearts with promises of
carnal delights...and an unexpected gift...*

CHAPTER 1

Ben Solomon, owner of the Solomon Museum, sat at his desk and thumbed through the book lying in front of him. By this time he should have it memorized. His fascination with the “Translations of the Ancient Scrolls of Niveka” was almost an obsession. He couldn’t get the heretofore unknown city out of his head.

The translations were prepared by Dr. Cassandra Linsey and her husband, who was also a linguist of ancient written languages, Khafeel Mim. It seemed interesting and almost a mark of fate to Ben that the linguist, the only known translator of the Nivekian hieroglyphs, should also bear the name of one of the viziers of that ancient city. But the story in the

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translations was as beautiful and sad a love story as any he had read. He had soaked it up and was eager to learn more. Hence his excitement at the opportunity to host the Nivekian Exhibit.

When the opportunity came up for the Solomon Museum to host the traveling exhibition of the artifacts from the Tomb of Sahrametatiri, royal wife and twin sister to King Zyphirasesammon, he had jumped at the chance to gain a closer look into the world of this newly discovered civilization and its rulers.

There was mention in the translated texts of King Zyphir's royal wife, Sahrametatiri, but the majority of the text involved the love of his life, a secondary wife, bearing the royal name of Aset-meryankhzyphir-Isis, beloved life of Zyphir, commonly known as Isadora.

Sahrametatiri was portrayed as the cosseted, pampered figurehead, but something about the woman intrigued Ben. He wasn't sure why, because there was little written about her, but the fact that it was her tomb that had been unearthed seemed to say she held an important role, more than simply a puppet of the king.

Of course, there was the fact that she had brought Zyphir and his second wife together, which spoke of a selfless act uncommon among royal wives. Then it apparently had been up to her to hold the monarchy together after King Zyphir disappeared. No ordinary woman could have done that. It took a strong, intelligent leader to command at such a time. It was little bits and pieces such as that which had caught and held his attention.

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The contracts had been signed and the exhibit should arrive within the week. He had made arrangements to house the contents of the tomb in one of the more secure exhibition halls of the museum. He'd also upped the security measures and once the exhibit arrived there would be double guards around it. He was taking no chances.

He couldn't wait to get his first glimpse of the original scrolls which were the basis for the translation by Dr. Linsey. When news of the discovery of the scrolls was first released, many people thought it was pure fiction, until a team of scientists were brought to the tomb and verified the authenticity of the artifacts.

He looked again at the photograph of the statue that purportedly represented Queen Sahra. She had been a beautiful woman with a lush, rounded figure. How any man could have resisted her, he couldn't imagine. She had a feline quality about her, and he imagined when she walked into any room it was with the regal grace of a female predator secure in her world and the honor of the people that was her right.

He looked to the corner of his desk, where a carved ebony figurine stood proudly erect and regal. He imagined Sahrametatiri and her proud carriage would have made a perfect model for the goddess. He was surprised when the package had arrived late that afternoon. There had been no note, nothing to indicate who had sent it. But it was a beautiful statue of Bast, an Egyptian goddess, with glittering emerald eyes—the graceful body of a woman with the elegant head of a cat. It was deserving of a place of honor.

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The authenticator for Egyptian art was gone for the weekend, but on Monday he would ask Miriam Smith to take a look at it. For now, he would allow himself the pleasure of keeping it here in his office where he could enjoy it, at least for the time being. No one entered his inner sanctum, and it always remained locked in his absence. Not even the cleaning people were allowed to come in unless he was around. It was too often the case that a valuable piece would be left with him for evaluation after hours and the main safe upstairs was already sealed with a time lock.

He leaned back in his chair and stretched. He glanced up at the clock on the shelf against the wall and was surprised to find it was already midnight. He had lost track of time. Again. His ex-wife, Candace, still held an interest in the museum, and he had totally forgotten about the dinner she had arrange for several potential contributors. She was certainly not going to forgive him for missing it. As much as he hated those things, he knew it was a necessary appearance if he wanted the museum to survive.

Candace and he had never seen eye to eye on things, which was one of the reasons their marriage had fallen apart. They had sort of shifted into marriage after college. She had passion all right, but it was more for his money than it was for him or the museum or history of the pieces it contained. In those early years she had turned her nose up at going with him on the digs each summer, preferring to stay at home and play by the pool or lunch at the country club.

It was upon his return from Mexico five years ago that she

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had informed him she wanted a divorce. He couldn't say he was heartbroken over the break up, and had actually sighed with relief. Their marriage had become a painful anchor weighing around both their necks. Unfortunately he hadn't been able to afford to buy her out of her share of the museum, so she still retained a say in how things were run.

At least she contented herself for the most part with organizing the charity functions and contacting potential contributors, and dealt with some of the more visual responsibilities that he had no interest in. Even though she had just as much of a background in archeology as he had, she had no desire in pursuing any type of career where she might break a well-manicured nail. Candace liked being the decoration on the top of the cake, not the filling.

Yet he had been like an ostrich with his head neck deep in the ground. He'd never realized she'd been having an affair for the last year of their marriage with one of the major contributors to the museum. Jack Craig's interest in Candace was probably the reason he became a major contributor with a special interest in the museum. They were married before the ink was even dry on the divorce decree.

She didn't need her shares in the museum to support herself. Half the time Ben thought she retained her portion strictly in an effort to control him, even though they were no longer married. Craig provided for her very nicely in the way she had always wanted to become accustomed to. No, her only stake in the museum was to grind the knife in his back as deep as possible and to make sure it stayed there. And right now

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there wasn't a thing he could do about it. At least she didn't have control over the finances. If she had, she would have milked the museum dry long ago.

She was going to flay him up one side and down the other for missing this little social event of hers. Damn, it just made him weary thinking about her. And at the moment he was too tired to be concerned about what she would say.

His cell phone was turned off and so was the switchboard. He wouldn't have to deal with her tonight. He closed his eyes. A couple minutes of rest and he'd head for home.

* * *

“Wake up, Ben Solomon. Wake up.”

He heard the velvet, accented voice through a fog of dreams. Had he been asleep longer than he thought? Was it morning already?

“Who's there?” he mumbled as he righted himself in the chair. Damn, he must have been exhausted because he'd been deep into la-la land. Then he saw the vision in front of him. “What the hell?” He rubbed his eyes, but the image didn't fade. “This can't be right. I must still be asleep.” The statue of Bast that had been resting on his desk now apparently stood before him, full of life.

“No, Ben, you aren't asleep. I have come to give you a message.”

He straightened in his chair, wary of what he was seeing, knowing that he must still be asleep. There couldn't be any other explanation.

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“I am Bastet and I know you recognize me. I have come with a message. Zyphirasesammon is sending you a gift. It is the jewel of Niveka that he places into your keeping.”

“What are you talking about? What jewel?”

“This jewel is very precious to him. He has determined that you are the one man to understand its value and to treasure it as it deserves. You will understand how to handle it.” She held up a length of delicate gold chain. “To aid you, he sends this necklace which will bind the jewel to the earth. Only the person who places it on the jewel is able to remove it.” She laid the glittering necklace on the desk. “It will halt her shapeshifting abilities. Use it wisely, Ben Solomon, and care for this jewel well.”

Ben looked down at the chain and then back at Bastet. “Why me?”

“You have been chosen by the gods of Egypt. You alone can satisfy the need that lies in the heart of the jewel. You alone will make the jewel shine brightly once again.”

She began to shimmer and Ben jumped to his feet. “No. Wait. You can’t leave yet. Where is the jewel? How will I recognize it?” Was he nuts? The goddess wasn’t real. It was just a dream.

“You will know her. She is the crown jewel of Niveka who has walked through eternity alone. Her gift is love and only you can free her to shine brightly. Use this time well. Zyphir, the god-king, has spoken.”

And then she was gone. He blinked, rubbed his eyes, and then walked around the desk to where she had stood. He

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leaned down and picked up some sort of gritty, glittering substance. It looked like gold sand. He then walked over to the window and opened the blind to find the beginnings of a foggy morning about to emerge. He turned back to look at the desk and the chain was still there. What the hell had just happened?

* * *

Sahra sauntered into the room toward the dais where Bast waited.

“What is it this time?” she asked. “Another tomb to unearth? Who is it now?”

Bast studied her with her usual haughty, I-am-Goddess look. It was one Sahra had practiced herself when she had been young, so she was untouched by its use now.

“The artifacts from your tomb will be on exhibition at the Solomon Museum in the United States. You will go there to watch over them.”

Sahra huffed. “Why me? That sounds like an extremely boring assignment. Isn’t there anyone else to handle it?”

“You are the one to accomplish this task. Only you are...intimately...familiar with the contents of the exhibition. It must remain intact. There are many who would try to steal from your past.”

“Isn’t there someone at the museum to take care of this?” She saw the look of impatience cross Bast’s face and her whiskers twitched. “All right, all right, I’ll handle it. When do I have to be there?”

“The exhibition will arrive in two days.”

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“Well, at least that gives me some time for myself. I can get an idea of what’s available to keep me entertained.”

“Don’t get into trouble,” Bast admonished her.

Sahra opened her eyes wide and batted her long lashes. “Who? Me? I’m here to serve, aren’t I? I do what you tell me.”

Bast nodded regally. “Just accomplish the task.”

Sahra bowed and backed away. “As you wish, Goddess.” She then pivoted and, turning around, and leisurely walked out of the audience room of the temple.

There had to be something more to this immortality than what she had experienced over the last millennia. It had come to a point where there seemed no purpose to what she did. Of course, that one task when she’d had Khafeel to watch while he contacted Cassandra Linsey wasn’t bad. That was sort of interesting, especially when it was her own tomb that was to be discovered. Finally, these mortals would know about Niveka and its people.

There were times when she simply felt invisible. Well, actually she was for the most part. Why had she ever accepted this immortality stuff anyway?

Because she thought she might have a chance at finding out what this emotion called love was all about. But after all this time she still didn’t have a clue. Oh, she’d had her share of men, but not a one that she’d wanted to keep. There were times when she felt like the cat she shapeshifted into, always on the prowl and never satisfied. But the human side of her wanted something she wasn’t sure she was meant to find or to

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ever have.

Another task, another city. She truly was becoming weary of it all. Khafeel had managed to find the love of his life, why couldn't she?

CHAPTER 2

As usual Candace was late. He looked down at his watch. Very late, as he'd been waiting for more than an hour. She was miffed at him for not appearing at her party the night before, so out of guilt he'd agreed to meet her for dinner and drinks at Charmaine's. He'd arrived right on time, but she was nowhere to be seen. It figured.

They were supposed to go over the final plans for the set up and opening for the new exhibition, as well as outlining the new plans for security. She had agreed to oversee the hiring of the additional guards and the opening night invitations to be sent to their special contributors for a preview of the exhibition. Supposedly, everything was in place, but with

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Candace he never knew for certain.

It still aggravated him that she had wanted to retain her interest in the museum. But there was simply nothing he could do about it right now.

He was nervous about the upcoming exhibition. It was a major coup for the small, privately-held museum in acquiring it. It would be housed with them for the next month. He expected to meet with the person overseeing the artifacts on Monday when the boxes would arrive ready for unpacking. Each piece would be inspected and catalogued, photographs taken—the whole process well-documented as it was prepared for exhibition.

He took another sip of the drink resting in front of him on the bar, then looked down at his watch. *Let's face it, she probably wasn't coming.* He might as well bag this meeting. As he prepared to pay the tab and rise from the stool, someone sat down next to him and he turned, expecting it to be Candace. What he saw stopped his heart in his chest.

She was ravishingly exotic, with long, straight, black, silky hair. She looked at him and smiled a slow, sensual tilting of full lips. Her dress hid nothing from his imagination, a tight black leather skirt and strapless, stretchy top that molded her luscious breasts. His gaze drifted downward to the minuscule skirt encasing her exquisite upper thighs.

“Like what you see?” she asked in a throaty, accented voice.

He blinked and looked away, dragging the glass back up to his mouth. He felt the burn of alcohol as he swallowed what

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remained in the glass. He cleared his throat. "Sorry about that," he finally managed to mumble.

She tilted her head as she studied him. "Are you?"

"Well, yes, of course. I was staring and it was rude." He had a hard time concentrating as her exotic perfume seemed to surround him. And then his cock shot to attention when she opened her mouth and slid her pink tongue over the surface of her perfect white teeth.

"Are you here for dinner?" he found himself asking. "Are you meeting someone?"

He couldn't help staring at her eyes. Almond shaped jewels was the only way he could describe them. Glittering like a cat's eyes. Examining its prey, trying to decide if it was tasty enough to pursue.

"No," she finally answered. "I'm not waiting for anyone. And you?"

He shrugged. "I thought I was, but she didn't show up."

"She?" Her dark eyebrow arched in query.

"Oh, my...business partner." Why didn't he just say ex-wife? This woman was nothing to him.

"Ah, I see. So you don't have a dinner partner?" She turned to take a sip from the glass the bartender had just set before her. He didn't recognize the drink, it almost looked like a glass of straight up milk.

She apparently saw where his attention had turned. She swung to face him with the glass in her hand and raised it to her lips. It came away leaving a milky moustache over her red lips and he had the decided urge to lick her upper lip clean. He

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had a feeling it would add a new flavor to milk. Her tongue slipped out once again and she swept it across the milk residue and then it disappeared back inside her mouth.

Oh, man, his body was getting harder by the second. Between that sexy tongue of hers, the teensy black skirt and the silver sequined tank top, leaving her creamy shoulders bare, he was hard pressed to maintain composure. He hadn't been this hot for a woman in a very long time.

He took a deep breath and decided he couldn't let this woman out of his sight, certainly not until he got to know her a lot better than he did right now. There was something about her that said if he let this one get away, he'd be a damned fool.

Taking a deep breath, he plunged in. "My name's Ben. I know we don't know each other, but would you like to have dinner with me?"

She studied him for a long time with those jewel-like eyes of hers. It was a look that seemed to peel back the layers of flesh to see what was inside a man. Then she smiled.

"Yes, Ben, I'd like to have dinner with you."

He rose to his feet and held out an arm, which she accepted. This close her perfume clung to him as he led her toward the dining room. Luckily, they had a cancellation and, after a nice tip, they were led to a table in a secluded corner of the dining room. He didn't wait for the maitre d' to help her with her chair and pulled it out himself, settling her into it before taking his own seat. The host handed them each a menu.

Ben glanced at the items quickly and then closed it. He'd

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been here quite a few times and already knew what was available.

“Do you know what you’d like to eat?”

Her attention shifted from the menu to him and she smiled knowingly. “Yes, I think I know exactly what I want tonight.”

His cock perked up at her words. He had the distinct feeling that she wasn’t talking about what was on the menu.

And then he felt a delicate foot against the inside of his thigh near his knee. He almost jumped out of his skin as it traveled toward his groin, and that was when he was absolutely certain she wasn’t talking about the menu.

“By the way,” she said, “my name is Sahra. And I’ve very pleased to meet you, Ben. I think it’s going to be lovely getting to know more about you.”

And then her foot was at his crotch and he knew damn well it was going to be a wonderful night.

* * *

Sahra liked taking the lead with her men. She liked the look of this man. She wanted to take him to bed. She gasped as a firm hand grabbed her foot, and another started to stroke it. She tried to pull it back, but somehow he had taken control. She stared at him wide-eyed across the table. She couldn’t just yank it away and take the chance on toppling the whole table. She couldn’t use any of her abilities, not in front of all these people. So now what?

A shudder ran through her as his other hand kneaded her foot slowly. He stroked his fingers sensuously up her calf and

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back down again, and she felt herself getting wet at the intensely erotic touch.

The waiter came to their table ready to take their order, and still he wouldn't release her foot, continuing to massage it as he waited for her to give her order to the waiter.

She swallowed and then tried to concentrate. He made it very difficult, and she squirmed in her seat. She was the one who was supposed to be in control, she was the queen after all. So what if he didn't know that. He should have understood the dynamics. She managed to give the waiter her order, hoping that when it came his turn, he would release her foot in order to do so.

No such luck. As nonchalantly as possible he told the young man what he wanted without missing a beat. Then the waiter left them alone.

"I believe you may release my foot now."

"Really?" he said, a small smile playing around his lips. "You could just give me the other one as well. You know the nerve endings in the feet are very sensitive." He watched her as he pressed his thumb against a spot on the sole of her foot near her heel and she jumped as a tingle raced through to her pussy. And then he pressed it again and she gasped.

She knew many ways to seduce a man, but she had to admit she'd never tried it by massaging their feet. This was a new one. Again, she tugged at her foot, but he still wouldn't release it.

"Did you ever consider that a woman might be able to be brought to an orgasm just by her lover massaging her foot?"

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He wouldn't. But it was there in his eyes, the intent to take control of her game. She struggled a little harder, but his grip grew more firm and his thumb more insistent. She felt the searing heat of passion spread throughout her body. Damn him.

"You're taking liberties. I'm not such a pushdown as that." She leaned forward, intent on winning this game. "You can't do it."

An eyebrow quirked. "I think you mean pushover. I can't? Are you sure?" His thumb pressed again and she squirmed in her chair and gasped. Yet, she refused to give in.

It seemed to go on forever, as though he could sit there all night massaging her foot. Suddenly, she felt the danger pressing close of his dominating her. And that was something she could not have. He was dangerous and she should have realized it before. Ben wasn't the kind of man to allow a woman to lead him around. He was like the men of her time, like her brother Zyphir, or even Khafeel. She had made a huge mistake with this one.

Finally, she ripped her foot from his grasp. "You take liberties, Ben."

He leaned back in his chair. "You aren't used to strong men, are you, Sahra?" His dark gaze seemed to penetrate her skin. No, he was definitely not like the others she'd had since immortality had been granted to her.

"My brother was a strong man. I have known many strong men." She lifted her chin and stared back at him. He was enjoying himself, she could see that. How had she missed it?

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He leaned closer. "But not as a lover," he said in a deep, intimate tone.

She felt the heat flood her face. She did not want to admit it, but he was right. Most of the men she had met were either weak or arrogant, or cruel. If she were honest, the problem was that none of them had measured up to her brother, King of Niveka, a strong man, yet kind in his way. Once he had married her and secured the throne, he could have seen to her death one way or the other, but he never had. When he fell in love with Isadora, he could have placed her on the throne and removed Sahra, but he had not.

And then there was Khafeel, vizier to her brother, whom she'd never been able to seduce. He was more loyal to Khafeel than any blood brother would have been. These were the two men by whom she judged all other men. And most, if not all, came up lacking.

Suddenly, as she looked at Ben, she saw something of these men in him. Is that what drew her to him tonight? Was that part of the weariness of all these years, the submissiveness of the men? In her own time they had wanted her because of her position as Queen of Niveka, and because she had the ear of the King. Never for herself.

This man didn't know anything about her and still he seemed to want her. And unlike the other men since her immortality, he wouldn't be willing to allow her to dominate him. She found that exciting. Maybe she needed a change.

"No," she finally admitted to him, "never as a lover."

"Maybe you're looking for something different. Because if

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I take you to bed, Sahra, it will be as equals.” The waiter returned with their food. “Maybe you should think about that while we eat. It may change things for you.”

She stared at him across the table. “You are different, Ben. Maybe I’m in the mood for someone a little more...challenging.”

This little side excursion before going to the museum might just be what she’d been looking for. She watched him as he picked up his napkin and spread it across his lap. She looked at his hands as he lifted his eating utensils. He had long, tanned, fingers. They looked like hands that would please a woman immensely. She tingled with the remembered touch of his strong fingers on her foot.

Could he make her orgasm just by touching her feet? Maybe it was something she would have to discover. He certain intrigued her.

CHAPTER 3

He wasn't sure he could last much longer without having her. She was even more delicious than the meal they had just finished eating. He stared at her over his cup of coffee as she sipped at her tea. She apparently didn't drink alcohol as she had ordered milk, just as she had in the bar. And now she had added cream to her tea. Or more precisely a bit of tea in her cream from what he could see.

And there was that feline sensuality in her movements, and in her eyes. There was something almost familiar about her, but he couldn't quite figure out what it was. She had said very little during dinner, encouraging him to do most of the talking. He found himself wondering what was going through her

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mind.

Candace was beautiful, but compared to Sahra, it was a cold, icy beauty that she had cultivated over the years he had known her. There was something extremely hot about Sahra, sizzling and sleek, and he felt that if he touched her he would burn up.

She had managed to skirt most of his questions and he still knew very little about her. What he did know was that he wanted to get her into a bed as quickly as possible. She turned her cat-eyed gaze back to him and his cock pressed against the front of his pants.

“Do you live in the city?” he asked.

She shook her head and the light caressed her hair. “No. I am here on...business.”

Business. He found himself wondering exactly what sort of business she was in. Not many women in a strange city would agree to have dinner with a man they had only just met.

He tried again. “Will you be here for long? I’d like to see you again.”

She hesitated before answering him. “I’m not sure yet. It depends on how long I am needed. It could be a couple of days, maybe several weeks.”

“Tell me your last name. Where I can find you. Are you staying at the hotel across the street?”

She smiled and leaned toward him. “Let’s not make things complicated. Tonight is...enough for now, don’t you think? The dinner has been delightful. Thank you for inviting me.”

He really wasn’t going to get anywhere with her. She was

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a tough one that's for sure. And she liked having the upper hand, he'd already had a taste of that. But he didn't plan to let her go just yet.

"Would you like a walk in the gardens? It would be a nice way to work off that heavy dessert we shared. If your feet hurt, I can always give you a nice foot massage," he said with a grin.

For a moment, the look in her eyes was smoldering and then she smoothed her expression. The nod of her head was regal as though acquiescing to the question of a servant. She really intrigued him. Where did she come from? What was she doing here? Was she some sort of royalty visiting the city incognito? Damn, his imagination was getting away from him.

The waiter returned with his receipt and Ben rose from the table and helped her up. They left the restaurant through a side door that led directly into the gardens. If one continued very far it would lead them into the city park. The trees were netted in tiny twinkling lights. It looked a bit like a fairy world. How appropriate.

He put his arm around her waist and guided her down the main path, then veered off to the left, taking them down a secondary path that he knew would lead them toward a small manmade stream with a footbridge crossing it.

The night was balmy and peaceful. It was clear with what looked like a million stars in the sky. He stopped at the center of the bridge. The water from the small stream tumbled along its path and he gazed down into the sparkling, shallow depths.

"It's a beautiful night."

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She looked up at the sky. "Tonight it reminds me a bit of home." He heard a hint of wistfulness in her words.

"Far away?"

She gripped the wooden handrail of the bridge. "Yes, far away."

"Here in the United States?"

She turned to look at him and shook her head. "You ask too many questions, Ben. But no, not here in the States. Far away. And that shall have to do for now."

Suddenly, she reached out and grabbed the front of his shirt, lifted up, and planted a searing kiss on his lips.

There was no hope for him. He reached out to pull her closer. Her taste drugged him and he felt his arousal mounting. This wasn't exactly the place to fuck her. He looked around, frantic to find a place hidden away from the main path. Finally, he dragged her across the bridge and into a crush of trees.

That was as far as she was going to allow him to lead, because suddenly he found his back against the rough bark of a tree and her hands were tearing at his shirt.

"I want you to fuck me right here, Ben. I don't want to wait another second," she growled into his ear as his buttons scattered in the shrubs.

Well, damn, who was he to turn down a lady? He reached for her, but she shoved his hands away and her own pressed against his naked chest, her nails digging into his flesh and he hissed at the painful pleasure.

"This is the way it is done, Ben." Her hands were at the

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opening of his pants, ripping them open, and pulling down the zipper. And then he thought he'd died and gone to heaven as her hand wrapped around his throbbing cock. Pre-cum oozed from the slit and she smeared it across his tip.

He hadn't wanted it to be this way. He had wanted to take his time with her. She was as beautiful as any fine painting hanging on the walls of the museum and she deserved to be worshipped properly. But she was apparently having none of it. And for now he planned to let her have her way.

* * *

He was hers and she planned to use him fully. Her hands gripped him, sliding up and down his length. She dropped to her knees and consumed him with her mouth, dancing across the surface of his skin, relishing the flavor of him. So very different from the others. He was masculine fire in her mouth. Although he allowed her to do as she wished, she knew at any moment he could try to take control. But she wanted him like none of the others through the ages.

She skipped her tongue along his rigid staff, swirled it over the full, mushroomed tip, sliding beneath the cap, playing him like a fine instrument, sipping at him like a rare wine. She wanted to savor him slowly, remember the taste and smell that waltzed through her, but she needed him inside her now.

His fingers were tangled in her hair as he gripped her. She felt his desire rising fast and furious, his energy blending with her own. There was no time to take it slowly as her pussy dripped with her juices, pulsed with her own desire. She

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couldn't wait.

Swiftly rising to her feet, she shed her panties. His arms circled around her, lifting her. She grabbed his shaft, easing it toward her entrance. Wrapping her legs around his waist, she slowly lowered herself onto the burgeoning rod.

He was so big and she felt the walls of her sheath expand as he penetrated her, each nerve ending clutching at the stiff flesh as it entered her. His mouth descended to claim her lips, pushing his tongue deep inside just as his cock claimed her pussy, so his lips claimed her mouth.

She undulated against him, rose up and slid back down, circling her hips. She felt him expand her channel and she stopped moving, the tip of his cock snug against the opening of her cervix. She felt the sharp pleasure overtake her.

She was in control, driving the action, but somehow with his hard fingers pressed into her skin, she felt his power surround her, the desire to lead.

Suddenly, he whirled around and she found herself pinned against the tree as he claimed control. He pressed her against the sharp bark, his hands fastened around her wrists like steel bands, and thrust them up against the tree, claiming superiority as he began to move inside her. He demanded the right of the aggressor, curling and swirling.

She tried to twist her hands free, but he was too strong. He didn't hurt her, but kept her anchored there as he played her body, driving her passion to a searing blaze she could no longer control.

She broke the kiss and turned her head away as she fought

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for control, the command she had always know with the lovers she had claimed. But he was having no part of it. Time and time again he pushed deep and then retreated, penetrated her needy passage again and again.

His cock would press against her clitoris, sending a sharp zing through her body, and just as she was ready to dive off the edge, he would stop. Continually he kept her at the edge of her climax. She fought against it, fought to fight her responses to him.

“No,” she cried out. “I will not allow this.”

“You want it, Sahra, reach for it. Let me give this to you.” He thrust into her, rubbed against her clit and she growled in frustration.

“I will take it,” she raged back.

“You can’t take what I’m more than willing to give,” he responded, penetrating so deep she was certain he’d passed through the small opening and into her womb. She felt his balls slap against her as he thrust his hips, and she screamed as she tumbled over the edge, shuddering in reaction as the waves of her orgasm washed over her.

Before she could catch her breath, he was again moving inside her, keeping her notched firmly in the crevice of her passion, refusing to release her. She leaned back against the tree and tried to rein in her emotions, but again he refused to release her, shifted against her and pressed unbelievably deeper than before. He covered her mouth with his and swallowed her gut-wrenching scream as the exquisite pleasure pain erupted and engulfed her.

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It was as though he imprisoned her within the invisible chains of passion and she had no way of escape. And she was reaching close to the place where she wasn't sure she wanted to. Was this the passion that Zyphir had with Isadora, and that Khafeel had found with his Dr. Linsey. This was all-consuming, and frightening, and beautiful.

And then she exploded again and again when she thought she could give no more. He stole her passion from her repeatedly until she was nothing but liquid heat in his arms. She wanted it to go on forever, and that had never happened to her before. And it frightened her.

Then suddenly she felt him spurt his seed inside her, filling and bathing her womb. And for the first time in her life she wondered what it would be like to have that seed take root and to carry a child in her womb. The thought shocked her sensible.

He released her hands and pulled from her body, carefully lowering her legs until her feet were planted firmly on the ground. What a joke that was, because suddenly she didn't feel firmly planted anywhere.

He leaned against her forehead and she could tell he was trying to gain his own composure.

"I want to see you again," he rasped out.

Suddenly, she panicked at the loss of control she had experienced, the want for more of it. She pulled from his arms as sheer terror swamped her at what had just happened. Without pausing for a second, she shifted into her cat form, for the first time uncaring that anyone might see her conversion.

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“What the fuck?” she heard him yell behind her, but she was beyond caring. She had to get out of there fast for her own sanity. She wanted to stay too badly, and she wasn’t human, she couldn’t have him. He belonged to the here and now, was not some ageless being who served at the gods’ whims. She simply could not have him. But for the first time in her life she wanted something for herself, more than anything in the world. She’d been offered a peek into ecstasy and she wanted to stay.

CHAPTER 4

Ben shook his head, unable to believe what his brain told him he had seen. Lately his life had been filled with a series of bizarre happenings. In fact, ever since he'd signed the contract to host the Niveka Exhibit. Was his mind going?

It wasn't that he didn't believe in mystical experiences. He'd had a few of his own when he'd been on a couple of digs. But here in his office? At the restaurant? It didn't make sense. But then what did make sense when experiences like this happened?

Once he realized Sahra had disappeared, barring the bit about the shapeshifting into a cat thing, he'd righted his clothing and hotfooted it back to the museum. Something kept

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niggling at his brain. Something about Sahra that seemed somehow familiar.

He turned on the desk lamp, sat down, and opened the Niveka Translations. He turned to the section about the history of the city. Then he saw it and something seemed to lock into place. There was a photograph of one of the statues found in the tomb. It supposedly was a likeness of Queen Sahramatatiri. He pulled out the magnifying glass and peered closer.

Sure enough, the statue looked surprisingly similar to the woman he'd just had out-of-this-world sex with. His gaze fell on the golden necklace, the links etched with the image of Bastet. He picked it up and held it up to the light. Something odd was happening, something unexplainable. Could he just turn his back on events that every fiber of his being told him were momentous and would change his life? Even if he didn't understand them, he had to follow his instincts.

And his instincts said he hadn't seen the last of Sahra.

Being with her had been different than with anyone else. What he felt for her was primal, yet real, more real than he'd felt during his marriage to Candace. He'd thought he loved Candace, but that hadn't been real. And he had known her for four years before they had finally married right after graduation from college.

But what he felt with this strange, exotic woman, someone he knew nothing about, was vastly different. And he had a feeling this necklace, the appearance of Bastet, the shapeshifting he thought he'd witnessed, were all linked together.

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There was little information on the city of Niveka and its rulers. The sum of everything that anyone knew was in the book that now rested on his desk. He wanted to know more, to discover the story behind the ruling queen during the time of King Zyphir. He knew from what he read that she had been assassinated. He knew she had been the twin sister of King Zyphir and that in order for Zyphir to ascend to the throne he had to formally marry Sahrametatiri for political reasons. But that's as far as it went.

Who was Sahrametatiri really? There were indications she was promiscuous, yet she showed compassion for Isadora, a second wife to Zyphir. And she apparently received the loyalty of Khafeel after Zyphir's disappearance. A spoiled woman of loose morals wouldn't have been able to retain the respect and loyalty of anyone, certainly not someone of Khafeel's power.

He needed information. Suddenly, it had assumed an urgency he hadn't felt before. And he had to know because his future depended on it.

Maybe he would be able to determine more once the exhibit arrived, when he saw the actual artifacts. Sometimes he could sense the energy of the past in an object when he touched it. It was not an ability he had shared with anyone, but just some inner sense about an object.

He had felt something special in the statue he'd received, but had thought nothing of it. It was not unusual for him to sense vibrations. It happened a lot with the displays in the museum.

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If he were honest with himself, he felt something special when Sahra had sat next to him in the bar at the restaurant. It was nothing specific he could put his finger on, but it had made him ask her to dinner. There was indeed something unique about her.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He was not going to obsess about the situation. He had a feeling things would come around as they were supposed to. Fate did that kind of thing. If it was meant to be, then it would happen.

He inhaled deeply. He could still smell her scent on his skin. That faintly exotic aroma that clung to her, and now to him. His cock grew hard at the remembrance of her soft, silky pussy surrounding his throbbing member. How wet she was, how eager, how responsive.

He'd never felt so perfectly locked with someone as he had with her in those all too brief moments in the garden. The intimacy of the act still filled him with the passion of those moments, with the fragrance of her release as it permeated the air around them. More succulent than the flowers that filled the dark garden.

And the stars in the sky had made it seem endless, no beginning, no end.

No, it wasn't the end. It wasn't simply a meeting of strangers who had sex and then separated never to meet again. He was certain of it.

She had run scared. But what was it exactly that she had been frightened of? It was a mind-blowing experience and one he wanted to repeat over and over again. But only with her.

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He sighed and tried to concentrate on relaxing his body and his mind. The time would come and until then he was going to try to soak up as much information as he could. Because he had a feeling his Sahra was very closely connected to the city of Niveka and the translation of the scrolls setting on his desk. And he was going to be ready the next time he saw her.

He fingered the necklace he still held in his hands. Yes, he was going to be more than ready for her next time.

* * *

Sahra shapeshifted back into the form of a woman once she was out of the garden and Ben was far behind her. How could she have let it happen? He had somehow buried some emotion, some element of himself, inside her, and she was afraid of the consequences. It started out to be another of her cat and mouse games where she would pounce when the time was right and he would be caught. And when she was done, she would walk away without looking back.

But it hadn't worked out that way, because she was looking back, and with each step regret filled her. Along with the fear. She would not be controlled by any man, certainly not by that one.

She trembled as she remembered him filling her and how many times she had orgasmed in the short space of time he had held her within his grips. She could not allow these feelings to rule her. No man could ever truly love her; she had learned that long ago. How many men did it require for the

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lesson to take? Was she always going to find herself searching for a man who would fill a void inside her that simply could not be filled?

But he had come so close, too close, in her opinion. She should never have accepted this assignment from Bastet. Not this time.

She saw the flickering lights of a bar on the other side of the street. She knew just how to cleanse herself of the irritating man. Smoothing a hand along the lines of her short, leather skirt, she crossed the street and walked through the doors.

She glanced around the bar, intent on finding her target, dismissing man after man. Then she saw one who would meet her needs. He would give her what she wanted. She would take from him and, like any empty container, when she was done, she would toss him aside. As she had done through millennia.

She sauntered across the room, feeling every male eye in the place locked on her progression. He was sandy-haired, deeply tanned, tall and broad. He was a man who worked outside from the look of him in his well-worn blue jeans and blue denim shirt. She could see the caramel wisps of hair peeking out from beneath his shirt. Yes, he would do nicely.

She walked up to him and grabbed the front of his shirt, yanking him down to draw a kiss from his firm lips. There was no hesitation from him, not in the least. She heard the loud guffaws of the other occupants of the room. But she didn't care. She was determined to take from this stud exactly what

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she needed and then she'd move on. Then things would be right again. And she would have her control back.

She leaned up and whispered into his ear. "I want you to fuck me," she growled.

She felt the change in his breathing, saw the lust fill his expression. Yes, for him sex would be enough, more than enough. And when she walked away, he wouldn't even remember her. Stranger sex is what they called it now and they all loved it. It's one of the things she liked about this time period. She could get as much sex as she wanted and none of them cared.

Except for Ben. She pushed the thought out of her mind.

"You bet, sweetheart. Anywhere you want it," the sandy-haired stranger said and then grinned, showing a full set of perfect teeth.

She grabbed him by the arm and pulled him toward the back door. The alley would do just fine for what she planned.

Determination was foremost in her mind. She would rid herself of the memories of the garden, of the sweetness and eroticism that Ben exuded. Of the knowledge that here was a man who would take control, but wouldn't try to break her. She would not have it. Yes, this alley was perfect for what she wanted.

She shoved the man against the concrete wall and worked frantically at the opening of his pants, gripping his worthy staff, already stiff and ready. Thank goodness he wouldn't need preparation. She wanted it over and done with, to prove something to herself. She climbed onto him and took his organ

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inside her, then proceeded to ride him fast and furious. Reaching for her climax, she rubbed her clit against his hot shaft.

He grabbed onto her hips with his large callused hands, lifting and dropping her onto his fierce prick. It wasn't long before he came, spurting jets of his thick semen inside her. When she finally did come, it wasn't the explosive passion she'd experienced just hours ago. It left her feeling empty.

She pulled herself free of him and straightened her clothing.

"That was great, babe. Maybe we can get together again, real soon," he said as he righted his own clothing, pushing his softened prick back inside his pants.

Not in your lifetime, she wanted to say. She simply pivoted around and left the alley to continue her prowling. He hadn't satisfied her, not the way Ben had.

She walked into the next bar, found another stranger and fucked him in the back room. And then another bar, where she met two brothers and she let them fill all her orifices with their lust.

At the end of the night, as the sun was just beginning to rise over the city, she felt dirty and used, like any prostitute of the streets, no matter the age, after a hard night of fucking. She dragged herself back to her hotel room, and when she looked in the mirror, the only thought she had was that what she had tried to do tonight was destroy herself. She ripped the mirror off the wall and sent it careening across the room where it shattered against the wall.

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What she saw in the mirror was exactly what she had allowed herself to become over the millennia. An alley cat, opening her thighs to any male with a hard cock. Anything to numb the pain in her heart of always being alone. Anonymous sex didn't fill that deep chasm inside her. There was no intimacy in the sex she had. Nothing more than two bodies rutting together until an itch had been scratched. And then she moved on.

But with Ben there had been a glimpse of something different. And that had terrified her. She ripped off her skirt and blouse and tossed them into the garbage can. With dragging steps she made her way into the bathroom. But a shower was never going to wash away the pain and frustration she felt.

She was once called the Jewel of Niveka, royal queen, a ruler who received the respect of their people as her right. Now she simply felt like a street whore—used up and washed out. And it was the burden she would bear for eternity.

CHAPTER 5

He was excited about the arrival of the shipment of Nivekian artifacts. It was almost a dream come true. And then he recognized the people accompanying the van from their photographs. Dr. Cassandra Linsey and the tall, imposing man could only be Khafeel Mim. And then he was shocked to see the cat that accompanied them. He knew that cat, had seen it once before. And he knew who that cat was.

He slowly made his way toward the couple. Dr. Linsey was holding the cat in her arms, petting it, and the cat lay complacently quiet.

“Good morning, Dr. Linsey. I’m honored that the Solomon Museum has been chosen to host the exhibit. And I’m excited

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about the opportunity to pick your brain a bit about the wonderful discovery of Niveka.”

He looked down at the feline she was holding, and the cat stared back at him, suddenly going very still. For a long moment he held its wide-eyed glare until suddenly it blinked, screeched and shot out of Dr. Linsey’s arms, and scooted away.

“My goodness, what’s gotten into her?” Dr. Linsey exclaimed, apparently surprised at the cat’s actions.

Khafeel Mim came up and encircled her waist with his arm. “You know how skittish she can get when around strangers.”

He smiled and held out a hand to Ben. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Solomon. I am Khafeel Mim and this is my wife. Please call me Khafeel.”

Ben nodded and accepted the clasp of the strong hand. “Yes, I recognize you from the photographs in the book. You’re a linguist as well, and did most of the translations of the scrolls, if I remember correctly.”

“That’s right,” Dr. Linsey responded as she also held out her hand to Ben. “He’s the one with the real expertise. None of this could have been accomplished without him.”

Ben shook his head. “It’s all so amazing, to have discovered such a city. I really am eager to learn more about it. I’m particularly interested to know if you have any other information on Queen Sahrametatiri.”

Something in their stances stilled at his statement. He saw them glance quickly at each other. It was Dr. Linsey who

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spoke first. “Queen Sahrametatiri? I don’t think there was very much mention of her in the scrolls. I’m not sure we can add much more to what is there.”

Suddenly, he knew he was on the right track. Looking at Khafeel he had an idea there was a great deal more to be learned.

“Why don’t we go up to my office while they finish unpacking the trailers? My...partner...Candace, will oversee everything.” He pivoted around and headed back inside the museum and led them up to his office.

Once they were seated comfortably with a cup of tea before each of them, he reached over to his desk and picked up the necklace, dangling it between his fingers.

“This came into my possession unexpectedly. Something about a jewel of Niveka?” He held it out so they could look at it. “Would either of you know anything about it by chance?”

Again, that stillness pervaded the room. Khafeel reached out to take the necklace from Ben’s hand, and he studied it closely. Then he looked at his wife. He turned back to Ben. “May I ask how you acquired it?”

Ben leaned against the desk and crossed his arms, studying the pair. “I know you won’t believe this, or maybe you will, but Bastet gave it to me.”

“Bastet? Here?” Khafeel looked shocked.

“You aren’t what you appear, are you, Mr. Mim?”

“Call me Khafeel.”

“Hmmm. Khafeel. Isn’t that the name of the king’s vizier? Very interesting that you happen to bear the same name. And

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that you're the only one proficient in the Nivekian language to help translate the scrolls. Don't you think?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Solomon. It is simply coincidence."

"Ben. Please." The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end and he knew he was on the right track. "I don't think anything about what's happened here over the last few days is coincidental. And I don't think your name being the same as that vizier is coincidental."

"What are you trying to say?" Dr. Linsey asked in a quiet voice.

He leaned forward. "I think you are the original Khafeel. Just like that cat downstairs isn't simply a cat."

"That's absurd," Dr. Linsey blurted out. "How can you possibly think such a thing?"

"Because of what I've witnessed in the last few days. That necklace, for one thing." He nodded toward Khafeel. "A statue of Bastet was delivered to me several days ago. Something happened that first night and suddenly I was looking at a living being. And she left that necklace for me to use. I didn't understand at the time, but I think I do now."

"What do you understand?" Khafeel asked.

"Sahra, a woman I met the other night. I saw her shapeshift into a cat."

"Really, Mr. Solomon, you have a very vivid imagination."

He shook his head. "I don't think so. Not at all. That cat was the very same one that you held in your arms not an hour

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ago. And you know it.”

“This is really all fantastic,” Dr. Linsey said as she started to rise from her chair.

“Dr. Linsey, you’ve been around these archeological digs and you know the energy that can emanate from them. Don’t tell me you haven’t felt it. There’s something mystical about history and the vibrations of what is left behind. I’ve felt them. Are you trying to tell me you haven’t?”

“Well, yes. But that’s different.”

He reached over and took the necklace that dangled from Khafeel’s fingers. “No, it’s not. Fate plays some strange tricks on us sometimes. I understand the difference between fantasy and reality as well as anyone else. I also understand a bit about the mystic energies that surround us. And I think you do as well. Or none of us would know about this glorious city of Niveka.”

“What is it you want from us...Ben?”

He leaned forward. “I’ve been offered something from this Egyptian goddess, Bastet. I think...Sahra...serves her in some way. And I think this goddess wants to give something to Sahra, or show her something about herself, and I’m the key she’s using to do it. I met Sahra the other night and I know there’s some spark between us. Something happened and she shapeshifted and ran because of it. I need you to assist me. You have information that will help me. This necklace will keep her grounded until I can show her there’s nothing to be afraid of, that’s what the goddess told me. But I need your help to get through to her. Will you help me? Would this

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goddess have come to me if I was any danger to any of you?"

They were silent for long moments. Cassandra reached out to clasp Khafeel's hand and he looked at her. Even Ben could see the love that melded these two people together. He had to wonder about their story as well. But right now his concentration was on Sahra and gaining her trust.

"Sahra is a troubled woman. What do you wish to know, Ben?" Khafeel finally asked him quietly.

* * *

What kind of joke was Bastet trying to play on her? How could she have known that the attractive man she met in the bar was meant to be a trap laid down by Bastet? Damn the gods for doing this to her. She would have to demand Bast relieve her of this assignment. She simply could not go on with it.

She paced back and forth in her room, unable to come to a conclusion she was happy with. She felt like a cornered cat with a wolf keeping her at bay. Were Cassandra and Khafeel in on it as well? Did they all wish her downfall?

Well, she would show them all. No man would get the best of her. Not even one as attractive as Ben Solomon. She stalked over to where her clothes hung and pulled out a dress made of gold silk threaded through with crimson. She was a queen and she was not going to let any of them forget her station. Not even Ben Solomon. Once she donned the dress, which fit her as snugly as a glove made for her alone, she swept her hair into an updo and added a gold comb. Around her neck she

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draped an amulet—one used to ward off unacceptable lovers. It had been made for her long ago, in another lifetime, by a gypsy woman. She'd never had the occasion to wear it before. But with Ben, she was taking no chances.

She clasped several wide etched gold bracelets around her upper arms. Now she was ready to face them all.

She walked out of the hotel with her head held high, the walk of an ancient queen. She asked the doorman to hail a taxi for her and gave the driver the address to the museum. It wasn't going to be easy, but she couldn't back down.

Khafeel and Cassandra should have warned her and then she might have been better prepared. After that night of numbing, mindless sex, she had confined herself to her room, not wanting to face anyone. Afraid she would come face to face with him on the street.

What she had done after making love with him was self-destruction in its worst form. It had been a method of self-flagellation and she had used any body she could to inflict the pain, to drive off the terror of succumbing to the attraction she felt for Ben Solomon.

She had gained some ground since then, had managed to convince herself that the attraction had been a fluke and she had simply gone off the deep end in her response to it. She'd almost had herself convinced.

Until she saw him in the museum, and then it had all come flooding back. Well, this time she would take a different path. She would bring out her nobility to keep him at bay. Most men were cowed immediately when they were presented with her

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“queenly” side.

The taxi arrived at the museum and Sahra stepped out onto the pavement. Taking a deep breath, she mounted the steps, her head held high. She could do this. She would show him who she was.

Stepping into the cool, entryway of the museum, she allowed her eyes to become accustomed to the subdued lighting. She wasn’t quite sure where the exhibition was going to be displayed and she looked around a bit uncertainly.

“Looking for something, Sahra?”

She stiffened and drew her noble mantle around her. Gathering her courage, she turned to face him.

She tried to remain expressionless, to retain the haughty manner. It was a difficult thing to do in the face of the intimate memories that flooded her when she looked at him. Her gaze drifted unwillingly down his body and then quickly back up. She saw the knowledge in his passion-filled gaze.

“The Niveka exhibition,” she said succinctly.

She saw the hint of a grin shadowing the corners of his mouth. She would not allow him to have the upper hand, and she tightened her determination and lifted her head.

“You lift that chin much higher and you’re likely to get a nosebleed.”

How dare he. “Your point?”

“Well, your majesty, follow me and I’ll take you to the exhibition hall.” He grabbed her arm and yanked forward, and she almost lost her footing. “And then we’ll talk.”

“We have nothing to talk about,” she responded as she

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righted herself and tried to keep up with him as he strode toward a doorway directly ahead. “Where are Cassandra and Khafeel?”

“They left to get a bite to eat. They got tired of waiting for you, kitty,” he said pointedly.

She tried to yank her arm free. “How dare you!”

He dragged her closer. “I know who and what you are, kitty-cat, so don’t try to put on airs with me. It won’t work. I’m not like all the other hangers-on who come sniffing after you, good for a quick fuck now and then. I want more than that.”

She fought the urge to shift, to run fast and far, but this time she refused to turn tail and run. “You’re a fool, Ben Solomon. I am not for you.”

“We’ll see, pretty kitty, we’ll see. I’ll take you to the exhibition and you can tell me all about how it was to be queen of Niveka. They say you were the jewel of civilization. You sparkled at the top and everything else revolved around you and King Zyphir. I’ll bet you were quite the dazzling gem.” His eyes surveyed her heatedly. “You still are, in my estimation.”

“You can’t have me.” Desperately she tried to pull free of his grip.

Finally, he released her and she stumbled backward.

“I don’t want to scare you, kitten. But I’m not like all the others and you will have to get used to that.”

“Stop calling me that.”

“What? Kitten? But you are—pretty kitty, and I’m going

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to make you nuzzle up real close for a little petting. But that's for later."

He made her feel hot and cold all at the same time. He made her angry and aroused her. He made her want to fuck him and beat him, but she didn't know what came first.

For now she just followed him, her brain a swirl of emotion.

CHAPTER 6

Ben watched as Sahra moved among the artifacts from Niveka, first touching one object and then the other. He couldn't imagine what it could feel like to walk among personal possessions from your own tomb. Things that surrounded a person after they were dead. He also still had a problem trying to accept the fact that the beautiful woman standing before him was more than two thousand years old. Had witnessed a changing civilization, passed through so much of history and was now standing here before him. He shook his head in disbelief. It was just too much to absorb.

He had known this woman intimately with his body for a brief time. How could he care so deeply for her without

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knowing her at all? Yet, as he watched her, and after speaking with Cassandra and Khafeel, he felt she was a part of him and had been before he'd even met her in the flesh. But how did he hold on to her, make her realize what he felt for her was real?

She was a woman who had been worshiped almost as a goddess in her own time. Now she was immortal and served a goddess herself. She had been married to her own brother to secure the throne at Niveka, yet had never consummated the marriage no matter the pressure brought to bear by the people around them. Instead, she had become strictly a figurehead, allowing another woman to come first in the king's affections.

And plots and murder surrounded her. How could she ever allow herself to truly fall in love with any of the men of her court? Not a one of them ever saw the woman. Never took the time to try to understand her. She had been virtually alone, unable to trust anyone. It was no wonder she was jaded by her past.

He wasn't sure he knew quite where to begin with her, how to convince her of the honesty of his passion for her. The trick was to get her to stay long enough to hear what he had to say. He wanted to get to know the woman he was finding himself falling in love with.

He saw the mask of her nobility in the silken dress, the glittering jewelry, the upsweep of her hair. But he had also known her desire until she had become afraid to face it and had run like the hounds of hell were at her heels. He couldn't fight the magic that the goddess had bestowed on her, but he could, just for a time, bind it, to give him time to make her

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listen to him. But first he had to get her into a position where he was close enough to clasp the damned thing around her neck.

He watched her pick up a scarab and study it, a small smile playing at the corners of her sensual lips.

“My father gave this to me,” she said softly, reminiscing of another time. “It was for my birthday when I turned fifteen.” She turned to look at him. “He was King Zazamoukhwosret and my mother was Taheret, one of his lesser wives. She was given to him as a peace offering by one of his enemies.”

He walked up to her and gazed down at the jewel. “He must have loved you very much to give you such a gift.”

“As far as it went, he was a strong ruler. He did what he must for his people. And my mother did what she could to protect us. To keep us alive long enough to one day rule. Because Teheret was a lesser wife and my brother the first male heir to be born, his life was in constant danger, and finally she sent him away when he was a babe. I never knew him for the longest time. I didn’t even know he existed. Until his return as an adult. And then he was closer to Khafeel than to me. He had been raised with him.”

She walked over to another display that held a glass decanter, inlaid with semi-precious jewels. She held it up to the light. “This held the oil my servants used to anoint my body before my marriage to Zypfir.” She lifted the stopper and inhaled the scent. “I remember that day as though it were yesterday. It was a day filled with sorrow as well as happiness. My father was dead, but my brother was returned to us. Yet I

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did not know if he would accept me. My mother was exultant—her children were once again united with her. Of course, by then my father's other wives and consorts were scattered to the winds. My mother was a very intelligent woman and had gathered many supporters for Zyphir over the years. Everything she had worked for culminated in the day of our marriage and our ascension to the throne of Niveka. That day was the one perfect moment I can remember. Bittersweet, but perfect."

He listened as she reminisced, felt the energy of those memories surround him. The sadness of loss, the joy of a moment remembered. When she looked at him her eyes glittered brightly. And then he saw the light dim and she returned the decanter to the platform.

"All gone. Life is so fleeting, change is immortal. Although sometimes I think I am caught frozen in time." She looked at him. "I am eternal, but I cannot seem to change with the passing of the years."

"How did it all end?"

She walked away from him as though burned by his nearness. "A lover betrayed me. Khafeel was denounced and sentenced to death, and for me, it was poison. After Zyphir's disappearance, it was difficult to hold my position alone. The nobles wanted me to marry again—a man of their choosing. And I refused. I should have known what they would do. My brother was the only true friend I had, my only confidante. When he was gone, I had no one and I was so lonely. I knew what would come next. Either choice I made would end in my

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death.”

“Did you love him?”

“My brother?”

“No, the lover who betrayed you.”

She gave him a look that spoke volumes on her jaded past. “Love? I loved no one except my brother. To have done otherwise would have been a death sentence for me.” She shrugged. “It was anyway, but at least I was heart whole when the day came. My destiny lay in my death, no matter what happened, that I could not avert. The gods have their plans and far be it for mere mortals to attempt to alter it.”

“Why did Bast make you immortal?”

She sauntered around the room, not looking at him, seemingly lost in the past. “The gods were bent on discipline. They never planned for our civilization to be lost forever. But they would reveal it in their own time, through the right people. In that, they used those who had ruled during its prosperous and benevolent period. Our reign was a happy time for many years, the land was fruitful, the people content. Until it all fell apart. Its downfall started by a jealous secondary wife of Zyphir. Zyphir followed Isadora into the afterlife to become a god in his own right. It was his time. It fell to Khafeel and me to search through the millennia for the right person to reveal the secrets of Niveka to. Someone who would safeguard them. It wasn’t easy. Many succumb to the lust for money and power.”

“What happens to you now? The city has been revealed. Khafeel has found happiness. What about you? What happens

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to you?"

She shrugged. "I go on. My true purpose is over, so the gods throw out bits of service now and then." She sighed. "But I must admit, I have grown bored with my life. There is no longer purpose."

And suddenly in that moment he saw the woman. A lonely, beautiful woman, so lost and yet so needy. And he had the greatest urge to take her in his arms, to show her there was more for her, so much more.

"Come upstairs with me. Let me fix you a cup of tea. It'll make you feel better."

She turned and offered him a sad smile and then nodded. "Very well."

With that smile and the look in her eyes she seemed more vulnerable than he had ever seen her before.

* * *

Suddenly she was tired of it all. Weary of her immortal existence. It seemed that all her time in service to the gods had been pointed to putting into the hands of the right person the scrolls of Niveka. And from that point forward her existence was pointless. She couldn't find another focal point upon which to center. And there were times when panic overwhelmed her at this loss of purpose.

Ben handed her the cup of tea. Ben. Something about this man still drew her, even though she knew it could never be more than a passing interest.

"You seem tense," he said. "I'm not going to pounce on

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you.”

She stiffened. “I never thought you would.”

“What’s wrong?”

She ground her teeth. She wanted to yell, “*You’re what’s wrong. Nothing I feel right now is right. It can’t be.*” But she didn’t. Any little indication of her unease and something told her he’d have no problem using it against her. She flitted a quick look at him and then slid her gaze away. She took a sip of tea and then set the cup down on the corner of the desk.

“I should go. I only came to make certain everything was in place for the exhibition.”

“Isn’t that what Cassandra and Khafeel are supposed to do? Isn’t it their job to accompany the exhibit and give the talks?”

“Well...yes, but—” What could she say? Even she didn’t have any idea why Bast had sent her here. She had no real purpose. Of course, that was true all the way around. There was simply no reason for her to...exist any longer.

“Then relax.” He rose from his chair and circled around the desk. She watched his movements like a wary cat tracking the progress of a larger predator.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to try to help you ease back. You’re still too tense.”

Then she felt his hard hands on her shoulders, kneading at the tight muscles. And it felt heavenly. “Mmmm,” she couldn’t help emitting almost a purr as his fingers worked at her muscles. “Where did you learn how to do that?” Then she

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remembered how he had rubbed her foot the other night. He certainly had magic hands.

“I took a course a long time ago. It comes in handy now and then.”

She found herself relaxing into the touch. She closed her eyes. It felt like she was literally melting there. And then something changed. His hands were gone and there was a cool weight around her neck and she heard the snick of a clasp closing. She jumped up from the chair and whirled around on him, her hand going to her neck to feel the links of a collar around her neck.

“What the hell did you just do?”

He stepped back and looked at her. She felt like a cornered cat with no way of escape. She attempted to shapeshift, but found herself unable to do so.

“I had to do it.”

“Do what? What have you done to me?”

“The necklace came from Bast. You’re grounded, pretty kitty.”

She pivoted around, panicked, cornered, and spotted the door. She had to get to it, to get out of here. As she attempted to skirt around him and reach her intended target, he grabbed her arm and spun her around. “Not today, kitty. Today you’re going to face what you’ve been running away from.”

She struggled against him. “I have no idea what you mean.” Her authority was slipping. And Bast had done this to her. She had yanked her power away from her and handed it to this infuriating man in front of her. “You will not control me.

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No man controls me. Ever.”

“Well, love, I didn’t want to do this, but you leave me with no choice.” He hauled her across the room, as he jerked his tie from around his neck. Shoving her against the wall, he wrapped the tie around her hands and anchored her to a coat hook above him.

She kicked out with her feet, aiming for a most sensitive spot, but he managed to sidestep her just in time. Rage filled her.

“Damn you, let me go. Bastet could not have done this. How dare she.” She raged at him and at her.

Ben stepped away from her and, with arms folded across his chest, he watched her. Impotently she pulled at the bonds that held her hands high above her. Again she kicked out, but he was too far away. It wasn’t until a long time later, when her strength was almost fully depleted that he dared to step closer.

It wasn’t so much anger that filled her now as panic. “You have no right to do this,” she rasped at him.

“I never planned it this way. She was the one who came to me. I think she knows you better than you know yourself.” Her gaze skirted frantically around the room, looking for some way to escape. The collar weighed heavily around her neck. Bastet had effectively clipped her wings or her nails, so to speak, and she had no self-protection available to her. She saw her own demise before her.

He made no move to touch her. “Tell me, do you think the gods chose wisely when they sent Khafeel to Cassandra Linsey?”

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She lifted her chin and tried to give him her most haughty look. "I have no idea. I simply followed orders."

He quirked an eyebrow. "I wonder. Do you always just simply follow orders? Somehow I doubt it. In fact, I have the feeling you're quite a handful even for the gods."

She mutinously refused to answer him and turned away, balling her hands into fists above her head. She'd never felt quite so helpless. And she didn't like it one damn bit. Curse Bastet for putting her in this position.

"Let me go," she bit out. "Now. You have no right."

"Bastet gave me the right. You and your shapeshifting ways are at an end for right now. At least until I can make you listen to me. No more sprinting away because you're afraid of giving in to your feelings. This is a new day and a new age. And I'm not one of the boys back home."

"You have no idea what you're talking about. I'm afraid of no one. Certainly not you."

"But you are afraid of yourself and what you feel. For me. With me. Afraid of what I make you feel."

"Bastard! You know nothing about what I feel. I've fucked more men over the millennia than you can possibly imagine. In more ways than you could ever think of." She leaned forward as least as far as her position would allow. "Do you know how many men I fucked after I left you?" She tossed her head as though none of it meant anything to her. "I use men and then I throw them away. That's the end of it. One, two, however many it takes to assuage my sexual desire. I let them fuck me any way they wish. None of them matter. Not. A.

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One. So you might as well let me go.”

“Tsk. Tsk,” he said, shaking his head as though none of what she had said phased him in the slightest, or shocked him. And that’s what she had wanted to do, make him feel disgust for her and make it so he couldn’t get rid of her fast enough. “My fiery little kitty, I can definitely see you need taking in hand. And I’m just the man to do it.”

“Not in this lifetime, or any other.” She shot back angrily. She felt the fear begin to slide through her like a lethal, slithering snake. She’d never met a man like him.

“We’ll see just how little you care, sweetie. It’s going to be a long afternoon. And when we’re done, you’ll know the difference between being made love to and fucking. And there’ll be no getting away from me this time. No fuck and run this time, baby.”

His gaze raked over her and in shock, she felt her pussy flooding with her juices. She couldn’t let him do this. If he did what he said he planned to, she would shatter. Her self-control had never come closer to crumbling.

CHAPTER 7

He knew this wasn't going to be easy. It wasn't until last night that he'd finally decided to use the necklace. She was like a young kitten who had been cruelly used and wasn't about to let anyone get close if she could help it. And she'd darn well use those nails and scratch them if they tried. But Ben most assuredly was planning to get intimately close to her before the afternoon was over.

He looked at her as she stood there bound with his silk tie, stretched tautly, sparkling anger in her cat eyes. Her gold dress hugged her body, her breasts pushed against the expensive fabric, her nipples tightly taunting him. The silk caressed her thighs, outlining her mound, arms bare except for the exotic

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bracelets she wore.

Her ebony tresses that had been so neatly confined had wispy tendrils escaping to cling to the sides of her passionately colored cheeks. It was indeed a goddess who awaited his attentions, an angry one for sure.

It wasn't his intention to break her, that wasn't what this was about in the least. But he had to make her see he wasn't like the others. It wasn't just lust he felt for her, but something far deeper than even he could have imagined.

But he did have to break through her fear. And he had to show her the difference between being loved and being fucked.

Too bad the dress would end up being destroyed in the process. It was a very pretty dress and she enhanced its lines beautifully. But not just yet.

"Are you willing to listen to reason? Will you behave?"

She looked at him as though he had lost his mind. "You have to be joking. Let me loose," she yelled again, gritting her teeth. Another flyaway wisp of hair settled over her eyes and she tried to blow it aside. Her hair was as unruly as she was and it settled back over her eyes once again. She pulled at the bonds and only made them draw tighter.

Finally, he moved closer to her, careful of her flying feet. "Here, let me help you with that." He reached up and released the gold comb that held the elegant twist in place. Her shimmering hair fell down past her shoulders. He stroked his hands through it and it felt like delving into the richest French silk decadent dessert.

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And then he cupped her face, staring deeply into her eyes. She tried to turn her head, to look away, but he held firmly. “Look at me,” he commanded. “Don’t look away.”

Finally, she stilled and stared back at him. He thought of nothing else but finding her soul, of touching that spot deep inside her to a place where she could not run, could not hide from him. He could hear her breaths increase and deepen, he could smell the fear. Again, he stroked her hair, trying to soothe her, but he would not let her look away.

Her lips parted slightly and the heat of her molten, dilated gaze sparked the flame in his body. He reached up and stroked the inner flesh of her arms and heard the aroused gasp she uttered from her sensually parted lips. He leaned closer, but he did not turn his gaze from hers, keeping her locked within his will.

He could feel her, like a captured butterfly trapped within his cupped palms. He could feel the flutter of her wings against his senses. Almost like a delicate kiss, again and again and again. He trailed his fingers down her arms, felt her shudder and heard the soft moan. Finally, he broke the gaze. Her eyelids fluttered down.

“Let me go,” she whispered. “You don’t know what you’re asking of me.”

He walked away from her and around the desk, opening a desk drawer. Inside was a sleep mask that he used on occasion when he tried to take a nap here in his office on the couch. He walked back to her.

“What are you going to do with that?”

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“I want you to feel what I’m going to do to you. I think you use your eyes to judge people and not your heart.”

“Of course I don’t use my heart. I use my mind. People are not what they seem.”

“That I will concede. But, pretty kitty, you aren’t in Egypt now. You’re here with me, by the grace of your goddess, I might add. I want you to feel me, to absorb me, to understand the difference of what I want to give you.”

“Give me? You want to fuck me the same as the rest. Don’t try to convince me otherwise. I’m a unique thing to you. You’re a museum curator who wants to know what it’s like to fuck a queen. Something you’d never get to try in other circumstances.”

“Think what you like, little kitty.” He put the blindfold over her eyes and adjusted it.

“No,” she protested. “I won’t let you do this.”

“My sweet prettycat, you can’t stop me.”

“Stop calling me that. I’m not a kitty, your kitty, or a fucking prettycat.”

“What are you, my dear?”

“I’m a queen of Niveka. And I deserve respect.” She lifted her chin, but he was certain the effect wasn’t quite what she intended, with her hands bound and her exquisite eyes blindfolded.

He leaned forward and blew a puff of breath against her long, elegant neck. He felt her shudder in response. Again, her lush, red lips parted. “Are you wet yet?”

“Why would I be?” she responded in a breathy voice.

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“Because you know what we had together that night was different than with anyone else you’ve been with in the past. You ran because you were scared of how I made you feel. Well, no more running.”

“You can’t keep me here forever.”

“I can keep you just as long as I like. I own this museum and no one is going to question what I do or say. And you can’t get free without my help; you can’t shapeshift and run away from me like you did before.” He leaned close, his lips almost touching her cheek. “You will know my touch, know my scent, and they will be so ingrained inside you, you’ll never be free of me, no matter how many other men you allow inside you to try to forget me. You’ve been alone for far too long, and so have I for that matter. But I know what to do to fix it. You are afraid to reach out and take it. Today, you will reach out—to me.”

“Never.” And this time it wasn’t anger he heard. This time there was a small catch in her voice. Oh, yes, she was afraid he would have exactly what he wanted from her. And that hard shell of control that surrounded her would shatter completely.

* * *

He had blinded her and trussed her up. She wanted to run and she wanted to stay. She could not admit to herself that he was right. She wanted him. But she was too afraid of believing him. Letting down her guard even a little had caused her death thousands of years ago, and she vowed she would not make

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that mistake again. But this man with his amazing hands was driving her over the edge very quickly.

Suddenly she felt him lift one of her feet, angling it back and up. "Now what are you doing?"

"We never finished that foot massage the other night, did we? Remember what I told you?"

"You wouldn't," but his hands were already doing amazing things to her foot.

He stroked along her limb. Without her vision to deflect her thoughts, she felt every single touch of his knowledgeable hands. "I told you I took a course and I can do amazing things to your body without even touching anything but your feet."

"I don't believe you."

"Then we shall see, won't we?"

He stroked along the sole of her foot and suddenly it seemed like a switch had been turned on inside her body and every nerve ending came to life. His hands were warm, but he was also using some kind of lotion or oil with a faint scent of sandalwood teasing her nose. His hands were rhythmically kneading her foot, and as hard as she fought to rein in her responses, she felt herself giving in to the sensual touch. It really did feel wonderful.

"You've never really been touched, have you, Sahra?"

"Of course I've been touch and handled in many different ways."

"But not like this, am I right? Lovingly, passionately. I doubt you've truly been intimate with another person."

"You don't know what you're talking about," she managed

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to mutter.

“Yes, I do. Touch is so important, but I think we forget. Intimacy isn’t just about feeling a cock inside your pussy; it’s about your emotions and feelings. It’s caring about your lover’s responses. The human body can be so responsive. If I touch this spot,” and she felt his fingers press firmly on a sensitive spot on her foot.

She stiffened as she felt a tingling in her breast. “Oh,” she gasped. He did it again and her nipple tightened in response. “Stop it this instant.”

But, of course, he did no such thing. Moving toward the back of her foot toward her heel, he touched another spot and pressed. And just like the other night, her pussy contracted in rhythmic pulses as he kneaded that very sensitive area on her foot. She jerked her pelvis.

And then suddenly he dropped her foot back to the floor. Her body still tingled.

She felt his breath as he leaned close to her. “I want to make love to you properly, to worship your body with mine the way it should be, but I’m not sure you’re quite ready for that yet.”

“Let me go.”

“Do you promise not to run away? To take the time to get to know me? The way I want to know you. To learn everything about you.”

She couldn’t lie to him. The moment she was free she planned to make a run for the door. Her heart wanted her to stay, but she knew from past experience, no man could be

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trusted, no matter how much she wanted to trust this one. “No, I won’t promise that.”

“Yes, well, I had a feeling that would be your answer.”

The next thing she felt was a rip along the shoulder of her dress and then another on the other side. Then she felt the air-conditioned air swirl over her overheated body. “You’ve ruined a perfectly good dress. How dare you?”

“Easily, I’m afraid. You have such a delectable body. Stunning I might say.” A hand stroked across one plump breast and she arched against the feel of it. “How many men have enjoyed your body, but never your mind, or held your heart?”

“Legions,” she answered. “You’re but one of many.”

“Ah, but I want to know your mind and touch your heart.”

His hands moved downward and twisted into her panties and then she was naked. One day she would give Bastet a real piece of her mind over this little bit of fancy work. She felt a hot hand at her mound, a finger sliding between her wet lips.

“Oh, you are very wet already, little puss.” He slid a finger inside her and she swallowed, trying not to respond to the tingly feeling that swept through her at the touch. He added a second finger to the first, widening her channel, making her hotter, making her want to feel his cock inside her once again, remembered how well he fit, how deep he had gone.

And then he crooked his fingers and she spasmed against his hand. “I’ll bet your cream is rich and thick and oh-so sweet. You ran off too quickly the other night and I never got the dessert I craved.”

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Then she felt his hot breath flutter across her engorged entrance and she almost shattered right then and there when his tongue penetrated inside her. He tasted her, seemed to savor her as his tongue slowly glided inside, then out, circling over her labia lips, around her swollen clit and back inside.

“Oh, gods, stop. Please stop.” She was going to come any second if he kept that up. Why was he doing this to her? She wanted him so badly she could taste it. She wanted to suck him, to fuck him, to learn every inch of his body the way he seemed so intent on learning hers. Yet, she was afraid to give in to her emotions. Afraid of where she might end up.

Then she felt him move once again and suddenly she was spinning, her face pressed to the wall. He buried his fingers inside her pussy and then she felt a hand at her ass, easing along the crack.

“What are you doing?”

And then she felt him ease two slick fingers into the tight bud between her cheeks. His hands penetrated both her orifices deeply. It was then his fingers began to play her body like a fine musical instrument and he the master musician. She danced to his tune like the dances of long ago, as the force of the rhythm skyrocketed through her body, unable not to respond.

Hot and cold ripped through her, her heart pounded, her nerve endings sizzled, her womb contracted and then she shattered into tiny little pieces, all landing at the feet of this knowledgeable lover.

“All right,” she cried out, unable to resist any longer,

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dangling there, held up only by his hands, his strength. She couldn't fight it any longer. She wanted him to take her, to show her love and not just lust. At this moment she thought she would die if he didn't make her his.

CHAPTER 8

“Let me go and make love to me, Ben. Show me what you mean, because I know I have never been made love to as you describe it, by any man.”

Those were the words he'd been waiting to hear. He didn't know if it would lead to something permanent the way he hoped it would, but at least he could show her the depth of feeling he felt for her. She was from a far different world than he was and he couldn't even be certain they could have a future together, but he had to make her understand.

He reached up, lifted her off the hook, and unbound her hands. Then he gently massaged her arms and wrists. Picking her up, he carried her over to the couch that he often used for

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naps. And then he removed the blindfold. She blinked and then looked around.

“Ben,” she whispered, reaching up to clasp her arms around his neck.

For the first time that day, he leaned down to capture her succulent lips and thrust his tongue deep inside. She tasted like pure heaven. Like liquid gold she melted into his arms, and he pressed her close. His cock raged with the need to possess her, but as he promised, he was going to take it slow and sweet.

He moved down her body, sipping at her skin, swirling his tongue along her hot, sweet flesh. Her fingers tangled in his hair and he turned his head, reaching for one of her hands. Kneading the palm, he then sucked one finger into his mouth, razed across it with his teeth, then sucked the middle digit into his mouth, licking along its length. He heard her sigh and then tremble.

Releasing her hand he nipped at her breasts, sucking a nipple deep into his mouth, worshiping her with his tongue. He feathered his fingers along her thigh.

She stopped him and looked into his eyes. “I want to feel your skin against mine. I want to taste you, the way you’re tasting me.” Her fingers worked frantically at the opening of his shirt and then shoved it off his shoulders. He toed off his loafers, rose and divested himself of the remainder of his clothing, and then came back to her.

Her hands eagerly sought his body, trying to learn every nuance of his flesh. She arched up and pressed her pelvis to his and he notched himself between her thighs. His cock slid

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between her wet pussy lips and he stroked along her opening. This time she made a sound that was more cat than human, a purring that shot straight through to his loins.

He looked down at her, knowing that passion filled his stare. "Look at me."

She turned to stare at him. "I am. You're glorious."

"No. Look into my eyes. I want you to see what I feel as I penetrate your hot, little cunt. Do you hear me? I want you to see right into my soul."

He saw her eyes fill with tears. "No one has ever made me feel the way you do. I'm scared of these feelings."

It was the first time she had admitted to those feelings out loud. Before, she had run as fast and far as she could. She had tried to wipe him from her mind. But this time he was going to make certain she couldn't do that. Not this time. He was going to imprint himself so deeply she could never be rid of him. She was already that deeply rooted inside him.

He centered the tip of his penis at her opening and slowly penetrated. My God, it felt like he was entering a silken nirvana. Her hot sheath separated and enfolded him inside. He buried himself completely. His gaze held hers as he began to move in a lazy, undulating rhythm that she countered with her hips.

Her lips parted and her tongue slid across their surface. He couldn't resist, and he dropped his head to suck her tongue into his mouth, tasting her sultry passion.

This was how it should be between them, how it should have been from the beginning. He couldn't get enough of her,

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and wanted more and more.

She looked up at him in wonderment, and he stopped moving buried inside her. He was in no urgent need to climax at the moment, he simply wanted to be inside her, to make her a part of him.

She blinked rapidly and there was moisture on her eyelashes. He leaned forward to kiss each lid and she sighed.

She leaned up to kiss him and then pulled back to look up at him. "You make me feel things. Wonderful things that I have never felt before. Is this making love?"

He smiled. "This is me making love with you."

"More please."

He began moving again, this time with more urgency. He brushed against her clit and she shuddered and then moaned. Using one hand, he circled her engorged clit with his fingers, driving her upward, and then she tumbled over the edge and he was waiting to catch her as she pulsed all around him.

He pushed deep, pulled out, and penetrated again. She arched up, sending him deeper still, touching her sensitive cervix. And then he exploded with wave after wave of ecstasy, pouring into her welcoming body.

She wrapped her arms around him and held him close, laughing and crying all at the same time. Finally, they both floated back to earth.

He fell to the side of the couch and pulled her against him. "No more running."

She looked up at him. Her gaze was soft, yet he still sensed she held a part of herself back from him.

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“Trust me, Sahra. I’m already in love with you and I’ll never hurt you.”

She reached up to brush a lock of his hair away from his face. “I am not used to normal. I’m not really human. I don’t know if I can do a real relationship such as Khafeel has found with his Cassandra. You would be taking a chance. If I should choose to stay.”

“I’m ready to do that. I was married, you know. To Candace. It didn’t work out. We’ve been divorced for a while, but I haven’t had the urge to pursue another relationship. Not until you. I want to try to make this work.”

She looked at him but didn’t say anything, and then she leaned her head against his shoulder. “I want to try, Ben. But I am afraid. Give me time.”

He stroked her back and pulled her close against him. For now, what they had just experienced had to be enough.

* * *

Something awoke Ben from a sound sleep. He glanced down at Sahra and found she was still out to the world. He couldn’t help staring at her, soaking up her presence. It still shocked him that she was really someone from a whole other time. That a goddess had appeared to him.

His gaze moved down to her slender neck and to the glittering necklace still surrounding it. She wore another and he would have to remember to ask her what the amulet was dangling from the silver chain. He hadn’t been certain he wanted to use the necklace Bast gave him, and had done so as

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a last resort. There truly was some mystical element to their relationship and he had to delve deeper, had to show her there was more to what was between them.

He heard something shatter and turned to look at the door. Glancing at the window he knew it was nighttime and probably late enough that there shouldn't be anyone else in the museum, except for security. They were used to him staying late at night and having his door locked, so didn't attempt to enter the door of his office.

Slowly, he eased himself up from the sofa, trying not to wake Sahra. There was no need to involve her in whatever was going on in the museum. He pulled down the blanket that rested on the back of the couch and covered her—body heat only went so far. Then he quickly donned his clothes and quietly left the office.

He walked down the hallway to the stairs leading to the main floor. It was one of the smaller museums in the city, so he didn't really have far to go. The security lights were on as he expected, but then he saw there were several more lights on in the Nivekian exhibition hall than should be. Something wasn't right. He wondered where the security guards were—he hadn't seen either of them yet.

Then he stopped short as he saw a pair of feet just at the entrance to the hall. The shoes looked like those worn by the security guards—shiny black leather. He hadn't thought to bring some sort of weapon with him, not that he had one. On more than one occasion, Candace had suggested he keep a gun in the desk drawer, but in his opinion that would cause more

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trouble than help. He wasn't proficient with one and he didn't plan to take any chances.

He studied the hallway and then sprinted off to the side, against the wall just outside of the exhibition hall. If he could just see who was inside, then he'd go back to his office and call the police. It would be a stupid move to try to confront them on his own, but first he wanted to see who it was and how many there were. And he hoped the security guard was just knocked out and not dead.

As he inched toward the entrance, he saw shards of glass scattered around the guard. Ben didn't recognize him, so he must be one of the new people the security company had sent over when he'd requested additional support. A fat lot of good it seemed to have done.

And then he peeked around the corner. Shock struck him speechless, caught like a deer in headlights as he recognized two of the people in the room. This was nuts. What did she think she was doing?

He stepped out past the unconscious guard.

"What the hell are you up to, Candace?" he shouted. The woman almost dropped the priceless piece she was planning to place into a wooden box just behind her. And then she seemed to catch herself and turned to look at him, a cold expression on her face.

"Ben, what are you doing here?"

"More to the point, what are you doing here?"

"Ben, Ben," she said shaking her head as her husband took the piece she held in her hand. "You always were a bit dense,

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weren't you?"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Well, there's just no way around it this time, you'll have to go." She slowly moved toward him across the room.

"What do you think you're going to do? I'm calling the police. I've had enough of your shenanigans over the years. I want you out of my museum and I want you out now." He bent down to check the pulse for the downed guard. Satisfied he had a strong, steady pulse he rose back up to face Candace. He pointed to the broken glass on the floor near the guard. "Obviously, you've already broken one priceless piece."

"Not really. It was just a copy we were planning to exchange for the real one. You'd be surprised at the number of very good copies on display in this museum."

Ben didn't think it was possible to be more shocked than he had been when he looked at her and realized what she was doing—what she had been up to all along.

"You bitch!" Now he knew why she wanted to retain her shares in the museum. She'd been stealing from it the whole time.

"We've been getting away with it for quite some time. I take the pictures, Manny, the young man unwrapping that vase, makes the copies, and my darling Jack, who has the contacts, negotiates the sales. We've had quite a nice little business going on here. Unfortunately, we had a little financial mishap and rather than replacing a piece at a time we needed to do something major. And do it quickly. The Nivekian exhibit was a lucky stroke for us. It's unfortunate that you

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chose tonight to spend the evening in your precious museum. Oh, well, this haul should tide us nicely for some time, until we find another nice little sheep to fleece.” She lifted one of her gloved hands from inside her pocket and he saw she had a small, black pistol in her hand.

“You can’t be serious.” He was flabbergasted. “You’d shoot me?”

She shrugged. “It’s been nice, but all good things, and ex-husbands, must come to an end sometime.” He heard the shot fired, but by then it was too late, the burning sensation that spread through his chest had him gasping for air. He staggered back and that’s when the second bullet hit him.

Goddamn it! Not now, not when so much awaited him. He pressed his hands to his chest, felt the blood seep past his fingers, could smell it all around him. “Candace—” and then he dropped to the floor next to the guard.

CHAPTER 9

Sahra felt cold and moved to snuggle closer to Ben, and suddenly realized he was no longer lying next to her. She rose and wrapped the blanket around her sarong fashion, and then searched the office and the bathroom.

Since her own dress was damaged beyond repair, she hunted around Ben's office for something that might be suitable for actually walking out of the office in case she ran into someone. The necklace around her neck stopped her from using her own powers to whip something up quickly, which she'd been known to do in a pinch. So much for the gypsy amulet keeping unwanted lovers away. But then was Ben really so unwanted a lover? That might have had something to

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do with it. Bast's necklace was a whole other story.

She would have words with Bast another time about this little trickery with the necklace. Right now she wanted to locate Ben. She found a closet and inside there were several shirts. A couple of drawers beneath and she located some running shorts and T-shirts. That would have to do for now. As she tugged on a gold T-shirt that had the image of a pyramid on the front and a pair of gold-trimmed black nylon jogging shorts, she wondered where Ben could have gone to.

She turned and sniffed the air, a habit gained from her shapeshifting. She might not have access to her more active powers, but her sense of smell was still as acute as ever. The scent that assaulted her nostrils was not good. It smelled like fresh human blood; that shouldn't be something she should be smelling here in the museum.

"Bast, I'm at a disadvantage here without my powers. This is not a good thing," she mumbled under her breath. She heard a loud pop, and then another. Again, she sniffed the air as she hurried down the hallway in her bare feet. She stopped as panic assailed her. This time the smell in the air was more dense. She gasped as she recognized the human scent attached to the blood. It was Ben's.

There wasn't a moment to lose. She reached the top of the landing and then halted and crouched down as she observed people below. Two men were hurrying down the hall pushing a cart loaded with crates.

Once they were past the staircase, she tiptoed down the steps and along the darkened hall, following the men to see

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where they would go. She watched as they loaded the boxes into a huge van parked in the garage at the back of the museum. She slipped back into a darkened alcove and waited until they moved past her again. Then she went out to the van, jumped in back and peered into one of the crates. Outrage filled her as she lifted out one of the pieces and realized it belonged to the Niveka collection. It belonged to her.

She carefully laid the piece back into the crate. They were trying to steal from her and from the museum and must have hurt Ben in some way. The smell was now overpowering. She had to find Ben. But she also needed to do something to stop them. But what? Without her powers it wasn't going to be easy.

First things, first. Disable the van. She vaulted down and around to the front, located the catch and lifted the hood, peering inside at the engine. Thank goodness she'd read a manual or two about these vehicles, even if she didn't know the inner mechanics all that well. If she was going to walk in this age, she had to have some idea of how things worked. She might not know anything about what was under the hood, but that wasn't going to stop her. She began yanking on belts and hoses, pulled at caps and tossed them across the floor. That should keep them occupied for a bit. Now to figure out how to corner them until she could call 9-1-1 and get help.

She snapped the hood back in place and whirled around to scan the area. Okay, the garage door was open. What if she managed to get it closed and locked it? There had to be a way to do it and then disable any possibility of it being opened

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until help arrived. She scanned the walls near the door and looked for the control box that would allow the door to rise and fall.

She finally located it and, after trying to figure out the buttons and what each of them did, she located the two that raised and lowered the door. She could only hope these people were too busy stealing her objects and wouldn't notice the door—not just yet.

She turned and frantically looked around the room, knowing time was running out. She located a crowbar resting against the wall. Sprinting across the floor, she grabbed it, settled the curved end behind the bank of wiring that connected the box to the door mechanism and yanked with all her strength. She ducked as sparks flew, pulled one more time, and the connection from the power source that allowed the door to be raised and lowered was severed.

Frantically, she again looked at the four walls for any other exits and saw one door at the back. She ran to it, hit a small patch of oil, skidded, and ended up on her rear, stubbing her bare toes against the door frame. She hissed, but didn't make a sound as she jumped to her feet. She tried the steel door, but found it was locked and wouldn't budge. She peered out the window and saw it was padlocked from the outside. This was a good thing.

Then she limped back to the entrance she'd come through that led into the museum. As she passed through, she noted the lock on the door, a deadbolt. And, again, it was a steel door. If she waited for them to go back inside with another load of

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objects and then locked the door behind them, they weren't going anywhere in the near future. Even if they managed to escape through a window, that van was going nowhere.

She slipped back into the alcove to wait. Fear surrounded her as the scent of Ben's blood permeated the air. She had to get to him quickly. But if she didn't stop these thieves, they might kill both of them before she could help him.

She ran the back of her hand across her sweat-slickened forehead. This being human thing was crap. Now there was a word she'd never thought she'd have a use for. She could have dispensed with these criminals quite easily if she'd had her powers. Now she was covered in oil, her toes hurt, and she was dripping sweat like a cat who'd just been dunked in the sea. And she didn't like it any better than she would have had she been in her cat form and dumped in any body of water. This was just as miserable.

She stilled as she heard the sound of voices and the vibrations of the cart as it was rolled across the floor. But this time it wasn't strictly male voices—there was a female as well. She held her breath and waited for them to pass. The moment they were through the door, she jumped out, slammed the door shut, and shoved the bolt home. No one was going anywhere for a while.

She whirled around and headed back down the hall at a dead run, the sound of angry voices and pounded fists filling her ears. That made her smile—for at least a moment. She saw a phone on the wall, picked it up and dialed 9-1-1.

"9-1-1, what's your emergency?" the voice on the other

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end asked.

“There’s been a robbery at the Solomon Museum. I think there are people hurt. The criminals are locked in the garage. Send someone. Hurry.”

“Wait—” But she slammed the phone down. They would have to do the rest for themselves. She had to get to Ben.

* * *

Sahra didn’t have a difficult time locating him and she was horrified when she did. There was so much blood. No wonder the smell had been so overpowering. He was lying next to another man who was unconscious, but it was Ben who was bleeding so profusely.

She dropped to her knees and carefully lifted his head. The whole front of his shirt was soaked in blood. “Ben, look at me,” she pleaded. “Open your eyes.”

So much blood and she had no way of helping him until the police arrived. She’d never felt so helpless.

Suddenly, he inhaled deeply and his eyelids snapped up. He coughed, and more blood bubbled around his mouth.

“Sahra...closer,” he rasped.

She leaned down and he reached up for her neck. She felt his fingers fumble at first and then the clasp of the necklace was released and it fell onto his chest. “You’re free now. You have to get out of here.”

She heard a gurgling in his chest and then he coughed again and blood poured from his mouth.

“I’m not going anywhere and neither are you. You have to

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hold on. I've called the police."

"No...no. You can't be here. Too many questions."

"I don't care. I'm not leaving you." He could not die. And he might if she left. How could he be worrying about her at a time like this? It seemed to say so much about the type of man he was. And she had refused to see it.

"It won't work. Nobody can help me now. Don't want you troubled."

She threw her head back and looked up. "Bastet," she screamed. "You can't let him die. You gave him to me, you have to save him. I don't have the power."

Her arms tightened around Ben, trying to hold on to him, to stop him from leaving her. For the first time in a millennia, not since her brother disappeared, she felt tears sliding down her face. She looked down at him. "I can't lose you. Not now," she pleaded and then leaned down to press a kiss against his lips, trying to infuse her immortality into him.

Suddenly the room went dark and a fierce golden light lit it up, blinding her. She threw an arm across her eyes and leaned down to shield Ben from whatever was happening.

The light faded and she raised her head. They were no longer in the museum, but crouched in the temple of Bastet, with her gazing down on them.

She looked up at her pleadingly. "Help him. Don't let him die."

"I thought you did not want him. You need no man. Remember?"

"You orchestrated all this and you know it. If it hadn't

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been for the necklace, none of this would have happened. Why did you do it?"

"I thought he was the right man for you, but obviously I was mistaken. He will be cared for in the afterlife and you can go about your business of hopping from man to man for the rest of eternity. This is what you wish, is it not?"

She had. But that was before. She looked down at the face of the one man who had torn his way past her defenses and reached inside her soul. She hadn't thought it was possible, but for this man she would walk through the fires of hell to save him.

"Send me into the afterlife, not him. He doesn't deserve this."

"You would sacrifice yourself for this human? I thought you didn't care. That these mortals meant nothing to you."

She hesitated for a moment before answering, looking down at Ben, afraid each breath might be his last. "I was wrong," she answered quietly. "Take me, but spare him."

"You care that much?"

Tears spilled down her cheeks. "More than that," she sobbed. "Please, Bast, I have never, ever asked for anything from you. Not for myself. I've served you to the best of my ability. And I don't ask this for me, but for him. Let him live."

"You're a sight, Queen Sahrametatiri. You look very little like royalty right now. More like something the cat dragged in. Have you learned something from this man?"

She reached out to touch his face. "I have learned a great deal, more than I thought possible. He's the one who is

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worthy, not I.”

“Very well, Sahrametatiri.” She reached out a hand and the air sizzled as a bolt of lightning filled the chamber, blinding Sahra. She blinked rapidly and then frantically looked down at Ben.

The blood was gone and his shirt was pristine white and he lay in a sleep, most likely induced by Bast. She breathed a sigh of relief. Leaning forward, she kissed him and then rose to her feet. She looked up at Bast.

“I’m ready,” she said and bowed her head.

“Ready for what?”

“To be sent into the afterlife. I swore to give up my life for his. I am ready to pay the debt.”

“Ah, Sahrametatiri, you have changed. And I was right, wasn’t I? There is a man in this world that you could learn to love. A man who has the power to change you—for the better, I might add. I give him to you. No, I give you to each other. Do you really think Zyphir would have allowed me to separate you from a man you could learn to love, one who could give you happiness? Your brother has always watched out for your best interests. He, above any other, would want to see you happy.”

Sahra was overwhelmed and for once she was speechless. All she could do was look up at Bast. She blinked rapidly to try to quell the rise of more tears.

“Thank you,” she finally managed to say. “What will happen now?”

“I will send you back. The rest is for you to say. And

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possibly a little of fate and the gods' goodwill."

"Will I remain as I am?"

"Immortal? Yes. I may have need of your service again. I would hate to...burn my bridges as they say."

She wanted to laugh and to cry all at the same time. "I will continue to serve to the best of my ability."

"But I think there will be heart in it this time." Bast nodded toward Ben. "He will give you that. And soul, too, I think."

The light grew bright once again and when Sahra opened her eyes, they were back in Ben's office. She climbed onto the couch next to him and curled around him, feeling his warmth.

"I love you, Ben Solomon," she whispered and then leaned her head against his chest, content for the first time in her very long existence.

CHAPTER 10

Ben awoke and found himself lying on the couch in his office. He reached up to touch his chest and found not a speck of blood or any wounds. Quickly, he sat up. His gaze encountered a cat sitting on his desk, licking its paws.

“Sahra?” he asked, feeling a bit disoriented.

The beautiful creature turned to look at him, slowly rose to its feet, and stretched. The next thing he knew the cat was gone and Sahra appeared before him. A naked Sahra in all her glory. His cock quickly rose to attention. Yet his body felt like it had been put through the ringier.

“What the hell happened here?”

She sauntered toward him, smiling a sensual smile. “The

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world has been set back on its axis, I guess that would be the best way to put it.”

“I don’t understand.”

“The police were here to scoop up those nasty criminals. I told them you were indisposed, but they want you to come down to the station to make a report.”

“Candace.”

“Is that who that awful female was? And, yes, I managed to round them up, single-handedly mind you, into the garage, where they very nicely waited to be apprehended by the police.”

“Who called them?”

She yawned and looked down at her nails. “I did, of course.”

“But she shot me.”

He saw a flicker of something in her expression. Panic? Pain?

“Yes, you were shot. I didn’t realize she was the one who did it. If I had know that—”

“What?”

“She never would have gotten out of here alive. There would have been scraps left for the police to scoop up. I’d probably have tried to use her as a scratchpad, but then,” she looked at him pointedly, “I didn’t exactly have my powers to work with at that particular moment, now did I?”

“What about the guard.”

“Still unconscious. But he’s fine. He’s been transferred to the hospital.”

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His gaze bore into her. "But I wasn't. So what did you do?"

He saw her swallow and knew she was hiding some deep emotion behind a facade. "I called on Bast to help us...you. I asked her to heal you." She turned her head to look at the desk. His gaze widened when he saw the statue was now setting there as it had been before Bastet had appeared to him.

He walked toward Sahra. "Now what?"

She placed her hands on his chest and looked up at him. "What do you want to happen, Ben?"

He cupped her face, gazing into her eyes. "I know we can't have a normal relationship, you being immortal and all. But I love you and I want to spend my life with you."

She traced a sideways figure-eight on his shirt. The mark of infinity. "Oh, you might find that your longevity is a bit more extended now than it was before."

"Do you still feel you have to have all those other men?"

She looked up at him. "No. Not any more. Make love to me, Ben. Show me again how it should be between a man and a woman who love each other."

"Are you sure?" he asked, unable to believe she meant to stay with him.

"More sure than I have been of anything in my life. I love you, Ben, and if I had lost you, I don't know what I would have done."

He peered closer at her. "What sort of deal did you make with Bast?"

"None really. It was her plan that I should love you right

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from the start.”

He pulled her closer. “And so you do.”

She reached for the buttons on his shirt. “And so I do.”

He lifted her onto the desk and spread her legs. “I guess I should start right now.”

She undid the front of his pants and then his heavy cock was in her hands. “The police are waiting.” She hopped off the desk and slowly dropped to her knees in front of him. It was amazing that his dick should get so hard after everything that had happened tonight.

“They can wait,” he groaned as she engulfed him with her sweet mouth, practically swallowing his full length. “Oh, yes,” he breathed, “they can most definitely wait.”

ADRIANNA DANE

Theresa Gallup uses the pen names of Tess Maynard and Adrianna Dane. Theresa has been writing since the age of 10. A legal secretary for 30 years, she is currently working on another erotic romance, as well as a full-length romantic mystery/suspense. She has been married for 30 years and has three grown children (a daughter and twin sons), and is a new grandmother.

Writing as Tess Maynard, her first published short story appeared in the ezine, *The Whispering Forest*, in January of 2004. Writing as Adrianna Dane, where adding sensual heat to romance is her motto, *Esmerelda's Secret* was her first foray into the erotic romance genre.

Having traveled and lived from the East Coast to the West Coast, Theresa receives inspiration for her stories from a variety of sources, including music and poetry, and her tastes are eclectic.

For more information about current projects, visit Theresa's websites at www.tessmaynard.com
or www.adriannadane.com.

* * *

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