

Loose Id

# SHIFTING SANDS

LACEY  
SAVAGE

## Praise for the writing of Lacey Savage

### *I, Nefertiti*

*I, Nefertiti* is a wonderfully imaginative story. I am normally not a lover of time travel stories, but this was an awesome one... The storyline is fantastic, and the characters memorable. This is definitely a story that a newbie to time travel would love.

-- Angel, *Enchanted in Romance*

*I, Nefertiti* is a beautifully written creative slice of ancient times served up smoking hot.

-- Michelle, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

The beauty and profound depth of love Akhenaten and Nell felt for each other crossed millenniums and made me sigh at the final word in the book. This is an absolutely fantastic book that I would HIGHLY recommend reading, and certainly I consider it deserving of a Gold Star Award.

-- Mila "Bean" Ramos, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

If you are looking for delicious paranormal pleasuring that will keep you up all night, then this is the book to get! This reviewer loved it and it is a flawless five hearts! Get your copy of *I, Nefertiti* by Lacey Savage now!

-- Janalee, *The Romance Studio*

The characters are richly drawn and the love that grows between Nell and Akhenaten is very satisfying. The sex scenes are hot. I enjoyed this story and cannot wait to read Ms. Savage's next book.

-- Candy, *eCataRomance Reviews*

*I, Nefertiti* is now available from Loose Id.

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Lacey Savage

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This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (voyeurism, exhibitionism, same-sex sexual contact, ménage, some violence).

# Shifting Sands

Lacey Savage

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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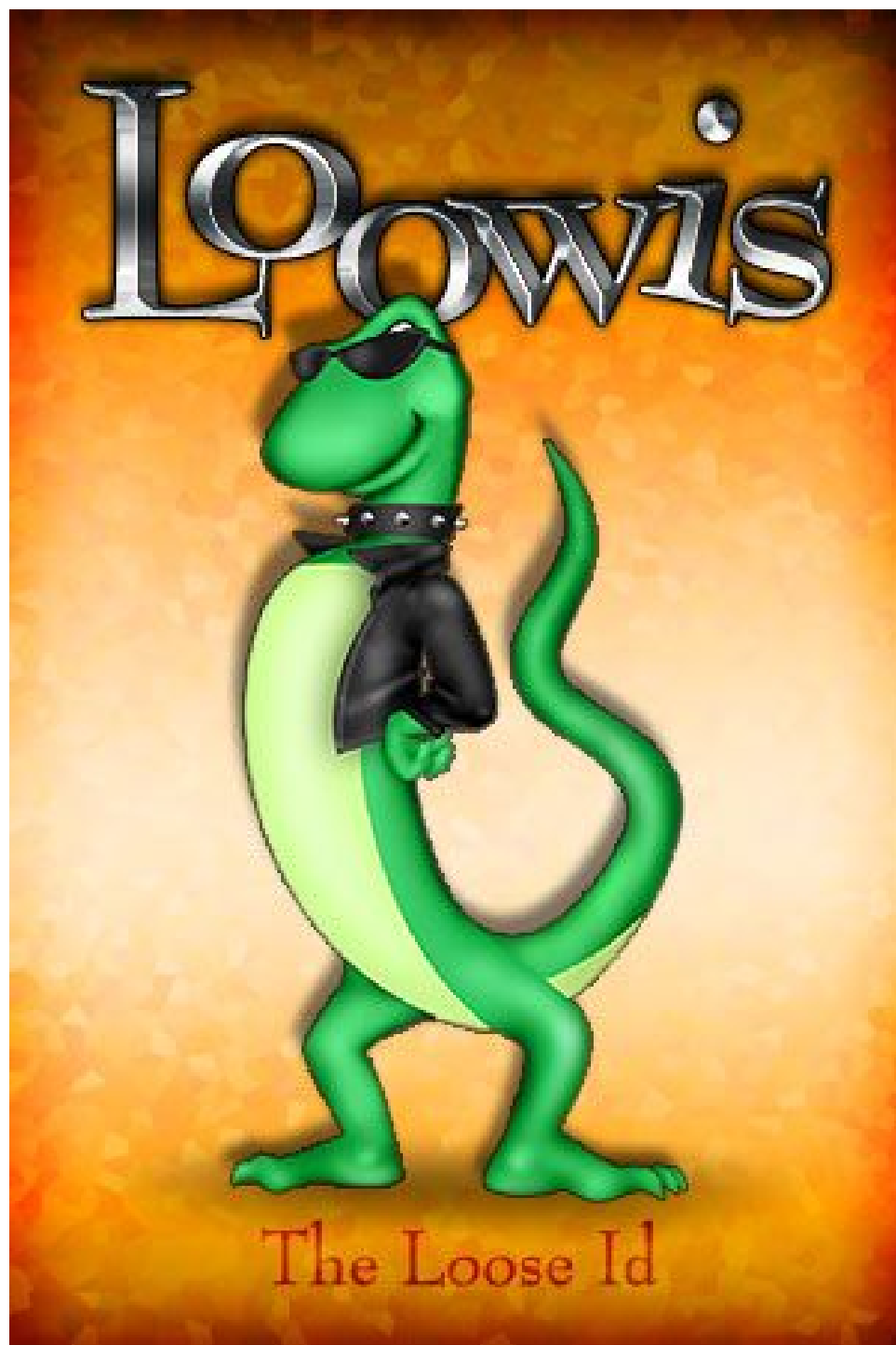
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## Prologue

*You've disappointed me, Ramose, priest of Amun-Ra.*

The melodious feminine voice slithered down Ramose's spine, rousing him from the half-unconscious state holding him captive in its torpid grip.

*Where am I?*

His head ached as he struggled to open his eyes. Remembered images flittered across the black insides of his eyelids, murky and alarming.

*Nefertiti.*

She was the reason he was here. She'd fought him, challenged him when it shouldn't have been possible. She'd thwarted his every move, every well-laid scheme. Years of planning and devising the perfect way to destroy Akhenaten's rule had been unraveled in the blink of an eye by one woman.

*No. Not a woman. A demon in disguise.*

He groaned as a stab of pain pierced his rib. Had she wounded him? Memories flickered through his brain, some bright, as though illuminated by the sun's rays, others dark, as if conjured from the depths of the underworld. Nefertiti's face. Akhenaten standing in the doorway of a chamber in the farthest recesses of the royal tomb. A flash of white light flooding the walls and lingering on the bruise shadowing the base of the queen's neck.

A bruise Ramose had inflicted.

Agony washed through him to mingle with another emotion that nagged at his brain like a half-remembered dream. Guilt? No. Impossible. Everything he'd done was for the good of Egypt. He had to save the people from Akhenaten's traitorous rule and Nefertiti's fiendish intentions. The true gods of Egypt had been stifled for far too long.

Slowly, as if waking from a dream that had invaded his mind for an eternity, Ramose opened his eyes to find himself naked, kneeling on a smooth, marble surface. He didn't recognize his surroundings, but that didn't mean anything. Nefertiti had gained the upper hand while they fought, perhaps driven by Akhenaten's cries. The pharaoh had arrived just as Ramose prepared to end the battle, once and for all. Akhenaten's fierce, possessive shout had distracted both Ramose and Nefertiti from their struggle, but the queen had apparently recovered much more quickly. A mere moment of hesitation had cost Ramose everything he'd worked so hard to accomplish. Bending his head to his chest and pressing his palms to the hard ground, he silently vowed never to repeat that mistake.

"You've disappointed me," the voice repeated. "I had such hopes for you."

Ramose lifted his head. Blackness bathed the chamber, deep and engulfing, broken only by the light of a single candle near the edge of a round pool. Its flame flickered and grew stronger as Ramose focused his gaze on the center of the gleaming dark water. The surface rippled, small waves sending soft spray dancing in the firelight.

Lined up along the perimeter of the basin lay a feast fit for a royal banquet. Roast fowl, jugs of wine, and serving trays filled with figs, plums, dates, pomegranates, grapes, and a number of mysterious concoctions Ramose couldn't even begin to name sat waiting for a crowd of revelers.

The voice had seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once, yet he couldn't see anyone. He squinted, peering into the corners of the shadow-filled chamber.

"Who's there?" he asked, surprised to find his voice hoarse, as if it hadn't been used in far too long. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Who are you?"

A silvery laugh reached his ears at the same time the pool's waters stirred and a slender, shapely figure emerged. The candlelight's glow painted her coppery skin with shades of gold and caught in the long, dark hair falling over her shoulders. Naked but for a strip of cloth that covered her sex, she stepped from the pool, her full, round breasts seductively swaying.

Fear clenched Ramose's stomach. The emotion, wholly foreign and unsettling, startled him. Memories of long ago, of a woman submerging beneath the deep waters of the Nile, tugged at his self-control.

"Eshe?"

The figure moved gracefully, leaving wet stains on the pale marble as she walked. She stopped an arm's length away from Ramose, and he looked up into a pair of deep green eyes. The woman's full lips barely moved as she spoke. "So, you do remember."

He swallowed hard, struggling to make sense of his situation. Who was this woman? She'd reminded him of Eshe as she'd emerged from the pool, but now that she'd drawn closer, he realized she didn't look like Eshe at all. Her eyes were too dark, her hair too long, her breasts too full. Eshe had been slimmer, younger, more delicate.



Grief settled in Ramose's chest, heavy and unbearably thick, as though Eshe's death had occurred only hours earlier rather than so long ago. He couldn't remember the last time he'd thought of her. He worked hard to keep her memory locked away where it wouldn't interfere with his plans. His feelings for her were still too powerful, the ache too raw. They would only get in the way.

"Are you here to torment me?" He hated the note of pain that made its way into his voice. This wasn't like him. He didn't allow his emotions to the surface, but this woman had managed to shake him with her soft voice and probing words. He had the eerie sensation she could see directly into his soul.

Another laugh filled the room. Long, slender fingers touched his jaw and tilted his head. "Look at me. Do you not recognize me? Can you not see?"

He took in her full lips, the straight line of her nose, her arched brows. Then his gaze moved upward to settle on a pair of well-defined, golden horns. The sun disk hovered between them.

With a gasp, Ramose tore himself from her grasp and lowered his head until it touched the marble. "Hathor," he whispered hoarsely.

The ancient goddess of love. The mother of the world.

His limbs trembled as he knelt before her, his eyes closed, his lips pressed tightly together. His prayers had been answered. He'd worked so hard to ensure that the people of Egypt would not forget their true gods and goddesses, and now one of their most beloved deities showed herself to him in all her naked glory. Her presence filled the chamber with ancient power. The air crackled with it.

"You need me," Hathor said simply. "You *must* learn."

Ramose nodded. "I have always served you."

"Have you?"

He heard a note of amusement in her voice. Was she laughing at him? Had he not strived to do everything in his power to stop the false pharaoh now sitting on Egypt's throne? *Aten, the one true god*. Ramose scoffed at the thought. There was no such thing as only one true god. Hathor was proof. Maybe she should have shown herself to Akhenaten instead.

"I have --"

"You do not understand," she said, cutting off his attempt to explain.

He felt her touch on his arm, gently indicating he should rise. He did, but kept his head lowered until she once again lifted his chin so he could no longer avoid her gaze. Emerald with flecks of gold, her eyes sparkled and bore deep into him. Ramose fought the urge to jerk from her grasp.

"But you will," she said. "There is a world beyond the one you know. It's full of wonder, able to grant you your deepest desire if you know what you're searching for."

“Akhenaten’s immediate elimination as Egypt’s pharaoh,” Ramose said without hesitation. “It’s the only thing I want.”

Hathor’s beautiful eyes clouded. “Is it?”

“Yes. I know of no other way to serve you but to ensure your survival in the minds and hearts of the people of Egypt.”

“Ah.” Hathor released him and stepped away.

As he watched, a golden throne rose from the pool to hover above its surface. Hathor’s feet never touched the dark water as she moved toward the dais. She stopped only long enough to tear a perfect grape from a plate and pop it into her mouth before taking her rightful place upon the throne.

Etched with the symbols of the horns and the sun disk, the throne radiated mystical energy. Ramose’s throat clogged. He felt humbled, yet overwhelmed in Hathor’s presence, and couldn’t help but wish she’d soon disappear along with the turbulent water and the magical feast. He might have prayed for this encounter his entire life, but now that she was here, he wondered how he’d survive.

Gripping golden armrests until her knuckles turned white, Hathor leaned forward and fixed Ramose with a fierce stare. He wished she’d speak. Anything would be better than being scrutinized.

Her green eyes flickered and lit from within, glowing with an emerald sheen. He blinked, trying to clear the spell holding him captive, but found he couldn’t block her out, nor could he turn his head to avoid her powerful gaze.

“You will learn,” Hathor repeated, though her lips never moved. Her voice was everywhere, echoing from the walls, ringing in his mind. She spoke of truth and love, of Eshe and Nefertiti, of Akhenaten and Amun-Ra.

Ramose struggled to make sense of the words, but the whispers flowed through his mind, lingering for only a moment before slipping away.

Caught between the desire to run from the Goddess’s chamber and the need to stay for as long as she’d have him, Ramose felt powerless to stop what was happening. To his dismay, his groin tightened as she spoke, his cock straining upward through the patch of dark curls at the apex of his thighs.

He tried to move his hand and cover himself, but found his body wouldn’t obey. His balls tightened, pulsing with need as her full lips pursed and her green eyes held him prisoner.

Something moved along his cock, warm and wet as a woman’s mouth. He gasped at the sensation flooding his senses. His shaft twitched, and his hips thrust forward of their own accord. Suddenly, nothing else mattered but the swift, delicious ache in his sac and the phantom lips enveloping his rod.

An unseen tongue swept along the base of his cock, hovered at the tip, dipped into the slit at the head of his shaft before an unbearably hot mouth plunged the entire length, gripping him into a tight, hot sheath. He moaned, the sound torn from his throat, and yet Hathor wouldn't allow him the release he sought. She narrowed her eyes as she watched him being brought to the brink of rapture by the pleasurable sensations assaulting his cock, not a hint of a smile playing upon her luscious lips.

"Why?" he managed to rasp, as his cock twitched for the hundredth time at the powerful, erotic ministrations dealt by the hand and mouth of his invisible tormentor. Pressure clenched around his cock, making him grit his teeth.

"Because the past affects the future and can endanger the present."

It wasn't much of an answer, but Ramose found he no longer cared. The wet, silky motions on his rod increased in speed. The tongue lapped furiously at his cock, sucking him with agonizing fervor. It felt as though whoever had him wanted to punish him, to make him come while teaching him a lesson he'd never forget.

*You will learn.* Hathor's words rang in his mind as his balls drew up, tightening at the base of his cock. The fleeing ecstasy of impending orgasm flooded his body, tensing his muscles.

Ramose's shaft pulsed one last time before releasing his seed in throbbing spurts. Then the bright light wrenched him away from the cool marble and plummeted him into a world of chaos.

## Chapter One

*July 6 -- Los Angeles, California -- Will Cleopatra's Curse Strike Again*

*It's been two weeks since Tess Robb, the fourth actress in as many months to play the coveted role of Cleopatra, announced that she and the producers of Cleopatra II had mutually agreed to terminate her contract.*

*"Ms. Robb is greatly troubled by the death of cameraman Allan Brown. Finding a body hanging among the costume racks would be traumatizing for anyone, but even more so for Ms. Robb, who has the gift of extreme empathy. Difficult circumstances are especially heartbreaking for her," Robb's publicist stated in a press conference.*

*The sequel to the Oscar-winning epic film has been plagued by strange occurrences, including the disappearance of Nell Winters, tragic illnesses, and even a suspicious death, causing many to believe the film is cursed.*

*However, the curse hasn't discouraged a number of hopeful actresses from taking the highly publicized part. This morning, the role of Egypt's most famous queen went to Kathy Clark, a relative newcomer to the Hollywood scene, best known for her portrayal of Sara Green in A Life Worth Living, the longest running soap opera in Australia.*

*"We're confident Ms. Clark is the right person to bring Cleopatra into the twenty-first century," director James Sanford told reporters gathered outside the movie set this afternoon. "With her as our leading actress, we'll finally be able to put this silly curse business behind us. And let me make this very clear: There is no curse. Just a lot of speculation and a number of very unfortunate events."*

Elena Black folded the wrinkled newspaper and tucked it under a plate holding the half-eaten remains of a cranberry muffin and a battered apple.

*Curse, my ass.*

Stupid, superstitious idiots, the whole lot of them.

She'd been on the job for almost three months, and the stress of the production had only gotten worse with every passing day. This should have been a short gig -- two, three weeks at most. *Cleopatra II* was being billed as an epic movie, and Cleopatra herself wasn't involved in many action scenes. The most difficult aspect of playing the role was memorizing lines and trying to not blush during some of the more heated love scenes; and there were plenty of those.

Yet another reason for Elena to be grateful she wasn't an actress.

No, acting was definitely not for her. Being a stunt double suited her much better. She craved the action, the extreme stunts, the ability to amaze with feats of courage and superhuman strength ...

Okay, so maybe it wasn't as glamorous as she made it out to be whenever anyone asked her about her job. But being a stunt double paid the bills and allowed her to prove on a daily basis that she wasn't as weak as everyone had always made her out to be.

Frowning, she stood up, the metal chair scraping against the pavement as she pushed it away. Sweat coated her forehead, and she ran her palm along her hairline. She groaned when her hand came away streaked with enough copper foundation and tanning lotion to cover a bronze statue.

As if the heat weren't bad enough. Record-setting temperatures of 100 degrees had everyone on edge. Add to that the constant babbling about curses, and Elena was ready to snap the next time someone so much as mentioned a streak of bad luck. No, make that luck of any kind. If anyone talked about fate, destiny, or any other absurd notion, Elena would make sure they knew exactly what it felt like to have a curse cast on them. And she wouldn't stop at a random disappearance or two. There would be plagues, pestilence, and everlasting damnation.

Another bead of sweat trickled down her temple. Her head throbbed. The heat threatened to drive her insane, and her stupid costume only made it worse. Her head itched under the shoulder-length black wig. The straps of the bra-like garment -- if the tiny slip of material could even be called that -- kept falling down over her shoulders, and the swath of silk loincloth barely covered enough to keep her from flashing half the studio every time she moved.

Sweat dripped into her eyes, having first slid through enough eyeliner and mascara to beautify half the women in Los Angeles, and stung like hell. She blinked quickly, hoping to clear the burning sensation, but the pain only intensified. Squeezing her eyes shut, she groped the surface of the table for a napkin. She'd managed to smear the makeup from her right eye down over her cheek before a hand closed around her wrist and pulled her fingers away.

"Why does James put up with you?" A woman's voice. One Elena recognized.

“Because I’m fearless, strong, and infinitely charming?”

Diane Golden, the head of the makeup department, gave a distinctly unladylike snort. “Yeah, right. If you ask me, you’re a hairsbreadth away from getting fired.”

“Who asked you?” Elena snapped. She could peer out of her right eye now that the stinging sensation had begun to fade.

Diane pursed her lips, but remained blissfully quiet. Elena swallowed back a sigh of relief. She liked Diane, she really did, but today wasn’t the right day for anyone to tell her how she should or shouldn’t behave. Diane was lucky Elena stood still long enough for the woman to fix her ruined makeup and apply a new set of false eyelashes.

“There. All done. Now stop fidgeting, and for God’s sake, don’t touch your face.”

Elena scowled. “Fine. Do you know if they’re ready for me yet?”

“Dunno. Last I saw, James was talking to the big-shot reality TV producer.”

Elena’s pulse quickened. “Max is here?”

“Yep. Came around an hour ago. James is setting up a spot for him to ride along with the cameras this afternoon.” Her eyes widened. “Hey! You’re on the list, aren’t you?”

Sweat coated Elena’s palms, and for once, it wasn’t because of the heat. “I signed up when James made the announcement about Max recruiting directly from the set for his next show.”

*Power to Extremes* had been the highest-rated reality show on television for three years running. Contestants competed against each other in extreme challenges, each devised to test them physically and mentally. There were only twelve spots up for grabs each season, and competition was fierce. This year, Max “The Man” Donovan had decided to hand-pick the contenders himself.

A chance to compete with the best of the best: athletes, stuntmen, military, special forces ... Elena would have given anything to be among them this year. Contestants benefited from more than just their fifteen minutes of fame from competing on *Power to Extremes*. They received job offers, endorsement contracts, and a myriad of other opportunities Elena might never have.

“Guess you better knock him dead, huh?”

Diane’s voice brought Elena out of her reverie. “Guess so.”

A tall, thin woman whose face shone as brightly as her smile stepped around the small table in the rest area. “Elena Black? They’re ready for you.”

Diane squeezed her hand for good luck. Despite herself, Elena mirrored the older woman’s smile. She really did like her. She just didn’t get a chance to tell her very often. Frowning, she ignored the guilt that settled low in her belly. She’d been busy, that’s all. Too busy to stop and thank everyone who worked just as hard as she did.

Half an hour later, Elena sat atop a black mare. She stroked the animal's neck, whispering soothing sounds to calm her. The heat didn't just affect humans, it seemed. The beautiful creature stomped her hooves impatiently and shook her sleek body, snorting and nickering her displeasure.

"It's okay, beautiful. Just a few minutes more. You and I are going to go for one fast ride, and if we're lucky, they'll get it on the first try and neither one of us will have to do this again."

As if she understood, the horse stopped trotting in place and cast a glance over her shoulder. Smoothing the mare's mane, Elena took a deep breath, fighting to calm the nerves twitching low in her stomach. She glanced at the cameras mounted on flatbeds, but the familiar sight didn't soothe her. Especially with the knowledge that Max lounged just behind one of the massive stands. All around her, cameramen stood poised to start filming, ready to capture the chase from a variety of angles.

As far as stunts went, this one was simple. Cleopatra was in Rome, being chased out of an elaborate festival by men who'd been sent to kill her. Elena's job was simply to ride the horse as fast as she possibly could down a narrow, winding path, leaping over obstacles that had been strategically placed in her way.

"Piece of cake, right, beautiful?"

The animal shook its head and neighed. Another dark-eyed glance told Elena the mare thought they were both nuts for doing this in 100-degree weather.

The chatter on the set came to an abrupt end, and Elena bent low over the horse's neck. She brought her fingertips to her lips. An image of her brother, Sam, grinning from ear to ear and giving her a thumbs-up sign flashed through her mind. Tears stung the back of her eyes. "This one's for you, baby brother. As always."

"Action!" The megaphone amplified James's call and carried his shout through the sticky air. Elena dug her heels into the animal's flanks just as the last traces of the director's cry and her brother's image faded.

The horse took off running, well trained for the rigors of life on a movie set. The animal didn't hesitate when they came to the first obstacle, a thick branch lying in the middle of the road. Elena crouched low and kept her head averted from the cameras to her right. An old trick of the trade -- let them catch only glimpses of her on the horse. Close-up shots would be filmed later, with the real actress.

The sun had begun to creep toward the horizon. Along the edges of the empty road, black, menacing shapes gathered in the ripening gloom. The horse leapt over another obstacle, this one higher than the first. Around them, cameras and trucks whirled, the sounds blending with the hammering of Elena's heart and the pounding of her pulse in her ears.

The third and last obstacle was larger than the others. An overturned chariot blocked their path. Elena had practiced the jump before, though not with this particular horse. Still,

she knew what to expect and didn't flinch when the animal's hooves seemed to slide a little as they neared the barrier ahead.

"Easy," she murmured, but her warning came too late. Her mount ran fast -- *perhaps too fast*, Elena thought briefly. Her fingers tightened on the reins. Her thighs clamped down along the horse's powerful muscles. She felt every clench of the sinewy tissue as the mare tensed beneath her. White-knuckled, Elena gripped the reins harder and gritted her teeth. The horse leaped and flew into the air, its hooves arched forward to jump over the chariot.

A sudden flash of light burst from within the trees lining the left side of the cleared path. Exquisitely bright, as though the sun had suddenly decided to cut a swath across the sky until it hovered right before her. Momentarily blinded, Elena squinted and averted her gaze.

Though it felt as if the world stood still, gravity took over at an alarming rate. Elena barely had a chance to turn her head and glimpse the dirt-encrusted hoof connect with the wheel of the overturned chariot before she was tossed from the saddle. She glided through the air, her breath wrenched from her lungs. Helplessly, she watched as the ground rushed up to meet her.

Elena heard James yell "Cut!" a moment before she landed on the tightly packed earth, the horse's agonized neighing scream ringing in her ears.



## Chapter Two

A crisp, sweet-scented breeze played over Elena's skin. She smiled, relishing the cool wind that swept through her hair and fluttered along the nape of her neck. Even the air-conditioning unit in her apartment didn't feel this good.

Something tickled her cheek. She thought about opening her eyes, but decided against it. Completely relaxed, she breathed slowly, deeply, and for once, she didn't feel on the verge of a panic attack. Elena smiled, and a sigh of satisfaction eased past her lips. She didn't know what had caused this sudden change in her mood, and she didn't care.

The smile vanished abruptly as an image of the stumbling horse flickered across her eyelids. Her pulse raced. So much for bliss and euphoria.

"Fuck!" She sat up quickly, the movement at once dizzying and disorienting. The damned horse had tripped during what was probably the most important stunt of her life. Max had witnessed every second of her humiliating performance. Her chances of being a contestant on *Power to Extremes* were shot to hell.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!"

"You're awake."

The rich, masculine voice slithered down her spine, burrowing deep in her bones. That voice could give a girl multiple orgasms doing nothing racier than reciting the dictionary. The shiver trickling along her overheated skin went much further than the cool touch of the breeze.

Stumbling to her feet, she reached out to steady herself. Her surroundings looked entirely unfamiliar, and she blinked hard to clear her vision. She'd been lying on the ground, sprawled on top of lush green grass and wild, colorful flowers growing at the base of a marble fountain. Some she recognized, such as irises, chrysanthemums, lilies, and blue delphiniums.

Others were strange, with broad, sinewy petals and velvet centers. Tall walls and sheltering trees encased the confines of the private garden. Above, the sun shone in a flawless blue sky.

This wasn't right. She didn't remember a fountain or an enclosure like this on the set. And where were the cameras? The horse? James and Max?

The wind stirred again, drifting over her skin. She felt its smooth touch caressing her legs and belly, cold against the wetness between her legs.

Startled, she looked down to find the dreaded Egyptian costume gone. There wasn't a strip of clothing on her entire body, but she was covered from head to toe in markings drawn with body paint. Very badly smudged body paint. What must have at one point been carefully crafted designs now blended together in artless smears over her skin.

Her throat suddenly dry, Elena spun on her heel and almost ran into a man standing only a few inches away. Except for a short strip of cloth covering his cock, he was as naked as she. Beneath the cream-colored garment, the hard length of his rod left no doubt as to what he thought of her unclothed state, despite the messy stains adorning her skin.

Elena's cheeks heated as she forced herself to look up. "Oh, I ..." Black, seemingly bottomless eyes framed by impossibly long, dark lashes captured her attention, and her words caught in her throat. He looked familiar, though she was sure she'd never seen him before. Black eyebrows slashed sharp lines above his captivating gaze. Full lips curved upward, and his smile sent a rush of heat streaming to her pussy. She clamped her jaw shut, stifling an unwelcome moan.

His head was shaved, as was the rest of his face. Not a hint of stubble marred the perfection of his features. Her gaze wandered lower, over the ribbon of sunlight dancing along the broad planes of his chest, and lower still, following the tantalizing path of a trail of soft, short curls that disappeared beneath the loincloth.

Her heart threatened to pound out of her chest. Why was she here, naked, with this man? And where were the damned cameras?

"I don't understand --"

The rest of the sentence got lost inside his mouth. She hadn't seen him move, but he was there all the same, his lips soft yet insistent against hers, his arms wrapped around her waist. She felt the thick length of his erection nudging her stomach, and her knees buckled.

His hand moved over her spine, the caress fleeting, ghostly. She pressed against him, needing more of him -- wanting all of him. When his fingers strayed to the underside of her breast, the moan she'd been stifling escaped her throat. Her head swam with thoughts of this man, this moment, his mouth on hers. As if mirroring her body's yearning, his kiss grew fevered, his tongue slipping between her lips, invading her senses. He tasted like wine and sex, a heady, bone-melting combination that went straight to her pussy, making her inner walls clench in empty agony.

He tweaked her nipple, and a shot of ecstasy traveled from the beaded bud straight to the pit of her stomach. If he could do that with a mere touch, what could he do with his cock, his tongue, his fingers inside her swollen, needy cunt?

This was madness. Delicious, heart-pounding madness. She didn't know this man. She couldn't remember how she even got here. And here she was, a breath away from letting him fuck her brains out.

He thrust against her, once again his body mirroring her thoughts. His hips moved to a rhythm all their own, short, frenzied motions that sent his fully erect cock nudging her belly. She answered with her hips slamming against him, her pussy throbbing, craving what he promised with each stirring movement.

A loud commotion sounded from beyond the garden walls. She broke away from the tempting feel of his hard body, her fingers trembling as she brought them to her chest, trying to calm her hammering heart. "What do you think that is?"

His brows furrowed over his dark eyes. "They're looking for you -- for us."

"Who?"

He moved toward her, reaching out to graze her breast with his fingertips. She trembled at his touch and bit her lower lip to keep from crying out. Whoever was looking for them would be alerted by any sound she made, and she knew instinctively she couldn't let that happen.

This man ... her emotions went wild around him, and it made no sense.

His fingers wrapped around a silky strand of black hair. Her wig. He tugged gently as the tresses entwined over his knuckles, and she was sure the wig would come off in his hand. It didn't, but she felt the gentle tugging at her scalp.

*None of this makes any sense.*

"Eshe," he whispered, tracing her lower lip with the tip of his thumb. "Mine."

"Who?" Confusion stabbed through Elena's chest. Who was this woman whose name he'd murmured with such reverence?

"They won't take you. I won't let them."

Elena opened her mouth to ask another question, but the words never made it past her lips. Blackness set in, deep and encompassing, blinding, disorienting. She tried to scream, but even that was denied her, as her throat refused to work. After what seemed like an eternity, light began seeping through the dark shadows, and she saw him again, walking toward her.

A smile formed on her lips unbidden. He was naked, the loincloth from only a moment ago having apparently been discarded. She didn't even know his name, but his presence was comforting, and again the faint touch of familiarity teased her, as though there was something she should remember, but couldn't.

Behind him, Elena caught a glimpse of James and most of the camera crew running at breakneck speed in their direction. The horse's terrified whinny echoed through the air, and the damp mugginess of the California heat wave made her silky skirt stick to her thighs.

"What the devil is going on here?" James demanded when he was within earshot. He turned to the newcomer, his eyes narrowing in anger as his gaze swept over the man's naked form. "And who the fuck are you?"

*Good question.*

Elena struggled to rise, her head still pounding, though with less ferocity. "If you find out, let me know. I'm not entirely sure, but I think he either just about killed me, or he just saved my life."

"Well?" The man pressed his lips tightly together until they formed a thin line that nearly disappeared in his pudgy face. Crimson stained his cheeks as he visibly struggled to keep his gaze fixed on Ramose's face while it clearly wanted to linger on other parts of his body.

"Well, what?" Ramose asked, surprised and pleased to hear his voice steady, the words crisp and clear in the oddly accented language of the foreigners.

The man shook, his anger obviously getting the better of him. "Who the devil are you, and why are you naked?"

The first question he could answer. The second meant explaining about Hathor, which was something he wasn't ready to do quite yet. Not until he understood the vision himself and figured out what the goddess wanted of him. He thought he knew, but the more he pondered the unusual meeting, the more he couldn't be sure. It felt as though she'd delved into his mind, only to be disappointed by what she'd found there.

Ramose suppressed a sigh. Why couldn't Amun-Ra himself have come to him? He would have handled the situation much better if he'd been faced with the god he'd devoted his life to. Amun-Ra wouldn't have spoken in riddles, and he wouldn't have stroked Ramose to overwhelming orgasm with a ghost touch and an invisible mouth as warm and inviting as the sweetest sheath.

He hoped.

"My name is Ramose," he said, again marveling at the intonation of the words he uttered. They were strange, with a lilt he didn't recognize. Romans? No. These people didn't look like Romans, or Greeks, or any other civilization he knew of. The large, black creatures behind the small, pudgy man looked like some sort of weapons, but none he recognized. They made a strange whirring noise, as if gearing up for attack.

A trickle of trepidation shivered down his spine. Hathor's voice reverberated through his brain like a bad omen. *You will learn.* What, exactly, did she mean to teach him?

He shook his head, clearing her disturbing voice from his thoughts. He'd been thrust into an unusual world -- that much he knew. Hathor had called it a world full of wonder, and judging by what little he'd seen, he could believe it.

He glanced up and met Eshe's startling blue gaze. He frowned, his pulse beating a mad rhythm through his veins.

*No. Not Eshe. Impossible.*

But she looked so much like the woman he'd known that it had thrown him entirely off guard. The goddess had sent him flying through the portal while he was still in the throes of orgasm, and when he'd seen Eshe's face, he'd believed Hathor's spell still held him prisoner. Not until she spoke did he realize she wasn't his Eshe at all.

Her features were nearly identical, though, and the resemblance shocked him. Heart-shaped face, full red lips, pert, upturned nose. Her skin was a darker shade than Eshe's, though here and there sweat had marred the tawny perfection, leaving pale streaks in its wake. His brow furrowed as he tried to make sense of her appearance. Her hair looked strange, too, though it was the same shade, a deep, midnight black, cut bluntly just above her shoulders. But it looked wrong somehow, slanted to the right, her bangs falling into her eyes.

He suddenly yearned to see her smile, to find out if her grin would cause twin dents in her cheeks. He'd loved seeing Eshe smile. He used to make her laugh just to see those dimples flash for an instant. She laughed so rarely back then. As their time together lessened to stolen moments in the garden, she laughed less and less, until there were no more laughs at all.

"I believe I know what's going on here, James," another man said as he came up behind the first. He was trimmer, taller, and dressed head to toe in strange black garments that encased his body like a second skin.

"And what, on God's green earth, might that be?" James waved a hand in the air and went on as though he didn't expect an answer. "The horse will need to be put down if it broke a leg, and we'll likely have to get a new stunt double since I doubt Elena will ever want to ride again." He jerked a finger in the direction of the woman who looked so much like Eshe before turning his angry glare back on Ramose. "And to top it all off, we have a naked man wandering the set."

"It's the curse," Elena murmured. She leaned against a tree, gently prodding the bruised flesh on her forehead.

"The curse?" Ramose echoed. A hint of unease settled in his gut. He knew all about curses, and none were ever a good sign. "Who cursed this place?"

"There is no such thing!" James clenched his jaw, a vein throbbing in his neck. "But if those blasted reporters get word of this, we'll never hear the end of it. Not a word to them from any of you. Understood?"

The newcomer and Elena both nodded. James prodded his index finger into Ramose's bare chest, then yanked his hand back as if he'd been burned. The color in his cheeks deepened. "What about you? You're not going to give an exclusive to the first reporter who hands you twenty bucks, are you?"

Ramose had no idea what bucks or reporters could possibly be, but he sensed the man's desperation and shook his head. It seemed to be the desired response, as James turned his back to him.

"Alright, Max. What's your theory? And if you say anything about the curse, I'm likely to kick you off my set before you know what hit you."

"Whoa, easy there." Max grinned and winked at Elena. Ramose swallowed hard, something akin to jealousy settling in his chest.

Jealousy? That was absurd. He hadn't let that emotion rear its ugly head in a long time. This woman merely looked like Eshe. Besides, the man was no pharaoh, and the circumstances were entirely different.

"You brought this all on yourself, you know," Max continued, fixing James with a knowing glance. "You gave them free rein on the set."

The vein pounding viciously in James's temple turned an angry shade of purple and threatened to burst out of his skin. "Who?"

Max leaned in as if to whisper conspiratorially, but his voice was much too loud. "The porn stars, of course."

A low moan escaped James's throat. A crooked half-smile blossomed on Elena's face as her gaze raked over Ramose's nakedness. Despite his misgivings about the bizarre situation he found himself in, his cock stirred under her scrutiny, hardening as she took in his entire length. Her smile deepened, and two identical dimples appeared in her flawless cheeks.

Ramose stifled a groan as his cock hardened further, spearing the air before him. His balls tightened, drawing upward toward his shaft. Ah, Hathor, if the woman didn't stop looking at him like that, he was going to blow another load, and this time, right in front of the two men whose eyes had widened to the size of amulets at the display his cock had decided to put on.

He wanted to see her naked, to cleave her delicious cunt with his tongue until she begged for release.

*Amun-Ra, this is not working!* He had to think of something else, and fast. *Akhenaten.* He conjured an image of the man on his throne, and although his cock didn't wilt as he'd hoped, at least it was no longer threatening to unleash his seed on the ground.

"Whose idea was it to use porn stars in the orgy scenes?" James asked, his voice thick and unsteady.

Elena's deep, throaty laugh flitted along Ramose's skin. His cock twitched and leaked a drop of pre-cum.

"I believe it was yours," she said, her sapphire gaze sparkling with mischief and the promise of exquisite delight.

"Figures," James murmured, his gaze darting every which way but in Ramose's direction. "Fine. At least he's doing what we're paying him to do, though I rather wish he'd do it elsewhere. Someone take him to the proper set."

"I'd be happy to show him the way." Bruise seemingly forgotten, Elena moved to stand beside him. She touched his arm, and her soft fingers against his flesh made him tremble with barely contained lust.

By all the gods in Egypt, what had gotten into him? It had been years since he'd lain with a woman, and none of them had ever affected him this way.

Ah! Years. *Many* long, solitary years. That had to be it. He'd never found the same pleasure in anyone else as he had in Eshe. He was horny, that was all. And his newfound lust was to be expected at the sight of a woman who looked so much like the one person he dreamed of seeing again yet knew he never would. His body craved her as it always had, perhaps even more so after his long abstinence.

"No." Max stepped between them. The loss of Elena's body heat hit Ramose like a physical blow. He wanted her near him. Judging by the throbbing in his cock, he wanted her over and around him, too.

"Max is right," James said. "You're staying here. The trainer's seeing to the horse, and I need to speak to him and figure out what we can salvage of this scene. This is the last day we have this set. Like it or not, we need to get this shot, and we need it done right. You're staying."

Elena opened her mouth as if to protest, but the authority in James's tone left no room for discussion. Begrudgingly, Ramose accorded the man a little respect.

Ramose knew leadership when he saw it. Whatever James lacked in physical appearance, he more than made up for in voice and body language. Like all other inborn talents, leadership was a quality that couldn't be denied a person, no matter what physical gifts the gods had refused to accord them.

"Max will take you. Won't you, Max?"

Max looked like he'd much rather have stayed behind with Elena, but eventually nodded. Ramose supposed he couldn't blame the man. He'd much rather have stayed with Elena, too.

"Come on," Max said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Let's put that cock to good use."

## Chapter Three

Elena heaved a huge sigh of relief as she walked off the set three hours later. They'd found her a new horse, and after Diane spent almost an hour applying make-up to cover the bruise on her forehead, they'd attempted to re-shoot the scene. It took six tries, but the last attempt satisfied James and he called it a wrap, then left to shoot yet another scene.

Elena turned right toward the staff parking area, her hand buried inside her briefcase-style purse. She struggled with the contents, digging through old receipts, lipstick containers, tissues, and even something that felt suspiciously like a half-eaten apple, until she found what she searched for.

Fingers wrapped firmly around her keys, she scanned the lot for her blue Volkswagen Passat. Yet instead of the new car she loved, a different image flashed through her mind. *Ramose*. Coppery skin, dark, seemingly bottomless eyes, a perfectly muscled chest. Heat rushed through her pussy, making her nipples tighten.

*Damn*. And just when she thought she'd managed to stop thinking about him for longer than a few seconds. It had been almost impossible to concentrate on the scene after Ramose and Max had left the set, especially knowing where Max would take him.

Other than the Cleopatra Curse, the orgy scene had been the main topic of conversation for days. The set had been brimming with anticipation, everyone from actors to keygrips speculating about how far James was actually willing to go to achieve the illusion of complete realism.

Mumbling a half-hearted curse, Elena jumped in her car and drove to the temple set. Though some of the scenes had been shot on location, the Hollywood set of *Cleopatra II* spanned twelve city blocks. Everything from makeshift tombs to Roman roads had been built on various lots. Some were small, yet others, like the temple, were probably as big as the real thing. Not that Elena had ever seen a real Egyptian temple, but she'd watched enough



documentaries when preparing for some of the stunts to assume she had a pretty good idea of what ancient times must have looked like.

Finding a parking spot close to the entrance proved impossible, but Elena persevered, finally sliding her car into a space at the far end of the staff parking area. She slid out of the air-conditioned vehicle and gasped as the heat and humidity wrapped around her like a heavy blanket.

Slamming the door behind her, she took off toward the temple set at a brisk pace. The sooner she found Ramose, the quicker she'd be able to get him out of her thoughts. This torturous heat, combined with the injury she sustained from the fall, had clouded her mind. He couldn't be as sexy as she remembered, as utterly breathtaking. No one was that stunning.

Inside, blessed air-conditioning sent cool air flowing through the building. Elena's stomach tightened in anticipation as she walked past the various rooms, all assembled individually in such a way as to make a moviegoer believe the temple was all one massive structure. It wasn't, of course. Different portions had been built in each area, providing easy access for camera crews. Close-up shots were essential, and those were filmed differently than sweeping panoramic views of the entire temple.

Today, the set buzzed with activity. Make-up and costume people rushed past her from one room to another, while buxom women and muscled men strutted past her in racy Egyptian costumes. Though she was no stranger to sex or the occasional porn flick enjoyed in the privacy of her own living room, Elena was still shocked to realize just how many extras James had hired for this scene. The fact that some were wearing less than a floss string between their toned butt cheeks made her avert her gaze, though she managed to catch a glimpse or two of parts that weren't often on display on a movie set. At least, not on a respectable, Hollywood-epic movie set.

"Did you see the hunk they brought in at the last minute?"

Elena paused behind a rack of costumes and peered between two full-length dresses draped over hangers. Two women, interns by the looks of them, huddled together and spoke in hushed, excited tones.

"You mean the tall one with the shaved head? Oh, yeah. I'd have to have been blind not to see him. Abs of steel on that one."

"Abs? You were actually looking at his abs?"

The girl couldn't have been more than nineteen. Her face flushed a deep red. "Yeah, but only because his cock hovered so close to it."

They both broke into a fit of giggles, and Elena gritted her teeth. They couldn't be talking about Ramose. She swallowed hard, trying to calm the irrational feeling of jealousy that hit her like an open-handed slap. And if they were, so what? Why should she care?

"Damn, Mandy, that cock! Can you imagine the things a girl could do on a cock like that?"

“I have a few ideas.” More torrential giggles.

Elena’s fists tightened in the silky material of the garments.

“I read on the Internet that there are these places where you can take your boyfriend, and they’ll take a mold of his cock and turn it into a custom dildo. Think the hottie would mind if I asked him to come with me on a road trip?”

Elena cleared her throat. A muscle worked in her jaw, and she had to forcibly unclench her teeth. “Excuse me.”

The girls both turned to her, eyes wide and shining with barely contained lust. Elena placed her palms flat along her thighs to keep from doing something she was bound to regret.

“Can we help you?”

“Yeah. Can you tell me where they took the aforementioned hunk?”

Mandy’s cheeks reddened further. “I think they’re ready to start shooting.” Her voice dropped to a low whisper, as if she was preparing to impart some deep, dark secret. “They’re filming the orgy scene.”

Elena fought to keep her tone dry and uninterested. “So I’ve heard. Where?”

“Turn left at the end of the hall. You can’t miss it.”

With a brief nod, Elena spun on her heel and stormed down the corridor. Her fingers dug into her palms.

“Action!”

James’s shout reached Elena’s ears just as she stepped into the room, though “room” certainly didn’t do it justice. The place was more like a gutted warehouse; one that now housed a perfect reproduction of the inner temple sanctuary, or, at least, as close to one as modern audience expectations would allow. A golden offering altar stood in the center of the chamber, with pillows and throws placed in perfect symmetry around it. Hieroglyphs depicting sexual acts, from the relatively tame to the outright kinky, covered the walls.

At least two dozen people were entwined in various positions on the floor. Elena gaped as she realized this wasn’t play-acting. These people weren’t wearing flesh-colored bodysuits, grinding against one another. They were actually fucking. In front of the cameras, in front of a hundred staff members who had gathered to watch.

Her mouth suddenly dry, Elena let her attention wander over the different arrangements, some of which she hadn’t even known existed. Groans filled the room, and the scent of sex permeated the air.

Her pulse quickened, desire flooding her cunt as she continued to stare. In front of the altar, a raised platform showcased three naked men. Ramose instantly commanded Elena’s attention. Two other men flanked him on both sides, but their hard, muscled physiques didn’t even come close to Ramose’s physical perfection.

His skin shone a warm golden brown that spoke of hours spent in the sun. Made entirely of firm masculine lines, each ridge and plane on his body drew her eye down, lower and lower until her gaze firmly fixed on his cock. Flaccid, it hung low, long and thick, and full of delightful promise.

Where had she seen him before? Why did he look so familiar? Obviously, he was one of the porn actors James had hired. Was that it? Had he played a role in one of the movies she kept hidden among her extreme stunt documentary specials?

A woman Elena had never seen stood before the platform. She wore a bra and matching panty set made of golden chains, all tinkling against each other as she moved. She contemplated the men in silence, nodding her approval as she strolled before them. In one hand, she held a smooth, jeweled scepter. One end was curved slightly, its tip round and shiny at the top of an elongated shaft. Elena pursed her lips. She had a couple of toys in her bedroom drawer that looked suspiciously like the scepter the woman held in her hand.

Stopping in front of Ramose, the actress ran the tip of the dildo along Ramose's thigh. "Oh, yes. The queen will certainly like you."

"Cut!" The whirr of the cameras came to an abrupt stop. "No, no, no. Do you really think the woman Cleopatra has entrusted with choosing her a lover would behave so mechanically? I want to see lust and desire! Grope him a little, for devil's sake!" Without waiting for a reply, James gave the signal to resume filming.

This time, the woman ran her fingertips over Ramose's chest, her full lips curving into a sensual smile. Elena's stomach tightened into a knot. She blinked hard and thought about averting her gaze, but couldn't tear it away from Ramose's cock. She expected to see it twitch, at least, if not outright harden as the actress dipped the tip of the dildo to caress the underside of his sac. She slid her other hand down to encompass his shaft. His rod didn't so much as stir, and his eyes remained glazed, staring off into the distance as if he were completely oblivious to the orgy going on around him.

"No! Cut! I wanted professionals, not virgins! What did I hire you for? Stroke him, already! We won't show anything explicit in the final product, but if you don't give me real lust, I'll never sell this epic as the sexy movie it's supposed to be."

Elena groaned. Hollywood's preoccupation with sex had been growing steadily more obvious over the past few years, but this sudden turn toward the real thing was unheard of. James was well-known in the industry for his unorthodox methods, and this certainly qualified. Once word got out about the way these scenes were filmed, moviegoers would flock to the theater to see if they could catch a glimpse of the real action. Then they'd buy the DVD and the collector's edition in the hopes that some of the outtakes might have made it into the special features.

"Action!"

"Oh, yes. I think the queen might like you." The actress dropped to her knees before Ramose. "Though I can't be entirely sure. Perhaps a taste will alleviate my doubts."

Elena tried to stifle a gasp, but couldn't. The assembled onlookers were apparently just as stunned by the actress's brazen improvisation, as a murmur of disbelief traveled through the chamber. To Elena's surprise, James didn't signal the end of the scene, but allowed the cameras to continue recording every motion of the woman's tongue flicking over Ramose's cock.

Ramose grunted, the sound transmitting clearly through the myriad of minuscule microphones hidden around the chamber. His cock suddenly stirred, stiffening under the careful ministrations of the woman's mouth. Her lips encompassed the tip of his rod, and Elena caught a glimpse of a wet, pink tongue sweeping down the length of his cock. Apparently, the actress's gag reflex was well under control, no doubt from years of practice.

Blood roaring in her ears, Elena blinked back the ache stinging her eyes and fled the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You didn't seem to mind having an audience," Max remarked as he led Ramose from the chamber.

Ramose had spent the better part of the day being told where to stand, how to move, what to say, even when his cock should harden. All the while, strange machines whirled and people buzzed around him in a fevered rush, tugging, prodding, ordering him around like a common slave. As time passed, he found it increasingly difficult to contain his annoyance. Now, walking down a winding corridor with Max, it surprised him to discover he was grateful for the company.

He shrugged, hoping the gesture didn't reveal any of the frustration he felt. "It wasn't a problem."

He still didn't understand where he was, or why Hathor had brought him here, but the only plan that seemed to make any logical sense was to follow along with whatever this society asked of him. The people he'd encountered hadn't looked surprised to see him appear, which meant that either Hathor had warned them, or he fit in better than he'd expected. Either way, opening his mouth more than necessary could mean arousing their suspicions, which wouldn't help him figure out what he was meant to do here any quicker. At least they'd given him some clothes. The garments didn't quite fit, and it had taken him a long time to figure out the fastening on the pants, but he'd managed to cover his nakedness before leaving the chamber.

He glimpsed another image of Nefertiti along the wall. He'd seen others, too many since he'd arrived here. Some flickered and moved, something he still hadn't gotten used to, while others simply showed still portraits of her face. She smiled seductively in all of them, as though trying to charm whoever glanced upon her features to do her bidding. Just as she'd done to Akhenaten.

Ramose tightened his fists at his sides. When he got back to Egypt, he'd make sure no one else ever fell under her spell.

"Yeah, right. I guess you're used to it, in your line of work," Max said, snapping Ramose from his thoughts. They rounded a corner and walked past another half-finished room, this one resembling a tomb but missing a fourth wall. Instead, chairs were lined up where the barrier should have been, and the same machines he'd seen all over the place continued to click and hum.

None of this made any sense. Since he'd arrived, he'd stood idly as a woman sucked his cock, fondled his sac, dragged her fingertips over his chest. Like him, she'd been told what to say, where to walk, when to talk, yet the man giving the orders didn't look like any pharaoh Ramose had ever seen, and his subjects didn't scramble to do his bidding. In fact, some even talked back, or argued with the commands they were given.

For the majority of the time, Ramose had done nothing but stand around, waiting to be told what else the man expected of him. Halfway through the day, he'd eaten an overly sweet, dry pastry that had stuck in his throat, and taken a few swigs from a cup of hot, black liquid he found he rather enjoyed. Bitter and aromatic, it reminded him of the strong herbal brews the priests of Amun-Ra drank during some of the longer, more complex ceremonies, to keep their throats from giving out during a vital chant.

Ramose had kept himself awake by scanning every face, peering into every shadowy corner, trying to catch another glimpse of *her*. Elena had been in the chamber for a brief moment. He'd seen her blue eyes narrow in anger, her jaw clench, her red lips press together in a thin line. Even furious, she was still the most stunning woman Ramose had ever seen.

Second most stunning woman, Ramose reminded himself. Though Elena might have looked like Eshe, she *wasn't* her. Couldn't be.

Max cleared his throat, casting an amused glance at Ramose. "You alright?"

Ramose nodded. He hadn't noticed they'd reached the end of the corridor. How long had they been standing there? He shook his head, trying to clear the image of Elena's beautiful face. Clearly, he wasn't thinking straight.

Taking a tiny key out of his pocket, Max unlocked the door and led Ramose into a much smaller room. Unlike the others, which had seemed a strange mix of carefully crafted precision and contained mess, this one was crammed full with crates, a variety of objects -- most of which Ramose couldn't name -- and garments hanging from the ceiling and from hooks on the walls.

"I thought we could talk in private," Max said, running his fingers over a switch in the wall. The room was suddenly flooded with light from somewhere overhead, and Ramose blinked in response to the unexpected illumination. He's seen the lights everywhere since he'd arrived, but he still couldn't keep from marveling at the way human beings were apparently able to harness the power of the sun from the tips of their fingers.

*Akhenaten said the sun god would one day be in everyone's home. Is this what he meant?*

Ramose stared up at the brilliant glow emanating from the ceiling, until his eyes burned and began to water.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Max asked again, laying a hand on Ramose's shoulder. "You don't look so good."

Ramose licked his suddenly dry lips. "I'm fine." The lie rolled off his tongue easily, as lies always did. What good would it do to explain how out of sorts he'd felt since he'd arrived here?

Max fidgeted with the fastening on his shirt, then took a step forward. He trailed his fingertips over Ramose's chest, down the length of his abdomen, where his hand finally stilled at the fastening to his pants. "Look, I've never done anything like this before ..."

"What, exactly, is it that you're doing?"

Silence enveloped them for a long moment, but Max didn't let his hand drop. "In your line of work," Max said at last, his voice strained, "you do a lot of ... different things, right?"

Ramose nodded. It seemed the safe thing to do.

"Ah. Good, then." Max's tone was louder now, steady with confidence. He glanced up and met Ramose's gaze. "Look, I can guarantee you a spot on my show. *Power to Extremes* can make you a famous man. There's something about you ..."

"I see," Ramose murmured, even though he didn't.

Max pressed closer, flattening his lean body against Ramose's. The man's erection nudged his thigh, hard and insistent.

"Ah." More sex. He was expected to perform, yet again. It hadn't mattered that his cock had barely stirred at the ministrations of the woman in the previous chamber. It probably would have remained limp, if not for the brief glimpse of sparkling sapphire eyes and that luscious mouth he remembered so well.

Did they think a man was more to his liking? He'd tried, after Eshe died. He'd tried everything. Men, women, often many of them at once. Nothing helped for long.

Max seemed to take Ramose's silence for consent. He dropped to his knees and pulled down the fastening system holding Ramose's pants around his waist. Cool air drifted through the room, playing in the curls at the apex of his thighs, drifting over his cock. His rod didn't so much as stir as Max's mouth closed over the tip, his palm cupping Ramose's sac and squeezing gently.

From the corner of the room, a flash of movement caught his attention. He turned his head, and his pulse quickened, his breath catching in his throat.

*Elena.*

He narrowed his eyes. His gaze focused on a screen like many of the others he'd seen throughout this structure. The flickering images constantly in motion and the sweep of vibrant colors shifting and flashing had taken some getting used to, and he'd had to close his eyes a few times to stifle the wave of nausea rising in his throat, but he'd adjusted.

Elena's face filled the screen. Ramose's cock twitched, stiffening as he watched her get strapped to a harness. She smiled at him, her eyes alight with excitement. Her lips moved, but no sound accompanied the image. He pictured those lips wrapped around his cock, felt the warmth of her mouth enveloping his shaft, and he swallowed hard as his erection swelled, filling the sweet, moist inside of her inviting mouth.

The pictures changed in rapid succession. She was no longer tied to the ropes, but flying through the air in an ancient temple, a dagger clutched in her hand. Her garments were different now, but it hardly mattered. Ramose's senses were overwhelmed by her presence, her nearness. Her mouth on his cock quickened its rhythm, and she added her hand, the quick stroking motions making him gasp with pleasure.

He saw her extraordinary leap from one end of the temple to the other. She seemed to glide through the air, and then she pivoted and threw the dagger, which buried itself with stunning precision in a man's chest. The man dropped to his knees, clutching the weapon now piercing his heart.

Suddenly, Ramose understood. Blood roared in his ears, pounded in his cock. He thrust his hips harder against the mouth that held him prisoner, the knowledge of what he was meant to do here flowing through him like the euphoric effects of the best royal wine.

She had to come back with him. Only she could kill Akhenaten. With her obvious talents, she could sneak into the palace undetected, could launch the dagger that would end Akhenaten's life and his reign as pharaoh.

*Yes.* It was so simple. So perfect. Hathor had sent him back to get help, and he'd found the person who could grant his deepest desire, just as she'd promised.

His sac tightened against his shaft, and he teetered on the edge of orgasm. "Suck me, Elena," he gasped, each word wrought from his lips between harsh gasps. "Let me fill you."

The hot moist cavern that had held him suddenly fell away, and cold air streamed along his overheated cock. Startled out of his euphoric thoughts, he glanced down. Disappointment filled him, softening his erection.

Max's dark eyes were clouded, his brows furrowed. His lips looked swollen and red from the effort he'd expended, and in his right hand, he held his own stiff cock. He rose, the flustered movement rigid and awkward, and wiped the back of his hand over his mouth. "I see this was a mistake."

Ramose nodded, though his cock still thrummed with the nearness of that sweet release. He'd been teased, fondled, caressed, sucked, and groped at every opportunity today, but never to completion. If he didn't come soon, he was certain his cock would remain in a state of constant arousal for all of eternity.

Without another word, Max stormed from the room, slamming the door behind him. Ramose walked to the screen, where Elena's image had faded into blackness, and ran his fingers over the smooth surface.

She was his salvation. His one chance at making things right.

He'd take her back to Egypt with him.

Just as soon as he figured out how.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elena jumped to her feet, trying to calm her hammering heart. "You want me to do what?"

James's expression remained inscrutable. "What you do best." His deep voice echoed in the nearly empty studio. The makeup department usually brimmed with activity, but currently only Diane and two other artists were in the spacious, airy room.

*Guess everyone's still enjoying the show in the temple.*

Elena struggled to hide the hint of annoyance fluttering through her chest. "Let me see if I understand this. You want *me* to take my clothes off."

James rolled his eyes. "You say that like I just propositioned you."

"Didn't you?"

"No. For your information, Kathy picked you herself."

"And that's supposed to make me feel better? Knowing that your newest starlet wants me to take my shirt off so she won't have to?"

James cleared his throat. "Err ... and your pants."

"My *what*?"

At least he had the decency to blush. A crimson stain crept up his neck and into his pudgy cheeks. "Yeah, well. It wouldn't be much of a love scene if slot A didn't fit into tab B, now would it?"

"It's the other way around."

"What?"

"The analogy. Tab A into ..." She waved a hand in the air and plopped back into the makeup chair. "Ah, never mind."

"So, you'll do it?"

"I didn't say that."

James blew out a long breath and dragged another chair to sit beside her. They glanced at one another in the full-length mirror. "Are you embarrassed? Is that it?"

"Let's see. You're asking me to go nude in front of ... what, a dozen people?"

"If today was any indication, more like a hundred."



“And this is supposed to convince me?”

“Come on, Elena. What’s the big deal? It’s not like you’re going to get it on in front of the camera. I just want this movie to be as sexy as possible. And nothing’s sexier than ...” His face twisted into a grimace as he obviously struggled to find the right word. “Sex.”

Elena pursed her lips and fixed James with another narrow-eyed stare, which he returned. “There’s something sexier than sex in public. Sex in private. In a bedroom. Between a man and a woman, without a hundred gawkers watching them grope and fondle. “

James didn’t answer. They glared at each other for a full minute in the bright mirror, so hard she thought the glass would crack from the weight of their combined stubborn determination.

“Well?” James asked at last as Diane returned to her station and dunked a wide black puff into a container of bronzer. “Will you do it?”

Elena raised an eyebrow and wrinkled her forehead, pretending to actually consider his absurd request. James leaned forward in his chair, hands clasped between his knees.

“No,” she said at last.

James jumped to his feet. “You are the most exasperating woman --!”

“I’m a stuntwoman, James. Got that? I do extreme stunts, and do them damn well.”

“Oh, yeah. You fell off that horse beautifully this morning.”

Elena decided to ignore the jab. “I am *not* a body double. I’m not a porn star. I’m not a stripper. I’m not a whore. I will not take my clothes off on camera. Got that?”

“Well, why bloody not?”

A choked sound between a laugh and a growl escaped Elena’s throat. James stood beside her, hands on hips, a scowl deepening the lines around his mouth. His British accent grew more pronounced the more aggravated he became, and Elena loved hearing it. Sometimes, she liked to annoy him just to see how far she could push him before he started asking for his martinis shaken, not stirred. Of course, James looked nothing like his Bond namesake, but his voice sounded like a melted-chocolate aphrodisiac. If you closed your eyes.

But, damn, he was thickheaded. “Why don’t you get one of the porn stars to do it, James?”

“None of them are right for the part. Their bodies are too willowy, or too fake. Have you seen some of those boobs?” His eyes widened, and he shuddered, as though genuinely afraid of the prosthetic implants.

Elena’s chuckle was genuine this time. “Yeah. I’d be scared, too, if I were you. Those things could knock you out cold.”

“Open your mouth,” Diane said.

Elena did as she was told. The makeup artist dipped a lip brush into a tube of shiny, luminous lip gloss and started applying it to Elena's mouth.

"Now do you see why it must be you?" James walked up behind her chair.

She didn't, of course. There were a thousand other women working on *Cleopatra II*. One of them surely had to match Kathy Clark's body type, as well as Cleopatra's, whatever she might have looked like.

Elena closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the makeup chair. An image of Ramose standing before that beautiful woman on set, his cock stirring beneath her expert touch, came unbidden. Elena shivered, a wave of unexpected pleasure rushing through her, along with something else, something that felt annoyingly like jealousy.

Which was absurd, of course. She had no reason to be jealous. She'd never seen the man before today, before the dream, or whatever it had been, after she'd been thrown from her horse. She had no right to feel anything toward him, or any woman he chose to engage in scandalous behavior with.

*Scandalous?* Elena snorted and blinked her eyes open, surprised by the turn of her thoughts. She was starting to sound like a prude, something she certainly wasn't. She'd had her share of relationships. None of them had lasted very long, but she'd certainly enjoyed more than one night of mind-blowing sex over the past few years. So why did she want to claw that woman's eyes out if she so much as looked at Ramose's cock again?

She needed to get off this set. Maybe even get out of L.A. for a while. The excruciating heat was obviously doing strange things to her brain.

As soon as Diane finished with the lip gloss, Elena reached for the bottle of iced tea she'd set on the dressing table. She took a sip through the thin straw, careful not to mess the methodically applied mixture sticking to her lips. The lightly sweet, crisp flavor of the tea washed over her tongue. She soaked in the pleasure, letting the cool liquid trickle down her throat.

"You're sure you won't reconsider?" James asked.

More images flashed through her mind. Ramose's cock, thick and erect, spearing the air before his flat abdomen. The tip of his cock nudging her clit. His mouth on her breast, sucking a beaded nipple, grazing it with his teeth. His fingers plunging deep inside her moist sex as she tightened her inner muscles around him.

A tender, fluttering ache settled between her legs. Her labia felt heavy, swollen, as if he'd actually been doing all those things to her. She had to grit her teeth to keep from moaning. "Absolutely."

James's disappointed sigh resonated through the room. "Fine. Looks like we'll have to find someone else."

"You do that." The words had barely left her mouth when she caught a glimpse of movement in the mirror. Her gaze darted to the motion, and her heart slammed against her ribcage, then seemed to still entirely as Ramose walked into the room.

"Ah! There you are, chap. We need to talk."

Ramose nodded, but his gaze met Elena's in the mirror. She gripped the iced-tea bottle tighter, her breath suddenly wrung from her lungs. His dark eyes flickered with knowledge, as if he could read her every thought.

"You were great in the orgy scene," James was saying, though his voice sounded far away to Elena's ears. She had suddenly become attuned to every move Ramose made. She heard it all, from the way his shoes scuffed on the floor as he walked, to every deep, rhythmic breath he took. The awareness made her shudder.

"Say, chap, you wouldn't mind doing something a little more involved, would you? The man you were standing in for today called in sick for the third day in a row. If you agree to step in for him on a more permanent basis, he won't need to return."

"Fine."

"Good, good. Then it's settled. As soon as we find a suitable body double for Cleopatra, we can film the love scene and finally wrap up this production." With one last glare in the mirror for Elena, James turned and headed for the exit.

Ramose's touch on her shoulder was so unexpected, Elena nearly jumped out of the chair. Her hand flew to her throat. The sudden move startled Diane, who dropped the container of blush she carried, sending the powder spilling onto the floor.

"I'm sorry," Elena murmured, though her attention was riveted to Ramose's lips. He'd bent down, and his mouth was now flush against her ear. His breath warmed her skin, shooting a tingle through her body that culminated in a low, steady, throbbing pulse in her aching pussy.

When he spoke, the rich intonation in his voice sounded foreign and melodious, and it traveled down her spine, igniting a new blaze of heat between her legs. "I need you."

This time, she did leap off the chair. "James!"

Her cry stopped the director in midstride. He turned, concern etched on his features. "You okay?"

She nodded and swallowed hard. "I'll do it."

## Chapter Four

An hour later, Ramose and Elena stood in another half-finished chamber. This one had been decorated with plush silk pillows, a bed fit for a pharaoh, a low table, and not much else. At one end of the room, a window overlooked a blue screen. At the other, a large group of people had assembled, and more of those noisy machines had been placed around the perimeter of the room. From the ceiling, long black tubes hung down, reaching a few hand spans from the top of Ramose's head.

"Microphones," Elena said, following his gaze. "I guess they want to catch every moan."

He had only to reach out his hand and he could touch her dark, velvety skin. Her black hair had been perfectly coiffed and smoothed down into straight locks that barely brushed her shoulders. Her blue eyes sparkled, but her lips remained pressed down into a thin line, as they had since she'd entered the chamber. "Will you moan for me?" he asked before he could think better of it.

She blinked and looked up at him, surprise evident on her features. He expected a hint of color to mar her perfect cheeks, but she met his gaze boldly. "I barely know you."

"That doesn't seem to matter here," he said. Since he'd arrived in this odd place, he'd been stroked, fondled, and grabbed by more people than he'd had sex with in his entire life.

"You have a point." She tilted her head and grabbed her lower lip between her teeth. Ramose's gaze focused on her mouth, on the hint of moisture glistening on her full red lips. He pictured her mouth wrapped around his cock, her tongue sweeping along the length of his shaft. A shudder he couldn't prevent rushed through him.

His cock had been erect since he'd spotted her sitting in that chair in front of the mirror, yet now that she was close enough that he could smell her sweet, feminine scent, his rod ached with pent-up, frustrated desire. How could one woman stir such lust in him? He'd

gone much longer than this without the pleasure of a tight cunt ... so why was he ready to spill his seed at the mere sight of this woman's mouth?

"You two ready over there?" James's voice echoed through the chamber, much too loud. Ramose was grateful for the interruption of the myriad of thoughts buzzing through his mind, none of which he wanted to analyze much further. He had a job to do here. Hathor had sent him to this place for a reason. He had to get Elena and go back to his beloved Egypt, the only place he belonged.

Ramose nodded in James's direction and lay on his back on top of the silky bed covering as he'd been instructed to do when they'd arrived. They'd also told him to strip out of the strange garments he'd been given, which was a relief, more than anything.

"You sure you want to do this?" Elena murmured as she climbed onto the bed and swung one long leg over his hip to straddle him. She was as naked as he, though they'd let her wear a thick chain and an amulet that hung down between her breasts. It looked heavy, the golden disk shaped like the sun, and it made him think of Hathor and Aten at once. He blinked hard to clear the image away. He didn't want to think of either of them. Not now.

"That depends. What exactly are we doing?" His cock throbbed, and a blind man couldn't have missed his erection, yet Elena had been careful not to touch any part of her delectably curvy body to his straining shaft. Somehow, he didn't think she meant to allow him to plunge his stiff cock into her inviting pussy.

She arched her eyebrows, surprise and confusion flickering in the depths of her blue eyes. "We're going to pretend to fuck."

He started to speak, but she placed her index finger over his lips, silencing him. "Pretend, mind you. Remember that. I know you're used to doing much more when the cameras are rolling, but that won't happen. Not now. Not with me. Got it?"

Her finger still pressed against his lips, so he couldn't reply. Instead, his tongue darted out and swept over her skin. She tasted like honey, figs, and the unmistakable trace of arousal, as though she'd been touching herself not much earlier.

Elena drew her hand back as if she'd been bitten and swept her fingers through the silky mass of her hair, leaving it disheveled. A woman ran toward them, hairbrush in hand, and swept the black locks away from Elena's face. Elena's thighs trembled as she tried hard not to let her weight press against Ramose's hips, and he was glad to see the uncertainty in her eyes. Good. It looked like he affected her as much as she affected him. If the attraction were one-sided, he'd have a much harder time convincing her to go back with him.

And she had to go back. With her acrobatic talent and her ability to throw a dagger, there was no doubt in Ramose's mind that she was the perfect person to finish the job he'd started. When Ramose and Elena returned, Akhenaten's reign would be over. For good.

"And ... action!"

James's shout had barely echoed through the chamber when Elena pressed herself down on him. Her pussy was moist and warm, her folds slick with cream. Her heat brushed his cock, making him shiver. His balls tightened, and his shaft swelled to an impossible hardness. Amun-Ra, if she didn't stop rubbing herself on him like that, he wasn't going to be able to pretend much longer.

She must have felt his muscles stiffen as he fought to control the raging lust making his cock ache, because she lowered her mouth to his neck. Her teeth nipped the side of his throat, and he breathed in sharply. Her scent imprinted itself on his senses, sweet and spicy, her musky arousal making his mouth water.

He needed her. Craved her like he'd never wanted anyone else.

*Even Eshe?*

The voice taunted him, ringing in his ears as Elena's velvety folds rubbed against his cock. He arched his back, tightening his hold on the curve of her ass, pressing her closer to him until her breasts were flat against his chest.

"Cut!"

Elena's breath came out in ragged gasps. He heard the soft moan escaping her throat even as she tried to push back from him. When he didn't release her, she chuckled, but didn't relax in his arms. "I think we're done here."

"We haven't even begun."

She looked ready to protest, her lips parted as though to singe him with some scathing retort, and she probably would have if James hadn't come up behind her.

"That was good, but not exactly what I was hoping for."

Elena's eyes narrowed, and she yanked her body out of Ramose's grasp. He didn't release her in time. She fell sideways, landing on her back beside him. Turning her head only slightly, she glared at James. "What exactly did you want? I told you, I'm not having sex on camera."

"I don't want sex," James quickly assured her. "But I want more than what you're giving me. I want it to look as though you're having sex, even though you're not. Can you do that?"

"Dry humping. You're asking me to dry hump, with my clothes off." Elena's strangled laugh sent another wave of desire through Ramose's already stiff cock.

"I'd never dream to tell you what to do. But I'm paying you well for this extra service you're providing, so please, whatever you do, make it seem real. Okay?"

She blew out a breath, the air escaping her lungs sending her long black bangs flying across her forehead. "Fine. Whatever. How much longer?"

"If we get this scene, that's it. It's the last thing we need to shoot, and we can all wrap up."

After James disappeared back into the shadows, Elena propped herself on her elbow and glanced down at Ramose. Despite her obvious annoyance a moment ago, her eyes blazed with intensity and barely contained desire. "How can you stand it?"

He mirrored her movement, holding his body weight on his elbow, as well. They faced each other, their bodies a hand's length away, yet not touching. "What?"

"This." The sweeping gesture she made with her hand encompassed everything around them. "The cameras. All these people watching you fuck. All the strange women parading on set, spreading their legs for you." Her eyes narrowed as she spoke. In anger? Ramose couldn't be sure.

He didn't know how to answer her. Did she expect him to explain the joys of the flesh to her? Or to recoil at the accusation she made that he'd enjoyed the pleasure of many different women? Unsure which response would placate her, he simply leaned in and brushed his lips across her brow. A shudder went through her at his touch, and he reached out and stroked the lush valley between her full breasts with the tip of his finger. "There's only one woman who interests me."

"You lie." Her voice came out barely above a breathy whisper.

"No." If only she knew the depth of truth in his words. His cock ached for her, certainly, but he needed her help, as well. All of Egypt needed her.

"Assume your positions, please."

Uncertainty flashed in Elena's eyes before she did as James instructed and climbed atop Ramose. He couldn't prevent the sigh that escaped his lips as her inner thigh brushed the outside of his leg.

A bead of precum dripped from the tip of Ramose's cock. James had better get whatever it was he wanted from them soon. He didn't know how much longer he could keep from spilling his seed, especially since Elena's arousal had only intensified once they'd started, and now her intoxicating, musky scent enveloped him, taunting his self-control. It would be so easy to grip her hips and slam her down on top of his cock. He'd slide inside her in one swift, sudden move. She was already slick and wet for him, her juices dripping through golden curls and down her thighs.

*Golden curls?*

By Amun-Ra, why hadn't he noticed before? Her thick, straight black hair framed high cheekbones and bright blue eyes, but her eyebrows were pale in comparison, and the curls covering her pussy certainly didn't match her black tresses.

And yet, the sight left him breathless with need. Eshe's sex had been shaved as custom dictated, silky-smooth to his touch. What would it be like to dip his finger between Elena's folds, to feel the texture of her nether hair brushing against his skin?

"Don't even think about it," Elena murmured.

Startled, he glanced up. "How did you --"

“You were looking at my pussy as if getting ready to devour me whole.” The blush he’d expected earlier finally crept up her cheeks. Her brows furrowed. “How about you keep your eyes on mine from now on?”

Elena had to keep reminding herself that this was *not* an enjoyable situation to be in, but Ramose’s easy grin and lust-filled gaze nudged her self-control. It would be so easy to plunge down on his cock. She could almost hear the shocked gasp of the assembled audience, the indignant murmurs.

Hovering so close over Ramose’s cock without touching the thick erection was sheer torture. Worse yet, his rod was entirely bare, devoid of a condom or any other protective sheath. Shouldn’t James have at least required his actors to wear a rubber? Or was that not *realistic* enough? She’d definitely have to insist on one next time.

*Not that there would be a next time.*

Sweat beaded on Elena’s forehead from the strain of keeping any part of her body from touching Ramose’s. The bright lights overhead bathed her in unbearable heat. As if the extreme temperatures outside weren’t enough to drive her mad, the air conditioner inside the studio did nothing to cool her overheated skin.

“You all right?” Ramose’s fingertips skimmed over her temples, then dipped lower to trace her lips. Elena bit back an involuntary sigh.

“Fine.” The lie spilled easily enough from her mouth, but she averted her gaze, no longer able to look him in the eye. If a simple look could make her stomach flutter and cream pool between her legs, what could the man do with his hands? His tongue?

*This train of thought is not helping!*

Giving herself a mental shake, Elena glanced over her shoulder at James, sitting on his high director’s chair. “You ready for that take yet, or have you changed your mind?”

“Settle in for the long haul, doll. You’re not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“Figures,” she muttered between clenched teeth.

“Your enthusiasm is overwhelming. Any more talk like that, and it might go to my head.” Ramose’s grin widened, revealing straight white teeth. His smile was contagious, though she fought hard to keep from returning it.

“It’s not personal, okay? I’d just rather be somewhere else.”

*Anywhere else.*

His smile faded, dark eyes glittering with an intensity that startled her. “Good. That’s exactly what I need to talk to you about. You have to come with me --”

“Action!”



James's cry was just that: a call to action. Elena's training kicked in, taking over all other impulses. She pressed her mouth over Ramose's, cutting off the rest of his words. Whatever he wanted to ask her could wait, at least until the scene was over.

Her heart pounded wildly as his lips parted and his tongue darted out to meet hers in a slow, sensual duel. Heat spread through her muscles, warming them, loosening her tight control as she strained to keep from making contact with Ramose's body in any vital place.

She leaned against him, her breasts flattening against his chest. His hands moved down her spine, his caress leaving a fiery trail everywhere he touched, until it felt as though her entire body burned from the inside out. The intense lust threatened to overwhelm her. Her inner muscles fluttered, struggling with the emptiness in her core. She needed his fingers, his cock, *something* inside her eager pussy.

The tip of his cock brushed the entrance to her cunt, and she shuddered, squeezing her eyelids closed to maintain whatever small shred of control she still possessed. She couldn't fuck him here. Not in front of all these people. All the rolling cameras.

His palms gripped her ass, kneading her flesh, parting her cheeks. A soft breeze caressed her body, lingering between her thighs where her juices had smeared, coating her skin.

Birds chirped and leaves stirred overhead as Ramose's fingers spread her wide open, preparing her for his thick shaft. Any moment now, he was going to take her, and she'd finally get what she'd been craving since she first caught sight of his aroused cock.

She trembled, no longer caring about the myriad of reasons they shouldn't be doing this. Raw, carnal need swirled through her veins. Ramose's tongue swept over her lips; then his mouth moved lower, placing wet, heated kisses on her neck. His finger found her opening, and he nudged her entrance, sliding only the tip inside her waiting channel. Her muscles squeezed around him, and she pressed down on his hand, needing more than the quick, teasing flicker of fulfillment.

The sweet scent of jasmine filled the air, along with Ramose's masculine, clean odor and the unmistakable aroma of her own arousal. The desire coiling in her core was deep, primal, overriding any other longing. She wanted him to grip her hips, toss her on her back in the grass, and fuck her until she screamed his name, until the climax building through every nerve ending finally solidified in an overpowering, satisfying release.

"And ... cut! That was perfect!"

James's voice swam lazily through her thoughts, reaching the farthest corners of Elena's mind before she could make sense of his words. With a gasp, she pulled back as the overhead lights flooded her vision, noting through the fog still clouding her judgment that her inner walls still gripped ... *something*. The sensation of being filled lingered, creasing her nipples as they tightened further.

"Get your finger ... out of me." Her voice was hoarse, unrecognizable to her own ears. Blood roared through her head, pounding in her temples. Good Lord, what had she almost done?

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she remembered the absence of a condom. She was going to kill James. Though it really wasn't the director's fault that his stunt double couldn't contain her lust for one of the porn stars.

Embarrassment flooded her, and she closed her eyes. She dug her teeth into her bottom lip, and to her dismay, tears pricked the back of her eyelids. This wasn't fair. First the fall from the horse, then the complete lack of judgment in agreeing to participate in this scene. Whatever slim chance she'd had to impress Max and secure herself a spot on his reality show were long gone.

A strong, warm hand closed over hers. She blinked, then narrowed her eyes at Ramose, who leaned on an elbow, watching her. The overhead lights flooded his features, making his shaved head shine in the harsh illumination. His lips were turned down in a scowl. "I don't know what just happened, but I'm more certain than ever that you need to come back with me."

She took a deep breath, trying to calm her hammering heart before attempting to speak. "Where?"

"Home. To Egypt."

"You're really Egyptian?" She tilted her head and studied him. His straight nose was slightly too wide, his eyes too large, his cheekbones too high for what passed for Western male beauty these days. She supposed his full lips and copper skin tone could have been attributed to Egyptian descent.

"I was born in Karnak."

"Good for you." She hoped she sounded as frustrated as she felt. "What does that have to do with me?"

"Everything. You must come with me. I was sent here to find you."

Elena swallowed hard, the flood of emotions returning and once again threatening to unravel. "Who sent you?"

He opened his mouth as though to utter a name, then seemed to think better of it. "It's not important. All you need to know is that if you don't stop Akhenaten, everyone in Egypt will suffer."

His dark gaze bore into hers, intense and unflinching. For a moment, she considered removing her hand from Ramose's tight grip; then something in his statement nudged at her mind, stirring her recollection.

"Akhenaten ... wasn't he a pharaoh in the Eighteenth Dynasty? I took ancient history in college, you know. What kind of trick is this?"

Emotions swept across his face. Anger? Uncertainty? She couldn't be sure. "No trick, though you speak as though Akhenaten's reign is in the past. How long ago?"

Her dry chuckle held no humor. "About three thousand years."

He released a deep breath between pursed lips. "So he's dead, then, here, in your world."

It didn't sound like a question, so Elena chose not to answer. Instead, she said, "You want me to go to Egypt. Are you shooting another movie there? Is that why you need me?"

Ramose wrapped a lock of her hair around his finger, and her wig shifted, pulling at her scalp. Diane would be furious if it came off. She grimaced at the thought of another long session in the makeup chair, of being fussed over for hours if James decided at the last minute he needed another take. She'd learned quickly not to assume a director was finished with her until he actually dismissed her in no uncertain terms.

"You don't understand," Ramose whispered, leaning in until his breath caressed her cheek. "You may be the only one who can save an entire nation from a tyrannical rule. Akhenaten has built temples, pyramids, and palaces, but he's managed to ruin the one thing our people need the most."

"And what's that?" she asked, despite herself.

"Faith in the true gods of Egypt. Amun-Ra, Hathor, Horus, Seth, and the others. They need our belief in them. You must help them. Help us." His fingers squeezed her hand until a sharp stab of pain shot up her arm, but her mouth gaped open and she was unable to pull away from the desperate plea she saw in his eyes. "Help me."

After a long moment of stunned silence, she laughed, but the sound seemed shaky even to her. "You're telling me you've ... what? Come from Ancient Egypt to take me back in time so that I can end a pharaoh's rule? Do I have that straight?"

"More or less. Yes."

She gaped at him. "You do realize how absurd that sounds, right?"

He shrugged, drawing her attention to the sinewy muscles rippling across his chest and broad shoulders. "Not long ago, perhaps even after Nefertiti's change, I would have agreed with you. What I'm asking is highly unlikely, but not impossible. There are greater forces at work than you can see." His eyes darkened, as though he fought an inner struggle as he tried to determine how much more of this crazy story he could tell her before she'd run away screaming.

*Not much.*

His sigh echoed through the room. "You don't believe me, do you?"

She forced an indulgent smile. "I believe *you* believe what you're telling me."

He nodded, and his features smoothed into a mask of bland indifference, though she recognized the turmoil roiling in the depths of his gaze. "Then I'll just have to convince you."

## Chapter Five

Ramose peered into yet another chamber, with no luck. This one was empty of all but a few boxes, and his gut instinct told him Elena wouldn't be hiding behind one of those. As soon as James had announced they were free to go for the night, Elena had bolted from the room, stopping only long enough to grab some clothes.

Ramose had followed her as soon as he realized she meant not to talk to him again before leaving. Though he would have just chased after her naked, he'd decided to slide his legs into the foreign garments he'd been wearing earlier. If he ran down the corridors naked, someone was bound to stop him and ask him to perform again. These people were ravenous! He couldn't take that chance.

He quickened his stride, pausing only to glance briefly at the images of Nefertiti lining the walls. In each, she smiled seductively, beckoning at whoever stopped long enough to stare into the depths of her green eyes. In some of the representations, she wore garments unlike any found in Egypt, but much like those he'd seen often since he arrived here. In others, her clothes resembled those made for a queen.

He still couldn't figure out what role she had to play in all this. Was Hathor aiding her, as well? But how could she, when Hathor's purpose and Ramose's were the same? Eliminating Akhenaten would ensure the return of the true Egyptian gods to the hearts and minds of the people, and yet Nefertiti had seemed ready to do anything for the pharaoh, no matter the cost to Egypt.

Ramose had seen her come through the portal. He'd watched as Nefertiti blinked out of existence, and when she returned, the changes in the queen had been apparent. Her newfound commitment and love for Akhenaten were obvious, as were her passion and interest in the pharaoh's reign. Ramose didn't believe in coincidences. Was it possible that Hathor had brought her to Egypt, from this place? Before arriving in Egypt, had her days

been spent on her knees, obeying the commands of any man who wanted her to provide pleasure at his whim?

Ramose rubbed his neck, trying in vain to relieve some of the tension that had settled there. Since arriving here, he'd found more questions than answers, but one thing was certain: Elena was the reason he was here.

He turned a corner and halted at the base of a long set of stairs. Hesitating for only a moment, he gripped the metal balustrade and took the steps two at a time. Elena had to be up here.

At the top of the stairway, he pushed open a large metal door. A loud squeak and hot, sticky night air greeted him as he stepped out onto the roof. He let the door slam behind him.

Elena didn't turn around as his footsteps clattered on the ground. She gripped a thin railing and peered down at the opaque fog approaching from the east, blanketing the city. Bright lights flickered, fighting to penetrate the pale shroud and the darkness that had settled over the tall structures. In the distance, sounds unlike any Ramose had ever heard vied with one another. He recognized a faint scream, and the cry of an animal, but there were others ... sharp, loud scrapes and high-pitched metallic whines that made him cringe. Anger and desperation seemed to roll off the city in waves.

"Welcome to L.A.," Elena murmured, though she continued to stare out toward the horizon. "You should have come in the fall. It looks much more inviting when the leaves are turning shades of red and gold, blanketing the sidewalks."

"I'll try to remember that." Ramose moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, drawing her to him. She stiffened in his arms, but didn't protest or jerk out of his grasp. Her hair looked different, he noticed. It still hung down to her shoulders, but it was pale, lighter than the sand on the banks of the Nile on a summer's day, lighter even than the walls of Akhenaten's palace. She smelled sweet, like figs and honey. The scent enveloped his senses, made his mouth water.

"Why are you here?"

"I already told you."

She laughed, but the sound was devoid of humor. "Right. You're from the past, and you need me to go with you to save ..."

"Egypt," he finished for her. "Egypt needs you."

She turned in his arms until she faced him, her gaze boring into his. White light spilled from a tall post onto her features, illuminating the confusion in her blue eyes. "Why are you really doing this?"

"Because we're connected, you and I. Can't you feel it?"

For a moment, he feared she'd deny it. She swept the tip of her tongue over her lower lip, and the sight made Ramose's cock stir. Fighting the urge to pull her closer to him, to

thrust against her belly, he clenched his teeth and bit back a curse. He'd come out here to talk to her, not to seduce her. He wasn't going to be like James, or any other man who used her for his own purposes.

A stab of guilt pierced his gut. Wasn't that exactly what he was doing? Trying to convince her to go back with him so she could kill Akhenaten? Didn't that serve his purpose?

*That's for the good of Egypt.*

He didn't believe the voice whispering in his head any more than he thought she'd actually agree to go back with him, even if he knew how to make that happen. But he had to try.

"There is something about you," she admitted at last. "That's why I came up here. I should have probably just gone home, but I couldn't leave you here." Her soft chuckle sent shivers down his spine. "Sounds stupid, huh?"

"Not at all. Truth be told, I have nowhere to go."

"Right. Because you're from the past."

He nodded and twirled a strand of her hair, like he'd so often done with Eshe. Where Eshe's hair had been straight, Elena's was wavy, softer, and easier to coil around his finger. Her eyelids fluttered and drifted closed. "You're exhausted," he murmured against her temple. "You should rest."

She blinked rapidly, her desert-colored lashes sweeping long shadows over her flawless cheeks. "I'm fine. Really."

He didn't believe her. She didn't look fine. She looked pale. In fact, her dark, coppery skin was gone along with her dark hair, leaving in its wake a perfect, smooth complexion of pure, pale alabaster. It suited her. Better, in fact, than the darker tone, and she'd been stunning then. Now she looked like a figure shaped out of pure marble, only warm and inviting to the touch.

Her crimson lips stood out against her light skin, and Ramose couldn't hold back any longer. He dipped his head and claimed her mouth. She opened to him instantly, her lips parting, allowing him entry. She tasted as sweet as she smelled, and he inhaled deeply, drinking her in.

"Please listen to me," he whispered between kisses. "It is possible to travel between my world and yours, and I need you. You must come with me."

His hand swept over her ribcage, her hips, then moved lower to linger between her thighs. Heat emanated from her core through the long, flowing garment she wore. The soft material reached almost to the ground, and he lifted it, baring her skin to the warm night air.

"How is this accomplished? This shift through time?"

He frowned, unsure how to answer her question. He needed her to believe him and wished he could tell her exactly what traveling through time would entail, but he couldn't lie to her. Wanting to hide the uncertainty he was sure must have shown in his face, Ramose

dropped to his knees before her. He breathed in the scent of her arousal and relished the sight of the fine curls covering her pussy, the moisture beading on her folds. He dragged a fingertip along her inner thigh, trailing it higher, pausing at her slit. "I don't know," he admitted at last. "But I intend to find out."

She gasped as he parted her folds and leaned closer, drawing her scent to him. "Anything else you want to tell me?"

Musky, with a hint of spice, her arousal called to Ramose on a primal level, imprinting itself on him. His cock throbbed, aching with need for her. "Many things. But not now."

Using two fingers on either side, he held her sex open, spread wide for him. He sighed as he glanced at her inner lips, the hooded bud of her clit, the soft, velvety folds slick with cream, and that tight, inviting opening that gaped, pink and glistening, ready for his cock.

He looked up. Their eyes met, and his heart skipped a beat. She was so breathtaking, so much like Eshe, and yet, so different.

Elena ran her palms over his head and leaned against the railing, urging his mouth closer. "What are you doing to me?" she asked.

"Nothing you don't want me to do."

He caressed her folds, lightly at first, before letting his tongue circle the beaded nub. She cried out and her knees buckled, her legs trembling as he dove in for another sweep of his tongue, this time along the full length of her slit. Using the wetness of her cunt to moisten his fingers, he then penetrated her, slowly. Her pussy squeezed down on the intrusion, adjusting to one finger before he inserted a second, then a third.

He laved around her clit with the tip of his tongue, careful not to apply too much pressure to that sensitive spot. She tightened around him, her muscles fluttering with the onset of her orgasm.

Her body trembled, and he sped up his motions inside her tight channel as she squeezed his fingers and rocked against his hand. He quickened the swipes of his tongue, lapping at her clit.

Her orgasm floated on a soft cry of ecstasy, and with her breathless moan of release came a whisper of hope to fuel the fire of his determination.

He'd pleasure her like this until she agreed to go with him, even if it took all night.

Elena opened her mouth to speak, but all the words running through her mind after the onslaught of that amazing orgasm seemed inadequate to describe what she'd just experienced.

She glanced down, then shut her eyes tightly, the sight of Ramose's fingers still thrust in her quivering cunt too much for her to bear. Her legs trembled, and she held on to Ramose's shoulders for some much-needed support.

"Who are you, really?" she asked.

He trailed soft kisses over the sensitive skin along the inside of her thigh. "I already told you, but you refuse to believe me."

The sincerity in Ramose's voice traveled straight to her heart. She shook her head, swallowing past the lump forming in her throat. Impossible.

*Wasn't it?*

"You're right. I can't accept what you're telling me. There must be a simple explanation."

Perhaps he'd taken a bad fall and hit his head, or escaped from a mental institution somewhere. The thought made her shudder. And what did that say about her, willing to fuck a stranger on a rooftop?

Her heart pounded, and she opened her eyes to gaze down into his. Shrouded in shadow, his features looked mysterious. Dangerous. A delicious shiver ran through her.

"I'm not prone to exaggeration." He stood, towering over her so she had to tilt her head to look at him. He cupped her sex in his palm. The slight pressure against her clit sent a wave of liquid heat pooling between her legs. "Perhaps you think I'm making up tales to get you to fuck me."

She chuckled against his throat. "The thought hadn't occurred to me, but now that you mention it ... are you?"

"No."

She breathed a soft sigh of relief, though she shouldn't have. It would have been easier if he'd confessed he'd made up the entire story in an elaborate attempt to get her to spread her legs for him. Not that it had been difficult to get her to do just that. She'd always been cautious when it came to men, erring on the side of safety rather than lust or passion. Yet with Ramose, all her good sense vanished the moment he came within two feet of her.

"Are you saying you don't want me?" she asked, hating the desperation tingeing her tone.

"I want you more than you could possibly know." His hand slid beneath the hem of her t-shirt, and she gasped at the contrast of his strong, masculine palm against her skin. She wore no bra to impede the progress of his fingers, and he circled a nipple, then tweaked it between thumb and forefinger. "I need you."

Heat pooled instantly in her breasts and cunt, savage and demanding. She craved his cock. Had to have it. *Now.*

Fumbling between them, she found the small button at the top of his waistband and flicked it open, then pulled the zipper down. Tugging on his jeans, she was rewarded by the sight of his fully erect cock springing out of the tight confines of his pants. He wore no underwear, which was a blessing as much as a surprise. "Are you sure you're not a porn star?"

"I don't know what that is, but if it'll please you if I say yes, then I'm sure I could become one."



She laughed, but the sound got lost in the noise of the city. A dozen feet below, life went on as it always did in L.A., oblivious to what was about to happen on the roof. Cars honked, people laughed and shouted, a dog barked. Glass shattered, probably from a broken bottle, judging by the ensuing volley of curses.

“No need,” she assured him. Her hand moved over the drift of fine hair sprinkling his sculpted abdomen before tightening around his erection. “Though I assume you know how to use this thing?”

He answered with a grunt and a thrust of his hips. His erection pressed against her stomach, throbbing with an unheeded desire that matched her own. “I’ve done this before, once or twice.”

An unexpected pang of jealousy pierced Elena’s heart. She didn’t want to think of him in another woman’s arms. She craved his cock deep inside her, his seed emptying into her womb, her name on his lips. Ravenous, she unleashed the sudden fury on his mouth, kissing him with fierce abandon. He matched her fervent need, his tongue slipping between her teeth to sweep along the inside of her mouth, harsh and demanding.

He cupped her ass and lifted her easily off her feet. Her body heeded his call, and she wrapped her legs around his waist, her skirt bunching around her hips. Hard, male muscles pressed against her skin. She trembled as the tip of his cock nudged against her folds, seeking entry.

She reached between them, cupping his balls, guiding his shaft. He hissed a breath between clenched teeth, the effort he expended to hold back apparent on his strained features. Lamplight shone over his face, illuminating the faint sheen of sweat covering his forehead, his cheeks.

“No need to be gentle,” she assured him. “I’ve done this before, too.”

He growled, the sound primal and possessive. His grip tightened around her, and he thrust forward, impaling her in one swift move. His cock was big, bigger even than she’d expected from seeing him, touching him. It breached her tight opening, stretching her inner muscles to capacity. She gasped from the unexpected onslaught of pleasure.

Ramose’s movements stilled, his fingers digging into the flesh of her ass. “Did I hurt you?”

“You surprised me, that’s all.” Her words came out breathless, needy. She ground her hips against his, lodging him deeper inside her.

At her encouragement, he moved again, pushing his cock further until its tip nudged her womb. The pressure built, sending shivers of ecstasy thrumming through her core.

Ramose withdrew almost entirely before slamming into her again, the force of his thrusts shoving her against the railing. The metal balustrade’s square edges bit into her spine, but she didn’t care. The pleasure flooding her cunt intensified, turning the pain into a barely remembered irritation.

With each deep penetration, his cock tapped the rear wall of her cunt, striking deep. Sensation flooded her, tightening her muscles. She'd never achieved two orgasms so close together before, wasn't even sure she was capable of it. As though hearing her thoughts, he removed one hand from her ass and brought his fingers to her clit, rubbing the tender nub to the heights of delicious rapture in time with the thrusting of his hips.

She squirmed against him, the release building inside her hammering at her sex, yet refusing to send her over the edge. His cock pounded inside her, slamming into her, each thrust harder, rougher than the one before. She needed the release so bad, tears stung her eyelids.

"Come with me," he murmured in her ear.

She knew what he meant, and it wasn't what her body withheld from her. He wanted her to go to Egypt, to the past. It wasn't possible.

It *wasn't*!

"No."

He thrust harder, as if punishing her for her refusal. He pushed in, fast and steady, for what seemed to Elena like an eternity of exquisite, overwhelming pleasure; then he tensed for a moment before his orgasm raced through him, his seed squirting into her channel, soaking her.

Gripping his shoulders, she breathed in the scent of him, all musky male sweat and cum, before giving in to her own lust. Her cunt squeezed him, milked him, her muscles spasming, clenching, and finally unleashing a flood of intoxicating pleasure. She cried out, the sound carrying on the night air.

The orgasm came with a blinding pain behind her eyes. She tightened her grip on his arms, fighting to stay upright. Fire burst through her mind, burning everywhere it touched. It swept lower, tightening her nipples even further, making them throb. When it reached her cunt, she cried out, the dying embers of her orgasm mingling with the overwhelming ache.

Before she could blink, it was over, and she lay on her back, spent, her chest heaving with the effort of her ragged breaths. Ramose hovered over her, his eyes shrouded with undisguised worry.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded and swept the tip of her tongue over her lips, fighting to moisten them. Only a minute ago, Ramose had kissed her; now her mouth felt dry. She struggled to sit up, but a wave of nausea slammed her flat on her back again. She squeezed her eyes shut and waited while her body gradually quieted, then attempted to sit up for a second time.

This time, with Ramose's help, she succeeded in rising to her knees. Her gaze swept over his body, his coppery skin dark in the shadowy night. She caught a hint of moonlight

playing over her pale legs and glanced down, surprised to find her skirt was gone. She brought her hands up to cover her breasts, realizing they were bare, as well.

“When did you undress me?” she asked, struggling to remember what had happened. One moment she was being thoroughly fucked, and the next, she was flat on her back.

*Damn.* Had she passed out? And what had Ramose done to her?

“I didn’t.” His voice sounded different. Softer. His accent more pronounced. Recognition nagged at the back of her mind, too hazy for her to capture the faint thread of memory.

“Then what ...” The rest of her words drifted into oblivion as she realized she could no longer hear the noises from the street below. In fact, she couldn’t hear anything but the faint sound of waves lapping at a nearby shore.

She turned her head, and her gaze finally settled on her surroundings. A river spread out to her right, like a dark ribbon set against a black backdrop. Moonlight danced over the rippling water.

Her heart threatened to break out of her chest as she glanced down at the sandbank on which she sat, the palm trees lining the shore, the tufts of grass sprinkled here and there along the riverbank.

Ramose gripped her chin in his fingers and turned her head until she was forced to face him. His eyes, already midnight-black but seeming even darker in the depths of the night, shone like bottomless pools in the faint silvery light. “Welcome to Egypt. Your destiny awaits.”

## Chapter Six

Elena rose to her feet, swaying unsteadily as Ramose's words sent a shiver of foreboding down her spine. "Destiny? You can't be serious."

Moonlight spilled over his face, illuminating his coppery skin with a silver glow. Naked, he looked sleek, powerful, and dangerous.

There was that word again. Did she actually think him capable of harming her? Perhaps not, though when he looked at her like he wanted to devour her whole, *safe* wasn't exactly the first word that came to mind to describe him. Her sex throbbed and heated, responding to the powerful sensations coursing through her.

"We were brought together, Elena. After what we've just shared, you still don't believe that?"

She swallowed hard. Her head still pounded, sending piercing stabs of pain behind her eyelids, though the ache was nowhere near as powerful or overwhelming as it had been when she'd ... what? Traveled through time? "I don't know what to believe."

She took a few steps closer to the shore, where the dark water lapped at the sand. The rhythmic sound of the small waves crashing against the shore calmed her frazzled thoughts, helped her focus on what her mind kept trying to tell her was impossible.

To his credit, Ramose didn't speak. She'd expected him to gloat, to say *I told you so*, but he stood quietly behind her, making no move to touch her.

Grateful for the space, Elena breathed deeply and closed her eyes. She could handle any stunt she'd set her mind to. This was no different. It was simply another challenge, another test she could use to prove she could handle anything. Swallowing hard, she struggled to make sense of the last day. "When I fell from my horse earlier," she said at last, her voice carrying through the night air, "I saw you. Did I come to Egypt then, too?"

He didn't answer. Unsure whether he'd heard her, she turned to find him sitting on the sand, his hands clasped around his knees, watching her. Even flaccid, his cock impressed her, nestled among a nest of dark curls. Her pussy throbbed with feminine recognition.

"I can't take credit for what you experienced earlier." He ran a hand over his head, then scrubbed his face. "Nor can I take credit for tonight."

"What do you mean? You brought me here. You've been trying to convince me to come with you since we met."

"That may be so, but I have nothing to do with you being here. Or with me coming home, for that matter."

She inhaled sharply, then released the breath in a fluttering sigh. "Are you telling me you didn't do this? You didn't bring us here?"

He shook his head. She sank to her knees in front of him, her gaze fixed on his eyes. He looked sincere, though that didn't fill her with the relief she'd hoped for. If he had nothing to do with this, then who did? And even more importantly, who could take her back home?

"I'm scared." Her voice trembled, and she squeezed her eyelids shut, fighting to keep the tears at bay. Time travel in movies and books was one thing. Being suddenly and unpleasantly hurled into the past was entirely different.

She didn't see him move toward her, but she felt his arms enveloping her, pulling her close to him. She stiffened for only a moment before giving in and leaning into his warmth. His broad chest welcomed her, molded to her. She fit perfectly against the sleek muscles and firm lines of his body. It felt like ...

*... coming home.*

That thought was much too disturbing to contemplate. Elena harshly pulled away from Ramose's embrace and stumbled to her feet. His hand darted out, and he grabbed her wrist as she turned away, keeping her rooted in place. "Where would you go?"

"I need to think." That was the understatement of the century. What she needed was to go home. She wanted to be in her own bed, wrapped up in her favorite blanket, falling asleep to some late show and whatever lame guest was on that night.

Ramose's fingers tightened on her wrist, his warm skin against hers summoning memories of sweet, hot passion. Her nipples tightened in response. She jerked out of his grasp, succeeding in breaking free this time, and took a few steps forward. It wasn't enough. She could still smell him. His scent burrowed between her legs, making her pussy clench.

"While you're thinking, I need to find you some clothes."

"Why? I'm not staying. I have to find a way to get home."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "And how do you plan to do that?"

"The same way I got here." Her voice faltered, dropped to a low whisper. "I don't belong here."

"You do now. At least until you do what you were brought here to do."

She shook her head and opened her mouth to protest, then closed it again. What if he was right? What if the only way she could get back home was to do whatever he needed her help with? As soon as that was done, perhaps whatever power had brought her here could also take her back.

*Right. And Dorothy only needed to tap her heels together three times to get home.*

Resolutely ignoring the voice in her head, she thrust her chin up and met Ramose's gaze, trying to calm her hammering heart. "Just what exactly is it that you need me to do?"

"I already told you. I need you to end Akhenaten's reign."

"What makes you think I can do that if you can't?"

His eyebrows furrowed. "I saw you. In one of the moving images, you spun through the air like the rules of the gods didn't apply to you. You twirled and flew toward your target, then tossed a dagger and hit the mark square in the heart."

Her stomach fluttered and dropped, along with her jaw. "What you *saw*," she said when she could trust her voice, "were some very good special effects."

"Special effects?" His lips pursed together, drawing her attention to his mouth. "I don't understand."

She waved her fingers in the air. "You know, tricks, fabrications. Stunts. That's what I do for a living. I make dangerous situations look good in the movies."

He shook his head, his frown deepening. "That's not possible. I saw you with my own eyes."

"Yeah, well, filmmakers are awfully good at what they do in the twenty-first century. Bet you couldn't even see the ropes attached to my waist."

Comprehension dawned upon his features, and with it, disappointment forced its way into her gut. She felt like she'd let him down, though that was absurd. Just because he didn't understand modern technology didn't mean she could let him believe she was able to defy the laws of gravity.

"It's not possible," he said firmly. "You are here for a reason. Hathor herself told me that you --"

"The *goddess* Hathor?" Elena interrupted. She hadn't meant her skepticism and dismay to come through so clearly in her tone, but neither could she hide it.

"The goddess is the reason I came to you. She sent me."

Elena shrugged, deciding it wasn't worth another argument. Besides, if time travel was possible, how much of a stretch would it be to believe in the power of an ancient Egyptian goddess?

She froze in midstride. Time travel opened up a myriad of possibilities. "Do you think it's feasible that we can control this sudden movement through time?"

Her abrupt change of subject seemed to startle Ramose. He glanced at her skeptically. "I doubt it. I couldn't even figure out how to get it to send me back home. Why?"

Her pulse quickened, excitement thrumming through her veins. "My brother could use my help."

"Is he in trouble?"

She bit her lower lip, unsure how much to disclose. She never talked about Sam to anyone. "You could say that. He's dead."

Faster than she could open her mouth to brush away his concern, he came up behind her and wrapped his strong arms around her waist. This time, leaning against him didn't seem so hard, and she was suddenly grateful for his presence.

"I lost someone, too, a long time ago," he whispered, his breath fanning her cheek.

"Family?"

"Not exactly. Eshe was ... she was my inspiration."

"Sam was mine."

An image of Sam sitting on their mother's porch flashed through her mind. He must have been about fourteen. She was seven. He'd come home with a variety of nasty-looking bruises from playing tackle football with his friends. At least, that's what he'd told their mother. Elena knew better. He'd returned from school every week for a year with new battle wounds, each earned because he stood up for some kid or another who couldn't, or wouldn't, stand up for himself.

She'd asked him once why he did it. He said it was because no one else would.

Her throat tightened as her brother's image faded from her thoughts. "Wouldn't you try to save Eshe if you could? Wouldn't you do everything you could to bring her back?"

Ramose tightened his grip around her waist. His erection pressed into her back, hard and insistent. She almost didn't make out the words he murmured against her neck. "I already have."

Elena twisted out of his grip. "Eshe. She was the woman in the courtyard."

He fisted his hands at his sides to keep from reaching out to her again. Since he'd met her, it seemed like all he ever wanted to do was touch her, taste her, ravish her. The throbbing in his cock intensified, making it hard to think straight. "What courtyard?" he murmured at last.

"When I fell from the horse earlier today, something happened. I had a ... dream, or a vision. I'm not sure which. You were there. And you called me Eshe." She tilted her head. He could barely make out her face in the darkness, but her blue eyes glittered with curiosity. "Why?"

He shrugged and turned away. "How should I know? Despite what you're telling me, I wasn't there this morning."

"No, it wasn't like that. I don't think what I saw actually took place this morning. But it did happen. Maybe even years ago." She moved to stand in front of him and trailed her fingertips over his cheek, his jaw. He clenched his teeth, fighting the heat thrumming through his veins, tightening his balls. "Yes, years ago," she continued. "You didn't carry the worries you do now. Life hadn't been so hard on you. Yet."

"You don't know me. And just because you look like Eshe doesn't mean --"

Elena's eyes widened. "I look like her? You mean, not just in the dream?"

He released an agitated breath. He hadn't meant to tell her. It would just result in more questions he didn't have the answers to. "A little," he grudgingly admitted.

She raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. "I don't believe you. Judging by your reaction, I think I look a *lot* like her."

"You have her small, upturned nose." He tapped the tip of her nose to punctuate his observation.

"What else?"

He brushed away a streak of dust coating her cheek. "Her high cheekbones. Her slightly pointed chin. Her full lips." He'd continued to touch all the places he mentioned, but when he came to her lips, she parted them, her tongue sweeping out over his finger.

He pulled back as though she'd burned him, but Elena only winked and grinned, twin dimples appearing in her cheeks. His heart stopped for a moment, then pounded hard against his ribcage. How had Hathor ever expected him to pull off this mission when she'd sent him such a distraction? He spent all his time in Elena's presence fully aware of the slightest move she made, his cock in a permanent, aching hard state. By Amun-Ra, would he be able to let her go when the time came to sneak her into the palace with only a dagger in her hand? Despite what she'd told him, he still believed she was the only one who could do this.

She had to. For the sake of all Egypt.

"I should be furious with you." Her melodious voice startled him, and he realized belatedly he'd been staring at her mouth. He glanced up to meet her steady gaze, but it didn't help the arousal setting his body on fire. Her blue eyes seemed to stare right into his heart.

He swallowed hard, stepping back to put some distance between them. "Why?"

"For not telling me how much I look like your dead girlfriend. For bringing me here."

"I already told you --"

She waved a hand in the air to silence him. "Yeah, yeah. You don't know how it happened. But you still should have told me about Eshe."



His gut constricted at the reminder. "There's nothing to tell." His voice sounded sullen even to his own ears, but he didn't care. He wouldn't talk about Eshe, especially not with someone who looked so much like her. Even after all these years, it was still much too hard.

Elena looked as though she might argue, but after a moment she shrugged, as if having decided the argument wasn't worth it. "Fine. So, what now?"

He straightened his spine, glad for the change of subject. His cock still throbbed at the sight of Elena's full breasts, her narrow waist, that yellow patch of curls between her thighs, but he hoped the need to fuck her again would lessen if they just concentrated on why they were here. "Now, we go to the palace. You have an appointment with the pharaoh."

Elena made a face. "I thought I already told you. I can't do what you want me to do."

"I don't believe that. Besides, right now, it's not important. You don't want to spend all your time in Egypt naked, do you? The sun's rays are merciless."

She tapped her foot, arms folded across her chest. "Fine. We'll go to the palace. But only for some clothes and maybe a bite of food. I'm starving. We're not murdering any pharaohs, you understand?"

"Whatever you say." He hoped she couldn't see him smirking in the dark shadows, but when she walked past him and slapped his shoulder with the back of her hand, he knew there was little chance she'd missed it. And still, he couldn't wipe the smile from his face.

They walked in silence for a while. Ramose let Elena take the lead, directing her with a soft-spoken word when she veered too far from the path that would take them to the palace. They made their way along the bank of the Nile, the constant gurgle and soft crash of the waves their only companion. No one traveled this path at night. The city of Akhet-Aten was still young, with no large port, heavily trafficked harbors, or boat crossings.

Ramose was grateful for the privacy. He didn't have to duck out of sight to avoid anyone who might recognize him, and he could watch Elena's round, firm ass sway as she walked. The perfect globes did nothing to soothe his raging erection.

"So, what are you, here, in this time?" Elena asked over her shoulder after a while. "A warrior? An assassin?"

Ramose chuckled. "A vizier."

She halted and turned. Ramose almost crashed into her. "You can't be serious."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you. I used to be a priest of Amun. But that was a long time ago."

"Why did you give it up?"

He scowled. "Akhenaten has forbidden the worship of all gods save one. He only believes in Aten."

She watched him for a long moment. "I'm sorry. That must have been very hard for you." She didn't wait for him to acknowledge her statement, but offered him a feeble smile and turned back toward the city.

Ramose could make out the palace walls in the distance now. The structure's tall spires depicted Aten's blessing over the sprawling site. Like everything else Akhenaten had built, the palace was an offering to the sun god, yet more proof that his god had to be worshiped alone, above all others.

Ramose also noticed there'd been some changes since he'd been gone. Workers had made progress in building the main city wall that would span the perimeter around the residential quarters. When Nefertiti had shoved him through the beam of light to meet Hathor, the palace walls had already been built, but Akhenaten had spent little time worrying about the safety of the villagers. Even through the night's dark shadows, Ramose could now clearly make out the statues highlighting the entrance to the city and the vivid depictions of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and the sun god marking the white marble. He frowned at the unsettled roiling in his stomach. How long had he been trapped in the portal?

Shaking his head, he offered his hand to Elena. After a moment's hesitation, she took it. "We must hurry," he said. "The workers will begin climbing out of their beds shortly, and we must be at the palace before that happens."

"You're afraid they'll take one look at me and want me for themselves?" She wiggled her hips provocatively, a gesture that sent a shuddering pulse to his cock.

"I'm afraid they'll take one look at *me* and have me executed."

If his words shocked her, she didn't show it. "I guess you're not exactly popular around these parts, are you?"

"Not anymore. I was, once."

"Was it worth it?"

He raised an eyebrow.

"Whatever you did to have them hate you so," she continued, "did it get you what you wanted?"

"No. That's why you're here."

They'd reached the west wall of the palace, and before Elena could question him further, Ramose dropped to his knees, pulling her down with him.

"What are we doing?" she whispered as Ramose parted the leaves of a henna shrub. Small pink flowers sprinkled the ground around them, and he ran his hands along the earth, scattering them.

"We're looking for a way in."

He found it at last, the latch in the marble, just where he remembered it. He felt for the small hole with his index finger and pulled. A section of the wall slid forward, revealing a gap just large enough for them to pass through. On the other side, he caught a glimpse of torchlight spilling over the flowers in the royal garden.

He gestured toward the opening. "You first."

“Does it bother you? Having to sneak into the palace you once lived in?”

“Not as much as you’d think. Now go.”

Elena shrugged, but did as he’d instructed. As she slid forward on her hands and knees, he got a perfect glimpse of her tight, round ass, the pink folds still slick with her arousal and his cum, the soft curls between her thighs. He wanted nothing more than to throw her down on the ground and fuck her senseless until she screamed his name. He dug his fingernails into his palms to keep from touching his throbbing cock.

He had to get her some clothes, something long and baggy that would cover her entire body, hide all her luscious curves. Maybe then she’d stop being such a distraction. Even as the thought flashed through his mind, he knew nothing short of sending her back to her own time would help with the longing flooding his groin.

“Are you coming?” Elena peered at him through the opening from the other side, her voice barely above a whisper. “There are people here.”

He nodded, intent on concentrating on their task rather than Elena’s gorgeous body and the night’s pleasures. There would be time enough to indulge later, after Akhenaten was dead.

“I’m coming,” he said, hoping he could keep from doing just that.

## Chapter Seven

Elena watched Ramose squeeze through the gap in the wall. Torchlight illuminated his shaved head and broad shoulders, his sleek, muscled chest and abdomen, his narrow hips. She held her breath as he rose, his fully erect cock jutting out from the nest of dark curls. A wave of feminine heat traveled through her body at the sight of him, making her knees buckle.

“Clothes,” she said, trying to assemble her thoughts into some logical order. “That should be our first priority.”

“Quiet!” He grabbed her wrist and pulled her down to her knees with him. She opened her mouth to protest, but he silenced her by placing the tips of his fingers against her lips. He scanned the area, concern furrowing his brows.

He pointed to her right, and they crawled on hands and knees through the cover of foliage. They were obviously in some sort of garden. She recognized a variety of colorful flowers, like narcissus and jasmine, but others were foreign to her. Still, the smell was intoxicating. Sweet and potent, it almost drowned out the masculine, musky scent of Ramose’s body. Almost.

Voices rose in the distance. No, not voices, Elena realized. Moans and breathy whispers, sounds of ecstasy. The erotic harmony imbued the already exotic air with a delicious sensuality, a need that traveled through her and settled low in her stomach, making her inner walls clench in anticipation.

Ramose pulled her forward, and they hid among a canopy of leaves. The groans and gasps of pleasure sounded closer now. Elena elbowed Ramose out of her way so she could see past him. From this vantage point, she could make out the blazing torches in elaborate golden holders, approximately five feet above the ground. Light flickered and wavered in the soft breeze, casting a golden glow over an empty throne.

Her gaze wandered over another bunch of exquisite flowers, a small fountain not unlike the one in her dream, and finally settled on a low bench where a woman reclined. A man knelt between her legs, kissing her cunt.

*Well, that explains the moans.*

Ramose pressed a finger to Elena's lips again, but she had no intention of calling out. These people would kill Ramose if they caught him; what would they do to her?

Elena couldn't make out their features entirely, but she could see enough of what they were doing for the tremor of arousal that had been plaguing her all day to intensify into full-blown lust. Need clawed at her, settling between her legs. Her folds felt heavy and much too sensitive. She shifted her legs beneath her, but quickly realized that was a mistake as her ankle brushed her slit, making her shiver.

She heard Ramose's breathing quicken; he, too, must be affected by the scene they were witnessing. Somehow, that was a small comfort. All he had to do was touch her, and she'd jump on top of him, right then and there, consequences be damned.

The man looked up and thrust two fingers inside the woman's cunt. "Come for me, beautiful." His voice was hoarse. His dark eyes shone with lust, and something else, an emotion so powerful that seeing it slammed into Elena's gut. She didn't know such love was possible, but there it was, clearly written on the man's face as he pleased his lover.

"Have you ever seen anything more breathtaking?" Elena asked, careful to keep her voice low.

Ramose made a sound between a chuckle and a growl. "Yes."

The woman leaned back on her elbows. She wore a loose, white garment that flowed around her, elegantly outlining the obvious swell of her pregnancy. Moonlight danced over her coppery skin, making it shimmer.

She looked so familiar ... the lines of her profile, the swell of her round breasts, and the long, lean lines of her naked thighs. Elena made a half-hearted attempt at searching her memory and came up empty. Obviously, she couldn't possibly know the woman. She lived three thousand years earlier, in a land Elena had never even seen before today.

Just like she'd never seen Ramose before today. And yet, he, too, seemed familiar.

She studied the woman's lover, then shook her head. She'd never seen him before, that much was certain, though the adoring way he looked at his companion made Elena's heart clench. Would anyone ever look at her that way? What would it feel like to have the adoration of a man like that? He was handsome, but there was something else about him. He exuded sensuality and power, his authority clear in the straight lines of his broad shoulders, the set of his jaw, the certainty and self-assurance clear in his gaze. Straight dark hair brushed wide shoulders, and his muscles flexed as he buried his head between the woman's thighs.

He lowered his mouth to her pussy one more time. His tongue swept over her folds, parting them, delving deep into her slit. She came with a cry, her passionate call piercing the night air, her back rising off the bench. He held on to her hips as she writhed with the force of her climax, and when it was over, he slid over her body to hold himself above her. The woman's large stomach should have made it difficult, but he effortlessly slid his cock within her folds. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him close, and they moved together in a sensual rhythm.

Elena's heart skipped a beat. *So that's what love looks like.*

She darted a quick glance at Ramose, expecting him to be just as riveted by the erotic display before them. He wasn't. Instead, his gaze was fixed on her, his dark eyes wide with arousal. He grabbed her wrist and brought her hand to his cock. She gripped his thick length, stroked him, then slid her fingers lower, cupping his balls and gently kneading them in her hand.

He rewarded her with a low groan. She stroked the tender tip of his glans, then followed the tracery of blue veins with the tips of her fingers to the drop of precum glistening at the top. When she smeared it over the swollen plum-sized head, Ramose jerked back, his jaw clenched tight, his fight for control clearly written on every taut muscle. She grinned, loving the way she could affect him as deeply as he affected her.

Lowering her head, she released his cock and slid her hands over his abdomen, feeling the tight ridges beneath her palms. He oozed erotic sensuality from every pore. Everything about him, from the depths of his dark gaze to the girth of his shaft, left her breathless with need. Just looking at him made a whimper clog her throat.

"Elena." He breathed her name rather than spoke it, and the sound drove her to slide the tip of his cock into her mouth. She could still taste herself on him. The knowledge pushed her forward, made her pussy cream as she took him further. His cock settled on her tongue, thick and heavy, nudging the back of her throat.

His climax hovered at the brink of exploding. She felt it in every tight pulse of his cock, heard it in every ragged breath. He gripped her hair in his hands, pushed her head lower until she enveloped his entire length. Her nails dug into his hips as she held on. When his rod jerked against her tongue and his seed finally began to pump, she swallowed every drop, milking him clean.

He came for a long time, his cum coating her throat with its sticky texture, flooding her senses with its salty taste. His cock pulsed and throbbed, releasing one final spurt before she let it slide out between her lips.

"You're incredible," he murmured.

She settled her head on his thigh. The soft curls surrounding his shaft tickled her nose, and his scent enveloped her, much stronger than the sweet aroma of the flowers surrounding them. She threaded her fingers through the thick patch of curls, caressing him. Past the foliage, she could make out the couple on the bench. They lay together, chests heaving,

obviously spent from their lovemaking. The woman lay on her side, her back pressed against her lover's chest. She faced the shrubbery where Ramose and Elena were hidden, and as recognition hit, Elena stifled a gasp.

"Nell. That's Nell Winters."

Ramose had been running his fingers through her hair, but he stilled his movements at the sound of her words. "I don't know who Nell Winters is, but I assure you, that woman isn't her. That's Nefertiti."

Elena's mouth gaped open. "*Queen* Nefertiti? That's impossible."

She felt Ramose shrug. "If that's not Nefertiti, then she's a demon of some sort. I saw her switch places with the real queen."

"You saw her ..." Elena shook her head and struggled to sit up, forcing herself to keep her voice down to a low whisper. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I. The gods work in mysterious ways."

"Gods?" Elena echoed. It seemed like she'd done nothing but try to make sense of things since she'd arrived. Would she *ever* understand?

Ramose stroked her cheek. "All you need to know is that you're here for a purpose. Hathor will send you home as soon as you've killed Akhenaten." He gestured toward the couple lying on the bench.

Elena's blood turned to ice. Dread flowed through her, cutting to the bone. "No. I won't do it. I'm not a murderer."

Before he could say anything else, she crouched low to the ground and darted through the bushes in the direction of the gap in the wall. It didn't matter that Ramose set her blood on fire, that he made her lust after him with a need she hadn't even known she was capable of experiencing.

There were limits to what she was willing to do for a man. For *any* man.

And murder was definitely outside those limits.

Ramose gritted his teeth and fought the urge to run after her. Where could she go? If he had no idea how he got her here, what chance would she have of finding her way back home, wherever that was, on her own?

Why couldn't she understand that Hathor had chosen her for a reason, just as she'd chosen Ramose? Being handpicked by the gods and appointed a task was nothing to scoff at, and it certainly wasn't an honor one turned down.

He heard Nefertiti murmur something to Akhenaten and crouched low to the ground, straining to make out their words. They'd spoken to one another earlier, but Ramose hadn't been able to understand a word they said. He thought at first they were too far away for their

words to carry clearly, but Elena had seemed to understand. Or did she only pretend, just like she'd pretended to fuck him in front of all those people?

A low, pounding throb settled behind his eyes. Ramose grimaced. This wasn't supposed to be so complicated. Hathor hadn't said anything about Elena being so sweet, so captivating, so ... seductive. And Amun, when she'd wrapped those luscious lips around his cock, he thought he'd die and meet the gods all over again.

There it was again. That guttural sound, like Nefertiti was speaking to Akhenaten in another tongue. And yet, it seemed somehow familiar, the soft lilt of the words caressing his mind like a half-remembered dream. Ramose concentrated on the words, absently drawing lines in the sand with his index finger. Was that the language he'd spoken to Elena when Hathor had sent him to meet her? Was that why it sounded familiar?

Akhenaten answered, his tone urgent now, louder. His words carried through the night air clearly, yet they still made no sense. Had Nefertiti taught Akhenaten her native tongue? Was she really the woman Ramose had seen depicted in all those images in Elena's time?

Too many questions floated through his mind, intensifying the pounding in his head. He peered through the foliage as Akhenaten extended his hand to Nefertiti. She took it gratefully, and he helped her rise from the bench, her swollen belly making her teeter precariously as she struggled to maintain her balance. Her self-deprecating laugh rang out, and she pointed to her stomach, wrinkling her nose in distaste. Akhenaten leaned forward and murmured in his wife's ear. Her face lit up with unmistakable joy. Together, they walked back toward the palace and the set of guards waiting, watching.

Ramose recoiled from the sight of the happy royal couple. A heavy weight had settled in his stomach. Bile rose in his throat, along with something that felt disturbingly like envy, which was impossible. Ramose didn't envy Akhenaten's position as pharaoh, or anything else he had.

*Not even the look in Nefertiti's eyes as she glanced at him?*

Ramose shook away the disturbing thought and turned around, careful to remain on his hands and knees. He'd lingered too long here. While he was certain Elena couldn't return home without him, she could have gone anywhere by now. Though her nudity might not garner more than a few curious glances if she walked through the streets of Akhet-Aten on her own, her startling blue eyes and that crop of golden hair would raise more than a few eyebrows. *Among other things.*

A pang of fierce possessiveness speared his chest, and he quickened his crawling pace toward the gap in the wall. He shoved his shoulders forward, scraping his skin against the marble's rough edges. The burning pain sent a shiver of awareness through his body, then quickly faded, leaving nothing more than an annoying stinging sensation in its wake. He glanced at the wound, but shadows obscured the edges of his vision. Something wet and sticky ran down his arm, and he wiped it away with the palm of his hand.



The sun would rise soon. Already, Ramose could make out the dawn of a new day, no more than a pink smudge on the horizon. He had to find her. Before someone else did.

After coming out the other side of the makeshift tunnel, he rose to his feet and cast a wary look around him. He saw no guards along the wall, but that didn't mean much. The men patrolling the perimeter made the rounds regularly. It would only be a matter of time until they came this way and found him standing here.

He had to get moving, but where? In which direction would she have gone? To his right, Akhet-Aten sprawled, lazy and welcoming. To his left, the Nile flowed like a dark silk ribbon, slicing through the night. After only a moment's hesitation, he turned left toward the river. That's where she'd arrived. It would only stand to reason that she'd try to return to the same place.

Nefertiti had. She'd gone back to those tombs more times than Ramose could remember. Was she, too, looking for a way home? Could it be that she was no more a demon than Elena?

He stumbled over his feet, the breath suddenly gone from his chest.

*Impossible. Nefertiti was sent here to destroy Egypt, to entrap Akhenaten, to seduce him into doing her bidding. That's why Hathor needs me. Needs us.*

He repeated those words like a mantra as he walked, scanning the desert's flat lines as he approached the riverbank. He couldn't afford even a sliver of self-doubt. His entire mission depended on his ability to convince Elena that what they were doing was the only way to rescue Egypt from a madman's rule.

Nefertiti *was* a demon.

Wasn't she?

He caught sight of Elena at last, her shapely figure silhouetted against the light-streaked sky. Her yellow hair shone, touched by the sun's early morning rays. For the second time that night, his breath left his lungs. If he didn't know better, he'd have thought she was no more than a flickering image, an illusion sent to tempt him away from his purpose.

She stood close to a tall palm tree, its wide leaves casting long shadows on the ground. Dawn broke over the horizon, sending a misty haze over the golden sand. The fog enveloped Elena, twirled around her feet, yet she remained standing, her attention rapt in the direction of the river.

Unease pricked his skin. He dropped to the ground, lying flat against the soft tufts of grass growing along the riverbank. He saw them then, a group of six guards, heading toward Elena. He murmured a curse low under his breath for not having noticed them sooner. Golden armbands in the shape of the sun god's symbol marked the men as part of the royal guard, all handpicked by the pharaoh himself. Their dark bodies glistened in the pale light, muscles corded as they gripped their weapons.

Ramose slithered forward until he came to the bark of another palm tree. He was close enough now to hear their ragged breathing, and he risked another glance through the grass.

One of the men said something to Elena, his gaze roaming freely over her body. Ramose gritted his teeth, forcing himself to remain on the ground. He had no weapon, and he was sorely outnumbered. Revealing himself would only get him captured, or worse. He didn't doubt the guards had orders to kill him on sight. Akhenaten considered him a traitor, a dangerous enemy. And with good reason.

Elena answered in that same melodious tongue he'd heard Nefertiti speak earlier. He frowned, expecting the guard to anger at her foreign words. Instead, the man's reply gave no indication of puzzlement or not having understood her.

Ramose swallowed hard. How was this possible? What language could Elena possibly speak that the guards could understand, yet Ramose couldn't? He'd heard the language of the slaves numerous times, but that was harsher, more guttural. Certain that wasn't the tongue they spoke, he bent his ear to the ground, straining once again to listen.

It was no use. After another exchange, the guard gripped Elena's arm and propelled her forward. He didn't use enough force to make her stumble, but he shoved her hard enough to make it clear she had no choice in the matter.

Elena held her head high as they escorted her toward the palace. Ramose flattened himself along the ground on his stomach, hoping the grass and the shadows would hide him from view.

It worked, at least as far as the guards were concerned, but Elena's gaze shifted and fell on him as she walked past his hiding place. He held his breath, certain she'd point him out to the guards, convinced it was all over. To his surprise and sheer bafflement, her lips remained pressed into a thin line, and it quickly became obvious she had no intention of calling out. Her startling blue eyes held no anger as she glanced at him, only fear and curiosity.

The guards marched on, and Ramose released a long sigh of relief. They had Elena, but that would only save him the trouble of getting her inside the palace himself. For now, the important thing was that they didn't know he was back. Yet.

## Chapter Eight

“Where did you say you found her?” Akhenaten asked as Elena shifted from foot to foot for the hundredth time. She’d been standing in the throne room for what felt like an eternity, but in reality couldn’t have been any longer than a few hours. The sun’s rays shone harshly through the tall gaps in the marble walls. She squinted against the brilliance, shielding her eyes with the back of her hand, and turned to stare at the throne.

“By the river bank, Pharaoh. Near the workers’ quarters.”

“That would explain her state of undress at the time, then. You say she was alone?”

“Yes, Pharaoh.”

Elena licked her dry lips and transferred her weight to her heels, hoping that might relieve the ache in her soles. They’d given her some clothes, a linen tunic and a wide belt made of twine. Peasant’s clothes, if the attire of the pharaoh and his queen were any indication, but better than walking around naked for everyone to gawk at. A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. Perhaps being on display for James hadn’t been such a bad thing. It had certainly increased her tolerance of total strangers leering at her body.

She only wished they’d let her sit. She’d tried squatting, but one of the guards had immediately yanked her up harshly by her arm, and she had the beginning of a nasty bruise to prove it. A short while later, she’d risked leaning against one of the large circular columns, only to be sharply prodded with the blunt end of a spear.

“Did she say where she was from? Her appearance is very unusual.”

*Maybe you should ask her.*

Elena rolled her eyes. She’d discovered she hated being treated as though she weren’t in the room, but the guards had talked about her as if she weren’t there since they’d taken her to the palace. To her surprise, she’d quickly realized she not only understood their language, but also spoke it flawlessly. She chalked the unexpected ability up to an unusual,

and not entirely unwelcome, side-effect of whatever time-travel portal Ramose had pulled her through.

Her language skills had done her little good, though. Her captors seemed more interested in speculating about her than addressing her directly. She'd even rehearsed an entire story she could tell them, if only they'd give her a chance to recite it.

"Her fair coloring and light hair are extremely unusual." Akhenaten leaned back in his golden, jewel-encrusted throne. A disk decorated with the rays of the sun shone almost blindingly from each armrest. The pharaoh reached for a cup, holding it out for a servant to fill with thick burgundy liquid from a long-necked jug. "What do you think?"

"She's certainly not Assyrian or Babylonian," Nefertiti replied. Her voice was low and husky, yet filled with a quiet confidence and authority Elena hadn't expected. "Elamite, you suppose?"

*What on earth is an Elamite?* Elena gnawed on her lower lip. Suddenly, her well-rehearsed story about being a Roman citizen didn't seem so wise. She wished she'd paid more attention in her ancient Egyptian history class. She remembered that Akhenaten had ruled around 1350 BC, but other important details escaped her. What else was going on in the world in the fourteenth century BC? Were the Romans even around? Had they been to Egypt?

Maybe not being called on to explain her background was a good thing. If only her luck would hold. She swayed forward, taking some of the pressure off her heels. Her bladder screamed in protest. She needed a long, relaxing bath, a warm bed, and a toilet. Who knew such little luxuries could mean so much?

"I've seen her before," Nefertiti murmured, rising from her throne.

A shiver of apprehension danced down Elena's spine as the queen circled her in a whirlwind of silk and heady perfume. Today, she wore another loose gown, this one less gauzy and ethereal than the one she'd been wearing the night before in the garden, but just as elegant and delicately tailored to highlight her swelling stomach.

She stopped to stand in front of Elena and tipped her chin up with her fingertips. "Yes. I know you, don't I?"

Elena's gaze slid around the room as she carefully avoided Nefertiti's eyes. She didn't want to offend by staring directly at the queen and risk another sharp prod from the guards' spears. Who knew what customs these people had, what odd beliefs about respect and courtesy? Still, she couldn't help but allow herself a quick glimpse, especially since Nefertiti stood close enough for Elena to feel her warm breath caress her cheek. Swallowing hard, she looked up at last into a pair of brilliant green eyes framed by long, thick black lashes and a flawlessly applied line of kohl.

Elena's mouth gaped open, her earlier suspicions confirmed. She knew it was impossible, but Nefertiti looked so familiar, so much like --

“Nell? Nell Winters?” In her surprise, Elena spoke much louder than she’d have liked.

The queen’s facial expression shifted from polite curiosity to shock, and finally to dismay. She dropped her hand to her side as though she’d been burned; then she spun on her heel and headed back toward her throne.

“Leave us!” Akhenaten bellowed to the startled guards. He’d bolted from his seat and met his wife halfway. Slipping his arm around her waist, he helped her up the few steps before she waved him away and collapsed onto her throne.

The guard who’d escorted Elena cleared his throat, obviously uncomfortable. “You want us to leave? All of us? But, Pharaoh --”

“I gave you an order, and I expect it to be followed. Stand by the doors if you must, but make sure you’re not within fifty paces of us. You understand?”

The guard nodded rapidly and turned around quickly, indicating to the rest of his men that they should do the same. Elena watched them take their positions on either side of the double-doors. Their expressions were inscrutable, but their dark eyes had narrowed to slits and their harsh glares remained fixed on her.

Elena trembled as she took a step forward. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to --”

“That’s close enough.” Akhenaten lifted a hand in the air, halting her in midstride. “Who are you, really?”

“You’re from ... home, aren’t you?” Nefertiti asked before Elena could reply. “Have you come looking for me?”

Elena shook her head and ran her fingers through her disheveled hair, dismayed to find her hand trembling. “No. At least, I don’t think so. I didn’t know you were here.” There. At least that much wasn’t a lie.

“You speak perfect Egyptian.”

“So do you,” Elena retorted.

Akhenaten laughed, the sound genuine and reassuring. “My wife is a fast learner.”

Nefertiti -- Nell -- jabbed Akhenaten’s arm playfully; then her eyes widened with sudden recognition. Curiosity poured from her in interested waves. “You were on one of the movie sets I worked on, weren’t you?”

Elena grinned, glad to be talking about something she understood. “Yes. My name is Elena Black. I was your stunt double in *SpinDrome*.”

Nell chuckled dryly. “I hated that movie, you know. I still can’t figure out why I agreed to do such a silly action flick.”

“Probably the same reason I took my clothes off in front of a dozen cameras. James Sanford is a brilliant director.”

“You took your clothes off for him?” Nell’s raised eyebrows asked a dozen silent questions.

"It's not what you think. Not exactly. He needed a body double for the actress who ... err ... who replaced you." She grimaced at the inelegant reminder of another actress taking the role of Cleopatra in Nell's stead, but Nell didn't react, so Elena continued. "I said no, at first, but Ramose is even more persuasive than James --"

Akhenaten jumped to his feet. "Ramose? You know him?"

Elena gritted her teeth and cursed under her breath. She'd known Ramose had been afraid of being caught, and obviously his assassination plot wouldn't make him too popular at court. She hadn't meant to mention his name at all, but as soon as an image of his hard, muscular body appeared unbidden in her mind, his name had rolled off her tongue. She nodded. They wouldn't have believed her if she'd lied, anyway, much as she might have wanted them to.

Akhenaten gestured to the guards, who rushed up and flanked her from behind. "Where is he?"

Elena stiffened her spine and thrust out her chin, meeting Akhenaten's angry gaze. "I don't know."

"Like hell you don't." Nefertiti tightened her grip on the throne's armrest and leaned forward, her green eyes blazing. "He put you up to this, didn't he?"

Akhenaten's lips flattened into a tight, thin line. "How is this possible? He disappeared when you pushed him through Aten's light, did he not?"

"I don't know *what* that was," Nefertiti retorted. "And neither do you."

"But Elena does, doesn't she?"

"No," Elena snapped, tired of being ignored while others debated around her. "I told you, I don't know where Ramose is. And I don't know how I got here, either. What you called 'Aten's light,' I call a magical time-travel portal." She waved a hand in the air, her frustration at being interrogated breaking through her previously calm demeanor. "Trust me; it sounds as absurd to me as it does to you."

"Somehow, I don't quite believe that. This is your last chance. Tell us where Ramose is, or suffer the consequences."

Elena's blood ran cold. As clichéd as the threat sounded, the pure tinge of authority in Akhenaten's voice left little doubt that he meant to carry out whatever punishment he deemed she deserved. "I. Don't. Know."

"Fine. Have it your way. I'm afraid a proper prison hasn't yet been built in Akhet-Aten, but a courtesy stay in one of the palace's confinement rooms should cure you of whatever misplaced loyalty you're currently feeling."

Before she could open her mouth to argue, the guards gripped Elena's arms and yanked her off the ground. "I have the perfect cell for you," one of them whispered in her ear.

Their massive bodies framed her as she hovered between them, held up only by their solid grasp. Tears burned her eyes and threatened to spill down her cheeks. She glanced at

Nell pleadingly, but the woman's worry-filled gaze remained fixed on Akhenaten. Removing her palm from her belly, she placed it over her husband's outstretched hand. Elena had just enough time to see Akhenaten return the reassuring squeeze before the guards hauled her from the throne room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days passed before Ramose had an opportunity to sneak into the palace undetected and look for Elena. Akhenaten had tripled the guards inside and outside the perimeter. The pharaoh's men kept vigilant watch, marching around the boundary of the walls, often in groups of three.

Elena must have told Akhenaten about him. Ramose had expected as much, yet the ache thrumming a constant rhythm in his chest wouldn't die down. Why couldn't she keep her mouth shut long enough for him to finish what he'd started? What *they'd* started.

He ground his teeth and pressed his back flat against a wall, pausing until a guard turned at the end of the hall and began patrolling in the opposite direction. Ramose had waited for nightfall before finally deciding he couldn't afford to hesitate any longer. If Elena had told the pharaoh about their plan to murder him, such an admission would surely have landed her in a prison cell, or worse. Traitors to the pharaoh were punished by death, as he well knew. Yet Elena wasn't a traitor. Not really. She wasn't Egyptian, and Akhenaten's rules shouldn't have applied to her. But here, in Akhet-Aten, all people were Akhenaten's subjects, and ignorance of his laws wouldn't save her. Besides, Ramose had a feeling that the intent to kill a leader wasn't lightly overlooked in any time period.

He risked a peek around the corner and breathed a sigh of relief. The corridor was empty, but wouldn't stay that way for long. He had to move quickly. Darting one last glance over his shoulder, he broke into a run, only stopping at the end of the long hall, where the corridor split off in two directions. The path to his right led straight into the throne room, a place Ramose wanted to avoid at all costs. To his left lay the inner courtyard, with its exotic flowers and warm pool for the royal couple's pleasure.

Footsteps sounded behind him, and he turned left, keeping to the shadows as much as possible. The palace was awash in light, illuminated every ten paces by burning torches, glittering from sconces high on the walls.

At the entrance to the courtyard, he hesitated, quickly scanning the area for guards. It was blissfully empty, save for two men standing on either side of a large window. That chamber, Ramose knew, was one reserved for visiting dignitaries from Egypt's neighboring nations, but as far as he'd been able to discern, there were no such visitors in Akhet-Aten. He frowned and dropped to the ground, crawling forward on his hands and knees until he reached the edge of the pool.

A fat yellow moon had crept up in the blue-black sky and now reflected in the deep waters, casting an eerie glow. Ramose caught a quick glimpse of his face, streaked with dirt

like the rest of his body. He'd managed to steal a worker's tunic the first night, but the garment hanging just to his knees now looked more brown than white. He'd spent more time crawling on his stomach than upright over the past two days, and even the quick dip in the Nile that morning hadn't done much to keep him clean for long, as he'd only been forced to sneak back into the palace through the gap in the wall.

A few more halting paces, and he stood close enough to the chamber to glance through the window without being seen. He'd moved quietly, and the guards hadn't stirred at his approach. A tall sycamore tree offered some protection from curious eyes, allowing him to stand without drawing attention to himself. Inside the room, torchlight spilled over rich yellow cushions, making them shine almost as bright as the woman splayed upon them.

Almost.

His heart thundered in his chest at the sight of Elena. She slept curled up on her side, pressed in against herself. Guilt washed over him. She looked small and frightened, coiled in a tight ball as though to protect herself from anyone who sought to harm her.

Like him? Ramose couldn't be sure what Elena thought of him. He'd brought her here, and then he'd let the pharaoh's guards capture her, without lifting a hand in her defense. She didn't look like she'd been mistreated -- in fact, quite the opposite, judging by her opulent surroundings -- but that could change at any moment.

Ramose abandoned his hiding place, murmuring a quick, thankful prayer to Hathor and Amun for the cover of night. He'd always felt more comfortable in the dark. Even when he was still Akhenaten's vizier, the shadows hid him as he moved through the palace undetected. Perhaps that's why he'd never been able to accept Akhenaten's Aten as the one true god. Any god who cast that much light on his subjects couldn't be trusted. Men and gods alike held secrets, and the deep, inky blackness of night welcomed those who wished to keep them.

One of the guards said something Ramose didn't understand. He'd spent enough time hearing people speak to realize he couldn't understand a word any of them said, but he'd decided not to dwell on that disturbing fact. There had to be a logical explanation for his inability to comprehend their words. Maybe they spoke another language? Perhaps Akhenaten had given new orders since he'd been gone? It was possible, though unlikely, that the pharaoh had been so paranoid about another attack that he'd decided his guards would need to speak in a tongue only they understood.

But what about the rest of the villagers of Akhet-Aten? The workers he'd encountered earlier had mumbled to one another in the same thick, foreign speech. And Elena? How was it possible she'd know this tongue?

Annoyed with himself for asking yet more questions he didn't have answers to, he inched forward again to lay beneath a marble bench. Through the window, he could still see Elena, curled up on the silky pallet. Lying on his back, Ramose was certain the guards



wouldn't be able to see him from where they stood, though anyone coming much closer would quickly be able to discern that the shape underneath the bench could only be a man.

Still, he had to risk it. He couldn't very well sneak into Elena's chamber, but he could watch from the courtyard for an opportunity to let her know he was close. For the moment, she looked unharmed. If things suddenly took a turn for the worse, at least he'd be close enough to --

*What? Leave her like you left her before?*

Sadness clogged his throat, thick and unfamiliar. He hadn't felt this way since Eshe ...

*Amun, that was too long ago.*

He didn't want to think about Eshe. Not now. Maybe not ever again.

Ramose stretched his sore muscles, trying to find a comfortable position on the hard ground. Not wanting to dwell on the uncomfortable position, he laid his head on his bent elbow and shifted a little, until he had a perfect view of Elena.

They'd given her some clothes, he was glad to notice, though the linen tunic she wore did nothing to hide the full swell of her breasts, her wide hips, her narrow waist. Everything about her beckoned him with feminine, luscious delights, and not for the first time he wondered if Hathor had placed her in his path to tempt him from his purpose.

He shifted his hand low over his stomach to grip his erect cock, sliding his palm over the sensitive tip. He pictured himself climbing through the window and kneeling beside the cushions, brushing his fingertips across Elena's lips. "What are you dreaming about tonight, love?" he murmured low under his breath. "Is there room for me in your thoughts?"

She stirred as though having heard him and rolled onto her back, her rhythmic breathing drawing his attention to her tempting breasts. Her nipples were tight, straining against her tunic. He yearned to rip the fabric away and feast his eyes on those perfect mounds, to nibble on those delectable erect peaks.

Her legs were parted, though from his hiding place beneath the bench he couldn't get so much as a peek at the pink lips of her luscious pussy or the perfect desert-colored fuzz covering her mound. He groaned and stroked his cock faster, feeling the climax begin to build low in his balls and spread with a rush of heat through his body.

Biting down on his lip to keep from moaning again, he forced himself to slow his movements before spilling his seed. He thrust his hips forward, his rod straining to reach Elena, though she might as well have been a world away. Her lips were parted in sleep, and Ramose imagined them wrapped around his needy, eager cock, laving him with her tongue.

He trembled, picturing her mouth sucking him, her tongue licking him, her fingers stroking him. He could almost feel the delicious sensation of her warm, wet mouth sliding up and down over his erection, nudging the tip of his cock, toying with his shaft. She'd take his whole length into her mouth, devour him as he thrust his rod between her lips, filling her the same way he'd filled her pussy.

He'd wrap his fingers in her hair and pull her close to his groin, and when she let her fingers slide over his balls, he'd come, spilling his seed down her throat. She'd take it all as she had before, every last drop, watching him all the while she swallowed every bead of cum dripping from his spent shaft.

Trembling, Ramose forced himself to pull his hand away from his throbbing cock. He didn't want to come like this, lying beneath a bench, watching Elena through a window. He wanted to feel the touch of her silky skin on his, wanted to hear her moan his name as he came.

Amun, why did she affect him this way? Why her, of all women in Egypt? Why the one woman he couldn't have?

Swallowing hard, he closed his eyes to block her image from his mind.

It made no difference. As soon as their task was over, she'd be swept up through the portal and out of his life forever.

Which was exactly how it needed to be. And just the way he wanted it.

## Chapter Nine

Elena woke with a start. She kept her eyes closed, drowning in the sound of silence. No cars honked, no one shouted from the street below her window, and even the incessant squeak of her upstairs neighbor's bed remained blissfully quiet. In fact, there were no sounds at all.

No, that wasn't entirely true. A bird's wings fluttered, accompanied by a low call. Somewhere nearby, water lapped against the edges of a riverbank -- or a pool. And even closer, the swish of fabric pricked the edges of her awareness.

She looked up and gazed into dark eyes. Startled, she sat up, self-consciously crossing her arms over her chest, and drew her feet up underneath her. A young woman, no more than eighteen or so, watched her with as much curiosity as Elena felt.

"Is it true?" the girl whispered, her voice barely audible even in the deafening quiet. "Are you really from Nefertiti's birthplace?"

Elena licked her dry lips. "That's the way I understand it. Who are you?"

"I'm ... Muet. Nefertiti's sister."

"Her sister?" Alarm bells rang in Elena's head. It was clear that Akhenaten had known about Nell's strange past, but did Muet? She hadn't seemed surprised by Elena's revelation about sharing a birthplace with the queen, and if she was indeed Nefertiti's sister, didn't that mean they should have shared a birthplace, as well? Muet clearly wasn't from the twenty-first century, though at first glance, Elena wouldn't have thought Nefertiti a starlet from L.A., either.

"Nefertiti doesn't speak much of her time away from us. I thought maybe you could tell me more."

"But you do know ..." She struggled to come up with a delicate way to divulge the information without giving anything away. "That she's not from around here?"

Muet lowered her gaze. Thick lashes hid her dark eyes as firelight played upon her face. "She's told me a little. Mostly about how she came to us, but not much of her life before that."

"Okay, well, I suppose I can fill in some of the blanks for you. What would you like to know?"

"Was she a queen? In your world?"

Elena laughed. "She was certainly treated like royalty. Men unfolded red carpets whenever she showed up, and she was never without a limousine."

Muet's eyebrows rose. "What is a limousine?"

"Ah ... it's like ... a carriage. You have those here, right?"

Muet nodded.

"Good," Elena continued. "It's like that, only if you can imagine the most prestigious carriage. Heads turn when it glides by."

"Like a chariot," Muet supplied.

"Yes, like that. Anyway, Nell was never in short supply of those. At parties, she was often the guest of honor, especially after she won the Oscar."

Muet's eyes widened. "There is so much I do not understand. Nell -- that is what they called Nefertiti in your world?"

"Nell Winters, to be specific. Utter her name in any household from New York to Guatemala, and you're likely to see people's faces light up. She wasn't your typical Hollywood actress. She was kind, friendly, and generous with her time. Even the paparazzi liked her."

"Wait, you go too fast. New York, Guatemala, Oscar, paparazzi ... what are these places?"

Elena blew out a long breath and patted the gold cushion beside her. "Sit with me. This may take a while."

Servants had brought plates of fruits and nuts while Elena slept, and the women dined on the flavorful snacks as Elena explained some of the details of modern life. Muet listened intently, interrupting only to ask a question when Elena used a term she didn't understand.

"And what of you?" Muet reclined on her side, her elbow beneath her head. "Were you royalty, as well?"

"Not quite. Think of me more like a useful servant. I performed some of the more difficult, dangerous tasks for women like Nell. And on occasion, I performed other duties the actresses themselves didn't want to do." She wrinkled her nose, thinking of her last body-double scene. If not for Ramose, she would have never agreed to that.

Muet gathered some of the material of her floor-length white garment and tucked it between her knees, shifting on her cushion. "Were you forced to do these things?"

"Forced? No. It was my job. I enjoyed it, for the most part. The extreme stunts, in particular, really got the adrenaline going."

"What kind of stunts?"

"The usual. Car chases, explosions, rock climbing, jumping from airplanes, pretending to drown, that sort of thing."

"Why would you do these things? For pleasure?"

"Of a sort, yes." She popped a date into her mouth, chewing slowly as she tried to think of a way to explain the natural high she got after a stunt had come off without a hitch.

"Haven't you ever done anything you knew was dangerous, even risky, just to see if you could do it?"

Muet shook her head. "I don't think so."

Elena sighed. "Well, that's the difference, I suppose. Some people have the need for adventure. It's in their blood, I think. Maybe it's genetics. My brother, Sam, loved it, too."

"Is your brother a servant like you?"

Elena grasped her lower lip between her teeth, fighting the sting behind her eyes. "Not quite. My brother is dead. If he would have lived, he probably would have been a cop like our father. A ... guard of sorts," she explained when Muet pursed her lips.

"Your brother is with the gods now. That is, he's with the one true god. Aten," she said quickly, her gaze darting around the room as though afraid she might have been overheard.

"Relax." Elena placed her hand over Muet's. "Akhenaten's not here. And I won't tell him."

Muet swallowed hard and turned her palm up to grip Elena's hand. "His guards are right outside your window."

Elena half-rose, craning her neck to look out into the garden. She couldn't see anyone outside now, but that didn't mean they weren't there. "Which brings up a good question. Why am I here, and not in one of the cells the guards promised me?"

"Nefertiti's orders. She wanted you safe, though she doesn't trust you."

"Because of Ramose." It wasn't a question.

"Yes," Muet murmured, once again averting her gaze. "He tried to kill Nefertiti and her child."

Elena blew out a long breath. Could it be true? Was Ramose the monster these people made him out to be? She didn't want to believe it, yet how could a man who'd tried to kill a pregnant woman be anything but? Did it matter that his motives were pure, that he believed Nell -- Nefertiti -- to be a demon, and he'd acted on behalf of all Egypt? Elena thought so, but then again, she hadn't been the one to deal with the threat to herself and her baby. If she'd been in Nefertiti's shoes, she'd have reacted the same way.

"I'm not in league with Ramose. Not really," she added when Muet raised a questioning eyebrow. "Yes, he brought me here, but I don't intend to do anything to harm Nefertiti. Or Akhenaten. You must believe me."

Muet rose from the cushions. Elena held her breath. She wasn't certain why Muet's approval meant so much, but it did. She wanted the girl to trust her. Strange as it sounded even to her, spending a few hours in Muet's company had made her think of the girl as a friend. One of the few in this far-away land.

"I do," Muet said at last. She glanced over her shoulder while striding to the door. "But it'll take more than words to convince Akhenaten, or my sister. Good luck to you. I'm not sure we'll meet again."

Muet disappeared into the hallway in a mist of white cloth, pulling the door closed behind her. There were more guards outside, Elena knew. She collapsed back against the cushion, her thoughts drifting in a myriad of directions. If she couldn't convince Akhenaten of her intentions through words alone, what would it take to prove she meant him no harm?

She couldn't. Not without Ramose to tell them she'd blatantly refused to go along with his plan, and that wasn't likely to happen. Which meant she had to take matters into her own hands. Nefertiti and Akhenaten were likely to keep her here for weeks, perhaps even longer, while they considered how much of a threat she posed. She couldn't let that happen. Being dragged into the past against her will was one thing, but it didn't mean she had to sit idly while others decided her fate for her.

Her feet made no sound as they slid onto the marble floor and she crossed the distance to the window. She paused, trailing her fingertips over a tall, thin, exquisitely sculpted clay vase. If talking wouldn't get her anywhere, perhaps action would.

"You, there," she called to the guard standing to the right of the window.

He glanced up, his eyes narrowing. "What is it?"

Elena inhaled deeply, breathing in the scent of the jasmine-filled night air while gathering her courage. The garden was still. Without a breath of wind to stir the flowers, it looked like something out of an ancient painting. A fantasy courtyard beneath a cloudless, inky-black sky.

"I thought perhaps you might be getting tired of standing there. Or bored. I can help with both."

The guard's features darkened, his scowl even more pronounced. "Your tricks will not work on me. I have orders from the pharaoh himself. You are not to leave your room."

"Who's talking about leaving?" she asked in what she hoped was her sweetest voice. "I don't want to go anywhere. In fact, I want to invite you in. I'm getting lonely, too. Maybe we can entertain each other."

The other guard chuckled. "What could it hurt, Jarha? I'll stand watch out here. She is beautiful."

Elena smiled at the compliment, though her insides twisted in knots. Could she really go through with this? Pretending to fuck had been difficult enough on a movie set, but actually performing the act with a complete stranger, pretending to be interested in him, was an entirely different scenario. Still, she wasn't sure she could take on two guards with her bare hands, even though she'd trained with a martial artist for one of her stunt roles. One man, she might have a chance against.

She'd distract the guard, then use the vase to incapacitate him. It felt solid enough to stun a man, if not knock him unconscious outright. If her plan worked, his friend wouldn't even question the strange noises coming from inside the room until the last moment. Then perhaps she could take the remaining guard by surprise and overcome him.

It was a long shot, but it was the best plan she had.

Jarha's eyes darkened with lust, and his mouth turned up into a leer. Elena fought back a shudder and stepped away from the window, letting him climb through.

"So, just what exactly is it you want to do for me?"

She needed to get him to turn his back to her, if only for a moment. She pointed to the cushions. "Anything you ask. Why don't you lie down?"

"No. If you're really willing to entertain me, then I want you on your knees with your mouth clamped around my cock. Now."

Elena hesitated, her pulse pounding. This had been a mistake, and now it was obviously much too late to ask him to leave the room. Any indication that she hadn't been sincere in her earlier offer would only heighten his suspicions.

"Fine. We'll start with this." She dropped to her knees and trailed her palms up the guard's thighs. Coarse hair tickled her skin. He shuddered when she cupped his balls, his erection tenting his loincloth, hard and insistent beneath the thin garment.

"It's been too long since a woman's lips welcomed my rod. Are you as good as you look?"

*As good as I look?* Was that a compliment, or was he calling her a whore? She stifled the panic clogging her throat. Considering what she was about to do, was there a difference?

She forced a smile onto her face and lifted his loincloth, baring his dick. Thin but surprisingly long, it stuck out from a nest of dark curls, its tip glistening wetly in the dim torchlight. Blue veins marred the dark skin, ending just beneath the mushroom head.

Elena's tongue darted out and touched his cock. He tasted like sweat, and she fought back a shiver of revulsion. The vase was within grasp, but she couldn't use it without drawing too much attention to herself. One wrong move, and the man would shout for his friend. Whatever chance she might have had would be gone in a flash. No. she had to do this his way.

*Show time.*

Elena closed her eyes and took him in her mouth.

Ramose's fingernails dug into his palms as he clenched his hands into fists to keep from instinctively gripping his hardened rod. Still lying beneath the bench, he watched as Elena's red lips wrapped around the guard's shaft. The man's fingers tangled in her hair and pressed her head close to his groin. His hips thrust out grotesquely as he worked his cock deeper into her mouth.

Bile rose in the back of Ramose's throat, and he grimaced. What game was she playing? He'd only left her alone for a night. Was that all it took for her to offer herself to any man who crossed her path? He didn't know nearly enough about her time, or her world, to understand why she'd almost made love to him in front of all those people, but this was different. She wasn't playing with this man, pretending to lavish him with attention. His cock thrust in and out of her mouth, and she gripped his thighs to steady his motions, her eyes squeezed closed. With pleasure? He couldn't tell from this distance.

*Why her, Hathor?*

He'd asked the same question a hundred times in the last couple of days. Did Hathor mean to punish him for what happened to Eshe? It was his fault she'd died, but he thought he'd come to terms with that. Obviously, the gods hadn't. Well, he didn't need the reminder. He might have accepted what happened all those years ago, but he'd never forgiven himself.

And he wasn't about to lose Elena now.

Murmuring a quick, frustrated prayer to whatever god happened to be listening, he slid from underneath the marble bench and rose to his full height. He had to get her out of there. He hoped she'd come willingly, but if she didn't, he'd carry her out of the royal palace bound, gagged, and tossed over his shoulder if he had to.

The remaining guard stood perhaps ten steps away. His eyes widened when he caught sight of Ramose, and he brought his spear up into a defensive position. He opened his mouth, perhaps to warn his friend, but he never got the chance.

Ramose lunged for him, pouring all the anger thrumming through his veins into a single blow. He slammed his elbow into the man's throat with enough force to drive him back into the wall. The guard's cry came out as no more than a hoarse croak.

Elena's muffled cry echoed from inside the room, followed by a crash, like the sound of pottery breaking. Ramose reacted without a second thought. He drove his fist into the guard's gut, driving the man to his knees. The guard clutched his stomach with one hand while the other gripped his throat. One last blow to his head ensured he wouldn't be alerting anyone else.

Ramose scanned the courtyard quickly, reassuring himself the fight hadn't alerted any other guards who might have been in the vicinity. Then he lunged for the window. Gripping the windowsill, he lifted his knee over the low barrier, intent on rushing in to rescue Elena from the mess she'd gotten herself into.



A slender hand on his arm stopped his advance. "What took you so long?"

Annoyance flashed through him, lightning-quick, to merge with the anger and frustration already there. "I had a bit of trouble with the guards," he said, keeping his voice low. By the gods' grace, the men Akhenaten had surely stationed outside Elena's door obviously had not heard the commotion. However, he wasn't about to press his luck by giving in to the desire to shout his displeasure. "If you hadn't noticed, they're swarming the perimeter, thanks to you."

"You think this was my doing?" She took a step back, giving him enough room to climb into the chamber. The guard she'd been pleasuring only minutes earlier now slumped against a wall, a wide gash in his forehead oozing a thick trail of blood down his cheek. Broken shards of dark clay lay scattered around him. "I'm not the one with the crazy plan to assassinate the pharaoh."

Ramose scowled and crossed his arms over his chest. "And I suppose you told them all about that, didn't you?"

"As a matter of fact, no."

"But you did tell them I was here."

She lifted her chin and stared at him, her blue eyes flashing in the dim torchlight. "Oh, I'm sorry." Sarcasm dripped from her honeyed voice. "Was that supposed to be a secret?"

Ramose threw his hands up. "You are the most infuriating woman I've ever met. Don't you ever do what you're told? If you hadn't run away from me, this might have all been over by now."

She prodded him in the chest with a slender finger, and her touch sent a shiver of pleasure down his spine. She frowned. "If I hadn't run away, you'd have insisted I go through with this insane plan of yours."

Ramose clenched his teeth against the heat her presence ignited and tried to focus on the fact that he'd had just about all he could take of her uncooperative attitude. Either she was here to help him, or she could go back to whatever time period he'd found her in. "We're getting out of here."

"No shit, Sherlock. Do you think I like being held prisoner?"

"My name is Ramose. Or have you forgotten in your fervor to suck the cock of every man in the palace?"

Her lips thinned into a straight line. "Listen here, you arrogant son of a bitch. I wouldn't be in this situation if it weren't for you. I was simply doing what I could to try to escape."

Ramose snorted. "I see that. By fucking everything that moved, you figured you'd ... what? Find yourself an ally who could help get you out of the palace undetected?"

She spun around, grabbed a cushion, and threw it at him. Ramose ducked just in time, and the missile flew over his head, missing him entirely.

"Don't be absurd," she said. "For your information, I thought to distract the guard long enough to knock him out cold." She smirked. "A plan that, in case you didn't notice, worked quite well."

He moved forward, stalking her. For every step she took back, he moved closer, his gaze never leaving hers. "I could be wrong, but the distraction was *my* doing. Your lover here probably reacted when he heard the commotion outside. Did you really expect to hit him over the head with something while *kneeling* before him, his hands fisted in your hair?"

She opened her mouth as if to argue, then closed it. The flash of anger in her brilliant sapphire gaze dimmed, then faded altogether as she glanced out over his shoulder at the courtyard and the wall beyond. "I ... I guess I didn't think it through properly," she murmured. "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

He reached out to grab her arm, intending to pull her forward toward the window, but desire shot through him as his skin brushed against hers, sending a pulse of heat straight to his groin. He didn't bother masking the groan that escaped his lips. Her eyes widened in surprise, then darkened with unmistakable passion. "Ramose ..."

He drew his thumb over her mouth. "Enough arguing. Enough talking." He pulled her close, molding his hard body against her soft curves, marveling at how perfectly she fit against him. "Enough of everything -- but this."

He crushed her mouth with his, slipping his tongue between her lips. She responded instantly, thrusting her tongue against his, and the kiss took on a rhythm of its own. Sensual and primal, what started out as an overwhelming need, burning inside Ramose's veins like molten lava, slowly built into something even more powerful, leaving his raging erection throbbing against her belly.

When he finally broke away, Elena pulled the dirty tunic over his head. "You couldn't find better clothes?"

"Didn't look very hard," he admitted, tugging on the knotted belt keeping her garment gathered at her waist.

Elena glanced at the door. "What about the guards?"

"Now you're concerned about the guards? After all the risks you've taken?"

She pursed her lips and trailed her fingertips through his chest hair, stopping to tweak a nipple. "It seems we're both good at taking risks. It'll be the death of us, I'll wager."

Gracefully, she dropped to her knees before him. An image of her mouth around the guard's cock entered his mind unbidden, and he inhaled sharply between clenched teeth. Gripping her arm, he yanked her to her feet. "Why couldn't you wait for me?"

She blinked as though trying to make sense of his words. "You're jealous."

He growled, shoving her back against the cushions. Her teeth embedded in her lower lip, drawing blood as she landed hard, partly on the fluffy mound, partly on the marble floor,

but she didn't cry out. He expected to see fear in her gaze, but she watched him defiantly, as though daring him to strike her.

That she'd even think he'd ever hurt her upped his anger to full-fledged fury. He lunged on top of her, pinning her down with his body weight. With one hand he gripped her wrists, holding them above her head, while with his other hand he lifted her tunic, baring her cunt, belly, and full breasts. Her puffy nipples hardened beneath the weight of his stare, and she panted, her chest heaving with exertion. "What do you think you're doing?"

He didn't answer. Moisture had gathered between her thighs, smearing his skin. Was the arousal for him, or had it been there all along, caused by the guard's cock spearing her throat? The fact that he couldn't tell drove him to the brink of madness.

"Is this what you wanted?" he asked, nudging her legs open with his knee.

"What do you want me to say? That I want to be fucked? Fine. I do. But not by him." She gestured with her chin in the direction of the fallen guard. "By you."

Ramose's pulse quickened, throbbing in his temples. He thrust forward, shoving the tip of his cock into her tight channel, then stopping when she thrust her hips up to meet him halfway. "Beg me for it."

A muscle worked in her jaw. Her eyes narrowed, and she looked as angry as he felt.

"Never," she said.

"Really?" He held her down as she tried to squirm away, his cock still prodding her pussy. It took all his self-control to keep from slamming the length of his rod inside her, but he needed to know she spoke the truth.

"How arrogant can you get?" She wriggled beneath him, but her efforts only managed to allow his cock to slide a little further inside her hot, moist passage.

Lowering his mouth to her earlobe, he pressed the full length of his body against her curves. "Beg. Me."

"No."

His teeth grazed her throat, eliciting a shudder. She arched her back, sending his shaft a little deeper. He swallowed hard, fighting the ache in his balls that had him wanting to plunge into her, again and again and again, until she screamed his name loud enough to bring the entire palace down on them.

Her inner muscles clenched and unclenched around the tip of his cock, squeezing him rhythmically even against her will. Her breath came in harsh, ragged gasps, proof she wasn't as immune to him as she wanted him to think.

"One little word, and this is all over."

She moaned, her voice sending a shudder down his spine. He didn't know how much longer he could keep this up, but she obviously had enough stamina to keep the game going all night. "You're an ass."

“Maybe. But you love me anyway.”

*Where did that come from?*

“Love?” The word came out as a gasp. “Who said anything about --”

He thrust into her, the diversion forgotten. His cock ached with unfulfilled desire, as did every muscle in his body. He wanted her -- no, *needed* her -- and the realization stole the breath from his lungs. She didn’t have to beg him for anything. It was he who should have begged her ... begged her to come with him, to fuck him, to rescue him.

His thoughts came together in a jumbled mess as their bodies slammed hard against each other. Her pussy milked him, inner walls clenching tightly around his cock. He couldn’t think anymore, couldn’t even breathe. She drowned him in the scent of her arousal, the heat of her body, the press of her hard little nipples against his chest.

And despite the danger, in that moment, as the torchlight glowed and flickered around them, she became his whole world.

## Chapter Ten

Though Ramose cradled her in his arms as he thrust inside her, Elena knew she floated in midair, propelling toward the bottom of an endless shaft. She cried out, partly from fear and partly from the tension coiled inside her, pressing for an explosive release.

Cool air rushed around them, yet Ramose remained oblivious to the shift in their surroundings, his features contorted with the heat of passion, his breath hot against her lips.

“Mmm ...” Whatever Elena had meant to say escaped her lips as a ragged sigh. If she was falling to her death, this was how she wanted to go, fucked senseless by a man who could rob her of every coherent thought with his mere presence.

Orange torch flame leaped up and licked their sweaty bodies, sending a rush of heat melding with the stream of cold air. She recoiled briefly from the touch of fire, expecting to be singed, but the warmth was pleasant, encasing her in a cocoon where her every sense was attuned to ... Ramose.

His body called to her on a primal level, and she gave up trying to understand what was happening to them. The sweat and arousal coating their bodies mixed with the slight scent of smoke in the air to produce a heady mixture. Its aroma enveloped her, traveling through her slightly parted lips to coat her throat until the only thing she breathed was their sex. With the strange odor came the ability to focus on minute details of their joining. She became intensely aware of Ramose’s cock filling her pussy to its absolute depth, stretching her eager cunt while she tightened her muscles, gripping him, driving him to the edge.

His lips brushed her neck, zinging a shot of arousal down into the pit of her stomach while the tip of his tongue snaked out and darted over her skin. He plunged inside her, again and again, his motions rough and demanding.

She hovered on the edge of release. Digging her fingernails into his flesh, she dragged them down his back, arching her spine until she took him as far as she could inside her, until

she thought her cunt would split from the invasion of his swelling cock. And still she wanted more. Always more.

"Elena." Her name on his lips drove her over the edge. The release she'd been craving built into an impending, unyielding pressure, and all her muscles clenched at once as the orgasm ravaged her body. She felt Ramose tense on top of her, tightening his hold around her, pressing her body to him as though he meant to absorb her into him until she could no longer tell where she ended and he began.

The blinding pain behind her eyes struck at once, violent and uncontrollable, irrepressible. She screamed, and her vision darkened, the agonizing torment blending with the sweet release to torture her until her throat clogged with tears she couldn't shed.

The ache dimmed as quickly as it appeared, leaving her breathless and disoriented. Sweltering heat enveloped her along with a new scent, cloying and intoxicating. It gagged her, and she struggled to breathe.

Above her, Ramose grunted. She'd felt his climax and knew he must be as disoriented as she was. They'd stopped falling, she realized with a start. Something dug into her back, and her skin scraped along ... pavement?

The chamber was gone. The burst of hot air she'd felt only moments ago came from her right, along with a loud mechanical whirr. She turned her head and looked into a vent. It spat wafts of steaming vapor in thick, billowing clouds, and the odor that had seemed so familiar earlier finally had a name.

*Laundry detergent.*

The street noises of L.A. slammed into her with vicious force, and she struggled to make sense of them. Cars honked, people yelled at one another, a dog barked in the distance, someone kicked over a garbage can, and somewhere close -- too close -- footsteps rang against the pavement.

"Ramose," she whispered, trying to keep her voice low. She couldn't see anyone in the dark shadows of the back alley behind the Laundromat, but that didn't mean they were alone. And while Elena was sure there must have been worst situations to be in than finding herself naked in a Los Angeles alleyway, just now she couldn't think of any.

"Ramose!" Her whisper took on a frantic edge. "You need to get off me."

"Never," he murmured. He bent his head and raked his teeth across her earlobe, eliciting a shiver from her despite the situation they found themselves in. "You're mine. Hathor brought you to me. Only she can take you away."

He moved inside her, his cock stirring into hardness. If she hadn't been so concerned about their immediate surroundings, she would have been impressed with his stamina. But this was definitely not the time to compliment his many sexual talents.

Elena wriggled beneath him, trying to get free, but he only thrust into her harder. Each move drove the tip of his cock deeper into her pussy, and she bit her lip to keep from crying

out. Heat pooled in her belly, then traveled lower to send another gushing stream of liquid to her pussy. She groaned, trying to keep a clear head, fighting to peer over Ramose's shoulder to see if anyone was approaching. Had the footsteps faded away? She couldn't tell. All other sounds were muffled now, obscured by Ramose's panting breaths and his low, lust-filled grunts.

"Mine," he repeated, as though the word held magic only he understood. He released his tight grip and moved his palms over her breasts, kneading them in his hands with soft, circular movements. His eyes remained closed, his head tossed back in ecstasy. "Mine."

She knew she should stop him. If anyone came across them like this, getting arrested for lewd behavior or public mischief would be the least of their worries. Yet she couldn't bring herself to shove him off her.

Her clit throbbed, pounding with each thrust, the hard nub brushing against Ramose's pubic bone. His cock speared her, again and again. Elena's body tensed for a moment before she lost herself to the flood of sensation coursing through her, giving in to another explosive release.

"Hey! You, there! What do you think you're --"

Ramose's cock twitched inside her clamped inner walls, and he released his seed with a bellowing cry. Elena struggled to open her eyes, not remembering having closed them, but the pain took over, piercing her temples to expand into a pounding, throbbing mass of pure agony. She thought she caught a glimpse of a flash of white light, but couldn't be certain. The world spun, taking her with it on a whirlwind ride she was powerless to stop.

As before, the pain and the disorienting sensation melted away in a sudden sweep of heightened awareness, and Elena found herself back in the marble-paneled chamber she'd become so familiar with over the past two days.

Ramose rolled off her. Rivulets of sweat ran down his face, making his coppery skin glisten in the firelight. His taut, dark nipples beaded into erect points among the slight fuzz covering his chest, and Elena fought back the urge to run her hands through the curly hairs, to tweak a nipple between her thumb and forefinger.

Elena tore her gaze away from Ramose and stared at the ceiling, shaking off her stunned disbelief. Had they truly traveled back to L.A.? Or had their lovemaking made her imagine all kinds of impossible things?

"What do you mean, she's not here?" The deep male voice shocked Elena out of her thoughts and back to her surroundings. She began to rise, but Ramose placed a finger against her lips, silencing her and keeping her low to the ground.

A quick glance around told Elena they weren't on the same cushions where they'd begun earlier. A screen, decorated with what looked like a funeral procession or a wedding march, hid them from view. She remembered it from when she'd been brought to the chamber. She'd admired the way it stood off in a corner, meant to provide a sliver of privacy for anyone wishing to dress without the intrusion of prying eyes. Unfortunately, though the

screen supplied a decent hiding spot for her and Ramose, it also kept her from seeing who'd spoken. She didn't recognize the voice, but Ramose apparently did as he stiffened and rose on an elbow, his finger still pressed to her lips.

"What shall we tell the pharaoh?" Another voice, also male, this one quivering with uncertainty while the first had rung with authority.

"With any luck, the pharaoh won't be around much longer to hear whatever lie you manage to come up with."

"That's Djal, leader of Akhenaten's royal guard." Akhenaten murmured in her ear. Elena's heart hammered against her chest, and it was her turn to press her fingertips against Ramose's lips. No matter how quiet he tried to be, the men were much too close. He seemed to understand and dropped his own hand from Elena's mouth, his brows turned downward in a look of sheer frustration.

"Are you sure we should be discussing this here?" the nervous man asked, his voice trembling.

"Where else? Akhenaten has spies everywhere, though I know most of them, and they're loyal to our cause."

"But still, what you're proposing ... it's ... it's ..."

"Blasphemous?" Djal supplied. "To murder the representative of the gods? Perhaps if it were any other pharaoh, I'd have agreed with you. But Akhenaten doesn't follow the gods. He doesn't believe in them. And his own symbol of religious power is weak. The people still haven't accepted Aten as their god. Perhaps they never will." He paused, his footsteps sounding closer.

Elena lay flat on the floor and grabbed Ramose's shoulders, bringing him down with her, hoping that if any shadows were to be seen through the silken screen, Djal wouldn't notice them so close to the ground.

"But what of the people of Egypt? They won't accept --"

"The people of Egypt are stupid, mindless creatures." A sneer crept into Djal's voice. "Like you. They require leadership, and they'll accept whatever they're told. Especially when I take the throne and show them how a real pharaoh behaves. A leader should be strong and powerful. Above all, he should earn the respect of his people. By force, if need be."

The second man gulped, the sound ringing out clearly through the otherwise silent chamber. Elena fought back a shudder. Djal's cruel, calculating tone sent a shiver of apprehension down her spine.

"You mean to kill them all, then."

It didn't sound like a question, but Djal answered it anyway. "Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and the rest of the repulsive royal family. Though I do believe I'll save Muet for last. There's something ... pure about her. I intend to see that innocence torn away in a bloody mess before I'm through with her."



Elena blanched. Bile rose in her throat, and she dug her fingernails into Ramose's arm. He didn't flinch, but remained staring at the screen, eyes narrowed, mouth turned downward into a deep frown.

"Pity we couldn't find Ramose before he managed to break out his foreign whore," Djal's companion said. "He's done a lot to clear a path for us."

"That's true. Akhenaten has been so busy chasing after his former vizier he never even thought to turn his all-seeing gaze closer to home." Djal's voice began to fade as he neared the hall, but not enough to keep Elena from making out the rest of his words. "Yes, pity indeed. After killing Akhenaten, I would have chained Nefertiti and offered her to Ramose as a gift. He deserves a reward for all he's done. I believe he would have greatly enjoyed torturing her."

## Chapter Eleven

"Don't touch me," Elena said once she was sure Djal was out of earshot. She scrambled backward and shook her leg, hoping to dislodge Ramose's hand. His palm lay on her thigh, warm and reassuring despite her apprehension, though she couldn't recall when he'd placed it there. Djal's last comment played in her mind, over and over again like a broken record.

Ramose pulled his hand away and turned to look at her. His deep, dark eyes appeared troubled as he chewed on his lower lip. "You understood him."

Elena gulped, tearing her gaze away. A chill enveloped her body, and she rubbed the goose bumps on her arms in vain. "Every word."

"That's what I was afraid of."

She licked her suddenly dry lips and pulled her knees up to her chest. "Then it's true."

"I recognized his voice," Ramose said as though she hadn't spoken.

Elena felt his gaze boring into her, but she refused to meet it, afraid of what she'd see in those captivating eyes if she allowed herself to look -- *really* look.

"I've known Djal since Akhenaten rose to the royal throne and I became his vizier. But I don't understand him anymore."

Elena's head throbbed. "Are you saying you don't agree with what he's doing? Or you don't understand why he'd accuse you of being capable of such cruelty?" She swallowed past the knot in her throat and forced herself to continue. "Unless, of course, it's true."

He gripped her chin and turned her face until she had no choice but to look into his eyes. He held her captive as his brows furrowed, watching her intently as though trying to read her mind. She could have wrenched back out of his grasp, but she needed to know. She had to hear the words, to see his face as he admitted his real purpose for wanting Akhenaten and Nefertiti dead. Thinking he was plotting to assassinate the pharaoh for the good of all

Egypt was one thing ... but learning he was doing it for pleasure made her stomach churn with the sickening impact of that knowledge.

"I told you." He ran his thumb first over her jaw line, then her lips as he spoke, and she had to force herself to keep from shuddering beneath his touch. "I don't understand a word he said."

"That's a new one." She pulled back and rose to her feet. Peeking around the corner reassured her that Djal and his companion were really gone. They'd left the guard she'd knocked out still lying against the wall. Blood had dried on his cheek, leaving a dark smear against his tanned skin.

Ramose grabbed her wrist. "What? You're not about to let me in on what's going on here? It seems you're the only one in a position to know."

She ground her teeth. "What are you babbling about? You *brought* me here, remember? Why, I wonder? You couldn't capture and torture Nefertiti, so you thought you'd find an easier victim in the twenty-first century? Well, I have news for you --"

"Torture?" He stood and straightened his spine, towering over her. His features contorted into unmistakable fury. "Is that what Djal said? That I wanted to torture the queen?"

"Not in so many words," Elena said. She stood her ground, unwilling to give him the satisfaction of flinching or pulling away from his grasp. "But he did say you'd have enjoyed it if you had the opportunity, and that's telling enough, don't you think?"

"Djal is a fool." Ramose stepped closer until his body pressed against hers.

He took up all her personal space until his scent enveloped her, and she had to fist her hands at her sides to keep from reaching out to him.

"He knows nothing about me," Ramose said. "Is that why he was here? To persuade you to tell them where I was hiding so that when they found me, they could accuse me of all sorts of crimes I had no intention of committing?"

"Are you denying having tried to kill Nefertiti?"

"No, I --" He clamped his mouth closed, then tried again after only a moment's hesitation. "I believed she was something she wasn't."

"And now?"

He reached out and twirled a strand of her hair between his fingers. "And now I see she couldn't have been the demon I'd accused her of being. Nefertiti is no more a demon than you or I. Though I'll admit she seems a little ... lost."

Elena shook her head. "On the contrary. I think she's exactly where she belongs."

Ramose took a deep, quivering breath and let it out slowly. His full lips had thinned into a straight line, as though he were afraid to speak.

"Wait a minute." Elena's rubbed the bridge of her nose. "You asked me why Djal was here. Does that mean -- Oh, fuck!" Comprehension hit swiftly, and she staggered backward a step. If not for Ramose's hand still clamped on her wrist, her knees might have buckled. "You don't mean to tell me you *really* didn't understand what they were saying?"

The slight upturn of his mouth was entirely devoid of humor. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. Not a damn word."

"You're kidding."

"Do I look like I'm kidding?"

His brows furrowed above black eyes, and the lines etched around his mouth made him appear tense, concerned, maybe even a little bit unnerved, but definitely not amused.

"So what are you telling me?" Elena asked. "That I can understand ancient Egyptian perfectly, even speak it, but you can't?"

He scrubbed a hand over his handsome face. "I don't know about the ancient part, but that wasn't Egyptian. At least, not to my ears. It sounded like nothing I've ever heard before. If that is, in fact, the language of my people, why does it suddenly seem so foreign to me?" He paused as though another thought struck him. "What language am I speaking?" Elena hesitated, and he released her wrist and grabbed her shoulders, peering straight into her eyes. "What language?"

"English," she said at last. "You're speaking English. You have been since the first moment I met you." She held up a hand when he opened his mouth. "And before you ask, I've never studied ancient Egyptian, but it flows off my tongue. So well, in fact, that I don't even know I'm speaking it when I make the switch. If not for the fact that everyone else understands me, I'd doubt it myself."

"That's wonderful for you." His scowl deepened, and he released her shoulders. "Hathor is responsible for this. I can feel it. But why? What have I done to displease her so?"

"Just a stab in the dark here, but didn't you try to kill the royal couple? The same royal couple appointed by the gods themselves?"

Ramose's eyes widened, and the color drained from his cheeks. "That's impossible. Akhenaten doesn't even believe in the true gods. He follows Aten and no other."

"Be that as it may ... the pharaoh is still the representative of the gods in Egypt, right? And you tried to kill his wife and dethrone him. Did you really expect the gods to stand by idly and watch as a mere mortal interfered with their design?"

Ramose slumped against the wall and dropped to the floor. He cradled his head in his hands. "I never meant to go against their wishes. I thought I was helping. I thought ..."

Elena knelt before him and reached for his hand, squeezing it lightly. "I know what you thought. Perhaps Hathor meant to teach you a lesson. Or perhaps she meant only to punish you. We don't know. We *can't* know."

All the fight had drained out of his features when he finally lifted his head to look at her. His eyes, usually so full of emotion, now looked vacant as he seemed to stare right through her. "What do I do?"

Elena shrugged. "I can't pretend to understand your religion. In truth, I'm still struggling with the knowledge that not only do your Egyptian gods exist, but that they also interfere in our affairs. Not to mention the fact that time travel is possible. I'm really going to have to think about all this when I get back home." She nibbled at her lower lip for a moment. "It seems to me that you need to work with the gods instead of against them. And since you can neither speak nor understand the language, you'll have to rely on me to interpret."

Ramose took a deep, shuddering breath. His broad chest expanded with the effort, drawing Elena's gaze to the planes of his rippled muscles, his flat abdomen, and his cock nestled upon the dark mass of curly hair at the apex of his thighs. Even flaccid, he was impressive in length and girth. Pure feminine desire flooded her core.

"You said earlier that Djal had a plan. What was it?"

The serious tone of Ramose's voice brought her out of her reverie. Her mouth went dry. "He means to kill the entire royal family, just as you did. Though unlike you, his motives aren't as pure. I believe he not only plans to murder them, but torture them, as well." Tears stung the back of her throat as Djal's words swam through her mind. "Muet, in particular."

Ramose rose to his feet, pulling Elena with him. "Then we must stop him. At any cost."

She didn't try to hide the smile forming on her lips. "Don't tell me you're actually willing to risk your life for the man you detested with every fiber of your being only moments ago."

Ramose frowned. "There will be plenty of time for you to lecture me about my mistakes. Later. Right now, we have to find Akhenaten. Then we have to convince him we're not the ones trying to kill him."

"Not anymore, you mean. Somehow, I don't think that'll be as easy as you make it sound."

He chuckled, the first genuine sound of amusement she'd heard from him all day. "Who said anything about the will of the gods being easy to carry out? We'll be lucky to be alive by this time tomorrow."

She slipped her hand inside his as they headed for the door. "You sure know how to make a girl feel safe."

"If you wanted a bodyguard, you should have kept him around." Ramose hooked a thumb in the direction of the fallen guard.

"Ah, sweetheart, why would I do that? His cock didn't taste nearly as good as yours."

Ramose gripped Elena's hand tightly as they rounded another corner. He brought a finger to his lips, indicating silence, and pressed his back flat against the wall. Elena followed suit, nodding her understanding.

Jealously still swam through his veins, and he gritted her teeth, willing his hammering heart to slow. He had to concentrate on getting to Akhenaten's royal chambers before one of the guards caught sight of them, and being concerned with Elena's teasing words would only serve to distract him.

Still, he wished she hadn't brought up the fact that she'd had another man's cock in her mouth only a short while earlier. Lust clouded his vision, mingling with anger to form a new sensation, one he didn't entirely dislike. It felt familiar -- like the way he'd felt about Eshe every time he pictured her in the pharaoh's arms. But that had been different, hadn't it? Eshe had been the pharaoh's concubine, and Ramose had loved her.

*Love.*

There was that word again. When had it happened? When had he allowed himself to fall in love a second time with a woman he couldn't have?

"I think the coast is clear."

Ramose nodded briskly. He considered releasing Elena's hand, knowing she'd stay close to him anyway, but found he couldn't. Instead, he tightened his grip. Pressing his palm against her warm flesh sent a jolt of desire to his cock. Reflexively, he clenched his jaw against the sensation. This wasn't the time for diversions, even ones as enjoyable as what he had in mind.

*But what if we don't get another chance?*

The side hallway opened on to a steep, broad, stepped staircase. The royal chambers were located at the top of the stairs, where a handful of guards would surely be stationed.

"Wait." He stepped into a shallow alcove, pulling Elena along with him. It didn't provide much cover, but he hoped it would give them enough warning if a guard's footsteps sounded nearby.

"What is it?" Elena's hair stuck out in a tangle of soft waves. He reached out and wrapped a strand around his index finger.

Dipping his head so their lips barely touched, he whispered, "I wanted to do this ... one last time."

Her lips parted as though she wanted to speak, but he cut off whatever words she'd meant to utter, with the press of his mouth against hers. She opened to him, the inviting moist warmth of her mouth igniting a blazing passion in his veins. He sank his tongue within her welcoming, wet depths. The shudder coursing through him caused a drop of precum to drip from the tip of his cock. Her mouth tasted wanton, like faint spices and sex. The heady flavor made his head reel. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer. She moaned against his lips, her hips thrusting provocatively against him.

Their tongues tangled together in a dance perfected through centuries of lust and desire. Elena ran her fingers over his skin. Before they'd left the chamber where Elena had been held prisoner, Ramose had grabbed the guard's loincloth, as well as his weapons. Now he wished he hadn't. The hilt of the blade pressing against his hip bit into his flesh.

Elena slid her hand over his back, his shoulders, his arms, then lower still to cup his ass through the fabric of the coarse garment. His cock strained against her stomach, fully erect.

He deepened the kiss and pressed her against the wall. Her soft moans and the blood roaring in his ears drowned out all other sounds. Briefly concerned about being caught in such a compromising position, he broke the kiss and strained to listen, but the hall remained quiet. It would be a few hours before the royal household stirred to start their day, though guards made the rounds routinely through the palace, especially now that they'd been placed on high alert.

*Just one more taste.*

He lowered his head and drew the erect bud of her nipple between his lips. He suckled deeply, leaving a wet spot on her tunic that grew beneath this mouth. Laving at the hardened bead, he moaned softly, his fingers digging into her hips as he held her to him.

She ran her hands down the sides of his neck and kneaded his shoulders. He released her at last and straightened, brushing an errant lock of hair away from her face.

Her tongue darted out to moisten her parted pink lips. "One last time, you said. Do you really think we'll die tonight?" Elena slipped her fingers beneath the loincloth and grabbed his cock. Her gentle, delicate touch did nothing to stop the pounding need that had settled in his balls.

"No," he lied. "But I thought it would make you more receptive to my advances."

Her low, throaty chuckle made his rod twitch in anticipation. "You don't know me at all, do you? I don't need the thrill of danger to want to fuck. When it comes to you, it seems I'm always ready." She grabbed his hand and positioned it on the inside of her thigh, where cream had dripped over her smooth flesh to moisten her skin. "See? Always ready."

"For me?" The words slipped out before he could think them through. "Or for anyone?"

Anger flashed in her blue eyes, then disappeared so quickly that for a moment, he thought he'd imagined it.

Elena sighed. "You have no reason to trust what I say, especially after what you witnessed back in that chamber. I can't entirely explain it myself, but for whatever reason, while I'm with you ... I'm yours."

*While I'm with you ...*

*And then?* he wanted to ask. What would happen when she was no longer with him? When Hathor sent her back to her time?

The answer was obvious, but he didn't want to consider it. There was a much better chance they'd both be killed before dawn. He chose to focus on that instead. It was a more cheerful prospect than the alternative. Losing Elena for a second time ...

He closed his eyes, pressed his lips to the side of her throat, and willed the disturbing thought away. He'd lost Eshe, not Elena. Just because they looked alike didn't mean they were the same person. He needed to remember that.

"We need to keep moving." His voice sounded hoarse to his own ears.

Elena went still. Her hard nipples pressed into his bare chest even through the fabric of her tunic, and her breath came in soft, ragged gasps. "No sex, then, huh?" Her light tone betrayed no disappointment, but her tense muscles told a different story.

He placed a soft kiss to her forehead. "This isn't the time."

"As if that's ever stopped us before," she murmured, leaning against him. Her arms wrapped around his waist, and she rested her head on his chest. Her sweet, feminine scent mingled with the scent of her arousal, intensifying the throbbing in his cock. He bit his lip, focusing on the pain. If he took her again, here, now, he'd never be able to let her go.

It took every measure of strength he possessed to pull away from her. "Are you ready?"

She glanced up at him and nodded, her lips pressed into a thin line. Her creamy complexion had turned pale, and she looked even more shaken than he'd thought. Whether because of what had nearly happened between them before he'd pulled away, or the danger surrounding them, he couldn't be sure.

"Good. Then come."

He didn't reach for her hand this time. From the corner of his eye, he saw her smooth her hands down her tunic before following.

Their bare feet made no sound on the marble steps. Ramose wrapped his hand around one of the daggers tucked inside the waistband of the loincloth and scanned the length of the staircase, glancing over his shoulder every few steps to make sure they weren't being followed. Elena's breathing was the only sound within earshot. The inside of the palace seemed as quiet as a tomb.

Apprehension made the hairs on the back of Ramose's neck stand on end. "There were no guards posted at the base of the stairway leading to the royal chambers," he whispered.

Elena shivered beside him. She wrapped her arms around herself. "Are you questioning our good luck?"

"I'm not sure it is luck. The palace has been alerted to the possible presence of a known assassin, and there are no guards posted at the bottom of the staircase leading right up into the royal chambers? In the middle of the night, no less? Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Now that you mention it ... somewhat. But perhaps they're all at the top of the stairs, guarding the chamber itself."



Ramose grunted, unconvinced. "You don't believe that any more than I do." He slid a narrow dagger from the back of his waistband, keeping the broader blade for himself. "Take this."

Elena's hand closed around the hilt. "I hope I remember how to use it. I had some training --"

"I saw you throw one just like it. The knife found its mark from across the room."

"Yeah, well, real life isn't like in the movies. We don't get a second, third, and forty-third take if we mess up."

Ramose frowned, but didn't press for an explanation. This wasn't the first time she'd denied being able to handle a weapon as expertly as he'd seen her do. Was it modesty that kept her from priding herself in her abilities, or did she honestly mean to tell him what he'd seen hadn't been real?

They moved slowly, keeping out of the firelight cast over the marble by torches spaced a few steps apart. The shadows didn't provide much cover, but they allowed for a small measure of comfort. Ramose hoped they'd at least have the element of surprise on their side, but a keen sense of awareness nagged at him, as though they were being watched.

The double-doors of the royal chamber came into view, but just barely. No torches flickered around the gold-gilded frame, and darkness shrouded the entire top step. A figure leaned against the wall to the right. In one hand, the guard held a spear, but it slumped to the side just as the man did, his shoulder propped against a marble column. This wasn't the stance of a professional soldier.

His progress entirely silent, Ramose gestured for Elena to stay behind him. He lunged forward, stealthily, unnoticed by the lone sentry. Ramose closed his hand around the man's throat and spun him around, dragging him down a couple of steps and slamming him against the wall beneath a torch. The face of a scrawny young man became clear in the firelight. He looked more like a merchant or a farmer than a guard, and wide eyes flickered from Ramose to Elena, terror clearly written across his features.

The man muttered something Ramose couldn't understand. "He thinks we're here to kill him," Elena interpreted.

Ramose tightened his grip on the guard's throat as anger bubbled up to the surface. "Djal knew we were coming. That's why he's the only one here."

Elena translated Ramose's words, and the man managed to nod, the gesture barely perceptible through the death grip Ramose applied to his neck.

Ramose's teeth snapped together, his jaw tight, his fury raging in barely restrained waves. His vision blurred until the guard's face became an obscure, unfocused shape.

"Stop. You're killing him."

Elena's voice and her warm hand on his shoulder brought a measure of control to Ramose's simmering rage. He shoved the man backward. With one hand clutching the bruise

already forming on his neck, the guard fought to keep his balance. He gripped the railing, took a shambling step forward, then thought better of it and spun on his heel to disappear down the vast staircase. Ramose lost sight of him in the shadows long before he reached the bottom.

Pausing only long enough to make sure Elena would follow, Ramose climbed up the few remaining stairs and crossed the distance to the double-doors while trying to gather his wits. He kept his steps as sure and measured as he could before halting in front of the entrance. The handle gave way easily, and the door swung inward.

He wasn't sure what he'd expected to find inside, but the surprise in Nefertiti's startling green eyes must have mirrored his own. Color rose along her cheekbones. Lying on the spacious bed she now shared with her husband, she rested her weight on her elbows. Her long skirt rippled in the stray breeze kicked up by an unseasonable gust of wind blowing through an open window.

Akhenaten's head nestled between her thighs.

The pharaoh apparently hadn't heard the door open. His tongue worked in fevered circles, lapping along Nefertiti's bare slit. He was naked, his ass thrust high in the air as he kneeled before her. His balls swung as he sucked, nibbled, and licked the juicy pink folds bared to him. At last, Nefertiti gripped Akhenaten's head, her fingers tangling in his hair, and lifted his face up from the depths of her cunt.

For a moment, Ramose regretted not having let Akhenaten finish what he'd started. Convincing Nefertiti and Akhenaten of their intentions would be hard enough without the royal couple being frustrated and embarrassed at being caught in such an indelicate position. "Pharaoh --"

Akhenaten turned to face them and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. His guttural words, as before, made no sense to Ramose. The pharaoh waited, as though expecting a response. Ramose turned to Elena.

"He says he's glad to see you arrive on time, as always," she whispered, her lips barely moving. "I don't know what he means. Do you?"

Ramose shook his head, bringing his attention back to the royal couple. Akhenaten sighed, then snapped his thumb and middle finger together. Another flick of his wrist brought five guards, all solidly muscled, out from behind the tall marble columns spaced around the room, weapons at the ready. Djal was among them.

He didn't have to understand Ramose's next words to know their meaning. He'd just given the order to kill.

## Chapter Twelve

Clad in the ceremonial royal guard garments reserved only for public gatherings, Djal took a step forward. The other four guards took their positions, flanking him on both sides.

Ramose yanked the blade from his waistband, feeling the tip bite into his flesh as he pulled it free. A thin cut marred his abdomen, but he ignored it. That wound would only be the first of many tonight. He wouldn't let them kill him without a fight, and they weren't getting their hands on Elena while he still drew breath.

"Wait --" Elena began. The rest of her words were foreign to him, lost inside a jumbled mess of melodic tones and harsh, guttural sounds. He hoped she was telling Akhenaten and Nefertiti about the plot against their life, but by the way Djal smiled cruelly and Akhenaten's green eyes remained fixed on Ramose, it didn't look as though she was having any luck convincing them.

"Enough of this." Ramose took a step forward, his blade pointed in the direction of Djal's throat. The guard stood halfway across the room, giving Ramose little hope of reaching him before the other men got to Elena, but he had to do something.

Elena's hand on his arm stopped him. "No. Hang on. Something's happening."

She was right. Djal let his sword arm drop to his side and lifted his other hand in a gesture of supplication. Ramose narrowed his eyes. What game was he playing now?

"He says he has a deal for you," Elena translated after Djal spoke in the language Ramose still couldn't quite believe had been his own.

"Tell him I'm not interested in his deals."

Elena and Djal bickered back and forth for what seemed to Ramose like an eternity. Nefertiti had drawn a sheet over her body, and Akhenaten had slipped on a loincloth, but they watched the argument without interfering, though suspicion remained etched on their features.

"They don't believe you can no longer speak or understand your native tongue," Elena said, turning to him. "I've done my best to try to convince them, but we better finish this conversation quickly before they lose patience entirely."

"They've already decided they won't believe a word we say. Why even try to convince them?"

"Because the entire royal household will die if we don't, and your precious Egypt will fall into the hands of a murderous madman. Is that what you want?"

Ramose made a show of shifting his grip on the blade. "Fine, then. Do what you have to do. But make it fast."

His frustration growing with every passing moment, Ramose tried to content himself by watching the faces of those around him. Akhenaten's eyes remained fixed on his own, his mouth turned down in a gesture of blatant mistrust. Nefertiti, however, eyed Elena, and her face reflected more curiosity than fear.

At last, Akhenaten rose from the bed, putting an end to the ongoing argument. Once again, he executed the same flick of his wrist, this time with greater impatience. Djal didn't move.

"What's going on?"

"Akhenaten's ordered us killed, but Djal isn't obeying orders." She swallowed hard while Djal spoke. "He says he'll do no such thing. Akhenaten's furious."

Ramose didn't need Akhenaten's body language translated. The pharaoh's ire showed in his tight jaw, his narrowed eyes, and not least of all in the fact that he lunged for the weapons rack by the window and gripped a broad, gem-encrusted blade in his hand. He turned it on Djal, barking orders at the other guards.

Blood roared in Ramose's temples. He'd have given anything to be able to understand, to take part in the conversation bouncing back and forth around the room. At least it looked like Akhenaten and Nefertiti no longer needed to be convinced of the threat to their lives.

Akhenaten pointed an accusing finger at Ramose and shouted something unintelligible. Ramose turned for only half a second, but it gave Djal the time he needed to leap forward and grab Elena hard by the arm, pulling her to him. She held her dagger in one hand, but Djal gripped her wrist and bent it backward until she yelped and dropped the weapon. Her gaze held a mixture of anger and terror that made Ramose's gut churn.

"Let her go," he demanded. He gripped the blade's hilt until the etchings dug into his palm. "It's me you want."

Djal's blade rested almost comfortably against Elena's throat. He replied, and Ramose had to wait until Elena translated. Her words came out rapidly. "He says he'll only let me go if you kill Akhenaten and Nefertiti." Another moment passed while Djal spoke. "He also says the guards won't interfere, unless needed. This is your task. It always has been."

Ramose licked his lips and turned toward Akhenaten. Nefertiti ran to his side, her strides impeded by the swell of her stomach, ripe with child. Tears shone in her eyes, but her lips pressed tightly together in a determined frown. The pharaoh held his blade and bent his knees as he dropped into a fighting stance. There was no way he would let Ramose near his wife without a fight.

Understanding tightened his chest. The way Akhenaten felt about Nefertiti mirrored the way Ramose felt about Elena. The queen of Egypt was no demon. She never had been, no more than Elena. He couldn't kill her. He couldn't kill either of them.

"No."

The word must have been clear enough in any language, because a blow landed hard to the back of his neck. He staggered, fighting to keep his footing, but stumbled and fell forward on one knee only a few steps away from Akhenaten, whose determined grimace and bared teeth dared him to come no closer unless he wanted his throat slashed before he could find his footing.

Djal barked a few harsh words. Elena remained silent.

"Now what?" Ramose growled between clenched teeth, pain blurring his vision.

"Ah, you know, the usual." Elena tried to keep her tone light and failed miserably. Her voice shook with barely contained fear. "Kill them both now, or I die."

Ramose struggled to stand. "Is that all?"

"For now."

"Fine, then. Tell him I agree."

Elena gasped. "You can't."

"You heard the man. I'm not about to let you get killed because I couldn't do what I set out to do in the first place." His chest tightened until he could barely breathe. Unable to look up and face the terror in Nefertiti's eyes, Ramose kept his gaze glued to the floor.

"Don't you see this is exactly what he wants?" Elena asked. "He wants to pin the murder of the royal couple on a scapegoat, a traitor who's already been branded as such by his people. He'll kill us anyway. That way, Djal is hailed a hero to Egypt for slaughtering the man who murdered the pharaoh. Akhenaten has no successors. How hard do you think it will be for him to claim the throne?"

"I said, I'll do it," Ramose said, fighting to keep his tone even. "What happens after is no longer my concern."

He heard the resignation in her voice when she spoke again, though he couldn't bring himself to turn around and witness the disappointment in her gaze. "Ah. So Djal was right about you after all."

He closed his eyes against the flood of pain that clogged his throat. "Just tell him. I want his word you won't be harmed."

A moment later, Elena came within his field of vision. Djal had released her, though he kept the blade pointed at the soft hollow of her throat.

“He says he knew he could count on you.” Elena all but spat the words at him. She kept her arms wrapped around her stomach as though just looking at him might cause her to double over in pain.

Ramose turned to her and rose to his feet, his blade thrust forward. “Yes. Too bad you couldn’t do the same.”

Elena licked her lips. “I don’t understand.”

“Because you don’t trust me.”

“I don’t know you!” she cried.

Her sudden outburst startled Djal. He flinched, thrusting his blade forward with a sharp movement that ripped into the tender skin at the base of Elena’s throat. Blood splattered her tunic and she gasped, stumbling backward until her back pressed against the wall.

Ramose jumped, heart hammering, praying Djal hadn’t hit an artery. The crimson stain on Elena’s chest didn’t get much larger, and blood hadn’t sprayed as he’d known it to do when an artery was severed, so after a moment he allowed himself a long breath of relief. “No one’s dying here tonight. Understand?”

Elena touched her fingertips to her throat. They came away dripping. She inclined her head in the direction of the guards. “Except maybe them.”

## Chapter Thirteen

Ramose didn't have time to agree. He'd wanted to reassure Elena the traitors would be the ones to perish, but apparently Djal wasn't in the mood to allow any more talk in a language he didn't understand. This time, he delivered a sharp poke to Ramose's ribs with the hilt of his spear. The impact jolted him forward and he stumbled again, gritting his teeth and managing to keep his balance, but just barely.

Ramose's blade hovered a handspan away from Akhenaten's midsection, but the pharaoh hadn't moved to block the weapon with the blade in his hand. Dislike simmered in his green eyes, but not the hatred Ramose had grown accustomed to. Did he accept what Elena had told him? Did he know Ramose meant him no harm?

Then he saw Nefertiti's hand on Akhenaten's arm, and he understood. She held him back, offering comfort and the kind of strength only a lover could provide when death loomed around the corner. It was by her grace alone that Ramose still had a chance to put his plan into action. He inclined his head, almost imperceptibly, hoping the pharaoh would understand his feeble signal.

Then there was no more time for gestures or warnings. He felt Djal's impatience and feared what would happen if the traitor began to doubt the sincerity of Ramose's agreement.

Murmuring a quick prayer to Hathor, Ramose lunged forward, bringing the blade up over his head and then sweeping it down in a high arc. Akhenaten didn't flinch, though a muscle twitched in his jaw. At the last moment, Ramose allowed his aim to shift slightly, and the strike that had been aimed at the pharaoh's neck missed by a mere hair.

He thought he heard Akhenaten breathe a sigh of relief, but he only had a fraction of a second to consider the implication of the trust the pharaoh had shown him before spinning on his heel and bringing the blade down to slice into the nearest guard's stomach. The man's eyes widened in shock, and for a moment, time stood still. Silence fell over the chamber, so

deep that the only sound Ramose heard was the dying man's gurgling last breath and the slick slurping noise Ramose's blade made as he swept it through the man's intestines.

Then Elena screamed, and the room exploded into chaos.

Furious guards closed in on him, their weapons clenched in white-knuckled hands, their faces set in deep, angry scowls. They blocked his view of the rest of the room. He couldn't see Djal, but he knew the man had Elena. One scream was all she'd allowed herself, but the sound was enough to pierce deep into Ramose's gut and imprint itself upon his mind.

He charged the guards, his own weapon raised high above his head, both hands wrapped around its hilt. Surprise flickered for only a moment in one of the traitor's eyes as Ramose neared, flinging himself at him. The guard tried to parry the weapon with his own blade, but he hadn't counted on the strength of Ramose's wrath. He shoved the guard forward, propelling him with all his might. The blow Ramose delivered to the man's head cleaved his skull in two.

Blood gushed and splattered the walls and the pale bed sheets, staining the once pristine royal chamber with red smears and bits of torn flesh.

Pushing the still corpse away with a violent shove, Ramose spun on the second guard. The man yelled something Ramose couldn't understand, but he assumed the guard called on one of his allies for help. A quick glance to his right told Ramose that Akhenaten had engaged the other two guards. He still couldn't see Elena, but he caught sight of Nefertiti's gauzy shift. She wasn't far behind Akhenaten, and by the grace of Hathor, they were both still standing.

That was all the reassurance Ramose needed -- for now. He pressed forward, falling into a crouch and digging his blade into the guard's knee. It crunched through bone to come out clean on the other side. The traitor's scream rent the air, and he dropped his weapon, clutching at his wounded leg. Ramose tore the sword out of the man's flesh and delivered a final blow to the guard's chin. Teeth snapped and rattled and the man fell backward, either unconscious or dead. Ramose didn't care enough to find out.

Ramose circled around his fallen foe. He finally had a clear view of the room and spotted Elena huddled on the ground. Blood ran from her temple to merge with the trickle at the base of her throat. Nefertiti knelt beside her, pressing two fingers to the side of Elena's neck. A few steps away, Akhenaten tugged his blade free of the last guard's midsection.

Djal was gone.

Ramose ran to Elena's side and grasped Nefertiti's shoulder, pulling her away. "What are you doing to her?"

Akhenaten snarled and rammed his elbow into Ramose's ribs, shoving himself between him and the queen. Nefertiti spoke in an agitated tone and grasped her husband's hand, pulling him to her. She gestured to Ramose, then to Elena, and finally, to the exit.



The last traces of anger dimmed from Akhenaten's green gaze, and he bent down beside Elena. Ramose joined him, and together they lifted her carefully. Akhenaten supported her head only long enough for Ramose to grasp her entire weight. He slipped one arm under her knees and the other below her shoulderblades. Her head pressed into his chest as she stirred. Her eyelids fluttered open to reveal clouded blue eyes.

Relief flooded him, made his knees weak. He clutched her tighter to him. "You're all right. Thank Hathor, you're alright."

"I'm fine," she murmured, her voice weak but unwavering. "The others?"

"We're all here. Though when this is over, you'll have to explain to me why Nefertiti can't understand me, either. I've learned enough about what's happened to us to know she's from your time. She should speak both languages, just as you do."

Elena moistened her lips. The blood seeping from her temple had begun to dry, leaving a dark mark against her alabaster skin. "I don't know. Maybe that's another question for your goddess."

Ramose's chuckle was devoid of humor. "Believe me, I have a lot of questions for Hathor, most more important than that one. We need to get out of here. Djal isn't likely to admit defeat so easily. He made sure there would be no loyal guards nearby while he executed his plan. While we're in the royal chambers, we're easy prey. We need to find guards who are still dedicated to Akhenaten, and fast, before Djal and his minions return."

Elena nodded and repeated his words. Akhenaten and Nefertiti fell into step behind Ramose without argument. Nefertiti looked unharmed, though her usually sparkling eyes were a muted, dull green, wary and somber.

They descended the broad staircase and followed the bend in the main passageway before coming to the garden's entrance. Nefertiti wasn't likely to fit through the gap in the wall in her condition, but if they were lucky, perhaps Djal hadn't posted his men around the back entrance to the courtyard.

"Do you remember the last time we were here together, you and I?" It was Elena's voice, but Akhenaten's words.

Ramose's lips curled in a slight smile. Somehow, he didn't think Akhenaten was talking about the night he and Nefertiti had made love while Ramose and Elena watched them.

No, he spoke of the festival. Ramose had dressed as a priest of Amun, and together with the royal physician, hatched a plan to destroy Akhenaten and his beloved wife. Things hadn't gone exactly as planned. Akhenaten killed the physician, and Ramose followed Nefertiti, thinking to rid Egypt of a demon who'd besotted their pharaoh. Instead, she'd shoved him through the portal that brought him to Elena.

Emotion stung Ramose's eyes, threatening to blind him. How could he have been so wrong?

"You have to understand," he said, casting a look at the pharaoh over his shoulder. "I only wanted what was best for Egypt."

Akhenaten spoke, and Elena translated without missing a beat. "And obviously, you didn't think that was me."

"Can you blame me? If only you'd made room for the true gods to reign alongside your Aten, things would have been different. You're asking me, and all of Egypt, to turn our backs on everything we believe in."

Akhenaten sighed. "You don't trust me."

Ramose's words echoed back at him. *You don't trust me*. Hadn't he accused Elena of the same thing? She'd thought the worst of him when all he'd wanted was to save them all. Had he done the same disservice to Akhenaten?

"No," he said at last. His foot caught in an overgrown shrub, and he stumbled slightly. Elena's weight made it difficult to keep his footing, and he paused for a moment to set her on her feet. "I didn't trust you. But now --"

Akhenaten's hand on his shoulder made Ramose turn. Both women watched them with interest, Elena continuing to flawlessly translate the words that passed between them. "Don't say it. Perhaps it's too much to ask that we bridge the gap so soon, but we've both taken first steps in the right direction. Maybe when this is over --"

The rest of the pharaoh's words were drowned out by a fierce cry. It took Ramose a moment to realize it was his own. He'd caught sight of Djal as the man rushed forward, having hidden himself behind a massive tree trunk in the courtyard. The dagger he'd been holding flew through the air, and Ramose only had a moment to react. Beside him, Elena staggered and tried to grip his arm as Ramose propelled himself through the air to his right. The blade meant for Akhenaten slammed home.

Pain speared his chest, and the world spun in a sudden surge of red haze. Trying to focus through the agony, he staggered backward into a warm, reassuring grip. His fingers flailed around the hilt of the weapon now embedded in his flesh. Yanking it from his chest with a sharp tug allowed a stream of blood to gush from the wound.

He clutched the dagger for only a moment before bringing the weapon behind his back, then stumbled forward. Djal rushed toward him, long blade in hand. The traitor's grin widened. Ramose's step faltered, his knees buckling under him. Obviously, Djal thought Ramose easy prey. After Djal killed him, it would only be a matter of subduing Akhenaten before slaughtering the women.

Failing to keep his balance, Ramose flung himself into a roll. Plump, tall grass grazed his chest. Blood rushed from his wound to smear over his abdomen.

Djal jumped into the air. He would have cleared Ramose's fallen form if not for the dagger Ramose still gripped. As Djal leaped over him, Ramose brought his dagger up with vicious force. He plunged the blade upward into Djal's groin, burying it to the hilt in the

man's flesh. Djal's startled cry turned into a scream of pain as he fell to the ground. Ramose called upon the last remnants of his strength to deliver blow after blow with his knee to the traitor's midsection. He struck him again and again, even as Djal's blood flooded the grass and shifting sands beneath him.

Both men's cries mingled with the cacophony of noise that suddenly erupted around them. It seemed reinforcements had finally arrived.

## Chapter Fourteen

The cool morning had given way to a hot, damp day. Elena sat on the edge of a large bed draped with luxurious silk cloth, pressing a cool compress to Ramose's forehead. He didn't stir, and her heart constricted in her chest.

She hadn't been able to leave his side since he'd been brought here, unconscious. The guards -- those who were still loyal to Akhenaten and had been allowed to remain at the palace when the others were rounded up and summarily executed -- had been sent to find the royal physician, who had been given time off to tend to an ailing family member in town. Enough men stayed behind to guard the doors of the guest chamber and the royal family themselves, but with the threat apparently eliminated, their presence was more ceremonial than necessary.

"How is he?" Nefertiti's soothing voice came from behind Elena, but she didn't turn around to face the queen.

"Not well. Where is this doctor of yours?" She didn't bother to hide the impatience lacing her tone. Two women, assistants of a sort to the physician, had been by earlier to clean and wrap Ramose's wounds in tight strips of cloth, but Elena would feel much better once a proper physician had seen to Ramose.

"I received word he's on his way."

"Shouldn't he be here? This is where his duty lies, isn't it?"

Nefertiti crossed the distance to the other side of the bed and sank into a plush, cushioned chair. "Damn it, Elena. He's a doctor, not a prisoner." She grinned suddenly. "Did you ever watch *Star Trek*?"

Elena's gasp poured from her lips before she could stifle it. "Just when I was beginning to think of you only as queen of Egypt, you say something to catch me completely off guard. I don't even know how to address you. Nefertiti? Nell? Your Majesty?"

“Nefertiti will do. It’s who I am, now.” She placed a hand over her rounded stomach and patted the bulge with obvious reverence. “Sometimes, I forget I was ever someone else. That life seems so far away, so long ago.”

“Well, your disappearance made the news.”

“As did yours, I’m sure.”

Elena drew her lower lip between her teeth. She hadn’t considered that back home, someone might be worried about her. Though she didn’t have many friends, and family was scarce since Sam had died, her father would be concerned. She frowned, running the cloth over Ramose’s temple before wringing it out into a copper bowl and dipping it back into a jug of cool water.

“Were you faking it?” She asked, breaking the comfortable silence that had settled between them. “Your inability to understand Ramose? Was it all an act to avoid answering questions better left unanswered?”

Nefertiti shook her head, her straight black hair sparkling in the ray of sunlight pouring through an open window. “You mean, did I comprehend the language you and Ramose spoke earlier? No, I couldn’t understand a word, though the overall lilt and tone was vaguely familiar, like I’d once known it in another life. Was it English?”

“So, then, it’s true?” Elena said, switching over to modern English. “You can’t speak your own birth language any more than Ramose can speak ancient Egyptian?”

Nefertiti shrugged and lifted her hands in the air in a gesture of genuine puzzlement. “I have no idea what you just said to me.”

Elena frowned, but could detect no hint of dishonesty in the other woman’s clear gaze. “I did watch *Star Trek*,” she said, returning to Nefertiti’s earlier question and shifting back into ancient Egyptian. “And I think Ramose could have benefited greatly from a universal translator.”

They both chuckled, and for a moment, it felt as though there were no secrets between them, only a sense of kinship and familiarity. Elena’s gaze fell back to Ramose, and she ran her fingertips over his slightly parted lips. “I’ve never found such loyalty in anyone. Even when misplaced, it’s a wonder to behold.”

“He tried to kill me.”

Elena’s gaze snapped to Nefertiti’s, but the hatred and ire she expected to see there were absent. Instead, Nefertiti looked upon Ramose with a mixture of sadness and what appeared to be a hint of wonder.

“You don’t hold a grudge,” Elena said simply.

“After what’s happened in the last few hours ... no. Not anymore. Though I have to admit there were days after I pushed Ramose through the portal that I woke in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, seeing his face looming in every shadowed corner.”

Elena swallowed hard. "I can understand that. And for what it's worth, I know he regrets what he's done to you."

Nefertiti laughed. The sound bounced through the chamber and echoed off the walls, startling Elena. "I wish he wouldn't. I can't say I greatly enjoyed fearing for my life, but if not for him, I wouldn't have realized that this is where I belong. Maybe I would even have gone back to L.A., went on with my life ... if you could call it that. And you ..." Her mouth turned upward in a mischievous smirk. "You never would have met Ramose."

Elena opened her mouth, wanting to argue that not meeting him might not have been such a bad thing, but one glimpse of Ramose's pale face, his clenched jaw and furrowed brow, made her stomach flip-flop. "Then I thank you. And him, for what it's worth." She bent down and pressed a kiss to the side of his mouth.

For a brief, heart-stopping second, she thought she felt him stir, then realized it was just the rhythmic, shallow breathing that had made his chest expand.

"You have need of me, my queen?"

The one voice Elena had never expected to hear again rang through the chamber, making her heart pound rapidly against her breastbone. She clutched the cloth tightly in her hand, unable to turn around.

"Ah, Khaotep. I'm glad you've arrived. Ramose is in need of your skills."

"Yes, my queen. The guard who found me filled me in a little. I'll see to him at once."

Footsteps rang out behind her, and Elena couldn't keep her gaze averted any longer. She rose and turned, her knuckles white from the effort of wringing the cloth between stiff fingers.

Her mouth went dry. Dark, wavy hair fell over a broad forehead, and his slim, aristocratic nose looked the same as she remembered. No, not quite. The fall he'd taken in the fifth grade that resulted in a broken nose wasn't apparent, nor was the scar above his left brow she'd come to know so well. And he looked older, fine lines sprinkling the corners of his mouth and eyes. But the rest of him ... *Oh, God.*

Elena's knees weakened, and she felt for the bed, sitting down before her legs gave out altogether. To his credit, he looked as shaken as she felt.

"Sam?" Elena kept the back of her hand pressed against her lips so the words came out as barely a whisper. "Is it really you?"

"Do you know each other?" Nefertiti asked, rising to her feet.

"No, my queen." The physician took a step forward, his brows furrowing over dark eyes. He rubbed at the stubble on his jaw. "But she looks so much like my sister, if I didn't know better, I'd think Aten had seen fit to return her to us."

"Eshe," Elena murmured. "She was your sister."

Khaotep froze, his arm partly outstretched toward his patient. "How did you know?"

“Ramose mentioned her. Seems she had two men in her life who loved her very much.” Tears struck the back of Elena’s eyelids, and she was suddenly overwhelmed by envy for this woman whom she apparently resembled. Eshe had had a brother and a lover who adored her. Elena had neither.

Curiosity flickered in Khaotep’s eyes as he glanced past her at Ramose. “She never told me about him, though I can’t say I blame her.”

“Why’s that?” Elena asked, despite herself. She didn’t want to know any more about this woman whose life she couldn’t have.

“Perhaps this conversation is best saved for later,” Nefertiti suggested in a gentle voice. “Right now, Ramose needs Khaotep’s undivided attention.”

Elena rose to her feet, grateful to find her limbs would support her. She didn’t think she could deal with any more information today, anyway. She needed time to process everything that had happened over the last few hours.

At Khaotep’s insistence, Elena and Nefertiti left the room, though Elena refused to go far, even when Nefertiti promised her she’d be summoned back as soon as there was word of Ramose’s condition.

“Thank you, but no. My place is here, with him.”

They stood in front of the door leading to the guest chamber. A guard flanked each side of the frame, barring entrance to anyone but members of the royal family, and Elena.

“You said earlier that you’d never seen such devotion in anyone.” Nefertiti walked across the hall to the window overlooking the palace gardens. “I have.”

“Really? In who?”

“A number of people. My sister, Muet, for one. I think she loved me from the moment I stepped through the portal into this world.”

Elena smiled. “How is she holding up?”

“She’s hardly left my side all day since the news of the assassination attempts spread through the palace, but I finally convinced her to tend to Akhenaten for a while.” Her grin widened. “Not that my husband will appreciate her doting anymore than I did, but he’s too well schooled in hiding his true emotions to let on he’d rather be alone. And speaking of my husband, he’s another person who left me dumfounded by his unshakable loyalty. He refused to let anyone turn him against me, even when the argument came from someone as persuasive as Ramose.”

“You think it’s an Egyptian trait, then?”

“I doubt it. You have it, too. I see it in your eyes when you look at him.”

“At Akhenaten? He’s not my type.” Elena’s attempt at humor fell flat. Nefertiti pursed her lips. Elena grimaced, knowing she’d be reprimanded for even hinting at having an interest in Akhenaten. “I didn’t mean --”

"I know what you meant. You must love him very much."

This time, Elena didn't pretend not to know who Nefertiti meant. "I ..." Emotion clogged her throat, as did her denial. She wanted to tell the other woman she was wrong. Elena wasn't in love with Ramose. She'd only known him for a few days. People simply didn't fall in love that fast.

Except, she had.

"You may both return to the chamber," Khaotep announced from the doorway, saving Elena from having to answer. She wasn't sure she'd have been able to utter the words, anyway. At least now she didn't have to find out.

"Well? How is he?"

"Dying."

Elena felt as though the air had been knocked from her lungs. She rushed to Ramose's side. His skin stretched tight over his cheekbones, and sweat dotted his brow. "Can't you do anything at all for him?"

"He's lost too much blood." Khaotep indicated to the darkly stained bandages heaped in a low container beside the bed. "He's having trouble breathing, and his heart's no longer pumping as it should. The dagger sank too deep, cut through too much. There's nothing anyone can do."

"Like hell, there isn't." She perched on the edge of the bed and lowered her head until her mouth brushed Ramose's ear. "You're not going to die, you hear me? I'm not going to let you."

"You have to understand. He's in Aten's hands now. If he wills it, Ramose will go to him."

"He's not going anywhere!" Elena bolted to her feet. "Not to Aten. Not to Hathor." She ignored the startled look in Khaotep's eyes at the mention of the forbidden goddess. "Not to anyone but me. I'll be damned if I'm going to let him be turned into a mummy, wrapped in cloth, and sprinkled with spicy incense just because he needs a blood transfusion!"

Nefertiti ran a hand through her shoulder-length locks. "What are you thinking?"

Elena drew herself up to her full height and straightened her spine. "I'm taking him home."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ramose had died once before, and that time had been much like this one.

"What have you done?" Hathor's accusing voice rang out through the now familiar cavern. The dark pool rippled. A half-melted stub of candle cast a pale light over the droplets of mist spraying over the surface.

"I saved Akhenaten. I had to. Egypt --"



“Forget Egypt.”

Ramose’s mouth hung open. Had the goddess truly spoken, or had an impostor infiltrated her magical chambers? He squeezed his eyelids closed, and when he opened them, he knelt on the cold marble, naked, just as before. An unlikely breeze played over his skin, disturbing the curls between his legs. He shifted uncomfortably. Hathor hadn’t yet appeared before him, but her voice was unmistakable.

Or should have been, but her words made no sense.

“Forgive me. I don’t understand.”

A growl of impatience echoed through the room, and movement drew Ramose’s gaze back to the limpid pool. Candlelight danced upon its surface, illuminating the chamber in pale, shadowy light. If he hadn’t been so nervous, he might have found the ethereal effect soothing.

A pair of almond-shaped eyes and red lips appeared amid the swirling points of light. Hathor parted the water and emerged, levitating a few handspans above the shimmering surface. Her body remained dry, as though the liquid sensed her displeasure and had decided to stay out of harm’s way.

Ramose wished he’d been so lucky.

Hathor stretched her arms wide on either side of her body and sank back into thin air. Ramose held his breath, expecting her to plunge into the water below, but her throne appeared out of nowhere at the last moment, and she settled comfortably against its tall back, gripping the golden armrests. The goddess pointed a long, slender finger at his chest. Her gaze narrowed, condemning him with nothing more than a glare. “You left her.”

An image of Elena’s sultry grin arose in his mind’s eye, clear and unsettling. His heart hammered against his chest. Longing filled his veins, shooting a blast of hot, unmistakable desire straight to his groin. His cock stiffened in an instant. “I didn’t leave her. You summoned me here.”

The goddess waved a hand in the air, the gesture leaving a shimmer of silvery dust in its wake. “I did no such thing. You asked to see me. You said you had ... *questions* for me.” She spat the word as though it left a foul taste in her mouth.

Ramose shifted uncomfortably. “I do have questions, though I’m not sure they shouldn’t remain unasked.”

“You didn’t cross over into my realm just to back out at the last moment.” He thought he saw her lips twitch with amusement, but when he looked again, any hint of mirth was gone. “Whatever else you might be -- and you’re many things, Ramose, priest of Amun-Ra -- you are no coward.”

“I haven’t been a priest for a very long time.”

“What nonsense are you spouting now? Just because you don’t wear the garment of one of Amun’s chosen doesn’t make you any less his priest. Now stop feeling sorry for yourself and ask what you’ve come to ask.”

He cleared his throat, trying to think past the blood that roared in his ears. When he opened his mouth to speak, Hathor held up a hand. “Wait, before you begin. There are rules in this, as in everything, or we’ll be here for all eternity, and we both have better things to do.”

“Rules?” The word echoed hollowly in the cavern.

Hathor blew out an exasperated breath. “Yes, rules. You’d think the concept entirely unfamiliar to you.” This time there was no mistaking Hathor’s smile for what it was. “Perhaps it is. In any case, the rules are simple. You may ask me three questions, no more. After I’ve answered the last one -- to my satisfaction, mind you, not yours -- you’ll have to choose.”

“Choose what?”

“That’s one.” Hathor’s smirk turned to a look of self-satisfied gloating. “And it’s one answer you’d have found out anyway. Don’t waste another question in such a foolish manner.”

“But I didn’t --”

“You’ll have to choose which one of them you want. Both Elena and Eshe are within your grasp. I can return you to your first love, and you can even save her life if that’s what you want. Or you can go back to Elena, and perhaps together you can decide what to do about the predicament you’re both in.” She leaned forward as though to impart a secret, and her voice dropped to a mere whisper. “You can’t speak your native tongue, and that won’t change. And she ... well, she doesn’t belong in Egypt any more than you do. Think, and choose wisely. Neither option is as good as it sounds.”

Ramose closed his eyes, fighting to keep his grip on reality -- or as much of it as he could handle in this place between worlds. His thoughts spun in myriad directions, playing images across the back of his eyelids. Elena straddling him with a hundred people watching, her moist folds barely brushing his cock. Elena lying naked at the edge of the Nile, moonlight spilling over her flawless alabaster skin, making it shine with a radiant glow. Elena wrapping her lips around his cock in the garden and digging her fingernails into his hips as he pumped his seed deep into her throat.

He blinked to clear away the memories, but they wouldn’t fade. He remembered the way she tasted, sweet and slightly spicy, like the flavor of temptation itself. He could even feel the texture of her silky hair as he wrapped a golden strand around his finger.

His breath came in ragged gasps as desire clawed at his insides, making his already erect cock throb painfully. “I’ve decided.” His voice sounded hoarse, throaty to his own ears.

Hathor’s eyebrows drew up in surprise. “So quickly?”

"I won't leave Elena. Not again."

The goddess smiled, perhaps the first genuine smile he'd seen from her since this whole thing began. "Good. Now utter your last two questions and leave my realm."

Ramose clasped his hands in his lap. There were so many things he wanted to know. Why had the gods allowed Akhenaten to rule if he'd abandoned them? Was Aten even a real god? Did he exist alongside Hathor, Amun, and the other deities Ramose had worshiped all his life?

Then there were other matters, even more pressing. Would Egypt survive the internal strife caused by Akhenaten's rule? Would the Egyptian people continue to be one of the most powerful and revered cultures in the world?

And still more questions came to mind, many having to do with Elena. Did she love him? Was he making a mistake? Even as the last question flashed through his mind, he knew the answer. He belonged with her. He felt it in every fiber of his being. His cock twitched as though in agreement, and he clenched his teeth to stifle a groan. When he saw Elena again, he'd make sure he showed her exactly what effect she had on him.

"Home," he uttered at last. "How do we get her home?"

"Ah, the portal. I'm truly surprised you haven't figured it out by now."

Ramose frowned, thinking back to all the occasions he'd been thrown through time. He couldn't make any connection between the events leading up to the portal opening. "If it's a word or a thought --"

"There you go again, thinking in such limited terms." She leaned back on her throne and picked up a fat grape from a nearby platter. "It's neither."

Ramose clenched his fists at his sides, impatience building in his chest. He was growing tired of riddles and word games. "Then I give up."

"It's sex."

His balls drew up in their sac in response to Hathor's bizarre answer. "You're not serious."

"Oh, but I am. Every time you and Elena join together, the sands of time begin to shift around you. Couldn't you feel it? See it?"

He started to shake his head, then stopped. He remembered the brilliant white light and the slight disorientation that came with finding himself at an entirely different location. And Elena had always complained of headaches.

"It's always there, hovering around you, waiting for your release. Only your mutual climax can make it burst forth, taking you both with it. You and Elena are joined. You always have been."

"Why her?" He asked the question before he realized what he'd done, but a moment later realized he wouldn't have withdrawn it even if he could have.

“Because every man has a true love the gods have chosen for him. The two souls are destined to meet again and again through many lifetimes. In your lifetime, your love was never ...” She gestured as though grasping for the right word. “... yours. Eshe’s death changed you, embittered you toward pharaohs whose deeds you couldn’t understand. Because of that, you almost destroyed another union the gods had worked so hard to forge.”

“Nefertiti.”

“Yes. Nefertiti. Akhenaten had married the wrong woman, and her fate remains undecided.” The goddess rubbed the bridge of her nose and suddenly looked wary, as though the weight of time had finally caught up with her. “All you need to know is that Akhenaten and Nefertiti are exactly where they need to be. Safe. Together. Thanks to you, I suppose.”

The pool shimmered. Its surface broke into agitated waves, and the candle burned out, plunging the chamber into darkness. Ramose reached out, grasping nothing but empty air. He had so many questions he still wanted answered, but they all faded into inky blackness along with Hathor and her mystical chamber.

“Come on, baby. Wake up. Please.” Elena’s familiar voice brought a smile to his face.

A smile that hurt.

He groaned, trembling as feeling slowly returned to every aching surface of his body. The dagger wound in his chest tore at his flesh. Every breath sent a wave of agony through his lungs, and he struggled to find the strength to grip Elena’s fingers in his much larger hand.

His eyelids fluttered open. Elena bent over him, her hair brushing his cheek. He felt her breath warm his skin, smelled her sweet, feminine scent. The sensation speared his belly, drove through the pain to jolt his cock with a stream of delicious awareness.

He grazed her skin with his lips. She jerked back, but his solid grip on her hand held her close to him. “Fuck me,” he whispered.

## Chapter Fifteen

“You can’t be serious,” Elena stammered. She tried to yank her wrist away, but Ramose held tight, keeping her close to him.

“I thought ... you were always ready.” The half-smile he gave her was laced with pain, and his voice sounded strained from the effort of speaking.

“This isn’t the time or the place. You’re ... ill.” She couldn’t bring herself to tell him he was dying. “I need to bring you home with me, to my time. There is medicine that can help you, but I need to figure out how the portal works, first. Nefertiti said that back in the tombs --”

“No.” He shook his head, and his dark golden skin gleamed in the candlelight. “That portal is no longer there.”

“How do you know?”

He shrugged. The effort tensed his muscles, and he closed his eyes as his chest heaved from his quickened breathing. “Trust me just this once. Please. If you want to go home ... fuck me.”

Elena pried his fingers from her wrist and turned to walk to the window. She’d felt the fever burning his skin. He didn’t know what he was asking. Having sex with him wouldn’t help bring him home with her anymore than clicking her heels together three times and wishing herself in an emergency room at L.A. County General would.

She gripped the windowsill and leaned forward, breathing in the night’s honey-scented air. The absence of a pane of glass should have been distracting, but she’d quickly found she loved being able to look outside unhindered. Everything looked crisper, sharper. Stars glittered overhead like a thousand tiny diamonds in a sweep of black velvet. The warm breeze caressed her skin, reminding Elena of the way she’d caught her first sight of ancient Egypt, enveloped in Ramose’s arms ...

Stifling a gasp with the back of her hand, she spun around quickly to face the bed. Ramose watched her from impossibly dark eyes. Pain compressed her chest as she took in the bruise framing his right eye, the long gash on his cheek, the drawn, gaunt features of his chiseled face.

“When you brought me here the first time ... we were making love on the rooftop.”

He nodded, wordlessly. His sculpted, full lips had thinned into a white, bloodless line. A muscle twitched in his jaw, and it quickly became apparent to Elena that he was grinding his teeth. Her heart ached at the thought of his wound, still raw and bleeding through the new set of bandages. If she didn’t get him help soon ...

She swallowed hard, fighting the sting of tears pricking her eyelids. “And the second time in the chamber where you found me ... I could have sworn we were in L.A. for only a minute before being swept back here.”

The tip of his tongue darted over his lips. “I don’t remember the switch.”

She grinned. “You were busy.”

“We don’t have much time. If we do this, I’m afraid you’ll have to do all the work.”

Elena dug her fingernails into her palms. She couldn’t possibly make love to a dying man ... could she? If it meant saving his life?

She walked slowly toward the bed, taking in the hard lines of his body beneath the thin sheets. Traitorous heat sluiced between her folds as her glance darted between his thighs. His cock was already hard. The thick bulge tented the sheet, drawing her gaze to the long, breathtaking line of his erect shaft. She could make out the head, where a bead of precum had left a wet stain on the linen, and the round swell of his balls, tight and entirely too tempting, wrapped in the white cloth.

The dark red stain seeping through the bandage covering his chest wasn’t nearly as sexy as the rest of him. Pain speared her heart, mingling with the lust swirling low in her stomach to form an entirely new sensation. “I don’t think I can do this.”

Ramose’s eyes drifted closed, his long lashes casting deep shadows over his cheeks. “I understand ... I’m not an attractive sight right now.”

She bit down on the inside of her lip, hard. “That’s not at all what I meant. It’s not a matter of not being attracted to you.” A small, nervous laugh bubbled forth from her lips. “That’s never been an issue.”

“Then what?”

She reached out and stroked her fingertips over the sheet, tracing the inside of his thigh. “How can you ask that? Have you seen the condition you’re in?”

“Hathor said my decision wouldn’t be pleasant.” He took a deep breath, straining against the pain etched on his forehead, and continued. “I hadn’t realized she meant she’d toss me back on my deathbed, at the mercy of the sweet pussy of the woman I love.”

Elena's stunned silence dragged on for much too long, and Ramose opened his eyes. He cocked his head sideways. A vein throbbed in his neck, drawing her attention to the fact that he still had a pulse. But for how much longer?

"All right," she said, trying to keep her voice level. "We're going to do this my way. Don't move."

His chuckle came out as a ragged gasp. "Where would I go?"

She slapped him lightly on the knee before catching herself. Grimacing, she darted a quick glance at his face. He didn't seem to be in any more pain than before, so she released a long sigh.

*I can do this. It's just sex. We've done it before.*

But sex had never been a matter of life and death before, nor had she been afraid that her every move might cause him to expend his last breath. She'd heard men say they wanted to die fucking, but she didn't think this was quite what they had in mind.

She yanked her short tunic over her head. "Promise me that whatever happens, you won't die while you're inside me."

His eyes widened as he took in her naked body, his gaze resting on her pointy nipples. "Promise me that whatever happens, this won't be the last time we fuck."

"If you keep your promise first, that shouldn't be a problem."

Elena took a deep breath, then pulled the sheet from his body. He was entirely naked but for the bandage wrapped around his shoulder and most of his chest, and firelight shone over every delectable dip of sinewy muscle. She reached for his cock. The silky, hard shaft twitched beneath her fingertips.

Ramose grunted. "We both have to come, or this won't work."

"Great. Do you know of anything else that could make this even more difficult? Because if you do, I'd like to know about it before we begin."

"Yes. Talking."

Shaking her head, Elena climbed onto the bed and knelt beside him, cupping his rock-hard length.

"Don't move," she repeated, despite his earlier remark. She dipped her head to bring her mouth closer to the quivering tip of his cock. "I want you to enjoy this."

His hips rose slightly off the bed, and his cock nudged her lips. Elena tried to hold back the smile threatening to break through her defenses. How typically male. His life dangled by a thin thread, and sex still held heaps of sweaty appeal.

She trailed the tip of her tongue into the crevice between his thigh and pubic bone, tasting the sheer masculine flavor of his skin. He shuddered, and she moved on, licking the underside of his testicles with a long swipe. This time, the low, throaty sound he made didn't sound like one of pain. Desire echoed in his every breath. Encouraged, Elena licked him

again and again, making each stroke longer than the previous one. His muscles tensed as she dug her fingers into his thighs, keeping his hips steady on the bed. She didn't want him writhing or squirming, lest the pleasure he so obviously enjoyed rapidly turned into pain.

"That's it, baby," she whispered over his cock. "Let me do the work."

She breathed in his scent, nuzzled the coarse hairs at his groin and cupped his sac, exploring every inch of him. She lapped at him again, this time along the full length of his shaft, stopping just below his glans to blow a soft stream of air over the moisture she'd left in her wake.

Ramose rewarded her with a low moan. She grinned, teasing the purplish vein snaking across his cock with the tip of her tongue. More precum oozed from the slit in his rod. When she got to the tip, she smeared it over the round dome and brought some of the moisture back down, slicking his shaft with a mixture of saliva and creamy, salty cum.

His cock twitched again, pulsed, and went still as she fell upon him, enveloping him entirely with her mouth until he reached the back of her throat. Ramose's cry echoed throughout the chamber. He gripped her hair, pulling her head back with such force that tears stung her eyes and her breath caught in her throat.

"Not like this," he murmured, his eyes wide and frenzied. "Inside you. I need to come inside your tight cunt."

Taking another shaky breath, Elena nodded and straightened her spine. Swinging one leg over his hip, she fought to keep her balance as she lowered herself over him. She needed to keep from touching him. His body was already bruised and broken enough without her adding to his injuries. The wound that wouldn't close wasn't her only worry. A purplish bruise she hadn't noticed before marred one side of his ribs. What if they'd been broken in the struggle with Djal and his guards?

Refusing to think about hurting him for another moment, she reached down and grabbed his cock. Her folds dripped with moisture. The tip of his rod caressed her slit. She shuddered in anticipation, despite her best efforts to remain clearheaded and focused.

When had she ever been able to keep a tight rein on her senses while having sex? Especially sex with Ramose, which had been breathtaking from their first encounter. Their last time together wasn't likely to be any less passionate.

*This is not the last time.*

She leaned back and allowed her body to drop down, inch by excruciatingly exquisite inch. Ramose sucked in a breath between clenched teeth, and the tears Elena had been holding back poured forth unabated.

His brows furrowed, and he reached up to wipe at the tears streaming down her face. His arm trembled and fell back upon the bed after only one swipe, but his hips bucked upward and hers bore down to meet them, helplessly drawn by the thick girth of his cock stretching her inner walls, demanding entry.



The muscles in her legs screamed from the effort of clenching them above him, unable to slam down and release the tension gripping her body. She rose and fell on his cock in rhythmic, precise movements. Sweat poured down her face to mingle with the tears and drip between her breasts, down her belly, and finally to blend with the juices her pussy produced with every thorough thrust.

His fingers fisted in the bed sheets as he arched his back, his words slurring with passion and pain at once. "You have to want this, too."

She gasped as his hips thrust upward and his cock speared deep, sending a shudder of contentment streaming through her. "I do."

She bit down on her lip and watched his face contort with the effort of fucking her, and suddenly realized how much she meant it. Her insides fluttered and her chest cramped with something more than fear for his life or even unashamed desire.

For a brief moment, Elena forgot about everything else but the man whose body she clutched with her thighs. His cock filled her, threatening to send her over the edge with every pulsing thrust. The fire blazing in her belly expanded outward, sweeping through her body and leaving a fiery trail in its wake.

"I love you." She didn't know whether she'd uttered the words aloud. The room spun, faster and faster, white-hot light bathing her body in a stream of lightning-bright illumination.

"I love you, too, Elena."

She heard her name, felt Ramose tense beneath her, and let go, her own release flooding her senses as Ramose's cock stiffened for only a moment before unleashing a sputtering stream of hot cum inside her quivering sex.

And then the world turned upside down.

Again.

## Chapter Sixteen

Thick, cloying heat swathed Elena's body in rolling, misty waves. Her head spun, though the excruciating headache she'd grown to expect was inexplicably missing. She blinked and tried to make sense of her surroundings. She'd expected to be in L.A. Perhaps back on the roof of the movie set, or even in the shadowy back alley she'd glimpsed earlier.

Instead of tall structures, cars, and people rushing around as though their lives depended on their next appointment, she only saw sand, sand, and more sand. In the distance, pyramids stood proudly, blocking out some of the setting sun. Streaks of purple gave the baby-blue sky a darkly dangerous hue. A shiver of apprehension ran down Elena's spine.

At least Ramose was here. He stood only a few steps away, his back to her. Relief flooded her chest. If he could stand on his own, it meant his wound had been healed. Perhaps simply activating the portal had been enough to save his life, even if it only managed to bring them somewhere else in Egypt.

The ground swayed. Elena's stomach lurched, and she teetered, managing not to pitch forward, but just barely. Her heart drumming an insistent rhythm in her chest, she realized she wasn't on solid ground after all, but a long, narrow raft. As though to remind her, the raft swayed again. The murky waters of the Nile looked anything but friendly as they roiled beneath the much-too-delicate vessel.

"Ramose?"

He didn't turn toward her, so she called his name again. And again. Panic built in her throat. Balancing on her toes, she rushed toward him, faltering when she came close enough to hear the low grunt escaping his lips to blend with the crashing waves. His hands gripped something level with his waist. As she took another hesitant step forward, Elena caught a glimpse of straight, blue-black hair shimmering in the fading light.

Her pulse skipped a beat. A million vile words settled on her tongue, and she opened her mouth, preparing to unleash them all in a steady rhythm in the first language that came to mind.

Something pulsed against her tongue, stifling whatever she was about to say. The taste assaulted her senses, musky and distinctive. The woman kneeling before Ramose looked up, and Elena found herself staring into a pair of blue eyes. *Her* eyes.

*Eshe.*

Elena wanted to speak, to ask how this was possible, but Eshe went back to her task, and Elena tasted every delicious swipe of Eshe's tongue gliding over Ramose's cock. When Eshe lingered, dipping the tip of her tongue into the narrow slit at the head of Ramose's shaft, Elena shivered, no longer able to hold back the rush of heat dampening the folds of her pussy.

Eshe gripped Ramose's ass, and Elena felt the sinewy muscle tense beneath her hands. His firm buttocks flexed as he shoved his hips forward, spearing her mouth. Elena's hands -- or were they Eshe's? -- gripped tighter, until her fingernails dug into his skin. He rewarded her with another groan. His cock twitched, engorging even further until it blocked every other thought from Elena's mind but that of his impending climax.

His shaft was smooth and hot, slick and swollen. Her tongue teased the vein snaking over the underside of his cock, and he stiffened, gripping her hair, holding her face close to the curly black thatch at his groin.

She wanted him to come. *Needed* him to come. She could already taste the salty flavor of his seed, knew how it would feel when it finally flooded her mouth to squirt down her throat.

"There! On the water!" Angry voices cut through the euphoria in Elena's mind to bring her crashing back. The bundled papyrus reeds of the raft's surface cut into her knees. When had she kneeled? She couldn't remember.

Ramose yanked her mouth from his cock just as his seed erupted. It splattered over her face and dripped down her breasts in hot, creamy spurts. His breath came in ragged gasps, and he swore, cupping his balls and squeezing. Instead of slowing the onslaught, his orgasm built and continued, landing on her lips, her shoulders, her hair.

She dared a glance at the riverbank. *They'd found her.*

"Hide!" Ramose gripped her upper arm and yanked her to her feet. She smelled him on her, his scent marking her as his. Cum dripped over the symbols decorating her skin, smearing her body. "Where? They've already seen me."

"No, they haven't. They haven't cleared the palm trees yet, but they will. You must go."

Her throat tightened. There was only one place to hide from prying eyes, and it wasn't on the raft. She wanted to protest, to tell him she couldn't swim, but the anger and fear

blazing in his eyes drowned any argument she might have made. The terror wasn't for him, she knew, though the royal guards would kill him the instant they saw him with the pharaoh's most valuable concubine. No one but the gods' chosen was supposed to touch her, yet Ramose had. That act alone was punishable by death.

Her own fate would be much worse. She'd been trained in every act of pleasure known to man, yet her abilities were for Amenhotep III alone. To give herself willingly to another was unthinkable, and the pharaoh's justice would not be swift, or altogether very just.

But she had given herself, body and soul, and had received much more in return. Ramose loved her the way no one else had. His touch was a gentle, warm contrast to the pharaoh's blows and cruel tastes.

She allowed herself one moment to press a quick kiss to Ramose's sun-browned cheek before turning and diving into the dark, treacherous water. It was high-tide season. Out here, in the middle of the river, the current was strong, but nothing a seasoned swimmer couldn't handle.

Ramose thought she'd learned how to swim in her childhood, like every other Egyptian child. Except her youth had been spent cloistered in preparation for her duties to the pharaoh, and indulgences such as swimming or playing with the other children hadn't been permitted.

Her body sank through the water. She took a deep breath before her head plunged underneath, just in time to hear more shouting. The voices were closer now, too close. Perhaps she could hold her breath long enough for the pharaoh's men to determine Ramose was alone and leave.

Even as she conceived that plan, she knew it was impossible. Already, blood roared in her ears and her lungs burned. She'd exhausted the gulp of air she'd counted on, but fought until her throat tightened. A silent scream broke free from somewhere deep inside.

Water rushed in, and she struggled, thrashing against the currents tugging at her legs. Something gripped her wrist. A hand? She didn't know. The phantom sensation disappeared as quickly as it had materialized.

*No more. Oh, gods. No more!*

A swift, sharp stab of familiar pain pierced Elena's already aching head. Her entire body recoiled, fought against the whirlwind gripping her, spinning her.

Sputtering and gasping for breath, Elena collapsed onto a hard, warm body, but a grunt from below made her sit up. She clawed at her throat, willing the air back into her lungs. Her eyes stung, and tears rolled down her cheeks in heavy waves.

Then hands gripped her arms and pulled her up as a cacophony of noise erupted around her. For a moment, she couldn't make sense of the words or of her surroundings.

"That's Elena Black! I know her. Stop!"

Two men rushed toward her. She squinted, trying to place them. Recognition hit at last, and she slumped in the grip of the hands still holding her arms.

*Thank you.*

She didn't know who the prayer was intended for, and right then, it didn't matter. She struggled to keep more tears at bay.

"James. Max." Her voice shook. She pointed toward the ground where Ramose lay, blood oozing from the raw, open chest wound. The bandages were gone. "Call an ambulance."

## Chapter Seventeen

“You’re sure you want to do this?”

Ramose crossed the distance to the bed where Elena lay on her side, her head propped on an elbow. She wore a lacey garment that bared more than it covered, and her full, pouty lips were red and swollen from his kisses. They’d been kissing a lot since he’d been released from the hospital into her care.

“What’s the alternative? I never fuck you again because I’m afraid of where we’ll end up?”

Her tongue darted out between her lips, moistening them. Her mouth glistened in the pale firelight. She’d lit candles all around the room, and the golden light spilled in flickering ripples over the dark wood furniture. Above the headrest, a replica of an Egyptian papyrus scroll found in Tutankhamen’s tomb hung in a gold-gilded frame. Elena had bought it for Ramose when he’d moved in.

It still felt strange, surreal even. Elena had convinced James and Max there’d been an accident on the set, and they’d rushed him to the hospital. Thinking back, it seemed as though a lifetime had passed while he regained his strength and tried to learn all he could about his new world.

Yet there was so much he didn’t understand, so much she still had to teach him. He’d learn. If it took every ounce of willpower to blend in, he’d make sure it happened. He spoke the language perfectly. Maybe he could even get a job. He’d always had an affinity for numbers. No matter what century, people always needed someone to manage their funds for them. How hard could it be to pass himself off as a knowledgeable businessman?

“You’re worrying again.” Elena rose to lean against the headboard and crossed her arms beneath her full, tempting breasts. “You’ve been doing entirely too much of that.”

"I know." He couldn't help it. Depending on anyone to take care of him made him uncomfortable, but there would be time to worry about doing something about it later.

Right now, he needed a good fuck to clear his mind.

The bed frame creaked beneath his weight. Elena held out her arms, and he fell upon her, ravenous. She'd dabbed on perfume, and the flowery scent blended with the natural aroma of her skin to form a heady mixture that seemed to grip him by the groin. His cock hardened and pressed against her mound. She spread her legs wider, cupping his ass and pulling him to her. A breathy moan escaped her lips.

"I wanted this to be perfect." Her warm breath caressed his neck as her fingers dug into his flesh. She ground her mons against his cock.

"It is." They'd been planning this encounter since the night she'd brought him to her apartment. It had taken time for his wounds to heal, but the doctors had kept him under close supervision at the hospital for days before releasing him. Now, although the bandage he wore reminded him the wound hadn't completely healed, the rest of his body felt ready to tackle whatever he threw at it. At the moment, he felt more than ready to tackle Elena. His cock throbbed, hot and heavy between his thighs, affirming his thoughts.

She nibbled at his earlobe, grazing her teeth over the sensitive skin. The unexpected sensation sent a shiver down his spine.

"You're not having second thoughts, are you?"

"No," he said, meaning it. He'd told her about the conversation with Hathor, about the choice she'd offered him. In return, Elena had told him about remembering portions of her life as Eshe.

The concept of fate had always held a certain appeal, but Ramose had preferred to believe a man shaped his own destiny. Yet after realizing how closely everything was connected, Elena's life as Eshe, Sam's life as Khaotep, he was willing to admit their paths weren't as random as he'd assumed.

Choices made the path worth walking. Hathor had made that much clear. Choosing Elena had been the right choice -- the only choice worth making. Eshe had never been his, not really.

"Then what is it?"

He slid one hand up along her ribs and cupped the underside of her breast. Her skin felt warm and silky, the weight of her breast heavy in his palm. She trembled against him as her nipples beaded into tiny points, skimming his chest.

How could he tell her he wondered if constantly shifting back and forth through time would weaken his resolve? If he didn't belong here, in her time, if he failed miserably in trying to adapt to a world that moved so much quicker than he'd been accustomed to, would there come a point when he no longer wanted to return? Elena didn't belong in ancient

Egypt; that much was clear. Then again, neither did he. Was he doomed to shift back and forth, never truly belonging to the past or the present?

Elena's hand on his cock chased the dark thoughts away. "Let it go, baby. At least for now. We know how to get back here. When we shift, we'll be together. We'll be together still when we return."

"Elena --"

She shoved her mouth hard against his, silencing him. His head spun, though no longer with worry or inner turmoil. Her mouth parted for him, and passion took over. He thrust his tongue between her lips. She opened to invite him inside her moist, warm cavern. His fingers yearned to follow suit. Shifting on top of her just enough to bring his hand down between them, he cupped her pussy through the thin lace material, finding the crotch already damp.

"Mmm ..." He swallowed her breathless moan, thrusting aside the flimsy material to gain full access to her silky folds. Liquid heat ran down her thighs, coating his fingers as he slid two inside her tight sheath.

She cried out, gripping his shoulder and bucking against him as his fingers nudged further inside her inner channel. Her cunt gripped him, held him close while he brought his thumb up and circled the engorged bud of her clit. Keeping him pressed against her, she rocked her hips off the bed and arched her back, plunging him deeper inside her.

Her lips were so soft, so malleable against his mouth. Panting, he continued to kiss her as though he'd never kissed before -- and he hadn't, never like this. Finding new angles, new depths of thrusts, licks, swipes, and dips of his tongue, he kissed her until the entire world faded away, leaving nothing but a warm, moist blend in the wake of reality.

She came with a shudder and a gasp, unleashing a hot, sticky pool of liquid over his fingers. Her body stiffened, then relaxed, and she broke the kiss to glance up at him with wide, startling blue eyes.

Color stained her cheeks, rosy against her pale skin. She grasped her swollen lower lip between her teeth as though she wanted to speak, but he pressed his index finger to her lips. "No more talking. There's been enough of that already."

She nodded, wordlessly, then watched as he bent his head to her pussy and flicked his tongue over the evidence of her climax. She shuddered, gripping his head, holding his mouth so close to her cunt, he inhaled her spicy, musky scent with every raggedly drawn breath.

He nuzzled her golden curls, and she released a soft sigh, her spine arching, her limbs stretching toward the foot and head of the bed. He kissed her clit, nudging it slightly with his tongue, knowing it would still be too tender to lavish much attention on. She squirmed beneath his ministrations, relaxing when his mouth dipped lower.

He gripped her legs and placed them over his shoulders, loving the way her thighs squeezed him, holding him captive so close to her slick folds. He licked the cream from her slit in a long, gentle swipe from the base of her anus to the tip of her clit. The shudder



racking her body made him grin. His cock twitched impatiently, and he palmed it, holding it close to his body while his mouth went back to work on her sopping pussy, fucking her with his tongue in quick, rapid motions.

“Ramose,” she sighed. He didn’t remind her of their agreement not to speak again. He’d never tire of hearing his name on her lips.

Withdrawing his tongue, he thrust his thumb inside her passage. Her thighs quivered. There was no more time to waste.

Gripping her hips, he slid her down the bed and lifted her to straddle his waist. She giggled, her face shiny with sweat and sheer radiance. She looked happy, he realized, and was instantly mesmerized that he could provoke such a reaction in anyone. She gripped the base of his cock, squeezing his balls lightly. “Let me feel you go in. Please. Let me feel every inch of you.”

“How could any man deny a request like that?”

Sweat broke out over his forehead as he willed himself not to rush. He wanted nothing more than to plunge his cock with one slick, sudden move, balls-deep into her tight, hot cunt. Instead, he went slowly as she’d requested, gasping when the tip of his cock met her folds, groaning when it slid easily inside her.

Excruciatingly gently, he lowered her onto his shaft. Her eyelids drifted closed, and her head fell back. He licked the pulsing hollow at the base of her throat, his hands closing in on her breasts, not to pinch or squeeze, but more because he needed something to hold on to.

Moaning, she came again, the pale light in the room illuminating the deep blush tinting her skin. Her pussy clenched and quivered around him, and he thrust his cock inside her, sighing with the exquisite pleasure of their union.

Aching ecstasy streamed down his cock with every slow thrust. Her snug channel enveloped him, wrapped him in warmth and softness. His climax built inside his balls, tightening his stomach, hardening his shaft until it resembled a steel rod, ready to explode inside her.

“Yes,” she whispered, the word a barely audible breath in the otherwise quiet room. “Yes.”

Spasms quivered over the length of his cock, tightening his balls, making him grit his teeth. The shift he knew was coming pressed in on him. He couldn’t hold back any longer. The pleasure built, pounding at him from the inside out, and then it exploded in a swirl of hazy white light, blinding him, sending his senses reeling.

Hot cum flowed from his cock, filling her. Elena dug her fingernails into his shoulders, her own cry of release apparently overtaking any fear or apprehension she might have been feeling about yet another trip into the past.

Ramose slumped backward, bringing Elena down with him. He kept his eyes screwed shut until the last drip of cum fell from his cock, not yet ready to face a palace, village, or

workers' tavern full of onlookers. They'd been lucky when they first landed beside the Nile in a secluded spot. He doubted their luck would hold.

"Ramose?" Elena's melodious voice traveled down his spine. He could feel the rhythm of her heartbeat, strong and steady, pounding against both their chests.

"Mmm ..." he mumbled incoherently, his fingers drawing circles on her back. Any second now, she'd ask him to open his eyes, to face whatever new challenge Hathor had decided to throw at them.

"I think we're okay."

He swallowed hard, his brain refusing to make sense of her words. Sure, they were okay. For now. Maybe for the next minute or two. Maybe even until they got back to her time. But what about the next time? And the next?

Elena shifted in his arms, lifting herself off him. His cock slipped from her pussy with a slight squelch. "We didn't go anywhere."

"What?" He opened his eyes and blinked rapidly to clear his vision, sitting up. He took in her bedroom, still decorated in that same part American bachelorette, part Egyptian man-out-of-time style, and his mouth went dry. "That's impossible. I saw the bright light, the vortex that always claimed us. I *felt* it, Elena."

Her lopsided grin reached her eyes, deepening their pale blue softness. "I think Hathor's let us off the hook." She thrust a finger at his chest. "Let *you* off the hook."

His chuckle was half relief, half hope. When he'd been inside Elena, nothing else had mattered. Not his new life here, or the mess he'd managed to make of things back in Egypt before finally getting a second chance to set them right. Nothing but the two of them.

"I think we're okay," he said, echoing her words. Gripping her wrist, he pulled her to him until she straddled his lap. Her wet folds brushed his thigh, and his cock stirred, already eager for another round.

"Just so you know ..." He brushed a damp strand of hair away from her eyes. "I love you for you. For the woman you are, not the woman you once were."

Her smile faded and her brows furrowed, her serious expression tightening his chest for a moment before she replied. "And I love you ... for both of us."

He swept her up and shoved her down on the bed, raining torrential tickles down on her body. The room erupted in a deluge of feminine, blissful giggles.

In the distance, Ramose heard another laugh, this one throatier, though just as pleasure-filled. Hathor's voice slid over his skin, oddly comforting.

*I knew you'd learn.*

THE END

## Lacey Savage

Lacey Savage began her love affair with romance at an early age. In high school, she checked out steamy romance novels from the public library and would often be found reading them in the middle of class.

Lacey still reads more than she cares to admit, and probably more than her husband would like, considering how many books she keeps bringing into the house. Her favorite genres have always been erotica, romance, fantasy, science fiction and mystery, so she tries to incorporate a little of each into her writing.

She initially majored in Marketing, then went back to school to major in English Literature. After earning her degrees, she decided to turn her efforts to her true passion: writing. A hopeless romantic, Lacey loves writing about the intimate, sensual side of relationships.

She currently resides in Ottawa, Canada, with her loving husband and their mischievous cat.

You can learn more about Lacey by visiting her website at [www.laceysavage.com](http://www.laceysavage.com), and can reach her at [laceysavage@rogers.com](mailto:laceysavage@rogers.com).