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Trouble With Mitch

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TROUBLE WITH MITCH

Myla Jackson

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Chapter One

"I couldn't possibly take it. It's a priceless asset to the museum. The public deserves a chance to see it." Amira Nassiri held her hands up, refusing to accept the beautiful blue-green bottle recently discovered on an archeological dig in the Zagros Mountains of Iraq. Her fingers itched to smooth over the details of the hand-blown glass, miraculously intact after a thousand years. She shook her head and stepped back. "No, I can't. It wouldn't be right."

"You don't understand. This bottle is particularly special because it's from the sarcophagus of an ancient princess. Unfortunately, we had to return the sarcophagus and its princess to its native country. Fortunately for you, I kept this bottle."

"Isn't that stealing?"

Mr. Baumgartner shrugged. "What they don't know won't hurt them. And since I can't display it in the museum without raising suspicion, I want it to go in a private collection where it will be most appreciated."

"And not seen by just anyone. Thanks. You're passing on a stolen artifact." Amira hiked the strap of her Prada bag up her shoulder, preparing to leave.

"It's only stolen if someone knows about it." The museum curator leaned closer, his breath smelling of stale coffee. "It's said to transfer magical powers to the woman who possesses it." He pushed the bottle toward her. "Look at it. Its beauty is beyond compare."

"Even more of a reason for me to leave it in your care." Besides, Amira didn't believe in magic. She did however love beautiful bottles of all shapes and sizes and this one was so very unique and old. Still. "No, I can't take it."

"I insist. For all you've donated-done for the museum-you deserve it." In the dim yellow light of his office at the back of the museum, Mr. Baumgartner's face

glowed a purplish-red. A testament to years of overindulgence in liquor. "It will only take a minute to wrap it for you so that you can carry it home safely. Or I could have it sent via courier?"

Amira didn't want to take the stolen bottle, but if she didn't, there was no telling who the curator would give it to. Better to take it and figure out a way to get it back into the care of the museum without the curator being aware of it. "Okay, if you insist." The thought of a courier dropping the precious glass, made Amira's heart skip a beat. "But a courier won't be necessary."

As the curator fumbled with the packaging, Amira admired the play of light on the colored glass. She really should insist on leaving the bottle with the museum. Taking one step outside the museum with the stolen artifact made her just as much a criminal as Mr. Baumgartner. But the ancient blues and greens captivated her. She couldn't allow its beauty to be spirited away into a private citizen's collection. Such a gift should be shared...

"My assistant, Edie, disappeared on me," Mr. Baumgartner groused. "Do you know how hard it is to get good help these days?" He glanced at her and smiled. "I guess you do, what with being in the perfume industry and all."

She nodded, rather than answer with words. She'd hoped to be home by now. If not for the call she'd received from Mr. Baumgartner on her way back to her Manhattan penthouse apartment, she'd have been soaking in the hot tub with a glass of wine.

Much as she wanted to tell him it could wait, she'd too often been surprised by gifts of rare antiquities from Mr. Baumgartner that she hadn't been able to refuse. This gift would have to be the exception.

He knew she had a weakness for bottles. Her line of perfume was world famous for their exotic and unique packaging with limited numbers of the most unusual being produced. The bottles represented collector's items with or without the exquisite perfumes inside. She'd seen one of her perfume bottles bring as much as twentythousand dollars at a private auction.

The museum curator wrapped the bottle in tissue paper and gently laid it in a box. When he was done, he closed the lid and held it out to her. "A beautiful gift for a beautiful woman." He bowed, his heavy jowls jiggling so much, Amira fought giggles rising in her throat.

She took the box and backed away. "I'll be sure to plump up my donation, Mr. Baumgartner. Thank you."

"Please, won't you stay for a drink?" The man straightened his tie, his gaze falling on the vee of Amira's blouse.

"No, I think not." Amira resisted the urge to cover her cleavage. Mr. Baumgartner might come up with fabulous treasures to add to her collection, but she had no intention of suffering through a drink with the man. Just like every man she'd met, they were after only one of two things...her money or sex. The first, she gladly gave to good causes, the second, she preserved for...

In her hurry to exit the warehouse, Amira paused. What was she "saving" herself for? Not that she was a virgin, although she might as well be. Her father kept her on a very tight leash.

If not for her one fling with womanizer Mitch West, she might never have experienced the pleasure of the most exquisite orgasm. Oh the way he made her feel. Just the memory of the places he'd touched had her creaming in her panties.

They'd met at a party her father threw for his employees and support staff in the lobby of his corporate headquarters. After several drinks, she'd managed to slip upstairs to her office. Mitch followed. They'd talked and stared out the window at the New York City skyline, sharing their dreams. Then they were kissing and before she knew it, they were sprawled across her desk, making love like they were meant to be together.

That he'd dropped her like yesterday's fashions after that one night made it all the more disheartening. Why? Had she been that bad? She thought it had been pretty terrific. But he never called her afterward. Not once. He'd handed over her father's

investments to another stockbroker and she hadn't seen him since. Had he been put off by the way her father treated her? Please let it be that and not her lack of prowess in lovemaking.

Amira sighed. Sometimes she wished she could be like normal, everyday women who didn't have a constant entourage of bodyguards crowding her every step. It had to be a total turn-off to men. What she wouldn't give for the freedom to walk about the streets, carefree and most importantly...*By. Herself.* But how could she? While she stood in the warehouse at the back of the large museum, her bodyguards waited for her in the lobby. A limousine stood on the street out front, ready to take her anywhere her heart desired, when all her heart desired was to be by herself, independent of her jailors, free to be with whomever she chose.

A red, lit Exit sign at the rear of the warehouse caught her attention. "Mr. Baumgartner?"

"Yes, Miss Nassiri?" He hurried to her side.

She pointed at the sign, a thrill of excitement tingling through her veins. "Where does that door lead?"

"Into the back alley." He frowned. "Why?"

"And the alley leads to?" The excitement bubbled up like champagne in her belly.

"A side street."

Escape. She could leave her bodyguards behind and roam the streets of New York. Just like any anonymous person. "I'll leave through that door, Mr. Baumgartner."

"But Miss Nassiri, your car is waiting out front."

"Is there a problem with me leaving through the rear of the building, Mr. Baumgartner? Security alarms, locks?" She'd learned from her father never to take no for an answer and never to explain herself.

"No, I can unlock the door and let you through." The curator tugged at his tie. "What about your bodyguards? Are you sure that's what you want?"

She answered with raised eyebrows, when her knees were shaking. She'd never tried to dodge her bodyguards. Her father would be livid, but right now, she didn't give a damn. Besides, he was in Venice for the week. On the streets of New York City, she could easily lose herself and her bodyguards with no problem.

Without waiting for permission, she strode to the chained and padlocked back door and waited, tapping her bright red Manolo Blahnik pointed-toe pumps.

Mr. Baumgartner raced over, fumbling in his pocket. "Just a moment while I find the key."

As the man inserted a key into a padlock, a commotion at the door leading to the front of the building set Amira's heart pounding. Had her bodyguards become impatient? "Please hurry, Mr. Baumgartner. I don't have all day."

The lock clicked and the hasp swung free. Mr. Baumgartner loosened the chains and pushed on the lever, opening the door.

A shout sounded behind them.

Amira sucked in a deep breath, and without looking back, passed through the doorway and out into the alley.

"What's the meaning of this—" The door swung shut, cutting off Mr. Baumgartner's words to the intruders behind him.

In high heels, Amira didn't have a chance of outrunning the bodyguards if they had already made it across the warehouse floor. Quickly, before she could lose her nerve, she grabbed a loose board from the ground and shoved it through the two handles of the back door. That might not stop them, but at least it would slow them down long enough for her to duck out of sight.

With freedom a short jog ahead, Amira tore out, the box tucked under arm, running like a football player breaking into the end zone.

The door behind rattled.

Amira didn't look around, she kept running. If she could make the end of the alley, she could merge into foot traffic and lose the bodyguards altogether. Her heart hammering against her ribs, she ran as fast as she could in her spiked heels, wishing for the comfortable shoes she worked out in with her trainer.

She rounded the corner and slipped into a crowd of tourists, ducking low to blend in, cursing her bright red coat. The crowd flowed toward a double-decker bus parked against the curb. Amira allowed as many people as possible to pass her, keeping a buffer of ten tourists between her and the corner she'd emerged on.

"Next stop, Times Square!" the tour guide shouted above the noise of fifty people talking at once. "Don't be left behind."

The announcement caused a renewed surge of humanity, trapping Amira in their ranks and shoving her forward to the steps of the bus. When she tried to back up and slip out of the line, she found herself sandwiched between two large women intent on making it onto the bus before it left without them.

With the two women shoving her forward, she was forced to step up onto the bus or be cut off at the shins by the bulldozing women. As she climbed the steps, shouts erupted from pedestrians nearby. Two big men dressed in black suits and wearing dark sunglasses on a cloudy day broke through the crowd, shoving people to the side.

These men weren't her bodyguards, but they'd emerged from the same alley she had and they were searching for someone.

At the top of the stairs now, she hurried onto the bus, clutching the box in her hands, and bending over to watch the men through the windows. The two women behind her pushed her forward and she stumbled, catching herself on the back of a seat.

The tour guide climbed on board, swung the door shut and grabbed the hand-held microphone. "Everyone ready for Times Square?"

"Yes!" the group shouted in unison.

"Take your seats, please," the guide instructed, even as the bus lurched forward into traffic.

Amira found a seat near the rear of the bus. As she settled into it, her gaze connected with one of the men who'd been searching for someone. His eyes widened and he shouted to his partner, pointing at the bus.

No, he pointed at her!

Amira ducked, hoping she'd been incorrect, wishing she had been a good little rich girl and left the museum with her phalanx of hired muscle. Although, why those men would be after her, she didn't know. She settled the box in her lap, a sudden horrible thought occurring to her.

Hadn't Mr. Baumgartner admitted that the bottle was stolen? What if she was caught in possession of stolen merchandise? Those men could be policemen, FBI or CIA.

Her breath caught in her throat and she spun in her seat as the light changed and the bus chugged forward. The men ran alongside the vehicle, pounding against the side of the bus.

"Jesus! What's wrong with those people?" The woman beside Amira stared in horror at the men raising such a ruckus beneath where she sat. "What do they want?"

"Probably missed their bus. Can't they tell a tour bus from a city bus?" asked the grizzled old man in front of her, wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt. "Get the fuck away, you morons!" He shot his middle finger at them.

Could this bus go any slower? Amira fought the urge to move to the other side of the aisle, away from the crazed men.

The traffic eased enough the bus could speed up, leaving the men behind. One of them stood in the middle of the street, blocking an oncoming taxi.

Was he crazy or just stupid? Taxi drivers didn't stop for anything in New York City. Amira's father didn't allow her to ride in taxi cabs, stating they were Kamikazes on wheels.

Amira squeezed her eyes shut against the blood and guts sure to be spread all over the pavement. Tires squealed and a horn blared. She opened her eyes not to a dead man

laying sprawled on the street but to the taxi driver being thrown out onto the street. Both the men jumped into the front seat of the taxi. As the vehicle shot forward, the passenger bailed out of the back door, rolling to a stop against the curb.

"Did you see that?" The woman beside her nudged Amira with her elbow. "What's this world coming to? Are they filming a movie?" She craned her neck, apparently searching for the cameras.

"I don't think so." She watched in morbid fascination as the taxi dodged through traffic, following the path the bus took. A light changed, trapping the taxi behind several others. With the men stuck at the light and distance growing between them and the bus, Amira didn't have much time. The bus turned at the next block, giving her the chance she needed.

Sure now that the men were following her, Amira searched the streets ahead, hoping for a miracle or an escape route to materialize. Why were they after her? For the bottle? Or to kidnap her? She had no intentions of waiting around to find out. Hugging the box to her chest, she staggered to her feet and ran to the front of the bus.

The tour guide blocked her way. "Please take a seat while the bus is in motion, miss."

"You have to let me out," Amira gasped, fear making her heart beat too fast and her breaths come in short, shallow rasps.

"I can't do that. We have a schedule to keep." The woman, resembling a guard at a prison facility, crossed her arms over her chest. "You'll have to wait until the next stop."

"Let me out or I'll..." Amira struggled with what could be bad enough to move the tour guide out of her way. "I'm going to puke. If you don't let me out, I'll puke on you."

"Oh, good Lord, let her skinny ass out, for Pete's sake!" One of the large women who'd practically forced Amira onto the bus earlier shouted at the guide from halfway down the aisles.

The tour guide glared at Amira. "Fine. But we're not waiting on you, so hurry it up."

The bus screeched to a halt and the door swung open.

"You don't have to wait. I'm not getting back on." Amira descended the steps and darted into an Oriental rug store.

The door closed and the bus filled with tourists continued on its way to Times Square.

Before Amira had a chance to determine just where she'd landed, tires squealed and the taxi with the two thugs blew past the rug store, hot on the tail of the bus.

Amira ducked behind a rolled carpet and waited until the bus and taxi disappeared. Then she left the building and headed back the way she'd come.

Unwilling to take a chance on a taxi, she hailed a bicycle rickshaw complete with a clear vinyl tent around it. As she stepped inside and allowed the young man to tuck a dirty blanket around her legs, she sighed. Who would think to look for the daughter of the richest perfume tycoon inside a bicycle rickshaw?

Amira settled back and enjoyed the ride back to her Manhattan apartment, realizing she'd had enough excitement in the past hour to last for a while. Next time she decided to ditch her bodyguards, she'd think twice.

Fifteen minutes later and following a thorough chastising from her father over the telephone, Amira stripped out of her damp clothes and, in her bra and panties, padded through her penthouse apartment overlooking Central Park. A drink was what she needed. A drink and a long soak in the tub. She made it as far as fixing the drink, but ended up collapsed on the brown leather sofa, curiosity getting the better of her. With a triple martini balanced in one hand, she ripped the tape off the box Mr. Baumgartner had given her earlier. What the hell was so special about the pretty blue-green bottle that two men had chased after her on the streets of New York?

Tape removed, she opened the lid and set her martini on the mahogany coffee table.

She dug into layers of tissue paper until she reached the bottle. Nestled in tissue, it didn't look all that important. Its long, thin neck appeared a darker shade of blue-green than the onion-bulb shape of the base.

Amira eased the bottle from the tissue and held it up to the light. She gasped when every hue of the rainbow rippled across the surface.

"It's beautiful," she said aloud, her voice echoing against the walls. So what? The bottle was pretty. But pretty enough to chase after someone to get it? Not hardly. Valuable enough, maybe. She tipped it upside down and searched for markings.

Nothing.

So what was the big deal?

She set the bottle on the table, reached for her martini and then leaned back against the cushions, sipping her drink and staring at the bottle. Who were those men? Maybe Mr. Baumgartner would know about the men who'd chased her.

Amira dug her cell phone from her purse and speed-dialed Mr. Baumgartner's number at the museum. After five rings, the museum operator picked up. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to speak with Mr. Baumgartner."

"Oh, ma'am, I'm sorry, but there's been an accident."

Her stomach clenching, Amira grabbed the phone tighter. "What accident?"

"I'm sorry, I've been instructed not to give out information to anyone but family. Are you family?"

"No. This is Amira Nassiri, one of the museum's benefactors."

"Oh, well. Then I guess it's okay to tell you." The operator's voice dropped to an intense whisper. "There was a break-in inside the warehouse today and Mr. Baumgartner was attacked."

"How is he?"

"We don't know yet. He's unconscious and the paramedics are with him now."

"Oh my. Thank you for the information." Amira hung up and paced across the room. "What the hell?"

Trouble With Mitch

She stopped in front of the bottle, anger building at the inanimate object. Not that she really liked Mr. Baumgartner very much. The man gave her "gifts", but he always expected something in return. Usually, hefty donations. Still, she didn't wish ill on the man and it sounded as if he'd met with a lot of ill. Probably dished out by the two men who'd chased her for several blocks.

Amira froze at her next thought. Would Mr. Baumgartner have told them who she was? Would they come looking for her here? She lifted the house phone and started to dial security on the front desk. Halfway through the numbers, she hung up. What would she say? That she thought she'd been followed and that someone was after her? Where was her proof? She'd look like a paranoid rich girl and it would be reported back to her father. He'd be back from Italy faster than she could finish her martini.

No. She had to handle it herself and trust in the building's state-of-the-art security system her father had paid dearly for. She glanced through the windows out at Central Park, in the early throes of spring, where young leaves were just budding from gray branches.

Rain ran in rivulets down the floor-to-ceiling glass panes, blurring the view. Amira pressed her forehead to the cool window. Why did things have to happen the way they did? She'd finally taken a step on the wild side and what happened? Freakin' everything. Was it a sign she should follow her father's advice and remain cloistered behind security systems and bodyguards for the rest of her life?

She threw her hands up in the air. "I'm tired of living my life in a bubble, dammit!" But she wasn't brave enough to face a scary world alone. Catch-22. She stared at the bottle across the room. "It's all your fault." The need to throw something propelled her forward until she stood in front of the onion-shaped bottle, the lovely bluish-green reflecting off the glass of the coffee table. She grabbed the neck of the bottle and held it over her head ready to smash it against the wall and watch it shatter into a million satisfying pieces.

Once her hand wrapped around cool smoothness, her sky-rocketing anger died to a sulky fizzle. No matter how mad she got, she couldn't destroy a thing of such ageless beauty. She brought the bottle to her chest and dropped onto the couch. "What's the use? I don't even have the guts to throw a stupid bottle."

Exhausted by all the events of the day, Amira stared at the martini glass, empty but for the olive resting against the bottom. Like her. Empty. So what did the olive signify? Her dreams? If she didn't fill her glass with life, would her dreams and desires shrivel up?

She wished she could find someone to love, to share her world and thoughts with. Someone who would whisk her away to his secret hideaway. Maybe a desert sheik, determined to make her his one-woman harem, content to love her and her alone. A man who couldn't care less about her money.

"Ah, what's the use?" She leaned her head back, the bottle still cradled against her chest. Her hand rubbed over the bulbous base, feeling every wave and crest in the glass, marveling at its simple beauty. She snorted softly. "I can see me now. I'll be an old maid collecting bottles instead of children." Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes, letting exhaustion claim her.

A rumble pierced the sound of the teeming traffic traversing Fifth Avenue far below, jerking her awake. "What the heck?"

Amira rose from the couch, struggling to stand as the floor shook beneath her feet. Earthquake? In Manhattan? A flash of light blinded her, followed by a huge clap of thunder. Had the city come under attack, again?

Amira tucked the bottle under her arm and dropped to the hardwood floor, covering her face with her free arm. Now would be a good time for those bodyguards to show up and save the day.

Then the world stopped shaking, the rumbling ceased and the paintings on the walls stilled.

Was it safe to come up for air? Amira stayed flat on the floor for a few seconds longer, afraid to pull her head out from under her arms in case a second tremor followed the first and the ceiling decided to crash in on her.

When the second tremor didn't happen, Amira sat up and looked around, her gaze making a slow pan of the room.

The windows were intact, no cracks, no broken glass. The walls stood as straight and unblemished as before. Everything appeared unfazed by the tremors. If the Rousseau painting weren't tipped slightly to the left, Amira might have questioned the vermouth in her martini.

She had just set the bottle on the coffee table when a deep groan sounded from the other side of the leather sofa.

Amira screamed and leaped over the coffee table, grabbing the designer lamp from the end table beside her and holding it like a baseball bat.

"Who's there?" she asked, angry that her voice shook.

"What the -" A man sat up, his head appearing over the top of the couch, his blond hair sticking up straight and his amazingly broad shoulders bare.

Amira's mouth went dry. "Don't move or I'll use this." Amira shook the lamp at him.

He frowned at the lamp. "What? Are you going to shoot me with a ray of light or something?" His gaze narrowed and he blinked. "Amira? What the heck—"

"Mitchell West?" Had she dreamed him up? No, she could feel his hot gaze as if he'd run his hands over her semi-naked body. "What the hell are you doing here? And stop staring at me!" She had to take the upper hand, even if all she wore was her bra and panties. A man with shoulders as broad as his could easily take control of a woman and...and...rape her or something. Her blood heated, his naked shoulders doing crazy things to her concentration. She eased toward the coffee table where she thought she'd left her cell phone. The table was empty except for the martini glass and the stolen bottle. Where the heck had the cell phone gone? "How did you get in here?"

"I can't help staring at you. You're...well hell, you have a great body. What did you expect?"

Her skin heated and she tossed her mane of rich black hair over her shoulder. "It's my body, damn it, and you have no right to stare at it, so quit!" Wow, did she really sound that stupid? Hell, he'd had his chance and blew it.

"Yes, Miss Nassiri." The man averted his eyes. God, he was gorgeous with sandy blond hair and startling blue eyes, like a golden Adonis, all buff and beautiful. But that wasn't the point and she wasn't any nearer to getting him out of her apartment.

"You didn't answer my question. How the hell did you get into my apartment?"

He faced her, for which she gave him a dirty look, and he looked away again. "I don't know how I got here, but I think it had something to do with a stone."

"Stone? Is it some kind of code word or something? You know, who cares? The fact is that this is private property and you're trespassing. Get out or I'll call security and have your ass thrown out."

"Look, Miss Nassiri, I'd gladly leave, except one major problem." He glanced down.

Amira rose on her toes to see past the couch to whatever the man was looking at. "What problem?"

He gave her a wicked grin. "I seem to have lost my clothes."

Chapter Two

The lamp dropped from the Amira's hands, the bulb shattering on the hardwood floor. She stared at him her face flushing deep red. "You've what?"

So she wasn't completely immune to him after all. Good. It might help him extricate himself from an embarrassing situation. Before her father got wind of it. "I seem to have lost my clothes." Mitch West had never been in quite such an embarrassing situation before. Sure he'd been caught in a woman's bed by her unsuspecting boyfriend or fiancé, but never had he found himself naked in a woman's apartment and not remembered how he had gotten there. What the hell had happened to him? Why was he here and why couldn't he remember? Had he been on an all-night bender?

Amira's liquid-brown eyes widened, her full, sensuous lips forming an O. Then she shook her thick mane of ebony hair over her shoulder, backing toward the kitchen where a phone hung on the wall beside the bar. "I'm calling security."

He couldn't let her reach the phone. If the security guards picked him up, he might end up in some jail cell—a misunderstanding he couldn't afford in his line of business. Business. He was a stockbroker on Wall Street. Shit! What would his customers say if they got wind he'd been arrested as some sort of pervert sneaking into the apartment of the daughter of one of the richest men in the country, Ram Nassiri? Especially after Ram Nassiri had threatened not only his career as a broker, but his life if he so much as showed up on the same street as his daughter. Not that he usually let threats scare him, but Ram Nassiri had assured him that Amira wanted nothing to do with him. That she found him beneath her and nothing more than an unfortunate fling. That last part had hurt him more than he'd cared to admit. For the first time in his life, he'd met a woman he could envision being with, and she had turned her nose up at him.

That she'd dumped him, left him feeling used and angry. If she called security, her father would get wind of it and follow through on his threat to ruin his career. He'd be damned if he let a poor little rich girl ruin his career. Mitch leapt to his feet and raced to reach the telephone before Amira.

The result?

She crashed into his chest so hard, she bounced back and would have fallen if he hadn't circled an arm around her, pulling her close. Too close.

Her warm, soft skin collided with his from his chest to points farther south, hardening points, reminding him he was completely naked and she wasn't too far from the same condition. Couple that with the fact she was a knockout, if you went for dark-haired, exotic beauties of Middle Eastern descent. And his body knew her body as if they were forever connected by that one night they'd made love.

Mitch's cock twitched in recognition of her. *Down, boy*. The woman wasn't receptive, didn't want him, used him like a gigolo. He had no intention of going there again.

"Let me go!" She pressed her hands against his chest and shoved backward.

He didn't release her completely, unwilling to let her have the opportunity to call security. "Look, let me explain." Shoot, he'd have to remember first to be able to explain.

"I don't want to hear your explanations, they'll be full of the lies you like to tell. If you don't let me go, I'll scream." She sucked in a deep breath.

Before she could let it go in what was sure to be an ear-splitting shriek, Mitch clamped his mouth over hers, muffling the sound that would have shaken the rafters.

She pounded against his chest, her small fists barely hurting. After a few long seconds, her fingers opened and splayed over his muscles, her lips softening beneath his.

Trouble With Mitch

What had started as a defense mechanism morphed into something he could have predicted on his part. He must have wanted to kiss her on an instinctive level. But his mind told him he was treading in dangerous waters, given his suspect arrival in her home. He inhaled her scent, triggering memories of the night she'd opened herself to him, given willingly of her body. That night she'd smelled good. Real good. Like oranges and some kind of flowers all wrapped up in a sexy package he couldn't seem to keep his hands off.

Her fingers contracted, pulling lightly at the smattering of hair covering his chest, just like they had when she'd come into his arms the first time.

Automatically, Mitch's tongue slipped between her teeth and dove in to tangle with hers. His arms tightened around her, his hands capturing her slim waist, the skin soft and sleek. One hand traveled lower, cupping the rounded globe of her ass, drawing her cunt against his cock, nothing but a scrap of satin panties between them. He rubbed his dick against the slick fabric, wanting more than anything to touch the fine and silky hair beneath, to set her on fire like she ignited him.

At first soft and compliant, she leaned into him, her breath warm against his throat. Then she gasped and stiffened.

Uh-oh. Here it comes. Mitch braced himself for the pounding he'd receive for daring to come on to her. Hell, he deserved it. What made him want to kiss her, when she'd made it clear through her father that he had no place in her life? Was she playing him for a fool again? That's what he got for thinking with his dick.

Fuck! He didn't need to be arrested for indecent exposure or attempted rape. A stockbroker relied heavily on his reputation. At this rate, his entire career would be flashing before his eyes. Was it too late to extricate himself from this disaster? If he could use the phone, maybe he could call his neighbor Edie and have her bring some clothes from his apartment.

Edie.

Memory flooded him like a gargantuan tsunami, at the same time the dark-haired beauty shoved him backward and slapped him hard on the cheek.

"You jerk! Do that again and I'll have you up on attempted rape charges."

He rubbed the stinging area on the side of his cheek, scrambling to absorb the memories and maintain his bravado at the same time. "Seems like you were giving as good as you got, little girl."

"I'm not a little girl, so don't call me that."

Oh Mitch knew she wasn't a little girl, but she was petite and she had the tiniest waist he'd felt in a long time. A waist he couldn't seem to let go.

"Release me!" Amira pounded her fists onto his wrists.

As if coming up for air from the murky depths of some swamp slue, Mitch let her go and stepped backward.

She glanced at him then at the phone behind him.

Rather than risk her calling for help, he ripped the phone from the wall, cable and all, tossing it onto the counter.

Her dark skin blanched. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"I can't let you call make that call until you hear me out."

"You can't stop me." She inched away from him until she was out of his reach and then dove for the hall.

"Oh yes, I can." Mitch followed, but she was surprisingly fast.

She ducked into an open bedroom door and threw herself across the bed, reaching out for the phone on the nightstand. She had it in her hand and was about to punch the first number when Mitch cleared the door.

He launched himself across the room, landing in the middle of the bed on top of her, but not before she tucked the phone beneath her.

"Give it to me," he said, his cock pressed between the cheeks of her ass. Saints preserve him, he wanted to grind his dick into her and take her there. She was a hellcat with the body of an angel and his own body couldn't forget that, couldn't erase the memory of being buried deep inside her warm wetness.

But she had the phone and the way she bucked beneath him made him horny as hell and indicated she was probably still punching buttons.

Mitch eased his weight off her and flipped her over onto her back, dropping his full length on top of her to keep her knees from connecting with his swollen member aching to enter her. He snatched the phone from her hands and smashed it against the nightstand. The pieces fell to the floor, completely useless.

"You bastard!" Her hand connected to his cheek in another hard slap, the sound echoing against the tall ceiling.

"Maybe so, but I really didn't have any intention of harming you, but keep this up and I might change my mind." He clamped her wrists together and jerked them up over her head. "There. Now will you listen while I try to explain what the hell is going on?"

"I don't have to listen to you. You're nothing but a criminal and a liar. And if you rrape me, my father will have you dissected, one piece at a time, starting with..." She gulped, her eyes round and luminous.

"With this?" Mitch rubbed the evidence of his arousal against her center.

Her throat muscles convulsed and she nodded. "If it's money you want..."

"I don't want your goddamn money! I just want you to listen, then I'll leave you alone and you can get on with whatever is so all-fired important."

Her lips set in a firm line, and she squirmed beneath him, only making his hard-on worse.

"Will you quit moving? A man can only take so much from a beautiful woman and not lose control."

She snorted. "Yeah, right. Like you're attracted to me."

"You can't tell?" He leaned back enough to allow her a glance at his engorged cock. "I don't get that hard over just anyone."

"Bullshit!" Her back arched and she rocked beneath him, her breasts bumping against his naked chest. "You're nothing but a womanizing sleaze who lies to women to get them in bed and then takes off after scoring."

Mitch frowned. "I don't have to lie to get women in bed. They come willingly. Like *you* did, if I recall correctly."

"You crude bastard!" She jerked hard on her wrists. If Mitch let go, he knew he'd be slapped yet again. "You led me on."

"No, you invited me up, not the other way around."

"I know your type. You always get what you want, don't you? Then you leave."

"You don't know anything about me."

"I know enough to know you're scum. Let me go!" She rocked back and forth, jerking on her hands to loosen them from his grip. The more she bumped him, the slower her movements and the shorter her breaths.

Mitch held tight, his body stretched over hers to keep her from gaining leverage, his one hand holding both of hers above her head. There were other things he'd like to do to her all night, but if he tried, she'd have every right to hit him up with charges of rape. Mitch had never in his life forced a woman to have sex. They usually threw themselves at him. He wasn't going to start now. But the woman beneath him had made love to him then sent her father and her bodyguards in to clean up the mess—him. "I can do this all night," he said, his voice a low croak. "But I'd prefer to talk like civilized adults."

Her brows rose. "You're the one holding me down, who's the uncivilized one here?"

"If you promise not to make a nuisance of yourself, I'll let you up." His cock chose that time to twitch. Oh hell, had she felt it? Was he up for full-blown hysterics? He didn't have time for this. He had to find out what had happened to Edie and Harry. The last he'd seen them, they were fighting for their lives and the Stone of Azhi against the evil Danorah Hakalah. Were they alive or dead? Had they managed to save the stone from her clutches? "Look, you're sexy and all, but I just don't have time to play games. Behave and listen or I'll have to tie you up."

Amira's deep brown eyes rounded briefly, the flush of red creeping into her cheeks. Oh she had felt his cock nudging against her all right. Then her gaze narrowed into a cool, hard stare. "Okay, I'll behave and listen. Now let me up."

Mitch studied her eyes, trying to read into their dark depths to the thoughts behind them. Not a chance, her black-brown eyes were mysterious pools of ink, impossible to read. He had to trust that she would keep her word.

He let go of her hands and backed off the bed, grabbing a pillow to cover himself down there. No use advertising his arousal for her. She'd made it quite clear she wasn't interested in him for more than the one night they'd shared.

She pushed up onto her elbows and stared at the pillow covering his groin. "Okay, cowboy, you have exactly one minute to convince me I shouldn't scream my head off and shoot your ass for breaking into my apartment."

"Let's start from the beginning. I didn't break in." He sighed and shook his head. "Oh hell, you're never going to believe this."

"Fifty seconds and counting." She tapped her fingertips against the duvet.

"Amira. What day is it?"

"Thursday."

"What year?"

"You know what year it is. Stop playing with me. You have thirty seconds."

"It's important, Amira." He reached out and captured her hands in his. "What year is it?"

She stared down at his hands, squeezing her smaller ones. "You said you wouldn't hurt me."

As quickly as he'd grabbed them, he let her hands go. "Please. Answer me."

"It's two thousand and seven. Why?"

He heaved a sigh. At least it was the same year. "What day?"

What she told him was only a couple weeks from the time he'd last seen Edie and Harry. But anything could have happened to them in that short time. Much as he'd like to explore the beautiful Amira, she was off limits, and his friends could be in serious trouble. "I have to go." He backed toward the door.

"Wait!"

"I can't, I have to find my friends. They could be in danger."

"But you can't go!"

"I have to."

"You promised to tell me why the hell you were in my apartment. If you don't, I swear I'll call every cop in the city."

"Why do you care?"

"I deserve an explanation. You owe me at least that." She nodded at the pillow. "And you can't run around the city naked. Tell me what the hell's going on and I'll loan you some clothes. That's more than fair considering you're the trespasser here."

Mitch glanced down at the pillow. She was right. And she was being more than fair. "Okay. First tell me, did you come into contact with a bottle today? A very old, bluegreen bottle?"

Her brows tugged downward. "Yes. How did you know, and what does that have to do with why you're in my apartment and naked?"

"It has everything to do with both." He ran his free hand through his hair. "Where did you get the bottle?"

She hesitated.

"It's equally important, please."

"From a friend at a local museum," she answered.

"The American Museum of Natural History, by chance?"

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"Did you happen to run into a woman named Edie?"

"No, but Mr. Baumgartner said she hadn't shown up for work for days. How do you know all this? Were you following me?" Her eyes widened. "Or were you one of the men chasing me just a little while ago?"

His chest tightened. "What men? Who was chasing you?"

"I thought they wanted to kidnap me since I'd ditched my bodyguards."

"You ditched your bodyguards?" Mitch glanced around as if waiting for men to jump out of the shadows and shoot him as they'd warned him last time.

"Yes, but they're stationed in the lobby, should I need them."

"What about the men who followed you?"

"When I left through a back door of the museum, two men followed me." She smiled, looking pretty pleased with herself. "But I lost them."

Mitch ran a hand through his hair. The situation was worse than he thought. "Look, Amira, you're not safe."

"Sure I am. My bodyguards take me wherever I need to go and the security in this building is top-notch."

"You're not safe as long as you have one of the bottles from the tomb of Princess Vashti."

"Princess Vashti? Is that her name?" The curator had mentioned the bottle had belonged to a princess, but he hadn't mentioned her name. Yet somehow, the name had a familiar ring to it, as if she'd heard it before.

Her heart skipped a beat. Princess Vashti, the princess from the bedtime story her father used to tell her as a little girl. But it couldn't be. How would Mitch know about the story?

From her father's accounts, Princess Vashti had been given the power to make all her wishes come true, except one. She couldn't make a man fall in love with her. Because of this, she had died from a broken heart. Why her father had chosen to tell her that story, she had never understood. The ending had always made her cry, as though she had been the one to die of a broken heart.

Now more curious than angry at Mitch's sudden appearance in her apartment, Amira wanted to know more. "Who is this princess and why did she have this bottle?"

"It's a long story and I really don't have time to go into it." Mitch moved toward the door.

"You do if you want those clothes."

"Then I'll have to do without the clothing." With the pillow firmly planted in front of him, he turned toward the living room, giving her a wonderful view of his very fine, tight ass.

"I wish—"

"No!" Mitch swung around before she finished her sentence.

"What?" Amira rose from the bed, pulling the duvet up around her body.

"Don't say those two words."

"What two words?"

"I wish."

"I wish? Why the hell not? You show up in my apartment, naked, attack me when I'm only trying to protect myself and then you leave me hanging on your pathetic excuse for an explanation. I wish you'd march your ass back in here and tell me what the hell's going on."

Mitch spun around, dropped the pillow and marched like a toy soldier back into her room and stood in front of her. "Princess Vashti was the beloved daughter of Azhi, the Devil Shah of ancient Persia. She died of a broken heart. Her father was so angry he buried her with the Stone of Azhi, a magical stone. Any man who touched it would be forever confined in one of these bottles. And any woman who owned one of the bottles would own the man within and he would then be bound to grant her wishes."

Amira stayed out of grabbing range. "What does that have to do with you?"

"In the wrong hands, the Stone of Azhi is a powerful weapon. A woman by the name of Danorah Hakalah found out about the stone and was in the process of stealing it from my friends Harry and Edie when I grabbed it." Mitch's gaze strayed to the corner of the room, his mind obviously far away from Amira's apartment.

Amira still didn't get the connection and could barely concentrate with him standing right in front of her, stark naked. She remembered her first time with him and how she'd thought he was a classic male specimen, everything about him perfectly proportioned and larger than life. Her lungs tightened and she prompted him in a breathy gasp, "So?"

"I touched the stone and that's all I know." Mitch shook himself like a dog crawling out of a lake and looked down at his exposed body. His hands moved as if to cover himself, but then he shook his head and crossed his arms over his chest, daring her to say anything about his state of undress. "Now that I've granted your wish, I need to find out what happened to my friends, Harry and Edie. If you'd please give me those clothes you promised, I'll get out of your apartment."

"Okay, but move away from the door. I don't want you grabbing me again." She wrapped the duvet around her, Roman style, tucking the end between her breasts.

She led the way into the room where her father slept when he was in the city. The closet contained a full wardrobe of expensive suits and casual wear. She grabbed a pair of trousers and a polo shirt, handing them to Mitch.

Mitch didn't immediately take the proffered clothes. "These belong to your boyfriend?"

"No, they're my father's." She held them out. "Are you going to take them or not?" She tossed them on the bed, averting her gaze from that part of his body so incredibly male and still hard.

Oh, she'd had sex with other men before. But none quite measured up to Mitch's size and talent. Since Mitch, she hadn't wanted anyone else. The jerk had ruined her for other lovers.

Her tongue darted out to moisten her suddenly dry lips and she caught herself staring again at his cock, naughty thoughts of mounting him racing through her head. Her father would be appalled at her depravity. She was shocked herself, after he'd so callously dumped her. She wished she could be as casual about sex as other girls, but her cloistered upbringing and being in the constant company of her bodyguards kept her from experimenting very often.

Mitch took the clothing and slid the pants up his thighs. The legs were too short and the waist several sizes too big, but they covered that part of him so blatantly male and aroused.

Amira caught herself on a sigh and turned toward the closet, snatched a belt from the rack and held it out behind her. "This should help."

When she faced him, he had on her father's shirt, the shoulders stretched taught. Was the man a bodybuilder or something? He had no right to look so deliciously masculine.

"What happened after you touched the stone?" Amira asked.

Mitch shrugged. "I assume that, like Harry, I was sucked into the bottle you now own and you awakened me by rubbing on it."

Amira laughed out loud. "You expect me to believe you're some kind of genie in a bottle?"

A frown settled between Mitch's blond brows, his blues eyes flashing. "Believe what you want to believe. I'm not too happy about the situation either way. You think I want to be at the beck and call of some spoiled little rich girl?"

If there was one thing Amira couldn't stand it was to be called a spoiled little rich girl. What did anyone know about her life? She wasn't Paris Hilton, free to flaunt her wealth and fame for all of the country to gawk and laugh at. Amira had to fight for freedoms most poor people had automatically. Anger raged inside at the way he lumped her in with all of society's ne'er-do-well poor little rich kids. "Now wait a minute. You're the one who barged into my apartment. If there's any name-calling to be done, you deserve it, not me."

"Whatever. I granted your wish and told you the truth. Whether you choose to believe it is up to you. Frankly, I don't give a damn." He cinched the belt, gathering the loose waistline tight around his trim hips. Then he fished in the closet for shoes, finding a pair of her father's tennis shoes and slipping them on his feet. He winced as he put them on and left the strings untied.

In his too-short trousers, too-small shoes and his belt holding his pants from falling around his ankles, he should have been laughable. But Amira's breath caught in her throat. He was still incredibly hot, despite his clownish fashion statement.

"Now, if you'll excuse me. I have to find out what's been going on." Mitch headed for the door and Amira couldn't think of anything to say that would keep him there. She hadn't been so flustered and...aroused in so long she didn't want him to leave, despite his previous hit-and-run routine. "What about the men who chased after me? Any advice?"

He turned with his hand on the doorknob. "Hire more bodyguards and stash that bottle somewhere safe. Don't let anyone have it. *Anyone*."

Chapter Three

Harry Taylor, III tucked the revolver in the back of his trousers and closed his jacket over it. "Are you ready?" He stared at Edie Ragsdale beside him, her tangle of red hair pulled back in a tight ponytail at her nape. When she smiled up at him, he smiled back, then his gaze swung to the other two people preparing for the next step in their attempt to reunite the treasures from the tomb of Princess Vashti.

Kate Ralston stood with her feed braced apart, wearing khaki slacks and a blue chambray shirt. Beside her, Harry's partner, William Prater Moreland adjusted a new fedora on his head.

Harry would give good money for the hat, but he had bigger fish to catch. He had to find Mitch and collect the remaining bottles taken from Princess Vashti's sarcophagus. That, plus the Stone of Azhi had to be returned to break the curse he, Will and Mitch were under.

"I don't know why you're in such an all-fired hurry," Kate grumbled. "It's not as if you two are suffering or anything over our wishes."

"Maybe not now, but there's no telling when another wish will go awry." Harry nodded at Will. "I don't know about you, but the sooner this curse is broken the happier we all will be."

"I'll second that. I have no desire to return to hell whenever this pushy broad gets mad at me." He covered Kate's lips with his own before she could voice a protest over his use of the term pushy broad. She hated it when he called her that.

When he let her go, her brows dipped briefly into a frown, a weak one. "Watch it, buddy, or that's exactly where you'll end up, in hell wearing an Elvis suit."

They stood in the courtyard of the palace in Sand City, somewhere in the desert. They had already said their goodbyes to Kate's father who preferred to remain in the mysterious hidden city. All they needed now was for the girls to say the magic words.

Edie held Harry's hand, her long slim fingers fitting nicely in his palm. "Where to?"

"Make it the warehouse at the back of the museum. We need to see if Mitch landed in one of the remaining bottles."

Edie stared up into Harry's eyes. "I wish-"

Harry covered her mouth before she could finish. "Be careful, we don't want to end up in a porn studio or on a pirate's ship."

Her coppery brows rose. "Don't you trust me?"

"You, yes. Your wishes, not so much." He kissed the end of her nose. "Repeat after me, I wish we were in the museum warehouse close to where I work in New York City."

Edie glanced at Kate. "Ready?"

Kate nodded. "We're right behind you."

Edie repeated Harry's words to the letter and before long the ground shook, thunder rumbled and a bright flash blinded them. As the world faded around Edie and Harry, Kate's voice could be heard as if in the distance, repeating the same words.

* * * * *

Amira stared at the door to her apartment after Mitch left, her mouth hanging open, her body surging with energy of a kind she remembered from the night she'd spent with the odious man. The *sexy*, odious man.

Well!

Amira rocked back on her bare heels, the duvet still wrapped toga-style around her reminding her that she'd been with a naked man for the past ten or fifteen minutes. The very man who'd come into her life, made her aware of every sexual sensory zone and then left her high and dry without a word. And she already missed his presence again!

How pathetic was that? And if she wasn't careful, she'd find herself believing his cockamamie story.

If his story was true, she owned the man. She snorted. As if anyone owned Mitch West. Much less a woman!

And he was supposed to grant her every wish? Amira tapped a finger to her chin. What would she wish for if she could have anything she wanted? Her brow furrowed. What was she talking about? She could have anything she wanted without a man to grant her wishes. Her father could buy her anything.

Except freedom and excitement. Two things Mitch had in abundance.

And was it a coincidence that the bottle had come from the sarcophagus of Princess Vashti, the namesake of the princess from her father's fairytale? Now she wished she'd mentioned the story to Mitch. Maybe he would know the significance, if there was any. She stared at the closed door, wishing she hadn't let him get away so quickly. Not with a hundred questions racing through her mind.

"Damn!" Okay so it wasn't just the questions that made her want him back. She'd been with Mitch for all of fifteen minutes and she already wanted him. The lingering impression of his cock rubbing against her pussy had her panties all wet with desire. What was she, some kind of masochistic slut or something? She trudged back to the bedroom, intent on dressing and going out to find something to eat. Instead, she fell across the bed and let the duvet fall open. An image of Mitch pinning her to the mattress imbedded in her mind and made her blood run hot.

He'd been strong and pleasantly heavy lying across her. More masculine than any lover who'd ever ventured between the sheets with her.

Amira's hand rose to her naked belly, loving the sexy feel of her skin beneath her fingertips. She slid her fingers under the elastic band of her panties, threading through the curly hair over her mound and into the forbidden folds of her labia. Annoyed by the confines of the scrap of silk, she quickly shed the panties and delved into her pussy to lubricate her finger. Then she rubbed the warm moisture across her clit.

Trouble With Mitch

A groan rose from her chest as she stroked that nubbin of pleasure, that throbbing, ultra-sensitive spot that made her back arch off the bed. She touched it again, imagining a man's tongue teasing and tasting her down there. The only man who'd gone down on her had been Mitch, several times that one night. The other lovers she'd managed to lure past her father and into her bed had been too intimidated by the bodyguards and the possibility of her father storming in to do much more than fuck her and be gone. She'd loved that Mitch had taken the time and effort to go down on her, to suck her pussy and touch her like no other. She wanted that now. Instead of her hands, she wanted his lips, his tongue and his long, beautiful fingers stroking her.

Heat coiled low in her belly as she coaxed the sensations that would build into an orgasm. How much easier it would be to get off if it were a man doing this with his tongue.

Not any man. Mitch. She must be a glutton for punishment to want Mitch to make love to her. Hadn't his ultimate rejection hurt enough the first time?

She stroked her clit once, twice, imagining Mitch's tongue doing the stroking. Another groan rose in her throat. "I can't help it!" She cried out loud to her empty room. "I wish Mitch were doing this." As soon as the wish left her lips, she clapped a hand over her mouth.

"What am I thinking?" She stared around the room, her body tense as if expecting the jerk to suddenly appear and take over. For a full two seconds, she almost believed it could happen. Then she laughed aloud at her absurd dreaming. Magic wasn't real. Men didn't appear out of nowhere ready to grant her every wish. That's what you had money for. She lay back against the mattress and laughed.

Halfway through her laugh a clap of thunder ripped through the silence and the bed shook beneath her.

What the fuck? She rose up on her elbows. Was New York turning into another California with random earthquakes or what?

A flash of light blinded her and she squeezed her eyes shut, afraid a bulb above her head had exploded. No glass showered down on her. But the mattress dipped alarmingly between her spread legs and a warm wetness stroked her clit.

Amira's eyes popped open. Lying on his stomach between her thighs was a blondhaired man dressed in her father's clothes, lapping away at her pussy. "You!"

"Who did you expect? Brad Pitt? Not that I mind *performing* for you any other time, but," he paused, his tongue touching the tip of her clit. "You just couldn't keep from using those words, could you?" The last words were spoken more in the form of a growl and he went back to touching her in the most intimate way.

When she should have been screaming for security, she fell back against the bed, her body no longer her own, responding to his touch in a most embarrassingly abandoned way. "Why don't you stop?" she asked as she climbed the dangerously slippery slope to the most extraordinary orgasm she'd ever experienced. At the same time, she didn't want him to stop.

"I can't. You wished this, not me." His fingers trailed a path down her inner thigh, lifting each leg to drape over his shoulder. The movement raised her ass off the bed, the cool air only adding to her arousal.

"What do you mean I wished it?"

His tongue flicked at her clit, teasing and torturing her at the same time, then he drew her into his mouth and sucked on her folds. When he released her, she almost cried out. "It's what you wanted, isn't it?" He blew a warm breath over her moist entrance and pressed his finger into her, swirling it around.

That coil of heat tightening in her groin erupted into a full-fledged, no-kidding-hehit-THE-spot orgasm that rocked Amira's world. For several long minutes, she rode the wave, unable to speak or move for the exquisiteness of her release. When she relaxed against the pillow, spent, she asked again. "What do you mean I wished it?"

Trouble With Mitch

He crawled up her body, pressing kisses to the quivery skin stretched across her naked belly, and then tongued the tight beads of her nipples through her lacy bra. "You used those two words didn't you?"

"Wh-what the hell are you talking about?" She brushed her hair out of her face and stared up at the man. "What two words?"

"The most powerful words you now possess." He leaned over her, his mouth a breath away from hers. "I wish."

His lips touched hers, tasting of her sex. As the realization dawned on her, a sick feeling landed like a chunk of lead in her gut. She pushed against him until she could look him in the eye. "You mean all this is because I said '*I wish*'?"

"Give the girl a prize." He bit her lip, tugging it lightly, sending shivers of sensations through her body, despite her best efforts to ignore them.

"Then stop it!" Humiliation burned in her cheeks. "Stop it now!"

"I can't." He licked a line from the corner of her lips to the erogenous zone beneath her ear. "You have to wish me to stop."

"You're so full of crap. This is all a hoax. Stop it now before I call for security." Instead of an indignant tone, her voice faded off in a breathless whisper.

Mitch moved down her body again, tugging aside her bra to take her nipple between his teeth.

If she didn't stop this now, he'd fuck her completely. And oh, how she wanted it. "I wish you'd stop," she said, her voice shaking and completely unconvincing, but the words were spoken aloud nonetheless.

Mitch stopped immediately, his eyes pinched closed. "You're hurting me, woman," he said through gritted teeth. The bulge in his pants pressed into her belly. "Make up your mind, Princess."

Anger combined with humiliation. "If this wish stuff really works, I wish you were the hell out of my apartment."

When Mitch disappeared in front of her eyes, Amira gasped.

* * * * *

Harry landed on his feet, but Edie landed against him, shoving him off balance, sending him flying across the concrete floor.

"Freeze!" A man in a NYPD uniform stood over Harry and Edie, his weapon drawn. Another police officer moved in with his weapon drawn as well.

"It's all right, Officer. I work here." Edie climbed to her feet and held out her hand. "I'm Edie Ragsdale."

Instead of putting away his gun, the officer aimed at Edie while his partner kept his gun trained on Harry. "Turn around and put your hands up, lady."

"Did you not hear me? I'm not trespassing, I work here."

"I don't care who you are or where you work, keep your hands where I can see them?"

"Is there a problem, Officer?" Harry asked from his position spread-eagle on his belly on the floor.

"I'd say there is. A big problem." The officer jerked his head toward a large lump on the floor behind him.

Edie gasped. "Mr. Baumgartner!" When she moved toward him, the officer stood in her way.

"If you take another step, I'll be forced to shoot you."

Edie froze. "But he might be hurt."

"He's not only hurt, he's dead. The attack didn't kill him, but the myocardial infarction did."

"Oh my God." Edie stood rigid, her eyes pooling with tears.

Harry couldn't comfort her while lying on the floor with a gun pointed at him. "Edie, do as the officer says and stay away." "But, who would kill Mr. Baumgartner?" Her hands cupped her cheeks, her eyes wide. "I mean he was mean most of the time, but that's not enough of a reason to kill a man."

"That's what we're here to determine. We'll have questions for the two of you once our backup arrives, so don't count on going anywhere anytime soon."

"But we need to find –"

Harry could see the train wreck Edie was about to create and he headed her off at the pass. "We can wait, Edie." He motioned her to move farther away from the officers.

Thunder rumbled and a flash of light pierced the gloom of the warehouse.

"What the fuck?" The police officer holding his gun on Harry glanced up, blinking his eyes. But not quickly enough. Harry kicked his feet out from under him.

Will appeared behind the other officer and pinned his shooting arm behind his back, knocking the gun from his hand.

Harry leaped on top of the officer he'd knocked off his feet and pressed a knee into his back, forcing him to lie still. "Don't move. I don't want to hurt you." He turned to his friend. "Will, you got him under control?"

"Got him."

"Edie, check for the bottles in the sarcophagus."

Edie ran up one aisle and down another, her movements jerky. "I can't believe you attacked the police."

"I can't believe you haven't found the sarcophagus." The man beneath him bucked, trying to throw Harry off his back. "Will ya hurry it up? I don't know how long I can hold this guy without killing him."

"It's not here!" Edie skidded to a stop in front of Harry, her eyes wild, her hair in crazy disarray around her face.

God she was beautiful. Harry's breath caught in his throat and he thanked the lucky stars and the curse of Azhi that brought them together. "Then we'll have to find Mitch the hard way. Wish us to where Mitch's bottle is."

Edie opened her mouth.

"Careful, Edie," Harry warned. "Be real careful."

* * * * *

Amira searched the apartment, the closets, behind the shower curtain. Mitch was gone for good this time, not just pretending to be gone.

She couldn't explain how he'd been there one minute and gone the next and she wasn't going to try. Chalk it up to a very difficult day filled with being chased by men then dealing with one intruding into her private space.

And private parts.

Her skin flushed with awareness. Her panties were still damp with her juices.

Now that Mitch was well and truly out of her apartment, she could go back to being normal and bored out of her mind. What was she thinking? Excitement wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

She peeked through the peephole in her apartment door into the hallway leading to her own private elevator. No sign of Mitch there.

Well, good. She didn't need him and his crazy wish theory.

Then why was she aching all over like she had the flu? No, not the flu, but something equally achy and needy inside her welled up and threatened to overwhelm her.

She flopped onto the couch and plunked her feet on the table in front of her, right next to the infamous blue-green bottle that Mitch swore gave her the power to own him. If he was right, she owned Mitch West. A smile curled her lips. No woman owned Mitch. He was a law unto himself, a man who didn't stick around. But if he was right, this little bottle had some serious possibilities. "I should have followed him to see what nuthouse he returned to." Amira lifted the bottle and stared into the bulbous base as if it were a crystal ball and would give her all the answers. "What's the big deal about a silly bottle, anyway?"

Amira's cell phone rang from the depths of the sofa cushions. Her heart leapt into high-speed. Could it be Mitch? As quickly as her heartbeat ratcheted up, it slowed. No, Mitch hadn't called her before, why would he call now?

"Ami, tell me you're dressed to the nines and ready to play hooky from your bodyguards like you promised." J.C. Blanchett's voice blasted into her ear along with the swell of music.

Amira stifled a groan. She'd forgotten about her promise to meet J.C. for drinks at the swanky nightclub she hung out at. Another attempt at rebellion against her father's heavy-handed control of her life. Given the current circumstances, as bizarre as they sounded, Amira wasn't so sure ditching her bodyguards was all that good of an idea. "I don't know, J.C."

"Oh, hell no. You're not backing out on me now." J.C. huffed and breathed hard into Amira's ear, probably working out on her treadmill. Never having worked a day in her life, J.C. worked out at least three hours a day. Despite her obsession with her body, she was the closest friend Amira had. The daughter of the second richest man in the city, J.C. had been Amira's friend since they'd gone to private school together. "I have two guys lined up to meet us there in just under an hour. Now you and I know I could handle two men, but they are expecting two women. Don't let me down again, Amira. I won't take no for an answer. In fact, I'll be by to pick you up at our usual place around the corner from your apartment in...fifty minutes."

"But J.C. –"

The line went dead. J.C. had hung up, never giving Amira the option to tell her thanks, but no.

Not that Amira thought any of what Mitch had told her was more than a bunch of bullshit, but if any of it was true, she could be in for a whole lot more trouble.

No. None of that stuff was true. He'd just been trying to scare her. There had to be a reasonable explanation for Mitch's appearances and disappearances. Didn't there?

Amira rose from the sofa and marched into her bedroom, determined to find the perfect dress for her night out with J.C. She'd flirt and dance with the mystery man J.C. had drummed up for her and forget she'd ever seen Mitch or felt his tongue against her –

Start now, Amira. Start forgetting Mitch now.

Chapter Four

Mitch jogged halfway across Manhattan to his apartment. By the time he climbed the steps and fished his spare key out from under the fake potted plant in the corridor, he thought his little toe was broken and he'd walk with a permanent limp. Used to every item of clothing fitting to tailored perfection, Mitch swore he'd never again wear someone else's shoes if he could help it.

Without wasting too much time, he hurried toward his apartment. As he rounded a corner in the hallway, he ran into Edie's father, Frank Ragsdale.

Too breathless to speak, Mitch blocked the man's path. "Mr. Ragsdale, wait." He bent at the waist, propping himself against one wall as he hauled in air.

The older man frowned. "Do I know you?"

"We've only met once. I'm Edie's neighbor." Mitch sucked in another breath. "Have you seen Edie?"

"Not in two weeks. Not since she ran off after that Harry."

"Ran off with Harry?"

"Yeah, that man had her tied to the bed naked and she still wanted to go after him." The old man snorted. "Don't know what's come over kids nowadays."

Could it be they survived the fight with Danorah? "Do you know where she went?"

"How should I know? The girl's gone nuts over that boy. She was here one minute, mumbling about helping Harry find Will and Mitch, the next, she disappeared. Dangedest thing I ever saw." He shook his head. "I hope she's all right. Can't believe I gave her my blessing."

"Uh, sir. I'm the Mitch she's looking for." The way it sounded, Mitch would need a lot more than plane tickets to find the missing pair. He'd need someone who could wish them closer. He'd need to get Amira to wish him to where Harry and Edie were.

"Thanks, Mr. Ragsdale. I'll let you know when I find her."

"Good thing. Then maybe nobody will bug me."

"Bug you?"

"Yeah, seems like twice a day I get phone calls from people looking for Edie."

"They leave a name or number?"

"No, when I ask, they hang up." Frank shook his head. "Rude, if you ask me."

"Good seeing you, Mr. Ragsdale."

When Mitch turned to leave, Frank laid a hand on his arm. "When you see her, tell her I love her, will ya?"

"You bet." Mitch entered his apartment and switched on the light. The place was a shambles. His leather sofa and recliner had been slashed to shreds, his entire CD collection had been dumped across the floor. Anger squashed the sick feeling in his gut. This had to be Danorah's work. The bitch! If he ever got his hands on the woman...

With a sense of urgency pushing him through the mess, Mitch hurried into his bedroom and grabbed clothes and shoes, his heart sinking. Finding Edie and Harry would be harder than he'd originally thought. Since Edie hadn't been seen since that fateful day when Mitch himself disappeared, she could be anywhere. The way he looked at it, he only had two choices. He could spend a lot of time searching the city for people who probably weren't there or he could get back to Amira and ask her to wish him to his friends. After their last encounter, Mitch wasn't sure Amira would be receptive to anything he had to say. But he had to try. Harry and Edie's lives might just depend on it. He'd just pulled his pants up when the rumbling started. Oh no, Amira must have wished for something. As the rumbling increased, Mitch lunged for his shoes and rolled across the carpet. He'd be damned if he went barefoot or wore another man's shoes.

A flash of light blinded him and he shielded his eyes, holding his breath for whatever Amira's wish held in store. A loud bang shook the floor where he lay.

The light faded with the thunder. When Mitch opened his eyes, he was still in his room and standing before him wasn't Amira but four people, crowding into his room. It took a moment for two of them to register. Harry and Edie.

"Mitch!" Edie dropped down beside him. "Are you all right?" She ran her hand over his body as if checking for broken bones or lacerations.

Harry stepped up behind her, grasped her shoulders and lifted her to her feet, a fierce frown pushing his brows together. "He's okay, Edie." Harry held out a hand to Mitch.

Taking the hand, he got to his feet, shoes in hand. "How did you get here? I thought I'd have to search the world to find you."

Harry nodded at Edie. "We got here the quickest way we knew how."

Edie grinned. "We wished us here."

Mitch nodded at the other man in the room wearing an old-fashioned fedora. "Let me guess, you must be Harry's partner, Will." He held out his hand. Harry and Will had been the ones to discover the tomb of Princess Vashti. Back in 1924. Mitch still found it hard to believe the two men had been suspended in time the same way Mitch had been, by being entombed in bottles, released only when a woman rubbed her hands across the glass. Mitch tipped his head toward the dark-haired woman at Will's side. "I take it you own Will's bottle?"

Kate's lips twisted in a jaunty grin. "You got that right."

Will frowned. "You don't own me, you pushy broad."

She pressed a finger to his chest, her gaze narrowed. "Don't call me a pushy broad."

"Will you two cut it out while we determine what's next?" Harry stepped between the two. "Now that we have Mitch back, we can concentrate on how to break this curse."

"And how's that?" Mitch asked.

"We have to return everything to the burial site."

"Everything?" Mitch asked.

"Stone of Azhi, bottles, sarcophagus, everything," Edie concluded. "Who has your bottle?"

Mitch squelched his groan. "Amira Nassiri."

"The perfume princess?" Edie's brows rose into the hair draped across her forehead.

"Yeah."

"How'd she get it?" Harry asked.

Mitch filled him in on what had happened that day and how Mr. Baumgartner had given Amira the bottle.

"I knew he was filching artifacts," Edie said. "The man should have been jailed."

Harry slipped an arm around Edie's shoulders. "Yeah, well, you can't jail a dead man."

It took a moment for Harry's comment to sink in, but when it did, Mitch felt as if he'd been sucker-punched. "Dead? The guy from the museum is dead?"

Will removed the hat from his head. "Yeah, someone came in this afternoon and sliced his throat."

"Fuck!" Mitch dropped his shoes on the floor and slid his feet into them. "If the sarcophagus was already gone from the museum, someone must have known one of the bottles was missing. That had to be why they chased after Amira."

"You're probably right." Harry paced out into the living area and stood staring around at the disaster. "Danorah is up to her old tricks. What do you want to bet she was the one to get the sarcophagus returned to Iraq?"

Mitch tossed a polo shirt over his head and followed Harry into the living room.

"That might play to our favor," Edie stepped up beside Harry. "If the sarcophagus is really on its way back to Iraq, that's half the problem solved."

"Right," Kate added. "All we have to do is collect the rest of the stuff that belongs in it and meet it there?"

"Where are the rest of the bottles?" Mitch asked.

"Safe in a hidden city in the desert," Kate answered.

"The Stone of Azhi?" A nerve twitched at the corner of Mitch's eye. He hated to think of other men trapped by the stone in one of those damn bottles.

"Safely stored in the same city." Kate smiled. "Out of reach of the male population."

"Then all we need to do is collect the bottle Amira has and find the sarcophagus." Mitch inhaled and let it out slowly. Like Amira would give him the bottle willingly.

"In order to make this happen, we'll need to split up," Will said.

"I'll take the location of the sarcophagus," Harry volunteered.

"I'll get my bottle," Mitch chimed in.

"That leaves me with the stone and the remaining bottles." Will plunked his hat on his head.

Kate crossed her arms over her chest. "Are you forgetting something?"

"Oh, yeah." Will pressed a kiss to Kate's nose. "There. How's that? Now, would you please wish us back to Sand City? Oh, and bypass Hell if you can manage that," he asked, following with a muttered, "Pushy broad."

"Watch it, old man." She smiled and stood up on her toes to kiss Will full on the lips. "Ready?"

"As ready as I ever am." Will touched the brim of his hat. "See you guys in a day's time at the tomb of Princess Vashti?"

Harry nodded. "See you there in a day."

Kate made the wish, the room rumbled, a flash of light blinded Mitch and the couple disappeared.

Mitch gulped. "Do you ever get used to all that, you know, popping in and out?"

Edie smiled, a blush filling her cheeks.

Harry shook his head. "No. Much as I'm glad the stone brought Edie and me together, I would like to have control over my life again. Are you going to have any problems getting the other bottle?"

Mitch figured he would, but he'd never admit it to Harry who'd come over eighty decades into the future. "No, I'll be fine."

"Will Amira help you get back to the tomb?"

"Sure." He hoped. If he had to, he'd bind, gag and throw her over his shoulder to keep her in line until this was over. A smile tipped the corners of his lips. The image of the daddy's little girl bound and gagged was priceless.

"Okay, then we're off to find the sarcophagus." Harry nodded to Edie. "Think you can get it right?"

Edie's brows furrowed. "Of course."

"Then let's do it." Harry grabbed Edie's hand. "Wish us to within a mile of the sarcophagus. That way we don't land in the middle of an enemy camp."

"I wish we were within a mile of the sarcophagus."

Mitch held his breath. Edie had a way of wording things that landed her in trouble with her wishes.

Thunder rumbled and the bright light flashed. When Mitch could see again, Edie and Harry were gone, leaving him alone in his destroyed apartment. Now had to get back across town to Amira's apartment. He sure hoped she'd let him in. * * * * *

"I thought you were ditching the bodyguards," J.C. grumbled, not at all happy about the two men flanking Amira as she entered the club.

"I tried, but Daddy threatened their livelihood and lives if they lost me for the second time today." Amira's lips twisted. "I didn't have the heart to lose them." What she wasn't admitting was that she didn't have the courage to step outside her apartment building without some kind of backup. If the guys who'd followed her earlier really wanted to find her, they could. And they could be waiting for her to make another break for freedom. Only this time, Amira had no doubt they'd be ready for her.

"Maybe I should go back home. I don't feel much like partying." Amira slung her bag over her shoulder and turned toward the door.

"No way, girl! Your father rarely leaves the country without taking you along. This is your chance to live dangerously, have a little fun, get smashed!" J.C. was everything Amira wasn't. Where Amira was an overachiever, J.C. was a rebellious underachiever. If there was a rule, J.C. broke it.

Amira couldn't begin to count the number of parking violations J.C. had racked up since she got her driver's license. The woman really shouldn't be allowed to drive in the city. It just wasn't safe for the taxi cabs, pedestrians and bicyclists.

J.C. hooked her arm and dragged her toward the bar where two tall blond men stood, each with a hand in his pocket like clone *GQ* ads.

Great. The night was looking up.

Not.

Amira smiled, her face already starting to hurt. Why had she agreed to come out? Why wasn't she sitting behind the closed and locked doors of her apartment? Safe from the goons who tried to nab her earlier. She could be watching old reruns on her plasma TV instead of risking her life in a bar. At home no one could get past security and her bodyguards. No one could get in, including Mitch West. Although he'd gotten past the

bodyguards in the lobby in the first time. Amira still wasn't so sure how he'd accomplished that feat.

But she wasn't here to think about Mitch. She was on a mission to forget the man. How better than to dance with another? She turned to Ryan or Bryan. She couldn't remember his name, nor did she care. "You want to dance?"

"Sure." He took her hand, and holding it tighter than necessary, led her onto the dance floor. Once there, he kept hold of her hand, pulling her against him until his knee rested between her legs.

Okaaayyyy. So he was a little too familiar on first acquaintance. Some men knew what they wanted and went after it. Ryan-Bryan was one of them.

Amira cut him a little slack, reminding herself she was here to forget Mitch. Mitch who? She leaned against Ryan-Bryan's chest and forced herself to relax.

But a little devil inside started comparing. Ryan-Bryan's gut was a bit on the flabby side, not toned like Mitch's. Whereas Mitch had solid shoulders, Ryan-Bryan's could use a bit of work. And Ryan-Bryan had nothing to write home about in the package department rubbing against her belly. No, if she compared apples to abs, pears to pecs and oranges to orgasms, all Ryan-Bryan came up with was a fruit basket of ho-hum fruit. No comparison to Mitch.

But then Ryan-Bryan wasn't Mitch and probably didn't have a different feminine flavor for every day of the week. Ryan-Bryan probably wouldn't ditch her tomorrow after a great night of sex. So what if he was a little flabby and mostly out of shape? He was still a handsome man. He could turn her on in bed, couldn't he?

Ryan-Bryan's hand slid down her waist to cup her ass.

Getting a little friendly was he? Amira's sway to the music slowed as her body stiffened.

Then Ryan-Bryan's hand slid beneath her skirt and cupped her pussy.

All right, he'd stepped over the edge into no man's land. A place men had to be invited, not a place where they could just bumble in and cop a feel.

Amira stepped back, her cheeks burning. "Um, I think I'm ready for a drink."

"No, don't go. We're just getting warmed up here."

"Yeah. I could tell." Amira placed her hand on the arm he had trapped between them, feeling her up. "You've got something of mine. I suggest you let go before I break your fingers."

"Oh, come on. Don't go all virginal on me. You know you want it." Then the jerk had the balls to squeeze her pussy.

"Oh tell me you didn't just squeeze me."

"What's your problem? I thought you were out to have a good time." Ryan-Bryan's face darkened. "You were rubbing up against me like one hot hoochie-mamma. I can take a hint."

"Then take this hint." She jerked her knee up between his legs.

Ryan-Bryan's hands dropped from her pussy to his penis and he doubled over, groaning. "Bitch!"

"Bastard." Amira left the man hunched over in the middle of the dance floor. Rather than return to J.C. and face the music of having hurt her friend's attempt to fix her up on a date, Amira hurried toward the bathroom and the privacy of her own toilet stall. She didn't make it to the edge of the dance floor before a drunken behemoth of a man grabbed her around the waist and spun her around.

"Let go of me!" she wheezed.

"Just one dance, darlin'. Come on." The music was a fast-paced rock song, meant for freedom of movement on the dance floor, not a body-to-body clench.

Crushed against the man's chest, she could barely breathe. Lack of oxygen made her head light and fuzzy. If she didn't get loose soon, she'd end up passed out.

"I wish Mitch was here holding me instead of this baboon," she said in a whisper no one could hear over the pounding beat of the bass guitar. If there was a crash of thunder, the drummer drowned it out and the flickering strobe lights made it impossible to tell whether or not the magic thing was happening. As if it really could.

Amira stared longingly at the exit. She'd insisted on her bodyguards remaining outside the establishment. Now she regretted that decision. Basically, she was screwed and stuck with the behemoth baboon crushing the life out of her.

The big guy jerked to look over his shoulder. Had one of the bodyguards actually read her mind and come to her aid? Amira held her breath, unable to see beyond the guy holding her in a death grip.

"Fuck off!" he yelled at whoever was behind him. Then a fist flew out of nowhere, slamming into the man's jaw, sending him staggering into Amira.

He regained his balance by shoving her to the side.

Free at last, Amira ducked around several couples gyrating on the dance floor before she turned back to glance at her rescuer. His blond hair shone like spun gold in the flash of a black light. Then the big guy was throwing punches.

Amira gasped, sure one punch from the behemoth would leave Mitch with a skull fracture at the least, possibly brain damage. "No!" She pushed back through the crowd, jostled and shoved out of the way.

Meanwhile Mitch ducked and the baboon's punch missed his jaw by a hair. With the amount of force the bigger guy had loaded behind his swing, and the fact he was just punching air, kept his momentum moving forward and he crashed head first into a beam. The beam shook, but held.

The mighty baboon didn't, sliding to the floor in a colossal heap.

Mitch's gaze met hers across the floor, the music slowing to a sensual pace as if to match his smoldering glance.

Her breath still coming in short pants, Amira couldn't blame it on her lungs being crushed by a monster anymore. No, she had to blame it on her reaction to seeing Mitch again. Damn the man! He was a womanizing heartbreaker and he'd leave her aching and needy again like he'd done last time. Why did she put herself through the heartache?

Without thought, her body moved to the sultry tune, her hips swaying side to side.

The distance closed between them. Whether she'd been the one to move or Mitch, she really didn't care. All she wanted was to feel his body next to hers, touching in places more suited to mattress dancing than a public night club.

"It's not safe here," he murmured against her ear, his hand bunching in her hair, bringing her ever closer.

"You're telling me." She knew she should step away from the man who made her blood boil, but her body betrayed her, snuggling closer until they melded as one.

He pushed her long, heavy hair behind her ear and captured her earlobe between his teeth, a growl rumbling with the sound of the bass drums. "Let's go back to your place."

Her head dropped back, exposing her neck to his mouth, sensitized skin begging him to touch her. "I'm not so sure that's a good idea." Though her words denied it, her body burned, begging for release from the binding constraints of clothing. Relief from the oppressive agoraphobia of too many people in the room and the erotic pressure of Mitch's cock against her belly. There were too many layers separating her skin from his.

Amira moaned, glad the music drowned the noise she made. She should be happy she danced with Mitch in a crowded room. At least here, she couldn't crawl in bed with him and fall for him all over again. Here, she could pretend she didn't know him, that he was just another man in a crowded bar. Have a sexy dance and leave him there, maybe a little stiffer than when he arrived. It would serve him right for leaving her wanting more and never calling her.

He edged her toward the door. "Come, let's get out of here."

For a moment, she let him lead her across the floor in the direction of the exit. She wanted to be alone with him. Wanted to make love to him. Wanted him shoving his full erection deep inside her.

The red exit light flashed like a warning, pulling her out of the lust-induced haze and back to reality. "No." Her heels dug into the parquet flooring, sliding across as Mitch put pressure behind his grip and dragged her a few steps more.

"Amira, we have to leave. You're not safe."

"I'll stay as long as I like." As her bodyguards moved toward her, Amira smiled. "But you can leave." She nodded at her bodyguards.

They hooked Mitch's arms in meaty grips and hauled him out of the club.

As he left, she could hear him yell over the pounding music, "She's not safe, I tell you!"

"Who was the hottie?" J.C. held out a drink to Amira. "You know, if you didn't want him, I would have taken him." She eyed Mitch's backside as he cleared the entrance and disappeared into the night.

A flash of irritation bubbled up in Amira's throat. "You can have him, he's only interested in one-night stands."

"Perfect." J.C.'s lips curled in a sultry smile. "Me too." She elbowed past Amira and headed for the door. "I'll be back in a few," she called out over her shoulder.

What the heck? Amira found herself biting her tongue and wishing she hadn't given J.C. the go-ahead to purse the elusive Mitch West. He'd come on to Amira. Her body still wanted him, even if her mind told her he was no good for her. The thought of J.C. getting what he'd offered Amira a moment ago made her nerves bounce like pinballs inside her skin. After a full five seconds of indecision, she shoved all logical thoughts aside and marched for the door, ready to tell Mitch a thing or two about playing with women's hearts. She might even tell her friend J.C. off for not reading in to the invitation to pursue the womanizer. They were best friends for Pete's sake, couldn't she tell when Amira was being sarcastic?

Claws unsheathed and ready to pounce, Amira stormed out of the club and onto the sidewalk.

Chapter Five

The brilliant light flashed and Harry braced himself for whatever landing the wish would give him. Although he held tight to Edie's hand, he felt it slip from his grasp. He tried to reach out, but his arm wouldn't move. He couldn't see, he could only feel a sizzling burn like an electric current traveling through his body.

Then he was falling to the ground in the dark. Someone rolled into him with a soft grunt. By the feel of the soft curves, he knew it was Edie.

She slipped her hand back into his and remained low to the ground.

Harry's eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness and he could make out the shapes of large crates and pallets. The writing on the sides of the crates was all in Arabic.

Edie leaned close and whispered, "Where are we?"

"I'm not sure. But I'd guess somewhere in the Middle East."

"The sarcophagus has to be somewhere nearby. Did you bring a flashlight?"

"No, did you?"

"As a matter of fact, I have one stashed in my purse." She pulled the bag from her shoulder and fished around inside until she unearthed what looked like a pen. She clicked the end and bright light shot a tiny beam into the darkness.

"Great, if we were looking for a needle in a haystack, you'd have the right idea."

"All right, smarty, do you have anything better?" she asked.

"No, that'll have to do."

"Then let's find that sarcophagus and get it to the Zagros Mountains."

"Yeah, this should be easy. Stealing a sarcophagus, with a dead princess in it will be a piece of cake."

"We'll need a truck," Harry said, ignoring Edie's sarcasm. A loud hum preceded the flickering of fluorescent overhead lights blinking above them. "We may have more pressing needs at the moment."

They were inside a warehouse stacked high with crates and boxes. Where, Harry didn't have a clue.

Voices carried to them through the aisles. The voices were growing louder along with the pounding of determined footsteps.

"Hide!" Harry grabbed Edie's hand and dragged her down an aisle between the stacks of crates. When he came to a single stack of wooden boxes, he pulled on the lid of one box. Screws held the lid in place. He moved down the row, tugging at each lid until he found a loose one.

The voices sounded much closer and if he wasn't mistaken, the metal clicking sound was that of someone slapping a clip into an automatic weapon. Harry's heart leaped against his chest. He had to hide Edie. He'd never forgive himself if something terrible happened to the feisty redhead. "In here." He lifted the lid and shoved her over the edge of the box before he climbed in behind her.

He sank into a sea of airy fabric before he hit something hard halfway to the bottom of the crate, like slamming into a stone wall.

"Uh, Harry?" Edie whispered.

He lifted the lid just a little, enough to peer out into the warehouse. Two men appeared at the end of the aisle, headed their way.

"I think we've found –"

"Shh!" Harry let the lid down slowly. "They're coming this way."

"Yeah, I bet they're coming right here."

Though he didn't want to make a sound, his gut tightened and he asked, "Why?"

"We've found the princess."

* * * * *

More angry than he'd been in...well, ever, Mitch grabbed a cab and gave the driver Amira's address. If she wasn't willing to help him get that bottle, he'd just have to get it himself.

Had he really thought he could seduce her into giving him the bottle? A woman who used men and then had her bodyguards throw them out? Hell no. He was just lucky Amira's bodyguards weren't in the mood to follow through on their original threat to break both his knees the next time they found him sniffing around Amira.

To hell with her and her daddy's thugs. He'd get that damn bottle and get the hell out of her life.

Purpose stiffening his spine, he strode off in the direction of Amira's apartment, his feet gobbling the distance, one angry step at a time.

Then a thought occurred to slow his pace. Even if he got the bottle, he'd be hardpressed to get it to the Zagros Mountains without Amira to wish it so.

Fuck! He was screwed. He'd have to go back and convince Amira to give him the bottle and wish them to the tomb of Princess Vashti.

He hated dealing with difficult women. And despite the soft curves of her luscious body, Amira was perhaps the most difficult woman he'd ever had the pleasure of screwing.

* * * * *

When Amira emerged from the nightclub, her friend J.C. stood with her fists on her hips staring around. "Where the heck did he go?"

Relieved to find J.C. alone and at the same time disappointed Mitch didn't try a little harder to fight off the bodyguards to get to her, Amira admitted defeat. Going back into the club wasn't an option. Her head pounded to the beat of the bass drum, and not in a good way. All she wanted was to go home and crawl into bed.

With Mitch. Which was no longer in the cards since she'd had him thrown out, and the jerk had left accordingly.

Okay, well at least she could crawl into bed and hug a pillow, maybe get out the old faithful vibrator and perform a little magic of her own. The thought of getting herself off only made her more depressed over the outcome of the evening. She could be having wild and crazy monkey sex with Mitch if she'd only loosen up and accept Mitch for what he was, a bachelor with no intentions of changing his status in the near future. What was wrong with having sex with someone you knew wouldn't stick around? As long as you went into the bedroom with your eyes wide open and with no illusions, delusions or otherwise of anything more to come of it.

Her temples throbbing, Amira signaled to her bodyguards to get the car. "J.C., it's been fun, but I have a headache. Do you mind that I'm bugging out?"

J.C.'s shoulders sagged. "Nah. I didn't see much of interest inside. Only the hottie you threw out and he's gone. I'm headed home as well. Maybe next time?"

Amira hugged her friend and stepped into the waiting limousine, sliding across the backseat. She pressed the button to close the divider between herself and the two men in the front seat and leaned back against the plush leather seat, completely disgusted with her roller coaster emotions of the day. Why did Mitch have that effect on her? No other man made her as horny and crazy at the same time.

"Thinking of me?" The deep male voice shattered her thoughts and brought her upright. He sat in the shadows on the seat facing her, a grin spreading across his face.

"Mitch!" She dropped her voice to a whisper to keep the bodyguards from overhearing her. "What the hell are you doing in here?"

"I need something from you." He moved across the limo and slid into the seat beside her.

Her heart pounded against her ribs, her breath coming in short, shallow puffs. Amira wanted something from Mitch as well. Right here. Right now. She leaned toward him, ready for anything he wanted to do with her. Her hand found his thigh and moved along its muscular length toward her goal.

His fingers brushed the curve of her cheek, sliding down her neck to skim across her collar bone. "I need that bottle."

Amira froze, her hand poised to close around the ridge beneath his trousers. "You need what?"

"The bottle. I have to return it to the tomb of Princess Vashti by tomorrow." When Mitch leaned in to claim her lips, Amira halted him with a hand pressed to his chest.

"All the dancing and coming on to me was nothing more than a ploy to get that bottle from me?" Amira's voice rose with each word, her rage making her face burn.

"No, of course not. I want you too, but I'm on a bit of a deadline, here." He leaned back, a sigh escaping his lips. "Did I tell you that you're hot tonight?"

"Mitch West, I wish—"

His eyes widened and he lunged for her. "Don't do it. Don't make a wish when you're mad."

She flung herself across the seats to the other side of the limo and finished, "I wish you'd just disappear!"

Mitch West, womanizer and sexier than an Olympic god, disappeared before her eyes. Completely disappeared. The door did not open. He did not fall out. Thunder boomed, lightning flashed and Mitch disappeared.

"Holy crap!" She leaned forward. "What have I done?"

"I don't know. What have you done?" Mitch stared across at her, frowning. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

"Mitch?" She held out her hands and waved them in front of her. "Is that you? Are you still here?"

"Of course I'm here. I'm right in front of you."

She moved closer. "Where? I can't see you."

"Interesting." His voice caressed her like a coating of warm chocolate syrup. Rich, dark and melt-in-your-mouth sexy as hell.

A shiver of anticipation pebbled her skin with goose bumps. "Where are you?" She held out her hands. "Why can't I see you?"

"Sweetheart, apparently your wish is my command." A warm breath whispered against the skin of her naked shoulder.

"How can this be? Magic isn't real, it's all smoke and mirrors." She blinked her eyes several times, thinking maybe her mind was playing tricks on her. She had been overexcited earlier and maybe she'd fallen asleep and didn't even realize it.

"You're not imagining this, Amira." A large warm finger scraped along her jaw and up to tuck a lock of her hair behind her ear. "You aren't dreaming." Full, soft lips caressed her high cheekbones.

"I must be dreaming." She opened her eyes wider and stared around the interior of the limo. "What else would explain it?"

"I told you it would sound crazy, but you can't deny what you just saw."

"You mean what I don't see."

"The fact that I was here a moment ago, and now you can't see me at all." He paused, his hand sliding down the long column of her throat. "But you can feel me, can't you?"

She wanted to say no, but his hand skimmed the top of her low-cut strapless dress, tracing the mounds of her breasts. "Yes." Amira's head dropped back against the seat, every nerve in her body alight at his caress.

"Yes, you can feel me, or yes, you want me to continue?" His hand slipped lower, pressing the top of her dress downward until one puckered nipple peeked out.

"Yes." When he rolled the turgid peak on his tongue, the air whooshed out of Amira's lungs in a rush. "Yes!"

Hadn't she been moaning about letting him get away earlier? Hadn't she told herself, sex with Mitch was preferable to celibacy? "Yes!" she cried out.

The whoosh of the dividing window made Amira clap a hand to her exposed breast.

With the window six inches down, the driver glanced in the rearview mirror. "Are you all right, Miss Nassiri?"

If he noticed her flushed cheeks and the state of undress she was trying desperately to hide, he didn't say a word, keeping his attention on the New York City streets.

"I'm fine, thank you." Amira waited until the black panel slid back in place, before she said, "Don't touch me like that again."

"You mean like this?" Hands grasped her shoulders and pulled her against a solid wall of muscles she could feel if not see.

She closed her eyes and inhaled the musky, spicy scent of Mitch, her hands rose to push him away. When her fingers touched his chest, they climbed up to lace around his neck, drawing him downward until his lips brushed hers.

Hunger built like a wave, surging through Amira. Hunger for his lips, his hands, his body against hers. She crushed her lips to his, her tongue delving between his teeth, stroking him, remembering the pleasure he'd given her with his tongue. For a moment she was lost in her body's memory, coursing sensations stirring low in her belly. Along with the feeling of raw need came the memory of disappointment, hurt and anguish when he didn't contact her afterward.

Anger fueled her hunger. How dare he come back into her life after making love to her and then walking away? Was toying with a woman's emotions nothing more than a game for him?

Well, two could play by those rules.

He wanted something she had.

She wanted something he had. Releasing his mouth, she pressed kisses to his stubbled jawline.

He took up the dance and ran hands down her arms, his thumbs skimming over her breasts.

Her breath caught in her throat. Man, he had a way with his hands, his tongue, his entire body. Could Amira do it with a man she couldn't even see? Could she lead him on, take what she wanted, for as long as she wanted, and then think about letting him have what he wanted? That damned bottle.

The bottle that supposedly gave her the power over him. The power to wish for anything her heart desired. Anything her heart desired, huh...?

A smile curled the corners of her mouth. This whole situation was nuts.

"Did I bring that smile to your lips?" He tongued her exposed nipple, drawing down on her top to expose the other.

"Yes, in fact, you did." The smile broadened as she thought of all the wicked things she could wish from him. "You say that awakening you from the bottle gave me power to wish for anything I wanted?"

His mouth paused in its pursuit of her other nipple.

"Yes." He stretched the one word out, his voice hesitant. Her question had him wondering. If she could see him, she knew he'd be looking up at her.

Good. Let him wonder and worry a little about what she'd do. Her hands slid along strong biceps and she pressed her pelvis into his cock suggestively. "I wish you'd make love to me."

"Here? In the back of the limo?" His hands slid down to her waist and tightened.

"Yes, here. In the back of the limo. Now." When she'd wanted to say her words like a command, they came out in a breathy whisper. So much for wielding her power. He was the one with all the power over her body's reactions, and the really aggravating part was that he probably knew it.

Thunder rumbled and the car shook.

Mitch's lips reclaimed her right breast in a long, deliberate tug. "You didn't have to wish for that. I was getting there anyway."

He eased her down, until she lay sprawled across the seat, the cool texture of smooth leather doing nothing to chill the passion rising within.

Amira, her breathing suddenly erratic, gave a brief thought to how close they were to her apartment. By the continuous stop-and-go of the vehicle, they were caught in the gridlock that was New York City on a Friday night. Hopefully, they wouldn't arrive too soon. She'd have to ask the driver to circle the block...a hundred times. No, hell no, he'd have to circle all of Manhattan until daylight! She wanted more time with Mitch.

The heaviness of his weight eased off her body, leaving her feeling cold and alone. For all of two very long seconds. Then a hand caressed her knee and slid up the sensitized skin along the inside of her leg.

Her thighs fell open, one foot dropping over the edge of the seat. Amira wanted him to take her now. The slow steady progression up her leg had her tied in knots of anticipation, her pussy creaming with every touch of his fingers and lips. How would she hold herself together until he reached THE spot?

As he inched his way upward, he slid the hem of her dress over her thighs, the silky material gliding effortlessly, tickling her skin. He nipped at the tender skin of her inner thigh, then licked the spot and let his tongue travel the rest of the way to the edge of her panties, flicking and laving a path of delight.

When he tugged at the thong she wore, she was more than ready to shed the little scrap of material and free her to his form of delicate torture. His fingers dragged the panties down over her thighs in a slow, sexy slide, his fingers tracing a path all the way to her ankles until the panties fell to the floor.

Amira moaned. At last, she was fully open to him. But she couldn't see his expression. Was he looking at her? Did he like what he saw? She wished he'd say something, anything.

Heavy breathing and the warmth of his body hovering over her confirmed he was still there.

The rustle of fabric made her heart skip a beat. Was he taking off his clothing? If he were visible, she'd get to see all that fabulous skin, those rippling muscles, the sprinkling of hairs across his chest, making a vee down to his waistband.

Amira found herself straining to see what she remembered from the last time she'd made love with Mitch. Finally, she threw her hands in the air. "This is killing me. I wish I could see you."

Chapter Six

For the second time in the back of the limousine, thunder rumbled and a blinding light flashed in Mitch's eyes. His body tingled all over. When his vision adjusted following the flash, everything looked the same. Amira was lying with her legs parted, ready for him to take her, her long, dark hair tumbling over her bare shoulders and breasts, her skin flushed pink beneath that smoothly tanned exotic tone of her Middle Eastern heritage. She was so beautiful, it took his breath away. And she wanted him.

He'd been taking off his shirt when she'd made the wish. With a quick jerk, he flung the garment aside. It wasn't until his chest was bare that he realized he could see himself now. Whew! What a relief! Being invisible had been fun, but he'd hate to make it permanent. How would he work? Who would take him seriously? Who wouldn't think they were out of their mind if his disembodied voice spoke to them? Yet, teasing Amira into a lather of excitement had been worth the short time he'd been unable to see himself.

The rich heiress's eyes widened, her deep red lips parted. She sat up and reached out to touch his chest, her fingers skimming over the smooth muscles, edging downward to the button of his trousers, flicking it open.

The zipper whizzed down and his cock sprang free. He'd forgotten he'd been in such a hurry, he had come commando. Now, he thanked the stars he'd been in a rush.

His trousers pooled at his knees as he knelt on the floor of the limo in front of Amira. Her knees widened, allowing him to fit between her legs. Though he was ready to plunge into her and slake his desires, he was compelled to slow it down to ensure her complete and utter satisfaction.

So compelled he knew it wasn't just his common sense holding him back. It had to be her wish urging him to make her experience an incredible one. Mitch chaffed at being controlled, especially when he would have done the right thing in the first place. He didn't need a wish to force him to please a woman. He'd gotten no complaints from her the first time they made love. He'd never left a woman dissatisfied in bed.

The vehicle jerked forward, throwing him into Amira's lap. The figure-hugging dress rode high around her waist, her pussy open and glistening with her juices. Mitch parted her folds and tongued her clit. "Umm, you taste so good." A hand roved up her belly, over the bunched-up fabric to find her breasts. His dick throbbed, aching to drive deep inside her and let the warm wetness of her pussy embrace him.

Amira moaned, her hips rising off the seat, eager for more of his tongue. Her hands threaded through his hair and gripped it tightly, tugging him even closer.

While his tongue toyed with her clit, he dipped inside her channel, drenching his finger with her cream. Then he traced around her vaginal lips with her juices, wetting the skin, making her ready for his penetration. His finger dropped lower to the tightly puckered ring of her anus.

She bucked, her hips rising higher. "What are you doing?"

"Making love to you, as you wished."

"No, you should –"

He pressed the digit against the opening at the same time his thumb entered her pussy.

"Oh, Mitch!" she yelled at the same moment as a taxi horn blared next to them.

Half expecting the dividing window to drop down again, Mitch grinned, imagining the look on the bodyguard's face when he saw a man's naked ass across the expanse of the limo. The humor faded as Amira clasped her shins in her hands and pulled her knees back, exposing her pussy and anus more fully.

Applying more pressure, Mitch dipped deeper while increasing the flickers of his tongue against her clit.

Another moan reverberated through the limo's interior. Her feet dropped to the floor and she half rose off the seat cushion, her body tensed. A rush of juices oozed out around his finger, making his heart beat faster and his cock twitch for release.

When he had her on the verge of orgasm, he straightened on his knees and pressed his dick against her opening. "What do you want, Amira?"

"You, Mitch. Oh please. Do it now!"

He plunged into her slick, wet channel, her pussy hugging his engorged cock, the moisture guiding him deeper. Hooking his arms beneath her knees, he spread her legs wider, rocking in and out, his pace quickening with his need, desire fueling the fire burning in his groin.

Had she not wished for him to make love to her, he'd have wanted to. Her wish had nothing to do with his physical needs. That she had wished it annoyed him, making his thrusts stronger, angrier until he was slamming her against the back of the leather seats.

Amira clutched his shoulders and thrust her hips into him, then wrapped her legs around his waist and held him tight, her pussy convulsing around his dick, drenching him in warm fluid.

He thrust again, shooting up and near the edge. At the last minute, he pulled free, his cock resting against her thigh.

"No!" Amira cried, reaching for him to bring him back inside. "I wasn't ready for you to stop."

Mitch sat beside her and pulled her into his lap, his cock nudging against her naked bottom. "I don't have protection on me." Maybe sitting with her in his lap wasn't such a good idea. His cock hadn't had enough action and being this close to her only made him want more.

"I have what you need." Amira stretched across the seat, her ass rising in the air, her smooth, tea-colored bottom tempting him to touch.

As Amira reached into a compartment, Mitch cupped her pussy, his finger flicking over her hooded sex, parting the folds to touch her on that swollen nub that had him panting like a dog in heat.

Amira's hand pulled back and she shoved a foil packet behind her. "Here."

Now that he had her on her knees in front of him, Mitch couldn't resist the offering. He quickly stretched the condom over his erection, grasped her hips and slid into her from behind.

"Oh!" she dropped to her elbows, pushing her ass up higher, her rounded hips flaring out.

Mitch rammed in and out, the slick motion heating his cock to solid steel. The vehicle stopped at a light, throwing them forward. Mitch took the opportunity to flip Amira onto her back. He hovered over her, bracing his hands on either side of her head. The interior of the limo was long enough to accommodate them both lying full length across the floor, with little room to spare.

With her hair splayed out against the plush black carpet of the interior and her smooth knees bent and splayed to the side, Amira was flushed, breathing hard and the most beautiful woman Mitch had ever seen.

"Why do you want me now?" Mitch pressed the bulb of his dick against her opening without delving deeper, waiting for her answer.

"Can't you tell? Can't you feel the evidence for yourself?" The musk of their combined juices filled the interior of the car. Her chin set in a determined thrust, Amira planted her bare feet into the rug and pushed upward until her pussy wrapped around him, warm and wet.

Who was he kidding? He couldn't stop making love to her no matter how much he tried to tell himself they were too different. Mitch had grown up in a working-class family where everyone contributed toward the good of the family. Amira had only had to live from day to day. Hard work was a foreign concept. A concept other people did, not spoiled little rich kids. All Amira had to do was crook her little finger and her

entourage came running. She didn't need a genie in a bottle to grant her every wish. She could hire a man to service her if she wanted sex.

Yet she'd wished him to be the man to service her, and service her he would. He didn't have to like it.

But he did.

He thrust hard, driving deep into her womb.

Ratcheting in and out like a jackhammer, he pounded against her, his balls banging against her ass.

Her head swung side to side, her hand going to the mound of dark hair covering her pussy. She touched herself, a small whimper growing to a loud moan. "Now, Mitch, I'm coming now." With both hands, she reached out and drew him down to her.

He gathered her in his arms, his body tensed, shooting over the edge, plunging him into an explosion of sensations that were so intense they hurt. As he held her, his body so stiff he was afraid to move, the dividing panel slid downward.

"What the hell?"

The driver slammed on the brakes, sending Mitch and Amira shooting forward, sliding across the slick carpet. Their forward trajectory was broken by the cushioned seats in front of them.

A car door opened and then the one at the rear of the limo flew wide. "Get the fuck off her!"

"It's okay, Salim, really." Amira scrambled to pull her dress down over her nakedness.

Mitch jerked his pants up from around his ankles feeling like the kid caught with his hands in the cookie jar. No sooner did he have his pants up and fastened, then Salim was hauling his ass out onto the street.

A hundred pounds heavier than Mitch, Salim had no problem slinging him to the pavement.

Amira flew out of the car and grabbed the meaty arm about to slam a fist into Mitch. "No, please, don't hurt him!"

"It is my duty to honor your father's wishes."

"What about mine?"

"I work for your father."

"I see." Amira's eyes narrowed. "So be it."

As Salim cocked his jackhammer arm, Mitch stood and prepared to block the punch. He'd had enough karate training to know how to protect himself. Awareness and surprise were two key factors. He could take Salim and his backup, the other bodyguard-limo driver. At least he thought he could. Those karate lessons were looking pretty anemic in the face of such overwhelming odds.

But Amira had stood up for him. A warm glow spread through his chest, which he tried to ignore as he faced off with two of the biggest, meanest mercenaries he'd ever had the misfortune to tangle with. The last time they'd bested him because he wasn't expecting it. The day after his night with Amira, they'd cornered him in the subway on his way to work and told him that Amira had made a mistake. She didn't want him back in her life and if he wanted to live, he'd stay away.

By the look on Amira's face, she hadn't been the one behind the message. More likely her father had been the driving force behind Salim One and Salim Two tossing Mitch out of her life like a bouncer at the bar they'd just left.

"No!" Amira hopped on Salim's back and covered his eyes with her hands. "Run, Mitch!"

Instead of taking the opportunity to get the hell out of reach of the hammer, Mitch hurried forward, afraid Amira would get hurt. "Amira, get down from there, you'll get hurt. I can handle these guys."

Salim grabbed her arm, dragged her off his back and set her to the side. "Miss Amira, please. This man had dishonored you. He must pay." "My father doesn't make my decisions, damn it!"

The bulky bodyguard shook his head and pushed his sleeves up his massive arms. "Your father is responsible for your welfare until you marry. Then it will be your husband who looks after you."

As Salim advanced on him, Mitch backed a step, right into the grasp of the driver whose bulk almost equaled that of Salim. He trapped Mitch in a vise-grip clench.

His fists bunched, Salim braced his feet to sling a punch.

Before he could let loose, Amira's scream redirected his attention.

A man as big as the two bodyguards had flung Amira over his shoulder and ran down the city street, pushing people aside, knocking a man down who didn't move fast enough.

The bodyguards released Mitch and ran after Amira.

In a gasping voice, Mitch heard Amira call out, "I wish Mitch and I were anywhere else but here!"

* * * * *

Amira pounded against the back of the baboon from earlier that day, shouting at the top of her voice, "Let me down!" She must have missed the rumble of thunder, but she welcomed the flash of light that engulfed her and the four men around her. She knew the sound heralded the granting of her wish.

The hard muscles of the baboon's shoulders disappeared and Amira felt as if she floated in a bright mist.

"Mitch?" she called out, unable to see anything but thick, gray mist. She held her breath, fear of the unknown and unseen gripping her. Had Mitch escaped her bodyguards? Was he with her now? If he was, she sure as hell couldn't see him. Alone and afraid, a chill took over her body and shook her from head to toe. "Mitch!"

"Amira, where are you?" Mitch materialized out of the shadowy mist. "Amira!"

"I'm here." She fell against him, wrapping her arms around his waist. "I was so afraid. I thought they'd killed you."

Mitch held her against him, his arms like steel bands around her waist. "I thought that goon would take you away."

They clung to each other for a long time until a sound in the mist made them spring apart.

Amira spun in a circle, trying to pinpoint the direction from which the sound had come. "What was that?"

"Better question is," Mitch paused, "where are we?"

"I'm not sure. I think I wished for anywhere but here."

"That's pretty vague." Mitch batted at the mist, but the cloudy shroud refused to dissipate. The sound of something slithering in the fog repeated. "Uh, Amira, I don't think we're alone. Maybe you should wish us someplace a little less...questionable?"

"I think you're right. I wish—" Before Amira could complete her wish, something grabbed around her ankle and wrenched her to the side. "Mitch!"

What felt like a snake wrapped around her leg and dragged her into the mist, away from Mitch. With nothing to cling to or dig her fingers into, she couldn't gain leverage to slow her steady movement away.

"Amira!" Mitch called out. "Where are you? Talk to me!"

"I'm here," she cried. "Help me!"

Mitch appeared out of the mist and reached for her arm.

Their hands touched briefly, but the creature pulling her away jerked hard and she slipped out of Mitch's grasp, disappearing into the mist. "Mitch!"

"I'm here. Keep talking."

Another long arm slithered up her torso. Amira punched, slapped and scratched at it, but it continued its assent up her chest, inching toward her neck. "It's climbing up me. Hurry."

Mitch materialized out of the fog and pounced on Amira and the creature. No matter how hard he tugged at the snake-like arm, the creature maintained its grip, inching toward Amira's neck. "Make a wish, Amira. Wish me and you to your apartment."

As the long arm curled around her neck, Amira struggled to get free so she could utter her wish before it was too late. Thunder boomed as the air squeezed out of her throat in a short gasp. Amira squirmed and bucked beneath the weight of the arm, but to no avail. The creature had a stronghold on her and wasn't letting go.

Mitch crouched over Amira, his hands fighting to free her. "Hold on, Amira, hold on!"

"I wish Mitch and I were back in my apartment."

When the world around her faded to black, Amira's eyes drifted closed. Then a flash of light shone through her eyelids and the tension around her neck eased. She dragged in a deep breath, choking and gasping, precious air filling her starving lungs. Satin sheets tickled her cheek, a soft mattress cushioned her back and lips brushed across hers.

"Open your eyes, Amira. You're home." Mitch's voice coaxed her eyelids open. He lay beside her on her bed, his fingers caressed her cheek, sliding her hair behind her ear. "You did it." His smile brightened the room.

"Home?" she asked, staring up at him.

"We're in your apartment, in your bed."

The nightmare of the creature slithered through her memory and she sat up straight. "Did it follow?"

Mitch sat up beside her, pulling her into his arms. "No, sweetheart, the monster is gone. We left it behind."

The stiffness washed out of her and she sagged against him. "Good."

"Are you okay?" His fingers touched her neck where the monster's grip had almost robbed her of her life.

Her fingers followed his and surprisingly, she felt normal. A shiver racked her body at what could have happened and she snuggled closer to Mitch. "I was afraid."

"Me too," he said, pressing his lips to her temple. "Me too."

For a long moment she let him hold her, soaking up the warmth of his body against hers. As her strength returned, her mind rolled over all that had happened throughout the course of the day. "I can't go on like this." She pushed against him, until she could look up into his face. "These wishes are dangerous."

"I know. That's what I've been trying to tell you." He tucked another strand of hair behind her ear and kissed the tip of her nose. Then he kissed her chin and dragged his mouth along her jawline to that sensitive spot beneath her earlobe.

Amira's head dropped back and she closed her eyes. "How do I make them stop?" The last thing she wanted was for Mitch to stop kissing her, but she didn't want a repeat of their trip to wherever they'd just escaped barely alive.

"We have to get that bottle to the sarcophagus by tomorrow." Mitch pushed her back against the pillows, his hands sliding down her body to the hem of her dress. "As soon as possible." With the hem in his hand, he trailed it up over her hips, past her waist, and over her head in a slow, steady movement that set her nerve endings on fire. Once off, he tossed the dress to a corner. He shucked his jeans and lay beside her skinto-skin, his chest hairs tickling Amira's breasts, making them pucker in anticipation.

She kissed his beard-roughened chin and tongued the pulse beating in the side of his neck. Her leg slid up his and wrapped around the back, dragging him closer until her pussy rubbed against his thigh. The closer she got the more she wanted of him. "Shouldn't we be getting that bottle to the sarcophagus?"

"What's your hurry? We have until tomorrow." Mitch's hands found their way to her breasts, pushing them up, so that he could take one of the beaded nipples into his mouth. He drew hard on it, flicking his tongue over the turgid peak until her back arched, pushing her breast deeper into his mouth.

A moan built deep in her throat, emerging as she let out the breath she didn't know she'd been holding. "Yesss...tomorrow is a whole day away." Her body undulated, her hands diving down between them to grasp his cock. She pushed him over onto his back. "Where exactly is the sarcophagus?" Her fingers caressed his velvety smoothness with every intention of making this one-night stand a night to remember.

When she cupped his balls, Mitch sucked in a breath and let it out slowly. "Could be anywhere between here and Iraq. Are you going to do anything with that? Or just play?"

A wicked smile curled her lips at the desperation in his voice. She climbed over him, straddling his torso with her pussy poised over his face and her mouth over his dick. "I want to play." Her lips touched the tip of his cock and it flexed in her grip.

A moan rose from deep in his chest and Mitch grasped her hips in his hands, lowering her over him until his breath warmed the juices coating her nether lips.

Her belly tightened, tension pulling at the muscles of her channel. She spread her knees wider, dropping lower. Then she took his cock fully into her mouth, closing over him, sliding down his length until the tip of his dick bumped into the back of her throat.

By all that was beautiful, he was long, thick and hard as steel. Rising up to the tip again, she gulped in a deep breath only to let it out in a rush when Mitch tongued her clit in short, teasing flickers that set her pussy on fire.

His fingers slid around her hips to cup the rounded globes of her ass, massaging them. One hand found the crease, a finger drawing a line of juices from her pussy to the tight anal ring, pressing gently.

Amira's belly tightened and she rammed his cock deep into her mouth again.

His finger penetrated her anus, his tongue stroking her clit and his thumb fucking her pussy at the same time.

Letting loose of his cock, Amira straightened, her body rigid. She couldn't take it, the pleasure was too acute, yet her body ached for more. "I want you, Mitch. Inside me now."

Mitch eased her forward until he could sit up. Then he pulled her bottom toward him, sitting her down in his lap, easing her pussy down over his straining cock.

Amira took over from there, rising up on her haunches then lowering again. She loved the control she had to move up and down. Loved that she could turn him on so much that his dick was swollen and so thick it filled her completely.

His hands moved up her front to cup her breasts, fondling the tips until she cried out, "Fuck me, Mitch. Fuck me hard and fast. Like you did the first time."

Before she could think, he'd flipped her on her back and slid between her legs, pressing his cock home. Then like a jackhammer, pounding away at her defenses, he slammed in and out of her with such force her bed frame shook beneath them, the headboard banging against the wall.

As she rose to the peak and plummeted over, he stiffened and slammed into her one last time, holding steady as deep as he could go. His cock jerked, his seed spilling inside her. But she didn't care. She had all of him, if only for this one moment, a long moment she would cherish in her lonely dreams.

Mitch rolled to her side, pulling her with him, keeping their connection in the move.

She was glad he didn't break their bond forged of passion just yet. She wanted this moment to last throughout the night.

He brushed a strand of her thick black hair behind her ear and kissed the tip of her nose. "Even if we never see each other after this is all over, that was," he kissed her lips, running his tongue across the crease, "incredible."

Amira's heart squeezed hard against her chest. The dummy had to go and open his big mouth and spoil the moment by reminding her that this was all just a romantic interlude destined for memories, not repeat performances or love-everlasting.

A sob rose up in her throat and she determinedly swallowed it back down. Despite her attempt to keep it light, to set her expectations low, she'd let her heart skid into the danger zone. She'd fallen all over again for the elusive Mitch West.

Fool!

A tear trickled from the corner of her eye and plopped against the pillowcase.

"What's this?" Mitch brushed his finger along her cheekbone. "Why the tear?"

She forced herself to laugh, though her heart was shriveling inside. "No reason. I just guess you're so good at this, it must be a tear of joy."

His brows drew together, but he didn't dispute her words. Instead he drew her closer against him, until her cheek rested in the crook of his shoulder. "Rest, sweetheart. Tomorrow might get rough."

Her hand splayed across his chest, threading through the coarse hair. At least she could touch him and lay with him until then. He didn't seem to be in a hurry to leave her. Oh yeah, he wanted her to wish him to the sarcophagus tomorrow. Not that she had a whole lot of confidence in that really happening. The entire day had been a surreal experience. Something out of a fiction novel.

Amira yawned. Warm and secure with Mitch still buried inside her, she almost felt like tomorrow held promise. Her eyelids drifting closed, she pressed her lips to his chin and whispered so softly he couldn't possibly hear, "I love you, Mitch West." Just as she was about to reach blessed oblivion, her eyes popped open. Damn! They hadn't used a condom!

Chapter Seven

Will and Kate materialized close to Sand City as the sun rose on the desert, spreading fiery red fingers of light across the sand dunes.

"I love this place." Kate stood beside Will, her arm around his waist, and waved at the empty desert before them. "I love that you can't find Sand City by just the naked eye."

"Me too. Although it can be disconcerting at times knowing they can see us, but we can't see them."

Kate grinned. "Yeah, I wonder if my father is watching us right now." She squinted, trying to see the invisible city. "When this is all over, do you think we can come back here to live? I'm sure my father could make room for us in his section of the palace."

Will tipped her chin up and stared down into her blue eyes. "Your wish is my command."

Her beautiful smooth forehead wrinkled. "I'm not sure I like that."

His mouth hovering over her lips, Will paused. "Like what?" He pressed his lips to hers, pushing his tongue between her teeth to play with hers.

When they came up for air, she pushed him to arm's length. "When we return the loot to the tomb and the wishes go away, will you lose interest in me?"

His arms tightened around her. "Not a chance. The magic's not in the bottle, or the stone or the tomb." With his thumbs, he caressed her cheekbones. "It's in you, you pushy broad."

Her frown eased and she smiled up at him. "You're the only man I'll let get away with words like that. I must be getting soft."

Will's hands skimmed up her waist to the swell of her breasts. "Oh yes, I'd say you're getting soft. In all the right places."

"Ummm. Better stop. I'm almost certain my father is watching now."

"Such a shame." Will discreetly thumbed her nipples beneath the cotton blouse she wore and they puckered accordingly.

"Give me the Eye of the Serpent before we disgrace ourselves in front of the entire palace." Instead of the hard edge she liked to place on her words, they came out breathy and winded, as though she struggled to say them. Twin flags of color rose in her cheeks and not because of the intense desert heat radiating off the sand dunes.

Will chuckled. "Okay. But I want to pick up where we left off as soon as we resolve this little matter of wishes." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the key to Sand City, the Eye of the Serpent. "Do you want to do the honors?"

She shook her head, her hands crawling up his chest. "No, I'll let you do it."

As Will held the Eye toward the sun, tilting it up and down to capture the sun's rays, Kate's fingers slipped inside his shirt, threading through the hair on his chest.

"Stop, woman. Your father will have me drawn and quartered, or disemboweled. Or worse, he'll have me marrying you before nightfall."

She unbuttoned his top button and pressed a kiss to his naked throat. "Would marriage be such a bad thing?" Her gaze challenged him.

Will's arm dropped around her, and he gathered her into his arms. "Spending the rest of my life in a time almost ninety years from my own with a woman who could best me in practically any game, I'm not so sure." He pressed a kiss to the tip of her nose and then claimed her lips in a soul-sacrificing kiss.

When he came back to his senses long enough to breathe, he stared down at Kate. "Okay, I think I could possibly manage."

Kate's brows pushed together and she swatted his chest. "Manage? What's to manage?"

"That's a loaded question from a pushy broad."

"Yeah, but it's not *THE* question." She slapped his chest a little harder.

Will's lips twitched, but he forced a smile back, making his face poker straight. "And what question is that?"

Kate shoved away from him and stamped her foot, the movement losing its effect in the shifting sands. "You know perfectly well what question. What have we been talking about? Do I have to -"

Will captured her in his arms and crushed his lips to hers, stemming her flow of words. This time when he came up for air, he brushed a strand of her hair from her eyes. "Let's take care of business, then you can ask me to marry you."

"Me ask you – " she sputtered. "Why, you arrogant bastard."

He ignored her, raising the Eye of the Serpent to the sun. He titled it left, right, up and down until the rays captured the lights of the prism and shot out across the sand, the colorful lights illuminating the silhouette of a hidden city.

A man, dressed in the white robes of an Arab, stood at the gate. His blue twinkling eyes so much like Kate's, Will knew exactly who he was even before he opened his mouth. "I know I taught my daughter to use better language than that," the older man chastised. He held open his arms. "Kate, you're too much like me for your own good."

Kate fell into her father's arms. "I don't think I'll ever get used to you living here."

"The only way to get used to it here is to live here with me." He hugged his daughter to him.

"I'm working on that." Kate's glance caught Will's and she tossed her hair. "That particular project needs a little more tweaking."

Will held out his hand. "Mr. Ralston. It's good to see you before I'm tweaked into compliance."

"Call me Tony, or Dad." He winked. "Mr. Ralston makes me sound old."

"And you're anything but old." Kate snorted. "We know."

Anthony Ralston clasped Will's hand and slapped him on the back. "What brings you two here so soon after you left?"

Will grasped Kate's hand and entered the gate, pocketing the Eye of the Serpent for their next visit. "We need to collect the bottles and the stone."

Ralston followed, hurrying to keep up with Will and Kate. "I take it you found the missing bottle?"

"We have." Will turned a corner and headed toward Ralston's rooms. He came to a halt in front of an immense wooden door with an even more massive guard standing in front of it. "Are the items still in the secret cache?"

"They are. Safe and sound." Mr. Ralston stepped in front of the guard at his door and muttered words in Farsi. The man moved aside, holding the door open for the three to pass through. Ralston led the way. "Did you find the missing man?"

"Yes," Kate answered. "We found Mitch."

"That's good." Her father motioned for them to enter first. "Once you have all the bottles and the stone together, what then?"

"We have to get them back to the sarcophagus to break the curse." As they entered the room with the secret cache, Kate darted toward the far side. An elaborate mural graced the wall, interlaced with stone etchings, raised bricks and beautifully painted hieroglyphics. For a moment, she stood as though uncertain. Her black hair cascaded down her back, her blue eyes staring at the myriad images.

Will's heart squeezed in his chest. The events of the past few weeks had only made his love for this woman stronger, and despite the danger of the wishes and the constant reminder that someone else wanted the power badly enough to kill for it, Will couldn't regret having come this far with Kate Ralston. And if he had anything to do with it, he'd go even farther to keep her at his side. Even give up his perpetual bachelorhood.

"Do you want me to do it?" her father asked.

"No. I remember." She reached out and touched a drawing of a serpent. Then she pressed against a raised brick. Her hands glided over several raised golden knobs and a picture of a terrible beast, pausing on an embossed drawing of a beautiful woman. She wrapped her fingers around the raised etching and pulled gently. Stone ground against stone as the wall slid back and then turned, exposing a passageway into a large lit room.

Will shook his head. "These people never cease to amaze me with their ingenuity."

Ralston smiled. "Rightly so. I've a great respect for the ancients and their ways. I try to never underestimate them."

"You may not underestimate the ancients. But it's a pity you forgot about the rest of us." A voice behind them made all three of them turn.

Omar Qarim, the sleazy, conniving thief who'd originally stolen the Eye of the Serpent from Kate, stood surrounded by a phalanx of desert soldiers dressed in black robes, carrying AK-47 rifles. He nodded toward Kate. "Gag her."

Will shoved Kate and her father inside the room, jumped in behind them and pulled the stone door shut behind him. The door had closed all but a crack when the biggest, beefiest soldier slammed his shoulder into the stone, throwing the door and Will back. Staggering backward, Will tripped over a golden urn and crashed into a stone wall, his head smacking against the hardness. He blinked once, twice, fighting back the shadows settling in around him. The darkness claimed him.

* * * * *

Harry lay beside Edie inside the crate filled with scarves and apparently the sarcophagus of a princess. Lying over the stone tomb of a dead woman gave Harry goose bumps. Thank goodness he didn't have time to dwell on the morbidity of the situation. His own mortality and that of Edie's were in question with a storm of footsteps headed their way. "We have to get out of here."

"What if they see us?" Edie whispered, her warm breath chasing away the chill of death inside the crate.

"We can't wait here." Harry eased the top up, just enough to see who was coming. As quickly as he eased the top up, he dropped it quietly in place. The men had reached the end of the aisle and turned toward the crate in which Harry and Edie hid.

The footsteps stopped beside them and low voices spoke in Farsi, their words muffled by the dense wood of the crate lid. Harry understood just enough to guess at their next actions. "They're going to move the crate," he whispered softly enough for Edie to hear but not for the men outside the wooden slats of the crate.

The lid above them shifted.

Harry pulled scarves over Edie and himself, settling deeper into the crate. He held his breath, ready to spring up and yell, if they decided to remove the crate's cover.

Instead of removing the top, the men fitted it snugly over the crate, obliterating all light. Then they banged against it with something hard.

His heart in his throat and a sick sense of dread creeping over him, Harry realized the lid had been nailed shut with them inside.

"Uh, Harry, do you want me to wish us out of here?"

Having been in tight spots before, Harry shouldn't have been so nervous about this one. Something about being trapped with a dead woman made his body twitchy all over. He dragged in a deep breath and let it out slowly, willing himself to calm. "No. If you can stand it, we should go along for the ride and see where they take the sarcophagus. Are you going to be all right?"

She chortled softly, the sound barely audible and anything but funny. "Yeah, sure. I've never been more comfortable. Who'd know that lying in a crate with a dead woman would be so exhilarating?"

An engine rumbled closer to them. The box rocked and then rose as if suspended in mid-air. The engine revved and the box jerked, little bumps and shudders, letting Harry

know that they were being carried through the warehouse. At last the forklift halted and the crate lowered onto a hard surface. Had the driver set them down on the concrete warehouse floor?

Another engine started, emitting a different sound from the first. The crate bounced along with the engine.

"I think we've been transferred to a truck," Edie said into the darkness.

Harry remembered the first time he'd seen Edie in the museum in New York City, her eyes rounded, her mouth open, staring at him as he stood there naked in front of her after she'd rubbed him awake from his bottle. "I bet you're missing the museum about now."

Her body quivered next to him. "Not really. With Mr. Baumgartner dead, I can only imagine that would have been my fate as well if I'd been the one there."

Harry fumbled through the tangle of silky scarves to find her hand and hold it. "We make a good team, Edie."

"You think?"

"I know."

"Good. Because I wouldn't want to be trapped in a box with anyone else." Her fingers intertwined with his and she rolled over to face him. "Is it bad manners to kiss the man you love while lying with another woman?"

"Somehow I think she'd forgive us." Harry pulled Edie into his arms and kissed her, the panic of being locked in a box with a sarcophagus fading as his cock hardened and his need for this woman surged through his veins. "You know what I'm thinking?"

Her free hand crept across his abdomen and downward to the rise in his trousers. "You've found a way to pass time locked in a box?" She lowered his zipper and wrapped her fingers around his straining cock.

Her cool fingers made his breath catch in his throat. "You've got it."

She stroked his length, circling the tip with a single digit. "Oh, yes, indeed I do."

The ride in the darkened box suddenly didn't seem like such a bad idea. And if they ran out of air, Edie could always wish them out of it. In the meantime...

Harry slid his fingers beneath Edie's shirt, pushing aside her bra to cup her breast.

* * * * *

The shrill blare of an alarm blasted Mitch from his sleep. He shot to a sitting position. When he tried to swing his legs off the bed, his feet wrapped in the sheets and he tumbled to the floor in a heap, pain shooting through his shoulder and hip where he landed. "Damn!" For a moment he didn't know whether or not the flashing lights were from the bump on his head or emergency lights flickering in the corners of the room.

"Mitch? What the heck's going on? Where are you?" Amira's head appeared over the side of the bed. "Are you all right?"

"Come on." He jumped to his bare feet, grabbed her hand and tried to drag her out of the bed. "There's a fire or something. We have to get out of the building."

Amira laughed. "Slow down, cowboy. That's my alarm system. It goes off every once in a while. Don't worry. The security will take care of it. I should get a call..." She glanced at the green digits on the alarm clock. "About now." The phone rang as she'd predicted. With a smile she lifted it. "Yes?" Her brows puckered and she sat up straight, her naked breasts glowing darkly in the flickering strobe of the alarm lights.

Mitch's cock twitched and he wanted nothing more than to crawl back in bed with the beautiful perfume princess, but something wasn't right about the lights blinking.

"Huh?" Amira held the phone away from her ear and stared at it. "The line went dead."

Apprehension built in Mitch's chest, squeezing his throat into a tight knot. "We have to get out of here. Now."

"Let me grab some clothes." Amira slid off the bed and ran for the huge walk-in closet between the bedroom and bathroom.

Mitch snatched his jeans, jerking them up his legs as he hopped after Amira. "You don't have time to go designer on me, just grab something to cover yourself and let's go."

She reached inside a drawer in the closet and pulled out a nine millimeter pistol. "Here hold this while I get dressed."

Mitch palmed the gun, stared down at it and back at Amira. "Do you know how to fire this thing?"

"While other girls spent time at the beauty parlor, Daddy took me to the range." She frowned at him. "Don't tell me you've never fired a gun?"

Mitch shrugged. "What can I say? I'm a city boy. Grew up on the streets of hard knocks, but never so hard I had to carry a gun."

"How do you protect yourself? It's a jungle out there." Not that her father let her roam the streets without a contingent of bodyguards.

Mitch straightened to his full height. "I'm skilled in self-defense."

"Ever had to use it?"

A wry grin slipped across his face. "Once. A mugger tried to take my wallet."

Amira rolled her eyes. "On second thought, put the gun down before you shoot yourself, and help me into this thing." She pulled a long black burka from the back of her closet and tossed it over her head.

"Where the hell did you get that and why are you putting it on?" He pulled the burka back over her head.

"My dad gave it to me a long time ago, when we traveled together to Saudi. I thought it was dumb at the time, but now I'm glad I have it. Will you help me or not? We don't have time to argue."

His chest squeezed tightly at the thought of Amira in war-torn Iraq, a defenseless female in a male-dominant society. "You aren't going to Iraq with me." He held the burka out of her reach. "It's too dangerous."

"And it's less dangerous for a man?" She snorted, snatched the fabric out of his hands and slung it over her head. "Isn't that a bit too chauvinistic even for you, Mitch West?"

"What would your father say? You haven't told him a thing about us or what's going on. He'd put a contract on my head if he even knew I was in the same room with you."

Amira settled the black fabric over her shoulders. "What do you know about my father? He wouldn't hurt you."

Mitch's brows rose into his hairline. "Not hurt me? I'm still recovering from your last rejection. See this scar?" He pointed to the one next to his left eye.

"My father did that?" Amira touched the indentation.

"No, but his goons did. All you had to do was tell me to buzz off. You didn't have to sic your father and your bodyguards on me."

"But I didn't – "

A loud crash shook the apartment.

"Crap. They got here sooner than I thought. Come on." Amira stepped into the closet, grabbed Mitch's hand and jerked him in behind her.

He dragged his feet, looking back over his shoulder at the closed bedroom door. "How is hiding in the closet going to save our butts and how are we going to get to the bottle?"

"The bottle is in the safe on the floor below. Right now, we need to get out of the apartment."

"Are you going to wish us there? What if the thugs beat us to it?"

"Are you always this pessimistic?" Amira shook her head and shoved hangers loaded with designer clothing to one side until she'd exposed the wall with one lone hanger left on the rod. "Daddy may not know how to treat my boyfriends, but he does

have a good head for security." She leaned on the hanger and the wall in front of them slid open, exposing a spiral staircase leading downward.

Footsteps pounded through the apartment heading toward the bedroom. "After you." She shoved him toward the stairs.

With no other options jumping out at him, Mitch leaped through the door and down two steps before stopping to wait for Amira.

She stepped inside, reaching back to arrange the clothes around the lone hanger. Then she touched a button on the inside wall of the hidden stairwell. The panel slid back in place, throwing them into darkness.

Mitch gripped the metal railing and inched his way down the stairs, careful not to make a noise on the metal steps. After three or four steps, his eyes adjusted to the darkness and he noticed faint lights lighting each step. "Once we get the bottle, we'd better find the others. I'm more than ready for this little adventure to be over."

"Me too."

At the bottom of the staircase, Mitch bumped into a wall and ran his hands over the surface, searching for another button like Amira had used to trigger the other door.

Behind him, the soft sound of buttons clicking made him turn.

Amira closed a box on the wall and smiled sheepishly. "I disarmed the alarm system. Just push on the door."

Mitch gave the door a hard push and it swung open into a softly lit room big enough to fit his entire apartment. Clear cases lined the walls, displaying diamond necklaces, delicate artwork and an impressive collection of guns. "You're quite the collector. Are these all yours?"

"The jewelry, yes. The guns are my father's."

Mitch tapped the clear glass of the nearest case. "Plexiglass?"

"Something like that. It's bullet proof. If a thief wanted to get in, it would take a stick of dynamite or a pretty powerful saw to get through that stuff." Amira walked

across the room to the far wall where a collection of colorful bottles were displayed in a case all their own. In the center was the blue-green bottle from the sarcophagus. She touched her finger to a fingerprint scanner and keyed a code on the keypad. The clear door slid to the side. Reaching inside, she lifted the bottle from its velvet-covered perch. Bottle in hand, she turned to Mitch. "The guys upstairs might find their way down here. The cops should be here soon, but I'm not certain they'll get here in time. Where to?"

"I need you to send me and that bottle to wherever Will is. Harry and Edie are supposed to join up with us there. Then you need to wish yourself to someplace safe."

Amira's lips firmed into a straight line. "The bottle stays with me." She held it in her arms, refusing to give it to him.

"You can't come. It's too dangerous." Mitch held out his hand. "Please, Amira, we don't have time to argue."

"Exactly." With a smile, she spoke clearly, "I wish we were—"

"Wait." Mitch clamped a hand over her mouth. "What if Will and Kate didn't find what they were after? Someone wants the bottles badly enough to break into your apartment, who's to say they wouldn't try to steal the others and do away with Will and Kate?" His hand lowered.

"Good point. What do you suggest?"

"Let me go there first." He stared hard at her. "Invisible. You can bring me back within two minutes. If it's safe, you can join us."

Amira's brows furrowed, that stubborn look making Mitch want to kiss her hard. "I say I come with you now."

"If they need help, I can't be worried about you too. Give me two minutes." He reached for her arms and pulled her against him. "I don't want you hurt."

Her gaze met his. "And I don't want you hurt."

"I'll be all right as long as I'm invisible." He kissed the tip of her nose. "Two minutes and you can wish me back."

"Promise?"

"Lady, you've got the power, not me." Mitch laughed. "If the bad guys get through, wish yourself someplace safe. Don't wait until it's too late. Promise?"

She nodded, chewing on her lip. "I don't like sending you out into the unknown."

"Believe me, I don't like going into the unknown."

"Want to take one of my father's guns?"

"No. I'd end up shooting myself." He kissed her hard and set her away from him. "Now be a good girl and wish me invisible."

"I still think this is crazy." Amira hugged the bottle to her chest and stared at him.

Mitch gave her a tight smile. "Just do it."

Amira inhaled and let it out. "I wish you were invisible."

For a moment, nothing happened, then the requisite clap of thunder and shaking walls heralded the oncoming wish. White light blinded Mitch for a moment and he lost sight of Amira. For a moment panic seized him. Then she was standing in front of him, shaking her head.

"Did it work?" he asked.

She reached out, her fingers bumping into his chest. "I can't see you."

He let out the breath he'd been holding and smoothed a hand along her cheek. "Wish me to Will."

"But I want to go with you." Amira's fingers climbed up his chest to his face and cupped his chin, her thumb running over his lips.

"Two minutes." He kissed her thumb.

"Mitch?" Amira's fingers bunched the fabric of his shirt. "There's something I wanted to tell you."

"Yes?" He pushed her hair back off her face. The sensation all the more intense since all she could do was feel him.

"I know Princess Vashti."

He laughed. "How could you know a woman who's been dead for a thousand years?"

"My father told me stories about her when I was a child."

"He did?" Mitch's fingers curled around her arms. "What did he tell you?"

"That she could wish for anything she wanted, but that she couldn't wish for a man's love."

"Sounds like our princess. Must have been a legend that survived the centuries. Your father is from the Middle East, isn't he?"

"Yes." She closed her eyes and leaned her head against his chest. "He used to call me his princess," she whispered. "Do you think it means anything?" Her face tipped up to his.

Something cold brushed over Mitch's skin, but he shook it off. "No. Don't read anything more into this than you have to. Everything will be all right. You'll see." He lifted her chin and pressed his lips to hers. "Now wish me to Will."

She sighed. "I wish you were with Will."

Thunder shook the room, rattling the bullet-proof glass display cases. White light flashed in Mitch's eyes. His last vision of Amira, her forehead creased in a frown, her hands reaching out for him.

When the bright light faded, he found himself in a stone-walled room. Will lay on the floor at his feet, another man dressed in the white robes of the Middle East was bound and lying beside him. Kate sat in a chair, her hands and feet bound, a gag tied around her head. Her garbled yells through the gag made Mitch jump, until he realized she couldn't see him. Apparently, she was trying to rouse Will with her muffled screams.

Mitch had two minutes to get them out of this mess before Amira wished him back. He'd better get a move on. Before he could take one step, the stone wall behind him shifted, swinging open.

Chapter Eight

With limited space in the crate, Harry rolled Edie to her side facing away from him and slid his cock into her pussy from behind. The bumpiness of the ride made it a challenge to stay inside. To keep her close, he wrapped his arms around her and fondled her breasts.

"Umm, I never thought I'd be entombed in a crate, making love with a one hundred-year-old man." Edie giggled, her laughter catching when Harry's hand slid lower to touch her clitoris. "Oh, do that again."

He complied, pressing his dick deeper inside her warm wetness. "So how does it feel to be with a senior citizen?" His lips skimmed the back of her neck, her hair tickling his nose.

"Amaaazzzinng," she moaned, her hand holding his fingers in place over her sweet spot.

As he pumped in and out of her, her back arched letting him drive deeper. Shards of exquisite sensations shot through Harry's system, culminating in that rock-hard organ buried inside the most beautiful redhead in the world. He burst over the edge, his semen shooting into her, his body rocking in tight, desperate spurts.

Edie took control of Harry's nerveless fingers, twirling them lower into the juices of their lovemaking, dragging the moisture up to her clit. "There." She rubbed his finger around the little nubbin until her muscles tightened and she soon was gasping out his name. "Harry!"

He held Edie close, continuing to stroke her as she rode her wave to the end. Not until they both plummeted back to earth did Harry remember where he was. He lay back on the sarcophagus, satiated and momentarily exhausted. "Who knew Edie

Ragsdale would be a wildcat trapped in a box, lying across the sarcophagus of a dead woman?"

Edie scooted around to face him. "It must be the beast in you that brings out the wildcat in me." She cupped his face in the darkness and kissed him. "What happens when we arrive at our destination?"

"You'll need to wish us out of here before they open the box."

"I can do that, but where to?" Her lips trailed a path along his jawline. "We could wish ourselves out of the frying pan into the fire. Or in this case, out of the sarcophagus into a tomb."

"We'll have to take our chances. The rest of the gang is depending on us to help break the curse."

"I'm looking forward to the final showdown with Danorah." Edie's voice took on a hard edge so unlike the mouse she'd been when Harry had first met her.

"Me too." He liked the new, adventurous Edie and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. "That woman has caused enough trouble."

Edie's arm draped across Harry. "Do you think Will and Mitch are having any troubles collecting the bottles and stone?"

Harry pulled Edie closer. "Let's hope not."

The truck carrying the crate bumped to a stop.

"Harry?" Edie's voice dropped to a whisper.

"Uh-huh, sweetheart?"

"It's showtime." Edie held onto him as she spoke the most frightening two words Harry could think of, "I wish—"

* * * * *

Mitch leaped over the white-robed man and reached for the gag covering Kate's mouth.

As soon as he touched her, Kate screamed into the rag and hopped, chair and all, to the side, nearly tipping over.

"It's okay, Kate. It's me, Mitch." He grabbed her shoulder and righted the chair. "Amira wished me to be invisible. Do you understand?"

Her eyes wide, Kate nodded, her face turning right and left as if searching for him.

"I'm going to try to remove the gag. Hold tight. Someone's coming."

Kate sat straight, staring at the door as it swung the rest of the way open.

The black-robed desert soldiers stormed in.

Mitch's fingers fumbled to loosen the knot. If he could free her mouth, she could wish herself and Will out of the room. They'd have to come back for the other man when they could find help.

One of the men dropped down on his haunches and slid a knife between Kate's legs, slicing through the ropes binding her ankles.

Mitch danced out of range. If the soldiers knew he was here, they might start shooting at anything and everything. He kept quiet, standing behind Kate, working his fingers through the tight knot. At last he had it loosened, but he didn't have time to jerk it off before the man who'd cut the ropes pulled Kate to her feet and pushed her toward the door.

With the other two men out cold on the floor, Mitch was the only one left to save Kate from whatever fate the men had planned for her. By their leering looks, it couldn't be good. Without bothering to overanalyze the situation, Mitch launched himself onto the man's back.

He screamed and let go of Kate.

"Get out of here, Kate!" Mitch yelled, wishing now for that gun Amira had wanted him to take.

The gag shook loose from Kate's mouth. "I can't. We don't have the bottles and the stone. Omar Qarim stole them."

"Worry about that later. I don't know how much longer I can hold this guy." The man beneath Mitch bucked and swung around in circles, effectively blocking the doorway and keeping any other men from entering the room.

"Go!" Mitch yelled.

Kate shouted, "I wish Will, me and Dad were anywhere else but here!"

Thunder filled Mitch's ears and a sinking feeling filled his gut. "Oh no. Kate, you shouldn't have wished that. As soon as you get there, wish yourself to the tomb of Princess Vas - " Bright light blinded Mitch before he could finish his sentence. When the light faded, he was still holding on to the man in black, but Will and Kate had disappeared. Her father struggled to sit up, his arms behind his back, but his feet free.

Mitch whooped like a madman and leaped off the desert soldier's back.

So spooked from being attacked by an invisible enemy, the soldier ran from the room screaming. The stone door closed, locking Mitch and Kate's father inside.

"I don't know your name," Mitch said. How did you explain to a man that you weren't a figment of his imagination? "I'm an acquaintance of your daughter. I'm here to help, but I'm not sure how long. Let me untie your gag and ropes."

The man stared around the room, his head jerking, his gaze shooting to each corner.

Mitch laid a steady hand on his shoulder and untied the gag on his mouth. "There. Now let me get those ropes."

The black-robed man had dropped his knife when Mitch had attacked him. What was taking Amira so long? Five minutes must have passed already. Could she be in trouble?

As Mitch grabbed for the knife, thunder rumbled inside the stone-walled room. He let go of the breath he'd been holding, looking forward to seeing Amira again. "I'm about to be gone." He lashed out, cutting the bonds holding Kate's father's hands. Then he pressed the knife into the older man's hands. "Gotta go."

White light eclipsed the room and Mitch found himself back in Amira's vault.

"Amira."

At the sound of her name, Amira quickly wished him visible again and flung her arms around his neck. "I'm so glad you're back!"

"What took so long?"

"The men broke into the room right after you left. I fought them, but they got away with the last bottle."

Mitch gripped her arms and ran his glance over her body. "Are you all right?"

She stared down at her finger, a tear trembling on her eyelash. "I broke a nail."

A grin spread across Mitch's face. "If that's all that's wrong, I'm glad."

"Do you know how hard it is to get a good manicure these days?"

He laughed and pulled her to him.

A sob rose from her throat, and her arms wrapped around his neck. "I was so scared for you." She squeezed him hard then pushed back to look up into his face. "What happened?"

"Someone stole the bottles and the stone, Will, Kate and her father were all tied up and I attacked a mercenary." He drew in a breath and let it out. "I think Will and Kate are in trouble."

"Why?"

"Kate wished them to be anywhere else but here."

"Damn." Amira grimaced. "I hope they get out okay."

Mitch's arms tightened around Amira. "I didn't like leaving you alone."

"Other than losing the bottle, I did fine on my own."

"Still, I guess you should come with me."

Amira rolled her eyes. "Pul-eaze. Don't sound so excited." Though her words dripped with sarcasm, a smile quirked the sides of her mouth. "Terrible that you'll have to take me with you."

He frowned. "Stay close."

"Like a fly to fly paper." Amira's eyes narrowed. "With the bottle gone, will I even be able to wish us someplace?"

Mitch slipped an arm around her waist and pulled her close. "We won't know until we try."

"I'm all about trying." She ground her hips into his.

A moan rose from Mitch's throat. "You're killing me, woman. We have a job to do."

"I'm not stopping you."

"It's difficult to beat the bad guys with a hard-on."

She leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. "Where to, hero?"

"The tomb of Princess Vashti."

"I wish Mitch and I were outside the tomb of Princess Vashti."

Thunder rumbled, shaking the walls.

"Guess the magic still works," Amira slipped her hand into Mitch's.

"Oh yeah. It's magic all right." Amira's hold on him was pure enchantment. Mitch hoped he could keep her alive long enough to explore their new relationship in more depth. He shifted his trousers to make room for his hardening cock and prepared for the ride as white light filled the vault and all grew quiet.

One moment, he was standing in an air-conditioned room, the next sand stung Mitch's cheeks, blasted by the wind on a stormy desert. When the bright lights faded, Mitch found they'd landed near the base of barren, rocky hills, similar to those he saw pictures of on the news. Hills like Osama Bin Laden hid in. In front of him was the entrance to a cave.

Startled by engine noise behind him, Mitch spun in the sand and gravel.

A large canvas-covered truck rumbled into view, followed by a motorcade of various vehicles.

"Quick!" He grabbed Amira and shoved her behind a giant boulder. "Wish yourself somewhere safe, will ya?" Holding her in his arms, he pressed his lips to her hair. "Your dad would never forgive me if anything happened to you."

"I don't care what my father thinks." She turned in his arms. "Would you miss me if something happened?"

He stared down into her eyes, the pain of the beating he'd taken fading as he melted into her brown-eyed gaze. "Yeah, I'd miss you."

"When this is all over, are you going to disappear on me again?"

"Disappear?" Mitch's brows drew together. "I tried to see you last time, but your bodyguards said you didn't want anything to do with me."

Amira's eyes widened. "They did? Well, damn!" She reached up and kissed him hard. "I wanted to see you so badly, I could taste it."

"Then why did you send your thugs to beat me up? I tried twice to see you, both times I was met with bruises and contusions."

Amira's eyes narrowed. "Daddy." She drew in a deep breath and let it out. She'd kowtowed to him long enough. A grown woman shouldn't let her father dictate her life. "I'll have a talk with him when we get back to New York."

"You do that." He kissed the tip of her nose. "I'd really like to see you again, when this is all over." Brakes squealed and tires chewed on gravel. "In the meantime, company has arrived." Mitch peered around the edge of the boulder to where the truck ground to a halt.

A door slammed on the far side of the vehicle, out of Mitch's view, and a woman's voice called out, "Bring the sarcophagus into the cave. Ah, there's Omar. Just in time with the bottles and the stone."

Mitch would recognize that voice anywhere. The woman had almost had him killed in an alley a couple of weeks earlier.

"Danorah," he said softly, his chest tightening, his muscles bunching, ready for a fight.

That woman was the reason Mitch was trapped by the curse. If Danorah hadn't tried to steal the Stone of Azhi, Mitch wouldn't have grabbed it, setting off the chain of events that ultimately led him back to Amira. Okay, so maybe the events hadn't been all bad, although Mitch was sure what happened next wasn't going to be easy.

* * * * *

"Wait." Harry pressed a hand to Edie's mouth. "I know the area, maybe you should repeat after me."

"Okay, Harry. But make it quick. They'll have this box open soon."

Another vehicle lumbered up behind the one they were in.

"About time you got here." Danorah's muffled voice carried through the wooden walls of the crate.

"I have the bottles and the stone, as ordered. Pay me and I'll be on my way."

"Damned mercenaries," Danorah muttered loud enough Harry could hear her. "Take your money and be gone."

The other vehicle cranked up and drove off.

"We need to move now," Harry said. Closing his eyes, he pictured the entrance to the cave where he'd found the tomb of Princes Vashti. Large boulders that had fallen from the bluffs made an effective hiding place close to the cave's entrance. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." The box shook as if it was being pulled off the back of the truck.

"Say this: I wish we were hiding behind a big rock close to the entrance to the cave containing the tomb of Princess Vashti." Harry gripped Edie's hand and held his breath. Her wishes didn't always turn out like she'd planned.

"I wish we were hiding by the tomb of Princess Vashti."

"No, no. You forgot the part a about the rocks and outside the cave."

Too late. Thunder rumbled and white light blinded them.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I'm just not good at this."

When the light faded, Harry and Edie lay in a dark place, the scent of dirt and old stone filling their nostrils.

"Where are we?" Edie whispered.

"I think we're inside the cave." What he wouldn't give for a torch. He climbed to his feet and tugged on Edie's hand.

"How do we get out without a flashlight?" She rose, slipping her arm around Harry's waist. "I'm scared."

Voices echoed off the cave walls, headed in their direction.

"We need to hide."

"But how, we can't see anything?"

"Hang on to me. I vaguely remember the layout." Not that he knew where he was in that layout, but he had only one way to find out. Holding one of Edie's hands, Harry held his other hand out in front of him and walked forward until his fingers bumped against stone. Inching his way quickly along the cool cave wall, he stumbled into the altar he remembered from his last visit there over eighty years ago.

The people moving in their direction carried lights. The glow reached the chamber before the people did, giving Harry just enough light to see.

"Quick, duck behind the altar." Harry dragged Edie around the corner of the stone and crouched down, bringing her with him.

A man entered the burial chamber carrying a flashlight. He was followed by six large men carrying the stone sarcophagus of Princess Vashti. Behind them was Danorah, wielding another flashlight and leading two other men carrying a smaller crate.

"Set the sarcophagus in the center of the room and remove the lid," Danorah demanded. "Lay the crate beside it."

The men complied, lifting the lid off the sarcophagus and setting it on the stone floor.

Danorah opened the lid to the crate and reached inside. "I've waited for years to find the Stone of Azhi. She reached into the crate and removed a cloth bag. She set it aside and reached inside the crate a second time. She removed a bottle, the very bottle Edie had touched when she'd awakened Harry from his eighty-year sleep. Her hand rubbed down over the glass, the look on her face orgasmic. "The power will be mine. I wish you to come to me." Thunder rumbled against the walls of the cave, white light filled the chamber.

Edie gasped.

Harry rose beside her and walked out into the middle of the chamber.

The burly man closest to him yelled and pointed a gun at his chest.

"No! Don't shoot him!" Edie straightened from her hiding place and rushed toward Harry. "I wish Harry and I were back in New York City." She waited for the thunder, welcomed the white light, but neither happened.

Harsh laughter filled the cold interior of the burial chamber. "Fool! You no longer have the power." Danorah held up the bottle. "It's mine. All mine. Once I unlock the power to each of the bottles and the stone, I will be invincible." She reached inside the crate and pulled out the next bottle and rubbed her hand along the glass. "Watch and see."

Edie pushed forward. "Harry, stop her!" A big man grasped her arms and held her back.

Danorah shot Harry a narrowed look. "I wish you to obey me, and only me."

"Harry, please!" Edie cried.

He glanced at her and shook his head, his expression sad. "I can't. Danorah owns me now."

Edie fought against the hands holding her. If she could get to the bottle, she could take Harry back from Danorah. But the man holding her easily outweighed her three-to-one. "Let me go, you big dumbass!" She kicked his shin and stomped on his instep, but nothing she did could break his hold. "You won't get away with this!" she shouted at Danorah.

"Wanna bet?"

Bright light flashed in the chamber. When the brilliance faded, Kate and Will fell to the stone floor at Danorah's feet.

"Ah, just in time." Danorah held the second bottle up and rubbed the side. "I wish you to come to me, now."

Kate lunged for Danorah. "Bitch! You can't have him." A guard lifted her kicking and screaming off her feet.

Will stood and walked toward Danorah. "I can't stop myself, Kate."

"I wish you to obey my every command," Danorah said in a cool, clear voice.

"Yes, ma'am."

Danorah frowned. "And don't call me 'ma'am'. It makes me sound old." She looked around the room. "Now all we have to do is to go collect the third bottle and I'll have it all. All the power of an ancient princess." She opened her mouth again, "I wish—"

"Danorah, did Will tell you that he's an expert in the art of pleasuring a woman?" Harry ran a hand over Danorah's shoulder and down her arm to her hip. "He learned from a geisha in China."

"I don't have time for sex."

"No? We have to wait for the men to bring the bottle. Don't you think we could pass the time in a more pleasurable fashion?" Will eased forward, his hands reaching out to touch Danorah's breasts.

"Will Prater Moreland," Kate growled, "don't touch that filthy thief."

Will's brows rose. "Ah, dear Kate, you forget that you don't have control of me anymore. I don't have to do as you say." He turned to Danorah and stroked a finger down her breast, across her belly and lower still. "But I do have to please the woman who has the authority to wish for anything."

As Harry circled Danorah, Edie's eyes filled with tears. She knew what he and Will were up to, but she didn't have to like it. They were buying time. Time for Amira and Mitch to figure a way out of this mess. "Don't do it, Harry," she called out, knowing she couldn't stop him and shouldn't. Instead of concentrating on Harry's hands slipping beneath Danorah's shirt, she should be worrying about getting loose and finding Amira and Mitch. "I can't stand it! Take me away from them. They're nothing but manwhores!" She turned her face away from what Harry and Will were doing to Danorah and shot a glance at Kate. "Don't watch, Kate."

"I'm going to watch and I'm going to get my revenge for everything they do to her." Kate spat on the floor at Danorah's feet.

Danorah had the gall to laugh. "You think that bothers me?" She raised a hand and cupped Will's cheek. Her other hand reached low and caressed his crotch. "Tie them up. I want an audience for when their men make love to me."

As the guards bound Edie's and Kate's hands and feet, Danorah's laughter filled the chamber. "Come, Will, is it? I could show you things the geishas never heard of."

Chapter Nine

When the first scream blasted out of the entrance to the cave, Amira hurled herself forward. If not for Mitch holding her around the waist, she'd have exposed them both. "Let me go. They have the others," she hissed.

His face grim, Mitch held her firm, refusing to let her go. "We're no good to them if we're caught. There has to be another way to help."

Amira chewed on her lower lip. "What about turning invisible? We could sneak in and -"

"And get you killed?" Mitch shook his head. "No way."

"Then you go and I'll stay here."

Mitch snorted. "And I'm supposed to think you'd just wait here quietly? Fat chance."

"Then you come up with an idea."

"Danorah has to be the one behind the theft of the bottles and the stone. She won't be satisfied until she has it all."

Amira's eyes widened. "She'll want the other bottle. My bottle."

"Right." Mitch nodded.

A smile lit her face. "We could trade the bottle for the lives of the others."

"That's the idea."

As quickly as the smile appeared, it disappeared. "But we don't have the bottle. Those goons stole it from me."

Mitch scratched his chin and peered around the corner of the boulder. "They can't wish it here, so they have to wait for someone to fly it by airplane."

Amira grabbed Mitch's arm. "We could find that airplane and get it back."

"Sounds too dangerous to me."

"I could make you invisible, you sneak on board, grab the bottle and I'll wish you back."

"It might work."

Amira tapped a finger to her lip. "Timing will be key. I can't wish you back until you have the bottle. On second thoughts, maybe I should sneak in and get the bottle. You stay here."

"Fuck no!" Mitch said, a little louder than Amira cared for.

She stuck her head around the side of the boulder. The guards at the cave's entrance lounged against the rocks, unaware of the debate taking place only yards from them. "Not so loud, genius. Like you said, we can't get caught or we'll be of no help. For this to work, I have to go too. You're the muscle, I'm the wish."

"It's never as easy as you think. And what would your father – "

"I can make my own decisions. I'm here, aren't I?" She puffed out her chest, faking her confidence. For the first time in her life, people needed her, it felt good and she'd be damned if she failed them. "Are you ready?"

Mitch sighed. "Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you."

Amira peeked once more at the guards half asleep on the job. "We'd better hurry. No telling what's happening in there."

"For once, I agree with you." Mitch stood and held out his hand. "Make your wish."

Amira closed her eyes and concentrated on making the wish count. "I wish Mitch and I would disappear."

The requisite thunder rumbled and the light blinded her. When she could see again, she looked down at where she could feel Mitch holding her hand. She gasped when all she could see was the ground beneath them. "It worked," she said, her voice a feathery whisper. For several seconds, she fought to breathe.

"Good job, Princess," Mitch said softly.

The reassuring sound of his voice made Amira straightened her back. "Next wish, coming right up." She breathed in past the lump in her throat. "I wish us to where the bottle is."

Thunder exploded and lighting flashed, as usual. Amira blinked and she was standing inside a private luxury jet at the rear of the cabin. Five large men sat in leather seats, drinking from champagne glasses and cradling automatic weapons. One raised his glass and said something Amira didn't recognize. The others raised glasses toward the box sitting on the floor in front of them.

Amira squeezed Mitch's hand, glad she'd thought to hold his hand during the transfer.

He squeezed hers in return and then let go.

Panic seized Amira and she reached both hands in the direction Mitch had been standing but a moment before. Nothing but air met her touch. She inched forward, afraid to bump into him and make a noise, but more afraid of not finding him.

In the back of the aircraft was a galley, equipped with a sink, electric stove and refrigerator. As far as she could tell, no one was back there, but a light click from that direction made her look again. The electric burner on the stove glowed red and a paper napkin floated down to cover the glow.

Her heart stuttered in her chest and then pounded as fast as a beating snare drum. Mitch was creating a distraction.

Amira hurried to the front cabin and stood behind the last chair waiting for her opportunity to snatch the bottle from the crate. That opportunity came a minute later. One of the longest minutes in her life.

The acrid scent of paper burning filtered in from the back at the exact moment the fire alarm blasted the air around her.

She held her breath and crouched behind the chair, waiting for the men to rush to the kitchen.

Three of the four leaped from their chairs and ran to the back of the aircraft as smoke billowed from the galley.

Why hadn't the last man gotten up? And where was Mitch? Had he escaped the galley before the fun began?

She didn't have time to worry, she stepped into the aisles and moved toward the box. If the dumbass still sitting there wasn't moving, she'd have to steal the bottle right out from under his nose.

As she passed him, the scent of alcohol nearly knocked her down. The guy was passed out drunk. "Good grief," she muttered softly.

"You're a terrible spy, you know that?" a voice said beside her.

Amira jumped and bumped into a solid wall of muscles. "Mitch?" she whispered.

"I hope I'm the only invisible man you know."

"Jerk. I thought you were trapped back there with the others."

"No, I've been up here waiting for them to go back."

"You could have told me what you were going to do."

"And spoil the surprise. No way." His warm chuckle took the fear out of her.

Amira smiled. Mitch always had a way of making her feel good about herself and the situation. "Well then, come on, help me get the lid off this box."

"We don't have time. You take one side, I'll take the other and wish us back behind our boulder."

The door to the cockpit opened and a man in a pilot's uniform poked his head out. "What the fuck is going on?"

Mitch reached out and found her face with his hand, then he leaned close and kissed her. "I've got my side, do you have yours?"

She leaned down and gripped the handle. "I do."

"Make your wish now."

There were a lot more wishes she'd rather have made than returning to the cave where people's lives were at stake, but Amira knew she couldn't back out now. "I wish we were back behind the boulder near the tomb of Princess Vashti."

Thunder rumbled as the men lumbered back into the cabin, cursing. One of them kicked the drunk and muttered in a language Amira didn't know. As another walked up to the side of the box, Amira shrank back, hoping the man didn't discover her presence. His foot bounced against hers.

The man kicked again and stared hard at where he should be seeing whatever it was he was bumping into. As he reached out, bright lights lit up the interior of the cabin. The man gasped and staggered backward, holding his arm over his eyes.

Amira held tightly to the box, unsure as to whether or not it would make the transfer on her wish. When the lights faded, she found herself behind the same boulder, the box sitting in the dirt beside her. She unclenched her fist, released the box and said, "I wish Mitch and I were visible."

She'd never been so glad to see a man in her life as she was to see Mitch squatting beside her, a grin stretching across his face. "You did it."

"Don't count your chickens yet." She wrested the lid from the box and lifted the bottle from the packing foam. "Now you can count those chickens."

Mitch pulled her, bottle and all into his arms. "Okay, make me invisible again so I can see what's going on with the rest of the gang."

Amira clutched the front of his shirt. They'd faced danger so many times that day, she didn't want to let him out of her sight again, invisible or not. "I can't let you go."

He cupped her face and kissed her gently on the lips. "I'll be okay. I'll sneak in, get a peek and be right back. You stay here and safeguard that bottle. I promise not to be gone more than two minutes. If I am, wish me out."

Amira chewed her lip. "Okay. Two minutes."

"Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"I'll miss you, but I can take care of myself."

"That's my girl. Stay quiet and out of sight." He pressed his lips to hers, delving past her teeth to taste of her tongue. His hands roamed down to her waist to gather her in his arms. "I love you, Amira."

"I know." She didn't know, but she made light of his declaration so she didn't make a blubbering fool of herself. Her voice caught in her throat and tears threatened to spill over her eyelids. "I wish you were invisible." Silently she wished she were invisible too so that he couldn't see how much it hurt to let him go.

"Be safe, Amira. We're not through here." His lips pressed to her forehead, then he was gone.

A sob rose in Amira's throat and she swallowed it down before she did something stupid like alerting the guards to her position. Then she waited for two of the longest minutes of her life to pass.

* * * * *

Mitch slipped past the guards stationed at the entrance to the cave, careful not to scuff the gravel or make any sound whatsoever. With only two minutes to get in, assess and get out, he had to hurry. If he knew Amira the way he thought he did, if he didn't come out and if her wishes didn't get him out, she'd come in. And that's the last thing he wanted.

Once inside, he followed the sound of voices, down a tunnel corridor into a dimly lit chamber. Once in the chamber, he stopped dead-still at the sight that met his eyes.

The evil bitch, Danorah, stood naked, her pale skin glowing in the lights from several flashlights pointed at her. Two men knelt in front of her, their hands sliding over her skin, their faces hidden by her body. In front of Danorah stood an audience of her hired mercenaries and two women seated on the ground, their feet and wrists tied in front of them. Edie and Kate. Edie's face burned a fiery red, her green eyes blazing. She looked mad enough to spit fire. And Kate was no exception. Her dark hair was a tangled mass around her face, twin flags of color flew on her cheeks.

The men paying homage to Danorah's body shifted and Mitch could make out their faces.

"Son of a bitch." He swore beneath his breath. Harry and Will stroked the woman with their hands and tongues, working their way across every inch of her body. The blatant sensuality had Mitch hard as stone in one second flat and cursing himself for his primal reaction.

"Lower," Danorah cried. "I wish you to lick my cunt, Harry. I wish you to take my breast in your mouth, Will."

"Only because I have to, but it doesn't mean anything. I won't like it." Harry dropped to one knee, grasped her ass in both of his hands and buried his face in her pussy.

Will growled and took Danorah's breast in his mouth. He bit down.

"Ouch, damn you stupid man! Not so rough." Danorah slapped Will.

When he clenched his fists, she laughed.

"What are you going to do, hit me?" She pointed to the floor. "I wish you to get down on your knees and beg for my forgiveness."

Mitch almost laughed out loud. Of all the wishes Danorah could make.

Will's face creased in concentration. "I will not." Before he could get the last word out, he dropped to his knees. "Forgive me, please."

"You see? You can't win. I have the power. Once I have the last bottle, it will all be mine." She ran her hand down to the mound of hair at the apex of her thighs. "Then I will have everything I want."

"When we break this curse, you will pay for this," Will said, still on his knees, his fists clenched.

"You won't break the curse. I own all the bottles, the stone, everything and everyone." She laughed.

Mitch fought his urge to reach out and strangle the woman. If only he could get the bottles to the women and they could wish themselves out of the mess they were in. The odds were stacked against them.

The bottles rested in the sarcophagus with the mummy of Princess Vashti. Two guards hovered, one at each end, guarding the dead princess and the bottles. A bag lay on top of a crate, the exact size necessary to hold the black Stone of Azhi. The guards standing in front of Danorah stared at her, their tongues lolling like thirsty dogs, clearly intent on the decadent display of flesh, none of them looking toward the stone. If Mitch could just get the stone, maybe he could keep Danorah from completing the steps to ultimate supremacy. He couldn't destroy the stone. It was the key to removing the curse. The stone and all the bottles had to be returned to Princess Vashti. Only then would the curse be broken.

Mitch inched across the chamber, making a beeline for the stone. Once he reached it, he bumped into something soft. Something soft and invisible. Amira!

Damn the woman had a death wish! Unable to chew her out for entering a chamber full of bloodthirsty mercenaries, he bit down on his tongue and reached for her shoulders and shook her. Her fingers touched his jaw and she pulled him down for a very soft, very quiet kiss. Then her hands disappeared and she moved out of his grip.

His heart pounded so hard in his chest, Mitch thought for sure everyone in the chamber would hear. The bag rose from the crate.

Mitch leaned very close. "Where's the bottle?"

Equally as soft, she replied, "In the sarcophagus."

How? How had she managed to get the bottle past the guards at the cave entrance and those hovering around the sarcophagus?

Mitch held his breath as the bag levitated over the crate and then flew across the room.

"The stone! Stop it! Stop the stone!" Danorah screamed. The guard nearest to her lunged for the bag before Amira made it to the sarcophagus.

A soft thump made Mitch's heart stop. Amira. Had the big guard hurt her? Mitch hurried forward.

The dust on the floor shifted and took shape, outlining Amira's cheek and right side all the way down to her feet.

"Grab her! Grab the woman. Don't you see her? She's right in front of you, idiot!" Danorah screeched. "Don't let her disappear."

Amira's disembodied right side rose to her full height and she lifted the bag containing the stone from beneath where she'd fallen. "No. I won't let you do this."

The man who'd knocked her off her feet reached out to grab her.

She ducked out of the way and his arms flailed in the air. He lunged forward, blindly searching for her as she moved through the shadows of the tomb.

"To the sarcophagus, Amira! Get the stone to the Princess," Harry cried out.

"I wish you'd shut up," Danorah told Harry, her voice harsh. "And I wish you'd stop licking me."

"Gladly." He stood.

With the guard still flailing at the air, Danorah threw her hands up. "I'm surrounded by buffoons!" She darted toward Amira, but Harry jumped in her way.

"Out of my way," she demanded.

"Can't, you didn't wish it." He smiled.

When she tried to duck around him, he blocked her path.

"I wish you'd get the hell out of my way."

Immediately, Harry moved.

Will replaced him, blocking Danorah's path. "Hurry, Amira! Get the stone to the princess."

The two guards near the sarcophagus spread their long arms and stood in front of the sarcophagus. Although she'd brushed the dust from her face and side, the bag containing the stone was a dead giveaway as to her location. She stood just out of their reach, the bag appearing to dangle in mid-air.

With the other guards finally moving into action, she would never make it.

Mitch had to take the heat off her. If something happened to Amira, he'd never forgive himself. "Toss it to me, Amira."

"I can't. I don't know where you are."

The guards zeroed in on Amira's voice and moved in fast.

"Your two o'clock, ten feet." Mitch moved closer to the sarcophagus. "Throw it!" Mitch yelled. "Throw it now, then run!"

The bag flew into the air. Mitch caught it and stuffed it under his invisible shirt.

The two guards in front of the sarcophagus abandoned their search for Amira and rushed toward Mitch.

Mitch ducked to the side and doubled back toward the sarcophagus.

"Mitch, throw it to me now," Amira called out, her voice bouncing off the walls, nearly impossible to pinpoint.

"Where?"

"I'm with the Princess." She spoke softly this time and her voice didn't bounce off the stone walls, yet filled the air.

A cold chill slithered across Mitch's skin.

"Hurry, Mitch," she entreated. "It'll break the curse."

With the guards only inches from him, Mitch whipped the stone out from beneath his shirt and tossed it into the sarcophagus.

"No!" Danorah shoved at Will's chest. "Let me past."

"I can't do that."

"I wish you to let me past."

Will didn't move, a smile spreading slowly across his face. "Say that again? I'm not sure I heard you."

"I wish you to let me past."

He crossed his arms over his chest and stood exactly where he'd been. "No."

Danorah screamed and flew at Will, fingernails scraping the air. "The power is mine!"

"I don't think so. Not anymore." Will held his ground, refusing to let Danorah pass.

"Don't just stand there, seize the bottles and the stone!" Danorah shrieked at the guards.

"I wouldn't if I were you," Amira's voice called out strong and clear. "I wish Mitch and I could be seen."

Mitch gulped. "Uh, Amira...these guys each outweigh me two-to-one." Thunder boomed inside the cave and brilliant light blinded him. When he could see again, he was visible. He took up a karate stance and faced the guards, hoping his fierce bravado would scare them back. "It's all about leverage...it's all about leverage," he muttered. "Amira?" He glanced over his shoulder, but couldn't see her in the sarcophagus. Had her wish made him visible, but not her? His gaze shifted back to the guards advancing on him, their teeth bared like rabid wolves. "Oh, boy, this is going to get ugly. Are you all right, sweetheart? Maybe you should consider getting the hell out of here."

"I'm okay." Amira's voice filled the cave like a surround-sound audio system.

The guards stopped in their tracks and stared over Mitch's shoulder, their olivetoned skin blanching.

"What?" Mitch frowned, but refused to turn his back on the guards only a yard from where he stood. "Scared of me, are you?"

Then they dropped to the ground, genuflecting, their bodies shaking.

"What the fuck?" Mitch shot a look around the chamber. All of Danorah's guards lay prone, their arms out in front of them, speaking in low, frightened voices.

Even Harry and Will stood with their mouths open, staring past Mitch.

"No! She can't have it. The power is mine!" Danorah slipped around the openmouthed Will and raced toward the sarcophagus.

Mitch jumped in front of her, blocking her headlong charge. She hit him with such force, he spun around. Holding onto the naked woman, Mitch got his first look at what everyone else was staring at.

Amira rose from the sarcophagus. Or at least Mitch thought it was Amira. It looked like Amira, but then again, not. The woman had the same long black hair and brown eyes. But the clothing was the filmy fabric that had been the death shroud of the Princess Vashti. It showed none of the decay of a thousand years.

The frightening part was that Amira wasn't standing on anything. She levitated over the sarcophagus, holding the black Stone of Azhi in her hands. "Those who have served Danorah, if you value your lives, leave now." She spoke again, this time in Farsi.

The guards dared a glance up, then scrambled to their feet and ran from the cave.

"I didn't know you could speak Farsi," Mitch said.

Amira smiled and shrugged. "Neither did I." Then her face went poker straight and she raised her arms, holding the stone high above her head. "I decree this curse over."

"No. Don't do it." Danorah struggled in Mitch's grasp. "Don't waste the magic. You could own the world."

Amira shook her head. "No one needs that much control."

"You can have everything," Danorah pleaded.

"I've had everything money can buy." Amira glanced down at Mitch. "But it doesn't buy love. You have to earn that."

His heart swelled inside his chest and Mitch smiled back at Amira. "Damn right."

The woman he'd grown to love gave Danorah a stern look. "No woman should have absolute control of any man. Nor should any man have absolute power over a woman." Harry and Will had moved over to Edie and Kate to untie their gags and bonds.

Kate stood next to Will, her lips quirking up on the sides. "I don't know. I kinda liked having Will at my beck and call."

"You have that without the wishes. Only it's less dangerous for me." He turned her and kissed the tip of her nose. "Anybody ever call you a pushy broad?"

Kate's brows furrowed and she shoved against Will's chest, halfheartedly. "I wish you'd stop calling me that."

"Pushy broad." Will's brows lifted. "Ah-hah! It didn't work. Wish for something else."

Kate's mouth twisted in a wicked grin. "I wish you'd go to hell."

Will sucked in his breath, his glance bouncing off the corners of the cave. When the thunder and lightning didn't happen, he let out a long sigh. "Yeehaw! No more trips to hell!" He grabbed Kate around the waist and twirled her around. "Now that we're back on equal footing, you and I have to set a few ground rules if we're going to spend the rest of our lives together."

"Who said we were going to spend the rest of our lives together?" A tremulous smile spread across Kate's face. "Is that a proposal? Or are you teasing me again?"

Will dropped to one knee and took Kate's hand in his. "Kate, will you marry me?"

"Marry you?" For a moment, Mitch thought she'd tell Will what to do with his proposal. Instead, her face softened. "As you put it so eloquently... Yeehaw!" She threw her arms around his neck and nearly knocked him over in the dirt. "Yes!"

Edie stood, shaking her arms and smiling. "Looks like our wishes are over." Her gaze locked with Harry. "I don't know about you, but even without the Stone of Azhi, my greatest wishes have come true."

Harry pulled her into his arms. "And what wishes were those?"

"To find the love of my life and live my life with him." Her arms wrapped around his neck and she pulled his mouth toward his. "I don't need any more wishes. I have everything I ever wanted."

"Me too." Harry crushed her lips with his.

Mitch stared over the top of Danorah's head to Amira. "Seems like I have the wrong woman in my arms."

"I'd say." Amira frowned down at the naked woman draped over Mitch. "It's over, Danorah. My ancestor, Princess Vashti will be laid to rest once and for all."

"Your ancestor?" Danorah snorted. "Impossible."

"No. Now that I'm here, it all makes sense. My father told me the stories for a reason. This was my destiny."

"Then you're a fool to throw it all away. You don't know what you're missing."

"Nothing. I'll be missing nothing." Amira stared across at Mitch.

"But the power..." Danorah sobbed.

"Is inside me. I'm powerful without the wishes. I just had to see it for myself." She smiled at Mitch. "I can stand up for myself. I don't need a magical stone or bottle to make my own luck."

"No, you don't," Mitch let go of Danorah and reached for Amira.

"Wait." Amira held up a hand. "I haven't finished here."

"I won't let you do it." Danorah dove for the bottles in the sarcophagus.

"I wish the stone and the bottles to all disappear forever." Amira threw the stone. The stone sailed through the air, crashing into the bottles, shattering them. Then the stone rose above the sarcophagus and hovered out of reach.

Amira climbed down from the sarcophagus and stared back toward it, her eyes widening. "Look, Mitch, it's her."

Mitch pulled Amira into his arms and held her close, unsure as to what would happen next, but not willing to lose Amira to chance. "Who?"

"Princess Vashti."

The pale image of a woman rose into the air, wispy as a cloud of mist. She reached for the stone and held it to her heart. A man appeared beside her, equally as unreal and ethereal. He reached out to clasp her hand. When their fingers touched, brilliant light filled the chamber, blinding all who witnessed the reunion of a woman dead for a thousand years and the lover she'd lost.

When the light faded, all that was left was the dim glow from the flashlights. The stone, the bottles and the mummy had disappeared.

Mitch let out a long sigh. "Whew! I'm glad it's all over."

Amira pulled away. "All?"

"Okay, all except the part where you tell me you love me."

"You first."

"I already did. What part of *I love you* didn't you understand when I kissed you?" He gripped her hands and pulled her close. "Which reminds me...don't you ever do as you're told?"

She leaned up on her toes and kissed his lips. "Not anymore." When he opened his mouth to protest, she pressed a finger to his lips. "Unless I want to."

"Okay. Well then, is there anything you *want* to do?" Mitch waggled his brows. "Now would be a good time for you to wish us out of here and somewhere," he glanced around at his friends, "more private, preferably."

"I wish I could." Amira sighed and snuggled in Mitch's arms. "There were certain advantages to travel by wishes."

"Yeah, like not needing a plane, train or automobile." Mitch frowned. "That reminds me. How the heck are we getting back to the States without passports?"

"Good question," Edie agreed.

"We could be in trouble without them," Kate interjected.

"We'll be okay," Amira assured them. "My father has relatives here in Iraq and also in Saudi Arabia."

"I thought you were going to be all independent and rely on yourself." Mitch hugged her close to his side. "Not that I'm knocking a little help about now."

"I said I could fend for myself, not do everything myself." She crossed her arms over her chest. "I have a brain and I intend to use it."

"Spoken like a true descendent of the Princess Vashti." Mitch grinned at her.

"Damn right." Amira glanced around at the others. "If we're finished here, I need to make a few phone calls. We can use Danorah's satellite phone."

"What about me?" Danorah stood in the middle of the tomb, her once strong facial features looking older and less threatening.

Amira gave the woman a fierce frown. "If you behave yourself, I'll let you live."

"You gave up the power when you destroyed the stone and bottles."

"I don't need power to leave you naked and alone in the desert. And there are more than enough scorpions to kill a woman out here. Especially a naked woman." Amira's brows rose. "Which is it to be?"

As if suddenly aware of her vulnerability, Danorah covered her naked breasts with one arm and the thatch of hair at the juncture of her thighs with her other hand.

"No way. Let me have her," Kate said. "I'm still mad as hell at what she had Will doing to her." Kate shot Will a deadly glance. "And don't think you're getting off scotfree. You looked like you were having a little too much fun."

"Did you like that?" Will asked. "You know I was acting, don't you. I had to make it appear as if I was enjoying making love to another woman." He puffed out his chest. "And that it got you jealous was a bonus."

"We'll definitely be having words over that particular incident. *After* I take care of this bitch." Kate pushed the sleeves back on her blouse and advanced on Danorah.

Danorah backed away, her eyes wide. "I'm sorry, I didn't know what I was doing. Really. The power went to my head." Her glance shot to Amira. "Okay, I'll behave," she insisted. "Just don't let *her* have me."

"Done." Amira grimaced at Kate. "Sorry. Can't let you rip her to shreds today. But if she gives us any more trouble, she's yours."

"Deal." Kate glared at Danorah. "Letting her live is more than she deserves for all the trouble she's caused us. Just take one step out of line and... Bam!"

Danorah scurried toward her clothing. Once she'd grabbed it, she cast a quick glance back at the group of people standing in the chamber. "Fools! You'll never catch me." Then she raced out of the cave.

Kate lunged after her, but Will's hand snagged her elbow, jerking her to a stop. "Let her go."

"Are you kidding? After all she did to us, she deserves to die." Kate slapped at Will's handhold. "Let me go, you idiot!"

"Are you trying to start a fight?" Will grinned. "Because you know I love a good fight with you."

"She's not important." Amira slipped her arm through Mitch's. "What's important is to get out of here ourselves and leave this tomb in peace..."

"She's getting away with probably the last vehicle. How are we supposed to get out of here?" Kate demanded.

Edie stepped forward. "And she took the satellite phone with her."

Amira's lips twitched. "I'm not concerned."

"Not concerned about being stuck out in the middle of the desert with no transportation or means of communication?" Harry's brows drew together.

Amira shook her head. "No." Her smile spread across her face. "You see, I lied to Danorah. Did I mention that I'm the great-great-great-whatever Princess Vashti's

ancestor, and I inherited the power her father buried her with. I still have the ability to make wishes."

Mitch frowned. "I'm not sure I'm all that happy about that."

Amira's brows rose. "I'm betting you will be." Her hand roved over his chest and downward to his crotch.

Mitch gulped. "Try me."

Oh she'd try him all right. "You're on."

"What about us? Can you still get the rest of us out of here?"

Amira tipped her head to the side. "Didn't you hear Danorah? Whoever has the power of the Stone of Azhi has the power to impact anyone and everyone. You say Sand City is a good place to be?"

"Yeah," Kate's eyes narrowed. "But it's a long walk."

"I wish we were all in Sand City." Amira crossed her arms over her chest and prayed her father's bedtime stories were right. When thunder shook the sides of the cave, she let out the breath she'd been holding. Light shone and faded and the group of adventurers stood in the arched corridors of Sand City. "How's that?"

"Perfect." Will tugged Kate's hand. "See you guys later." He took off at a jog away from them.

Kate argued at his side all the way out of earshot. "Did you think to ask if I wanted to go?"

"We'll leave you two alone," Harry said, leading Edie in another direction, his hand sliding beneath her shirt before they'd gone more than five steps.

Which left Mitch and Amira alone in the corridor.

"Any idea where we can go?" Amira asked.

Mitch's hand slipped beneath the filmy dress she wore. "Not a clue."

"I wish we were in a quiet room all alone."

As the thunder rumbled, Mitch pressed his nose to hers. "I'm beginning to see this power you have has merit."

"Wait until you see what else I can do." She clasped her hands around his neck as the white light filled the corridor and faded to reveal a softly lit room, with high ceilings and filmy curtains draped over a king-sized bed.

Amira shrugged out of the borrowed dress, letting it slide down her body to the floor. Beneath it, she was completely naked. "Seems to me you're a little overdressed."

"I can fix that." He fumbled with the buttons on his shirt, cursing when he couldn't get out of his clothes fast enough.

Amira slid a hand inside the waistband of his trousers and touched his rock-hard cock. She couldn't wait for him to finish disrobing. "I wish you were naked."

A moment later, Mitch stood before her naked, his hands on his hips. "Whatever happened to foreplay?"

She advanced on him and grabbed his cock. "It's overrated." She ran her calf up the back of his thigh and hooked it on his hip, pressing his dick to her warm, wet opening. "Are you going to fuck me, or do I have to wish it?"

"Saints preserve us. We've created a monster." He hooked his arms beneath her knees and raised her high enough that he could slip inside her. "You might be allpowerful and everything, but when we're through here, I want to give you a few lessons on foreplay. You have no idea what you're missing."

"Then show me."

Mitch groaned, backed her against the wall and drove into her, his hunger equaling hers. His fingers trailed down her throat to her breasts, where one after the other, he tweaked the tips of her nipples into hardened peaks.

He pulled his cock out of her and positioned it at her entrance, the bulbous tip nudging her.

Amira squirmed against him, her legs tight around his middle, trying to force herself down over him. "Please."

He held her above him, keeping her from sheathing him. "Please what?"

"Please make love to me." Her fingers dug into his shoulders. She leaned into his throat, moaning, her teeth clamping down on his earlobe. "Please."

"Ouch!" he jerked back, laughter dancing in his eyes. "That hurt!"

"Then quit stalling and fuck me." He let her slide down over him until she cried out, her head thrown back, her hair spilling down her back.

"As the lady wishes." Mitch pumped in and out of her, until her back arched and she cried out, her body going rigid.

Her orgasm fueled his and he shot over the edge with her, driving into her one last time as deep as he could go. When their bodies cooled, Amira smoothed a lock of hair from Mitch's face. "I wish-"

Mitch tapped a finger to her lips. "Think before you wish."

She frowned until Mitch lowered his finger. "I was only going to say, I wish you'd show me some more of that foreplay you mentioned."

Laughter bubbled up in his chest and flowed over the room. He carried her across to the bed and laid her down. Then one kiss at a time, he worked his way down her body until his lips poised over her pulsing clitoris. "Your wish is my command."

The End

About the Author

I've written for Ellora's Cave since September of 2006 when my first release, *Trouble with Harry*, came out. Since then, I've expanded from reluctant genies to werewolves, chameleons, vampires and witches. For me, reading and writing gives me the freedom to explore strange new worlds and write the characters and creatures clamoring to escape my mind. I like writing everything from romantic comedy to dark and sexy suspense. Mostly I like to escape into other worlds, whether grounded in reality or complete fantasy. Come...escape with me!

Myla welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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