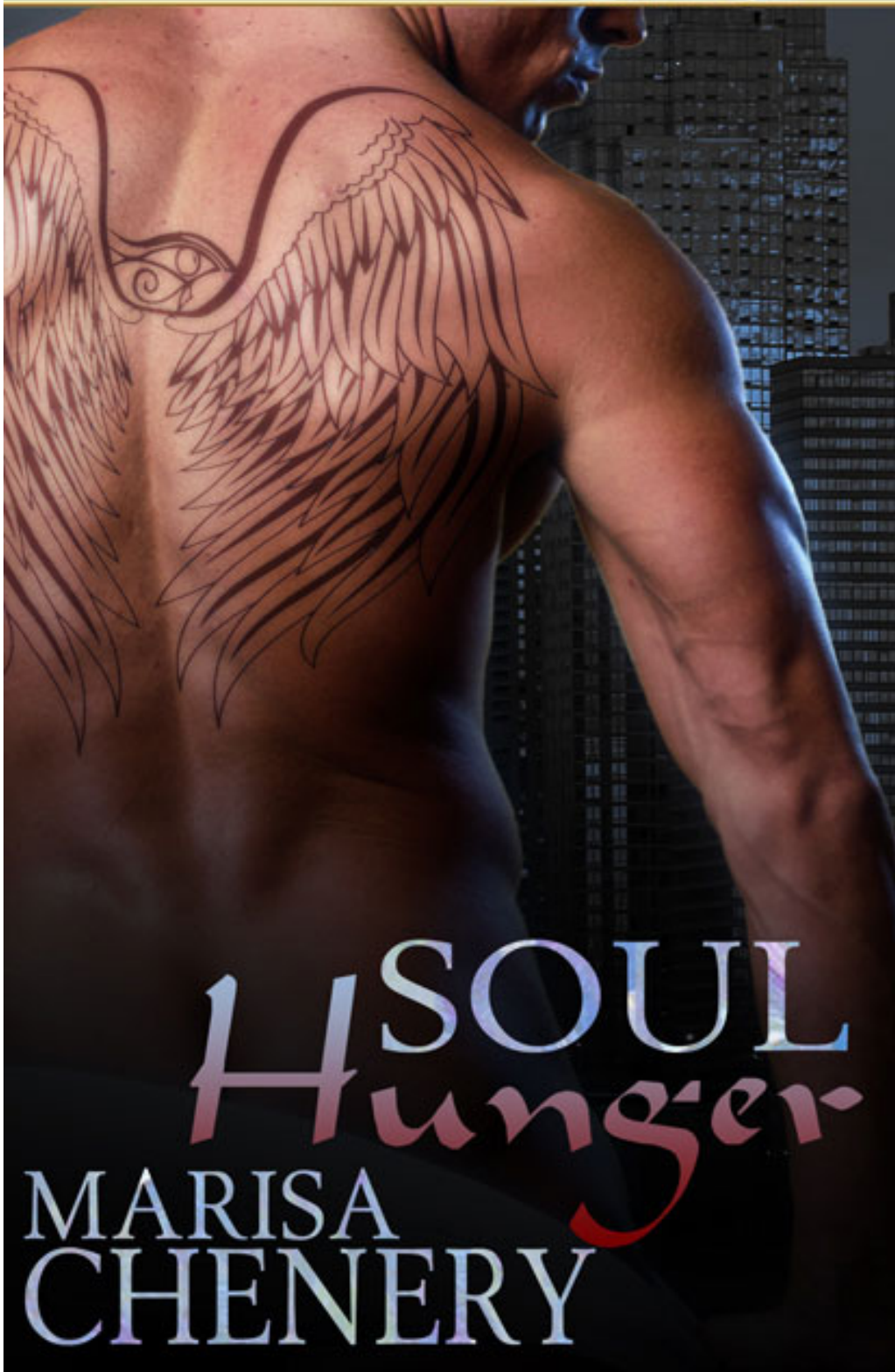


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



*H*SOUL *Hunger*

MARISA
CHENERY

Soul Hunger

Marisa Chenery

Book one in the Ra's Chosen series.

As one of Ra's Chosen warriors, Mehen must protect mortals from the undead who hunt them. Gifted by the sun god Ra, Mehen has never struggled with the task—until he saves a woman from three undead, and finds *himself* in need of saving. Something about the woman stirs him, and he's consumed by his need not only for her body, but also her blood.

Blythe may have been saved by the mysterious man, but her reaction to the feel of his arms around her and the way his eyes wander to her neck don't make her feel much safer. When she's taken to his headquarters against her will, she finds herself a prisoner. But when he unleashes passion unlike any she's ever known, she realizes she'll do anything to stay imprisoned.

But Blythe is not who she seems. And Mehen finds himself in the fight of his life to save the woman he loves from the evil that yearns to possess her.

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Soul Hunger

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SOUL HUNGER

Marisa Chenery

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BMW: Bayerische Motoren Werke Ag

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Lamborghini: Automobili Lamborghini Holding S.p.A.

Mustang: Ford Motor Company

An Old Legend

In Egypt of old the sun god Ra held sway, worshiped as the father creator. Each day he rode the skies in his solar barque bringing light to the land. And every night he traveled through the dark underworld until the dawning of a new day.

During his nightly voyage, Ra faced his greatest adversary, a being of such evil and darkness, people shuddered—the demon god Apep, the eater of souls. Ra and his companions battled the demon, defeating him each night only to face him again when darkness fell once more.

It is said that one night Apep gained the upper hand, which caused thunderstorms to rage and the earth to shake. Using the chaos he had created, Apep unleashed two evils into the world. Two demons called Sek and Mot were set loose to bring down mankind by collecting souls for their dark master, turning mortals into soulless shells commanded by Apep.

To counteract Apep's evil minions, the sun god chose six warriors. He gifted them each with immortality and the powers needed to defeat their enemies. As Ra's Chosen, the warriors fought the evil that threatened to take over, pushing it back, to stand between man and demons.

Some say to this day Ra's Chosen still fight to protect the unsuspecting mortals around them. In the shadows they stalk their prey each night, ever on guard, forgotten by those who they have been charged to watch over.

Chapter One

Mehen tracked the people who walked by as he sat at a table at the back of an outdoor patio at one of the bars found in Phoenix's downtown Copper Square area. He took a sip from the beer bottle that sat on the table in front of him keeping his eyes trained on the crowded sidewalk. Copper Square afforded the ideal place to hunt for the undead. In the heart of Phoenix, the square created ninety blocks of urban living and attractions, as well as businesses. The number of restaurants and bars alone kept the streets filled late into the night. Little did the mortals realize something evil stalked them as they enjoyed their night out on the town. But they didn't need to know. That was his purpose, to protect them so they could blissfully go about their lives totally unaware of the battles that waged around them.

He took another pull from the bottle and set it down. The mortals who sat around him gave him surreptitious looks, ready to scatter if he so much as moved. He ignored them. His sheer size tended to spook some mortals. At six-foot-eight, and two hundred and ninety pounds of pure muscle, he stood out in a crowd. Even though dressed in formfitting jeans, tight t-shirt, leather motorcycle jacket and motorcycle boots, all in black, he still drew peoples' stares instead of blending into the shadows. Mehen knew half the stares came from women who had more than a little interest in him. With his straight, jet black hair hanging just past his shoulders, chiseled looks, pale brown eyes and tanned skin, women forever stared at him with looks of longing. Sometimes he used that to his advantage, but this night he found himself uninterested. He had bigger prey to catch.

Scanning the crowds, Mehen waited for his skin to prickle, to let him know one of his enemies lurked nearby. He had the duty to fight the demon-kind who only existed to collect the souls of the living for their demon god master, Apep. The mortals they preyed upon who became what had hunted them just added to Apep's evil plan to escape the underworld. Like a disease it had the hunter as carrier, able to pass on the contagion to its victim. If left unchecked it theoretically could spread through an entire population. He and his fellow warriors had to make sure that never happened.

There had been times when Mehen thought their battle with Apep's minions could very well be a losing one. The demons' numbers only seemed to increase no matter how many of them he and his brothers-in-arms put down. In the end, they always managed to turn the tide. They may not be able to completely eradicate Apep's undead, but they at least kept their numbers down to the minority. Such was the case now. The pitifully small numbers of undead had Mehen thinking that it would be only a matter of time before the demons tried to change the tide once more. Things had been too quiet for too long. Centuries had passed since the last big uprising.

Deciding there would be no action to be had this night, Mehen drained what remained of his beer and stood to leave. The mortals pulled their chairs in closer to their tables as he walked past, not wanting to block his path. Mehen barely spared them a glance. Once he hit the street, he headed for the lot around the back of the building where he had parked his bike. It had been over two weeks since he had last seen one of the undead, never a good thing in his books. There had to be something brewing.

Reaching his BMW HP2 Sport motorcycle, Mehen unlocked the black helmet, chosen to blend in with the rest of his clothing, that hung from the side and put it on. He pulled the dark visor down over his face. Even though night time, he could still see everything around him. He possessed vision three times better than a mortal, a necessary attribute since his prey only hunted mortals during the hours of the night.

The bike roared to life when he hit the ignition, reminding him why he loved this modern age. He enjoyed riding the bike down the streets as it thundered between his legs. Nothing felt like it. The speed and power combined to form a true adrenaline junkie's dream. Mehen thought nothing of taking the bike out on a little used street and opening it up to the max when he needed to feel that rush.

Mehen left the parking lot and headed south to the Warehouse District where he and his brother warriors had taken up residence some thirty years before. The warehouse they had converted into their headquarters sat in an ideal area of the city. The old brick building's size perfectly hid what it really housed. It sat not too far from the downtown core, and at the time when they had first chosen it, not in a residential area. But that had changed. Over the last couple of years the city had allowed some of the older warehouses to be converted into loft apartments. It could become a problem to have so many mortals living in close quarters, but for now it didn't concern them.

Pulling up to the high chain-link fence that surrounded the property, Mehen triggered the gate mechanism with his mind and drove his bike through. He closed it again once inside. Revving the accelerator with a flick of his wrist, he shot across the open pavement until he reached one of the docking bays at the side of the warehouse. He didn't slow until he'd entered the building.

Mehen parked his bike next to a shiny black souped-up Mustang. Four other sports cars sat next to it. The others had already returned from their night of hunting. Mehen had a feeling they'd had the same luck he had, otherwise they would still be out.

He moved to the door at the far end of the room. When he came to stand in front of it, Mehen manually punched in a code on the number pad on the wall. He then placed his hand on the raised piece of stone set into the wall directly under the pad. The needle hidden beneath the stone's surface came up and pierced his index finger as he pushed down. With a drop of his blood hanging from the very tip, the needle retracted below the surface. A few seconds later the door's locking mechanism clicked open. Mehen brought his finger to his mouth and licked off the small drop of blood left behind. The pinprick wound healed the instant his saliva touched it. He walked through the door and it locked behind him.

He had now entered the inner sanctum of Ra's Chosen. The security system could not be triggered by the mind alone at any of the doors that led inside their headquarters. The stone, a gift from Ra himself, had been their one and only safeguard in the past. Only the blood of the six warriors of Ra's Chosen could unlock the stone's protection. The advent of modern technology had meant they could now employ even greater security measures.

Walking down the long hallway, Mehen reverently touched one of the images of Ra painted on the walls. The walls had been painted to match the color of the stone used for the Temple of Amon Ra at Karnak in Egypt. On top of that, in bright jewel tones, hieroglyphs and pictures of many of Ra's exploits had been painstakingly hand painted. It had all been done by Takan, one of his fellow warriors. The floor beneath his booted feet was also the same stone color. The overall effect created the illusion of the entrance into Ra's temple, even though it sat thousands of miles away.

Mehen stopped at the first door down the hall. Even before he pushed it open he heard the voices of his fellow warriors. They all looked in his direction as the door swung shut behind him. He shook his head. More than one of the men swore in disgust. Moving over to where the others sat at a large wooden table in the center of the room, Mehen slipped off his leather jacket and removed his *khopesh*, strapped across his back inside a scabbard. The *khopesh*, a sword that had the upper most part of the blade shaped as a sickle, was the symbol of a warrior as well as the only weapon Ra's Chosen used to bring down the undead. It was the best tool for the job with its blade made of bronze. For the undead, bronze was their greatest enemy. It took only one cut from such a blade to end their unnatural existence. The sword was so much a part of him, Mehen sometimes felt naked without it strapped to his back.

Placing the sword on the table, Mehen's gaze touched on each of the five men who he'd led into countless battles over the ages. As their leader, he felt responsible for each and every one of them.

The first to meet his gaze was Set, his second-in-command. Mehen had a much longer history with Set than he had with the rest of the warriors. He trusted Set with his life and couldn't picture not having him fight by his side. They both knew each other's strengths and weaknesses, and supported each other in times of need. Both he and Set had been the first of Ra's Chosen. Because of their reputation as strong warriors, they had been selected by Ra to accompany him on his solar barque each night as the god traveled through the underworld. They alone stood with Ra when he battled the demon god Apep. And they both had been there when Apep unleashed his demons Sek and Mot into the world, the first creators of the undead and the ones Ra's Chosen had not yet been able to destroy.

Moving his gaze around the table, Mehen looked at the remaining warriors – Akori, Denger, Kysen and Takan, each a strong warrior in his own right. And each bore the mark of Ra across the back of their shoulders just as Mehen and Set did – a winged sun with the eye of Ra in its center.

As Mehen studied his friends and allies, he thought how similar they were and how often they'd been mistaken for brothers. All had straight black hair, worn at varying lengths, and tanned skin. Their eyes that had been dark brown at birth had transmuted to a very pale brown, verging on the color of gold. The change had taken place after each man had been accepted as one of Ra's chosen and received the god's gift. As well as the shared coloring, they all towered well over six and a half feet tall, their large bodies well padded with muscle. But there the similarities ended because their personalities marked them each as individuals. All of that paled when compared to what bound them together—a commitment to rid the world of demon-kind.

Mehen sat down next to Set. "From the looks on your faces, I take it none of you made any kills tonight?"

"Not a one. If I don't get to use my sword soon it's going to get rusty with neglect," Denger said as he curled his lip in disgust.

Kysen laughed. "Which sword are you talking about, Denger? The one between your legs or the one you wear strapped to your back? If the ladies won't let you use the first one, there is always your hand. No need for it to get rusty."

Denger flipped Kysen off. "Blow me. I have no problems when it comes to the ladies, and you well know it."

Akori grunted. "Tell me about it. With you around, Denger, I don't stand a chance."

"Now *that* is a bunch of crap if I ever heard it." Set joined in on the banter. "It's the rest of us poor slobs that feel lucky if we can pick up some of your leavings, Akori. I keep waiting to see if you'll meet that one woman who will turn you down flat. You know it's bound to happen someday."

Set could always be counted on to say whatever he had on his mind. And he had no qualms about setting someone straight if he thought they were wrong, which had caused more than a fair amount of arguments over the centuries.

Akori barked out a laugh. "That will be the day Apep comes knocking on the door and asks to be turned over to Ra. Not going to happen."

Before the conversation could go any further, Takan interrupted. "I think something is brewing, Mehen. I can feel it. We tracked Sek and Mot here from Egypt all those years ago, and we have yet to find their lair. And it's been too quiet. They have to make a major move soon."

Mehen nodded. Takan was the scholar of the group. Along with his skill with a paintbrush, the warrior was the one who recorded the history of Ra's Chosen. Over the years he had filled many papyrus scrolls, meticulously writing down everything the Chosen did in Egyptian hieroglyphs, which he still did to this day with only one difference. Instead of papyrus, Takan now filled the blank pages of large leather bound books. And because of his scholarly bent, Takan could be counted on to be the most reserved of all the warriors. He hated to be the center of attention. He even kept his hair on the long side, especially in the front, almost as if he wished to keep his face hidden. Mehen could never understand why, though. Takan had no disfigurements or scars that

he wanted to hide. He was good-looking enough. Mehen could only attribute it to Takan's shyness.

"I feel it as well, Takan." Mehen shook his head. "It's too quiet." The others nodded in agreement. "Something is bound to happen soon, so I want you all to stay sharp when you're out hunting. Even though we haven't seen any of the undead it doesn't mean they aren't out there. They still have to feed." The urge to feed and make more of the undead drove the demons.

"Speaking of feeding," Denger stood up and headed for the door, "I have to do a little feeding of my own. I'm going to hit some of the bars before they close. Anyone want to join?"

Akori got to his feet. "I could use a little top off myself."

Mehen stayed behind as the rest of the warriors left the room to go to their private quarters located deep inside the warehouse. He absentmindedly ran his tongue across the sharp fangs inside his mouth. Just as the demons they fought, Ra's Chosen needed to feed off humans. But instead of souls, they needed their blood to keep them strong. Unlike the undead, the Chosen didn't kill the ones they drank from. The donors found the experience pleasurable, to the point of orgasm. It affected both parties that way, which had the warriors only seeking out women.

The warriors usually fed once a week, taking only what they needed. But they did not subsist on blood alone. Being very much alive, they needed food as well. Though the word vampire had been used to describe them, they were nothing of the kind. The Chosen could not be affected by garlic or icons from the one god. They did not need to sleep in coffins or fear the sunlight. Only the enemies of Ra had to fear the sun god's rays of light. For he and his men, the sun strengthened them when injured or weak.

Because the sun offered the Chosen protection, Mehen couldn't figure out why Sek and Mot had left the hot, sunny climes of Egypt only to come to Phoenix, a place just as hot and sunny. Phoenix wasn't known as the Valley of the Sun for nothing. It had sunshine eighty-five percent of the time and less than an inch of rain in any given month. Mehen would have thought relocating to England, or any other country that had more rain than sun, would have been a more strategic move.

Collecting his jacket and sword, Mehen headed out of the meeting room. He walked down the hall in the direction of his private quarters. He probably should have gone out with Denger and Akori to feed. His body craved blood, but it was too soon. He had fed well only two nights before. He shouldn't be feeling blood hunger yet. At least it didn't batter at him constantly. Mehen could ignore it for now. He didn't know why now after all these years his blood hunger demanded he take more than what he had previously needed. Hoping sleep would help take the edge off, Mehen decided it would be best to call it a night.

Chapter Two

Blythe Ashton looked out of her cramped cubicle and watched as the majority of her coworkers filed by on their way to the elevators. The large clock on the wall read five o'clock, quitting time, but Blythe wouldn't be leaving with the rest of the workers.

With a sigh, she turned back to her desk. As one of the many office assistants in a large insurance company, she had to do a lot of grunt work. When she'd applied for the job, Blythe had thought the position of office assistant would be a rewarding one within the company, allowing her to eventually work her way up the corporate ladder. Boy had she ever been wrong. The term office assistant had turned out to be just a glorified name for secretary. She spent most of her working hours either doing menial tasks or typing up lengthy reports on the computer for one of the higher-ups who should have been doing it herself. Now one of those reports forced her to work overtime. Her supervisor had dropped a large stack of papers on her desk a half hour before and told her the report had to be on her desk before Blythe left for the day.

So here she would stay, late into the night if need be, until she finished the damn thing or she could kiss her job goodbye. Which so wasn't an option right now. Having just gone through a messy divorce, she had a large unpaid lawyer's bill and the extra burden of renting an apartment for herself. Blythe needed every penny she made from her much-hated job.

As her fingers flew over her computer keyboard, Blythe grumbled to herself about the unfairness of it all. She earned a salary instead of being paid by the hour, which meant she wouldn't see any extra money on her next paycheck for this overtime. Technically, she earned the right to take extra time off instead, but so far she hadn't been allowed to use up any of her accumulated overtime hours. Stretching a kink out of her neck, Blythe stuck out her tongue at her computer monitor.

Pulling her mind back to the task at hand, she spent the next three hours steadily working. When she finished the report, she sent it to one of the office printers. With it printed off and placed on her supervisor's desk, she could finally leave. She slipped on her coat and picked up her purse before she headed for the elevator.

In the lobby, Blythe waved to the security guard seated behind the front desk on her way out. Taking the concrete steps down to the sidewalk, she decided to splurge a little and take a taxi home instead of the bus as she usually did. At times like this she wished she could afford to own a car. After she fished her cell phone out of her purse, she called one of the local taxi companies to arrange for a pickup.

Now November, the nights had decidedly gotten cooler. Not that Phoenix ever got cold weather, but she found it a nice relief from the sweltering summer months. As she waited for the taxi to arrive, Blythe looked up and down the street. This part of the city

was mostly deserted this time of night, with little to no traffic and very few pedestrians on the sidewalk.

Feeling as if someone watched, Blythe looked behind her. A man stood a few yards away, staring at her. Blythe moved a little farther down the sidewalk and hoped the taxi would hurry up and arrive, because the guy seriously gave her a case of the creeps. She'd never worried about it before, but she now started to think being a lone woman out on the street in the dark had not been such a good idea. She probably should have called for the taxi from the lobby and waited there for it to show up, but the time for that idea had passed. Knowing her luck, the taxi would arrive just as she got the security guard to let her back into the building.

Out of the corner of her eye, Blythe caught sight of another man on her other side. Turning to the first guy, her unease intensified. He'd moved much closer. Blythe walked down the sidewalk a bit to put more space between them, but the second guy had also moved in closer when she hadn't been looking. At this point they gave up all pretense of being just other pedestrians using the sidewalk. They lunged at her at the same time, forcing her to take flight in the only direction left open to her – the dark alley between the building where she worked and the one next to it.

Blythe knew she was running into a trap. There was no exit at the end of the alleyway, but that didn't stop her from trying to run. Her fight or flight instinct had kicked in and flight ended up being the big winner. Doing her best to run in heels, she took off down the alley and prayed that someone would be there who could help her.

She skidded to a halt before she reached the back of the alley. Another man stood there, and from the evil grin on his face, he had to be with the other two who had now moved in behind her. Blythe wanted to scream for help, but she had never been a screamer and there really wouldn't be much point. It would be a waste of breath. No one would hear her. That didn't mean she would go down without a fight, though. As the men inched closer, hemming her in, she pulled her purse off her shoulder and put her head through it so it hung across her chest. She then slipped off both her shoes. Not as spiked as stilettos, they still had a big enough heel to do some damage if she could manage to hit one of the three men with it.

A cold sweat ran between her breasts. Blythe slowly turned in a circle waiting to see which one of them would strike first. As they moved in closer, she could see their eyes. Something didn't seem right about them. To her, it looked as if nothing was behind them, that their souls were gone. Even though the men grinned with sick anticipation, their eyes remained emotionless and flat.

One of the men opened his mouth and gave Blythe a good look at the sharp fangs he had. She stumbled. This caused the three to edge even closer. When she looked at the other two, she saw they also sported fangs. Apparently she had been singled out by a group of wannabe vampires, because there could be no way those fangs were real.

To try to keep them back, Blythe brandished her shoe menacingly at them. "Get back."

Just as one of the men made a grab for her, the roar of a motorcycle filled the alleyway. Distracted by the sound, Blythe looked away for a split second, which her attacker used to his advantage. He wrapped his hand around her upper arm and pulled her against him. She struggled to free herself, but it didn't do any good. His other hand snaked out and grabbed a fistful of her hair. He yanked her head painfully to the side while his fake fangs started to descend to her exposed neck. Blythe whimpered in fear.

The thundering roar of the motorcycle grew deafening as it shot past Blythe and her attacker. After that everything happened fast. One minute her attacker had been about to sink his teeth into her neck, and the next, he gave her a rough shove to push her away. Blythe could only stare in horror when her attacker's body jerked and seemed to start to decompose before her eyes. The stench coming off him almost made her retch, but she couldn't tear her eyes away. In what seemed like a matter of seconds, her attacker disintegrated, leaving only an empty pile of clothes on the ground.

Looking up, she searched the alleyway for the other two. Now that their companion in wannabe vampirism had gone poof, they had focused their attention behind them. Blythe gasped. At the back of the alley, sitting on a flashy blue and white motorcycle, she saw a very large man. He turned the motorcycle's engine off and with one fluid movement got off the bike. The two men hissed and bared their fangs as he pulled off his helmet.

Blythe's jaw dropped. Now that he stood, she could see he had to be over six and a half feet tall, his large body all muscle. She could easily see the muscles in his thighs bunching under his jeans as he walked toward her remaining attackers. Blythe's eyes widened when she realized he held a sword in his hand.

Like a warrior of old, he swung the sword in front of him with natural skill. As the weapon arced in the air, the two wannabe vampires hissed and then went on the attack. The motorcycle guy stood his ground and waited for the others to come to him. The fight didn't last long. As soon as they got within reach of his sword, he swung it toward the attackers. The first one took a sword cut across his chest, while his buddy took one across the throat.

Like she'd hit rewind on a scary video, the two quickly decomposed like the first, leaving only a pile of clothes on the ground to attest that they had been real. Ready to gag, Blythe looked up to meet the gaze of her rescuer. At least she hoped he was her rescuer. He still held the sword in his hand as he advanced on her with slow steps. Her breath sawed in and out of her lungs as she started to back away. He must have noticed her staring at his sword with no small amount of fear, because he slowly reached behind his head and sheathed it in something concealed under his jacket. He then held up his hands while he continued to walk toward her, smiling. Seeing he also had fangs, Blythe did what any sane woman did when her brain decides she's had more than one too many shocks in one evening. She fell to the ground in a dead faint.

* * * * *

Mehen cursed under his breath when the woman dropped like a stone. Moving faster than any mortal could, he managed to catch her before her head hit the pavement. He shifted her so she sat with her upper body resting against his chest. Mehen pressed his fingers to the large vein at the side of her neck to make sure she had only fainted. Her pulse beat strong and even.

Looking down, Mehen wondered what the hell to do with her. He couldn't very well leave her lying on the pavement. There could be more of the undead lurking around. After encountering none the night before, it seemed strange that he would come across three of them hunting together. He'd never witnessed that before. The undead usually hunted alone. He had an additional complication that had to be dealt with. She had seen him dispatch the undead. Their demise, never a pretty sight, revealed exactly what they were—the walking dead. The mortal population had to stay ignorant of what lurked in the dark. If they ever became aware, there could be no telling how they would react. The Salem witch hunts proved what mass hysteria did to people. Dealing with another nightmare of those proportions could be someone else's headache. He intended to head it off at the pass.

The woman stirred in his arms but didn't wake up. Mehen reached up and pushed a lock of her long, light brown hair off her forehead. She was pretty, but not in a glamorous sort of way. He let his gaze drift down the rest of her. Her skirt was hiked up to her mid-thigh, revealing shapely, long legs. She appeared to be slim, but not that "really skinny" that society in this day and age thought women should be. Mehen couldn't understand why men would want their women to be that skinny. He preferred his women slim, but he didn't want to feel as if they would break when he held them in his arms.

He looked at her face. His gaze then shifted to the slim column of her throat. Focusing his senses, he could hear her heart beat and the blood rushing through her veins. He had to swallow when his mouth started to water and his fangs ached as he thought of what it would be like to feed from her. Her scent drew him as well, a mix of the perfume she wore and her own woman's scent. Mehen closed his eyes briefly and drew it in. His body stirred to life. The urge to take her became as strong as the urge to feed off her blood. A small sound brought his gaze back to her face. Finding her eyes open while she stared up at him, Mehen jerked as if someone had physically punched him in the gut.

The startling blue of her eyes mesmerized him. Mehen couldn't pull his gaze away. He hissed when a wave of intense longing shot through his body. Sudden images of them in his bed, with her beneath him as he surged into her, filled his head. They seemed so real. He could hear the small sounds she would make as he rode her and the taste of her blood as he sank his fangs into the side of her neck at the same time. His cock grew hard inside his jeans, making them feel suddenly too tight. Why did she stir him so strongly? He'd never had this kind of reaction to a woman before.

The woman gasped. Mehen realized he must have projected the images of them together inside his head to her. Her heart beat faster and he detected the faint smell of

her arousal. But that quickly faded when she seemed to suddenly remember what had happened earlier. She opened her mouth as if to scream. Mehen quickly put his hand over her mouth and her eyes widened with fear.

"You don't have to be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you. I'll take my hand away if you promise not to scream."

She nodded. He loosened his hand by slow degrees and started to pull it away. The woman's hands shot up, took a firm hold of his and bit down into the side of his hand hard enough to draw blood. Cursing when she tenaciously held on with her teeth, Mehen let her go as he tried to free himself. No longer in his hold, she released him and jumped to her feet. Mehen's gut clenched at the sight of his blood dripping down her bottom lip and onto her chin. Just the thought of her using her tongue to lick it off made his erection grow even harder.

She held out her hands as if to hold him off when he stood. "I have no idea what you did to your friends over there, and I really don't want to know." She nodded in the direction of what remained of the undead. "You can just let me go, and I promise not to tell anyone about the bloodsucking cult you're involved in."

Mehen shook his head. "Those aren't any friends of mine. I told you, I'm not going to hurt you."

She rolled her eyes. "Sure you're not. You just carry around that sword for jollies. Are you going to use it on me? Or do you plan to bite me with those fangs of yours first then finish me off with your sword?"

He flashed a sexy grin. "I wouldn't mind finishing you with my sword, but it wouldn't be the one I carry on my back. It would be the sword I carry much lower on my body. Your blood would just be an added bonus."

Blythe's breath caught in her chest. Her gaze drifted down his body to the huge bulge in his crotch. She swallowed audibly. Her traitorous body went into overdrive. The man might be a loon, but Blythe's body didn't seem to care because it burned for his touch. Just thinking of what he had in his pants made her heart beat at a rapid pace as her pussy clenched. Blythe forced her wayward body back under control. She needed to keep her head on straight if she hoped to get away.

He took another step closer. She backed up and then yelped when she came upon the brick wall. Realizing what she had done, Blythe tried to get herself to the center of the alleyway, but the guy moved faster than she thought possible. He somehow managed to close the distance between them in a blink of an eye. With both hands placed on the wall on either side of her head, he caged her in. His large body crowded her against the wall and she felt heat coming off him in waves. Her body responded to his closeness as the ache between her legs intensified. Blythe looked up to find him staring down at her, his eyes dark with desire.

"What are you going to do to me?" Her voice sounded too breathy for her liking. She cleared her throat and tried again. "All I want is to go home and forget any of this happened."

"Don't worry. You won't be able to remember what happened here."

His deep voice held a slight accent, one she couldn't put her finger on. "I won't?"

"No. For your own good I'll make you forget. It will be as if you never saw me or the undead."

"The undead? Is that what they were? Is that what you are?"

He grabbed her hand and placed it on his chest over his heart. "Do I feel as if I'm one of the undead?"

"No," Blythe answered in a whisper. He felt very much alive. His heart was beating strong beneath her hand. She resisted the urge to run her hand over the rest of his wide chest. "But you have fangs as they did."

"That does not make me one of the undead. My fangs are not used for stealing the souls of mortals."

Blythe recalled the erotic images that had flashed through her head when she first regained consciousness, images of him and her in bed while he took her with his body and his fangs. Her face grew warm just thinking about it. "No, but you do drink blood."

His gaze moved down her face to her throat. "Yes."

Not sure whether or not she liked the way he stared at her neck, Blythe brought a hand up and pulled the collar of her coat closer together. Her movement seemed to break whatever spell had come over him. He took hold of her chin and forced her to look into his eyes. Blythe felt what could only be described as a nudge inside her head. When nothing happened, it came again, only harder this time. A few seconds later he muttered a curse and released her chin.

He plowed his hand through his hair. She then saw the bite mark she had left on his skin. Not thinking, she licked her dry lips and tasted blood, his blood. He stiffened and his eyes latched onto her mouth.

"Sorry about your hand. I didn't realize I had bitten you that hard."

He pulled his gaze back up to her eyes. Holding her stare, he brought his hand to his mouth and licked the bloodied bite marks. Blythe bit back a gasp as his flesh healed together and the teeth marks disappeared as if they had never been. Seeing that, she had to wonder if there was a slim, a very slim, possibility that he had told her the truth—that he wasn't part of a vampire cult, and that those other men had to be the undead. She couldn't deny the fact that they had basically turned to dust, even though her brain still tried to find some other explanation for their disintegration.

Before she could try another tactic to get away, he wrapped his hand around her wrist and started to pull her toward his motorcycle. Blythe tried to get free, but his hand clamped like a steel band around her wrist. She even went so far as to try to kick him, but with her shoes lying in the middle of the alley it hurt her more than it did him.

"Stop. What are you going to do with me?"

Still holding her, he picked up his helmet and plunked it down onto her head. He then picked her up in his other arm as if she weighed no more than a child and put her on the back of his motorcycle. He quickly sat in front of her, wrapped both her arms around his waist and held them there with one hand as he started the bike.

"I suggest you don't let go."

Before Blythe could protest, the bike lurched forward. When he reached the end of the alley and turned onto the street, she held onto him for dear life. Traffic zipped by when the bike reached greater speed. With the dark visor down over her face, she couldn't see where they went, not that she wanted to look. Leaning her head against his back, Blythe closed her eyes and concentrated on not falling off.

* * * * *

Once the motorcycle disappeared down the street, a lone man entered the alley and looked down at what remained of the three he had hunted with. When one of Ra's Chosen's warriors had shown up to save the one their master had wanted brought to him, he had hidden in the shadows. Unseen, he had watched the warrior with the woman. Not newly made as the other three had been, he had seen a few of Ra's Chosen in action before. He knew his master would want to know the warrior took the woman with him. The warriors always made sure they wiped the memories of any mortal who witnessed the ongoing battle between the undead and Ra's Chosen. He didn't know why the warrior left the woman's memories intact and then forced her to leave with him. But there had to be something special about this mortal woman if his master had singled her out. After he kicked the piles of clothing to the back of the alley, he made his way out to the street. His master would want an immediate report.

* * * * *

Mehen smiled when the woman's arms tightened around him. At least he didn't have to worry about her trying to get off the bike. She had plastered herself to his back and held on to him as if her life depended on it, which it didn't. He almost laughed. He would never let her fall off.

He had no idea what to do with her. For some reason he hadn't been able to wipe her memory. It felt as if he had run up against a brick wall when he had tried. He couldn't leave her out in the world with the memories of him and the undead still with her. Ra demanded that no mortal know about the war that raged between his Chosen and the undead. So he had been left with only one option—he had to take her back to the warehouse and see if one of the other warriors could wipe her memory for him.

Just before he reached the warehouse, Mehen pulled over to the side of the road and turned to face the woman. When she didn't let go and moved with him, he had to

pry her hands off his waist. Once he faced her, he lifted the visor of the helmet, looked into her eyes and put her into a deep sleep.

At least that worked.

He couldn't risk disclosing their location. If none of the others could wipe her mind either, they were in serious trouble.

She slumped forward against him. Needing both hands to be able to shift gears, Mehen took her purse from where it hung across her chest and used the strap to bind her wrists in front of him. Satisfied that she wouldn't fall off the bike, he continued on his way.

Parking inside the warehouse, Mehen saw that Takan's black Corvette was the only car there. He freed her hands and stuck her purse inside his jacket before he picked her up. Looking down at her, Mehen felt something soften inside him, along with the urge to protect her. He wanted to hold her close, keep her safe from the dark things that lurked in her world. Cherish her. He shook his head free of his runaway thoughts.

Her scent swirled around him. The blood hunger rose up inside him. Something about her set off his need for blood, as well as his need for sex. Knowing he couldn't feed from her if he couldn't wipe her memory, Mehen pushed his hunger away and took her inside.

On his way to his private quarters, Mehen met Takan in the hall. The other warrior stared at the woman he held in his arms. She had the distinction of being the first mortal to ever be inside their headquarters. Before Takan could ask any questions, Mehen nodded for Takan to follow him. Inside his quarters, he placed the woman on his bed and gave Takan her purse. He gently pushed her hair off her face before he turned around.

"I need you to find as much information as you can about her. She should have some kind of identification inside her purse. See what else you can dig up." Mehen knew that wouldn't be a problem for Takan. The warrior spent as much time on the internet as he did writing in his books. And he always knew where to find the information they needed on the net.

"Why did you bring her here, Mehen?"

"I'll tell you outside." Once back out in the hall, Mehen took one last look at the woman to make sure she still slept and then closed the door. In case she woke up before he returned, he locked the door with his mind.

"What's going on?" Takan asked as they headed for the meeting room.

"I couldn't wipe her."

Takan sucked in a breath. "I've never heard of a mortal who couldn't be wiped."

"It's a first for me as well. That's why I need you to find out all you can on her just in case it turns out she can't be wiped."

Takan's steps slowed. "Do you want me to see if I can wipe her now?"

"No," Mehen growled. The word came out too harshly. Takan looked at him strangely. The idea of Takan being inside her head had his hackles rising. The feeling that she belonged to him came out of nowhere, blindsiding him. Mehen sighed and took a deep breath then said in a calmer voice, "No, not right now, Takan. Get me the information first. Something else happened tonight, but I'll wait until the others return before I say anything more."

Inside the meeting room, Takan went and booted up the computer. Mehen stood beside him while Takan opened the woman's purse and fished out her cell phone and wallet. As Takan flipped open her cell and keyed around to find her phone number, Mehen picked up her wallet. She had forty dollars in cash and a couple of credit cards. He pulled out one of the cards and read the name on it—Blythe Ashton. The only other thing in her wallet was her driver's license. The picture on it didn't do her justice. Looking at the address, he saw she lived in a part of Phoenix known to be mostly low-income housing.

While Takan tapped away on the computer keyboard, Mehen took off his jacket and sword before he sat down at the large table to wait. He had Blythe's scent all over him, and it now played havoc with his senses. Blood hunger still pushed at him, but without Blythe around he found it tolerable. That it remained meant he would have to go out later and feed. He couldn't trust himself to be around her if he didn't. It still bothered him that this would be the second time this week his body demanded blood. If it persisted he knew he would have to get in touch with Ra. The god had made him what he was, and Ra should be able to explain why he needed more blood to sustain him.

A half hour later, Takan stopped typing and turned to face Mehen. "I'm finished. There's not much, but I don't think she has led the kind of life that would warrant more than what I found."

Mehen got up and went to Takan. "All right, what do you have?"

"She was raised by her maternal grandparents. Far as I can tell, her mother didn't stick around to be part of her life in any way. Her father is not listed on her birth certificate, so she obviously has no dealings with him. Married for three years, but is now divorced. The rich guy she had been married to took her to the cleaners. No children. Now she works as an office assistant for a large insurance company. I can't find a car registered in her name so I would assume she doesn't own one. She probably can't afford one considering her salary is minimal. And she's in debt practically up to her eyeballs in lawyer's fees."

While Takan had spoken the rest of the warriors had returned. They all crowded around the computer, listening. Set, who stood behind Mehen, looked over his shoulder and nudged him to get his attention. "Who is the woman and why has scholar boy dug up all that intel on her?"

"Because at this moment she is locked inside my private quarters." Seeing the others look at him in surprise, Mehen motioned for them to sit. Once they had all taken a seat he spoke again. "Blythe, the woman, was attacked tonight by three of the undead."

"You mean three of the undead attacked her at the same time?" Set asked in a shocked voice.

"Yes, at the same time. The way they had her cornered in an alley, I would say they stalked her there. I managed to take care of them before they could bite her." The thought of what would have happened if he hadn't arrived when he had unsettled Mehen more than if she had just been another mortal.

"Then why didn't you just wipe her memory instead of bringing her here?" Obviously Denger had asked the one question also on Set, Akori and Kysen's minds as well, because they all nodded in agreement.

"I can't."

Set's jaw dropped. "What?"

"I can't wipe her memory." Then through gritted teeth, Mehen said, "I need the rest of you to try to see if you can wipe it." The thought of all of his men going through Blythe's head made him want to take her far away where they couldn't touch her. He hated the idea of it.

Akori let out a low whistle. "I didn't see that one coming. And what's up with three of the undead taking such an interest in her?"

Mehen shook his head. "I have no idea, but it can't be something we assume will only happen once. To have the undead hunt together instead of alone could be some new strategy Sek and Mot are trying. But I do know we have to find out if Blythe happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, or if the undead singled her out for some reason."

As the men talked among themselves about it, Mehen found his thoughts had turned to Blythe. She was turning out to be a distraction. Even though it bothered him that the others would soon try to get inside her head, he knew he had no other choice. And if they couldn't wipe her, he would have to face that hurdle when it came. He just hoped the undead had randomly attacked her, because if they hadn't, Blythe would not be safe in the outside world. And that would make his decision of what to do with her that much harder.

Chapter Three

Blythe came awake by slow degrees. She looked around the unfamiliar room and wondered how she had ended up on someone else's bed. The last thing she remembered was being on the back of a motorcycle, clinging to the motorcycle guy, afraid she would fall to her death.

Sitting up, Blythe took a good look at her surroundings. No question about it being a man's bedroom. The dark, heavy pieces of furniture screamed male. The king-sized bed had black Egyptian cotton sheets with a black cotton duvet. The walls had been painted a rich brown, enhanced by ancient Egyptian scenes and hieroglyphs painted in bright jewel tones. They had been painted so beautifully they could easily be called works of art.

Blythe swung her legs over the edge of the bed. The hardwood floor beneath her feet felt cool. She grimaced at the state of her pantyhose. At the bottom of her feet, she found huge holes and a couple of her toes poking through. They were fit for the garbage now. Blythe stood, yanked up her skirt and pulled them off. After she smoothed her skirt, she balled up her pantyhose thinking she would put them in her purse to dispose of later. She realized her purse no longer hung across her chest and looked back to the bed to see if it had been dropped there. It wasn't, nor did she see it anywhere else in the room.

Blythe moved to one of the three doors inside the room. The first door turned out to be a walk-in closet filled with men's clothes. The door next to it opened onto a fair-sized en suite. Noticing the trash can that sat between the counter and the toilet, she threw her pantyhose into it. Before she left the bathroom Blythe looked into the mirror on the wall above the sink. The dried blood on her chin made her quickly turn on the tap to wash it off. That taken care of she moved back inside the bedroom.

Blythe stepped over to the remaining door. She took hold of the doorknob, tried to open it, but found it locked. She pulled harder and told herself not to panic. There had to be a reasonable answer as to why he had locked her inside his bedroom. Maybe he didn't want her to wander around his house on her own. Somehow she didn't think that would be the reason considering his fangs and what had happened in the alley.

Pounding on the door with the flat part of her fist, she yelled, "Hello." When she heard nothing on the other side, she pressed her ear to it and pounded again.

She didn't stop pounding until she heard the door unlock. She took a step back just before the door pushed open. The man who had brought her here stood in the doorway.

"Did you find it necessary to make all that racket?" he asked while he crossed his arms over his wide chest.

"Sorry, but I tend to react that way when I wake up to find myself locked in a strange room."

"It was for your own good."

"I'd like to go home now."

"I can't allow that."

Would she make it past him? No, her chances were slim to none. His shoulders filled the width of the doorway and she remembered how fast he moved.

"You can't keep me prisoner. People will notice I'm missing."

He gave her a look of pity. "And who would they be, Blythe? Your ex-husband? Or the people you work with at the insurance company?"

His knowing her name was one thing, but that he knew about her ex-husband and where she worked sent a chill down her spine. He could have easily gotten her name by going through her purse and finding her credit cards or driver's license. She had no idea how he had discovered that other information.

Not wanting to show how his words affected her, she resorted to anger. "How dare you go through my purse? I want it back. I don't know how you found out about my ex and where I work, but that is invasion of privacy. And, I might add, it's rude to dig into someone's private life without asking. I don't even know your name."

Much to Blythe's annoyance, her chastising only made him chuckle. "Are you through with the lecture?" A smile lingered on his lips. "And it's Mehen."

"What?"

"My name is Mehen."

"What kind of name is that?"

"It's Egyptian."

That explained the ancient Egyptian art on the walls. It also explained his dark good looks and slight accent. "Well, Mehen, I demand you let me go. Or I'll be forced to make you."

Mehen moved until he stood directly in front of her. In a show of bravado, Blythe stood her ground. He shook his head while wearing a crooked grin. "And how exactly would you do that?"

Blythe craned her neck to look at him. He really was tall. As he stared down at her, her heart started to beat a little faster, and not from fear. She found herself attracted to him. Her body responded to his nearness. Her nipples pebbled beneath her blouse, making her glad she still wore her coat so he wouldn't be able to see. "I'll scream my head off."

"Go right ahead." Mehen took another step closer so they now stood toe to toe. "No one will hear you."

Blythe opened her mouth, prepared to give it her best shot, when Mehen's lips came down on hers. He then proceeded to kiss her gently, seductively. All thoughts of

screaming left her head. Her eyes fluttered shut as his lips moved with expert precision across her own. The man knew how to kiss. Blythe leaned into him and kissed him back even though the rational part of her brain told her she should pull away.

Mehen wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her against his hard body as he pushed his tongue past her lips. He tasted her, sweeping the inside of her mouth, before he sucked her tongue inside. Blythe groaned as arousal slammed into her, causing an ache to pound between her legs. Her pussy clenched and grew wet. Running her tongue along the inside of his mouth, she encountered his fangs. Mehen moaned when she brushed her tongue against one.

Blythe reached up and fisted her hands in the front of his t-shirt. The hard length of his cock pressed against her stomach. Increasing the pressure of her lips, she angled her head to the side so they fit better to his. Mehen pulled her closer and ground himself against her. Blythe pushed back as wetness pooled in her core.

Mehen's hands drifted down to her bottom. Taking hold of it, he lifted her and ground his erection against her pussy. Blythe moaned and sucked on his bottom lip as she rubbed herself against the large bulge in his pants. Lost in a haze of desire, she wrapped her arms around his neck. Never before had she felt such all consuming passion. Mehen knew exactly how to touch her, to push her arousal to even greater heights.

Breaking contact with her lips, he kissed and licked a path down to her jaw. Blythe shivered when he ran his tongue along the side of her neck. His grip tightened as she leaned her head to the side to give him better access. Mehen made a rumbling sound deep inside his chest before he dragged his teeth across her neck. Blythe gasped and shivered with desire at the feel of his sharp fangs against her skin. Mehen stiffened at the sound and quickly pushed her away.

Blythe blinked up at Mehen not understanding what had made him pull away. She reached for him, but he only growled before he put more distance between them. Slowly she came back to herself. She saw the look of hunger in his eyes as he stood panting with his hands fisted at his sides.

Once he seemed to get himself back under control, Mehen moved to the open door. "Come with me." His voice sounded tight, as if he was still fighting for control.

Still feeling a bit off-kilter from his kisses, Blythe crossed the room to stand next to Mehen. Without a word, he led her out into the hallway.

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Mehen made sure his body didn't touch Blythe in any way while he walked her to the meeting room where the others waited. That had been a close one. With her held in his arms, her body pressed to him, his blood hunger had almost gotten the better of him. The need to sink his fangs into her neck made them ache even now. He shook with the need to touch her skin and hold her tight as she fell apart in his arms. The scent of

her arousal filled his senses, making him want to pull her to the floor and sink his cock deep inside her wet pussy.

Mehen pushed open the meeting room door and let Blythe go in before him. When she came to a dead stop just inside, he rammed into her back. He gritted his teeth when their bodies came in contact. With a hold on her upper arms, he steadied her then with care pushed her away.

Mehen looked over her head and found that the others stood staring at Blythe with marked interest. His hackles rose. Against his better judgment, he took a step closer so he could stand protectively at her back. When Denger started to move closer in her direction, Mehen bared his fangs and hissed at him in warning. He didn't miss the concerned glances of the others at his odd behavior. It confused him as well. He shouldn't feel this possessive over a mortal, but he couldn't stop himself.

In their native tongue, Set asked, "What's up with you, Mehen? Denger decided he would be the first to try to wipe her memory. He means the mortal no harm."

Mehen replied in the same language. "I'm fine. I haven't explained everything to her yet."

"I thought you did that when you went to get her."

"I got a little sidetracked."

Denger snickered. "Is that what you call it? Sidetracked? I can smell her scent all over you, as yours is all over her." Switching back to English, he spoke to Blythe. "I can see why Mehen wants to keep you for himself." He gave her a suggestive look while he looked up and down her body. "Why not come over here, gorgeous, and we'll see if I can fix Mehen's little problem."

When Denger reached for Blythe, a feral, wild part of him rose up inside Mehen. Blythe was his. He didn't want any of his fellow warriors to touch her. With a roar of pure rage, he launched himself at Denger, grabbing his throat and slamming him down onto the table. Fangs bared, he hissed in the warrior's face. Denger tried to pull his hands from his throat, but Mehen had gone beyond rational thought. Denger had dared to touch what he considered his, which made his blood boil.

Blythe stood speechless as the other men tried to pull Mehen away from the one who had spoken to her. The attack had been so sudden. One minute Mehen stood at her back, and the next he had the other man by the throat. She had no idea what Mehen had said to the other two just before that, but whatever it was she knew it had something to do with her. All the men had turned to look at her before Mehen had gone on the attack.

With no small amount of effort the men managed to get Mehen off the other man. Breathing hard from his exertions, he stalked to her and possessively pulled her up against his side. Blythe swallowed at the wild look he wore. His body stiffened when the one who had first spoken to Mehen stepped toward them.

"Relax, Mehen." This time he spoke in English. He then focused his attention on her. "I'm Set."

The man proceeded with the introductions and her gaze roamed across each one curiously. Akori's gorgeous face could have graced GQ. She'd never seen a better-looking man in person in her entire life. Kysen wore his hair shorter as though he felt no need to draw attention to himself. When he winked at her, she smiled in return. Takan, who sat at the computer, seemed a bit on the shy side. He returned her nod before he quickly bent his head forward so his hair hid his face. Denger, who Mehen had attacked, rubbed his throat and nodded in her direction. She couldn't help noticing his long hair. It was even longer than hers.

Like Mehen, all the men dressed in black and they all matched him in height and breadth. "I'm...I'm Blythe." She made no move to offer her hand to Set. She had a feeling that would only set Mehen off again.

"Well, Blythe, it would seem we have a small problem that involves you."

"What do you mean?"

"You've seen too much of our world. We can't allow a mortal to walk around with that kind of knowledge."

Blythe looked from Set to Mehen, then back to Set. "Mehen said he could remove my memory of what happened in that alley."

Set sighed and shook his head. "That's our problem. For some reason Mehen can't wipe your memory."

"Okay." *What had she gotten herself into?* Thinking it best to play along, she asked, "Then what exactly are you going to do with me?"

"The rest of us will see if we can do it for Mehen."

Set's answer made Mehen pull her even closer to his side. She tried to put some space between them when she gave him a small shove, but he didn't allow it. "Look, it's really not necessary. It's not as if I'll be going around telling people what I saw. To be honest, no one would believe me. All I want is to go home to my apartment. I'm nobody special. I promise I won't tell anybody about this whole vampire cult thing you guys seem to have going."

Set chuckled and the corner of his eyes crinkled in amusement. "Is that what you think we are? You've seen Mehen take down the undead. How do you explain what happened to them?"

"I can't right now but there has to be another logical explanation. People do not just decompose in a split second. And the fangs, come on. How much did your dentist charge you guys for them?"

Set opened his mouth and flashed his fangs. Then to her shock, they seemed to lengthen until they touched his bottom lip. Her heart skipped a beat and Blythe took a step back only to be brought up short by the arm Mehen wrapped around her shoulders. She looked up. "What the hell are you guys? Are you really vampires?"

Mehen shook his head. "No, we aren't. Vampire is just what mortals came to call the undead we hunt. We are Ra's Chosen, warriors picked by the sun god himself to protect mortals from demon-kind."

"Oo...kay." Just her luck. Vampires or chosen ones made no difference. They were all crazy. "You mean Ra, as in the Egyptian sun god Ra?" Mehen nodded. "Riiight. And I'm the Queen of Sheba. Look, no offense, but Ra is just Egyptian myth. To be frank, I don't even believe in the whole religious thing. So you have the wrong girl if you think I'm going to fall for all that crap."

The room suddenly went so quiet Blythe thought she heard the proverbial pin drop. She figured she had done it with that last comment. Obviously these guys believed every word about this Ra's Chosen stuff. She had to admit that seeing Set's fangs elongate with no trick photography created a few doubts, but not enough that she felt ready to dive headfirst into believing what they had tried to feed her.

Hoping to smooth over her obvious blunder, Blythe cleared her throat then said, "Let me rephrase that. I like to see solid proof before I believe something so..." About to say farfetched, she thought better of it at the last minute. "Something that out of the ordinary."

Denger slid off the table and came to stand next to Set. "Enough of this. It doesn't matter whether she believes or not. Once her mind has been wiped she won't remember any of us anyway. Let's just get on with it."

Mehen automatically went on the defensive. He hissed at Denger and looked ready to attack him once more. His body stiffened as if he prepared to launch himself at the other warrior. To keep him at her side, Blythe turned and wrapped both her arms around Mehen's waist. His head snapped down in her direction. She shook her head. Surprisingly, that turned out to be enough to get him to back down. He gave her a soft look and gently caressed her cheek before he let his hand fall back down to his side.

"What the hell is the matter with you, Mehen?" Denger snarled. "You may be our leader, but I'm sure as shit not going to let you pound on me when I haven't done anything wrong."

Set quickly moved to stand between Mehen and Denger. Blythe tightened her hold around Mehen's waist, not that she really expected to be able hold him back.

"Enough," Set barked. "This isn't helping." He then focused on Mehen. "Whatever is going on with you, my friend, you have to rein it in. This has to be done."

Mehen took a deep breath while he ran a hand through his hair. "Fine, but none of you are to touch her. I can't promise you I'll be able to hold myself back if you do."

Blythe didn't miss the look of concern that quickly passed across Set's face. This appeared to be unusual behavior for Mehen. The others seemed confused and worried if she had to go by the looks that passed between them. Letting her arms drop, she allowed Mehen to move her so she stood in front of him. He pulled her back against his chest and placed his hands on her shoulders. Oddly enough, he made her feel protected. The others then circled around them.

Set tried first. "Look me in the eyes, Blythe," he said in a coaxing tone.

Once she did as he asked, she felt the same nudge in her head as when Mehen had tried to wipe her memory. When a few seconds passed and she still recognized them all, Blythe figured Set didn't have much luck.

He shook his head and took a step back. "Nothing. It's as if I ran up against a brick wall."

One by one the others tried with the same results until only Takan remained. At this point, Mehen was holding himself so rigid that Blythe felt as if she had a wild animal leashed behind her, one that would strike at the slightest provocation. When Takan stepped in front of her, Mehen's grip on her shoulders tightened. She hoped Takan wouldn't take his time, because she could tell by Mehen's fast breathing that he was about to crack.

Takan flipped his bangs out of his eyes and stared down at her. He gave her a hesitant smile before the familiar nudge in her head came again. This time when the nudging stopped, Blythe found she couldn't pull her eyes away from Takan's. She seemed to fall into them. Unable to look away, Blythe didn't move when Takan reached out and placed his right hand over her left breast, directly over her heart. Mehen roared behind her.

"Damn it, Takan!" Set yelled. "This is so not a good time to have one of your visions."

Mehen roared again then an instant later he disappeared. Blythe raced over to the door and quickly yanked it open, but she couldn't see Mehen anywhere. *Where the hell did he go?*

Turning back around, Blythe found the others watching her with bland expressions on their faces. She backed up until she felt the doorknob jab into the small of her back. In case she had to make a run for it, she wanted to be as close to the door as she could get. "Now what? Obviously none of you can wipe my mind or I wouldn't still be here."

Set sighed. "Technically, it is Mehen's place to decide what is to be done with you. Right now I don't think he's capable of making a decision, let alone doing what has to be done."

From Set's grim expression, Blythe felt whatever the outcome, it would not be in her favor. Her heart started to race. "I told you before, I won't talk."

"It's not that simple," he said sadly. "Ra has decreed that no mortal is to retain the knowledge of us or the undead. We can't let you just walk away."

Blythe wasn't stupid. She knew what Set insinuated. With her dead they wouldn't have to worry that their secret would one day come out in the open. *The hell with this.* Spinning on her heel, she yanked open the door and ran out into the hall. She only managed to go a few feet before she literally ran into Set's chest.

With a shriek of frustration, Blythe tried to dart by him, but Set wrapped his arms around her and held her against his chest. He squeezed her ribs until she stopped squirming.

"Sorry, but this is the way it has to be. I wish it wasn't. For now, I think it would be best if we kept you locked up so you don't try to escape."

He released her only to grab onto the back of her coat as he forced her to walk in the direction of Mehen's quarters. When Set walked right by, she dug in her heels, which did nothing to stop him.

"Where are you taking me?"

Set shook his head. "There is no way I'm going to lock you inside Mehen's quarters. He hasn't been acting himself since he brought you here. Until he can get his head screwed on straight, you're going to stay away from him."

At the end of the corridor, Set made a right, opened another door and pulled her into what looked to be an old warehouse space. He took her to a room that at first glance looked to be a very small closet or storage area. The inside seemed to be half the size of an elevator car. Realizing Set intended to lock her in that small space, Blythe tried once again to pull out of his grasp. Set firmly, but carefully, shoved her inside and pushed the door closed behind her. The room plunged into darkness. The lock clicked before she could try to feel her way to the door.

Blythe started to breathe at a rapid pace. She disliked being inside small, tight spaces. Locked inside with no light escalated her fear into near panic. Feeling as if the walls had started to close in on her, she sank to the floor as her body broke out in a cold sweat.

* * * * *

Mehen was thankful for the one gift Ra had given all his chosen warriors—the ability to bend time and space. They used this gift in times of need, or when they needed to travel vast distances in a short amount of time. With this gift they had been able to make the journey from Egypt to the States undetected. Mehen had used this particular gift to get himself away from Blythe and his fellow warriors before his rage got the better of him.

He now stood behind one of the late-night bars trying to calm himself enough to go inside. When Takan had reached out and placed his hand on Blythe's breast, it had sent him into an almost uncontrollable rage. His ability to flash himself out of the room was the only thing that had prevented him from trying to take Takan down. He knew Takan had no control over his visions, but his touching Blythe had all of Mehen's protective instincts going into overdrive.

By slow degrees, the rage abated. His fangs slowly retracted until they no longer touched his bottom lip. Once he felt as if he had himself back on an even keel, he headed for the front entrance of the bar. He needed to feed. With blood hunger battering at him, Mehen searched the dimly lit room for a possible donor. It didn't take him long to find what he looked for.

A woman stood at the bar. She sent him a heated look when he approached, her interest obvious by the slow seductive smile that appeared on her lips. She seemed to be

alone, and from the short, tight fit of the dress she wore, he knew she had come here looking for men. Mehen gave her a small smile, keeping his fangs out of sight.

"You look as if you could use another drink." He nodded to the almost-empty wineglass she held in her hand.

She swung long blonde hair back over one shoulder and looked him up and down. "Sure. Do you come with the drink?"

"If that is what you want."

She dragged a long red-tipped fingernail down his chest. "Honey, I definitely want. Why don't you order the drinks while I go find a table where we can get to know each other better?"

Mehen nodded. "That would be perfect."

He watched the seductive sway of her hips as she ambled away. Turning back to the bar he ordered another glass of white wine for her and a beer for himself. With drinks in hand, he headed over to the secluded table the woman had chosen at the back of the room.

While they drank, Mehen allowed the woman to move closer until she had her breasts pressed suggestively against his arm. He could hear the beat of her heart and the swish of her blood as it ran through her veins. Once she finished her drink he suggested they go outside. She quickly agreed.

Mehen led her out to the back of the bar. She stepped into his arms and rubbed her body against him as he moved her into the shadows. Unable to ignore his blood hunger any longer, he held her to him and bent his head to her neck. He licked the column of her throat as his fangs extended. When she bent her head to the side with a sigh, he sank his fangs into her neck. She gasped with shock, but when he started to feed, she moaned, grinding herself against him.

As the first gush of blood filled his mouth, Mehen swallowed, waiting for the pleasure it would give. When nothing happened, he drew harder. She shuddered and started to orgasm. Still Mehen felt nothing. With an animalistic growl, he sucked more of her blood into his mouth. When she sagged against him, he realized he had taken too much. Forcing himself to pull back, he lifted his head. She looked pale, but her heart beat steadily. He quickly licked the puncture marks in her neck and any blood that remained behind. He then wiped himself from her memory and planted the suggestion that she return to the bar.

When the woman unsteadily made her way back inside, Mehen knew he was in trouble. His blood hunger should have been appeased now that he had fed, but feeding had made it worse. He had gotten nothing from it. His body still craved blood, and he hadn't felt the pleasure he usually experienced while he fed. An image of Blythe rose in his thoughts. His cock instantly went hard and his blood hunger became acute. His body wanted the one woman he couldn't have.

Mehen flashed himself back to the headquarters. He knew he should contact Ra to find out what could be wrong with him, and to see what the sun god wanted done with

Blythe since she couldn't be wiped, but he decided that could wait. He wanted to make sure Blythe was okay. Opening the door to his personal quarters he found the room empty. He could barely detect Blythe's scent, which meant she hadn't been in the room recently. *Where the hell was she?*

Back out in the hall, Mehen headed for the meeting room. He found Taken the only one there. He looked up at Mehen from where he sat in front of the computer.

"Where is Blythe? She isn't in my quarters."

Taken refused to meet his eyes. "Set thought it best to keep her away from you until you settled down."

Mehen bit back a growl. "Is that so? And where exactly did he put her?"

"He locked her in one of the small storage rooms in the old warehouse."

With a curse, Mehen swung around and stalked out. He would have to have a few words with his second-in-command. Set had no right to arbitrarily decide Blythe needed to be locked up as if she were their prisoner. He was the leader of Ra's Chosen, not Set.

When he reached the door that led to the original warehouse space, Mehen slammed it open and strode over to the closest storage room. He could smell Blythe's scent even before he got to the door. He also smelled her fear. Unlocking the door, he yanked it open. The sight that met his eyes made him snarl with rage.

Blythe sat on the floor with her legs drawn up to her chest. She had her arms wrapped around them with her forehead pressed against her knees. She slowly rocked back and forth. Mehen quickly went to her. Blythe didn't so much as acknowledge his presence. She appeared to be lost inside herself. Reaching out, he gently placed his hand on her back. This close, he smelled the strong scent of sweat on her skin. When she still didn't respond, he gently gathered her up in his arms and headed to his quarters.

Set stood in front of Mehen's door. He seemed slightly taken aback when he saw Blythe's condition. His brows drew together. "What's wrong with her?"

Mehen brushed past Set and placed Blythe on his bed. She rolled onto her side and curled up into a ball. "Given the fact that she is sweating with fear and almost catatonic, I would say she's claustrophobic and you locked her up in a very dark, very small room."

"How could I have known she had a phobia?" Set drawled even though his voice sounded more than a little concerned.

"Did you even ask? Or did you just shove her in the room and lock her inside?"

Set at least had the decency to give him a guilty look before he went on the defensive. "I only did what I thought had to be done. This woman affects you, and not in a good way. You've never attacked any of us the way you went after Denger."

Mehen let his gaze settle on Blythe. His gut clenched at the sight of her curled up in fear. "I'll apologize to Denger later." He then turned to give Set a hard stare. "Next time

you make a decision such as this you talk to me first. I'll be the one to decide what to do with Blythe, not you."

Set scowled. "No offense, but I don't think you're using your head when it comes to her. I think another part of your anatomy is ruling you. Why don't you do us all a favor and fuck her already? Get her out of your system."

"I suggest you get the hell away from me, Set, before I do something you won't like," Mehen said through gritted teeth.

"Back off, Mehen." Set moved until he stood right up in Mehen's face. "If you can't fuck her, then do what has to be done. Since none of us can wipe her memories, there is only one other alternative to keep her quiet. She has to be silenced permanently. And if you can't do that, I'll do it for you."

Mehen's fangs came down as he gripped Set by the front of his shirt and slammed him against the wall. Just hearing Set insinuate that Blythe had to be killed to keep her quiet made his blood boil. She was his. He felt it was his responsibility to keep her safe.

"You so much as lay a finger on Blythe, friend or no friend, I'll rip your throat out. For now she stays here with us. I'm going to contact Ra. There has to be another option besides her death, because that one isn't acceptable to me."

Set roughly pushed Mehen away. "And if Ra says she must die, what then?"

"I'm sure it won't come to that."

Shaking his head, Set walked to the door. Before he left he said, "I think you're wrong about that one. It's not as if you can keep her here indefinitely. I suggest you come to grips with that."

As Set shut the door behind him, Mehen turned back to Blythe. If it came down to it, he knew he would keep her here away from the outside world to save her life. Even if he had to defy Ra, which he had never done in the past, he would keep her with him. Only with Blythe, did the surprising need to protect rise up so strongly in him, along with other needs that he didn't want to dwell on for too long. He still didn't understand his reaction to her.

With a sigh, Mehen used his mind to throw the lock on his door before he moved to the side of the bed. Blythe still lay in a ball. Gently, he brushed a sweat-dampened lock of hair off her forehead. He needed to get her out of that coat, and somehow get her out of the stupor she appeared to be in. The urge to hold her close and feel her heart beat with his was almost too much for him to ignore.

Instead, he said softly, "Blythe, look at me. You're back in my quarters."

He rolled her over onto her back. She blinked up at him and took a deep shuddering breath. Her eyes quickly scanned the room before she focused her gaze back on his face. With a small cry, she got up on her knees and wrapped her arms around his waist while she pressed her face against his chest. The animalistic side of Mehen roared to life.

Chapter Four

Blythe clutched at Mehen. He was her lifeline. The one who would make sure no harm came to her. The one who'd taken her out of the dark room where she'd felt as if she was slowly suffocating to death. A shiver racked her body as she thought about being inside that room. She burrowed closer.

Mehen groaned. "Blythe, you have to let go. You'll feel a lot better if you take off your coat."

"Don't let him, please don't let him." Blythe heard the incoherency of her words, the nearly hysterical trembling of her voice, but she couldn't stop shaking and couldn't focus her thoughts. When she thought of the darkness, the closeness of the small closet, she wanted to sink back down into herself.

"Don't let who do what?" Mehen asked softly. "If you mean don't let Set lock you in that room again, you have nothing to worry about. He knows I won't allow it."

Blythe shook her head. "No, I mean don't let him kill me. Before he locked me up he said I would have to be silenced."

Mehen cupped her chin in his hand and forced her to look at him. He gently stroked the pad of his thumb across her bottom lip. "I swear to you, you're safe here. Not Set, or any of my warriors, will do anything to harm you. You're under my protection. I protect what is mine."

Blythe gave him a confused look. "Yours? I'm not yours, Mehen. I'm not anybody's."

A look of hunger rose up inside Mehen's eyes before he bent his head to claim her lips. The hand that held her chin slipped around to the nape of her neck, holding her head where he wanted it. His lips skimmed across hers as his tongue swept along the seam of her mouth, seeking entrance. Opening to allow him access, Blythe pressed herself closer. Their tongues dueled while they thoroughly tasted each other. Blythe knew she shouldn't be lusting after Mehen, but for some reason she couldn't stop the feelings that rioted through her at his touch.

As he kissed her, Mehen moved his hands to the front of her coat and unzipped it. Blythe let go of his waist only long enough for him to strip it off. Her body already primed from the kisses they had shared earlier, she instantly became aroused. Her breasts grew heavy and her nipples tightened. Finding his t-shirt to be a barrier, she tugged it out from the back of his jeans. She shoved her hands under it and ran her hands along his back.

Mehen groaned and sucked her bottom lip into his mouth as he gently bit down. Blythe pulled the rest of his shirt free and pushed it up. She couldn't fight the need to

touch his skin. Her fingertips traced the large muscles of his chest before they glided down to his washboard abs. He didn't have an inch of fat on him. When Mehen reached for the buttons of her blouse, Blythe yanked his shirt higher until Mehen released her so he could tug it the rest of the way off.

Once he had her blouse unbuttoned, he yanked it off then pushed her down onto the bed. Blythe wrapped her arms around his neck when he moved to hover above her. It had been too long since a man had touched her in this way. One of his legs came to rest between hers and pushed against her pussy. Blythe ground down on his hard thigh. Wetness pooled inside her core.

Releasing her mouth, Mehen cupped one of her breasts in his hand. As his lips moved down to her chin and across her jaw, he pinched her nipple through her bra. Blythe arched her back and pressed closer. The hard length of his erection nestled against her hip. She tried to caress him through his jeans, but Mehen pulled her hand away after the first touch. It had been enough for her to tell he was just as large there as everywhere else.

Mehen lifted both her hands over her head and held them there with one of his as he nuzzled the side of her neck. Blythe felt his fangs scrape against her skin. In response, she arched her hips into him. Wanting him more than she had ever wanted a man before, she turned her head to the side. She wanted him to bite her, to sink his fangs into her neck. She couldn't understand her reaction, but she didn't want to study it too closely. Just the thought of him doing it brought her arousal to fever pitch. She sucked in a breath when his fangs grazed her neck.

"Do it," Blythe moaned. "Bite me." *Where had that come from?*

With a roar, Mehen threw himself off the bed. Standing, he looked down at her while his chest rose and fell like a bellows with his fangs still extended. Blythe sat up and reached for him. "Come back."

Mehen shook his head before he turned his back to her. His head fell forward revealing the upper part of his back. Blythe found her gaze drawn to the large tattoo that spread across the whole width along the back of his shoulders. Just like the paintings on his walls, this tattoo looked to be ancient Egyptian in design. A few inches below the base of his neck, on the center of his spine, a red sun had been depicted. In the center of the sun sat the Eye of Ra outlined in black and colored in reds and blues. On either side of the sun, in striking position, were two cobras that faced outward. Extending from the sun with the tips touching the edges of Mehen's shoulders were two large wings, each feather outlined in black and colored peacock blue.

"Did I do something wrong?" Blythe scrambled off the bed and placed herself behind Mehen. She reached out to touch his back, but he moved away before she could make contact with his skin.

"I have to go." Mehen's voice sounded strained. "Go to sleep. You'll be safe here."

Before she could say anything more, he rushed out of the room. The lock engaged once the door closed behind him. Her body still throbbed with desire. She was more

than a little confused by her reactions to Mehen. She threw herself on the bed, put her face in one of the pillows and screamed in frustration.

* * * * *

With blood hunger battering him harder, and aroused to the point of pain, Mehen stalked down the hallway toward the small temple to Ra. He needed to talk to Ra, but he had to wait for sunrise before he tried to contact the sun god. That was still three hours away.

Mehen walked between the two wooden pylons that stood at the temple's entrance. Almost an exact replica of some of the pylons at Ra's temple at Karnak, at first glance they appeared to be made of stone. The pylons, as well as the scenes and hieroglyphs depicted on the walls, showcased Takan's artistic ability. The warrior had spent years painting the walls of the temple and the rest of the headquarters.

Moving to sit on one of the benches that lined the walls, Mehen stared at the ceiling above him. Unlike the rest of the warehouse they had converted, the temple did not have a solid ceiling. As a sun god, Ra required he and his warriors worship him while the sun's rays shone down on them. But not wanting birds and other wildlife to make their way inside the building, the warriors had compromised. Instead of putting in a drop ceiling as they had done in their quarters, they kept the original height of the warehouse ceiling. To allow the radiance of the sun to glorify their bodies and spirits, they had opened the roof above the whole width and length of the temple and replaced it with panes of clear glass. At the sun's highest, it completely filled the temple with its bright light. Looking up now, Mehen saw the night sky high above. The stars twinkled down on him.

With a groan, he pulled his gaze off the star-studded sky and leaned his head back against the temple wall. He had no idea what to do about Blythe. What he did know was that he wouldn't allow her to be put to death. There had to be another option, but then again even if there happened to be one, Mehen didn't know if he could let her go. The moment her eyes had met his back in that alley, he'd become lost. Never before had he felt this possessive toward a woman. He'd had his share of women over the centuries to slake his lust as well as his need for blood, but once he had satisfied both those needs he'd been able to walk away without a backward glance. And it wasn't as if the women remembered him after he wiped their memories. Blythe would be a different story entirely. He wanted much more than casual sex. He wanted something much closer. She had a way with him. Back in the meeting room before his men had tried to wipe her, her touch had been enough to gentle him, to make all his rage drain away.

When around Blythe he didn't recognize himself. The blood hunger clawed at him, causing his stomach to cramp. Even now the cramps plagued him, and he felt pretty sure no amount of food would make it go away. That he'd fed already that night, taking more than he should have, had done nothing to stave off his blood hunger. If anything it had made it worse. The thought of how close he'd come to biting Blythe made his

fangs ache. But he couldn't, and not just because he couldn't wipe her mind. With her, he knew he wouldn't be able to stop in time as he'd been able to do with the other woman. He wanted to gorge himself on her blood until she had nothing left to give. He didn't know why, he just knew he wouldn't be able to control himself. He couldn't let that happen.

With a deep breath, Mehen could smell Blythe's scent on his skin. He closed his eyes and groaned as his cock lengthened even more inside his jeans. He groaned again when he remembered how it had felt to have her under him, to have her taste in his mouth and the smell of her arousal filling his nose. His body burned for her. There would be no going back to his quarters this night. Until he talked to Ra about what seemed to be happening to him, and why his blood hunger had gone all out of whack, he had to step carefully. Blythe in his bed with her long hair spread across his pillows, her body warm with sleep, would be too much of a temptation. It would be safer for both of them if he stayed away until he got himself under control. He stretched out on the bench. Mehen had a feeling when it came to Blythe, his legendary self-control would be a thing of the past.

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Sek glared at the undead who stood in front of him. He'd returned alone, and without the woman Apep wanted. Sek felt seriously pissed. When he became disappointed he usually liked to take it out on the one who caused him to feel that way. "Tell me."

"We found the woman exactly where you said she would be. The others managed to corner her in an alley."

"Then where is she?" Sek asked in a calm voice. He knew the only thing that gave away his displeasure was his eyes. Seeing how the undead avoided looking too closely at him, Sek knew his eyes burned red. "If you had the mortal cornered she would have been no match for four of you."

The undead shifted restlessly on his feet. "We would have had her except one of Ra's Chosen showed up."

Sek's lip curled in a snarl at the mention of one of those warriors – the hated enemy who made it their life's mission to undo everything he and Mot did. How he detested them. "What happened?"

"One of the others had the woman and just before he could bite her, the warrior roared up on his motorcycle and cut him down."

That particular undead had to count himself lucky one of Ra's Chosen had taken care of him. He had specifically told them the woman couldn't be turned, that none of them could take her soul. If they had returned with the woman turned after he demanded she be brought to him whole, their demon god would have taken it out on their flesh, one agonizing inch at a time.

Sek pinned the undead with a hard stare. "Did you say the warrior rode a motorcycle?" At the undead's nod, Sek ground his teeth together with rage. It had to have been Mehen. Only he drove a motorcycle while the others preferred to drive flashy sports cars.

"Sorry, master, I couldn't follow the warrior to see where he took the woman."

With a flick of his hand, Sek froze the undead in place. "And where exactly were you when the other three ended up being cut down by one of Ra's Chosen?"

The undead gulped. His eyes widened when he found he couldn't move. "I thought it best to stay hidden, so I could return to tell you what happened to the woman."

"Is that so? But when the warrior came to her rescue you couldn't have known he would take her with him. It seems to me you hid to save your own skin."

Having reached the end of his patience, Sek's hand shot out as he buried it inside the undead's chest. With a loud sucking noise, he pulled out the heart. When the undead opened his mouth on a silent scream, Sek stabbed him in the throat with the small bronze dagger he had concealed in the palm of his other hand. His disappointment started to evaporate as Sek watched the undead decompose. When nothing remained but an empty pile of clothes, Sek took a bite out of the dead heart and slowly ate it until he consumed it all.

* * * * *

Late the following morning, Set made his way to the kitchen. Like the rest of the warriors, he didn't need much sleep to function. They really only needed about four hours of sleep to be at their best. There had been times when the undead situation had become large scale, and they had been forced to go for weeks at a time with no sleep. The few times the undead became that much of a problem the warriors hunted them night and day. During the daylight hours, the undead slept, literally dead to the world, unable to rise until night fell. It made them easy prey, but they kept their lairs pretty well hidden, which made hunting them during the day harder. With their numbers down to the minimum the warriors now only needed to hunt at night.

Inside the kitchen, Set saw both Denger and Takan were already up and about. Denger sat at the large kitchen table eating a plate full of eggs and bacon. Takan stood at the stove flipping bacon that sizzled in a frying pan. It obviously was Takan's day to cook. Each warrior took turns cooking the meals. Unable to hire any mortals to look after them, they had been forced to learn how to do the menial chores that needed to be done each day. Not surprisingly, since they all enjoyed their food, they made learning how to cook their first priority.

Accepting a plate full of food from Takan, Set went and sat down across from Denger. Set cleared his throat to gain the other warrior's attention. When Denger looked up, Set asked, "How's the throat?"

"Fine. What's up with Mehen and that woman anyway?"

Set shook his head. "I wish I knew. The thousands of years I've known Mehen, not once has he acted so violently when it came to a woman. With Blythe, I don't think Mehen is capable of thinking straight."

"You think?" Denger asked sarcastically. "He would have tried to rip my fucking throat out if I had actually touched her." He then looked over at Takan. "Which reminds me, Takan, you took a big chance last night. You never did tell us what you saw in your vision when you touched the woman."

Takan turned away from the stove to face them. "I'm going to keep that information to myself for the time being. You know I don't have any control over my visions, and that my hand has to be over the person's heart to see it more clearly."

Out of all the warriors, only Takan had visions, able to see the past and the future. Set counted himself lucky that Ra had not gifted him with that. He liked not being able to see what his future, or anyone else's for that matter, would bring.

"It looked to me as if you managed to cop a good feel while at it," Denger said jokingly.

Takan shook his head. "Not everyone has sex on the brain like you and Akori, Denger. I don't think of Blythe in that way."

"Speak for yourself," Set shot back with a laugh. "I know I have sex on the brain just as much as they do. As for the woman, it would be no hardship to sleep with her. If she could be wiped, I wouldn't even mind feeding off her. You can't tell me you would pass that piece of ass up if given the chance, Takan."

Set let the smile he wore fade as Takan glared at him through the strands of hair hiding his face. Without saying a word, Takan turned his back on them and filled a plate with food. Set watched as the warrior turned off the stove and picked up the plate along with a bottle of water. He shoved a fork in the back pocket of his jeans then headed for the kitchen's entrance.

"Hey, Takan, I was just fooling around." When the other warrior kept walking he asked warily, "Where are you going with that?" Set had a feeling he knew where Takan would be going.

Takan paused at the doorway. "I'm taking it to Blythe. She's probably hungry."

Denger snorted. "Man, you must have a death wish. If Mehen catches you anywhere near her he'll beat your ass or worse."

Takan shrugged then said, "He'll just have to get over it."

Set looked over at Denger. He felt pretty sure his face had the same stunned expression that Denger's had. Takan never became confrontational. He avoided confrontations at all costs. It was completely unlike him to willingly do something that would piss Mehen off. Set had to wonder who else would be on the receiving end of a personality adjustment. He sure as hell hoped it wouldn't be him.

* * * * *

Blythe rolled onto her back and pulled the covers over her head when the noise came again. She didn't want to get up. Thinking it had to be her alarm clock, she blindly stuck her arm out from under the covers and reached over to her nightstand to turn it off. When her hand only met empty air, she groggily yanked the covers off her face. The noise came again. This time her sleepy brain registered the fact that the noise came from someone knocking on the door.

As she came fully awake, it still took Blythe a few seconds to remember where she slept and recall everything that had taken place the night before. She looked around the room and found herself alone. Mehen hadn't returned during what had remained of the night.

The knocking came again. Blythe slid out of the bed and walked over to the door. "Yes?"

"It's Takan, Blythe. Is it okay if I come in?"

"Sure, but you'll need a key. Mehen locked me in."

"It's all right. I don't need one."

Blythe took a step back as the door unlocked and Takan pushed it open. She noticed he carried a plate of food. The smell of eggs and bacon suddenly filled the room. Her stomach growled. She hadn't had anything to eat since lunchtime the day before. Looking up, she found Takan eyeing what she wore.

Giving him a sheepish grin, she yanked on the hem of the man's t-shirt she wore. The bottom of it reached her mid-thigh. "I borrowed one of Mehen's shirts to sleep in. I didn't want to sleep in my blouse and skirt." Blythe had no idea why she felt as if she had to explain herself, but that didn't seem to stop her from doing it anyway. "I would have asked if Mehen had come back before I went to sleep, but he didn't so I only snooped in his dresser drawers until I found one of his t-shirts."

Takan gave her a half smile. "I'm sure Mehen won't mind. I brought you some breakfast. I figured you'd be hungry."

"Thanks, I'm starved." Then it dawned on Blythe that it really must be morning. With no windows or a clock she had no idea of the time. "What time is it?"

"It's around eleven."

"As in eleven in the morning?" When Takan nodded, Blythe cursed, which caused him to grin. "You don't understand. I'm late for work. If I don't show up I'll be fired. The insurance company I work for has zero tolerance for employees who show up late, or not at all. I can't afford to lose this job."

Takan shook his head. "Sorry. You can't leave."

"At least let me call to say I'm sick and won't be in."

"You can't do that either."

Blythe managed to stop herself from calling Takan every swearword she knew. "Look, I'm going to be quite blunt here. Without my job, I can't pay off my debts, or pay my rent for that matter. Even though I hate it, I really, really can't afford to lose it."

Takan moved past her and placed the plate of food and the water bottle on the bed. He pulled a fork out of his back pocket and placed it next to the plate before he turned back to her. "You don't have to worry about any of those things anymore. I took care of them last night."

"What do you mean you took care of them?"

"Well for starters, I paid off your lawyer's bill. The money went into their bank account this morning and they have been emailed that your bill has now been paid in full."

Blythe blinked at Takan, completely taken by surprise. "Why would you do that? You don't even know me."

"I felt like being generous. As for your job and rent, I emailed your resignation to your boss, and your landlord has been given your notice. Kysen agreed to help me later today when I go and clean out your apartment. I'll give your landlord your apartment keys when we're finished."

Feeling as if her life had been taken from her, Blythe found herself at a loss for words. Nothing like having the carpet pulled out from under her. "Why?"

Takan gave her a tentative smile before he reached out and put his hand over her heart. "Because I saw that was how things had to be."

Blythe suddenly recalled what Set had yelled at Takan last night when he had placed his hand over her heart just like this. Set had yelled it hadn't been a good time for Takan to have one of his visions. "What did you see?"

Pulling his hand back, Takan shook his head. "Eat your food before it gets cold. I'll bring you some of your clothes when we're finished at your apartment."

After Takan left her alone once again locked inside the room, Blythe sat on the bed. She picked up the fork and started to eat the eggs and bacon he had brought. Methodically, not really tasting the food, Blythe ate until she cleaned the plate. Her mind a whirlwind of thoughts, she told herself not to panic. It couldn't be all bad that Takan had been able to so easily take over every aspect of her life. On the plus side, she no longer had to worry about how she would pay off her debts. But the big downside remained. She seemed to be a virtual prisoner, held by a group of warriors who hunted the undead. Blythe could easily see herself completely losing it if she thought about it too closely.

With her stomach now full and needing to do something that she would do in her everyday life, Blythe headed for the bathroom. She'd shower and get ready to face the day like she did every morning. She always felt more herself after a nice warm shower.

* * * * *

Mehen didn't understand it. Since the sun had risen, he'd spent the last few hours trying to contact Ra, but for some reason the sun god had chosen to ignore his call. That left Mehen hanging. He had no answers for what seemed to be happening to him, and

he had no idea what Ra would want done with Blythe now that they knew for sure she couldn't be wiped.

Frustrated, he decided he'd better check on Blythe. She had to be hungry. Seeing if she wanted anything to eat had been the last thing on his mind during the night. He had a hard enough time with his control when around her, let alone being able to string enough thoughts together to ask if she wanted something to eat.

He unlocked the door to his personal quarters and took a second to take a deep breath before he went inside. He felt a moment of unease when he didn't find Blythe in his bed. He then heard the sound of the shower running. Unable to stop himself, Mehen crossed the room to the partially open bathroom door. As he walked by the bed he noticed the empty plate that sat on it. One of the others had already brought Blythe something to eat. On one hand he felt glad someone had been thoughtful enough to bring her something, but on the other, he disliked the fact that one of them had been alone in the room with Blythe.

Mehen pushed open the bathroom door and his whole body clenched. Behind the frosted glass shower doors he saw the outline of Blythe's naked body as she stood under the showerhead. She had her head back while she rinsed her hair. With her arms up, she ran her hands through her long hair. Her generous breasts lifted with each stroke. His mouth suddenly went dry.

Lust warred with blood hunger when Mehen moved over to the shower doors and slid one open. Blythe cried out in surprise, but she did nothing to hide her nakedness from him. Mehen's gaze skimmed over her body as his cock hardened in response. She was perfect with her more-than-a-handful-sized breasts. Each one tipped with a pink nipple he wanted to run his tongue around. He wanted to skim his hands over her curved-in waist and flared hips. He wanted to have her long, toned legs wrapped around his hips while he surged into her body. Looking back up at her face, he saw her eyes had darkened with arousal. He heard her heart beating at a rapid pace.

Shaking her head, Blythe said in a breathy voice, "Stop looking at me like that if you don't intend to follow through, Mehen. You're killing me. You can't get me that worked-up and then suddenly decide you can't finish it."

Mehen wanted nothing more than to pull Blythe out of the shower and take her to his bed. He wanted her under him as he sank his aching cock into her wet pussy. He wanted to ride her until he exploded deep inside her, until he didn't know where he ended and she began. He could almost taste her on his tongue, feel her inner muscles clenched around his shaft as he pumped slowly in and out of her body. And then while she came, he'd sink his fangs into her neck, sending her straight into another climax. Another part of him wanted all that and more. It craved to be close to Blythe, to have her wrapped in his arms so he could find the peace and contentment that was missing in his life.

Blythe whimpered with need. Mehen realized he'd projected his thoughts inside her head again. The smell of her arousal mixed with the steam from the shower. His fangs came down when she threaded her fingers through his hair and pulled his mouth

down to hers. He knew he played with fire, but he couldn't resist. He longed for this woman to be his.

His tongue dueled with hers while he wrapped his arms around Blythe's waist and lifted her until her breasts pressed against his bare chest. Her legs came around his waist. Shifting his hold, Mehen moved his hands so they cupped her bottom. He positioned her so her slick opening came up against the hard bulge in the front of his jeans. Blythe moaned and rubbed herself against his erection. Mehen bit back a groan as he thought of how easy it would be to open the front of his jeans and impale her on his hard shaft. Taking her bottom lip between his teeth, he nipped it with his fangs. Two drops of blood rose to the surface. With a flick of his tongue he licked them away.

That one little taste proved to be almost too much. When the blood hit his stomach, his muscles cramped painfully, demanding he take from Blythe what his body craved. Her blood tasted sweeter than the headiest wine. One taste and he wanted so much more. He forced himself to pull away. He couldn't take the chance. If he drank from her and lost control, he could very well drain her completely. Mehen didn't want to assuage his blood hunger at the expense of her life.

Mehen tried to put Blythe down, but she tenaciously clung to him. She continued to rub against him while she panted with need. "Please, Mehen. Don't leave me like this."

He knew it wouldn't take much to send Blythe over the edge into an orgasm. He groaned. "I should leave, but I can't."

Her arousal beat at him. Even though it would push him to his very limits, Mehen wouldn't leave her in such a state. It would be unfair of him. He held her easily with one hand and bent his head to her breast. He sucked a nipple deep inside his mouth as he reached between their bodies with the other. Finding her clit, he stroked it with his fingers. Blythe pushed herself closer and threaded her fingers through his hair to hold him to her breast. Mehen drew harder on her nipple. He pushed one finger, then a second, inside her pussy. Angling his fingers upward, he moved them in and out of her slick passage when she threw back her head and moaned. She rode his fingers until her climax overtook her.

The sounds Blythe made while her body clenched spasmodically around his fingers forced Mehen to fight the savage urge to sink his fangs into her exposed throat. He gritted his teeth until he felt the veins stand out in his neck as his blood surged. After the last tremor shook her body, he slowly let her back down on her feet.

With his body throbbing painfully with unfulfilled desire and his stomach cramping, he softly brushed his lips across Blythe's mouth. "Finish your shower. I'll be in the other room waiting." Before he lost the struggle, Mehen turned on his heel and left the bathroom before she could reply.

Chapter Five

Blythe managed to get back into the shower without her legs giving out on her. She still felt small aftershocks of pleasure deep inside her pussy. At least this time Mehen hadn't left her in a state of intense arousal. The orgasm he had given her satisfied some of her need, but not completely. She wanted the hot, hard length of his cock buried deep inside her the next time he made her climax. She didn't know why he held back. There could be no mistaking that he wanted her as much as she wanted him. She'd had the proof of it pressed against her. Blythe shivered as she recalled how large Mehen had felt.

Back under the spray, Blythe quickly finished showering. She turned off the water, dried herself and wrapped a towel around her body before she stepped out into the bedroom. At first she thought Mehen had done his usual hit-and-run job when she didn't find him in the room right away. She then noticed the door to the walk-in closet stood open.

Blythe stepped around the door and looked inside. Mehen stood with his back toward her while he pulled on a fresh pair of jeans. She managed to get a very good view of his muscled backside before he yanked the jeans up to his waist. Watching the muscles in his back contract as he did up the button and zipper, she found her eyes drawn to Mehen's tattoo. She really couldn't be considered much of a tattoo person, but on Mehen she found it sexy as all hell. With his movements it looked as if the wings moved up and down.

"Are you finished ogling me?" he asked her lightly.

Mehen's deep voice brought Blythe back to her surroundings. "I'm just admiring your tattoo, among other things." He turned and looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. The expression on his face said he knew she had been admiring more than just his tattoo.

"It isn't a tattoo."

Blythe stepped back as Mehen came out of the closet and shut the door. He moved over to the dresser and took out a clean shirt. "It isn't?"

"No. It's the mark of Ra's Chosen. After Ra gave me my gifts he placed his Eye and the winged sun on my back."

"So all of you have that same mark?" Blythe quietly sighed in disappointment when Mehen tugged on his t-shirt and pulled it down to cover his well-muscled chest and abs.

"Yes, we all carry it in the same place on our bodies."

Their eyes met and Blythe's body started to burn for Mehen all over again. He seemed as affected as she. His hot gaze burned a trail down the length of her body and back up to her face. Prepared to drop the towel and see what Mehen would do, she stopped at the last second when he groaned and tore his gaze away.

"We can't, Blythe."

"Why not?"

"You don't understand. I should never have touched you like that in the bathroom."

Blythe stepped closer until only a few inches remained between them. "Then help me to understand."

Mehen stiffened when she trailed a finger down the center of his chest. "There are two reasons why I shouldn't make love to you. The first being it's forbidden to feed from a mortal and leave the memories of it intact."

"So if we made love you would want to bite me as well?"

Mehen's gaze burned hotter. "The act of feeding can be very erotic for both parties. I'd have my fangs buried inside you along with my cock."

Blythe felt her body liquefy as the mental image of what Mehen said he'd do rose inside her head. She moved a fraction of an inch closer. "I could live with that, I think. As for my keeping the memory of it, I can't see that it would change the situation I'm in now. And the second thing?"

Mehen's gaze shifted back to hers. He stared at her with stark longing. "I hunger for you, Blythe," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "For your body and your blood. I want you to the point that I can barely think straight, but I have to resist this pull you have over me. Something is going on with me, something that could be deadly for you. If I allowed myself to feed from you I'd want it all, drain you until you had nothing left to give. So until I get my blood hunger back under control I can't have you."

Even though Mehen had said he could very well kill her if they made love, it didn't stop her body from going up in flames. Her inner walls clenched with need. Her body clamored for her to take that risk, but the logical part of her brain made her step away.

Hoping to distract herself from the lust that still fired her blood, Blythe asked, "Now what? Since I'm that much of a temptation, I guess you won't want me to stay in your quarters. Takan has managed to take away my old life. So where does that leave me?"

Mehen's brows came together as he gave her a puzzled look. "What do you mean Takan took your old life away? Did he bring you the food?"

"Yes, he did. That's when he told me what he had done. He paid off my debts, sent my resignation into work and gave my landlord my notice. He and Kysen are at my apartment right now to move my things here."

"It would seem Takan has had a very productive morning. I had no idea he'd done any of those things. I've been in Ra's temple since before the sun rose trying to contact him."

Blythe stiffened. "So, did he make a decision about what is going to happen to me?"

Mehen sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. "I haven't a clue. He didn't answer my call. For some reason Ra has decided to leave me hanging."

"Typical." Blythe huffed. "Isn't that a typical trait of any god? They like to leave their worshipers in the dark, and when they finally answer it's so cryptic no one can decipher the meaning anyway."

"Ra is not that kind of god, Blythe. Not once in all the thousands of years I've served him has he not answered my call."

"Thousands of years? You've been alive for thousands of years?" Blythe had no idea he had been alive for so long, or that he was immortal. "Holy crap, you're ancient. You must have been around when the pyramids at Giza were being built."

"I may be old, but I can assure you, I in no way feel ancient. And, yes, I saw the pyramids being built."

Blythe shook her head. "Unbelievable. I can attest to the fact that you don't look or feel as if you're a decrepit old man, Mehen."

Mehen cocked a brow in her direction. "Let's not get back on a topic that will only have us playing with fire. As for your earlier question, you *will* stay in my quarters. We don't have guest quarters, and I won't be able to tolerate it if you stayed with one of the other warriors."

Blythe felt reassured by Mehen's possessive tone. She didn't want to be separated from him. All the others, except for maybe Takan, made her a little bit nervous, especially Set. To be honest, that warrior scared the crap out of her. She knew if Ra decided she must die, Set would have no qualms about carrying that order out. No, she would be more than happy to stay locked in Mehen's quarters.

"I prefer to stay here with you, Mehen. I feel safer with you than I would with the other warriors."

"I don't know how safe you actually are with me, Blythe, but I can't let you go," Mehen said resignedly. He gave her an intense stare that she felt all the way to her toes before he moved to the door. "I'll give you a few minutes to get dressed then I'll come back for you."

* * * * *

Takan pulled his black Corvette into one of the visitor's parking spots at Blythe's apartment building. Kysen shielded his eyes from the bright sunlight and looked up at it. "I must say the woman couldn't have picked an uglier place to live. The apartment building has seen better days."

"The woman has a name. It's Blythe. I doubt she could afford anything better."

Kysen turned back to Takan. "You'd better watch yourself. Talk like that will make Mehen think you want her for yourself. He's already staked his claim, and I don't think he'll tolerate your interest in her. I'm sure just being here with you will cause Mehen to want to wale on my ass."

"The interest I have in Blythe is purely platonic," Takan said offhandedly while he stepped out of the car. He waited for Kysen to join him before he headed for the front entrance. Digging inside his pants' pocket, he pulled out Blythe's keys. "I feel sorry for her."

Kysen snorted. "Yeah, sure you do. Why else would you have paid off all her debts and made sure she had nowhere else to stay but at our headquarters? I've never seen you take any interest in a mortal woman unless you needed to feed."

"Blythe is different." After he used one of the keys, Takan pushed open the secured front entrance door to the building. Perhaps he'd made a mistake by bringing Kysen with him. He'd thought with two of them able to move the furniture by flashing it and themselves back to the warehouse a few pieces at a time, it would be done a lot quicker. He also had thought Kysen would be the least likely out of his fellow warriors to look too closely at his motives for doing this. He'd thought wrong.

"I'll say she's different all right," Kysen said with a laugh. "She's the only mortal woman I've seen that had our steadfast leader going apeshit on Denger just because Mehen didn't like the way he looked at and spoke to Blythe. Then there's you, the scholar, who is happy to bury your nose in one of your books when you're not swinging a sword. I can't understand it."

While Kysen had spoken they had climbed the stairs to Blythe's apartment. At her door, Takan unlocked it and stepped inside. He avoided looking at Kysen. "If you're done flapping your lips, Kysen, I'd like to get started. I promised Blythe a change of clothes."

"Touchy, touchy. Fine, I'll keep my mouth shut. Where do you want to put her stuff?"

"In the old part of the warehouse for now. It's not as if her things will take up a lot of space."

The sparsely furnished living room only had a well-used couch and a small coffee table with a television sitting on it. The kitchen, located just off the living room, didn't even have a table in it. Takan headed for the only bedroom. Same as the living room, it didn't have much in it. It held a queen-sized bed, one nightstand and a large dresser. Sliding open the closet door, he found it packed full of clothes. At least Blythe's scumbag ex-husband had allowed her to keep all her clothes. He spied some pricy designer labels.

Back inside the living room where Kysen waited, Takan said, "You might as well start with the living room and kitchen. I'll work on the bedroom and anything she has in the bathroom."

Kysen nodded and walked over to the couch. He rested a hand on top of it, then it and he disappeared. Takan headed back to Blythe's bedroom.

* * * * *

Dressed, Blythe waited for Mehen to come back to the room. She hadn't relished the idea of having to wear her clothes from the day before. To compromise until Takan returned with some of her own clothes she had donned her skirt, but instead of putting on the blouse, Blythe had put Mehen's t-shirt on. It just about covered the full length of her skirt, so she had gathered up one side of it and twisted it into a knot at her waist.

Mehen didn't make her wait too long. He knocked first, then opened the door. His gaze took in what she wore. "I hope you don't mind. I borrowed your shirt to sleep in last night and I couldn't bring myself to put on my dirty blouse from yesterday."

He gave her a sexy grin. "I have to say I like how it looks on you better than it does on me. If you're ready, let's go."

Blythe stepped into the hallway next to Mehen. "Where are we going?"

"I thought I'd show you around so you'll know where everything is."

"Why would I need to find my way around here? I thought you wanted me to stay locked in your quarters."

Mehen came to a stop and turned to face Blythe. He put his hand under her chin and bent his head slightly so he could look her in the eyes. "You aren't a prisoner. I only kept you locked in last night until I felt sure you understood that you couldn't leave the building. I feel I can trust you not to run. You have to know if we really wanted to hurt you we would have had plenty of opportunity last night."

"Well, it isn't as if I have any place to go now."

"I'll have to have a little chat about that with Takan when he returns."

"Don't be too hard on him, Mehen. He told me he saw in his vision he had to do those things."

His brows drew together. "Takan's visions are usually spot on. He doesn't do things like that unless there is a very good reason behind his actions. Enough about Takan, shall we continue?"

At Blythe's nod, Mehen started down the hallway once more. He showed her the kitchen, the small laundry room and where each of the warriors' quarters could be found. She already knew how to find the meeting room since she had been there the night before. As they moved through the building, Blythe walked at a slow pace, which forced Mehen to match her stride. She found the artwork painted on the walls fascinating. She couldn't get over the fact that the walls and the floors had been painted to give the overall effect of being inside an ancient Egyptian building. At a piece that particularly intrigued her, she stopped and moved closer to get a better look.

Mehen came to stand beside her. "You like that one?"

Blythe nodded. This particular scene had the god Anubis standing over a mummy as he performed the rite of mummification. The details were exquisite and had to have taken the artist months to complete. "It's gorgeous. I've always been fascinated by all things ancient Egyptian, especially the artwork. Now don't laugh, but whenever I think about being in Egypt I feel as if I'd be going home. My ex-husband had promised to take me there one day, but he always had something important to do and couldn't take the time away from his work to take me on a vacation."

Mehen put his hand over his heart and gave her a dramatic wounded look. "I would laugh at such a thing?" He then asked, "How long were you married?"

Blythe shook her head at his antics and started to walk again. "Almost three years."

"What happened?"

"Where do you want me to start?" Blythe asked, with a laugh.

"The beginning is always a good place."

Blythe sighed. "All right." Usually she didn't like to talk about her divorce, but with Mehen it didn't seem to bother her as much. "I used to work as a legal secretary and Jake was one of the partners at the firm. In the beginning, I'd been flattered by the attention he showed me when he sought me out. He's everything I'm not—good-looking with an outgoing personality and an abundance of confidence. I found it hard to believe he could actually be interested in me. Eventually he asked me out on a date and I accepted. Things started to get serious really fast. I thought it had to be too good to be true. Men of Jake's caliber don't ask women such as me to marry them."

Mehen gave her a sideways look. "Why would you think that?"

Blythe chuckled. "I'm not exactly what you would call a raving beauty. Plain would be a better description. Everything about me is average, including my height."

"Not everyone thinks that way about you," Mehen said with all seriousness.

She chose to ignore that statement. After her ex, she found it hard to believe men spoke the truth when they complimented her looks. "Anyway, Jake said none of that mattered to him. Once we became engaged I quit my job at the law firm because he didn't want his wife to work outside the home. I moved in with Jake, at his insistence. We married six months later and I became what I call a kept wife."

"I take it you didn't find that lifestyle to be to your liking."

"In the end, no. The first year of marriage I felt happy enough, but after that Jake started to come home later and later. He sometimes stayed out all night, his excuse being he had to work on an important case. Just before our third anniversary, I had reached my limit of being stuck in a fancy home with no one to talk to except for the maid Jake insisted we have, who came twice a week to clean and cook."

"What did you do?"

"I waited up for Jake one night and had it out with him. He didn't react at all well to my show of backbone. I really saw his true colors that night. He basically told me that I had nothing to complain about. I had a nice house to live in, had whatever I wanted

bought for me, and if I didn't like that he spent more time at work than with me that was my tough luck. The real slap in the face turned out to be when he told me I should count myself lucky he had married me in the first place, and that our marriage would be considered a marriage of convenience rather than a love match. Jake wanted a wife who would do everything he told her with no complaint and I seemed to fit that bill. He then told me if I couldn't accept that then he no longer had any use for me."

"So you left him and Jake took you to the cleaners," Mehen said in a harsh tone of voice.

Blythe cringed. "So you know about that, huh? Not until after I had moved out did I discover what I had done to myself. I had stupidly signed a prenuptial agreement. I wanted to prove to Jake I loved him for him and not his money, so I signed the damn thing without reading it. And because of that one stupid act, I could only take what I had brought into the marriage, which didn't amount to much. I wouldn't get a penny more from Jake for alimony. I fought it and it turned out to be a messy divorce because of that. Jake won, of course."

Mehen pulled her to a stop just before they reached another doorway. He backed her up against the wall and took her chin in his hand. His gaze swept her face, showing the outrage he felt on her behalf. "Your ex-husband may have won in the end, but I think *he* lost something more precious than money. He lost you. Don't let the actions of that bastard define you. I don't find your looks average by any means, and you have a gorgeous figure any man would love to fondle all night long. Don't sell yourself short, Blythe."

The hot burning intensity in Mehen's gaze filled her with the need to be held in his arms. He meant everything he said, she could see it in his eyes. At a loss for words, she swallowed and nodded. No man had ever looked at her like this, making her feel as if she were the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her heart skipped a beat. She knew she'd have to watch herself. It would be all too easy for her to fall for Mehen, and fall hard. Her divorce had made her gun-shy when it came to men and the whole relationship thing. Not that there would be any chance of a relationship forming between her and Mehen. He was immortal. How could a relationship last between a mortal and an immortal? But she couldn't deny that she wanted him with every fiber in her being. The last man she had slept with had been Jake, and she desperately wanted to replace the memories of being in bed with him. And she wanted Mehen to be the one to do it for her.

Mehen smelled the musky scent of Blythe's arousal in the air around them and just like that he got a raging hard-on. He resisted the urge to reach down and adjust it to make room in the suddenly too-tight pants. If Blythe looked she wouldn't be able to miss the large bulge in his pants. With a deep breath, he tried to calm his body down. It had the opposite effect. It just pulled more of Blythe's enticing scent deeper into his lungs. The animalistic side of him roared at him to pull her down to the floor and take

her. He gritted his teeth, released Blythe's chin and took a step back. He plastered a smile on his face and tried to ignore the flush of desire that rode high on her cheeks.

He held out his hand. "I want to show you something."

Once Blythe placed her hand in his, Mehen took her through the open doorway. He turned to watch her reaction. She didn't disappoint him. She let go of his hand and slowly started to walk around the room with an expression of awe on her face. Her gaze kept shifting from the decorated walls to the high, clear glass ceiling and back. He crossed his arms over his chest and waited for the inevitable questions that he knew would come. It didn't take very long.

Blythe stood in the center of the room with her face tilted toward the ceiling. The bright sun shone down on her, highlighting her beauty. The sight of her standing there made his gut clench. Gods, how he wished this woman could be his. He fought the urge to sweep her up in his arms and take her to his bed. "What is this place?"

He stepped out from the shadows of one of the pylons and came to stand before her. "This is our temple to Ra."

She looked at him. "You're standing in the sun. Isn't it bad for you?"

Mehen chuckled. "Would we have built a temple with a glass ceiling if the sunlight harmed us?"

Blythe gave him a sheepish look. "Uh, I'll take that as a no."

"We are chosen by Ra, the sun god, so the sun makes us stronger."

"That makes sense. So is this where you go when you want to contact Ra?"

"Yes."

"Do you have to perform some kind of ritual to do it?"

Mehen grinned and shook his head. "No. I just look up at the sun and call out to him."

"Like this?"

Blythe closed her eyes and lifted her face to the sun. The shafts of light that surrounded her grew brighter in intensity. It only lasted for a split second, but it made Mehen wonder if Ra heard Blythe calling to him. Besides the warriors of Ra's Chosen, only priests and priestesses of his temple could contact the sun god, but Blythe wasn't any of those things.

When she lowered her head and looked at him, she shrugged. "I guess it didn't work. No harm in trying though."

Mehen nodded. Maybe his mind had played tricks on him, but he could have sworn from the way the sunlight had reacted Ra had heard her. He let it go and steered Blythe toward the doorway. "How about we go and see if Takan and Kysen have returned?"

"Okay. Can I come back anytime I want?"

"Of course. As long as you stay inside the building, you can go wherever you wish."

"Then I'm definitely coming back to the temple."

Mehen led Blythe out of the room. He would return alone later to try to contact Ra again. Hopefully the sun god would answer him. Mehen knew if he couldn't contact Ra before he had to go hunting the undead that night, he would have to feed again. He couldn't take the chance of losing control of his blood hunger around Blythe. He felt it slip the more time he spent with her. The thought of him pouncing on her and draining her dry sickened him. He needed answers before he ended up doing something he would regret.

* * * * *

Mehen sheathed his sword and watched the undead decompose into dust. They seemed to be out in full force. This had been the fourth one Mehen had put down. Able to communicate telepathically with the other warriors when he wished to, he found out they each had made just as many kills. He figured the lull had finally ended. Now they only had to wait for the storm. But Mehen couldn't shake the feeling that the greater number of undead that moved around this night had a purpose, especially when it had kept all six of Ra's Chosen busy for most of the night. It almost felt as if they had been used to distract them.

When he didn't sense any more of the undead nearby, Mehen walked to his bike. The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't discount the idea that the undead he'd brought down had been sacrificed for a greater purpose. With sickening dread, he could think of only one reason why.

Mehen drove to Blythe's old neighborhood. He parked his bike at the side of the road in front of the apartment building instead of the parking lot. After he removed his helmet, he slowly made his way to the apartment. His skin started to prickle as soon as he reached the front entrance, which meant undead had to be inside. He cursed under his breath. With his mind, he unlocked the door and took the stairs to what had been Blythe's apartment. At her floor, Mehen cautiously moved down the hallway. In case any of the other tenants happened to come out of their apartments, he didn't draw his sword. The prickling grew stronger as he neared Blythe's old apartment door. He reached over his right shoulder and wrapped his hand around the handle of his *khopesh*. Silently, he pushed open the door that had been left ajar.

He quickly scanned the room when he stepped inside the apartment. He spotted the two undead immediately. They didn't see him at first, since they had their backs to him. They rummaged through the kitchen cupboards obviously looking for something, or maybe some clue to Blythe's whereabouts. Takan and Kysen had completely emptied the apartment. Once he came within a foot of them, Mehen pulled his sword free from its scabbard. The two undead turned at the sound.

One charged while the other circled around him. Mehen lifted his sword high and prepared to cut the first undead down. A sharp pain slicing across the right side of his ribs brought him suddenly up short. He had a split second to acknowledge the fact that the second undead held a sword very similar to his own before the first one reached him. With a roar he swung his sword out in an arc and sliced the undead across the chest. Not waiting for that one to decompose, Mehen turned to face the one with the weapon.

He ignored the wound that stung along his ribs as he lifted his sword. He had enough time to study this one before the real fight began. The eyes were dead and flat, just the same as all the undead, but where the others could only be described as mindless in their need for souls, this one appeared more in control of himself as he glared at Mehen.

The undead ended the standoff when he charged Mehen. Their swords clashed as Mehen blocked his strike. He parried strike after strike as the undead swung at him trying to find an opening. Mehen felt blood slowly dripping from his wound. With each swing of the sword, the action pulled it open wider. Needing to end this before he started to weaken, Mehen blocked the undead's blade with his own. Using the momentum, he spun around, kicked his leg out and caught the undead in the chest. Before the undead could recover, Mehen launched himself at him and sliced his sword blade across his throat.

The sick smell of decomposed flesh filled the apartment. Sheathing his sword, Mehen pulled his leather jacket away from his wound. The thick leather had saved him from a much deeper wound. To stem the flow of blood, Mehen used his saliva to partially seal it. His saliva healed superficial cuts and bite marks, but it couldn't fully heal a wound such as this. His body healed a lot faster than a mortal's, but Ra's healing light would make the wound as if it had never been.

Careful of his side, Mehen bent down and picked up the undead's sword. It had been forged to resemble his *khopesh*, but there the similarities ended. Instead of being made out of bronze this one had a steel blade. He knew he couldn't leave the sword behind for the landlord to find, so he kicked the empty pile of the undead's clothes until he found the scabbard. With gritted teeth, Mehen pulled off his jacket and slung the now sheathed sword across his back along with his. Mehen then zipped up his jacket over both swords and headed out of the apartment. He needed to get back to the warehouse, but he had to feed before he did that. The loss of blood caused his blood hunger to gnaw painfully at his insides. Gritting his teeth once more against the pain in his side and his stomach, Mehen swung a leg over the seat of his motorcycle. He started the bike and headed for one of the late-night bars.

Unlike the night before, he didn't go inside the bar to search for a donor. He didn't have the patience to make small talk before he lured a woman outside to a dark alley. Choosing a bar that had a long line of mortals who waited to get inside, he walked down the line until he spotted the woman he wanted. He stopped in front of her and

put the suggestion she follow him in her head. As he turned to walk away, Mehen heard her catch up with him.

He wasted no time. Once he had the woman in the shadows of the alley, his fangs came down and he sank them into her neck. While his stomach cramped, he waited for the first gush of warm blood to hit and ease it. Same as the night before, it didn't do a thing to appease his blood hunger. The cramps grew worse. He felt no pleasure from the feeding. The woman's cries while she climaxed in his arms filled his ears, but still he continued to feed until her heart began to stutter. With a groan of frustration, Mehen sealed the bite mark on her neck and let her slowly slip to the ground. He propped her up against the wall as he checked for her pulse. It felt weak but steady. He wiped her mind and left her with the memory that she had too much to drink and had passed out in the alley.

Mehen debated whether or not he should find another donor and see if a back-to-back feeding would take the pain away. In the end, he decided against it. He needed to take care of his wound. Blood usually helped speed up the healing process, but the more he moved the more the wound tore open by small degrees. Mehen tried not to think about how much that disturbed him.

With his stomach cramping as if he'd starved himself, Mehen got back onto his bike and drove to the warehouse. The other warriors appeared to still be out on the hunt, which meant Blythe and he would be alone together. Once through the secured entrance, he headed straight for his personal quarters. He had everything he needed to look after his wound inside his bathroom.

Pushing open the door, Mehen found Blythe sitting on the bed watching television. Before he'd gone out hunting he'd shown her where to find it behind the doors of the one large wall unit. She smiled, but when she saw him grimace with pain when he pulled off his jacket, her smile quickly disappeared to be replaced with a look of concern.

Blythe slipped off the bed and came to where he stood near the walk-in closet. Her gaze dropped to the large slice through his t-shirt. "Mehen, are you okay? What happened?"

He clenched his jaw as he slowly took the two swords off his back. "I had a little run-in with some of the undead." Since his shirt couldn't be saved, Mehen grabbed it at the collar and ripped it down the middle, thinking it would be a lot less painful to pull it off his shoulders than over his head.

Blythe gasped when she got a good look at his wound. She then became all business as she helped to slip his t-shirt off his body. "You have to get this looked at. It looks pretty deep. You may need stitches."

Mehen shook his head. "I'll be fine. I just have to clean it and put a bandage on it."

"I don't think just putting a bandage on it will be good enough. You need to see a doctor, Mehen."

He moved to the bathroom, grabbed a washcloth off a shelf and wet it with warm water. He hissed when he pressed the cloth to his wound. With it held in place with one hand, he moved to the medicine cabinet and pulled out gauze, cotton balls and antiseptic along with a roll of cloth tape.

Blythe had followed him into the bathroom. "Here, let me do that." She pushed his hand away and gently set about cleaning his wound. "Are you sure you won't go see a doctor? This looks pretty deep."

Mehen gritted his teeth, this time not with pain, but from the feel of Blythe's hands touching him. He knew she meant well, but her touch only made him think of more carnal things. "Don't worry, Blythe, it'll be completely healed by tomorrow. I heal a lot faster than a mortal, and what hasn't healed by morning will disappear once I expose it to the sun."

Blythe put the washcloth down on the counter, picked up a cotton ball and the bottle of antiseptic. "The sun actually heals your wounds, huh?" She placed the cotton ball on the top of the antiseptic bottle and tipped it to soak it. "Sorry. This will probably sting like a bugger."

Even though Blythe had given him fair warning, Mehen still flinched when she tended to his wound. Once she finished cleaning it, she covered it with gauze. Mehen held it in place while she taped the edges. Blythe stepped back to admire her handiwork.

"It should hold. I'm not exactly a nurse, but at least the wound is covered."

Mehen watched Blythe gather up the supplies and replace them inside the medicine cabinet. His gaze hungrily followed her every move. She wore a light pink pair of pajama pants with a short matching t-shirt. He could almost see the outline of her nipples through the material of her shirt. His fangs came down as his cock grew hard inside his jeans. He wished more than anything that he could lose himself inside her. Mehen had a feeling that only Blythe could make the hollow ache inside his chest that throbbed every time he looked at her, go away. The more he got to know her the more he wanted to be with her.

He could smell her fresh, clean scent. She still smelled of the shampoo and soap she'd used in the shower earlier. He drew in a deep breath of air, savoring her scent. The animalistic side of him roared at him to take Blythe, to claim her as his. He wanted her so badly his body trembled with the strain it took to hold himself back. He didn't know if he could keep away from her for very long. His cock grew hard to the point of pain as he thought of taking her to his bed. When she turned to face him, Mehen knew he was lost.

With a growl of need, Mehen wrapped his arms around Blythe's waist and took her lips in a searing kiss. He moved his lips over hers lovingly, wanting her to respond. Blythe kissed him back and pushed herself closer. Her arms came up and went around his neck. He groaned at the feel of her breasts pressed against his chest with only the thin material of her shirt between them. Mehen reached up and cupped one warm

globe. He wanted to touch and lick every inch of her body until she whimpered with need.

"I want you so much I burn for you," he said against her lips.

Blythe held him tighter. "I'm not going to stop you, Mehen. I want you just as badly."

Turning them both, Mehen walked Blythe backward into the bedroom. He didn't stop until the back of her legs hit the side of the bed. Gently, he pushed her down onto the mattress. With her lips still locked with his, she moved into the center of the bed and pulled him down on top of her.

He felt himself slowly drowning in the feel and taste of Blythe. She swamped his senses until only she existed. Mehen swept his tongue along the seam of her lips. When she allowed him entry, he did a thorough sweep of the inside of her mouth. He had to have more. The feel of her under him made his senses soar. Lifting his head, he pulled her shirt over her head and bared her breasts to his view. Her nipples had hardened into tight peaks. Mehen slid down her body and swirled his tongue around one tight little bud. Blythe moaned and pushed herself closer, offering him more. He cupped her breast in his hand while he sucked her nipple deep inside his mouth.

"Mmmm, that feels good. Don't stop," Blythe said on a breathy moan.

He suckled at her breast until she started to squirm beneath him. He switched to her other breast while he ran a hand down her side. Hooking the waistband of her pajama pants, he pulled them past her hips. Blythe kicked them the rest of the way off. Now that he had her completely naked, Mehen left her breast and kissed a path down her ribs to her stomach. At her bellybutton, he swirled his tongue inside. He continued his descent leaving a wet trail of kisses as he went. Once he settled between Blythe's thighs, he bent his head to the one place he'd yet to taste.

Using his shoulders to spread her legs even farther apart, Mehen swept his tongue along her slick pussy. She tasted as good as she smelled. Blythe sank her fingers into his hair and held him to her as she rocked her hips against his mouth. She moaned when he pushed one finger, then a second, inside her core. Sucking on her clit, he moved his fingers in and out of her slick channel. Her inner muscles clamped down around them while Blythe rode his fingers.

Blythe arched her back. Her breaths came in shallow pants. "You're going to make me come."

With her orgasm almost upon her, Mehen pulled away. As Blythe whimpered and tried to pull him to her, he quickly undid his jeans and pushed them down just past his hips. His body on fire with need, he rose above her and sheathed his aching cock to the hilt inside her moist heat. They both groaned with pleasure. The feel of her silken inner walls wrapped around his hard shaft had Mehen on the verge of exploding. Once he got control over his body, he slowly began to move.

Blythe moaned. "Just like that. Don't stop."

"I won't," Mehen said through gritted teeth, fighting the need to ram into her until he came. "But I doubt I'll be able to make this last too long."

She felt so good. As he sank into her again and again, Mehen knew he wouldn't be able to hold back much longer. Pumping his hips between her legs, he felt Blythe clutch at his back as her hips rose off the bed to meet each stroke. Her inner muscles clamped around his shaft, holding him tight. They fit together perfectly.

Mehen wanted Blythe to reach her orgasm first before he reached his own. He angled his thrusts higher so he rubbed her clit while he surged in and out of her body. Blythe's hands drifted down his back until she dug her nails into his ass. Increasing his pace, he pushed her ever closer to her release. Blythe moaned when her climax overtook her. With her inner walls clutching at his shaft, Mehen slammed into her as his cock pulsed deep inside her body.

With his lust now satisfied, Mehen's blood hunger came to the fore. His fangs came down with a vengeance. Blythe had pressed her head back into the pillow while she climaxed, which bared her neck to his hungry gaze. He could hear her heart pounding and her blood surging through her veins. His gaze fixated on the large vein that throbbed in Blythe's neck. He slipped one of his hands through her hair and wrenched her neck farther to the side to give him better access. Mehen growled low in his throat as he prepared to sink his fangs into her flesh, unable to control himself.

"Mehen? Mehen, stop. I don't mind if you want to feed from me, but not in this way. You're hurting me."

Hearing the uncertainty in Blythe's voice, Mehen quickly pulled out of her body and jumped off the bed. He panted while he fought back the almost overwhelming need to take her blood. With quick movements, he yanked his pants back up and zipped them closed. He should never have touched Blythe. His lust and blood hunger were too closely tied together. He knew if he drank from her he wouldn't be able to stop in time. While around her, his blood hunger seemed to only get worse. Now that he'd slept with her, he craved her blood even more.

Looking over at Blythe, he found her staring at him with the bed sheets pulled up to her chin. She regarded him with a small amount of fear lurking in her eyes. Disgusted with what he had almost done, Mehen turned and left the room.

Chapter Six

A short while later, Set found Mehen in the meeting room. He lay stretched out on the large table, but sat up when Set called his name.

"You look like shit, Mehen," Set said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Thanks. Tell me something I don't already know." Mehen sighed. "I have a big problem, Set."

"With what?"

"It has a lot to do with Blythe."

Set shook his head. "I told you, fuck her and she'll be out of your system."

Mehen ran a hand through his hair. "That's only one part of my problem. I slept with her, and if anything, it has made it worse."

"You're losing me here. If you slept with her already, then what exactly is the problem?"

"I think something is wrong with me."

"How so?" Set gave him a quizzical look.

"Just lately I hunger for a greater amount of blood than what I have needed in the past."

"I'm sure an extra feeding a week isn't that much of a difference."

Mehen gave a half chuckle. "I wish it was only that. I've already fed three times this week and my blood hunger hasn't been satisfied. The last two times I fed, I almost drained the women dry. The worst part of it all is I get no enjoyment from the feeding. I feel absolutely nothing, and afterward it feels as if I never fed at all. My stomach cramps as if I'm starving. And when I'm around Blythe my blood hunger goes through the roof."

"Have you tried feeding off Blythe?"

"Hell, no. That's why I'm here instead of still in bed with her. If I'd stayed I would have taken everything she had."

Set gave him a long look before he said, "That would have fixed the problem of Blythe knowing about us." When Mehen hissed at him, Set held up his hand. "Relax. Look at yourself. I've never seen you react this way toward a woman before. You're ready to rip my throat out. You have feelings for Blythe, don't you, Mehen?"

"I guess. I don't know. All I know is that when I think of any of you around her, touching her, wanting to do anything to harm her, I feel like going berserk. Inside my head, I scream that she's mine and only mine. But I will give you fair warning, Set, if you so much as lay a hand on her again I won't be responsible for my actions."

Set smiled and nodded. "Fair enough. Did you tell Ra any of this when you spoke to him about Blythe?"

Mehen scrubbed his face with his hand. "That is something else that has me bothered. I didn't speak to Ra. He didn't answer when I called out to him. So I haven't got a clue as to what he wants done with Blythe."

"He must have some reason for why he didn't answer. What do you want to do about Blythe until Ra makes a decision about her?"

"She has to stay here."

"Is that wise? Considering all you just told me?" Mehen slipped off the table to stand in front of Set. "What happened to you?" Set pointed to the bandage along Mehen's ribs.

"I got that at Blythe's old apartment. I decided to swing by to have a look around. I found two undead rifling through the empty apartment. One of them fought with a sword. He got in a lucky swipe while I took down the other one."

Set's face grew hard. "Something's up, Mehen. First we don't see any undead for weeks, then tonight we each have our hands full. Now one of them fights back with a sword."

"I know. And the undead with the sword had more command of his faculties than the other one. It's almost as if he were a new breed of undead."

"I hope the hell not. That will make our job harder."

"Tell me about it. All I know is for some reason the undead are after Blythe. Given her past history, I can't see why, but they seem determined to get her."

Set nodded. "We also can't take the chance that if she did get captured she'd tell them where to find our headquarters."

"As long as Blythe stays here we don't have to worry about that. Besides, she has no idea where the warehouse is located. I made her sleep before I brought her in. The idea of the undead hunting her bothers me more." It actually made him downright jumpy. Stepping around Set, Mehen headed for the door. "I'm going to the temple to wait for the sunrise. Hopefully Ra will answer this time. Tell the others about the two undead I encountered. The other thing I told you, I want it kept just between you and me. They don't need to know about it right now."

"When was the last time you slept, Mehen?"

"I'm good. You'll know where I'll be if you need me." Without a look back, Mehen left the room.

* * * * *

Sek kicked the two piles of clothing across the floor with disgust. He hated failure. Twice now his quarry had somehow managed to slip through his fingers. First one of Ra's Chosen rode in to save the day and now this. It had to have been one of those warriors responsible for yet another loss of his undead.

When the two he'd sent to the woman's apartment didn't return from what should have been a quick in and out job, Sek decided to come and see for himself what held them up. To find the apartment cleared out and his undead no more made him snarl with rage. The loss of one of his new soldiers hurt the most. They weren't as simple to create as a normal undead.

The human soul had five parts. The Ib or heart, the Sheut or shadow, the Ren or name, the Ba or individual personality, and the Ka or life force. For him to make an undead all the parts of the soul had to be drawn out of the body, except for the Ka. Once the Ka left the body there would be no reviving it. The Ka kept the undead's body animated. With the Ba gone, the part of the soul that made a human unique, the undead became nothing but a mindless husk, which Sek found useful. To make one of his undead soldiers, the Ka as well as a very small part of the human's Ba had to remain. Just enough Ba remained to give them the ability to think for themselves on a small level and to be trained to fight. It had taken Sek painstaking months to create and train his small army of soldiers. He couldn't afford to lose even one.

Even though he disliked having to tell Apep of this latest failure to acquire the woman, Sek knew if Apep learned of it on his own he'd make Sek pay a hefty price for keeping secrets. Inside his head, Sek called out Apep's name.

Why have you called, demon?

Sek gritted his teeth against the grating sound of Apep's voice as it filled his head. The demon god's voice grated against the nerves like fingernails scraping down a chalkboard. "The woman has eluded me again, my lord." Sek then gasped for breath when an invisible hand crushed his windpipe.

Your failures displease me greatly, Sek, Apep roared, causing blood to leak from Sek's ears. I want that woman.

"I'm sorry, my lord. But I know who the woman is with." Sek fell to the floor as the hand released his throat.

Who?

"She has to be with Ra's Chosen." Apep's roar of fury at hearing the name of his enemy's warriors made Sek clutch his head in pain.

She must not be allowed to remain with those warriors. You must lure her away from them at all costs.

"It shall be done, my lord."

After Apep's presence receded, Sek painfully stood back up on his feet. He knew he wouldn't be able to find the headquarters of Ra's Chosen. He'd searched for it for the last thirty years with no success. He had a feeling Ra shielded the place so he couldn't find it. Somehow he would have to get the woman to come to him. Failure wasn't an option.

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Blythe spent the remainder of the night tossing and turning. Thoughts of Mehen and what they had done bounced around inside her head. She couldn't turn her brain off long enough to go into a deep sleep. She also woke up what seemed like every few minutes to see if Mehen had returned. And each time she found the place next to her on the bed empty she felt herself grow more disappointed.

She really didn't understand what had come over Mehen while they had made love. One minute he'd held her gently, giving her the most intense orgasm of her life, then the next he had been more than a little rough with her. Blythe could admit that he'd scared her when he'd wrenched her head to the side and just about tore into her throat. Luckily for her, Mehen had managed to snap out of it at the last minute. His behavior should have had her running screaming from the room, instead of having her longing for his return, but he was getting to her. She wanted to be with him, burrow under his skin and not come out.

Around eight in the morning, Blythe gave up trying to sleep. With her head pounding from lack of sleep, she decided to take a shower in the hopes that it would help make her less lethargic. It helped a small amount, but she decided a cup of coffee was the order of the day. She brushed her teeth and dressed in the yoga pants and long-sleeved knit top she'd picked out the night before. Her dresser, along with the rest of her belongings, had been stored in the old warehouse section. Not wanting to be seen wandering around in her pajamas in front of the other warriors, Blythe had thought it best to bring the clothes back to Mehen's room when she'd gone to get something to sleep in.

Blythe left the room and headed for the kitchen. She didn't know if anyone else moved around yet. It had been very late when Mehen had returned and she had a feeling the other warriors had stayed out even later.

Much to Blythe's surprise, one of the warriors was already there. Kysen stood before the stove cooking some eggs while hard-rock music blared out of the boom box that sat on one of the countertops. When he started to sing off-key into an invisible microphone, she bit back a laugh. Kysen must have sensed her presence, because he spun around to face her, still singing. Once the song ended, he went to the boom box and turned the volume down. He didn't seem to be embarrassed that she'd caught him singing along with the music.

Kysen gave her a wink before he asked, "What do you think of my singing voice? Do you think I'd make it as a rock star?"

Blythe couldn't tell if Kysen meant to be serious or not. "Hmm...well..."

"I'm kidding," he said with a laugh. "I know I can't sing worth a shit, but that doesn't stop me from doing it. For one thing, it drives the others nuts."

"And that's a good thing?"

"Most definitely. I have to have some fun out of life. My fellow warriors tend to be too serious at times. I make sure they lighten up once in a while, though sometimes my efforts get taken the wrong way."

Blythe chuckled. "I bet. How come you're up so early? I would have thought all of you would still be in bed."

Kysen poured her a cup of coffee and handed it to her. "There's milk in the fridge if you want it." He then turned back to the stove. "We don't need as much sleep as a mortal does. Plus today is my turn to cook."

After she put some milk in her coffee, Blythe moved to stand next to Kysen and leaned back against the counter while she watched him work. "You all take turns cooking?"

"Yeah. It's not something most of us enjoy, but it's better than starving. I think Takan is the only one who doesn't mind, and he's the best cook out of us all."

An idea started to form in Blythe's head. "Kysen, what would you and the others think if I took on the job of cooking for you all while I'm here? Cooking is one thing I enjoy doing, and I've had a few recipes that I've wanted to try but I didn't feel like cooking them just for me. I collect recipe books as well."

Kysen flashed her a large smile. "I kind of noticed that when I found that huge box of them in your apartment. Are you sure you're up to the challenge? The six of us can cram a lot of food into our stomachs."

"I'd love it. Really. I don't like sitting around all day with nothing to do. I had more than enough of that while married. We had a cook and a maid, so I pretty much led a boring life. I promised myself I wouldn't get into a situation such as that again. It just about drove me nuts."

"I'm sure the others would appreciate your cooking a lot more than mine. I can't see any of them objecting to it. Just don't say I didn't warn you if you end up most of the time holed up in the kitchen."

Blythe smiled. "I'd be in heaven."

Kysen stuck out his hand. He gave her hand a shake after she placed hers inside his much larger one. "We have a deal. I'll finish the breakfast then the kitchen is all yours."

Blythe let her smile fade away when she heard a loud warning hiss. She looked over to the entrance to the kitchen as Kysen quickly let her hand drop. Mehen stood framed in the doorway and glared at the other warrior. It didn't take much to figure out Mehen hadn't been impressed to see her shake hands with Kysen.

Wanting to smooth things over, Blythe took the plate of eggs Kysen handed her and placed it on the table. She then went to Mehen and looped her arm through his. She thought to distract him with the food. Before she could take a step, Mehen gently but pointedly pulled his arm out of her grasp. Blythe didn't want to admit it, but his rejection hurt. After what they had shared the night before she thought they were much closer, but given his reaction to her touch, it looked as if only she felt that way.

She picked up her coffee cup from the counter where she'd left it and went to sit at the table across from Mehen. He refused to meet her eyes when he started to eat.

Kysen took the chair next to Mehen and placed a plate of food for himself on the table. He gave Mehen a stare. "Please don't piss Blythe off, *sen*. She just decided she'd take over the big job of cooking for us. I, for one, don't want her to back out now."

"*Sen*? Is that Mehen's nickname?" Blythe asked.

"No," Mehen answered. "*Sen* is the Egyptian word for brother."

Blythe sucked in a breath at the longing that showed on Mehen's face for a split second when he looked at her. It quickly fell away to be replaced with a blank stare that showed no emotion. She swallowed before she spoke once more. "I see. I guess I'll pick up some of your language while I stay here. I've also always wanted to learn how to read hieroglyphs."

"Then you should go talk to Takan," Kysen said around a mouthful of food. "He's the scholar around here. He's also the one who painted all the hieroglyphs on the walls. I'm sure he'd love to teach you."

Blythe quietly sighed as Mehen pulled his gaze off her and focused on his plate. He shoveled the rest of his food into his mouth then got up from the table. Without looking at her, he headed out of the kitchen. Blythe stood and followed him.

Out in the hallway she called, "Mehen! Wait."

He spun around and held out his hand before she could come closer. "No, Blythe. Just stay away from me."

"What?"

"I need you to give me some space right now."

"Some space? I thought after last night —"

"It's because of last night I need to put some distance between us."

Blythe felt as if Mehen had slapped her. Her face fell as she stared at him. Then she started to get angry. "Let me get this straight. Because I slept with you last night you now don't want anything to do with me, is that right?"

"I just can't be with you right now, Blythe," Mehen said calmly before he started to walk away again, but Blythe stopped him.

"Oh, I see now. You got laid so now you're finished with me. Nice. I guess I really *do* have bad taste in men. It looks as if I'm only attracted to assholes. Well, I hope you enjoyed last night because that will be the last time I ever sleep with you."

Blythe turned her back on Mehen and headed back to the kitchen. How could she have been so stupid? At least she had learned her lesson this time. If another exceptionally good-looking man ever showed any interest in her again, she'd make damn sure she told him to screw off. Obviously they were interested in her for one thing only, and once they got it, she meant next to nothing to them. She'd be damned if she let another man hurt her again.

* * * * *

Mehen returned to his quarters and took a shower. He felt like shit. He hadn't meant to piss Blythe off. After he shaved, he walked into his room to find Set leaning against the wall near the door. He raised a brow at his friend. "I hope you aren't standing there with the hopes of catching me in the buff."

Set stood up straight and scoffed, "Please. I'd like to keep the food I just ate in my stomach. Your ugly naked body is not something I want to see."

"Then what's on your mind?" Mehen stepped into his walk-in closet to dress.

"Can I ask what you did to Blythe?"

He came out of the closet as he zipped up his jeans and tried to give Set a look of indifference. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, she seemed a trifle upset when I went to get something to eat earlier. Kind of hard not to notice what with all the cupboard slamming that went along with the curse words. You must have done something really bad, my friend. She called you a few choice words. Asshole and dumbass seemed to be her favorite since she used those more than the others. When she started talking about stringing you up by your balls, I thought it best to leave her alone before she decided to practice it on me before she could get to you."

Mehen cringed inside. He knew he had pissed Blythe off when he'd told her to give him some space, but he hadn't thought she would be quite that angry with him. "Shit. I think I screwed up. I didn't mean to piss her off, but I at least thought she'd cool down after a while."

"Well you thought wrong. What did you say to her?"

"It doesn't matter. I'll fix it."

"I beg to differ. It matters a lot. The woman can cook." Set said it as if that alone was something monumental. "During her tirade, she barked at both Kysen and me to sit down, then she took over the kitchen. Blythe made the best omelet I have ever tasted. Whatever you do, Mehen, do not, I repeat, do not piss her off to the point where she won't cook for us."

"I thought you said Blythe was a problem we had to fix. That you'd carry out Ra's order to silence her permanently if I wouldn't do it."

Set shrugged. "I said that before I had her food. When she isn't scared, Blythe is one tough woman. You should have seen Kysen hopping to it when she told him all the things she needed for tonight's dinner that she wanted him to get at the grocery store. The way she waved a paring knife in front of his face when she told him, I wouldn't have told her no either." A look of pure pleasure washed across Set's face. "She's going to make a huge roast beef dinner, by the way."

Mehen could almost see Set's mouth watering. He bit back a smile. "I'll go to her later and try to set things straight. I felt a bit strained when I spoke to her and I think she took what I said the wrong way."

Set snorted. "I'd have to agree with that. Out of all the grumbling and swearing she did, Blythe did say you were a pig because now that you slept with her you didn't want anything to do with her anymore."

"I only said I needed some space now that we'd slept together. It took almost all I had not to drag her to the floor in front of Kysen. All I can think about is having her again while I sink my fangs into her neck."

"I can tell." Set made a show of glancing down at the crotch of Mehen's jeans before he looked back up at his face.

Mehen scowled at Set even as his hand moved to adjust the front of his pants to accommodate his erection. He seemed to be in a perpetual state of arousal whenever he found himself around Blythe. Even thinking about her made that part of his body stand at attention. He yearned to be with her every second of every day. If he didn't know better, he would think he was starting to fall in love with her. Not that he had ever been in love before.

The door slammed open and Blythe came into the room. If looks could kill, Mehen figured he would have been a dead man. Blythe glared daggers at him. She crossed her arms across her chest daring him to say something. When he didn't, she turned her attention to Set.

"You can tell the person next to you that I'm not speaking to right now, I'll be with Takan. He said he'd teach me how to read hieroglyphs. So someone doesn't take a hissy fit, we'll be in the meeting room, not his personal quarters. Not that I really care if he gets upset since I don't belong to him. Takan thought I'd better tell the big jerk anyway." With that said she stomped out of the room.

Set laughed until he had to hold his sides. "You are so in the doghouse, my friend. Good luck trying to smooth over Blythe's ruffled feathers. I think you're going to need it. At least she toned down the name calling."

Mehen let out a long breath after Set left him alone. If he was a smart man, he'd let Blythe stay angry at him. That way she'd keep her distance. It would keep her safe, but Mehen knew he couldn't allow things to stay the way they now stood. He couldn't hurt her that way. Her ex-husband had done enough to hurt her already. Blythe didn't need him to add any more to it. He'd let her cool down a bit before he talked to her. At least she would be busy learning how to read hieroglyphs from Takan and not thinking of ways to do him bodily harm.

* * * * *

"So you hand painted all the hieroglyphs on the walls, Takan?" Blythe still couldn't believe he had done it all by himself. It had to have taken years for him to complete them all. The only room in the headquarters that didn't have hieroglyphs was the kitchen.

"Yes. Painting relaxes me, so I didn't find it a chore. Do you paint as well?"

"No," Blythe said with a chuckle. "My artistic ability only goes as far as finger painting. Painting walls with a roller and a brush is about all I can manage. I wish I could paint as well as you."

Blythe looked over at Takan who sat next to her at the large table in the meeting room. As usual, the front of his hair hung down in his face, obscuring it partially from view. From what she could see of his face, she knew Takan had no real reason to hide it. He was by no means ugly. None of Ra's Chosen warriors could in any way be called ugly. They were all very tall and muscular and she bet none of them had any problem attracting women. Blythe could only think that Takan's shyness had him trying to hide behind all that hair.

Takan gave her a half smile. "I'm sure you can't be that bad."

"Oh, yes, I am. I can draw stick people and that's about it."

"Well, lucky for you, you don't need to know how to draw to learn how to read hieroglyphs. What did Mehen say when you told him about my teaching you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" Takan gave her a doubtful look. "Did you tell him we would be alone together?"

"Yes, I did. Can we drop the whole subject of Mehen before I get pissed off again? I don't want to talk about him, and as far as I'm concerned, he can drop dead."

"That isn't likely to happen given that he's immortal," Takan said with a laugh. "Unless you decide to remove his head from his shoulders."

Blythe could still hear the amusement in Takan's voice. "Whatever."

"Try not to be so angry with him, Blythe. Mehen is going through a few things right now. Once he gets over them he'll realize he can't live without you."

Blythe doubted that. "Did you see that in one of your visions?" At Takan's nod, she rolled her eyes. "Please. I don't mean to offend you or anything, but I think this time your vision is wrong. Mehen made it abundantly clear that he wanted me to, and I quote, give him some space. I went through enough crap with my ex, I don't need to go through that again with Mehen. Now are you going to teach me how to read hieroglyphs or aren't you?"

Takan held up his hands in mock surrender. Another smile tugged at his lips. "Okay, okay. I'll let it drop." He then opened the large leather bound book he'd brought with him into the meeting room and moved it so it sat between them.

Blythe looked at the page closest to her. It had been completely filled with Egyptian hieroglyphs, all done in a very neat hand. Without being told, she knew Takan had been the one who had written it. The glyphs on the page matched the style of the glyphs that had been painted on the walls. "What does it say?"

"That will be for you to find out once you've learned how to read it."

Seeing how many glyphs filled each page, Blythe started to doubt her ability to learn it at all. "I don't know, Takan. I think maybe I've bitten off more than I can chew here. There's also the fact that I don't know how to speak your language."

"Don't let yourself get overwhelmed, Blythe. I can teach you both at the same time."

"You do realize it could take me years. Languages aren't exactly my forte. I took a French course in school once and barely squeaked by with a passing grade."

Takan's smile dropped as he gave her a serious look. "I would find it no hardship, even if it took you centuries to learn." Blythe found that comment surprising. "Now let's begin. Hieroglyphs can be read more than one way. Instead of just being read from left to right, they can be read right to left as well, or from top to bottom or bottom to top when written in columns."

He'd already lost her. "Okay. How can you tell which way you're supposed to be reading them then?"

"That's simple." Takan pointed to the page in front of her. "Can you see the way the people and animals are facing?"

Blythe nodded. "Yes. They're all facing to the left."

"Correct. That means these glyphs should be read from left to right."

"I get it. So if they faced right, we'd read them from right to left."

"Exactly."

She let her gaze skim the first row of glyphs. "What if there is one on top of another? Which one do you read first?"

"In that case, you always read the one on top before the bottom."

"Okay, I got that easy enough. Let's hope the rest goes as smoothly."

Takan gave her hand a squeeze then quickly released it as if he just realized what he'd done. "You'll do fine, *ket senet*."

Before Blythe could ask Takan what he'd called her, he continued on with the lesson. She decided to wait until after the lesson finished and ask him then. She focused her undivided attention onto what Takan was teaching her.

* * * * *

Blythe blew the hair that fell into her eyes out of the way while she busily mashed the potatoes she'd just finished boiling. Steam rose from them. It made her face feel hot, not that she minded. She'd been working in the kitchen for the last few hours and enjoyed every minute of it. She'd always loved to cook, but she enjoyed it more now that she had more than herself to cook for. Blythe just hoped she'd made enough food for the warriors. Given the size of them, she'd made triple the amount of food she thought would have fed a family of four.

At the sound of someone taking a deep breath, Blythe turned away from the stove to find Akori in the kitchen. He stood with his eyes closed while he sniffed the air. Since she'd already had similar visits from Set, Denger and Kysen, she left the potato masher in the pot and moved to block Akori from getting any closer to the stove. "Don't even try."

Akori's eyes snapped open and he gave her a sexy grin. "Try what? I just had to come and see if you needed any help. Dinner smells delicious by the way. I can even smell it all the way in my personal quarters."

"No, I don't need any help. Thanks for asking. And you can wait like everyone else. I know you only came here to see if you could sneak a bite. Not going to happen."

"Not even a little?" Akori tried to step around her, but she moved to block his way.

"No. I've already had three of you try the same thing, offering to help only so you can get closer to the food. I didn't let any of them get near it so neither will you."

Akori took a step closer. "If you gave me just a little taste, I could make it very worth your while." His gaze fell to her mouth suggestively.

Blythe would admit that Akori had to be the best looking out of all the warriors, even better looking than Mehen, but he did nothing for her. Only Mehen made her blood sing and her body turn to mush whenever he looked at her. Not that she thought Akori would make an actual pass at her. She knew his type. He loved women, all women, and flirted with every female he came in contact with.

With a hand on his chest, Blythe pushed Akori away. "No deal. Now out. If you keep distracting me like this I'll never have dinner finished. So if you want to eat any time soon I suggest you go find something else to do until it's time to eat."

Akori started to back away. "I'm going. I don't want dinner to be late. My stomach is already growling and is liable to start eating itself pretty soon."

Blythe shook her head with a smile and watched him walk away. As she turned back to the stove to finish mashing the potatoes, she couldn't help but think how well she'd settled in with the warriors. Even though it had only been a couple of days, her old life seemed more and more like a vague memory. A bad memory at that. And if she were honest with herself, she knew she didn't ever want to go back to it. Except for Mehen acting like a jerk, she felt more at home with the warriors than with anyone else, something she hadn't felt for a very long time. Not since she'd lived with her grandparents had she felt as if she belonged. Nothing waited for her in the outside world. She realized now that Takan had done her a favor by sending in her resignation and moving her out of her apartment. She always hated that she lived alone. Here, she didn't have to be alone ever again. If the warriors allowed her to stay it would solve the problem of her not being able to be wiped. She only wished things could have worked out with her and Mehen. If he'd only given her half a chance, Blythe knew she would have fallen for him, and hard.

As if her thoughts had conjured him, she heard Mehen call her name. Not wanting him to see that she still felt hurt, Blythe didn't turn around to face him. "What do you want, Mehen? I'm busy."

"I...I've come to apologize for what I said this morning. I didn't say those things to hurt you."

"But you did anyway."

"Look, I don't want to leave things like this. Will you wait up until I've come back from hunting tonight and talk to me?"

Blythe gave a short nod of her head. "Fine. I want to discuss something with you anyway."

When she didn't turn around, Mehen sighed. "Until tonight then."

Once Mehen left, Blythe let out the breath she hadn't realized she held and focused her attention back to the job of cooking. When everything was finished, she set the large kitchen table for seven. She placed a piled-high platter of roast beef in the center of the table along with a large bowl of mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables and gravy. To her, it looked as if she had enough food to feed an army.

With everything ready, Blythe went to the doorway thinking she'd have to go and tell the men they could come and eat. Much to her surprise, she found them all outside in the hallway. Even Mehen stood talking with Set. He broke off the conversation when he saw her in the kitchen doorway. The other warriors seemed to sense her presence at the same time when they all turned to look at her. She nodded at their expectant looks then had to quickly move out of the way as five very large males rushed for the kitchen.

Mehen followed them at a more sedate pace. As he walked by, his gaze swept her body. Longing and desire flashed across his face. Gritting her teeth against the intense wave of arousal that surged through her body from that one look, Blythe stood her ground. She needed to get a hold of herself. She would not just fall into Mehen's arms because he could bring her to full, aching arousal without even touching her, not after what he'd said to her earlier.

She waited for Mehen to take a seat at the opposite end of the table before she too went and sat down. Her butt had just touched the chair when the men started to load up their plates. Seeing how much each man took, Blythe wondered if there would be anything left for her once the food got around the table. But that didn't end up being the case. Takan, who sat next to her, filled her plate along with his before he passed the food to Denger. Blythe eyed the mound of food he'd given her, knowing she would in no way be able to eat it all. She didn't want to make him feel bad, so she picked up her fork and knife and started to eat after she thanked him.

It remained relatively quiet as the men concentrated on seeing how much food they could get down. In between bites, Blythe snuck looks at them as they ate. She had to bite the inside of her cheek to stop from laughing at some of the expressions they wore. They ranged from contentment to sheer bliss. When she shifted her gaze over to Mehen, she noticed he only picked at his food. And what he did eat seemed to bother his

stomach. He'd swallow then rub his stomach afterward. His face also seemed to be a bit on the pale side. Blythe assumed since they were immortal that none of the men could get sick, but from the look of Mehen, she started to wonder. She'd swear he showed signs of getting the flu.

Feeling a little concerned, Blythe spoke up. "Ah, Mehen, are you okay? You don't look so hot."

Mehen pulled himself up straighter in his chair when all eyes turned in his direction. "I'm fine. The food is delicious, Blythe. It's the best meal I've had in a very long time." That statement made the others quickly agree with him.

Blythe didn't miss the questioning look Set sent Mehen, or Mehen's nod in answer. Seeing that small exchange, Blythe would bet any amount of money Set knew what troubled Mehen. When both of them returned their attention to their plates, she decided to let it go this time. Whatever bothered Mehen, he obviously didn't want to talk about it.

The rest of the meal went by quickly. Blythe couldn't get over how much food the men ate, all except for Mehen, who continued to only pick at his. After all the hours it had taken her to cook the meal, they devoured it in a matter of minutes. Only what she left untouched on her plate remained. Even that wouldn't last long it would seem. As Denger and Akori left to get ready to go hunting, she could hear them arguing about which one of them would finish her leftovers. Takan and Kysen left shortly after they did.

Blythe got up from the table and started to clear it. Only Mehen and Set remained seated talking in low tones. When she reached for their plates, both men fell silent. Set stood, and much to her utter shock, kissed her cheek before he left. Blythe could only stand there with her mouth hanging open. If she'd known all it would take to win Set over would be a good meal, she'd have cooked something for him before he'd thrown her in that small storage room.

"I think you've made a new best friend."

Turning to look at Mehen, she could tell from the slight scowl he wore he hadn't been exactly happy to see Set kiss her, even though the kiss had only been a friendly gesture. "I guess that means Set won't lock me away in any small, dark rooms anymore."

Mehen's lip curled up in a snarl. "No he won't if he wants to keep all his body parts attached." He then quickly seemed to pull himself back together. "I must go. I'll see you later tonight." Before Mehen left, he lifted his hand as if to touch her, but at the last minute he pulled it away. With his hands fisted at his sides, he left her alone.

* * * * *

Before Mehen could get onto his bike on his way out for the night, Set held him up. The others had already left, which Mehen was thankful for because he didn't want any of them to overhear what Set would say.

Set stood in front of him and eyed him closely. "Blythe's right. You do look like shit."

"I don't think those were her exact words."

"Maybe not, but that's what she meant. You need to feed again."

Mehen put on his helmet, but kept the visor up. "I don't know if that is such a good idea, Set. It seems as if feeding only makes it worse."

"You need blood, Mehen. Your body has started to eat itself to get what it needs. You can't even manage to get food into your stomach."

"If only Ra would answer me I'd know what to do to make this go away."

"You're not going to like this, but I think the answer to your problem is staring you in the face."

"What do you mean?"

"Blythe. You said so yourself that all you can think about is feeding from her neck. I think your craving for her, and your possessiveness, are tied together. At least give it a try."

Mehen swung his leg over the back of his bike and took hold of the handlebars. "And if I kill her in the process? What then? That isn't a risk I'm willing to take."

"I don't think you'll let it go that far. You have more control than that." Set held his hand up before Mehen could say anything to interrupt. "I know the last two women you fed from were close calls, but I think it went that far because their blood didn't satisfy you."

"And you think Blythe's blood will?"

"It's worth a try. You're fucking starving, Mehen. You can't continue like this."

Mehen turned the key and started the bike. Over the roar of the motorcycle's engine, he said, "I'll think about it."

"Do that."

Flipping the visor on his helmet closed, Mehen backed his bike up and drove out the docking bay door. As he headed for downtown Phoenix, he couldn't get what Set had said out of his head. Just the thought of tasting Blythe's blood caused his stomach to cramp painfully. Mehen wanted to have Blythe naked beneath him with her blood filling his mouth, but he didn't think he could trust himself to stop before it ended up being too late.

Mehen parked his bike in the parking lot of a bar and headed out to the street. As he walked down the sidewalk, he kept his eyes and his senses open for any of the undead. He didn't have long to wait before he felt the familiar prickling of his skin. He looked left to right and spotted the entrance to a side alley on his right hand side—the perfect place for an undead to take its victim.

He soundlessly stepped into the alley. With his sensitive hearing, Mehen heard the juicy sucking sound of an undead while it fed. He cursed to himself. There would be no saving the victim. He knew one bite from the undead ended up being enough to start

the change in a mortal. That single bite was all it took to transfer the person's soul into the body of the undead. The blood the undead drank replaced the dead blood that ran through their veins. It also stopped their bodies from decaying. Mehen had once seen an undead who hadn't fed for a long period of time. With its flesh turned black in spots and with some missing in places so white bone showed, it hadn't been a pretty sight. The sickly sweet smell of rotted flesh that had permeated the air around it made it that much worse.

When he spotted the undead not too far inside the alley, deep in the shadows, Mehen slowly pulled his sword free of its scabbard. The undead had his back to him while he noisily fed from the man in his arms. Just before Mehen reached him, the undead lifted his head and hissed at the warrior. Blood dripped off his large fangs. He released his victim and lunged for Mehen.

Mehen kicked the undead away and swung his sword before him, herding him deeper inside the alley. They stood too close to the entrance of the alley for Mehen's liking. All he needed would be an unsuspecting mortal to stumble upon them when he took out the undead.

Once he figured they had gone far enough, Mehen slashed the undead across the chest when he went on the attack. The instant the bronze blade sank into skin, the undead let out a howl as his body started to decompose. Before the undead had completely disintegrated, Mehen felt something hit him from behind hard enough to bring him to his knees. He hissed in pain as a set of fangs sank into the flesh at the back of his neck.

With a growl of rage, Mehen reached behind him and hauled the newly made undead off his back. He'd forgotten how fast the change took place once a mortal had been bitten. Grappling the man to the ground, he slashed his sword across the undead's neck. Since this one had only just been turned, his body took longer to decompose than the one who'd made him.

Back on his feet, Mehen reached under his hair and placed his hand on the back of his neck where he had been bitten. He scowled when his hand came away bloody. Unlike mortals, Ra's Chosen were unaffected by an undead's bite. Their souls could not be taken and they could not be turned. But that didn't mean a bite from an undead hurt any less.

Using the empty pile of clothes at his feet, Mehen wiped the blade of his sword clean from the newly turned and sheathed it in the scabbard on his back. He hoped his getting bitten wouldn't be a sign of how the rest of his night would pan out. Being used as a pincushion by an undead was not his idea of fun.

Chapter Seven

An hour before the bars shut down for the night, Takan went to meet with Kysen, Denger and Akori at one of the bars they frequented when they wanted to unwind after a night of hunting. Or if they needed to feed. The Oasis, a hot spot for singles who wanted to hook up, made it an ideal place for the warriors to find women.

Takan made his way to the back of the room to one of the secluded tables where he knew the others would be sitting and took a seat next to Kysen. It didn't take long for a waitress to come over take his order. Once she brought him his beer, he took a swig from the bottle then said to the others, "A quiet night compared to last night."

"You can say that again," Denger said with disgust. "I'd looked forward to kicking some undead ass too. I only found one, and he was hardly worth the effort."

"Maybe you'll get more action here, Denger." Akori motioned to the mortals inside the bar at large.

Denger snorted. "Not with you around, I won't."

"It's not my fault women love my face as well as other parts of me. It's my cross to bear."

"You can give me that cross any time you want rid of it," Kysen said with a chuckle.

Takan broke into the conversation before the good-natured ribbing could go any further. "What do all of you think of Blythe?"

Kysen patted his stomach. "Frankly, I love the woman. My stomach hasn't been this well fed in centuries."

"I totally agree with that," Akori interjected.

Denger nodded. "I second that. No offense, Takan, but Blythe can cook you under the table any day."

Takan smiled. "None taken. How would you feel if she stayed with us on a permanent basis?"

"I think she'd fit right in," Kysen said as Akori nodded his head in agreement.

Takan turned to Denger. The warrior hadn't been so quick to chime in this time. "Denger?"

"I'll admit having her cook for us would make life easier, and we'd be much better fed, but I don't like the effect she has on Mehen. Since he brought her to the headquarters he hasn't been himself. There's something up with him, and it isn't good."

"Mehen won't always act that way. Once he comes to realize Blythe is meant to be his, he'll settle down." Takan took a sip of beer as the others stared at him. He'd seen that along with a few other things when he had his vision when Blythe had first arrived.

Kysen shook his head. "You know, Takan, you really creep me out when you do your whole I-know-what-is-going-to-happen-in-the-future act. How do you stand knowing things before they happen? It would drive me crazy."

Takan shrugged. "I'm used to it, and I don't see everything that will happen. Only bits and pieces of it."

"That would really drive me insane. All I have to say is if Blythe does stay we won't have to worry about her knowing about us. It will be nice to have a woman around. It will give the place that softer touch."

"And what of you, Takan?" Denger asked him. "I noticed you got all buddy-buddy with Blythe today, teaching her how to read hieroglyphs and all that. Are you hoping to take her from Mehen? Personally, I'd like to see her gone before she starts fights among us. We can't afford to have a woman come between any of us."

"I like Blythe, but not in that way. I enjoy her company."

Denger gave him a pointed look. "Make sure it stays that way, for all our sakes."

Takan took a long swig from his beer. If Denger had seen what he'd seen in his vision, the other warrior would know there was no possibility of him being sexually attracted to Blythe. She was Mehen's and that would never change.

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Blythe lost the battle to stay awake just before three in the morning. The two nights of back-to-back sleeplessness where she'd tossed and turned more than she actually slept took its toll. When she could no longer keep her eyes open, she turned the television off but kept the lights on as she stretched out on top of the bed. In a matter of seconds she fell asleep.

It didn't seem as if very much time had gone by before she heard Mehen softly call her name. With a big yawn, Blythe sat up in bed. "What time is it?"

"Almost five." Mehen moved to sit on the bed next to her. She didn't miss the fact that he positioned himself closer to her feet so there would be some distance between them.

"Sorry, I couldn't stay awake any longer. I know you don't want me to sleep here anymore. Once we've finished with our talk, can you show where I'm to sleep?"

"I want you to stay here, Blythe. This is where you belong."

"I don't understand you, Mehen." Blythe shook her head. "You acted as if you wanted me, and then after we made love you pushed me away." She wasn't about to let Mehen play her emotions. He either wanted her or he didn't.

Mehen looked at her with desire burning as his eyes darkened. "I want you, Blythe. That isn't the problem. The problem is I want you too much. All I can think about is having you again."

"Then why push me away?"

"I don't just want your body. I crave your blood as well."

Blythe leaned in closer to Mehen. "I don't mind if you feed from me," she said in a soft voice. "The whole idea of you inside me when you bite me turns me on. I just found you to be a little rough last night."

Mehen's nostrils flared when he took a deep breath. His fangs suddenly slid down past his upper lip. "Believe me, I want to. Feeding and sex go hand in hand."

"Then come and take what you want." Blythe pulled her hair away from her neck. "I'm willing to give you both my body and my blood." If this was the hurdle that was holding Mehen back, she didn't want it to come between them. She truly wanted him to take her blood while he took her.

With his hands fisted, Mehen groaned. "I can't. No matter how much I want you, I can't. Something is wrong with me. The last two times I've fed I came close to draining the women dry. I won't take that chance with you."

Blythe couldn't stop the wave of jealousy that washed over her at hearing he had fed from other women recently. "Was this before or after you'd made love to me?" She hated herself for asking, but she needed to know.

"Before. The last time was that same night"

That helped to hold some of her jealousy at bay. "And did you make love to her while you fed?"

"No. I felt nothing. Even her blood didn't satisfy my blood hunger."

It still irked her a bit that Mehen had gone to another woman before he'd taken her to his bed, but to hear that he got nothing at all out of it made her feel a little better about it. "Then come and take what you need from me." Blythe tilted her head slightly to the side in invitation.

Mehen moaned deep in his throat. "Haven't you listened to a word I've said? I can't. With you, I know I won't be able to stop until I've drained you dry. Is that what you want? Do you want me to kill you just to slake my thirst for blood?"

Blythe straightened her head. "You won't kill me, Mehen. There's something between us. We're drawn to each other. That alone will stop you from doing anything to harm me." When Mehen made no move to come closer, she reached out and pressed the tip of her finger against one of his exposed fangs. He wrapped his hand around her wrist and pulled her hand away before it broke the skin.

"Don't. You're playing with fire." His chest rapidly rose and fell.

"Then what are you going to do? You still need to feed."

He let go of her wrist and stood. "I'll search out donors as I've always done."

Blythe got up on her knees on the bed. Jealousy raised its ugly head once again. "In other words, you'd rather feed off a strange woman than from me. Sorry, but I'm not going to put up with that. If you want to have any kind of relationship with me, you'll only come to me for blood or I'm finished with you."

"You can't be serious."

She crossed her arms over her chest and glared at Mehen. "I'm dead serious. How would you like it if I went to one of the other warriors, say Akori for instance, and let him feed from me? Would you be able to stand the thought of him getting off while he drank from my neck? Or that I enjoyed it while he did?"

With a roar, Mehen grabbed her by the upper arms and dragged her against him. His lips slammed down onto hers as he kissed her thoroughly until he made her whimper with need. He lifted his head and looked at her with eyes dark with arousal. "You will never feed any of them. I'd kill them. You are mine."

Her body on fire as liquid heat formed between her legs, Blythe groaned when Mehen let her go. "Now you know how I felt when you said you'd go to other women to feed. Doesn't feel good, does it?" Blythe knew she had him when Mehen sighed and his grip relaxed.

"I won't feed from you, Blythe," he said softly.

"Then we'll be over before it has really begun." Blythe grabbed one of the pillows from the bed and slipped off the mattress. Taking hold of the duvet, she gathered it up in her arms. "I'm going to sleep in the meeting room."

"You don't have to do that."

Mehen tried to block her path, but she pushed him out of the way. "Yes, I do. You haven't had a decent night's sleep since I arrived. And I can't lie in that bed with you if you refuse to stop going to other women." Almost at the door, Blythe paused and turned her head to look at him. "At first I thought to ask your permission since you're the leader here, but I've decided I'm not going to word it as a question now. Whether you are with me or not, I'm staying. There is nothing for me in the outside world, and I like it here. The others are happy to have me cook for them. That is enough for me. Plus it will save Ra the trouble of trying to figure out what should be done with me. Get some sleep, Mehen. You look as if you need it."

With her head held high, Blythe left Mehen to ponder her words. She hoped he'd make the right decision in the end.

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The large table in the meeting room ended up being a lot harder than Blythe had anticipated. She folded the duvet in half, thinking she'd sleep inside it much like a sleeping bag. After ten minutes went by and she still couldn't find a comfortable enough position to fall asleep, she got up and tried lying on top of the duvet instead. That didn't work either. When Blythe slept, her body temperature always seemed to drop. With no covers over her, and only wearing light pajama bottoms and a short t-shirt top, she found it too cold. And it didn't help that her back started to ache from being stretched out on the hard table surface.

With a huff of frustration, Blythe sat up. Obviously if she wanted to get any sleep she'd have to find another place, and hopefully one not quite so hard on her back. She gathered the duvet and pillow in her arms before she jumped off the table and went out

into the hallway. She had no real idea where she would go. For a brief instant she thought of going to Takan's quarters to see if he'd be willing to give up his bed for her, but she quickly dismissed that idea. She didn't want to give Mehen cause to go after another one of his men.

Tired and wanting to just lie down and sleep somewhere, Blythe found herself standing in front of the entrance to Ra's temple. There really didn't appear to be any places that would be any more comfortable than the table in the meeting room, but she went inside anyway. She vetoed the benches that lined a couple of the walls. They were too narrow for her to lie on without having to worry that she would fall off while she slept. That left the floor, which surprisingly felt warm under her bare feet. Blythe could only figure the concrete floor still retained the heat from the sun's rays that shined down on it for most of the day. Deciding to see if the added warmth would make a big enough difference to allow her to sleep, Blythe spread the duvet on the floor and slipped inside it.

Stretched out on her back, Blythe felt the warmth from the floor sink into her stiff back. She sighed as she began to relax. Now that she was toasty and warm, her eyes fluttered shut. If she'd happened to be more awake, Blythe would have sworn the floor seemed to get warmer the longer she lay on it. With dawn starting to break over the horizon, she let sleep claim her.

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Mehen finally gave up any pretense of sleep just after dawn. He groaned as he rolled over onto his side and Blythe's scent filled his head. Before he could stop himself, he buried his face in the pillow and breathed more of her intoxicating smell. He groaned again as his cock throbbed in response. He thought of giving himself some relief, but he knew it would only be a temporary fix. All it would take to have him painfully aroused once again would be to go near Blythe.

He didn't know what to do about her. Every part of him wanted to make her his, but he still didn't trust himself to touch her, make love to her, and not have the danger of taking her life hanging over him. But he couldn't give her up. Having had her once, he craved her even more. She was starting to mean something to him. She affected him on a deeper level like no woman ever had. Mehen scrubbed his face with his hand knowing full well he was stuck between a rock and a hard place, and he really didn't want to find his way out.

Getting out of bed, Mehen pulled on a pair of loose sweatpants. He decided he might as well go to Ra's temple to try to contact the god once again. If Ra didn't answer his call this time, Mehen figured Ra had a very good reason for his silence. Now that Blythe would be staying on with them permanently the issue of her not being able to be wiped wouldn't be an urgent matter. As for his own problems, he could only wait and see how much worse things got before he'd have to somehow convince Ra to speak with him.

Once he stepped into the hallway, Mehen found himself drawn in the direction of the meeting room. He told himself he only wanted to make sure Blythe was okay, to see that she'd been able to fall asleep on the table, but he really knew he wanted to check on her for an entirely different reason. A part of him needed to make sure she indeed slept in the meeting room and had not gone to one of the other warriors' quarters.

When he found the room empty, Mehen bared his fangs as an unbidden image of Blythe lying in the arms of one of his men rose up in his mind. Ready to rip into the warrior who had taken his woman from him, he stomped back into the hallway. With a deep breath, Mehen detected Blythe's scent. He followed it, not detecting the scent of any of his men mixed in with Blythe's. He began to relax once he left the private quarters behind him and came to Ra's temple. The jealousy and anger left him in a rush at the sight of Blythe asleep on the temple's floor.

So as not to wake her, Mehen quietly crossed the distance between them. He wondered how she could sleep so soundly on the cool, hard floor. Even though the sun had started to rise, the floor still held a chill from the night. He shook his head. This wouldn't do. He couldn't allow Blythe to remain on the floor when she could be comfortably asleep in his bed. Bending over, he moved to pick her up. As he reached under her, Mehen found the floor beneath her more than a little warm. He wondered if that was Ra's doing. Maybe the god hadn't turned a blind eye on them after all.

With Blythe settled in his arms, he stood up and headed back to his quarters. When he started to walk, Blythe stirred and blinked up at him. "What...what are you doing?"

"I'm putting you in my bed."

Before Blythe could say anything else, Mehen looked her in the eye and put her into a deep sleep. He knew if he gave her half a chance she would demand he put her back on the temple floor. He'd be damned before he let his woman sleep on the hard floor while he rested in a soft bed.

After he had Blythe tucked under the sheets, he put the duvet over her. He looked at her as she slept. With her hair spread out on his pillow, Mehen wanted more than anything to slip into the bed next to her and hold her against him. His fangs came down as his gaze lingered on the slim column of her throat. His cock throbbed, tenting the front of his pants. He thought of how good it would feel to sheath himself inside her body, to have her liquid heat embrace his hard shaft, her throaty cries of need filling his ears. He wanted to hear her cry out his name when he sent her over the edge into an intense climax.

With his jaw clenched and his hands fisted at his sides, Mehen pulled himself away from the bed. Even though Blythe felt convinced he wouldn't do anything to hurt her, that if he drank from her he would be able to stop before he went too far, he didn't feel so sure. But he couldn't keep on like this. She'd backed him into a corner. If he fed from another, Blythe would want nothing to do with him anymore. He didn't want to lose her. That left only one alternative—he'd have to take the risk and chance feeding off Blythe. The thought made his blood race.

Mehen moved away until his back hit the wall. He slid down and sat on the floor with his legs drawn up to his chest. He leaned forward so his forehead rested on his raised knees and closed his eyes. Exhausted from lack of sleep, his stomach cramping as if he hadn't feed in months instead of days, and so painfully aroused he never thought he'd be comfortable again, Mehen wrapped his arms around his legs. He knew he was screwed.

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Blythe rolled onto her side and opened her eyes. She swore under her breath when she realized exactly where she slept. Damn the man. Mehen had once again used his powers to send her into a deep sleep, and then put her in his bed. When he had picked her up and told her where he would be taking her, she'd been about to tell him to put her down. That she couldn't remember anything after that moment spoke volumes. Glancing over at her digital clock that she'd moved into the room, Blythe swore again and flipped back the sheets. She'd slept through the entire morning.

Before she headed into the bathroom, she did a quick check of the room. She was alone. Mehen must have put her in his bed then left again, which Blythe thought had worked out to his advantage. If he'd still been in the room when she'd woken up, she would have ripped a strip off him. Until he decided he would only come to her when he needed blood, he had no say where she slept. Grumbling to herself about overbearing males, Blythe started the shower.

After a quick shower, she brushed her teeth and hurriedly got dressed. She quickly ran a comb through her wet hair and decided it would have to do. She'd missed making breakfast for the men and she had the feeling most of them would be impatiently waiting for their lunch. Leaving Mehen's quarters, Blythe made her way to the kitchen.

Utter chaos was the only way Blythe could describe what she found when she arrived. She paused just inside the doorway and tried to make heads or tails out of what seemed to be a free-for-all. Set, Akori, Denger and Kysen stood at the kitchen counters while they argued over who would make their sandwich first. Bread and lunch meat along with various other condiments had been spread all over the kitchen. What didn't fit on the counters had been placed on the table. Blythe noticed Takan sat at the table ignoring the other men as he sipped on a cup of coffee and read the newspaper. Blythe shook her head when she took in the extent of the damage the warriors had managed to make.

When a plate crashed, dumping a large sandwich on the floor and spraying mayonnaise all over the lower cupboard doors, Blythe decided enough was enough. She put two fingers in her mouth and let loose with a loud, shrill whistle. The warriors instantly fell silent and covered their sensitive ears. "What the hell have you done to my kitchen?"

Five male heads turned in her direction. All of them except for Takan gave her a guilty look.

"Mehen said to let you sleep, so we decided we'd make something for lunch," Kysen explained.

"I see. So instead of acting like mature adults and taking turns, you all decided to crowd in like a bunch of children and make a mess of *my* kitchen."

"Your kitchen?"

"Yes, Kysen, my kitchen. I told Mehen I'm staying. So if I'm to do all the cooking around here, you guys will refrain from making my kitchen look as if a bomb went off in it."

Akori let out a whoop and made a beeline for her. On the way, he stepped in a large splat of mayonnaise on the floor. His arms flailed when his boot slid in the slippery mess. He quickly righted himself and picked Blythe up and swung her around in a circle. "You have made me the happiest man alive." He stopped spinning and gave her a hard squeeze.

Feeling as if she were being squished by steel bands, Blythe smacked Akori's shoulder. "Put me down." She couldn't quite keep the laughter out of her voice. "It's nice to hear my staying makes you feel that way, Akori. I'm glad you approve, but you know what would make me even happier?"

Akori let her back down on her feet and gave her an expectant look. "What? Whatever you want you shall have."

"The four of you who trashed my kitchen can now clean it up." Akori's face fell at the mere mention of him having to clean up. Blythe gave him a stern look while she fought back laughter. He looked like a little boy who had been punished. "If you guys don't clean this mess up I won't cook you anything for dinner tonight."

That had the same effect as if someone had set a fire under the four warriors. Set bent down to clean up the mess on the floor while Denger and Kysen set about cleaning up the remains of their sandwich making. Akori shot over to the sink and started to fill it with water. Blythe cringed when she saw how much dish detergent he added, but thought it best not to say anything. At least he was going to wash the dishes.

Thinking to keep out of their way, Blythe went and sat down at the table with Takan. "So you just sat here and watched, did you?"

Takan put down the newspaper and chuckled. "At times such as this, it's best to stay out of the way. That is why a few years back we decided to have it that only one of us would do the cooking each day. Though I must say, I've never seen them so eager to clean up before."

Blythe winced when Akori none too carefully dropped a large stack of plates into the sink. "I guess the threat of not being fed is a good enough incentive."

"I think it's that and the fact that you would be the one who did the cooking."

"Speaking of cooking, I want to cook some authentic Egyptian food for tonight's dinner. I used the computer in the meeting room last night and went on the internet to find some recipes after you all left to go hunting. I hope you don't mind."

"You're welcome to use the computer whenever you wish, Blythe. It's there for everyone's use."

"Good. Anyway, I found some recipes and after a quick check in the kitchen I found I don't have all the ingredients I need. If I could do it myself I'd go run to the store for them, but since I can't leave, do you think you could pick up what I need if I give you a list?"

"Now that you're one of us, Blythe, there really is no longer any need to keep you hidden away. This is your home, not your prison. How about you make up that list while I go talk to Mehen, and then I'll take you to the store to get whatever you need."

Blythe smiled at Takan. "That sounds perfect. I hate being dependent on someone when I can do it myself. I had thought of what would happen when the grocery shopping needed to be done. I should be the one to do it. Though having a car to do the shopping with would make it a little bit easier. I'd hoped to save up for a car once I had my lawyer's bills paid off."

Takan gave her hand a squeeze before he got up from the table. "I already thought about that. We can't have you without a car of your own. Why don't you start looking around for one you want? When you find one, let me know and I'll go with you to get it."

"Seriously?" When Takan nodded, Blythe reached for the newspaper he'd left on the table. "I'll start looking through the used car section after we get back from the store."

"Don't bother with used cars, Blythe. It'll be a brand new one. And don't worry about how much it costs. Pick one that you really want. Now get to work on that grocery list. I'll be back for you in a little while."

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Takan found Mehen in Ra's temple, the one place where Mehen seemed to spend most of the daylight hours. He either could be found there or in the old part of the warehouse practicing with his sword. Takan had a feeling Mehen wanted to avoid being around Blythe as long as he could manage it. Takan knew he fought a battle he would lose in the end.

Mehen sat on the floor in the middle of the temple with his face lifted toward the glass roof while the sun beat down on him. Through Mehen's long hair, Takan could just barely make out the mark of Ra's Chosen on the warrior's naked back, the same mark he carried on his. As he waited for Mehen to acknowledge his presence, Takan studied the other man. Mehen looked as if he'd lost some weight. It would only be a matter of time before Mehen broke and finally took what his body demanded he take. Soon Mehen would come to realize what he needed to end his suffering.

Mehen lowered his head and stood. "Why can't I reach Ra, Takan?" Mehen turned to face him. "You've always been able to contact Ra more easily than the rest of us. Has he answered you when you've called?"

Takan shook his head. "No." That wasn't exactly the truth. The only reason he hadn't been in contact with Ra was because he hadn't tried to talk to the sun god. Ra would never not answer him, but Mehen didn't need to know that. Mehen had to figure this one out on his own. "I came to tell you that I'm taking Blythe out grocery shopping. I figured it would be all right for her to leave the headquarters now that she will be staying on with us indefinitely. Unless you'd like to take her."

"No, that's fine with me. I trust you with her. She'll be safe from the undead during the day. While you're at it, make sure she has access to the codes to get in and out of the warehouse. And make it so she can get through the other lock as well."

"I'll do that."

Takan watched Mehen grimace and place a hand on his stomach. He could all too easily imagine the painful cramps Mehen must be dealing with. Shortly after Takan had been chosen as one of Ra's warriors he'd gone too long without feeding and had paid the price for it. To have your body eat itself from the inside could in no way be considered something a person would actually choose to go through.

Before he left, Takan asked, "When did you last feed, Mehen? You look as if you need blood."

Mehen swiftly dropped his hand back down to his side. "I'm fine."

"No, you're not. You clearly show signs of extreme blood hunger. Why suffer when you already have a partner that I'm sure would be more than willing to share her blood with you?"

"First Set, now you. The pair of you seem intent on getting me to feed from Blythe. Maybe I have a good reason for not going that route."

Takan shook his head. "Then I feel sorry for you, *sen*. I know if I found that one woman who I wanted to make mine, I sure as hell wouldn't miss out on that closeness a feeding could give the both of us. It probably would be ten times better than what we get from the donors we seek out and then wipe. And if the situation happened to be reversed and she had to drink blood, I wouldn't want her going to a complete stranger for her needs when I would do just as well. Something to think about."

Hoping his little prod would garner some results in the not-too-distant future, Takan left a scowling Mehen alone inside the temple.

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"It's going to do what?" Blythe asked Takan with a bit of uncertainty.

"To get through the final lock, you have to press your hand to the stone and a small needle will take a drop of your blood."

Takan and she stood just outside the door that led inside the main entrance of the headquarters. Blythe eyed the innocuous piece of stone set into the wall just below the numbered keypad for the alarm system. When she'd stepped through the door and saw the sports cars and Mehen's motorcycle, she'd expected Takan to show her which car

belonged to him and then take her shopping. And when he'd shown her the keypad and told her the code that would allow her to get through the door without setting off the alarm, it had made her happy to know she'd be able to come and go as she pleased. The whole having a needle stuck in her finger thing didn't make her so happy. Needles really didn't bother her all that much when they couldn't be avoided, but being stuck with one every time she wanted to get through a door was an altogether different matter. She didn't relish the idea of being a pin cushion.

"Is that really necessary? Couldn't I just knock on the door and have one of you open it for me instead?"

"It's only a small needle, Blythe," Takan said with a laugh. "Come on, you'll hardly feel it at all."

"Maybe for you it's nothing, but unlike you I can't make any cuts or puncture marks I get heal and disappear with a swipe of my tongue. My poor finger will be a sieve if I have to go through that door too many times."

"You could always get Mehen to lick it for you." With a grin, Takan winked and gave her a nudge. "You never know, it could lead to something else you'd enjoy more and make up for the small prick on your finger."

Blythe thought pairing the word prick with Mehen's name aptly described his attitude of late. "Ha. Right. The way Mehen has been desperately trying to hold me at arm's length, that isn't exactly going to happen, now is it?"

"All you have to do is push the right buttons, Blythe, and he'll be putty in your hands."

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Fine. Let's get this over with."

Takan turned and faced the wall so his back completely blocked her view of the square piece of stone. She watched his hand come up and push something on it. When he stepped aside, she could see a small, thin needle that stuck up above its surface. She reluctantly let him take her hand when he reached for it. Blythe allowed Takan to pull her to his side and sucked in a sharp breath when he pressed the tip of her index finger to the needle. The sharp point then sank below the surface taking the drop of her blood with it.

Blythe stuck her finger in her mouth and sucked on it. "Ow."

Takan chuckled and shook his head. "It couldn't have been that bad."

Blythe stuck her tongue out at him. "It's still bleeding. See?" She squeezed the tip of her finger until a drop of blood appeared.

"You're just being a suck." Takan took hold of her finger and stuck it in his mouth. He swirled his tongue around it once, then gave it back to her. "There, all better."

Holding her finger close to her face until her eyes almost crossed, Blythe looked at it. She could no longer see the pinprick mark the needle had left behind. "Thanks. Now can we go shopping already?"

As Takan headed for the black Corvette, Blythe couldn't help thinking that if it had been Mehen who had taken her finger and licked it, she'd have been a big pile of goo on the floor. When Takan had done it she hadn't felt a thing. The feel of his tongue on her skin didn't make her insides melt. Or cause her pussy to throb to be filled. It was so unfair. Takan in no way lacked in the looks department, even with all that hair hanging in his face, but he did nothing for her. The same with the other warriors. She now lived with a bunch of men who looked as if they could make a career just from their faces alone, not to mention their well-buffed bodies, and of course she had to fall for the one who wanted her so much he felt he had to push her away. It didn't say much about her taste in men. Why couldn't she fall for someone who would want her as is? Getting into the passenger side of Takan's Corvette, Blythe pushed her wayward thoughts aside.

Chapter Eight

The demon, Sek, jolted awake when Apep's voice grated painfully inside his head. He quickly sat up in bed and gasped, "Yes, master?"

I sense the presence of the woman.

"Where is she?" Sek never questioned Apep on how he knew where this particular woman could be found. Nor why the demon god wanted her in the first place. What he did know for certain, if Apep could now sense the woman she must be outside of Ra's Chosen's headquarters. Even Apep could not see through the shield Ra must use to protect his warriors from demon-kind.

She's in the heart of the city, but not alone. A warrior keeps to her side.

"I can't leave my lair to hunt her down, master. There are still too many hours of daylight left. Will she still be there come nightfall?" Sek knew Apep could sometimes catch glimpses of the immediate future, and when it suited his purposes such as this case, he'd pass on what he saw.

No. Come night she'll be out of reach. The warriors protect her. You must wait until she leaves the safety of their headquarters. Then you can lure her away. During the daylight she will think she is safe. You will take her then.

"It will take some time to do the things I must do to survive being out during the day."

You will do as I command, Sek! Apep roared. I will not tolerate failure. I must have the woman.

Sek bit back a groan of pain as Apep's voice reverberated inside his skull. "I'll begin preparing myself tonight."

Time is running out. If I lose the woman I'll hold you personally responsible. Do not delay.

"It shall be done, master."

Sek let loose with a string of curses after he could no longer feel Apep's presence inside him. It would be no easy task to perform the ritual that would enable him to walk in daylight. He'd only done it once before and it had not been an enjoyable experience. The side effects took a nasty toll. But they would seem only like minor annoyances compared to what Apep would do to him if he didn't do it and the woman slipped through his fingers. The demon god's punishment would be swift and extremely painful. Sek shuddered as he thought of all the ways Apep would enjoy torturing him.

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Blythe found Takan to be a joy to shop with. Unlike some of the male population, he had no aversion to going from store to store so she could find exactly what she needed. They also got along amazingly well. The more they talked the better Blythe got to know Takan. She felt as if she'd found a new best friend. When growing up she'd always wished she had a brother. Takan would have quite easily fit in that role.

At the last grocery store, Blythe headed for the aisle where wine and beer could be found. When she reached for a six-pack of beer, Takan shook his head and instead picked up a case of twenty-four and put it in their cart.

"Takan, the recipe I have for the chicken says I only need one bottle of beer. Don't you think buying a whole case is a little overkill?"

He smiled. "No. Don't worry, it won't last long. I suggest if you want a few for yourself you'd better put them somewhere or you'll be out of luck."

"That's okay. I'll pass on the beer. I'm in the mood for wine, actually." Blythe moved down the aisle until she came to the wine section. She reached for a bottle of white wine and turned to put it in the cart. Takan immediately took it out of her hand and put it back. He then picked up the same wine but in magnum size. Blythe lifted a brow in his direction. "Umm, do you think I'm an alcoholic or something? That is way too big. I thought I'd just have a few glasses of wine and relax while you men are out doing your thing tonight."

Takan started to push the cart down to the end of the aisle. "I think you'll want more than a couple glasses of wine."

Blythe fell into step beside him. "And why is that?"

"Because tonight I want you to seduce Mehen and force him to feed from you."

Her steps faltered at what Takan said, but she quickly recovered. "Excuse me? You want me to do what?" Blythe looked around to make sure no one was too close to overhear their conversation. "For your information, Mehen is too afraid to feed from me."

Takan stopped walking so suddenly Blythe just about slammed into him. He turned to look at her. "What do you mean he's afraid?"

"Apparently he wants me too much. He thinks he'll drain me dry. He says he almost took more than he should have from the last two women he fed on, and that he got nothing out of it. It also did nothing to satisfy his blood hunger."

"Of course their blood would no longer satisfy him. Only your blood will do that now," Takan said in a vague voice as he seemed to get lost in thought for a brief time. "I never saw that part about Mehen being afraid to take your blood."

"Well, what do you know? The all-knowing Takan doesn't know everything after all." She quickly yelped when Takan gave her a smack on the butt. Blythe glared up at him.

"You deserved that. Didn't you ever learn not to sass your elders?" He gave her a crooked grin.

"You wait, old man. When you're least expecting it I'm going to get you back for that. As for Mehen, I won't do it."

"Why not?"

"We kind of had not really an argument, more like a discussion, about his feeding habits last night. To make a long story short, I told him as long as he refused to come to me and will continue to go to other women for his needs I won't have anything to do with him."

"Blythe, you're going to have to forget you gave Mehen that ultimatum. He's starving. Haven't you noticed him holding onto his stomach lately?"

"Yes, but Mehen told me not to worry about it."

"Well, you should worry. His body is eating itself. He's already started to lose some weight and he'll just grow weaker. Only your blood will sustain him now."

Blythe felt all the blood leave her face. "Will he die?"

"No. He'll just continue to get weaker and the cramps will start to become almost unbearable."

"Why me? If Mehen knows that only my blood is what he needs, why hasn't he fed from me?"

Takan brushed her cheek with his fingertips. "He doesn't know it has to be you and you only. You're the first, Blythe."

"The first what?" Blythe asked softly.

"The first woman to become a mate to one of Ra's Chosen. This is new to all of us. So put Mehen out of his misery and take him as your mate tonight. And one last thing, I suggest you don't say anything about this mate business just yet to the others or they'll freak out, especially Akori."

Blythe thought she hid her shock about being Mehen's mate exceedingly well when she asked, "What about Mehen?"

"Wait until everything is all said and done. If you tell him you're destined to be his mate, he'll balk and you'll have a fight on your hands to get him to take you as such. Right now, this has to stay just between you and me. We don't want to rock the boat too soon."

Takan once again started to push the cart. Now that they had everything on her list, he headed for the checkout. Blythe quietly walked beside him lost in her thoughts. Takan had been right to tell her she would need more than a couple glasses of wine tonight to fortify her. She had a feeling it would be no easy task to get Mehen to do what needed to be done.

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Mehen happened to be in the hallway when Takan and Blythe returned from their shopping trip. At first they didn't notice him. They were laughing together about

something. When Blythe put the bags she carried onto the floor and then pushed her index finger into Takan's mouth, the strong jaws of jealousy clamped down on him. He wanted to pound Takan to the ground for tasting Blythe's blood when it rightfully belonged to him. Beat him with his fists until Takan couldn't get up. Mehen drew in a ragged breath as Blythe retrieved the bags and started to walk toward him with Takan at her side. He had to get a grip on himself. Being so possessive of Blythe would only push her away.

"I told you, Takan, if you made me use that thing I'd get you to make it better," Blythe said with a laugh.

"I had to make sure the lock would recognize your blood and allow you entrance. I said I'd heal the mark it left behind. I just didn't expect you to ram your finger practically down my throat to do it."

Blythe hip checked Takan against the wall. "I did no such thing, you liar. Fine, next time I'll tell you before I get you to heal the hole in my finger."

Mehen clenched his jaw together so tightly the muscle that ran along it jumped. Watching how close Blythe and Takan had become made him want to growl with rage. Blythe was his, not the other warrior's. Deep down inside Mehen knew Takan didn't think of Blythe in that way, but it didn't do anything to alleviate the anger that coursed through his body.

"There will be no next time," Mehen growled before he could stop himself. Even to his ears his voice sounded low and threatening.

Blythe shot him a scathing look before she brushed past him. "Get a grip, Mehen. Takan's healing my finger is completely innocent. And for one thing, I put my finger in his mouth in the first place. So you can back off."

Mehen followed behind Blythe and Takan as they headed to the kitchen. Once they reached that room Takan put the bags he carried on the table. He told Blythe he'd collect the rest of the things they had bought from his car then left them alone. Mehen watched Blythe start to empty the bags as he tried to get himself back under control. Even to his ears, he sounded overbearing and rude. He had to rein it back.

"I'm sorry, Blythe. I can't seem to help myself when I'm around you."

"Then do something about it, Mehen." Blythe came to stand in front of him. She pulled her hair aside and bared her neck.

His fangs instantly came down and his stomach cramped as if sharp claws tore into it. "No." He shook his head in denial.

"No? Then how about this way?" She lifted her arm and offered him the inside of her wrist. "I know you want it, Mehen. Your fangs are showing and by the way you keep swallowing, I know your mouth is watering with hunger. Take what you need."

He stiffened when Blythe shoved her wrist under his nose. He pulled her scent into his lungs with each breath he took. It would be so easy to take her wrist and sink his fangs into her tender flesh. He could almost taste her blood on his tongue. Still he

resisted temptation. Mehen backed away from her. "I'll leave you to finish with your plans for tonight's dinner."

Before Blythe could say anything to stop him, he hurried out of the room. When he reached the hallway he heard Blythe yell that he was too stubborn for his own good. Maybe so, but at least she would remain safe so long as that stubbornness held.

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Blythe spent the rest of the day preparing the Egyptian food for that night's dinner. She had found four recipes off the internet that she thought sounded pretty authentic. She had a recipe for chicken that claimed to be ancient Egyptian. Blythe didn't know for sure if that was true, but it sounded like it would be good. The chicken had to be put in a marinade of beer, olive oil, spices and onions before being grilled or broiled in the oven. She also had a recipe for *dukka*, which consisted of coarsely ground nuts and spices mixed together. *Dukka* could be used as a dip or sprinkled over other foods. She also was making rice with a spicy tomato sauce and *wara' enab*, stuffed grape leaves. Those would be stuffed with beef and rice that had garlic and spices mixed into it. Since Blythe had never eaten Egyptian food before she had no idea how any of it would taste. She hoped the warriors would at least enjoy it.

Same as the previous evening, Blythe didn't have to go get the men once she had the meal set out on the table. Five of the warriors tore into the food with gusto. Blythe watched Mehen push his food around on his plate for a second evening in a row, except this time he only managed to swallow a mouthful of the chicken before he gave up. She could see the pain Takan had said Mehen must be feeling written on his face. Lines of strain bracketed his mouth and showed around the corners of his eyes. Takan was right. She had to do something to help Mehen. He couldn't go through another day like this. If all it would take would be for him to drink her blood, then she'd make him do it. Even if she had to tie him up, or have the others do it for her, cut into her own wrist and pour her blood into his mouth, Mehen would take what she gave him.

Mehen looked up and their gazes collided. She held his for a few seconds before she focused her attention on her plate. She felt his gaze linger on her before he too looked away. Out of the corner of her eye, Blythe saw Mehen put down his fork. The man would soon learn his fears were totally unfounded. He would learn that only because he'd drunk from those other women, and not from her, it caused him to take too much of their blood in desperation. She'd show him that she was more than capable of providing the blood his body craved.

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All had suddenly gone quiet on the undead front. Mehen checked with each warrior during the night and they all reported no sightings. After the last two nights of action, he'd thought for sure the number of undead lurking about on the streets of Phoenix would have started to increase. Something had to be up, which meant Ra's

Chosen had to make sure they stayed vigilant. Mehen didn't want any nasty surprises sprung on him.

As the night grew late and Mehen met with no action, he debated whether or not to hit one of the late-night bars and find a donor. The cramps in his stomach had reached the point where he could no longer ignore them. His body needed blood, and very soon. He still didn't understand the sudden change in his body's appetite. Nor why it had only taken days and not months to reach the stage of starvation.

Mehen could hear the loud music that blared inside the bar across the street from where he stood. The music grew louder when the door opened and two women stepped out into the night. He followed them with his eyes as they headed down the sidewalk. He could hear the sound of their hearts beating in his ears. He knew he could easily catch up with them, but he made no move to follow the women. Blythe's words from the night before echoed inside his head. She would have nothing to do with him if he fed off some woman he picked up. Mehen could lie to her and say he hadn't when he had, but it wouldn't be fair to Blythe. And now that she'd set the ground rules he found himself loath to break them. She meant too much to him to risk losing her because he didn't trust himself around her and had gone elsewhere to satisfy his blood hunger. He didn't know when it happened, but somehow Blythe had managed to worm her way inside him. He was falling for her, and hard. The idea of being intimate with another woman no longer held any appeal for him. He just wanted Blythe.

Feeling as if he stood on a high precipice about ready to fall, Mehen returned to where he'd parked his motorcycle. Before he headed back to the warehouse, he drove his bike to a deserted stretch of road and opened it up. The thrill he usually derived from riding at top speeds didn't seem the same this time around. Thoughts of Blythe and what he wanted from her took some of the enjoyment away. Still antsy and undecided, Mehen returned to the warehouse.

The other warriors had already returned by the time he drove his bike into the docking bay. Inside the headquarters, he heard the voices of his men coming from the meeting room. Not feeling in the mood to make conversation, Mehen went to his personal quarters. He knew Blythe would be there asleep, but still she drew him like a lodestone. Even though he couldn't trust himself to lie in bed beside her and just sleep, he felt compelled to check on her anyway.

Pushing open the door to his quarters, Mehen came to a standstill at the sight that met his eyes. Lighted candles had been placed throughout the room giving it a soft, warm glow. His gaze became riveted to the bed. Blythe, dressed in a red and black sheer, lacy negligee sat in the center of the mattress with her legs curled to one side. She looked at him with hooded eyes as he quickly stepped inside the room and shut the door.

"About time you got home," Blythe said in a seductive voice. "I've been waiting for you."

"I thought you would be asleep." His mouth went suddenly dry when she got off the bed and walked to him. He saw her pale pink nipples through the sheer material

that barely covered her breasts. Mehen swallowed as he followed the lines of the barely there negligee Blythe wore. It left nothing to the imagination.

Blythe trailed a finger down his chest to the top of his jeans. She gave him a coy smile. "Well, you thought wrong." Her hand lowered and she stroked his now-throbbing manhood through his pants.

Mehen jerked out of her reach. He'd never seen this side of Blythe before. She seemed to undress him with her eyes. Everything about her screamed sex. Drawing in a deep breath, he detected the scent of alcohol on her breath. "Have you been drinking?"

"I had some wine while you were out." She pointed to a spot over near his dresser.

Looking over to where she had pointed, Mehen saw the almost half-empty magnum of wine that sat next to an empty wineglass. Obviously Blythe had more than just a little bit of wine. She also appeared to be well on her way to becoming drunk.

"I think you've had enough wine for tonight."

"I agree. I have started to crave something else now." Slowly Blythe reached up and undid the thin satin ribbon that kept the front of her negligee together. The material gaped open, exposing her breasts.

The hold he had over himself started to slip. By the gods, he wanted this woman. His cock hardened to the point of pain. His fangs dropped down as they throbbed in time with his erection. He could only take so much. She looked far too tempting standing there while the smell of her arousal filled his senses. Even though she'd had a little too much to drink, it didn't stop him from wanting her under him.

As if she sensed he walked a very thin line and that it wouldn't take much to make him crack, Blythe ran her hands down her body until she reached the hem of her negligee. She inched it up slowly until he could almost see her glistening sex peeking out from beneath it.

"I have an ache only you can get rid of, Mehen." A slow, seductive smile formed on her lips.

Blythe let her negligee drop back into place as she reached for him. Instead of pulling him to her, she slowly pushed his leather motorcycle jacket off his shoulders and down his arms until it dropped at his feet. His heart beat at a rapid pace, threatening to burst right out of his chest. His breath sawed in and out of his lungs almost as fast. Every muscle in his body stiffened while he ruthlessly kept himself from reaching for the woman who stood before him.

Blythe shifted closer until the tips of her naked breasts brushed up against him. His body broke out in a sweat and he bit back a moan. She stood up on tiptoe and let her lips hover a hairsbreadth from his. She smiled and then shook her head. "No. I don't think I'm going to start here. There are a lot more interesting places I want to kiss you instead."

Before Mehen realized her intent, Blythe reached down and yanked his shirt out of his pants. She lifted it to his chin and held it there. The first brush of her lips against his chest caused him to suck in a sharp breath. Her lips left a trail of fire along his skin as

she worked her way to one of his flat nipples. She took the tiny bud between her teeth and tugged before she laved it with the flat of her tongue. She did the same to the other before she kissed her way to the center of his chest. Mehen knew he had to push her away before he snapped, but he couldn't make his body do as his brain commanded. The sensation of her lips and tongue exploring him felt too good.

"Blythe, we have to stop," he said in a broken voice.

"Time for stopping is over. You know it and I know it. It's time for doing."

Blythe slowly kissed a trail down to his abs. Drowning in waves of desire, Mehen didn't notice she had undone his jeans until she shoved her hand inside and wrapped it around his engorged cock. His breath caught as Blythe worked her hand up and down the length of his shaft. His hips bucked, pushing himself harder into her grasp. When she pulled him free of his jeans, dropped to her knees and took him inside her mouth, all ability to think left him. He looked down and watched as Blythe pleased him. He was lost. His control didn't just snap. It disintegrated in an explosion of fire. With a harsh growl of need, he pulled away and picked her up. Crushing her to his chest, he kissed her with all the pent-up longing that had built inside him since they had last made love.

"I have to be inside you. Now."

Blythe strained against him. "There's nothing I want more."

Ripping the covers to the foot of the bed, Mehen laid Blythe down in the center of the mattress. He left her lips only long enough to yank his t-shirt over his head before he followed her down. Mehen ran his tongue along the seam of her lips. When she opened to allow him entry, he thoroughly swept the inside of her mouth before he twined his tongue with hers. The taste and smell of her almost undid him. He would never get enough of her. Shifting so he lay half on his side with his erection pressed against her hip, Mehen cupped one of her breasts in his hand. With his thumb and index finger, he plucked at her taut nipple. Blythe moaned against his mouth.

He licked a path down to her chest, carefully avoiding her neck. Dipping his head, he swirled his tongue around her nipple before he sucked it deep inside his mouth. He trailed his hand down Blythe's body where it came to rest briefly on her hip. Bunching the material of her negligee in his hand, he pulled it to her waist. He ran his fingers down the top of her leg, then back up the soft skin of her inner thigh. Blythe's legs drifted apart when he neared the opening to her sex. She tunneled her fingers through his hair as he continued to suckle her breast.

At the apex of her thighs, he brushed his knuckles against her pussy. Mehen moaned at the wetness he encountered there. "So very wet," he said with a groan. He ran his finger along her wet folds. She was more than ready for him to take her, but he wanted to fan the flames of her desire even higher. Slipping one finger inside her pussy, he slid it in and out of her body. Blythe lifted her hips while she rode his finger.

The need to be buried deep inside her soon became too great. Mehen lifted his head from her breast and pulled her negligee all the way off. His gaze skimmed down the

length of Blythe's body. Her full breasts, slim waist and curvy hips called out to him. He wouldn't change a thing about her body. To him, she had the ideal shape for a woman. With his gaze locked to hers, Mehen worked his jeans down his hips until he could kick them completely off.

Now naked as she, he moved to settle between her legs. Holding his weight on his elbows, Mehen allowed Blythe to pull his lips down to hers. He kissed her thoroughly as he reached down to take hold of his cock and lead it to her slick opening. When her wet folds closed around the head of his shaft he stilled. He fought back the urge to come. He wanted Blythe to find her pleasure first before he found his. Once he felt as if he had control again, he slowly pushed deeper inside her body.

The feel of her silken sheath embracing him made Mehen groan with pleasure. When he fully seated himself, he pulled back then surged inside Blythe. They were a perfect fit. Pumping his hips between her legs, he felt her inner muscles clamped around his hard shaft, which increased his pleasure. Blythe wrapped her legs around his waist and clutched at his shoulders as she matched his strokes. Lifting himself up higher on her body, he angled his hips so his shaft rubbed her clit. He knew he couldn't hold out much longer. Increasing his pace, he rammed into Blythe. When the first wave of her release hit her, she moaned and held onto him tighter. Her strong inner muscles clutched at his shaft, pushing him to the point of no return. Throwing back his head, he rode her faster until he found his own release. He climaxed deep inside her, filling her with his warm seed.

With his body still pulsing inside Blythe, Mehen felt his blood hunger roar to the surface. He growled as his stomach began to cramp unbearably. He tried to pull away, but Blythe only clung to him tighter.

"No, Mehen. Take what you need. You're in pain. I'm not going to let you run away this time."

Caught between wanting to get as far away from Blythe as he could and wanting to taste her blood on his tongue, Mehen struggled with himself. But when she reached up and wrapped her hand around the back of his head and pulled him to her neck, he lost the struggle. Holding her tight to his body, he nuzzled the side of her neck. He dragged his tongue across the large artery there before he sank his fangs deep.

At the first gush of Blythe's blood, his cock hardened, lengthening inside her. She threaded her fingers through his hair, holding him to her, lifting her hips in invitation. Lost in the pleasure of feeding, Mehen pumped in and out of her while he continued to drink. Her blood surged through his veins, giving him the strength that he hadn't been able to get from his other feedings. She tasted like the most expensive of fine wines. As Blythe climaxed he quickly followed her with his own release. Sucking hard on her neck, he thrust into her as he experienced the most intense orgasm of his very long life.

When he slowly came back to himself, Mehen stiffened. Blythe lay limp beneath him. Dragging his tongue along the bite mark in her neck, he sealed the wound. He looked down at her as a shiver of fear ran down his back. She lay with her eyes closed, and there was a bluish tinge to her lips. He really started to panic when he heard her

heart struggling to beat then skipping a beat altogether. With a roar of anguish, Mehen quickly pulled on his jeans and wrapped Blythe up in the bed sheet. Reaching out with his mind, he called for help. In a matter of seconds all five of his men came crashing into his quarters.

"She's dying. I took too much of her blood."

Takan pushed his way over to the bed. He looked down at Blythe. "We have to act quickly or she will soon be out of reach. She needs blood, fast."

"She will never make it to a hospital in time." Mehen could feel Blythe slipping further away.

Takan's gaze locked with Mehen's. "You have to feed her. It's the only way to save her. You have to get her to drink from you." When Mehen hesitated, Takan growled as he pushed him away and began to reach for Blythe. "It has to be done now. If you won't do it, I'll feed her."

With a growl, Mehen shoved Takan away from Blythe. "I'll do it."

Using his fangs, he bit through the skin at his wrist. Propping Blythe up with the other arm, he held his wrist to her slack mouth. He didn't know if his blood would save her or not. He'd never shared his blood before, none of them ever had. When the first drops of blood hit Blythe's tongue she began to stir. She swallowed then took a long pull on his wrist. Her heart started to beat. The strong, steady sound of it echoed in Mehen's ears. He sighed with relief. Not sure how much of his blood Blythe needed to take, he allowed her to continue to feed when she wrapped her hands around his wrist and held it tighter against her mouth.

Once he figured she'd had enough, he pried his wrist away and sealed the wound with a swipe of his tongue. He gently lowered Blythe down onto the bed. The other warriors crowded close. After they were all satisfied that Blythe seemed out of danger, they quietly slipped out of the room.

Mehen started to shake as he thought of how close he'd come to killing Blythe. He felt almost sick to his stomach. Needing to feel her heartbeat, he placed a hand over the left side of her chest. Her heart beat strong and steady. What sickened him even more was the fact that his blood hunger no longer ate at his gut. For the first time in days, his stomach didn't cramp. He felt strong, stronger than he ever had. Mehen ran his hand through his hair. For some reason only Blythe's blood satisfied his blood hunger, but he didn't know if he could risk the chance of killing her each time he needed to feed.

He grew still when Blythe's eyes blinked open. She looked at him and smiled. "You look a lot better, Mehen. I'm glad."

Mehen picked up her hand and held it to his chest. "How can you say that? I almost killed you," he choked.

"But you didn't."

"Only Takan's fast thinking saved you, Blythe."

Her brows drew together slightly. She licked the small amount of blood that remained on her lips. "You gave me your blood?"

"You would have died otherwise. I should never have touched you."

"Oh, yes, you should have. Making love to you was amazing, but doing it while you fed can only be described as mind-blowing." When he opened his mouth to protest, Blythe placed a finger across his lips. "Not one word. You are not going to spoil it for me. The only reason you took so much this time is because you were starving. The next time you'll be more in control."

Mehen shook his head. His gut clenched at the thought of what could happen if he fed from her again. "I can't risk you," he said thickly. "There will be no next time."

Blythe tried to sit up, but he held her down. She huffed at him in annoyance. "Would you please shut up about the damn risk? There is no risk. Honestly, how do you feel now?"

"Did you just tell me to shut up?" Mehen asked. Here Blythe lay telling him to shut up when only moments before she had been near death. Any other woman would have wanted to run from him.

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Yes, I did. Now answer my question. How do you feel?"

"I'm back to my full strength. My blood hunger no longer has its claws in me."

Blythe gave him a smug smile. "There, you see? You have to feed from me, and only me. You aren't going to get around this anymore, Mehen. I mean it. Either you take my blood when you need it or I'll have the others chain you to this bed so I can have my way with you and force you to do it."

Mehen tried to bite back a smile, but he was unsuccessful. "My, aren't you the little warrior?"

"When it comes to you, yes I am. Now get back in bed. I'm tired, and you need to sleep as well. And I won't take no for an answer."

Getting off the bed, Mehen pulled the rest of the covers over Blythe. He then moved to get into the bed next to her. She shook her head and pointed at his jeans. "Lose the pants first."

He quickly shucked his jeans and slipped into the bed beside her. Blythe turned and snuggled against him with her head pillowed on his chest. Something inside him melted. Even though it had been a close call, now that they had shared each other's blood he felt more connected to Blythe. Where before he'd only thought of her as his, now he felt it went much deeper than that. As if she had become a part of him. Yes, he had at first wanted her body and blood, but she had come to mean much more than that, almost as if what they had shared this night had linked them together somehow. In all his centuries of living, not once had he bonded with a woman this way. He had used them for their blood and their bodies, but he didn't miss them or want to claim them as his once he'd finished with them. Only with Blythe.

Blythe snuggled closer and reached up to cover his eyes with her hand. "You're thinking too loud and I can't sleep," she mumbled sleepily. "I'm yours, and you're mine. Now stop thinking inside my head as well as your own and go to sleep."

Mehen pulled her hand away and looked down at Blythe feeling a bit surprised at her words. How could she have heard his thoughts? He hadn't projected them to her, he knew he hadn't. He started to ask her what she meant when he noticed she had fallen asleep. Holding her closer, Mehen kissed the top of her head and decided it could wait until morning.

Chapter Nine

Blythe woke up the next morning with a very warm, heavy weight pressed to her back. She looked down and found Mehen's arm wrapped around her waist. She smiled as she thought of how good it had been to make love to him. Yes, she would admit it only to herself that last night had been somewhat of a close call, but now that Mehen wasn't starving she felt pretty sure that wouldn't happen again. And if he thought he could still go to other women for blood, he had another think coming.

Gently, so as not to awaken him, Blythe lifted Mehen's arm just enough to allow her to turn onto her other side and face him. He didn't stir. The lines of strain that had been on his face the night before could no longer be seen. That alone had Blythe thinking she'd done the right thing when she had forced him to take her blood. She also felt that now that his blood hunger had been appeased, Mehen would be able to stomach food again. She looked forward to stuffing food into him. He had slimmed out over the last couple of days.

Checking to make sure he still slept on, Blythe shot him a quick look. His eyes remained closed while he continued to breathe deep and even. Last night she hadn't had the chance to take her time looking at Mehen's body. Slowly, she lifted the sheet that covered them both.

The man was built with not an inch of fat on him anywhere. She'd felt how hard his muscles were, and had seen his muscular chest and arms more than once, but now she could see his legs had as much muscle. Thick slabs of well-defined muscles padded his thighs and calves. His legs only had a light dusting of dark hair. She moved her gaze higher until she reached his sex. It lay flaccid on one of his thighs. Mehen definitely could best be described as a large man in every sense of the word. While she looked, his manhood stirred to life. Blythe's gaze shot back to Mehen's face. He looked at her with hooded eyes.

Blythe let the sheet drop back down. She gave him a crooked smile. "I guess you caught me."

Mehen pulled her close and kissed the tip of her nose. "What makes you think I didn't do the very same thing while you slept during the night?"

The idea that he actually had looked at her body while she slept aroused her. "Is that so? Then I guess fair is fair."

"I guess so." Mehen rolled her under him as he supported his weight on his elbows. He brushed his lips gently against hers. "How do you feel?"

Blythe felt the head of his erection brush against her pussy. Her body grew wet at the intimate contact. "Fine, but I'd feel even better if you would move up a little higher." She squirmed beneath Mehen and rubbed herself against him.

"I don't know if that's a good idea."

"Oh, I definitely think it's a good idea."

What if I lose control again? Can I take that chance?

"You won't lose control, I told you that already. The only chance you'll be taking is what I'll do to you if you don't make love to me. So don't second-guess yourself, Mehen."

Mehen grew still above her. "I didn't say anything, Blythe."

"Yes, you did. I heard you clear as a bell wondering if you would lose control again and whether you should take the chance."

"I didn't say that out loud. I only thought it."

"Are you saying I heard it inside my head?"

If you can hear this, then I have to say yes.

Blythe heard Mehen's reply and his lips hadn't moved. She'd kept her eyes glued to his lips the whole time. "I heard that." *Can you hear me as well?*

"Yes. I couldn't before. The only people I could communicate with in this way have been my men. We use it when we hunt to keep in contact with each other, or to call for help if we need it. It's a link we share by being Ra's Chosen. Maybe you now have this ability because I gave you some of my blood."

"Has this happened before when you shared your blood?" Blythe really didn't want to know, but the question had to be asked.

"I've never given any mortal my blood in the past. I've only given it to you, and only because you needed blood desperately. It must have forged a bond between us."

Blythe was happy to hear Mehen hadn't shared his blood with anyone else. Now that they could hear each other's thoughts it also made her wonder what else they shared. With her fingers threaded through his hair, she brought his mouth down for a searing kiss. She shifted beneath him until she could impale herself on the head of his shaft and sucked his tongue inside her mouth. She squeezed him with her inner muscles then gasped. She felt her own rising desire along with Mehen's, which doubled the sensations that coursed through her body. Taking more of him inside her core, Blythe felt his thick shaft stretching her, filling her, along with the sensation Mehen felt when her slick channel surrounded him.

With a moan, Blythe said, "I can feel what you're feeling."

Mehen pushed more of his length inside her until he had himself sheathed to the hilt. They both moaned with pleasure. "It's the same with me."

Blythe lost the ability to speak as Mehen reared back until he was almost free of her body then plunged deep inside her again. An intense wave of pleasure crashed through them both, bouncing between them, amplifying the sensations that coursed through their bodies. Blythe didn't think either one of them would last long. Linked as they were, feeling what the other felt, fed their desire at a faster rate. As Mehen plunged into her, Blythe felt her climax roaring up to meet her. Desperately she tried to hold her

orgasm back, wanting their lovemaking to last a little longer, but in the end she lost the battle.

With a loud moan, she fell over the edge. Her inner muscles clutched at Mehen's shaft while he continued to pump in and out of her. She felt her body clamp around him as if the hard length buried inside her had become a part of her body as well. Mehen's orgasm tore through him as he climaxed deep inside her, which in turn sent her into another intense release that seemed to go on forever, as did Mehen's.

Once the last tremors subsided, Mehen rolled with her so she lay sprawled on top of him with his shaft still buried inside her. When her breathing slowed enough for her to talk, Blythe said, "That was incredible. And see, you didn't even have the urge to bite me."

"The urge is there, believe me."

Blythe sat up so she straddled his hips. Mehen's fangs showed past his upper lip. Using their newly formed bond, she felt his need to taste her again. Not because his blood hunger demanded he do so, but because it would be a part of their lovemaking. Wanting it as much as Mehen did, Blythe pulled her hair away from her neck to expose her throat to him. "Come to me, Mehen."

With a growl of need, Mehen sat up, wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled her neck. "Stop me if my control starts to slip. You'll feel when it happens."

Already his cock started to grow hard inside her. She squeezed his shaft and rocked against him. "You won't lose control." She gasped when he dragged his fangs across the vein in her neck. "Do it."

Taking hold of her hips, Mehen pushed up into her. "I want my fangs in you as you take me."

With a moan, Blythe slowly started to ride him as she slid up and down his hard shaft. His fangs scraped once against her skin before Mehen sank them deep. She gasped and increased her pace as a wave of pleasure slammed into her. While he drank, she felt the pleasure her blood gave him. The taste of it filling his mouth gave him a heady feeling. One with him, Blythe suddenly was overcome with the need to sink her teeth in him, to taste his blood as well. When he swiped his tongue across her throat to seal his bite mark after he only took a small amount of her blood, she bit Mehen on the side of the neck in the same place he had bitten her. As she clamped down hard, he bucked beneath her as he climaxed, his cock pulsing deep inside her. Blythe quickly followed with her own orgasm.

Mehen leaned back on his arms and she slumped against his chest. His heart thumped loudly against her ear. "See?" She tried to catch her breath. "I told you it would be okay."

"I stand corrected." Mehen reached up and touched the spot on his neck where she'd bitten him. "You bit me."

Blythe sat up and pushed his hand away. She could clearly see the bite mark she'd left behind. A couple beads of blood showed where her teeth had broken the skin.

Without thinking, she leaned forward and licked the blood away. Mehen stiffened under her. Thinking she'd hurt him when she'd done it, Blythe quickly apologized. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You didn't. I liked how it felt to have you sink your teeth into me, and have you taste my blood. I liked it a little too much. Makes me wonder how good it would be if you had fangs and needed to feed from me on a regular basis. I don't think we'd ever get out of bed."

"Sorry, no fangs." She flashed him a large smile as she showed him her blunted teeth.

"Which I think is a good thing right now. The others have started to bellow in my head that I have to let you come up for air so they can get something to eat. I guess they're all a little afraid of what you will do to them if they make a mess of the kitchen."

Blythe slid off Mehen and quickly turned to go into the bathroom. "You can tell them I'll be there in a little while, and they aren't to touch anything. If they destroy my kitchen again I won't be very pleased."

"Consider it done. Maybe I should join you in the shower to save time."

"I don't think so. Nice try anyway." She then shut the bathroom door firmly behind her before she changed her mind.

* * * * *

Mehen and Blythe walked into the kitchen where they were met by the other warriors. The kitchen still appeared to be in pristine condition and in the way Blythe had left it the night before. He saw her do a quick scan to make sure everything was where it should be. With a nod, she moved over to the fridge and started to pull out items to make breakfast. The warriors visibly relaxed and went to the table to wait.

Takan slipped into the chair closest to where Mehen sat. "I see Blythe has fully recovered."

Mehen nodded. "Yes, she has. How did you know giving her my blood would save her?"

Takan shrugged. "I didn't. I figured if we can drink blood and have it strengthen us, maybe it would help Blythe. Not to mention the fact we're immortal. I really had no idea what our immortal blood would do to a mortal."

"Well, my blood has had a side effect on Blythe."

"How so?"

"There's now a bond between Blythe and me. She can feel what I feel, as I can with her. Plus we now can communicate telepathically. It's like she's a part of me."

Takan smiled. "That would explain why the two of you didn't seem eager to get out of bed today."

"And we would still be in there if the others had left us alone," Mehen said in a loud enough voice for the other warriors to hear. Set turned and gave him an unrepentant look, as did Akori, Kysen and Denger.

"You do realize what this means, Mehen?" Taken said, catching his attention once again. "You no longer will have to seek out donors for blood anymore."

Mehen turned to gaze over at Blythe. With a greedy stare, he wondered how soon he could lure her back to bed. When Takan cleared his throat he looked away. "To be honest, the idea of feeding off anyone else but Blythe no longer appeals."

"That's the way it should be now that you've claimed her as your mate."

Hearing Takan refer to Blythe as his mate, Mehen stiffened. Takan clapped him on the shoulder and then left the kitchen before Mehen could think of anything to say. *Mate?* Blythe couldn't be his mate. Ra's Chosen didn't have mates. They had all given up that chance when they had sworn to champion Ra. A mate was a weakness none of them could afford. Yes, he felt strongly about Blythe, but she was mortal and he would live forever. How could they truly be mates if he would lose her one day? He hadn't had a chance to think that far ahead.

Looking over at Blythe, Mehen found her staring at him. From her worried expression, he knew she had picked up on some of his emotions. He quickly smiled to reassure her as he slammed down a barrier inside his head. Her brow creased in response, but she turned back to what she had been doing. Mehen listened with half an ear to the conversation going on between his men while he became lost in thought.

To even think of Blythe as his mate made Mehen feel as if he'd been knocked off-kilter. He knew it wouldn't take much effort on Blythe's part to have him handing his heart over to her. He already considered her his, and now that they had this bond, he knew it would only grow stronger with time. Did he really want to go through the heartache of having to watch her grow old and die while he stayed the same, never to age? The only other option was to withhold his heart, to not lose himself completely to her. To do that, he'd have to put some emotional distance between them, which would be hard if he continued to feed from Blythe exclusively. Each time he took her blood, his feelings for her grew stronger.

Turning to look at Blythe once again, Mehen knew what he'd have to do. Blythe would hate him for it, but in the long run it would be better for the both of them.

* * * * *

Deep in the mountainside at Four Peaks Mine, one of Phoenix's off-road trails, Sek readied himself to perform the ritual that would allow him to walk in daylight. He'd begun his preparations the night before. Now the next night, he had everything he needed. It really wasn't so much a ritual as something he would have to put himself through. He stared at the undead he had assembled for his purposes. They all were the run-of-the-mill undead. None of his soldiers stood among them.

With a sweep of his hand, Sek froze them in place. None knew what he would do to them. Sek allowed more of his demon nature to surface. His fangs lengthened and his eyes glowed red, giving everything he saw a reddish tinge. The undead still had no idea what was about to happen.

Moving with preternatural speed, Sek grabbed the first of the undead, sank his fangs into his neck and tore into his throat. Gulping in the great gouts of dead blood, he sucked the souls the undead had harvested into himself. Before the rest had time to react, he tore into the next, moving down the line until he'd drained all six. He wiped the dead blood off his chin with the back of his hand.

Sek felt the souls moving inside him. Unlike the undead that were merely the vessels that stored harvested souls and had no awareness of them, he could hear and sense each one. They battered at him, wailing in his head to be set free. Breathing heavily, Sek mentally beat them into submission. He knew it would only be temporary. As long as he kept the souls inside him, it would be a constant battle. One where if he let them gain the upper hand they'd take him over, make mush of his brain and send him over the edge into insanity.

As he used a bronze knife to get rid of what remained of the six undead, Sek could already feel his body starting to absorb the energy the souls gave off. This energy would allow him to survive the bright sunlight. Eventually he would drain the souls of this energy and he would once again have to hide underground during the daylight hours, but it wouldn't be for many days.

The souls began to wail pitifully inside his head once again. Ruthlessly, Sek pummeled them to silence. Already he felt the strain of holding them inside his body. He moved through the network of tunnels he and Mot had made deep inside the mountainside and headed for one of the larger chambers. There, he watched the soldiers he had created train. Their numbers were still small. He only had fifty of them trained so far, not counting the one that had been brought down by one of Ra's warriors. He needed more, but he knew patience would win the day. When finished, he'd have his very own army of undead soldiers. With them he planned to rid himself of Ra's Chosen once and for all.

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Blythe skipped through the channels on the television not paying much attention to what flashed on the screen. The warriors had all gone out to hunt, leaving her alone in the headquarters. Not that she minded being alone. She'd grown used to being on her own since she'd left her ex. It gave her time to think. Like right now, she found herself thinking about Mehen and how he'd reacted that morning when Takan had called her his mate.

To say Mehen had been a tad uncomfortable about the whole idea was a bit of an understatement. She had easily picked up on the shock he'd felt through the bond they now shared. And the moment Mehen realized she'd felt it, he had erected some kind of

barrier around himself to keep her out. Blythe didn't feel that was a good thing. She tried to talk to him about it later, but he'd done his best to avoid her. Eventually she just gave up and let him have his space. She hoped he would be able to come to terms with the fact they were now mated. It had all happened so quickly she had felt some reservations about the whole thing at first, but now she'd come to accept it since she'd already started to fall in love with Mehen.

Before Mehen had left for the evening, Blythe made sure she saw him off. Not caring that his men stood nearby, she'd cornered Mehen and pulled his head down to give him a goodbye kiss. At first he'd been stiff, but after she'd nipped at his bottom lip a few times, he'd swept her up in his arms and kissed her until her legs had given out. They both were breathing hard when Mehen finally ended the kiss. Blythe took that to mean he'd started to come around.

Glancing over at the clock, Blythe saw it had grown late. She switched off the television and headed for the bathroom. Going over to the large bathtub, she turned on the taps to fill it. She added some of her favorite vanilla bubble bath to the stream of warm water. A small smile played along her lips as she thought of what Mehen's reaction would be when he came home and found her in the tub. She had a feeling it wouldn't take much for her to get him to join her.

Once the tub had filled, Blythe went back into the other room and undressed. She put her hair up in a ponytail and used a large hair clip to pin it to the back of her head after she formed it into a bun. Sinking into the warm bath water, she sighed with pleasure. She leaned her head against the back of the tub and let the vanilla-scented bubbles surround her. With her eyes closed, she sank further into the water until it came up to her chin.

Time ticked by and Mehen didn't return. Blythe hoped that didn't mean he'd run into trouble with one of the undead. Mehen might be immortal, but that didn't stop her from worrying about him while he hunted. Ra's Chosen had only one weakness—if they literally lost their heads it would be game over. He hadn't been far from her thoughts since he'd left. Since the night before, she pretty much couldn't stop thinking about how things had changed between them. She still found it hard to believe a man such as Mehen could be hers. After her ex, Blythe had seriously thought she would have a hard time finding a man she could trust with her heart. Then she'd met Mehen. She smiled to herself as a warm feeling went through her. She thought of how good they were together. Even though she'd only known him a short time, Blythe couldn't stop herself from falling in love with him.

When the water started to cool with no sign of Mehen, Blythe reluctantly pulled the plug and got out of the tub. After she toweled dry, she slipped into a short nightgown that clung to her curves. She got into bed and turned the television back on to help the time pass until Mehen came home. It grew quite late and Blythe had a hard time keeping her eyes open. Using their bond, she reached out to Mehen in the hopes of finding out what kept him. She encountered the same barrier that he'd used that

morning. No longer able to stay awake, she turned off the television along with the lights and went to sleep.

When the mattress dipped as Mehen got into the bed next to her, Blythe woke up. She groggily looked at the clock and saw she'd been asleep for a few hours. "How come you're so late coming back?"

Mehen shifted and brushed a kiss across her lips. "Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you. I got tied up. Go back to sleep." He then turned on his side with his back toward her.

Blythe felt her gut clench. That was what her ex had told her when he'd come home late or not at all, that he'd gotten tied up. It had to be a coincidence that Mehen had used that same explanation. Nothing more. But that didn't stop the warning bells from going off inside her head. Telling herself she was being silly, Blythe snuggled up behind Mehen and tried to go back to sleep. She didn't have anything to worry about. Mehen wouldn't do anything to hurt her. At least she hoped he wouldn't. Telling herself not to make a mountain out of a molehill, she closed her eyes and let the sound of Mehen's even breathing lull her to sleep.

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Much to Blythe's disappointment, Mehen had already left the bed by the time she woke up. She had thought since he'd come home so late the night before that he would have at least awoken her in a way both of them would have enjoyed. Obviously he'd had other plans for his day. She sat up in bed and cocked an ear in the direction of the bathroom. If Mehen had only gotten up to shower, there still would be a chance she could get him to come back to bed. But when she couldn't hear the water running, or the sound of him moving around inside the bathroom, Blythe knew he'd left the quarters.

Her stomach rumbled. Blythe sighed knowing she couldn't lie in bed much longer. She had other people to feed besides herself. She got up and pulled on some clothes before she went to brush her teeth. As she headed for the kitchen, she started to think of what she wanted to cook for dinner that night. So far all her meals had been a rousing success. Blythe found cooking for six large men who could put away more food than she'd ever imagined to be very rewarding. A lot more rewarding than when she worked at her dead-end office job. She didn't have a supervisor breathing down her neck, or watching her every move. Nor did she have endless amounts of paperwork to go through for hours at a time. The hardest part of her new job had to be keeping food in stock. Yesterday she'd noticed the cupboards and fridge had started to look pretty bare, which meant she'd have to go do a big grocery shopping very soon.

The smell of freshly made coffee filled Blythe's nose when she entered the kitchen. She'd agreed to allow the warriors who woke up before her to make a pot of coffee. They couldn't trash her kitchen by doing that simple task. Set sat alone at the kitchen table sipping from a mug. Even though Set seemed to have had a change of heart about

her, Blythe still felt a little more reserved around him than with the others. She didn't have to worry anymore that he would kill her to keep their secret, but knowing he would have done it made her a little cautious around Set. She could forgive the whole locking her in the closet thing. He hadn't known about her fear of being locked in close, dark spaces. He looked in her direction when she moved to the cupboard to take down a cup and then filled it with coffee. She gave him a slight smile. Blythe hadn't been alone with Set before. She hadn't tried to avoid being alone with him, it just worked out that way.

Set smiled back. "I sense that I make you nervous."

"Why do you say that?" Blythe put her mug down on the counter and started to bustle around getting the things she needed to make breakfast. She avoided looking at Set as she moved about the room.

"Maybe because you won't look me in the eyes and you're bouncing around the kitchen as you try to make yourself look busy."

Blythe spun away from the counter and just about slammed into Set. He took hold of her upper arms as he righted her. She hadn't heard him move up behind her while he had spoken. "Sorry, I didn't see you there."

"Only because you are doing your damndest to avoid me," Set said with a chuckle. "How about we start over? I know we didn't get off on a very good foot when we first met."

"Okay. I've gotten over you locking me in that closet."

Set gave her a lopsided grin. "But you haven't gotten over me telling you I'd kill you if it ended up being the only way to keep what we are from the outside world. Correct?"

"Well, what do you expect? I'd just had the shock of my life, had no idea who and what you guys were, and then you tell me you're maybe going to have to kill me. That doesn't exactly inspire somebody to trust you."

"No, I guess it doesn't," he said with a laugh. Set took a step back and leaned against the counter with his hip. "Now that you're with Mehen, and are going to be living with us indefinitely, I want us to be on good terms. And it doesn't have anything to do with how well I've eaten since you've been here, either."

Blythe chuckled. "Sure it doesn't," she replied. "And the saying a way to a man's heart is through his stomach has no bearing on you."

"Okay, I'll admit that if you ply me with good food, and a lot of it, I'll be putty in your hands. I just don't want you to feel nervous around me, Blythe. I won't bite you, or anything else along those lines. For one thing, Mehen would have my balls if I did. How about I help you with breakfast? And before you say no, I'll do everything you say. And I promise not to make a mess while I do it."

He flashed her a smile that would have any woman agreeing to anything he said. And she felt pretty sure he knew it as well. "Fine. You can help."

While they worked side by side, Blythe found she got along with Set quite well. He had no problems saying whatever he felt like saying, and he could be brutally honest at times. Sometimes Blythe couldn't help but cringe when she heard some of the things he said. With her better insight on Set, Blythe realized he felt she shouldn't take his threat of having to kill her personally. He would have only done it because at the time it had needed to be done. He had nothing against her.

They'd just about finished cooking when the others started to trickle into the kitchen. The only person missing was Mehen. Once everything had been dished up, Blythe caught Set's attention. "Set, you were up early today, did you happen to see where Mehen went? I didn't see him before he left his quarters this morning."

Around a mouthful of food, Set said, "The last time I saw him, he was heading into the old part of the warehouse to do some sword practice. I guess he's still there."

"Well, I'd better go tell him breakfast is ready before the lot of you eat it all up."

Blythe left the men who seemed to be finishing off the food at an alarming rate as per usual. She made her way to the door that connected the headquarters to the older section of the warehouse that hadn't been renovated. She spotted Mehen as soon as she stepped inside the warehouse proper. Shirtless, he stood in the middle of the large open space swinging his sword in swooping arcs. His large biceps bulged with each stroke. A film of sweat coated his upper body, giving it a slick look as if he'd oiled his skin. She followed his moves, still finding it hard to believe this gorgeous man actually belonged to her. She must have done something right to end up with Mehen.

To catch his attention before she came any closer, Blythe cleared her throat. Mehen lowered his sword when he saw her. "I came to let you know breakfast is ready. And if you plan on getting any of it you'd better hurry before Set and the others gobble it all up."

"I'm fine. I made myself something to eat when I first woke up."

"Okay then. Do you have anything planned for the rest of the day?"

Mehen had raised his sword once again, but at her question he lowered it. "Why?"

Blythe shrugged. "I thought we could spend some time together is all."

"I do have a few things I really need to do. Sorry. Takan mentioned about getting a car for you so you can be more independent. I think that's a good idea. Why don't you go and tell him what car you want so he can get it for you?"

Blythe's brows drew together. She got the distinct impression Mehen only brought up the subject of her getting a car to get rid of her. "I haven't picked out which one I want yet. I'd rather spend some time with you."

"Once you're finished with Takan I should be done with the things I have to do then we can spend time together. All right?"

"Sure. I guess I'll be with Takan if you need me." Mehen hadn't spoken unkindly to her, but she was getting the impression he was holding himself back.

Mehen nodded. He lifted his sword and sliced the air with it. Feeling as if she'd just been dismissed, Blythe left him to his practice.

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"How about this one, Blythe?" When she didn't answer right away, Takan leaned closer and nudged her with his shoulder.

"Whatever. If you like it, then sure," Blythe said with a shrug.

She sat next to Takan in front of the computer in the meeting room. After she left Mehen, she'd asked Takan if he would help her look for a new car. Once the breakfast dishes had been cleared away she'd met him here. They had been looking at websites for local car dealerships for the last half hour.

"You didn't even look at it, Blythe. I don't think you've really looked at any of the cars I showed you." Takan turned in his chair to face her. "What's going on?"

Blythe shook her head. "Nothing. I promise I'll pay more attention."

Takan put his face closer to hers until she looked him in the eyes. "That's better. Now tell me what has you so distracted."

"It's stupid. I'm probably overreacting, thanks to my cheating ex."

"If it's something that bothers you, it's best to talk about it. Even if it is nothing." Takan sat back in his chair and crossed his arms across his wide chest. His biceps bulged under his long-sleeved t-shirt. As usual, his bangs hung in his face.

Blythe sighed. "It's Mehen. He's acting a little distant. At least that's what I'm getting from him. It could be because you blew the whistle about me being his mate. Ever since you told him he's put up some kind of barrier in his head that I can't get through."

"Sorry if I jumped the gun on the mate business, Blythe. From the way Mehen talked about the bond you share I thought he would have taken the news better."

"Believe me, I would have thought the same thing. Last night he came home really late. I can't help but feel he did it on purpose. That he knew I'd be asleep when he came to bed. Then when I woke up this morning he was already up and gone. And when I asked him earlier to spend some time with me he told me to go look for a car with you." She rubbed her temples, then said, "My ex pulled the same crap until I got fed up with being put aside. That's when I found out he'd been fooling around on me with one of the junior lawyers in his law firm. I don't want to go through that again with Mehen."

Takan sat forward and picked up one of her hands in his. "You don't have to worry about Mehen sleeping around on you, Blythe. He's by no means a womanizer, and never has been. Now Akori, that's another story."

A smile spread across Blythe's lips. "Yeah, Akori definitely is a ladies' man. That man will try to seduce anything in a skirt."

"There, I made you smile." Takan gave her hand a squeeze before he let go of it. "Try not to let it get to you. Mehen will come around. He just needs the time to adjust to the idea you're his mate."

"I hope so. At least he's more comfortable feeding from me."

"See? The rest will fall into place. Now let's get back to the job of finding you a car. I think something sleek and sporty. And of course it has to be black."

"Of course," Blythe said with a smile.

Takan typed something on the computer's keyboard then clicked the mouse a few times before he nodded. "Perfect. I think we should get you this one."

Blythe leaned in closer to the screen to see what Takan had found. She took one look at the car as well as the price tag and started to shake her head. "Are you kidding me? That car's worth a fortune."

"So? Once you've lived as long as Ra's Chosen has, you tend to save up a lot of money. Forget the price tag. The main thing is do you like it?"

"Of course I like it. It's a BMW M3 Cabriolet. I'd be stupid not to like it. The thing has leather seats and a retractable hard-top." Blythe scanned more of the webpage. "The damn thing even has seats that have memory function."

"Then this is the one." Takan got up and headed for the door. "I'll slip out now and get it for you."

Blythe started to sputter a protest, but Takan ignored her and disappeared out into the hallway. She shook her head. The car he wanted to get for her cost more than she made in a year at her old job. Obviously money was no object for Takan. She felt pretty sure if she'd asked for a Lamborghini instead, he'd have gotten her one. Turning back to the computer screen, Blythe looked over all the features that could be added to the BMW. She hoped Takan would just stick with the basic model, but she had a feeling he would go for the top of the line.

Chapter Ten

Mehen stood outside his quarters door and took a deep breath to prepare himself to face Blythe. He'd been out hunting. It turned out to be another slow night, which hadn't done him any good. He'd hoped to tire himself out fighting the undead so he could come back to the headquarters and be so tired he'd just fall into bed. He needed to do something to stop him from thinking about Blythe all the time. He had become obsessed with her. The need to have her, to have his cock buried inside her, clawed at him constantly. His shaft grew hard as he thought of how good she tasted—both her blood and her body. He leaned his forehead against the door while he struggled to bring his raging body back under control. If he wanted to put some distance between them he had to keep himself detached.

Once his body cooled, Mehen pushed open the door. Blythe sat watching television sipping a glass of wine. She gave him a small smile when he closed the door behind him. He could tell she was still ticked off with him for not allowing her to kiss him before he left for the night. He'd done it knowing what her reaction would be, and for the fact that one kiss wouldn't have been enough. He would have dragged her to his quarters and had her naked beneath him in a matter of seconds.

"Did you find many undead?"

"Only a couple." Mehen went to the walk-in closet and took off his leather jacket and sword. When he came back out Blythe stood there waiting.

She gave him a cool stare. "Have I done something to piss you off?"

"No. Why do you ask?" He brushed past her and walked into the bathroom. Blythe's scent drifted over him as she followed him in. Running the water in the sink, he splashed his face with cold water. He really needed to stand in a cold shower instead. It was getting hard to resist her with her being so close.

"I couldn't help but notice you went out of your way to avoid saying goodbye when you left this evening. I thought I must have done something to make you angry with me."

"It isn't necessary to put on a show in front of my men every night." He reached for a towel and covered his face with it and dried it. He was being harsh, and even though he hated himself for doing it, he knew he had to stay strong.

"A show?" Blythe asked. He could hear the anger in her hard, clipped tone. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize last night I had put on a show when I kissed you. Judging by how you kissed me back, I thought you approved."

Mehen shrugged and said in what he hoped sounded like a bored tone, "I didn't want to embarrass you in front of the men so I went along with it." He put the towel

down on the counter and turned away from the sink. Blythe stood blocking his way while her eyes practically shot sparks at him.

She put her hands on her hips. "What is your problem, Mehen? I feel as if you're messing with my head again. How can you be so hot for me one minute and the next, so distant?"

"Just let it go, Blythe. I'm not in the mood to have an argument with you." Mehen quickly moved by her hoping she wouldn't notice the large bulge in his pants.

"Just let it go? Oh, I'll just let it go." Blythe yanked the duvet off the bed and snatched up a pillow. "For someone who doesn't want an argument you made damn sure you started one." She flounced to the door with the duvet and pillow held tight in her arms.

"Where are you going?"

Blythe stopped walking and turned around to face him. "I'm going to sleep in Ra's temple again. You obviously don't want me around you anymore."

"That isn't true." That was so far from the truth it wasn't even funny.

"Really? Then prove it." She dropped the pillow and duvet and stomped back over to him. She stood toe to toe with him with her head angled up to look him in the face. "If you still want me around then do something to prove it."

She made a tempting sight as she stood there and glared at him. Her chest rose and fell with each rapid breath she took. He snapped. He didn't care anymore that he had to push her away, that she'd be much better off without him. Or that he was trying to make the ultimate sacrifice, to willingly give up the joy of keeping her as his mate, to save them both the painful knowledge that they wouldn't have forever together.

"The hell with it," he moaned softly.

With a growl of male need, Mehen reached for Blythe as the barrier he'd so carefully erected inside his head disappeared. Just before he claimed her lips, he heard Blythe gasp as the hunger he felt for her poured into her through their bond. Hungrily, he slanted his lips across hers. He picked her up and walked with her until he had her back pinned against the closed door. Blythe wrapped her legs around his waist and ground herself against his engorged cock. Having to stay away from her all last night and then all day today had driven his hunger for her to a fevered pitch. He wanted her so badly he couldn't think of anything else but getting inside her.

Mehen kept Blythe pinned to the door as he took hold of her pajama bottoms in one hand and ripped them off her body. He reached between their bodies and brushed a finger against her pussy. He groaned against her mouth when his fingers found her dripping wet. Supporting her weight with one hand, he frantically worked at his jeans until he got them pushed down past his hips. His cock sprang free as he pushed them down even farther.

He released Blythe's lips and moved to nip a trail down the side of her jaw to her neck. His fangs surged down. Unable to wait any longer, he sank his fangs into her neck at the exact same moment he sank his cock into her wet sheath. With her blood filling

his mouth and the inner muscles of her core clamped around him, his eyes almost rolled back in his head when an intense wave of pleasure overtook him. It verged on the point of pain.

Blythe moaned and dug her heels into his ass as he reared back and drove into her again and again. The door thumped in time with his strokes. He didn't care that the others probably could hear what they were doing. Blythe whimpered while he surged into her. Just as her inner walls began to clutch at his shaft when she started to climax, Mehen lifted his head and sealed his bite mark with a swipe of his tongue. He thrust into her one more time then roared as his climax tore through him like a freight train. His cock pulsed deep inside her body.

With legs that shook, Mehen lowered his head to Blythe's shoulder and tried to slow his breathing. She wrapped her arms around his head and held him to her. Once he felt as if he'd be able to walk without dropping Blythe, he turned and carried her to the bed. He put the duvet and pillow back before he kicked his jeans off the rest of the way and got in next to her. He lay on his back and threw an arm over his eyes as Blythe snuggled up against his side with her head resting on his chest. Her breathing soon evened out as she fell into a deep sleep.

Mehen lay awake for what seemed like hours. When they'd made love, he'd been able to feel the love Blythe had for him. On one hand, it made him want to shout for joy to know his woman loved him as much as he had come to love her, but on the other he wanted to yell at the unfairness of it. To have to watch her grow old and then eventually die would be beyond any pain he'd ever felt in his life. He didn't know if he could be strong enough to go through that. And what if only Blythe's blood sustained him now? If only her blood could keep his blood hunger at bay, what would happen to him once she died and no other's blood would do? Would he have to live with the pain of having lost the woman he loved as well as go through the unbearable pain of slowly starving from blood hunger? There was only one way to see if just Blythe's blood would satisfy him, he would have to try to feed from another. He had to know one way or the other.

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Not surprisingly, Blythe woke up to find Mehen already gone, again. Even though they had made love before going to bed last night, she'd thought he would have reached for her during what remained of it. He hadn't. She definitely got mixed signals from him now. When he had broken, she'd felt how badly he had wanted her. It had brought her to instant arousal. Her anger had fled on the wake of burning lust. She'd needed him inside her so badly she almost couldn't breathe. And when Mehen had fed from her at the same time as he pounded inside her, she'd had to bite her tongue to stop herself from telling him how much she loved him. Somehow she knew that would have been the last thing Mehen wanted to hear. But then again, it was possible he would have felt the love she had for him through their bond. Blythe shook her head. She felt so confused when it came to Mehen's feelings for her.

Blythe got up and went about her normal morning routine. Once again Mehen didn't show up for breakfast. This time she decided not to look for him. When everyone had finished eating, she thought to ask Takan to continue her lessons to read hieroglyphs, but he reminded her that he had to go pick her car up in a little while. Blythe had been surprised Takan had to wait for the next day to bring home her new car. She'd been so sure he would have come home with it the day before. But at least that gave her something to look forward to.

After the warriors left to go about their business, Blythe decided to go to Ra's temple. She found being inside it relaxed her, and she hadn't had a chance to really check out Takan's work on the temple walls. Luckily for her, none of the warriors had the same thoughts as she, so she had the temple to herself. Bright sunlight already filled the room. Blythe closed her eyes and lifted her face to the sun as she let the warm rays sink into her skin. Thoughts of how Mehen acted toward her filled her head. In some ways his treatment of her seemed worse than her ex's had been. At least with her ex, he'd outright ignored her. Mehen tried to remain distant, but when pushed, he acted as if he couldn't get enough of her. She honestly didn't know how much more of it she could take.

It will all work out, Blythe.

Blythe's eyes snapped open and she look around the temple as the deep male voice filled her head. "Hello? Is somebody there?" She couldn't see anyone. She wondered if one of the warriors thought to play a trick on her. The voice had spoken in the same Egyptian accented English as all the warriors spoke, but she didn't recognize it. But then again, the only person she could communicate with in that way was Mehen, and she felt pretty sure he wouldn't do something such as this.

Don't fret so much. Mehen just needs time to accept his fate.

"Who are you?" Blythe had a feeling she already knew who spoke in her head, but she wanted to be sure.

You know the answer to that question. I've waited a long time for you to come. All will be well.

Blythe felt an invisible hand lovingly stroke her cheek. "Ra?"

She waited a full minute, but she didn't get a reply. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, Blythe knew it had been the sun god who had spoken inside her head. But why would Ra talk to her? And what had he meant when he'd said he'd waited a long time for her to come? Why had a god singled her, a mere mortal, out like that? She wasn't anyone special, not like the warriors Ra had chosen to protect mortals from the undead.

She stayed in the temple for an hour more hoping Ra would speak with her again, but he remained silent. She studied the hieroglyphs on the walls as originally planned. She couldn't decipher them yet, but some she recognized from her earlier lesson with Takan. Ra had been painted with the body of a man and the head of a falcon that had the wadjet sun disk resting on top of its head. The other she recognized with ease—the symbol for Ra's Chosen with the same winged sun with two cobras on either side of it,

along with the eye of Ra in the center. It matched the marking on Mehen's back. One day soon she hoped to be able to come and read the stories Takan had painstakingly painted on the temple walls.

She met Takan just as she walked out of the temple. He smiled when he saw her and came to wrap an arm around her shoulders while he led her to the headquarters' main entrance.

"Just the person I came looking for," Takan said. He then held out a set of keys.

Blythe took them. She could see the BMW logo on the black rubber that had been molded around the top of each key. She looked up at Takan. "Can I take it out for a ride?"

"Of course, and if you don't mind, I'd love to come with you. It handles like a dream. It almost makes me wish I could keep it."

"No way, buddy. That car is mine. You bought it for me, not you. If you want one, get one of your own."

When Blythe stepped into the docking bay, she felt her breath catch when she saw the shiny new car parked near the door. The top was down, giving her a good view of the tan leather seats. She quickly went over to the car and got into the driver's side. Takan climbed into the passenger seat beside her. Blythe put the key in the ignition and reached up to run her hands along the steering wheel. She then noticed the car had a stick shift.

"How did you know I knew how to drive standard?"

"Actually, I didn't. I would have taught you if you didn't know how to drive with a stick shift. A car like this, it would be a sacrilege to have an automatic transmission. It has too much power under the hood for that."

Pushing in the clutch, Blythe turned over the ignition. The BMW roared to life. She put it in first gear and with care drove it out of the docking bay. Once she cleared the gated entrance to the warehouse, Takan gave her directions to a deserted street. There, she quickly shifted gears until the car seemed to fly down the street. Reaching the dead end, she turned the car around and put it in neutral so it could idle.

Blythe reached across to the passenger seat and pulled Takan's face over for a loud, smacking kiss on the cheek. "I love this car. Actually you deserve another kiss for getting it for me." She gave him another loud kiss on the cheek.

Takan pulled her hands away and shook his head until more hair hung down in front of his face. He seemed a bit flustered when he spoke. "You're welcome. It's really not that big of a deal."

She saw his cheeks had flushed a slight red. Hoping to alleviate some of his embarrassment, Blythe asked, "Have you met Ra in person?"

Takan gave her a look that said her question seemed to have come out of the blue. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered if when he chose you to be one of his warriors whether he appeared to you in person, or if he did it all in your head kind of thing."

"No, he came to each of us in person once he made his decision. All except for Mehen and Set. They both had already been Ra's protectors during his travels through the underworld at night when the demon god Apep unleashed Sek and Mot on mortals. Mehen and Set were the very first of Ra's Chosen to be picked."

Blythe already knew the story of Apep and how he had set Sek and Mot, two of his demons, free to turn mortals into the undead to collect souls. Mehen had told her that story, but he had failed to mention he'd been with Ra when it had happened. "So what exactly did Ra do once he picked you?"

"He appeared before me and explained why I had been chosen, then he gifted me with immortality and the powers I'd need to help defeat the undead."

"How did he do that?"

"He gave me his wrist to drink from."

Blythe made a face as she thought of how sexually arousing it was when Mehen fed from her. "Ah, I see."

Having guessed at her thoughts, Takan laughed. "Drinking Ra's blood did not have the same effect as when we feed from mortals, Blythe. We didn't even have fangs then. We got them along with the other gifts after we drank his blood."

"Oh." She put the car in gear and started to head back in the direction of the warehouse. "So what is Ra like?"

"He's a god."

She rolled her eyes. "I know that. I mean what is he like as a man?"

Takan turned his head and studied her for a few seconds before he spoke again. "I guess you could describe him as fair and just. He's someone you can trust with your life. He's not a vengeful god by any means. Why all this sudden interest in Ra, Blythe?"

She debated whether she should tell Takan about her encounter in the temple or not, but in the end she decided there would be no point in keeping it a secret. "He spoke to me in the temple today. At least I think the voice I heard in my head belonged to Ra." Out of the corner of her eye she saw Takan sit up straighter in his seat.

"What did he say to you?"

"I'd gone to the temple to think about Mehen. He has been kind of standoffish of late. This voice in my head told me not to worry so much. That I should give Mehen time to accept his fate."

"This was while you were inside the temple?"

Blythe nodded. "Yes."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes. He said that he had waited a long time for me to come and that everything would work out in the end. Why would Ra be waiting for me?" She gave Takan a quick look and found him staring at her intensely before she turned back to look at the road.

"I don't know. You'd have to ask Ra that."

From the way Takan spoke, Blythe got the feeling he knew exactly why Ra had said it. She also sensed he wouldn't tell her even if she begged when he turned back around to look out the passenger window. Blythe couldn't shake the feeling that Takan had a lot of secrets inside that head of his, ones he didn't want to share.

At the gate to the warehouse, Blythe waited for Takan to unlock and open it with his mind before she drove through. She'd let him keep his secrets. She only hoped that one day he would trust her enough to let her know some of them. For now, she'd settle for trying to contact Ra herself and see if the sun god would talk to her again.

* * * * *

Sek slammed his hand down on the steering wheel of the nondescript sedan he'd stolen for his first trip out in the daylight. He'd lost the woman. He'd been out driving through downtown Phoenix hoping to catch the mortal woman out alone and away from the protection of Ra's Chosen. When Apep had called out to him, he'd almost run into a light post. What with all the souls he'd taken into himself and then to have the demon god speak to him, Sek felt as if someone had driven a nail through his head. The souls tormented him night and day. He constantly had to battle them into submission. Apep's call only added to the strain.

He knew Apep had felt his torment and that the demon god had enjoyed his pain. Apep laughed cruelly when the souls inside him began to scream in anguish as the demon god touched each one with his evil taint.

The woman is outside in the open. Now is your chance to act, Sek.

Sek gasped when Apep flooded his brain with the information where to find her. Once the god receded enough for him to function, he'd quickly turned the car around and headed for the deserted street Apep wanted him to go. When he reached it, he watched a black BMW speed by. He was able to catch sight of the mortal woman in the driver's side. Hitting the gas, he'd given chase, but before he could get close some kind of cloud descended over his brain. He became disoriented. He blindly turned down one street, then another. He realized he'd lost the woman when he found himself almost back to where he'd first started.

He pulled over to the side of the road just as Apep roared with anger inside his head. Moaning with pain, Sek clutched his head. Blood trickled from his nose and ears. His eyes rolled back into his head as he bordered on going into convulsions. Finally Apep grew silent, but Sek knew he hadn't left. Breathing hard, he waited for the demon god to speak.

You will come tomorrow to the city and hunt for the woman again.

"She is too closely watched, master. One of Ra's Chosen had been in the car with her."

You dare question me?

Sek ground his teeth together as a blinding pain shot through his skull. "No, master. I only thought there has to be a better way to capture the woman."

You will do as I command, Sek. I have seen that the woman will be near where you are now. Alone. You can take her then. Do not disappoint me again.

Sek sighed after Apep broke contact with him. He looked around. He sat parked near a large grocery store. He couldn't afford to fail. Since Apep hadn't said exactly what time of day the woman would arrive here, Sek knew he'd have to show up just before the store opened for the day. Sitting outside all day in the bright sunlight would be torture, but he hoped if he ended up being lucky enough the woman wouldn't keep him waiting too long.

* * * * *

Mehen watched Takan walk down the sidewalk toward him. The warrior had communicated telepathically that he wanted to meet with him before they went back to the headquarters at the end of the night. Mehen had agreed even though he had a feeling he knew what Takan wanted to talk to him about. He hadn't missed how close Takan and Blythe had grown.

Takan nodded his head in Mehen's direction. "Thanks for agreeing to talk with me."

Mehen turned and started to walk when Takan fell into step beside him. "What can I do for you? I take it you don't want to discuss this in front of the others."

"No. It has to do with Blythe."

"What about her?" Mehen asked as he tried to keep his voice as emotionless as possible.

"What's going on between you two? I thought you had accepted her as your mate? She told me you've been kind of distant with her of late."

Mehen clenched his jaw together. "That's none of your business, Takan. What happens between Blythe and me stays between the two of us."

Takan scowled. "I beg to differ. I feel responsible for Blythe's welfare."

With a growl, Mehen stopped walking and turned to face Takan. "Back off, Takan. Your interest in Blythe makes me wonder if you want her for your own. Is that why you feel responsible for her?"

"No. She is meant for you. My feelings for Blythe are different."

"Really now? How are they different? Are they different as in you just want to fuck her instead of keeping her as your own?" Mehen realized he'd gone a little too far with that one.

Takan's eyes flashed with anger. "You know damn well that isn't what I meant. I can see you're not in the mood to talk reasonably. So there really isn't any point continuing with this conversation. But I will say this, you need Blythe. Push her away and you will face the consequences."

Mehen stood where he was as Takan turned and stalked back the way they had come. He didn't like it that Takan showed so much interest in Blythe, nor the fact that he felt responsible for her. Running a hand through his hair, Mehen continued to walk in the direction they had been headed. Jealousy had reared its ugly head. He ruthlessly pushed it away. It wouldn't do him any good when he knew he would have to let Blythe go at some point. He didn't expect her to remain celibate for the rest of her life just because he couldn't be with her. Determined to do what he had planned before returning to the headquarters, he headed for The Oasis. Even though the warriors went there to look for donors some nights, Mehen knew tonight none of them would be there. He'd talked to the others to make sure.

Once inside the bar, he looked for a donor. He knew if Blythe ever found out what he was about to do, she would want nothing to do with him anymore. To her, his feeding from another woman would be tantamount to cheating on her. To him, this would be a test to see if only Blythe could satisfy his blood hunger. And to see if feeding from a donor made him sexually aroused, which used to happen before Blythe came into his life.

He spotted a woman who sat at one of the tables with another woman. The one he'd selected had long blonde hair. He chose a blonde on purpose, not wanting any reminders of Blythe while he fed. Mehen willed the other woman to get up and go to the bathroom, leaving the blonde at the table by herself. Once her friend left, he made his way over. The blonde looked up at him and smiled. Not wanting to waste too much time, he willed her to follow him outside to the back of the bar.

He backed the woman up against the brick wall and leaned in to brush his mouth against hers. Normally when he fed from donors he always kissed them until they grew pliant in his arms before he moved down to their necks. Now he felt nothing. He didn't even like that she touched him. She wasn't Blythe. Closing his eyes, he made himself move to her neck as he wrapped his arms around her to anchor her to him. His fangs slid down as he nuzzled her throat. The woman clutched at his shoulders and her head fell to the side. She moaned when he dragged his fangs against her skin. Opening his mouth, he sank his fangs into her neck.

The mental barrier he'd erected between himself and Blythe slipped as he swallowed the first mouthful of blood. When it hit his stomach it started to painfully cramp. Fighting the pain while he continued to drink, Blythe's cry of anguish filled his head at the same time the woman he held in his arms cried out in orgasm. Shaking from the intense cramp that clawed at his stomach, and from Blythe's emotions of betrayal, he swept the bite mark on the woman's neck with his tongue to heal it. He then wiped the episode from her memory. With the sound of Blythe crying in his head, he hurriedly walked away.

* * * * *

Blythe sank to the floor inside Mehen's quarters while tears slowly wet her cheeks. He'd done it. He'd gone behind her back and searched out a total stranger to feed from. When the mental barrier Mehen used to keep her out of his head all day dropped, at first she didn't know what had happened. One moment she'd been sound asleep and then the next her head filled with everything Mehen felt in an instant. With no block, everything he experienced, saw and felt flowed to her along their bond. Realizing what he'd done, she'd cried out in pain. How could he have done that to her? To have to hear the woman he held in his arms cry out in pleasure as she climaxed, as if Blythe herself held her, felt like a punch to her gut. She took perverse pleasure in the fact that Mehen's stomach cramped from the other woman's blood. He deserved to suffer for the pain he'd caused her. He knew what it would do to her if he sought out other women.

Blythe wiped away her tears as a coldness descended upon her. She wouldn't waste any more tears on the likes of Mehen. He turned out to be no better than her ex-husband. Not wanting to feel anything from Mehen, nor wanting him to pick up on what she felt, Blythe figured if he could erect a barrier between them, so could she. With her eyes closed, she pictured a thick brick wall inside her head that didn't let anything out or in. She built it high and strong. Once she finished, she opened her eyes. She could no longer feel Mehen.

With an air of unnatural calmness, Blythe sat back on the bed. She knew Mehen would come here as soon as he returned to the headquarters. Hands fisted in her lap, she waited.

Ten minutes later, Mehen opened the door. He stood in the doorway panting with the pain he still must be feeling. He slowly crossed the room.

"Blythe, I didn't mean for you to find out like this."

With no emotion on her face whatsoever, she offered Mehen the inside of one of her wrists. "Take some of my blood to stop the cramps."

Mehen shook his head. "No."

Surging to her feet, Blythe shouted, "Take some of my damn blood to get rid of your cramps! Now!"

Not giving Mehen much choice, she wrapped her other hand around the back of his neck to hold him in place and shoved her wrist against his mouth. He groaned as he opened his mouth. Just before he bit her, Blythe threw up another brick wall in her mind, and another. As Mehen's fangs sank into her skin and drank, she threw up wall after wall until she felt absolutely nothing. His feeding didn't cause her body to go up in flames with arousal, and the desire he felt as he fed didn't affect her.

Once she figured he'd had enough to stop the pain, she released his neck and tugged at her wrist. Mehen dragged his tongue along her skin and moved as if to take her in his arms. Blythe hauled back and slapped him across the face. His head snapped to the side with the force of it. When he looked back at her, she could clearly see her handprint on his cheek.

Blythe's lip curled as she spoke. "Don't think for one minute I'll ever forgive you for what you did. I already had one relationship with a man who cheated on me, I refuse to stay with another who will turn around and do the same thing to me again. I only fed you to ease your pain."

"I did it for your own good."

"My own good?! How do you figure it was in my best interests?"

"I can't be your mate. Don't you understand? I'm immortal. You are mortal. One day you'll grow old and die. Where will that leave me?"

"You bastard," Blythe said, shaking in anger. "How dare you? That makes you sound just a tad self-centered if you ask me. If our places were reversed, I'd count myself lucky to have whatever time I had left with you. Yes, it would hurt when you died, but at least I'd have years of memories to live with. Better yet, I would have gone to Ra and asked him if there would be any chance of making you immortal like me. But of course you never thought of that, did you? All you can think of is yourself. About how having me as your mate will affect you. Your true colors are showing, Mehen, and I don't like them one bit. As far as I'm concerned, even if you did speak to Ra and he decided to make me immortal, I wouldn't do it. At least not for you."

Blythe felt her hard-won coldness start to shatter. She brushed past Mehen and tried to open the door. The lock clicked into place as soon as she wrapped her hand around the doorknob. Unable to look at Mehen anymore, knowing if she did she'd break down, Blythe said, "Unlock the damn door, or I swear I'll scream my head off. Then you can explain to the others what exactly is going on. Now." She tried the door again, but it remained locked. "Don't say I didn't warn you. On the count of three I'm going to see how soundproof these walls really are. One. Two."

She never made it to three. The door unlocked and opened under her hand. Pulling it all the way open she stepped out into the hallway. She slammed the door shut behind her with a resounding bang. Blythe ran to Takan's quarters as she desperately tried to keep it together. She didn't want the other warriors to see her like this. When she stood in front of Takan's door, she raised her hand to knock, but it opened before her hand connected. The last of her control snapped when she saw Takan in the doorway. With a cry, she threw herself against his chest and the tears she held back rose to the surface in a flood.

Takan's arms closed around her as he stepped back into his quarters. He shut the door behind them and held her until she ran out of tears. Hiccupping, she leaned back and wiped her face with her hand. She then noticed Takan only wore pajama bottoms and that she had wet his bare chest with her tears.

She sniffed a couple of times. "I'm sorry, Takan. I don't usually turn into a watering pot. I promise."

Takan went into his bathroom and returned with a wad of tissue, which he then handed to her. "No need to apologize, Blythe. What happened to make you so upset?"

Blythe used one of the tissues to wipe her face before she blew her nose in it. "Mehen's a fucking asshole."

Takan's brows rose at her words. "Okay. Let's sit down and you can tell me why you think Mehen is a fucking asshole."

She went and sat down on Takan's bed beside him. "He fed from another woman tonight. I felt it through our bond. All of it."

"Why would he go and do that? It will only drive his blood hunger through the roof. He already went through it before he finally got smart and fed from you."

Blythe looked at Takan. "How do you...never mind. I won't even ask. You know about the blood hunger thing because you saw it in the vision you had when you touched me. If Mehen didn't know that before, he sure does now. One mouthful of that other woman's blood and his stomach cramped like a bugger. I got the feeling it hurt worse than it did before."

"Is he still in pain?"

"No. Being the dumbass that I am, I couldn't leave him like that. I fed him from my wrist before I came to you." Takan gave her a knowing look. "What do you take me for? He'd just been with another woman. I threw up so many bloody walls in my head to keep him out I didn't feel a thing while he fed."

"So what are you going to do now?"

Blythe sighed. She still hurt from Mehen's betrayal. "Mate or no mate, I can't be with Mehen anymore. I already had one husband who cheated. My heart won't survive a second one."

Takan wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "You love Mehen, don't you?"

Blythe snorted. "A fat lot of good that does me." She put her head on Takan's shoulder and sighed. "Is it all right if I stay here with you? In the morning I'll try to figure out where I can sleep. I'm just too tired to think about it right now."

"Of course you can. It will do Mehen a world of good to spend the rest of the night wondering what we're up to in here."

With a laugh, Blythe said, "I never would have guessed you had a cruel streak, Takan. I guess it's true what they say. You have to watch out for the quiet ones."

"I'm only cruel to those who deserve it. Now let's get some sleep. You take the bed and I'll take the floor."

Too tired to argue about who should sleep where, Blythe climbed into the bed and lay down. As Takan arranged a pillow and blanket on the floor for himself, she closed her eyes on the tears that threatened to come to the surface again.

Chapter Eleven

Mehen spent the remainder of the night pacing inside his quarters. He knew where Blythe had gone. She was with Takan. Just the thought of her inside the warrior's quarters, the two of them alone, made him want to punch his fist through the wall. He kept picturing them in bed together. He could almost hear Blythe moan with pleasure as Takan took her. Blythe belonged to him, not Takan.

Unable to be alone with his thoughts any longer, Mehen headed for the kitchen. Even at this early hour someone would be awake. He needed to talk to Set. He could always count on Set to lay it all out on the table for him, the good as well as the bad. Set would tell him point-blank if he thought Mehen had fucked up and what he had to do to fix it.

To his relief, he found Set in the kitchen drinking coffee with Denger and Kysen. The three of them gave him a pointed look when he joined them at the kitchen table. Obviously they already knew what had gone on between Blythe and him last night. Given their excellent hearing they would have heard Blythe yelling at him. "Well, don't all talk at the same time."

Denger spoke up first. "What the hell were you thinking?"

"I had my reasons."

"Sure you did," Kysen gave him a snarl. "You just set out to hurt the woman who loves you."

Mehen's turned his head to Kysen's direction. "Loves me? How do you know Blythe loves me? She's never said as much."

Denger snorted, drawing Mehen's attention back to him. "You really are thick in the head aren't you, Mehen? Of course Blythe loves you. Why else would she have gotten so upset and slapped you a good one for feeding from another?"

Mehen scowled. "How would you know Blythe slapped me last night?"

"I did a little snooping in your head while the two of you argued."

"Stay the hell out of my head, Denger, especially when I didn't give you permission to lurk."

Denger flipped the long tail of his hair back over his shoulder and crossed his arms across his wide chest. "We could all hear her when she yelled at you. I wanted to make sure you didn't hurt her again."

Affronted that Denger would actually have the audacity to say out loud that he would hurt Blythe on purpose, Mehen barked, "I wouldn't purposely set out to hurt Blythe."

"But that is exactly what you did last night when you went to another," Kysen shot back. "She didn't deserve that. To be honest, I don't think you *deserve* her. Blythe's the type of woman any man would want for his own. Since you don't love her enough to keep her, I think I'll take her. She may not love me at first, but I'm willing to work on it. I'll keep her in my bed until she forgets what it was like being with you. It will be nice not to have to go and search for a donor when Blythe will be happy to feed me."

Mehen hissed at Kysen. "You'll stay the fuck away from her, Kysen."

"Or you'll do what? You can't have it both ways you know. Either she's your mate, or she isn't. Which will it be?"

"She's mine."

Kysen stood. He leaned both hands on the table and stuck his face right in front of Mehen's. "Then keep telling yourself that. You can't stand the thought of another man touching her, or at the very least one of us taking her blood. I would never try to take Blythe from you, just so you know. I only said I would to open your eyes and make you realize what she means to you before you throw it all away." Kysen motioned for Denger to follow him out of the kitchen.

Once they left, Set put his coffee cup on the table with a thump. He'd remained quiet while the others had spoken, but from the serious look he wore on his face, Mehen could tell he now felt ready to talk.

"Okay, Mehen, tell me the real reason why you went behind Blythe's back."

Mehen sighed. As usual, Set didn't pussyfoot around. "How can a mortal be a mate to an immortal?"

"So that's what this is all about. You can't come to grips with the whole idea of Blythe being mortal and your mate. If you love her, it really shouldn't matter."

"Of course it matters. There's more at stake here than just her being my mate. I'm tied to a mortal and I can't feed from another."

Set shook his head. "You're losing me here. You can't feed from another? Isn't that exactly what you did last night?"

"Yes. But not without suffering a worse consequence than Blythe being pissed off at me." Mehen fisted his hands on the table in front of him. "My body won't tolerate a donor's blood any longer. One mouthful and I had vicious cramps as if I'd been starving for months. My blood hunger almost took me over."

Set eyed him carefully. "You don't seem the worse for it now."

"That's only because Blythe forced me to feed. As soon as her blood hit my stomach, my blood hunger cooled and the cramps disappeared. If I can only feed from Blythe, what will happen when she dies? Will I be left to starve slowly and painfully? And before you can ask, when I fed from Blythe she somehow managed to keep herself above it. She threw so many walls up in her head it rebounded at me."

A smile appeared on Set's face. "If she is capable of doing that, I think that explains why we couldn't wipe her. She already somehow put a small one in place without

realizing what she did. She has never been taught how to put up walls to keep someone out of her head before, but it would seem she's a natural. Blythe is one tough woman."

"I'm glad you approve of her abilities, but what about my other problem?"

"She's obviously meant for you. Why else would you be tied to her to that extent? Did you even think to ask Ra about making her immortal before you went and screwed things up with Blythe?"

Mehen gave him a guilty look. "No, I didn't." Seeing Set's look of incredulity, he shook his head. "Don't even say it. I know. I'm an idiot. Blythe already asked me that same question last night. With Ra not answering my calls, I didn't think about doing that."

"Then I suggest you go and see what Ra says before you try to patch things up with Blythe. And before you go off half cocked like last night. I wish you luck, my friend, because I think you're going to need it."

* * * * *

Blythe woke up with a blinding headache. She'd only managed to sleep for a couple of hours before she started dreaming about Mehen, and it hadn't been a pleasant dream either. In the dream he'd held a faceless woman in his arms as he fed from her. The woman moaned with pleasure and rubbed herself up against him. Unlike what had actually happened the night before, Mehen had become aroused. He pulled the woman closer as he lifted her tight skirt and ripped her panties off. Blythe yelled at him to stop, but either he couldn't hear her or he didn't care. He reared back and freed his erection from his pants. Just before he entered the faceless woman, Mehen turned to look at her and said, "You're not my mate."

Blythe had come awake screaming Mehen's name in her head. After that dream, sleep eluded her for the rest of the night. But she stayed in bed and refused to get up early, not wanting to take the chance of coming face to face with Mehen. When Takan woke up a short while after that, she feigned sleep. After he took a shower, he left his quarters.

Now almost mid-morning, Blythe decided she couldn't stay in bed and hide all day. At some point she'd have to be around Mehen, there would be no avoiding it. They did live in the same place after all. As she rubbed her throbbing temples, Blythe got out of bed. She then realized she didn't have anything else to wear but her pajamas. The clothes she'd gotten from the old warehouse the night before still sat in Mehen's quarters. That left her two options. She either could go to Mehen's quarters to get the clothes, and risk the chance that he'd still be there, or she could get something else to wear from the old warehouse. That also could be risky since Mehen liked to go there to practice with his sword.

Deciding to take the chance on the latter, Blythe inched open the door to Takan's quarters and poked her head out into the hallway. No one seemed to be about. The floor felt cool on her bare feet when she quickly made her way to the old warehouse

section of the building. Inching the door open that connected the headquarters to it, Blythe breathed a sigh of relief when she found the old warehouse empty.

After she grabbed jeans, a bra, panties, socks and a t-shirt, Blythe hurried back to Takan's quarters for a shower. Before she finished her shower she decided she didn't want to stay inside the headquarters waiting to run into Mehen. Now that she had her own car, she really needed to go do a big grocery shopping.

Blythe figured the warriors would have to make do until she got back. They all knew better now not to trash her kitchen. Spying the pad of paper and pen on Takan's dresser, she wrote him a short note to let him know where she'd gone.

When she left Takan's quarters, Blythe cursed to herself. She'd have to go to Mehen's quarters after all. Her purse, along with her car keys, was there. Steeling herself against the off chance Mehen would be there, she pushed open the door prepared to give him the silent treatment. Her luck held. His quarters were empty. Quickly, she snatched up her purse and shut the door.

Inside the docking bay, Blythe started her car and drove up to the gate at the entrance to the warehouse. Takan had given her a remote after they'd returned from her test drive. Feeling as if she'd made a clean getaway, Blythe headed for downtown Phoenix.

The drive to the grocery store that she usually shopped in didn't take very long. Blythe debated whether or not to take another turn around the block, just to give her an excuse to keep driving. She had to admit Takan had her pegged when he picked the BMW. She loved the power it had and the way it looked. As an extra bonus it was all hers.

Deciding to get down to the business of shopping, Blythe pulled into the grocery store lot and parked the car. Before she got out, she checked her purse to make sure she still had the debit card Takan had given her. She had it. Not wanting to take any longer than needed, Blythe got out of the car, locked it with the remote on her key chain and headed inside the grocery store.

She quickly filled the cart while she walked up and down the aisles. Now that she knew how much the warriors could eat in a day, Blythe crammed seven times the amount of food into the cart than if she only shopped for herself. When she rounded a corner to go down the next aisle, she just about ran over a man who stood right where she wanted to go.

"Sorry, I didn't hit you, did I?" She yanked the cart back toward her.

The man gave her a radiant smile. "No. I'm the one who should apologize. I got in your way. This is my first time shopping here and I don't know where everything is. I guess I didn't pay attention to where I was going."

Blythe smiled back. The man had a blond surfer look going on. His hair fell in shaggy waves to the tops of his shoulders. His face, as well as the small patch of skin that showed where his shirt hadn't been buttoned, looked tanned. His blue eyes were

friendly. Add all that together with very good looks, and Blythe found him attractive enough.

Taking pity on him, she said, "If you like, I can show you where to find the things you need. I've been shopping here for years. I know the store like the back of my hand."

"That would be great. It would save me from wandering up and down the aisles looking completely clueless."

"We can't have that," Blythe said with a chuckle. She held her hand out to him. "I'm Blythe."

"Nice to meet you, Blythe." He took her proffered hand and gave it a shake. "I'm Simon."

Blythe scowled to herself after Simon released her hand. She resisted the urge to wipe her palm on her pant leg. For some reason when he touched her, a chill had run down her spine. As if she'd touched something that could only be described as nasty feeling.

Since she didn't want to let on that his touch had made her uncomfortable, Blythe asked Simon what he wanted. He told her the three things he'd come for. They were all pretty basic and it didn't take her long to lead him to where he could find them. After he'd found everything he wanted, Simon thanked her for her help. "Hopefully we'll meet again sometime, Blythe. I enjoyed your company. Until next time."

When Simon walked away, she let her body relax. The longer she'd spent in his company the more uneasy she'd felt. She couldn't explain why he made her feel that way. It wasn't as if he could be one of the undead. They didn't walk in the broad daylight. They spontaneously combusted when exposed to sunlight, all the warriors had assured her of that. With a surfer's tan she definitely had to rule Simon out as one of the undead. Blythe shook her head at her own foolishness. She'd obviously been hanging out with Ra's Chosen too much if she now started to think every person who gave off a bad vibe could be one of the undead. She needed to get out of the headquarters more often.

It didn't take her long to finish the rest of her shopping. At the checkout, she tried not to cringe when the cashier gave her the final total. Blythe handed the girl her new debit card, grateful she didn't have to use her own money to pay for all the food. The warriors would put her in bankruptcy within a month.

After manhandling the full shopping cart out to her car, Blythe managed to fit all the bags inside her trunk. She slammed the lid shut and turned to take the cart to the cart return. She jumped and put her hand to her chest when she found Simon standing next to her.

"You scared me, Simon," she said with a small laugh. "I didn't hear you walk over here."

Simon gave her a smile that sent a chill down her spine. "I'm glad. Fear is a good emotion. One I love to instill in a mortal." He grabbed her by the arm roughly and

pulled her to him. "I have someone who really wants to meet you, Blythe. You think I'm scary, wait until you meet my master." His eyes glowed red as he laughed once more.

Blythe tried to pull herself free, but he easily controlled her. She tried to scream for help, but her vocal cords suddenly seemed to seize up. The other people in the parking lot ignored them as they walked by. Her gut clenched with true fear when she realized Simon, or whatever his true name was, somehow made them look away, the same way he had taken away her ability to speak.

When they reached a four-door sedan, her captor seized her chin in a viselike grip and forced her to look at him. An instant later she felt herself crumple into his arms as she fell into a deep sleep.

* * * * *

Mehen went to Ra's temple right after his talk with Set. He really needed to speak to the sun god. Even if he had to sit in the temple calling for Ra for the rest of the day, he'd somehow get Ra to answer him. He didn't want to go to Blythe until he knew for sure where things stood with Ra, whether there actually would be a chance he would make her immortal.

Lifting his face up to the bright sunlight that shone down inside the temple, Mehen called out to the god. "Ra, I must speak with you."

He got no response.

"I've come to seek your council. It has to do with my...mate."

So you have finally come to accept Blythe as your mate.

Mehen sighed with relief when Ra's voice filled his head. "Yes. But I don't understand. I thought once we swore allegiance to you we couldn't take any woman as our mates."

That is correct. I meant you warriors couldn't just take any woman as your mates. You can only be mated to the woman who was destined to be yours.

Of course they all had assumed Ra had meant they couldn't be mated, ever. They'd never thought the sun god meant they would have to wait until the right woman came along.

"And the others? Will they too find their mates one day?"

Yes.

"Even Akori?"

Ra chuckled. *Yes, even Akori will find his mate.*

Mehen whistled low. "I pity that poor woman."

"How will the others know when they've found their mates?"

They will know when their bodies start to crave more blood than in the past that they will soon find their mates. They will experience the same signs you did after you met Blythe. No other

mortal's blood will satisfy them. They will only be able to survive on their mate's blood, and the first time their mates feed from them it will forge the same bond you have with Blythe.

That explained why his blood hunger had been so out of whack, especially after he'd met Blythe. It also gave him an opening to ask his next question. "Blythe is mortal. If I can only survive on her blood, what will happen to me once she dies?"

Blythe will not die. Now that you have accepted her as your mate I'll make her immortal. It would be a cruel and unjust punishment to make you suffer the loss of your mate. That was never my intention.

Mehen felt like kicking himself. He now wished he'd had enough faith in Ra to attempt to speak to him again instead of assuming his pleas would fall on deaf ears. "When will you make her immortal?"

Very soon. You must...

"I must what?"

Blythe is in trouble. I can sense her fear.

Mehen stiffened. "In trouble? She's here inside the headquarters."

No, she isn't, Mehen. She is somewhere downtown. You must find her before it is too late.

"Where downtown?"

I do not know. I think Apep blocks me from seeing where she is. Something dark with the taint of evil hides her from me. Go now. Bring her back safe to me.

Mehen took off at a run. Even though he wanted to know why Ra had said that last part about his having to bring Blythe back to him, Mehen knew better than to ask. Time was of the essence. He sent out a telepathic message to the other warriors to meet with him outside the meeting room. In a matter of seconds they arrived.

Mehen looked at Takan. "Where did Blythe go?"

"She's either in my quarters still or in the kitchen I would think," Takan answered slowly.

"She's not in the kitchen," Akori said. "I just came from there."

"And she isn't in the meeting room either," Kysen added.

Mehen cursed. "I need to know where Blythe went. Ra just told me she's downtown where someone, or something, has taken her. He couldn't pinpoint her exact location because something dark that smelled of evil blocked him from seeing her."

As one, all the warriors took off at a run to Takan's quarters. Takan arrived first and quickly found the note that sat on top of his dresser. "She went grocery shopping."

"You've been shopping with her before, Takan, which store would she have gone to?" Mehen felt time slipping away.

Takan shook his head. "I'm not sure. The time I took her out we were looking for ingredients for the Egyptian meal she made. Wait a second. She did mention the grocery store she usually shopped in. It's that big store right downtown."

Mehen didn't think twice about it. He flashed himself directly to the store parking lot. When a few mortals witnessed his sudden appearance, he wiped their memory of it. A couple seconds later his men arrived using the same means of travel. He let them take care of the mortals' memories.

He quickly searched the parking lot. It didn't take him long to spot the black BMW parked not too far away. Mehen ran over to it. The top was up and when he tried the driver's door, he found it still locked. He moved around to the trunk. It didn't take him long to unlock it with his mind. With one hand, he lifted the lid and found the trunk filled with grocery bags. He reached into one of the bags that held a tub of ice cream. The ice cream still felt cold, which meant Blythe had just recently put the groceries in the trunk.

Focusing his senses, Mehen drew in a deep breath of air. He smelled Blythe's scent, and that of another. The second scent definitely had the sick smelling taint of evil. It couldn't belong to one of the undead, because their scent carried the stench of death, not evil. And in no way could an undead survive out in the daylight, let alone function in any capacity. No, the scent carried the mark of something truly evil. It smacked of demon-kind. That meant the scent either belonged to Sek or Mot.

Set came up beside him. "I smell demon."

"As do I." Mehen's lips drew together in a grim line. "That means either Sek or Mot has found a way to be out during the day. One of them must have taken Blythe."

"You can find her, Mehen. Use the bond you have with Blythe. You should be able to sense where she has been taken."

Mehen reached out to Blythe along their bond. Nothing. He cursed as he ran into one of the walls she'd erected in her head to keep him out. "She's still keeping me out."

"Don't give up just yet. At least she's still alive. If she were dead the wall wouldn't be there," Set said in his matter-of-fact way. "Blythe isn't stupid. She'll remember she can communicate with you through the bond and that wall will come crashing down. You just have to be prepared for it. I suggest we take her car home."

The others had searched the area around the parking lot as Mehen and Set talked. Akori called out to them. The warriors hurried over to where he stood near the street. He held something in his hand. "I found Blythe's purse. She must have dropped it. I smell demon all over it."

Mehen took the purse from Akori. "There's demon scent all around her car as well." The warriors exchanged knowing looks. They knew that only two demons currently lived in Phoenix. "We can't do anything more here. I want you all to go back to the headquarters. I'll drive Blythe's car back there. We can't leave it parked here."

"What are we going to do about getting Blythe back?" Denger asked. "I'm in the mood to kick some demon ass."

"We wait until Blythe uses the bond I have with her and calls out for help. Until then, we can do nothing but wait."

* * * * *

Blythe woke up to the sensation of all her blood rushing to her head. It didn't take her long to realize she hung over the shoulder of her captor. As she lay limp, her head flopped against his back with each step he took. Not wanting him to know she had come out of the sleep he'd put her in, Blythe slowly turned her head and tried to get her bearings. They were no longer in the city, she knew that much. There was too much open space, and when he took a left turn and started to climb uphill, she caught a glimpse of a treed mountainside.

Her captor continued his climb for a short distance before he came to a stop. He chuckled when she let her head hang down. "You can stop pretending to be asleep, Blythe. I knew the instant you woke up." He put her down on her feet and chuckled again as she glared at him. "You are a feisty one. You can look around all you want. I'll even tell you where we are. This is Four Peaks Mine, not that it'll do you any good."

The hold he had on her arm tightened when he waved his hand and a whole section of the mountainside shifted open. He pulled her to the opening. Blythe dragged her feet. She knew once he had her inside the mountain would shift closed behind them. It would be impossible to find from the outside, and there would be no way she could get it to open even if she managed to make a run for it.

Once he dragged her inside, Blythe realized she had a bigger problem than trying to get the mountainside to open for her. She only had time to see the tight tunnel that angled further down into the mountainside before the doorway shut and closed them in pitch darkness. Blythe started to panic as her fear of enclosed, dark spaces rose inside her. Her heart raced as she started to breathe at a faster rate.

Her captor came to a sudden stop. He then started to laugh. "Now this, I had not expected. I can smell your fear." He took a deep breath as if he savored the smell. "All that fear of yours is giving me a hard-on. Too bad Apep has other plans for you or I would have some fun." Blythe whimpered, which only made him laugh again. "I may not be able to play with you, but Apep never said anything about what I could do with you once I got you. I can't send you to Apep until tonight. I can't have you stumbling around in the dark in an attempt to escape, and I sure don't want you near me when I try to get some sleep. I have the perfect place to put you."

Unable to see where they went, Blythe felt her body break out in a cold sweat as he dragged her further along the tunnel. When he stopped once again, she blinked when a small fireball hovered in front of them. With what light it gave off, she could see the rock walls on either side of her. The tunnel looked to continue on even deeper.

He waved his hand along the left-hand side of the tunnel. Same as with the opening to the tunnel, the rock shifted to reveal a small open space inside it. "This will keep you from causing any trouble."

He shoved her into the space. Blythe had to crouch down in order to fit without knocking her head on the rock above her. She tried to back out, but he gave her another hard shove from behind. Then the rock closed behind her. Blythe started to shake

uncontrollably as complete darkness surrounded her. She went down on her knees and stretched out her arms. With ease, she touched either side of the space with her arms not even stretched out full length. The walls seemed to close in on her as she pictured the heavy rock coming down on top of her, smothering her.

Her panic soared. She started to feel faint and started to hyperventilate. Desperately, she tried to take slower breaths. She didn't want to use up what little oxygen remained inside the space. Running her hands along the surface of the rock, she found a small hole just big enough to let in fresh air. At least she wouldn't smother to death after all. Blythe wrapped her arms around herself. She started to let herself slip away to the same place she'd gone when Set had locked her in the closet in the warehouse. But this time there would be no Mehen to bring her out of it.

Mehen! In her panic she'd all but forgotten about the bond they shared and their ability to communicate through it. The walls she'd erected against him the night before still stood. She smashed them down and sent out a call to him.

Mehen, can you hear me?

I'm here, Blythe. Where are you?

The sound of his voice inside her head had Blythe almost ready to break down again. *I don't know exactly. He said the place is called Four Peaks Mine, but I've never been here before. Hurry, Mehen. He's closed me up inside the mountain. It's dark and I can't get out.*

Mehen sent a wave of calmness through their bond. *Try to stay calm, Blythe. We're coming to get you. Takan knows where Four Peaks Mine is. We'll be there in a few seconds. Stay with me so we can find you.*

That would be easier said than done. Now that she knew the warriors were on their way, she had to fight the urge to try to claw through the rock to get out of the tight space.

Please hurry.

We're here. Do you remember where the entrance is?

Blythe wanted to scream out loud, but she knew they wouldn't be able to hear her through the solid rock.

The entrance is about halfway up the side of the mountain. He somehow made the rock shift open.

We found the opening. I'm going to break off for a few minutes to help the others shift the rock. If you start to panic you can reach me through our bond.

She drew her knees up to her chest and hugged them. The pitch darkness seemed to close in on her. Blythe closed her eyes. How long would it take Mehen and the others to get inside? Each minute that passed seemed excruciating. What if they couldn't open the mountain? What if they couldn't find where her captor had stashed her and she ended up trapped forever? Blythe knocked her forehead on her knees as she told herself to get a grip. She couldn't let her fear take over. To distract herself, she started to think of all the things she wanted to do to her captor for shutting her inside the rock. If she had the strength of one of the warriors, Blythe would love to beat the crap out of him

until he begged her for mercy. But that still wouldn't be good enough. No. He deserved something much more painful. The idea of cutting his balls off and serving them to him on a platter sounded pretty good.

Lost in her own thoughts, Blythe screamed when a hand suddenly grabbed her shoulder. Still unable to see in the absolute darkness, she tried to pull away. "Who's there?"

Mehen's voice reached out to her through the darkness. "It's only me. I've got you."

With a cry of relief, Blythe allowed him to pull her out of the wall. She blindly clung to him. "Where are the others? I can't see anything."

"Takan and Kysen are here with me. Set, Denger and Akori decided to have a little look around."

At that moment, Set called out to Mehen as he came running up to them with Denger and Akori hard on his heels. "Let's get out of here. We've got one pissed off demon about to arrive." To punctuate his words, a loud roar filled the tunnel. "He really won't be happy that we rescued Blythe."

Mehen lifted Blythe up and took off at a run. She could hear the other warriors as they followed. Once outside, she blinked against the glare of the sun. She then felt the ground drop beneath Mehen's feet and they were falling. When she felt as if she had landed back on solid ground, she saw they were inside the warriors' headquarters.

Set turned to face Mehen. "Now that we have Blythe back safe, we have bigger problems to worry about. The bastard has created a small army of undead warriors."

Chapter Twelve

At Set's words, Mehen put Blythe down on her feet. He tried to pull her close, but now that she once again felt safe, she stepped out of his arms and moved closer to Takan. Mehen stopped himself from hauling her back. Through their bond, he felt that Blythe still hadn't forgiven him for his earlier transgression. Now back on familiar ground in the headquarters meeting room, she wanted some distance between them. He'd let her have it for now, but he would talk to her later and explain why he'd done what he did. And what Ra had told him in the temple.

Mehen turned to Set. "What do you mean by a small army?"

"I mean Sek has been a busy demon. Denger, Akori and I found a room full of undead. There had to be at least fifty of them all asleep in a row. Each one had a sword lying at their side like the one you took from the undead warrior you fought in Blythe's old apartment."

"And I'm sure they have all been trained how to use them as well."

"That isn't the scary part. They somehow sensed we were there and started to wake up. That freaked me out more. How the hell did Sek manage to create undead that didn't sleep like the literal dead when the sun is in the sky?"

Mehen shook his head. "I haven't a clue. I told you that one I crossed swords with seemed to be more in control of himself than the average undead."

"So what are we going to do about them?" Denger asked.

"We have to go back and destroy them." Mehen looked at each of his men. Denger rubbed his hands together with a smile on his face. The other warriors nodded their heads in agreement. "We'll go back to the demon's lair tonight."

"Why not go back there now while it's still daylight? Why wait until dark when they'll be at their strongest?" Blythe ask with incredulity tingeing her voice.

"Because that is what Sek will expect us to do. This way if we wait until nightfall he'll have hours to wonder when we'll strike."

"So you think playing head games with a deranged demon will give you the upper hand? I think you're nuts. Especially when he has something inside that mountain he uses as a go-between to Apep. I'd be more afraid of what the demon god can do even if he is still trapped in the underworld."

"How do you know Sek has that sort of connection with Apep?"

"I know because Simon, Sek or whatever the hell his name is, said after he captured me that he would be sending me to Apep tonight."

"This just gets better and better," Set grouched. "Whatever that connection is, it has to be destroyed."

"I'm with you on that one," Mehen said calmly. "We have some planning to do, but first I want to talk to Blythe." He looked directly at Takan. "Alone."

Takan nodded, but Blythe who still stood next to him shook her head. "We can talk later, Mehen."

"I think we should talk now."

"You may feel that way, but I don't. If you and the others are going to take on a small army of undead warriors, I think you should be more worried about your plan of attack for tonight rather than having a talk with me." When he would have spoken again, Blythe held up her hand and headed for the door. "Seriously, not now, okay? I need a shower in the worst way. I still feel a bit shaky from being trapped inside that rock wall. I'm not up to fighting with you right now." With that said, Blythe walked out without a backward glance.

* * * * *

Sek roared with rage when he found the empty hole in the wall where he'd stashed Blythe. Ra's Chosen had come to the rescue once again. How they'd been able to find his lair and the mortal woman was beyond him. In all these years, not once had any of the warriors come remotely close to his hideout. But today they had been able to pinpoint it exactly as if someone had led them here.

With a wave of his hand, Sek closed the opening in the rock wall. He then headed back down the tunnel to where his undead warriors slept. Ra's Chosen had left with Blythe, he could no longer feel their presence, but he knew they would be back. Now that they knew about the army of undead warriors he'd been amassing, they would feel compelled to come back to destroy them. Their sickening sense of duty to Ra would demand they do it. He couldn't afford to lose any more of his undead warriors. Mot expected him to deliver with the numbers he'd promised when they finally would be needed.

Inside the chamber where his undead warriors slept, Sek woke them up. Being that they could be woken during the day, it was just something else that made them different from the undead who harvested souls for Apep. Besides being mostly aware as well, they didn't need to feed from mortals to keep themselves animated. With the small piece of their soul that had been left behind on their turning, it also kept their bodies mostly alive. They still had the same undead weakness to bronze, but they were stronger and harder to kill.

As his undead warriors assembled before him, Sek knew the six warriors that made up Ra's Chosen wouldn't stand a chance against them. Six against fifty made the odds sway in his favor. The thought of finally being free of Ra's Chosen made him smile. Once the warriors had been taken care of, mortal-kind would no longer have their protectors.

* * * * *

Blythe stood under the showerhead and tipped her head back to wet her hair. She felt her muscles start to loosen as the water beat against her neck and shoulders. It felt good to wash away the sweat. Too bad it wouldn't wash away the memory of being trapped inside that rock wall. She had a feeling she'd have nightmares about it tonight.

Picking up the bottle of shampoo, she squeezed some into her hand then started to wash her hair. She was in Mehen's shower. Since she'd left her shampoo, conditioner and soap here, and knowing Mehen would be busy with his plans to attack the demon's lair, she figured she might as well take a shower in his quarters. When she finished she would have to find a place to sleep. Blythe didn't want to impose on Takan again. Plus she didn't want to give the other warriors the wrong impression. She didn't need them to think she had left Mehen's bed only to hop into the sack with Takan.

With her eyes closed, Blythe tipped her head back under the spray to rinse the shampoo out of her hair. When she tilted it forward and opened her eyes she let out a squawk. Mehen stood in the shower in front of her completely naked. She hadn't heard him come into the bathroom, let alone come join her.

Blythe lifted her arms to cover her breasts and the juncture between her legs. "Get out, Mehen."

"This is my shower. I don't have to get out if I don't want to, which I don't." He picked up her bottle of shampoo and squeezed some into his large hand before he put it back down.

"Fine, then I'll get out. I only thought to use your shower because all my things are here and I didn't feel like taking them back to Takan's quarters."

Mehen blocked her when she tried to open the glass door. "You will not be going back to Takan's quarters again to shower or to sleep."

With the shampoo in his hand, he started to wash her hair for a second time. Blythe bit back a groan of pleasure when his long fingers massaged her scalp and worked the shampoo through her hair. "I hadn't planned to sleep in Takan's quarters tonight. I'm going to find another place to sleep."

"That won't be necessary because you'll be sleeping in my bed tonight and for every night after that."

Blythe shook her head. "No, I'm not. If I didn't make myself perfectly clear last night, we're through."

She then had to quickly hold her breath when Mehen moved her back under the spray of water and rinsed the shampoo out of her hair. She gave him a furious glare as she wiped the water off her face. Her words seemed to have no effect on him. He calmly grabbed her bottle of conditioner and squeezed some of it into his hand. Without a word, he worked it through the entire length of her hair.

"Did you hear me, Mehen? I said we're over."

"I heard you." Once again he moved her back under the water forcing her to hold her breath.

When he let her back out, Blythe smacked him on his chest. "Would you stop doing that? You're starting to tick me off."

"Well, then I'll have to think of something to make you less angry with me." His voice had dropped an octave.

She watched Mehen pick up her bar of vanilla-scented soap and lather up his hands. Blythe knew she couldn't let him touch her body. Even though he'd hurt her last night and she didn't want anything to do with him, her traitorous body still wanted him. Having him stand this close without a stitch of clothes on made her heart race. Her fingers itched to caress his muscular chest. Blythe fisted her hands at her sides to stop herself. Mehen chuckled as he used their bond to send her a wave of longing. Shit, she'd forgotten to put the walls back up to keep him out. This time, however, Mehen was able to smash them down as soon as she started to build them.

With a growl of frustration, she swatted his hand away as he moved to touch her. "Stop it."

"Stop what? Stop trying to touch you? Or stop knocking down the mental walls you think to put up to block our bond?"

"The last one," Blythe said through gritted teeth.

Mehen shook a finger at her. "Sorry, but I can't allow you to keep me out."

"You can't allow? You can't allow!" Blythe snapped as she scowled at him. "How dare—"

Mehen leaned in and covered her mouth with his. He kissed her until all the fight left her, especially when he reached up and ran his soapy hands along her breasts. He sucked her bottom lip into his mouth and gently bit down with his fangs. Blythe tried not to be affected by his touch, but she lost the battle. As Mehen thoroughly soaped each of her breasts, she felt her body respond. Her nipples tightened into tight buds and her breasts grew heavy.

"You don't play fair," she mumbled against his lips.

"I play to keep," he replied huskily.

Mehen continued to soap her body. He ran his hands up her shoulders and back down her arms. Lifting his mouth away from hers, he pushed her back under the spray and rinsed the soap away. His lips closed around one of her nipples and sucked it deep as soon as he pulled her closer once again. Blythe couldn't hold back the moan that escaped her lips. With each pull of his mouth, she felt it deep inside her core. The ache between her legs intensified and wetness pooled.

After lathering up his hands once again, Mehen went down on his knees. He worked his hands along her waist to her hips, then down each of her legs. He carefully avoided her pussy, where she wanted him to touch the most. He teased her as the back of his hands brushed against her core and then moved away again. As if he knew perfectly well what he did to her, Mehen looked up and ran a soapy finger along the slit to the opening to her body. Blythe sucked in a breath and held it as she waited for him to touch her in earnest.

Putting the soap down, Mehen put his hands under the spray. He cupped them as he collected some of the water. Blythe braced her hand on the tiled wall as he rinsed the soap away from between her legs. Mehen then ran his tongue where his finger had been. She looked down and her breath caught at the sight of his dark head between her thighs. But when he spread her folds and speared his tongue inside her, her eyes drifted shut as an intense wave of pleasure surged through her. He lapped and sucked her sex, bringing her almost to the point of climax.

Mehen rose up on his feet and pulled her to him. Blythe's eyes fluttered open. She saw his fangs had dropped, the ends protruding past his upper lip. The sight of them aroused her even more. He bent his head and dragged them along her neck, but he didn't bite her. Blythe groaned.

"Stop teasing me."

"You'll just have to wait."

He turned her away from the spray of water and backed her up against the wall of the shower stall. With a growl of pleasure, Mehen lifted her legs around his waist and plunged his fully engorged cock into her tight sheath. Blythe locked her ankles behind his back and held on tight to his shoulders as Mehen rocked into her. The feel of his cock filling her, stretching her made her whimper with need. Unable to move with him, she clenched her inner muscles around his thick shaft.

Mehen pumped his hips between her legs and nuzzled the side of her neck. "Come for me, Blythe." The sound of his voice husky with desire went straight through her body. "I need to hear my mate's cries as she comes. Something she'll only do for me."

Cupping her bottom, Mehen surged in and out of her. He angled her hips so his shaft and his pelvic bone rubbed her clit. Blythe felt her climax build as her inner walls tightened even more around his cock. When she fell over the edge into an intense orgasm, the muscles of her core gripped Mehen's shaft in a tight fist. In that instant he sank his fangs into her neck. Blythe cried out as her climax seemed to go on and on.

Mehen rode her faster while he fed on her blood. She felt his cock harden even more the closer he came to his own orgasm. Before it overtook him, he swiped his tongue along the bite mark and slammed into her one final time as his cock pulsed deep inside her, filling her with his cum. Blythe could only hold onto Mehen as he pulled his now flaccid sex from her body and eased her back down on her shaky legs. He turned off the shower and lifted her out of the tub.

Sated, Blythe came back to reality. When Mehen picked up a towel and started to dry her off, she snatched the towel out of his hands. She glared at him. "I still don't think you play fair."

He dried himself off with another towel and smiled. "I couldn't think of any other way to stop you from being mad at me."

"I'm still mad at you."

Mehen took her lips in a long, hot kiss. Once he had her moaning, he lifted his head. "Do I have to take you to bed and make love to you until you stop being mad?"

Blythe skipped around that question with a question of her own. "Aren't you supposed to be with the other warriors strategizing?"

"Yes, but I can't leave here tonight with you still mad. I screwed up last night. I know that. And I can promise you it'll never happen again. I now know there will be no others for me. Only you."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I had to make sure."

Blythe brows furrowed. "Make sure of what?"

Mehen looked down at his feet, then back up to her face. "To make sure I could only feed from you. I never meant to hurt you."

"Well, you did. My ex-husband cheated on me, Mehen. It hurt. A lot. I don't ever want to go through that with you."

He pulled her into his arms and held her tight against him. "You'll never have to worry about that again. Ra explained everything to me."

Blythe leaned back in his arms so she could look up at him. "He finally talked to you? What did he say?"

"He told me that you are most definitely my mate, and that we were destined to be together, forever."

Mehen brushed his lips against hers and walked out of the bathroom. The meaning of his words slowly sank in. *They'd have forever?* She could only stand inside the bathroom in stunned silence.

* * * * *

Blythe managed to get a nap in after Mehen had left. After her traumatic morning and her tumultuous emotions when it came to Mehen, she'd been completely drained of energy. A couple of hours of extra sleep and Blythe woke up feeling somewhat refreshed.

The men had holed themselves up in the meeting room. After her nap, Blythe fixed them a quick late lunch and brought it to them. They all had been happy to see the food. Mehen's eyes had followed her every move as he stared at her possessively. Whatever Ra had told him had to have been good news. Mehen wasn't hiding what she meant to him anymore. From the looks the others sent her, she could tell they noticed the difference in him as well.

Now back in the kitchen, Blythe set to work preparing that night's dinner. It kept her busy. It also helped to keep her distracted enough not to think of what the warriors would face that coming night. She didn't know how the six of them would stand a chance against fifty undead warriors. They were well trained and had powers that Ra had gifted them, but still, the numbers seemed too great. She especially worried about Mehen. She didn't know what she'd do if something happened to him.

Blythe looked up from chopping vegetables when she heard the sound of footsteps behind her. She turned to find Takan with his head inside the fridge. "You better not be looking for something to eat. I've started to make dinner."

Takan closed the fridge door and held up the bottle of water he'd taken out. "No food, just something to drink." He came to stand beside her at the counter and leaned against it with his back toward the cupboards. He twisted off the cap on the bottle and took a long pull. "How are you feeling?"

Blythe started to chop the vegetables once again. She shrugged. "I'm not letting myself think about it too much. I figure it could have been much worse if you guys hadn't arrived to rescue me."

"I guess the bond you share with Mehen is a blessing in disguise. If not for that, we probably never would have found you."

"Yeah. He also kept me from losing it completely while I was trapped in the rock."

Takan reached out and pushed her hair behind her ear. "Have you and Mehen patched things up? I know he looked rather...satisfied...with himself when he came to the meeting room after he saw you."

Blythe put down the knife she held in her hand and looked at Takan. "I guess we did, sort of, I think. Hell, I don't know. The man does not play fair is all I have to say. He used my one weakness against me. He stormed my defenses and ran over me roughshod. Mehen said he spoke to Ra and that we can have forever together. Mehen didn't tell me how that can be. I know he has accepted me as his mate, but I don't really know whether he loves me or not. He hasn't said."

"Have you told Mehen that you love him?"

Blythe blew out a breath in a sigh. "No. I know it sounds stupid, but I've been waiting for him to say it first. I told my ex that I loved him first, and, well, you know how that turned out." She sighed. "Through our bond, I think I can feel that he loves me, and he should be able to feel the love I have for him, but until I hear him say the words I don't want to trust it."

"And what will you do if Mehen is waiting to hear you say those little words first?"

"Then we'll be at a stalemate, won't we? It hasn't been easy for me to trust men after the disaster of my first marriage. Then Mehen had to go pull that stunt with that other woman. He's told me it will never happen again, that I'm the only one for him, but I don't know if I can fully trust him again. What if I give him my heart and he turns around and tries another 'test' as he called last night?"

Takan turned Blythe to face him. He rested his hands on the top of her shoulders as he pressed his forehead to hers. "You can trust Mehen, *ket senet*."

"What does that mean? *Ket senet*?"

The sound of someone clearing his throat drew her attention. Takan moved away as Blythe turned to look at Mehen who now stood in the kitchen doorway. He walked over to where she stood and wrapped an arm around her shoulders as he pulled her up

against his side. "*Ket senet* means little sister," he said before he gave Takan a warning look.

Blythe elbowed Mehen in the side to put some room between them, but he didn't budge an inch. "Please don't tell me we're back to the big he-man-chest-pounding-don't-touch-my-woman stage again. If Takan called me his little sister then you don't have anything to worry about, now do you? And the feeling is mutual by the way. I think of Takan as a brother, nothing more. So back off." She elbowed him again for good measure.

Mehen only grunted when her elbow connected with his ribs and pulled her even tighter against his side. "Just as long as Takan remembers that I'll be more than happy to rip his head off if he inappropriately touches what belongs to me." His gaze met Takan's. "And just so you know, Blythe will not be sleeping in your quarters this night, or any time in the future."

With his hands held up in front of him in surrender, Takan slowly backed away. "I figured she wouldn't be. I'll just be leaving now." Takan winked at Blythe through the fall of hair that hung down in his face and left her alone with Mehen.

Now alone, Mehen released her when she gave him a shove. She turned back to the counter and picked up the knife she had used on the vegetables. With it held in front of her, she pointed it in Mehen's direction as her temper flared to life.

"This overprotective crap is going to stop right now, Mehen. Takan did nothing wrong. You had no cause to threaten him."

Mehen gave her a half smile and looked down at her. "Do you have any idea how sexy you look when you're mad?" When Blythe gave him a threatening glare, he instantly sobered. "You spent the night in his quarters with him. Alone. What do you expect?"

Blythe rolled her eyes at Mehen. "Listen to me closely. Nothing. Happened. Okay? Takan slept on the floor while I slept in his bed. All night. Alone. Get over it. Now if you don't mind, get out of my kitchen. I have work to do and you're bothering me."

Before Blythe knew what he intended, Mehen took the wrist of the hand that held the knife and pulled it behind her back. Her body arched into his. With his fingers buried in her hair at the back of her head, he slammed his mouth down onto hers. He kissed her like a starved man as his tongue pushed past her lips and tangled with her own. Blythe moaned when her tongue made contact with his fangs. She felt the bulge of his cock through his jeans where it nestled against her stomach. The bulge grew larger while he continued to kiss her.

Mehen sucked her bottom lip into his mouth and bit down on it before he lifted his head. With a step back, he said, "We'll continue this when I get back tonight from dealing with our undead problem." He swept her body with a heated gaze then walked out of the kitchen.

Aroused to the point of pain from that one kiss, Blythe resisted the urge to chase Mehen down and demand he finish what he'd started. She returned to the counter and

attacked the remaining vegetables with a vengeance. She couldn't wait until tonight. Two could play Mehen's game. Using their bond, she'd make him putty in her hands. She would get him so turned on that he'd beg for her to take him. Blythe smiled as she thought of what she'd do once she got her hands on him again.

* * * * *

The hours ticked by and still Ra's Chosen warriors didn't come back. Sek paced around his room deep inside the mountainside. He knew they wouldn't pass up the chance to destroy what had taken him years to accomplish. His undead warriors were too much of a threat. But instead of mounting an attack after they rescued the woman, they chose to wait, make him guess when they would arrive. If they thought their little mind games would give them the advantage, more power to them, Sek thought. He preferred that Ra's warriors arrived once night fell. The bastards would be in for a hell of a surprise if they did.

Sek.

"Yes, master?" Sek ground his teeth at the sound of Apep's grating voice. He had hoped to put this conversation off until he'd managed to take care of Ra's Chosen.

Why do I sense the woman is no longer with you? You assured me I would have possession of her tonight.

Sek clutched his head. The souls he'd consumed had grown weaker, but Apep's presence had them screaming with fear. With a growl he battered them into submission. "I had her secured. There was no way she could escape on her own."

But she did escape.

"Only with the help of Ra's Chosen. Somehow they were able to find my lair." Sek came close to passing out from the intense pain Apep's bellow of rage caused inside his head.

I want the woman! The time that she will remain useful to me is running out, if it hasn't already. She must not be allowed to become fully mated to one of Ra's Chosen.

Sek ignored the blood that dripped from his nose. "I don't understand, master. What do you mean before she is fully mated?"

If one of the warriors takes her as his mate and shares his blood with her, she will no longer be the weapon I have long sought to use against Ra.

Sek didn't fully understand how Blythe could be used as a weapon against their enemy, but he knew not to ask too many questions of Apep. The demon god only tolerated so many questions before he lost his patience, which usually had Sek writhing with pain on the floor. "All may not be lost yet, master. I have fifty of my undead warriors ready for battle. Ra's Chosen will return to my lair. My warriors greatly outnumber them."

Sek gasped in pain as Apep ruthlessly searched his memory of Blythe's rescue that morning. It felt as if someone took a large knife and used it to slowly cut away at his brain until they found what they searched for.

It is as I feared. The woman has formed a bond with one of the warriors. That is how they found your lair so easily. He must be removed.

An image of Mehen, who Sek knew to be the leader of Ra's Chosen warriors, suddenly rose up inside his head while Apep spoke. "I'll gladly end the life of that warrior, master."

No. I have something better than death for him. Death would be too easy. Use this instead.

At the feel of something filling his hand, Sek lifted it and held it up with his palm open. What looked to be a small gold snake, coiled as if ready to strike, sat in the center of his hand. "What must I do with this, master?"

Place my snake anywhere on the warrior's skin and it will do the rest.

Sek felt his body relax as Apep's presence receded. He eyed the small gold figure of a snake. It looked harmless enough, but he knew its looks were deceiving. Carefully, he slipped it inside the front pocket of his jeans and left to prepare for the battle that would take place that night.

Chapter Thirteen

Mehen watched Blythe as she sat on the bed flipping through the channels on the television. She hadn't yet pressed him to explain what he'd meant when he'd told her they would have forever together. But given how worried she looked, worry for him and what could happen to him this night, he had a feeling it hadn't left much room for her to think about anything else. He pulled his motorcycle jacket and sword out of his walk-in closet and went to sit on the bed next to her. Now that night had fallen, he knew she had started to worry even more and that pleased him. She may still be a little pissed at him, but deep down inside she had forgiven him. He knew it. Especially given how she'd responded to him in the shower earlier.

He pried the television's remote out of her white-knuckled grip. "Stop worrying, Blythe. Everything will be fine. Nothing is going to happen to me, or to the others."

"I wish I felt as confident as you, Mehen. I guess having been held captive by Sek has left its mark on me. I can't shake the feeling that something bad will happen."

Mehen put a hand on the back of Blythe's neck and pulled her closer so he could claim her lips. At first she held herself back, but when he sucked her tongue inside his mouth and grazed it with his fangs, she loosened up. He resisted the urge to take her down to the bed and sink his cock into the moist heat between her legs. Just the thought of taking her body as he took her blood made his fangs ache. He pulled away before they dropped and he made his fantasies reality.

"You really have to stop doing that, Mehen," Blythe said while she gave him a wry look.

He smiled. "What exactly do you want me to stop doing?"

"Stop working me up when you know you can't finish what you started."

Mehen stood. "It will give you something to think about when I'm gone. Anticipation can be a good thing."

"And frustration can drive a person crazy." Blythe got off the bed and followed him to the door. "Please, be careful, Mehen. Promise me."

"I promise to be careful. I'll be back before you know it." He took her lips in one last hard kiss before he walked out of his quarters.

As he went to meet with the other warriors, Mehen smiled to himself. It was a novel concept for him, to have someone who worried about him like Blythe did. He found he liked the idea of it. It gave him an excuse to quickly take care of Sek and his undead warriors so he could come home to his mate.

Set, Akori, Denger, Kysen and Takan met him outside in the hallway in front of the meeting room door. Each man had his sword strapped to his back, as did he. Each had a

grim look of determination on his face. It had been many years since they last had to fight the undead together as a unit instead of individually.

Denger stepped forward when Mehen reached them. The warrior's hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. Mehen could read the anticipation on Denger's face for the coming battle. "Let's do this. Let's make the bastard pay for daring to take one of our own. For Blythe."

"For Blythe," the other warriors repeated.

Mehen nodded. "For Blythe." That his mate had instilled such feelings in a bunch of tough, hardened, immortal warriors said much about her as a person. It also made him wonder how he ended up being so lucky to have her as his mate. He must have done something right at some point in his life to have ended up with Blythe.

He drew his sword from its scabbard. His men followed suit. After Set, Akori, Denger, Kysen and then Takan nodded to let him know they were ready, Mehen flashed himself to Sek's lair. The other warriors appeared and positioned themselves in front of the entrance. Takan, the one who'd been able to open the mountainside earlier that day, moved to stand before it. With a hand held out so it almost touched the rock, he closed his eyes and concentrated. In a matter of seconds, the rock opened and they were inside.

As before, Mehen's skin prickled when he entered the tunnel, a sure sign that the undead warriors were still there. At least he now knew for sure Sek hadn't decided to make a run for it.

Mehen signaled to Set, Denger and Akori to take the lead as they headed farther inside the tunnel. They had been the ones who had found where the undead warriors slept during the day. Darkness had just started to fall outside. Mehen hoped to catch some of the undead warriors just as they woke up for the night. Given that some of them had risen during the day, he didn't think they would be able to destroy many of them that way. But even if they managed to get a few it would be one less warrior they would have to face.

When they arrived, ten undead warriors stood inside the chamber with swords drawn. Whereas the regular undead would have still been sluggish until the sun had completely set, these undead warriors appeared not to be as affected. So much for the element of surprise, Mehen thought. Where had the other forty undead warriors gotten to?

Mehen didn't have any more time to ponder that question as the undead warriors charged them. As Ra's Chosen moved to engage them, the sounds of their swords echoed inside the rock chamber. If Sek hadn't already been aware of their presence inside his lair, he definitely would know now.

As with the undead warrior Mehen had encountered at Blythe's old apartment, these fought with more skill than he thought any of the undead capable of mastering. They were a lot harder to kill than their counterparts as well. Mehen blocked and parried each hit that came at him. Slowly, the undead warriors were dispatched with

Ra's Chosen's bronze swords. When the last one fell, Mehen looked around the chamber at his men.

He met Set's gaze. "Where are the other undead warriors? And how come none of them are rushing in here to give aid to the ones we finished off?"

Set shook his head. "Good question. I know I don't like it. It doesn't make any sense. Sek should have thrown everything he has at us. We are inside his bloody lair."

Denger let out a loud hiss and turned to face the entrance to the chamber. "More undead coming this way."

Mehen felt the familiar prickling of his skin. "Let's meet them in the tunnel. That way they'll be forced to come at us a few at a time instead of all at once."

The warriors quickly filed out of the chamber and took up positions in the tunnel. Mehen lifted his sword, ready to clash with the enemy, but what rounded the corner had him swearing under his breath. It wasn't just undead warriors that they had to face, but also the regular undead. Their numbers filled the tunnel to capacity. They fought to get at Ra's Chosen, snarling and trying to push each other out of the way.

The undead and undead warriors surged into them. Mehen knew as soon as they hit that they were in trouble. The warriors didn't just have to defend themselves against the swords of the undead warriors. They also had to fend off the regular undead who tried to sink their fangs into them. As more and more of the undead kept coming, Mehen roared for his men to fall back.

Hitting anything that came in reach of his sword, Mehen fell behind, allowing the others to get ahead of him. They rushed for the entrance to the tunnel. When the entrance came in sight, Mehen made an effort to catch up. He never made it. Just before he met up with his men the rock wall ahead of him opened and more of the undead spilled out into the tunnel, cutting him off.

He swung out as undead rushed him from both the back and the front. Trapped, knowing he wouldn't be able to fight his way free, Mehen yelled for Set and the others to leave him behind. Set moved as if to engage the undead that attacked him, but Mehen ordered him telepathically to go, to protect Blythe. When the undead dragged Mehen down to the floor of the tunnel, he was glad to see Set had followed his order as the warrior followed the others.

The entrance to the tunnel sealed shut as soon as the remaining Ra's Chosen slipped through it. Mehen felt a number of undead sink their fangs into his flesh before two of the undead warriors hissed at them and pulled him out of their clutches. The undead parted as Sek moved through them. The demon smiled, coming to stand in front of Mehen.

"Well, well, if it isn't the illustrious leader of Ra's Chosen warriors, Mehen. I've lost count the number of times I wished to have you at my mercy. It seems as if I finally got my wish today."

Mehen hissed at him. "Go fuck yourself, Sek."

"Now we both know that would be physically impossible. I'd much rather fuck Blythe, your mate."

A loud growl rumbled out of Mehen's throat. "You so much as lay a finger on Blythe again I'll rip your balls off and feed them to you."

Sek shook his head. "Threats will get you nowhere, but enough of this. Time to get down to business. Apep has a gift for you, Mehen, and I'm the messenger who will deliver it. Hold him tighter," Sek said to the two undead warriors who each held Mehen by an arm.

Sek reached into his jeans' pocket and pulled out a small gold snake coiled to strike. Lifting Mehen's t-shirt to his chin, Sek placed the snake on his chest directly over his heart. Mehen hissed as it started to burn his skin. The burning sensation intensified and the little gold snake seemed to come to life. Its tiny tongue flicked out tasting the air. It coiled itself tighter just before it struck. With its tiny fangs sunk deep into Mehen's flesh, it burrowed its way under his skin until it disappeared completely inside him.

Mehen felt it moving through his body as it left a trail of burning pain in its wake. When it reached his heart, Mehen's roars of pain filled the tunnel.

* * * * *

Blythe couldn't sit still. She paced inside Mehen's quarters unable to shake the feeling that something had happened to him while he fought the undead warriors. She wished she knew how to handle a sword as well as the others. If she had been able to she would have gone with them to fight at Mehen's side to make sure nothing bad happened to him. But instead she'd been left behind to worry herself sick.

She felt tempted to reach out to Mehen along their bond to reassure herself that he was okay, but she didn't want to take the chance that it would distract him. Instead, she reminded herself once again that Mehen had fought countless battles with the undead, and that being immortal, the chances of him dying were next to none. It still didn't make Blythe worry any less.

She paced the floor for what seemed like hours. More than once Blythe had to stop herself from biting her fingernails to nubs. If the thought of Mehen having to go fight even this relatively small number of undead warriors did this to her, Blythe didn't know how she'd manage to handle it in the years to come.

Along with her worry, Blythe had to come to grips with the fact she still wanted Mehen for her mate, even after what he'd done the other night. It wasn't as if he'd had sex with the woman. And through their bond, she knew Mehen hadn't gotten any enjoyment at all from the experience. As he said, he'd used the woman as a test only and now that he knew the outcome it would never happen again. Blythe knew she couldn't hold that over him forever. She loved Mehen pure and simple. She didn't want to ever let him go. She wanted the forever Mehen said Ra would give them. At least that is what she hoped Ra had meant.

Blythe nearly jumped out of her skin when a knock came on the door. The feeling that something had gone terribly wrong increased when she opened the door to find Set outside in the hallway.

"What? Where is Mehen?" Blythe didn't like the lack of emotion on Set's face. When Set just stood there and stared down at her, she shouted, "Answer me! Where is Mehen?"

"We had to leave Mehen behind."

Blythe felt all the blood leave her face. "What? What do you mean you had to leave him behind?"

"There were more than just the fifty undead warriors that we had to fight. They had at least a hundred regular undead with them. They rushed us inside the tunnel. Mehen told us to fall back. When he fell behind, more undead poured out of the wall and cut off his escape. We couldn't stop them."

Blythe swallowed around the lump that had formed in her throat. "So you and the others just ran away so Mehen could be captured?"

"We didn't have any choice, Blythe. Mehen ordered us to leave him behind."

"Bullshit. You didn't have to listen. Just because he ordered you to leave him behind didn't mean you had to do it. Why did you leave him?"

Blythe hit Set in the chest while the tears she fought to control started to fall. He let her hit him over and over again until she couldn't hold her tears back any longer. When she broke down into loud, gut-wrenching sobs, Set held her in his arms and let her cry against his chest. After she cried herself out, he picked her up and put her to bed. Before he left, Set promised her he and the other warriors would do everything in their power to get Mehen back. Blythe drew her knees up to her chest and curled into a ball. She pulled Mehen's pillow to her face. The pillowcase still held his scent. A fresh wave of tears fell as she buried her face in it and screamed against the pain in her heart.

* * * * *

Numb to everything except for the all-encompassing sorrow she felt, Blythe lay wide awake in Mehen's bed. She hadn't slept, didn't know if she could ever sleep again. It felt as if a piece of her had gone missing. She wanted to believe she would have felt it somehow if Mehen had been killed, that he still lived. But when she tried to reach out to him through their bond and he didn't respond, Blythe began to think he had been taken from her for good.

All cried out, she lay on her side with her body curled around Mehen's pillow and stared at the hieroglyphs painted on the opposite wall. Even though she couldn't read them yet, Blythe knew they told the story of the many exploits of Mehen while he'd protected Ra when the sun god traveled through the underworld each night. Takan had told her that. Mehen had never said a word about them.

Her gaze latched first onto the Eye of Ra symbol and then onto the glyph for Ra's name. How could Ra have allowed this to happen? How could he have allowed Mehen, someone who had served him faithfully for centuries, to be taken by their enemy? As the most powerful of all the Egyptian gods, Ra should have been able to save Mehen. And hadn't he told Mehen that he would have forever with her?

Slowly her numbness gave way to anger. The more she thought about it, the angrier Blythe became. She punched the mattress with her fist. Mehen deserved better from Ra. The warriors had all told her how Ra wasn't a vengeful god, and that they all looked up to him, that they would do anything he asked just because he had been the one who had asked. Blythe felt no such bond with the sun god. She owed him nothing. If she ever came face to face with Ra she would let him know exactly what she thought of him. With anger still heating her blood, Blythe sat up and pushed the covers off. She may not be able to talk to Ra face to face, but there was another way she could talk to him.

Jumping out of bed, Blythe stalked out of Mehen's quarters. Still in her pajamas, she made her way to Ra's temple. Once inside she stood in the middle of the room with her hands fisted at her sides. "Ra! I want to speak with you."

Blythe waited, but the sun god's deep voice didn't fill her head as it had the first time he'd spoken to her. "Goddamn you, answer me!" Blythe yelled. "Don't you dare ignore me. You did nothing to save Mehen. You let that bastard demon take away the man I love. Give me my mate back."

Still Ra remained silent. Tears of pain and anger burned behind Blythe's eyes. She opened her mouth to yell once again at the sun god when something heavy settled around her neck. She looked down to find a heavy gold necklace. Attached to the middle of it, on either end of the chain so it sat a couple of inches below her collarbone, was the Eye of Ra symbol made out in gold. The diamond eye in the center of it sparkled in the sun that shined down on Blythe through the glass ceiling. The whole thing just about fit the width of her palm.

"If this is a gift to make me feel better, I don't want it!" Taking hold of the necklace, she tried to pull it from her neck, but the thick chain refused to break. With a growl of anger, she tried to yank it over her head. The chain wasn't long enough to allow her to do it. Hoping to find a clasp to remove it that way, Blythe flipped the Eye of Ra to her back. She couldn't find a clasp on any part of the gold chain.

"Take this off me, Ra! Take it off!" Blythe yelled as her voice cracked with unshed tears that threatened to spill once again.

She would have continued to yell at the sun god, but Takan came into the room and took her into his arms. He pressed her face to his chest when she tried to pull away. "Enough, Blythe. You're going to make yourself sick. Ra couldn't do anything for Mehen last night."

Blythe's anger suddenly drained away. Tears slowly soaked into Takan's shirt as she stopped fighting to get away from him. "He could have done something," she said softly, her voice thick with emotion.

Takan put a hand under her chin and forced her to look up at him. "No, he couldn't have. Only during the day are Ra's powers at their fullest. At night, he has to travel through the underworld, which weakens them. If he'd been able to, I know he would have saved Mehen."

Blythe sniffed and wiped away her tears. She lifted the necklace away from her chest. "Why did he put this on me and then make sure I can't take it off?"

"I don't know, Blythe," Takan said while he looked at the diamond Eye of Ra. "He didn't give it to you in the hopes of making you feel better. I know that much. He had to have a reason for it, especially if he designed it without any way for it to be removed."

She let it drop down onto her chest. With a shove, she stepped out of Takan's arms. She stiffened when she felt an invisible hand caress her cheek. "I have to get out of here."

"Do you want me to walk you back to Mehen's quarters?"

"No. I mean I have to get out of the headquarters."

Takan shook his head. "I don't think that would be wise. Sek took you in broad daylight, remember? Somehow he managed to find a way to walk in the sun without it turning him to ash. It isn't safe out there for you right now. Apep wants you for some reason, and Sek will do everything he can to get you for him."

"I need to get out, away from all the things that remind me of Mehen. Just for a little while. I won't get out of the car, or stop anywhere. I'll be back before nightfall."

"You should ask Set first."

Blythe scowled at Takan. "I'm not asking his permission to leave as if I'm a child. I'm an adult. I don't give a damn whether Set, you or the others think I should stay locked up here. I'm leaving."

Takan held his hands up in surrender and stepped to the side so she could walk past him. Blythe hurried back to Mehen's quarters to change, feeling the walls closing in around her.

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Takan sighed as he watched Blythe leave the temple. "Forgive her, Ra, she's hurting right now."

I know. I felt her pain, and I hurt with her. This is something she must deal with on her own.

"We plan to go back to Sek's lair this afternoon to find out what he did with Mehen. We'll bring him back here whether he is alive or dead."

No. You must face the demon tonight, not during the day.

"If we go in during the day we at least won't have to worry about the undead attacking us as they did last night. We can't afford to lose another warrior to them."

It must be tonight.

Takan cursed under his breath when he felt Ra's presence leave the temple. He not only had to inform Set that Blythe would be leaving the headquarters alone, if she hadn't already left, but now he also had to tell him Ra ordered them not to attack until tonight. And that had been an order, one none of them could ignore. Ra had the right to make the ultimate decision in all things. Set and the others would not be pleased with Ra's decision.

There is no point in delaying the inevitable, Takan thought to himself as he left Ra's temple and made his way to the meeting room where the other warriors were. They all looked up when he walked into the room. They all had heard Blythe when she had yelled at the sun god. Takan had been the one to volunteer to go and try to calm her down.

"Well?" Set asked. "Were you able to settle Blythe down?"

Takan nodded. "Yes and no."

"I don't hear her yelling anymore. You must have done something," Akori said to him.

"I did manage to get her to stop yelling at Ra. She was mostly upset with the gift he gave her." The other warriors looked at him questioningly. "Ra gave her a necklace with a diamond Eye of Ra on it. She can't remove it and she thought Ra did it to try to compensate her because Mehen had been captured."

Kysen gave a low whistle. "I can see why Blythe would be a little pissed by it. Obviously Ra didn't mean it that way, but why would he give it to her in the first place, and then make it so she can't take it off?"

"I don't know." Takan said. "Blythe is also going out and I suggest we let her go."

"No way is she leaving the headquarters," Set barked.

"Is she crazy? Sek could be out there waiting for another chance to take her," Denger said in a loud voice.

"She has to stay at the headquarters where we can protect her," Kysen added.

"I know. I don't like it any more than you do," Takan quickly said before the others could say anything more. "But I think we have to let her go. There are too many reminders of Mehen here. If she doesn't get out of the headquarters for at least a little while she's going to break down. Besides, we have something else to worry about."

"Why do I get the feeling I'm not going to like what you are about to say, Takan?" Set asked blandly.

"I can guarantee you won't like it. I spoke to Ra before I left the temple. He has forbidden us to attack Sek's lair during the day. He said we have to go tonight instead."

"What! During the day we stand a fighting chance against Sek's undead. At night we'll be lucky to get out of there."

"I feel the same way you do, Set, but Ra has ordered us to stand down until tonight."

Set pounded his fist on the table as the other warriors grumbled about Ra's edict. Takan just hoped Ra's decision wouldn't be the end of them all.

Chapter Fourteen

Blythe drove around for hours with no real destination in mind. Sometimes she circled the same block half a dozen times. She drove with the top up, her mood no match for the sunny sky above her. A dark and gloomy day with rain suited her more, but this being Phoenix the chance of a sudden rainstorm was slim at best.

When she could no longer ignore her empty stomach, Blythe went through the drive-through at a fast-food restaurant. As she had promised Takan, she didn't get out of the car. She ate her meal inside her car, parked in the restaurant parking lot. The food tasted like nothing. It just filled the empty place in her stomach so she wouldn't have to listen to it growl in protest anymore.

After she threw the garbage in the trash can she'd parked next to, Blythe once again drove aimlessly down Phoenix's streets. When the hour grew late, she put off having to return to the headquarters. She didn't want to return to Mehen's quarters where she would have to sleep alone with the knowledge that he may never return.

She knew the warriors would be returning to Sek's lair today to try to bring Mehen home one way or the other. Blythe didn't want to be cooped up inside the headquarters while they faced danger yet again. What were the chances that not all of them would return once again? To have lost Mehen hurt more than enough. She didn't think she could stand to lose another warrior in such a short space of time. All of Ra's Chosen had come to mean a lot to her.

Blythe.

She sat up straight, almost afraid to believe she'd heard Mehen call her name inside her head through their bond. She tried to reach out to him through it, but like before she felt nothing. *Mehen?*

It's me.

She bit back a sob at the familiar sound of his voice. *I thought I'd lost you, that I would never see you again.*

I'll never leave you, Blythe. I need you to come to me.

Where? Where are you? I can tell the others and they can get you out of there.

No. They must not come. Only you can set me free.

How can I? I can't fight demons or the undead.

You are the only one, Blythe. I need you. Don't leave me here. I'm in Sek's lair. You have to come to me.

Blythe started the car. *I don't know where that is. You have to tell me how to find you, Mehen. The directions on how to get to Sek's lair suddenly appeared inside her head. I'm coming. Just hold on.*

Hurry, Blythe. And remember, you must not bring any of the other warriors with you.

Blythe roared out of the parking lot when Mehen's presence left her as quickly as it had come. Frightened out of her mind, she raced toward Sek's lair.

* * * * *

It was dark when Blythe arrived at Four Peaks Mine. To get to the opening to Sek's lair in the mountainside she had to leave her car parked at the bottom. On foot, she climbed up the rest of the way, using the flashlight she'd found in the glove compartment to light her way. Her heart beat loudly in her chest the closer she came to the entrance. She didn't want to be here, but she couldn't leave Mehen inside to face whatever horrors the demon had planned for him.

Once she arrived at the entrance to the lair, Blythe felt a shiver of unease run down her spine. The entrance stood wide open to the night. The last thing she wanted was to run into some of the undead. She had nothing to protect herself against them. She'd be too easy of a target for them to pick off.

Blythe swung the beam of the flashlight around the entrance. No undead jumped out at her. She took a deep breath and silently called out to Mehen.

Mehen, I'm here.

Come inside. I'll direct you to where I am.

Using caution, Blythe stepped inside the tunnel. Her skin crawled as memories of being locked up inside the rock wall rose to the forefront of her mind.

I'm inside the tunnel.

Keep walking down it until you come to a passage that turns to the left.

With slow steps, she kept the flashlight pointed in front of her as she made her way down the tunnel. She fought the urge to turn around and run out of there. Her heart threatened to beat out of her chest, the deeper she went. When Blythe reached the passage Mehen had directed her to, she peeked around the corner and flashed the beam of light into it. As with the tunnel, the passage appeared to be deserted. This didn't sit well with her. She knew Sek had a large number of undead hidden inside his lair. Why hadn't she seen any?

The hand that held the flashlight shook while Blythe slowly stepped into the passage and called out to Mehen once again.

I'm in the passage.

The first chamber to the right is where you'll find me. Hurry.

Picking up her pace, Blythe hurried down the passage. She found the chamber and walked inside. Using her flashlight, she scanned it looking to see where Mehen was being held. Before she could locate him, a torch set into the rock wall burst into flame then another and another, until the chamber filled with light. Now able to see better, Blythe's eyes locked onto Mehen who stood in the center of the chamber with his back to her.

"Mehen?" He didn't answer her or turn around. Blythe made a quick scan of the chamber as she took a step toward Mehen. He simply stood there. She couldn't tell for sure if he'd been restrained or not, but it didn't look like it. "Mehen? I'm here. Let's get out of this place before Sek realizes I came to you."

Blythe had almost reached Mehen when he swung around to face her. She gasped in shock when he grabbed her painfully by the arm. His eyes were no longer the pale brown, almost gold color that all Ra's Chosen shared. He stared down at her with eyes black as night. A smile, that Blythe could only describe as almost evil, spread across Mehen's face.

"Sek already knows you're here, Blythe. I told him I could lure you to me. Apep will be very pleased."

Blythe tried to pull free of Mehen's grip, but he only laughed at her futile attempts to get away. She helplessly watched as his fangs dropped down past his upper lip. When he opened his mouth and hissed, she saw some kind of black, thick substance drip from his fangs. As it hit the rock floor between them, Blythe heard it start to sizzle. What had Sek done to Mehen?

"I'm hungry, mate. Come feed me."

As Mehen pulled her closer and bent his head to sink his fangs into her neck, Blythe screamed.

* * * * *

"Where the hell is she?" Set demanded. "The sun is starting to set. Takan, you told me Blythe promised she'd return to the headquarters before dark."

"I don't know where she is. I've tried her cell phone a couple times already. She must have turned it off. I get her voice mail every time I try." Takan had already berated himself for letting Blythe leave in the first place. He could kick himself for it now.

"We can't wait for her much longer," Set said to all the warriors where they sat at the large table inside the meeting room.

Denger nodded his head in agreement. "We'll have to leave whether Blythe returns or not. She knew we planned to go in after Mehen. Blythe has grown on me, but she has to learn that she isn't living in the outside world anymore. She's going to have to follow our rules now."

"Give Blythe a break, Denger," Takan shot back. "She's hurting. She just needed some time to herself. There are too many memories of Mehen for her to remember here. She just needs time."

Kysen made a loud humph sound after Takan finished speaking. "For someone who told me you were interested in being friends only with Blythe you are pretty quick to defend her. Out of the rest of us, besides Mehen, you seem to have grown quite close to her. I'm starting to think your feelings are much more than just mere friendship."

"Shut the fuck up, Kysen," Takan growled. He felt his fellow warriors look over at him in surprise. His outburst was completely out of character for him. Takan ignored their looks. "I don't have to explain my feelings for Blythe to you, Kysen, or to any of you for that matter. Leave it alone."

"Fine," Kysen said to him. "I didn't realize that would be such a touchy subject."

Set cleared his throat loudly. "Enough bickering among ourselves, please. We need to stand strong together tonight if we have any hope in hell of getting out of Sek's lair."

Takan sat back in his chair and shook his hair into his face. "I agree." He turned back to Kysen to find the other warrior still watched him. Takan knew Kysen had only dropped the subject temporarily. Takan knew he'd have to be more careful of what he said around Kysen from now on. Kysen may be the more laid back of the warriors, but that didn't mean much got past him.

"I hate to break up the party," Akori drawled, "but we really should head out now. And Denger over here is just itching for the coming fight. I suggest we don't hold him up much longer than we need to."

Takan glanced over at Denger who looked as if he was ready to leap out of his chair and beat the crap out of someone. His large hands were fisted on the table. The muscle along his jaw jumped as he clenched his teeth together. The undead would be in for one hell of a fight tonight.

"Akori's right. We have to leave now." Set turned to Takan. "Try Blythe one more time on her cell phone. If you get her voice mail again we'll have to forget about waiting for her to come back. She's a big girl. Hopefully she won't do anything stupid."

Takan pulled out his cell phone and punched in Blythe's number while Set went over a few last minute details for the night with the other warriors. As before, he got her voice mail after the second ring. He hung up and took a deep breath. He couldn't shake the feeling that Blythe had somehow gotten herself into trouble.

He looked up to find the rest of the warriors watching him with expectant expressions. He shook his head to let them know he hadn't spoken to Blythe. When the others stood up from the table, Takan got to his feet as well. Same as the night before, they were going to flash themselves to Sek's lair. At Set's signal, they left the meeting room at the same time.

Takan pulled out his sword and scanned the area for any undead. It was now fully dark. The other warriors did the same. He felt a shiver of unease run down his spine when he saw the opening to Sek's lair standing wide open. Cautiously, he worked his way closer, knowing it could very well be a trap.

Just when they reached the mouth of the tunnel, the sound of a woman's screams echoed inside. Takan didn't think. He took off down the tunnel at a run. His gut told him it was Blythe who had screamed. With the rest of the warriors pounding behind him, Takan prayed they wouldn't be too late.

* * * * *

Blythe fought the urge to scream again as she fought against Mehen's hold. She knew it would be a losing battle, but she wouldn't let him bite her without a fight. He was no longer himself. Sek had changed him, somehow had poisoned Mehen. That had to be the only explanation. Mehen wouldn't have voluntarily switched sides even to save his own life.

She clawed at Mehen's face when his head descended toward her neck. If she'd had long nails she would have done more damage, but it worked enough to stop him before he came too close. He reared back and hissed.

Mehen lifted his hand to strike her when two things happened at once. The rest of Ra's Chosen barreled into the chamber. At the same time, the diamond Eye of Ra she wore around her neck warmed against her skin and started to glow. Mehen let go of her as he backed away. He held his hands up to shield his face against the light, as if it hurt him.

Blythe took a step closer to Mehen until she had him backed against the wall. The warriors came to stand next to her. She turned her head to look at them. They all wore expressions of horror as they stared at Mehen. "We have to do something to help him," she said. "Sek did something to him. We can't leave him here like this."

Takan, who stood right beside her, asked, "Are you all right, Blythe? He didn't bite you, did he?"

"No, but it was a close call. He doesn't like the diamond now that it glows for some reason. It doesn't hurt me. See?" She placed her hand right over top the diamond to show Takan and the others.

Takan shouted, "I don't think that's a good idea, Blythe."

No sooner had Takan spoken then Mehen jumped for her. Blythe quickly pulled her hand away and the diamond glowed even brighter. Before Mehen reached her, a surge of bright light shot out of the diamond and hit him dead on. Mehen dropped to the chamber floor like a stone.

Blythe called out Mehen's name and fell to her knees beside him. Set came down on his other side and pressed two fingers against the large vein in his neck. "Is he still alive?" Blythe asked him in a shaky voice.

Set nodded. "Yes. He's just out cold. For how long, that remains to be seen. We have to get him back to the headquarters and restrained before he wakes up." Set hefted Mehen over one of his shoulders. "We can flash out of here."

"I don't think now would be a great time. We're going to have our hands full in a few seconds," Denger said with a snarl. "A shitload of undead are about to join us."

Blythe stepped closer to Set while the other warriors moved to take on the undead that streamed into the chamber. There were too many of them. She started to shake as the undead's hisses and snarls filled the chamber. No matter how well Ra's Chosen handled a sword, she couldn't see how they could defeat all the undead.

The feel of the diamond Eye of Ra heating against her skin drew Blythe's attention away from the battle in front of her. The diamond glowed brighter and brighter, much

brighter than when Mehen had tried to attack her. When it became too bright for her to look at, she looked straight ahead. The diamond grew even warmer the more intense the light within it became. Then with a bright flash, light shot out of the diamond and hit every undead inside the chamber.

Blythe gasped in shock as the undead spontaneously combusted and turned to dust as if they had been hit by the sun itself. The diamond continued to shoot light when more undead came to take the place of the fallen. Finally when no new undead arrived the diamond's light dimmed until it went out completely. With her heart pounding, Blythe wrapped her hand around the diamond Eye of Ra. It looked as if she owed Ra an apology when she got back to the headquarters. He hadn't given her an ordinary piece of jewelry at all. He'd given her a weapon to use against the undead.

She now knew what she had to do. With a determined look, Blythe turned to Set. "Get out of here. Take one of the others with you if you need help with Mehen, but I need the rest."

"What are going to do, Blythe?" Set asked her warily.

"I'm going to end the existence of every undead I can find in this hellhole. Then I'm going on a demon hunt and see what my gift from Ra will do to him."

Set stared down at her for a few seconds before he nodded. "Fine. I can tell you won't take no for an answer." He then looked up at the other warriors. "Akori, Denger, Kysen, you stay with Blythe. Takan, I need you to come with me. If anyone can figure out what Sek did to Mehen it will be you."

Denger moved to take Blythe by the arm. "Get the hell out of here, Set, before more undead come into the tunnel."

Moments after Set and Takan made their escape with Mehen, the first sounds of the approaching undead could be heard. The diamond once again began to heat and glow. The warriors stood around her with their swords raised, ready to defend her if needed. In the end, they didn't have to use their swords. Like in the chamber, the diamond surged with light as it hit the undead head on and turned them to dust.

They spent the next hour searching all the chambers inside Sek's lair. Most turned out to be empty, but some held the undead, and the diamond turned them to dust as well. After every chamber had been searched at least twice, they realized Sek had managed to escape, taking his undead warriors with him.

Blythe swore inside the last empty chamber they had searched. "Maybe we should look one more time just in case he's hiding someplace we haven't found yet."

Akori shook his head. "He's long gone, Blythe. I can no longer sense any undead around. That necklace of yours destroyed them all. Sek would have run with his undead warriors as soon as the scales tipped to our side. The other undead meant nothing to him. He used them as pawns to distract us so he could make good his escape."

"Damn it." Blythe shook her head. "And here I looked forward to kicking some demon butt."

Denger laughed and pulled her against his side. "I must have rubbed off on you, Blythe. You sound just as bloodthirsty as I do. Don't worry. You'll get your chance to kick some demon butt eventually."

Kysen sheathed his sword. "Since there aren't any undead left to play with, how about we return to the headquarters to see how Set and Takan are doing with Mehen?"

Akori and Denger sheathed their swords as well. They exited the lair and Blythe held onto Denger's waist as he flashed them back to the headquarters the same time Kysen and Akori did. When they arrived the sound of Mehen roaring with rage could be heard as it echoed inside the headquarters.

Blythe took off at a run down the hallway, following the sound of yelling to the old warehouse. Her heart froze at the sight that met her eyes when she ran through the door. Set and Takan struggled to keep Mehen down on the old metal table that had been bolted to the concrete floor. She slowly walked toward them as Akori, Denger and Kysen rushed past her to help Set and Takan.

When she came to stand not too far away from the table, Blythe noticed Mehen's hands and feet had already been bound with thick ropes. As the other warriors fought to hold him down, Mehen tried to sink his fangs into anyone who came within range. They still dripped the thick black substance she'd seen before. His black eyes filled with rage as he struggled to get free. Set yelled at Mehen to calm down, but he continued to fight them.

Mehen's head whipped around in her direction when he caught sight of her. He ceased to struggle and gave her a cold smile. "Blythe, my mate. I can hear your heart pounding, your blood surging through your veins. It makes me hungry. You know it's only your blood I need. You know how good it feels when I feed from you. Won't you come feed me?"

While Mehen spoke the other warriors used the opportunity to bind him to the table with another length of thick rope. Blythe took one step closer after they finished tying the rope around Mehen's upper body and the table. They quickly moved to do the same to his legs.

Blythe sadly shook her head. "No, Mehen. I won't feed you."

Mehen roared with anger. This time when he tried to get off the table he couldn't move, which made him even angrier. "You are my mate," he snarled. "You have to feed me."

"Not until you're better, Mehen."

"I'm better than I've ever been."

She started to wonder if the ropes would hold him as Mehen struggled more violently against his bonds. The others must have thought the same thing. Each man moved to a spot near the table ready to pounce on Mehen if he should work his way free.

The diamond that rested against Blythe's chest started to warm against her skin once more. This time the glow was muted, softer than when it had taken out the undead. Mehen hissed when the soft light hit him.

"You bitch!" Mehen yelled. "Get that fucking thing away from me. It burns."

As Mehen cursed, threatening to rip her head off to get the necklace from her, the diamond surged with light and hit him. It knocked him out cold like it had in Sek's lair. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Blythe fought back the urge to go to Mehen, to touch him to make sure he was okay. Given his violent reaction to her, she thought it best to keep her distance. Blythe flinched when a strong arm came around her shoulders.

"It's okay, Blythe," Takan said in a soft voice. "It's only me. You need to go to bed. I'll walk you to Mehen's quarters."

She shook her head. "No. I'm fine. I should stay here in case Mehen gets out of control when he wakes up again."

"You need to sleep. You can't do anything for Mehen right now."

"Takan's right," Set said as he stepped around the table to stand in front of her. "Until we figure out what the hell Sek did to Mehen we can't do anything to help him. You won't be doing him, or yourself for that matter, any good by going without sleep. Don't worry, one of us will stay with him at all times just in case he gets out of hand."

Blythe wanted to tell Set that she'd be fine, but she didn't have enough energy to argue with him. Having little to no sleep at all the previous night had started to catch up with her. Now that Mehen had been secured, the adrenaline she'd been running on had begun to leave her system. Exhaustion took its place. Knowing Set or one of the other warriors would come for her if Mehen took a turn for the worse, Blythe sighed in defeat.

"All right. I'll go to bed. Just promise to wake me up if Mehen needs me."

"We will. I promise."

She allowed Takan to turn her around and lead her back inside the headquarters. Once the connecting door closed behind them, he pulled her closer against his side as they walked and squeezed her shoulder. "We'll figure this out, Blythe. Once I get you tucked into bed I'm going to go do some research about Apep and Sek. You'd be surprised at what I can find on the internet about those two. Most mortals think the person who posted the information made it up, which is true about ninety-five percent of the time, but the other five percent comes pretty close to the truth."

Blythe gave Takan a weak smile. "Well like Set said earlier, if anyone can find out what is wrong with Mehen it would be you, Takan."

Once Takan got her inside Mehen's quarters, Blythe crossed the room and fell onto the bed. She barely felt Takan take off her shoes before he pulled the covers out from under her and urged her into the bed. He kissed her on the forehead before he turned off the lights. Blythe fell into a dreamless sleep just as Takan closed the door behind him.

Chapter Fifteen

Threading his fingers through his hair, Takan pulled it straight back off his face while he skimmed the list of websites the search engine had brought up. It felt good not to have his hair hanging in his face, but the only time he kept it that way was when no one else would be around to see. He always felt self-conscious when anyone looked directly at him.

Takan blew out a breath and let go of his hair. He clicked on one of the websites. As he'd told Blythe, it always surprised him how much actual fact about Apep ended up posted on the internet by non-scholars. Takan had brought some ancient scrolls with him when they had moved to Phoenix from Egypt that were valuable for the information that had been written on them, but the internet seemed to always have something new. Takan read the first few paragraphs posted on the website, then hit the back button to return to the search results.

He went through page after page of websites, but none of them had any information on what had been done to Mehen. Most of them had descriptions of the undead with eyewitness accounts to back their information up. Nothing seemed to stand out with regards to Mehen's condition.

Frustrated by his inability to find anything at all that could help Mehen, Takan sat back in his chair and rubbed his tired eyes. No matter how tired he got, he knew he wouldn't give up the search. He had promised Blythe he would find something that would help Mehen and he had no intention of letting her down. The hurt look on her face when Mehen had cursed at her was one he wouldn't soon forget. If he could, he would have sheltered her from it, but in the end it wouldn't have done her any good.

Takan closed his eyes and sighed. "If only I could get a little help with this. Or the very least get pointed in the right direction to look up the information myself. It would make this a hell of lot easier."

I only waited for you to ask, Takan.

His eyes snapped open when Ra's voice filled his head. "I planned to ask you in the morning if I exhausted all possibilities on my own. Isn't it still night? I thought you would be a little too busy to come and talk to me."

Dawn is approaching, Ra replied with amusement sounding in his voice.

Takan looked at the computer's clock and saw Ra was right. "I didn't realize it had gotten so late, or early, whichever way you want to look at it." He covered a large yawn with his hand.

You need to sleep, Takan.

"Not until I find something to help Mehen," Takan said around another yawn. "Blythe is counting on me."

Has Blythe forgiven me for placing my Eye around her neck?

Takan chuckled. "I'd say she has more than forgiven you. Once she realized what that diamond was capable of she apparently cleaned out all the undead she could find in Sek's lair. She even impressed Denger with her willingness to hunt the undead."

That pleases me to hear. I didn't think Blythe would have accepted the gift other than the way I gave it to her.

Takan let the silence stretch between them before he spoke again. "When are you going to tell her, Ra?"

Soon. When the time is right. There is too much going on in her life right now.

"Once we fix Mehen things should settle down for Blythe. The rate I'm going here though, it won't be for some time."

You won't find the answer you seek. Not in the ancient scrolls, or your internet. This is something new for Apep. It is a new way of bringing someone under his thrall.

"You mean Mehen is now a new type of undead?"

No. Mehen is not one of the undead. He has full possession of his soul. He is just being used, manipulated by Apep. Apep's poison that has infected Mehen must be taken out. Bring him to my temple at noon and I'll remove it from him.

Even though Ra didn't speak to him in person, Takan furiously shook his head. "We can't. The diamond's light hurts him. Direct sunlight will kill him."

It will only kill what Sek put inside him. I'm not saying it won't be painful for Mehen, but it is the only way to rid his body of Apep's poison.

"All right. We'll have him at your temple at noon."

Ra's presence faded as Takan shut down the computer. He stood and stretched. Now he had to go and explain to the other warriors what Ra said had to be done to help Mehen. Sometimes it really sucked being the one Ra communicated with most easily. He really hated being the go-between at times, especially when it wasn't particularly good news he had to pass on.

Leaving the meeting room, Takan headed for the old warehouse. As he expected, Set sat in a chair close to the table. Mehen was still out like a light. Set sat with his arms crossed over his chest with his head drooped down. Takan heard him softly snore.

So as not to catch Set off guard, Takan made as much noise as possible when he came to stand in front of the other warrior. Set's head snapped up as he came awake.

"How is Mehen?" Takan asked.

Set took a quick look over at Mehen before he turned back to Takan. "The same. At least he isn't acting like a snarling beast."

"Ra just spoke to me a few minutes ago about Mehen."

"He did? It isn't daylight yet."

"No, but it soon will be dawn."

"Oh. What did Ra have to say?"

"We're to bring Mehen to his temple at noon. Once we get him there Ra will kill whatever Sek put inside him."

Set's reaction turned out to be the same as his had been. "No way. Not going to happen. The sun will kill him."

"Ra assured me it wouldn't. It will only kill the poison inside Mehen. It will probably hurt like hell, but it won't kill him."

"It sounds as if it will be fun then," Set said sarcastically. "Blythe will be a basket case. I think it will hurt her as much as Mehen to watch him go through that much pain."

"Then we'll keep her away from the temple while Mehen is there."

Set snorted. "Good luck with that. Do you actually believe you'll be able to convince Blythe to stay away? Don't count on it."

Takan knew Set had the right of it there. Blythe wouldn't leave Mehen to face this alone. "You're right. Can you let the others know? I need to go lie down for a couple of hours."

"Go ahead. I think we're all going to need to be at our full strength come noontime. Mehen isn't going to take being put in Ra's temple very well. I have a feeling this will be a painful experience for all of us."

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"Are you sure this is the only way?" Blythe asked as she looked at each of the two warriors who sat across from her.

After she woke up that morning she'd gone to the kitchen to grab a quick bite to eat before she went to check on Mehen. She hadn't expected to find a grim-faced Takan and Set seated at the kitchen table waiting for her. Nor had she expected what they had told her had to be done to help Mehen.

"Ra said it wouldn't kill Mehen." Takan tried to reassure her. "This is some new weapon Apep has created. I couldn't find anything that we could do ourselves to free Mehen of the poison."

Blythe absentmindedly reached up and wrapped her hand around the diamond Eye of Ra. "I guess we really don't have much of a choice but to trust Ra in this case. Who knows what the poison will do to Mehen if left in his system for too much longer."

"I know this will be hard on you, Blythe," Set said. "If anyone can help Mehen it will be Ra."

She didn't miss seeing the dark circles under Set's eyes. She knew without having to be told that he had spent what remained of the night watching over Mehen. "Can I see Mehen before we go to the temple?"

Set shook his head. "I wouldn't suggest that. He's awake and relatively calm for now. I think once he sees you that will change. The only time he's gotten agitated again is when he has asked for you and we've refused to let him see you."

Blythe would have liked to see Mehen, to reassure him that she'd be there for him when he went to Ra's temple, but deep down inside she knew she wouldn't be talking to the real Mehen. The black eyes and the dripping fangs didn't belong to the man she'd come to love and call mate. "I guess I'll meet you at the temple at noon then. I'll get there before you bring Mehen in."

Takan reached across the table and placed his hand on top hers. "Is there any way I can convince you to stay away from the temple, Blythe?"

She gave him a small smile. "I'm afraid not, Takan. Mehen is my mate, which means I'll stand by his side through the good and the bad. I hadn't thought we would have to go through the bad this early in our relationship, but I won't turn away from him now."

Takan gave her a nod of his head. "Set said you wouldn't stay away. I still had to ask just to make sure."

Blythe slipped her hand out from under Takan's and stood. She looked at the two warriors. "I'll be fine, so the two of you can stop worrying about me. I'm going to cook all of us a big breakfast, because I have a feeling we're going to need all the energy we can get to deal with Mehen. So you two get out of my kitchen so I can cook in peace. Let Denger, Akori and Kysen know the food will be ready soon."

As Blythe watched Set and Takan leave the kitchen she sighed deeply. She told Set and Takan that she could handle what Ra would have to do to help Mehen, but she didn't know if she could stay strong through it all. Somehow she'd have to find the strength to keep it together for Mehen's sake.

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After she'd fed the warriors and cleaned up the kitchen, Blythe made her way to Ra's temple. The others wouldn't bring Mehen for another fifteen minutes, but she had something she wanted to do before they arrived.

Blythe paused just outside the temple and took a deep breath to calm herself. How did one word an apology to an Egyptian god? She just hoped he would accept it, that he would understand where her anger had come from.

Deciding it would be best just to jump right in, Blythe walked to the center of the temple where the sun shone down the brightest. "Ra? Are you there?" She waited a few seconds, but he didn't respond. "Look, I'm sorry for what I said to you the other day. I now know you didn't give me the necklace hoping it would make me feel better after Mehen was captured. After last night, I wouldn't want to take it off even if I could. The diamond helped us get Mehen back."

I understand, Blythe. You don't need to apologize.

Blythe breathed a sigh of relief at the sound of Ra's voice in her head. "Anyway, I want to say thanks for the gift. I won't yell at you again to take it away."

Ra chuckled. *I'm glad to hear it. I never intended to make you angry. I gave you my Eye to safeguard you.*

"I know that now. Before, I probably wouldn't have listened to you even if you had tried to explain."

I know. And don't worry about Mehen. I will get rid of the darkness Apep put inside him.

"Are you sure it won't kill him?"

You have my word that Mehen will survive this. My sun will heal him. When the warriors bring him in make sure they remove Mehen's shirt. The sunlight must touch his chest. It'll be all right, Blythe. Just know that I'll be here with you.

Blythe felt Ra pull away. She shielded her eyes with her hand and looked up through the clear glass ceiling. The sun appeared to be at its highest, which meant the others would arrive at any moment. She felt a little better about this now that she'd talked to Ra, but it didn't completely stop her from being nervous. To watch Mehen in pain could very well be her undoing.

She heard the warriors when they approached the temple with Mehen even before she saw them. The sound of Mehen cursing as he yelled to be released preceded them. Blythe swallowed and stood her ground when they arrived at the doorway to Ra's temple. Mehen's gaze immediately latched onto her. She ignored him as he glared at her and instead spoke to the others.

"Ra wants you to remove Mehen's shirt."

Mehen, who had been allowed to walk on his own two feet, started to fight as Denger and Akori held him by each arm and Set pulled out a knife. With his arms still bound in front of him, Mehen couldn't do much except struggle when Set cut his t-shirt from neck to waist and pulled it off.

Kysen who stood behind Mehen said, "You might want to take a look at his back."

Denger and Akori turned Mehen around so everyone could get a good view of his back. Blythe sucked in a sharp breath when her gaze landed on the mark Ra had given him. It no longer had the bright colors it once had. The wings were no longer peacock blue, but pure black. The sun that had been colored red also had been changed to black, totally obscuring the Eye of Ra that had been inside the sun depicted in red and blue. The warriors' faces grew even grimmer as they stared at the changes in the mark that all of them carried.

Spinning Mehen around, Denger and Akori started to lead him inside the temple. As the first ray of sunlight hit Mehen he hissed and violently struggled to get free. Unperturbed, the warriors moved him even farther inside. By the time they reached Blythe who still stood in the center of the temple, Mehen roared as if in great pain.

Blythe fisted her hands at her sides and bit down on her bottom lip until she tasted blood. Hearing Mehen cry out like this, she had to fight herself not to beg the other

warriors to take him out of the sun. She told herself over and over again that this was the only way to save Mehen. Even when his skin started to smoke, especially on his chest just over his heart, she held back. Her eyes burned with unshed tears as Mehen screamed in agony. And Mehen's screams weren't just affecting her. The others felt the strain of it as well. More than one of them swore they'd make Sek pay for what Mehen now had to go through.

When Mehen went down on his knees Denger and Akori kneeled beside him, supporting his weight between them. Mehen bellowed in pain as a small hole opened up on his chest over his heart. Blythe held a hand to her mouth in shock as a small snake that looked to be made out of gold slithered out of his chest and fell onto the floor. She felt a chill run through her when the snake coiled up on itself as it tasted the air with its tiny tongue. Before it had a chance to strike, the sun that hit it seemed to grow brighter. The snake burst into flames and turned to dust in a matter of seconds.

Blythe's gaze shot back to Mehen. He no longer screamed in pain. His head had fallen forward onto his chest. "Mehen?"

Her hand shook as she stepped closer and lifted his head. Mehen's eyes rolled open. Black eyes stared back at her, but while she watched, the color slowly started to lighten. Mehen wrenched free of Denger and Akori's hold and fell forward onto his bound fists and started to heave. Blythe held back his long hair while he retched. His body shook as he threw up a thick black substance similar to what had dripped from his fangs. As soon as he threw it up the sun burned it to ash. While his body worked to free itself of Apep's poison, Blythe watched Ra's mark on Mehen's back change back to its original state until the black gave way to bright colors, and the Eye of Ra could be seen inside the red sun.

After Mehen brought up all he could, he collapsed on his side on the temple floor. Blythe lifted one of his eyelids. A single tear dripped down her face when she found Mehen's eyes had returned to their normal pale brown, almost gold, color. She pushed the hair off Mehen's forehead and kissed him. Ra had given Mehen back to her.

Set gently placed a hand on her shoulder. "Let me take the rope from around his wrists then we'll get him into his quarters for you. We'll leave him in your capable hands."

Blythe stood and moved aside so Set could remove the rope. Mehen's body still shook as if he had a fever. Denger and Akori each managed to take one of his arms and draped it around their shoulders. With care, they lifted Mehen off the floor between them. Blythe followed behind as they helped Mehen to his quarters. She hurried around the men when they reached the quarters and opened the door.

After Denger and Akori settled Mehen on the bed they took one last look at their leader then walked out of the room. Takan gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and made her promise to come get him if she needed any help, before he left too.

Kysen smiled and winked at her. "I'm sure you will have our boy here feeling right as rain very soon. He just needs a bit of loving and your blood and he'll be back on his feet in no time."

Set gave Kysen a hard look just before the other warrior left them alone. He turned back to Blythe. "Kysen does have a point, though. Mehen probably will need blood, but I doubt he's up to it right now."

"I'll make sure he gets the blood he needs, Set. We'll be fine. If I need help I'll be sure to ask for it."

"All right. I'll leave you alone with him then. I just wanted to say you did well back there, Blythe. You stood strong for your man. Mehen is lucky to have you."

Blythe knew she had an idiotic grin on her face as she walked Set to the door, but having Set compliment her meant a lot. Once she closed the door, Blythe went back to the bed. Mehen lay curled on his side with his legs drawn up to his chest shivering. She climbed on the bed next to him and placed her hand on his forehead. He felt a bit feverish. He turned his head in her direction and looked up at her.

"Blythe? Is that really you?"

She smiled at him and ran her fingers through his knotted hair. "Yes, it's really me. How are you feeling?"

"I'm cold. Weak. I feel as if I was trapped in a nightmare I couldn't wake up from."

"Well, the nightmare is over now. I don't think we should chance you taking a shower so I'm going to go run a bath. Just try to rest." She pulled the other half of the duvet over him before she got up and headed for the bathroom to start filling the tub. She thought maybe she would join Mehen in the tub, but in the end thought better of it. Now that she had him back there would be plenty of other opportunities to bathe with him.

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Mehen closed his eyes after Blythe disappeared into the bathroom. He wrapped his arms around his chest as he shook uncontrollably. He felt as if his body had been burned from the inside out.

He didn't remember much of what happened after Sek put that little gold snake in his chest. As he'd told Blythe, it had felt as if he'd been trapped in some kind of nightmare. The things he did remember, he didn't want to believe he'd done. The things he'd threatened to do to Blythe sickened him. That he would have just handed her over to Apep sickened him even more. He'd been helpless to stop himself. It was almost as if a barrier had stood between his true self and what had taken over his body. He could hear and see what happened around him, but only as a spectator and not as a participant.

Sek had taken him to a chamber after Apep's poison had worked its way through his body. Symbols of Apep had been drawn on the walls. On the floor another set of

symbols had been drawn. Sek had told him that through those symbols he sent Apep the mortal souls the undead collected. And through those symbols, Apep had spoken to him. The demon god's voice had brought him to his knees in pain, which Apep enjoyed. What Apep had told him now made his blood freeze in his veins. The demon god had told him exactly why he wanted Blythe. She was Ra's daughter. And with that knowledge, it now changed everything.

When Blythe returned to help him into the bathroom, Mehen ached to pull her into his arms and just hold her. He wanted to close his eyes and just breathe in her scent, but he had no right to touch her so intimately. With a god's blood running through her veins she was so much above him now. Along with what he'd learned from Apep about her, he felt too dirty to touch her. He felt as if the evil inside him had marked him in some way. That he would never fully be the same again.

He stood still and allowed Blythe to help him take off his jeans and then get into the bathtub. His stomach started to cramp with blood hunger when she knelt and started to wash him with a cloth. He ignored the pain and rested his head against the back of the tub as he stared at the ceiling. His fangs had burned while they had been filled with that noxious black substance. If he had bitten Blythe then she would have been Apep's to control as well. He couldn't take the risk that some of the poison still remained in his fangs. He'd rather suffer through blood hunger than risk Blythe.

Mehen got out of the bathtub at Blythe's urging and let her towel him dry. She wrapped the towel around the lower half of his body. Some of the chill had left him after his soak in the warm bath water, but he still felt weak. Blythe put an arm around his waist as she pulled his arm around her shoulders. With her help, he made his way back to bed. She pulled back the covers and took the wet towel off him before she tucked him into the bed.

"Go to sleep, Mehen. I'll be here if you need me."

Mehen closed his eyes. He would sleep, but he knew it would be far from peaceful.

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Blythe watched Mehen sleep. She moved to sit beside him on the bed when he started to thrash and mutter in his sleep. She didn't know what he said, mostly because he spoke in his native tongue, but from the tone of his voice she knew whatever Mehen dreamed about couldn't be pleasant. Her touch seemed to quiet him, though.

She stroked Mehen's forehead as his brows furrowed. Lines bracketed his mouth and eyes. Every once in a while he would wrap an arm across his stomach as if it pained him. Blythe didn't have to guess to know what bothered him. Mehen showed all the signs of acute blood hunger. Obviously after his body had rid itself of the poison in his system it needed fresh blood to replace it. Blythe decided she would let Mehen sleep for a little while longer before she woke him up and got him to feed.

Bending down, she kissed his forehead. She needed him to feed from her as much as Mehen needed the blood. After almost losing him she needed that affirmation

making love would bring. So she would know that she had all of him back. She hoped the wall Mehen had thrown up to block the bond they shared would come down when he joined his body to hers. She missed that closeness.

When Mehen groaned in his sleep and clutched at his stomach once again, Blythe decided he needed blood more than he needed sleep right now. Gently, she shook Mehen's shoulder. "Wake up, Mehen."

His eyes blinked open. "I'm tired still. I need to sleep."

Blythe moved to lie on her side next to him. "You can sleep later. I can tell your blood hunger is riding you." She pulled her hair away from the side of her neck. "Feed, Mehen." When he made no move to come closer, Blythe cupped the back of his head with her hand and tried to pull him against her.

Mehen shook his head and pulled away. "No. I'm still too weak."

"Once you've fed you'll feel stronger. You need blood."

"Not right now, Blythe. Please don't push. I'll feed when I'm ready."

He had already been through enough. Blythe let it go for now. "I won't push." She brushed her lips against Mehen's. Much to her surprise, he jerked back as if she'd burned him with fire. "You can go back to sleep then. If you won't take blood then at the very least you need food. If you think you'll be okay on your own, I'm going to start dinner."

"I'll be fine. I just want to sleep."

Blythe went to stroke Mehen's cheek, but he flinched away before her fingers made contact. When he closed his eyes, she got up off the bed. Her brows came together in concern as she took one last look at Mehen before she left the room.

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Mehen didn't leave his quarters for the rest of the day or night. Blythe brought him a tray of food once she had dinner cooked, but when she returned an hour later the food sat cold and untouched where she'd left the tray on his dresser. Mehen lay with his back to her, curled up on his side. She didn't know if he slept or not. When he didn't acknowledge her presence in any way, she thought it best to leave him be. She decided she'd let him have his way this day, but come morning she'd force him to do what he needed to regain his full strength.

When she returned to the kitchen with the untouched tray of food, Set, who had remained to help her do the washing up, shook his head. "He wouldn't eat?"

"No." Blythe scraped the food into the garbage before she rinsed the plate and put it in the dishwasher. "And he acted as if I wasn't in the room. I'll give him until tomorrow then I'm going to force the issue."

"He'll pull out of it. He just needs some time to get his head screwed on straight again."

"Let's hope so. Mehen can be a stubborn ass when he wants to be."

Set chuckled. "Yeah, he does have his moments. Well, if you're all done in here, I think I'll spend a relaxing night of vegging out in front of the television. Since you wiped out the majority of the undead population last night single handedly, I don't think we need to go out hunting tonight. Sek is long gone, but we'll have to hunt for him soon."

Blythe reached up and stroked the diamond Eye of Ra as she gave Set a saucy smile. "I may have to do some hunting of my own since this seems to work better than your swords do to bring down the undead."

"Like hell you will," Set shot back. "That will only be used in case you ever get in trouble."

"I'm only joking," Blythe said with a laugh. "If I don't have to see another undead ever again that would make me more than happy. I'll leave the job of taking down the undead in the hands of Ra's Chosen warriors."

Set gave her a hard smack on the butt. Blythe glared at him and rubbed her abused backside. "That's payback for yesterday. If you ever turn off your cell phone again, and don't get your ass back to the headquarters before nightfall, I'm going to make it so you can't sit down for a week. You got it?"

"Yes, Dad," Blythe replied sarcastically. "But I also have to remind you that I'm the one who cooks the food you eat. Don't piss me off. You never know what could end up in your food."

He held up his hands in surrender. "You win. I don't want any nasty surprises in my food, thank you very much. I think I'd better leave before I say something I'll regret later."

Blythe chuckled to herself as Set beat a hasty retreat. Alone, her hand drifted back up to the diamond. As she told Set, she'd never go out of her way to hunt the undead, but if any of the warriors ever found themselves in a tight bind, she wouldn't hesitate to come to their rescue. They were her family now, and she'd look out for them as much as they would look out for her.

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The next morning, Blythe rolled over in bed as she reached for Mehen. She jolted awake when her hand encountered empty space instead of a warm body. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she turned to look toward the bathroom. The door stood open and the lights hadn't been turned on, which meant Mehen had already left his quarters.

Blythe told herself not to worry as she headed for the bathroom to take a shower. That Mehen had gotten out of bed had to be a good sign that he had started to recover from his ordeal. She'd been more than a little worried by his behavior the night before. She'd returned to find Mehen still curled up on his side either sleeping or feigning sleep. She hadn't been sure which. Blythe didn't make a big deal about it. After she changed into her pajamas for the night, she'd slipped into bed beside him and switched on the television.

Mehen had then proceeded to ignore her for the rest of the night. Even after she'd switched off the television hours later and lay back to sleep, he kept to his side of the bed. Warning bells had gone off in her head then. It had to be more than just mere tiredness.

Now showered and dressed, Blythe headed for the kitchen where she knew the warriors would be waiting for their breakfast. She hoped Mehen would be with them. Right away when she arrived she noticed Mehen's absence. Only Set, Denger, Kysen and Akori sat at the table drinking their morning coffee.

She crossed the room to the fridge. In a voice that she hoped didn't give away how worried she felt, Blythe asked, "Have any of you seen Mehen this morning?"

The four warriors stopped talking at once and turned to look at her. "I thought Mehen was in his quarters with you," Set said slowly.

Blythe shook her head. "He must have gotten up early. I woke up alone this morning."

"Do you want me to go look for him?" Akori offered.

"No. I think we'd better just let him be, though I'm a bit worried that he still hasn't fed."

The warriors exchanged looks of concern. Set put down his coffee cup and turned in his chair to face her. "I thought you fed him last night."

"Nope. He refused."

"That's not good. His blood hunger will start to ride him soon."

"It already has. He has cramps. I hoped to convince him to feed when I got up this morning or force him to."

"I wonder if his refusal to feed is a byproduct of having that poison in his system," Kysen suggested.

Blythe had wondered the same thing during the night. She couldn't think of any other explanation as to why Mehen wouldn't feed from her. He knew he could only survive on her blood. "It would explain a lot."

They all grew silent when Mehen walked into the room. He avoided looking at Blythe as he went and sat down at the table with the other warriors. She knew from the hard look he gave the others that he'd overheard their discussion. With the warriors' exceptional hearing it was next to impossible to keep things from them.

"I'm fine," Mehen said to the room at large. "So you all can quit worrying about me."

Blythe decided to take the bull by the horns. "We'll quit worrying about you once you feed."

Mehen gave her a cold look. "I can't."

"Why?" She crossed her arms over her chest and stared back at him.

"I just can't."

"Wrong answer. Now either you come up with a better excuse than that, or I'll have your men hold you down while I cut my wrist and force you to feed. It could get pretty embarrassing for the both of us considering what happens while you feed. So which will it be?"

"Like hell you will," Mehen growled.

"Just watch me."

Set cleared his throat. "I'd listen to Blythe, Mehen, if I were you. Now I wouldn't mind watching Blythe get off as she fed you, but you on the other hand, I think that would turn my stomach."

Mehen stood up with enough force to send his chair flying. He turned to walk out of the room. Blythe yelled at him before he could leave. "Get your ass back here. We're not through with this conversation."

He turned back around with a snarl on his face. "As far as I'm concerned it's over."

"Look, if you're reluctant to feed because of the poison, don't worry about it. Ra would have made sure he got all of it out."

Mehen fisted his hands at his sides. "And what if he didn't? Are you willing to take that chance, Blythe?"

"Yes. I hate to see you suffer from blood hunger when I know it isn't necessary. I can stop the pain, Mehen."

"And what if it's something more than the poison I'm worried about?" Mehen said in a tight voice.

"What are you talking about?"

"Forget it." Mehen moved to turn away once again.

"Do I have to get the other warriors to hold you until you spit out what the hell is bothering you?" Mehen curled back his upper lip giving her a good view of one of his fangs. "You can flash that fang all you want at me, but it isn't going to change anything."

"You really want to know, Blythe?" Mehen shot back. "All right. I'll tell you then. I learned something about you during my time spent in Sek's lair, about why Apep wants you so badly. You have a god's blood flowing through your fucking veins."

"What?" Blythe shot a glance at the other warriors, who in turn shrugged. She turned back to Mehen more confused than ever. "What do you mean I have god's blood flowing through my veins?"

"You're the daughter of a god, and not just any god. You're Ra's daughter. That's why Apep wants you, because of your blood tie to Ra. If he gets a hold of you he can use you against Ra. And because of who your father is, I no longer feel I have the right to claim you as my mate much less feed from you. No matter what is destined."

No one stopped Mehen when he turned away and left the kitchen. The five other individuals in the room looked at each other knocked speechless by what Mehen had told them.

Chapter Sixteen

Blythe shook her head in denial when she finally got over her shock. She looked at the other warriors not liking the look of reverence on their faces. "Ra can't be my father. And don't look at me like that. I can't be the daughter to an Egyptian god."

"Do you have any proof that says otherwise, Blythe?" Set asked.

"No. I have no idea who my father is. My mother dumped me off at her parents' house when I was really young and never came back. She even left the name of my father off my birth certificate. If my grandparents knew, they never told me either. But that doesn't mean Ra is my father. It could be anyone."

"Or Mehen is right, and Ra is your father."

"Shut the hell up, Set. Look at me. Do I look like the daughter of the most powerful Egyptian god out of that pantheon? I think not. I'm mortal. I don't have any special powers or anything."

Kysen snorted. "That doesn't mean anything. It just means you took after your mortal mother more than Ra. Ra being your father would explain that gift you now wear around your neck. I don't think he would give it to just anyone."

Blythe wrapped her hand around the diamond as she started to hyperventilate. "He's not my father."

Akori got up from the table and came around to Blythe. He took her into his arms and rubbed her back. "Take it easy, Blythe. Breathe slowly or you're going to make yourself sick. Would it be so bad to have Ra as your father? I wish I could claim a god as mine. I had to make do with a father who had only been a soldier in Pharaoh's army."

"It doesn't have to change anything, Blythe," Denger said. "You will still be you."

Blythe pulled her face away from Akori's chest and looked over at Denger. "You say that now, but you all looked at me differently once Mehen told you. I don't want you to look at me as if I'm something special, because I'm not."

"Okay, I'll admit the news caught us off guard." The others nodded in agreement with what Denger said. "We have served Ra for centuries. He is our god. If you are his daughter it does put you in a whole different category."

"How can you just accept that Ra is my father? Apep could have lied to Mehen."

"Then why don't you ask him?" Set said. "Why not go to Ra now and ask him outright if you are his daughter? That way you'll know one way or the other."

Blythe pushed away from Akori. "Now?"

"Why not? We'll go with you to Ra's temple, and you can ask him yourself."

She looked at Denger, Kysen and Akori. They all nodded. Obviously they all liked Set's idea of confronting Ra. "Fine. Let's go ask Ra."

Before she could say anything more, the warriors hustled her out of the kitchen to Ra's temple. Once inside, Blythe started to get cold feet, but the men moved to block the entrance. Running away from this wouldn't be an option with them standing there like a solid wall of muscle.

Blythe took a deep breath before she called out to the sun god. "Ra, I need to talk to you."

I'm here.

From the looks on the warriors' faces, she knew they had heard Ra as well. "I need to ask you a question."

You may ask your question, Blythe.

"Okay. What I wanted to ask you is," Blythe paused to swallow then she blurted it out all at once. "Are you really my father?" She held her breath when Ra didn't answer right away, but it all came out in a whoosh when he did.

Yes, I'm your father, Blythe.

Her legs began to shake. "I need to sit down." She decided to forgo the benches and sat down on the floor. It suddenly warmed beneath her. She knew that had to be Ra's, her father's, doing. "How can I be your daughter?"

You were conceived in the usual way babies are, Ra said with a chuckle.

"That's not what I meant and you know it. I mean how did you end up being with my mother who is a mortal?"

Every thousand years or so I grow bored with my life. When that happens I like to spend time in the mortal realm. I pass myself off as a mortal and walk among them. That's how I met your mother.

"So you came to the mortal realm, met my mother and knocked her up in a day?"

No. It didn't happen like that. I met your mother and fell in love with her. We dated, as you mortals call it, and one thing led to another.

"What happened? If you love my mother, why didn't you stay with her after she became pregnant with me? And why did she run away and leave me for my grandparents to rear?"

Once your mother became pregnant I decided to tell her exactly what I was. I wanted to make her immortal, to bring her to the immortal realm to live with me. She didn't handle it very well. She ran from me.

"And you just let her go?"

I loved her too much to force her into something she didn't want.

"But what about me? You had to have known she'd dumped me on my grandparents. She never came back. To this day I don't know if she is alive or dead." Blythe felt the old hurt rise up inside her whenever she thought of how easily her mother had given her up.

Because you were born a mortal I had to leave you with your grandparents. You had to be allowed to grow up in the mortal realm, to live your life here, so when the time came you could make the right decision whether to remain a mortal or become an immortal. It cannot be forced on a mortal. Even I can't break that rule.

"Okay, I can accept that. What about Mehen and me? Is he still my mate?"

Of course he's still your mate. From the time of your birth you were to be his mate. Even if Mehen hadn't met you in that alley when the undead first attacked you, I would have found a way for the two of you to meet. I've always watched over you, Blythe.

Blythe swallowed around the lump that suddenly formed in her throat. "Well, in that case, Dad, you'd better have a word with Mehen. For some reason he's gotten it in his head that since I have the blood of a god flowing in my veins he isn't good enough for me."

You don't need my help with Mehen, daughter. I'm sure you'll be able to change his mind once you get him into bed with you.

Blythe felt her face grow flushed. "We're really going to have to work on this whole father-daughter relationship thing. Most fathers would be upset to hear that their daughters are having sex."

I'll try to work on it, Ra said with a laugh.

She then grew serious. "Can I see you? I mean, can you come here in person? Now? I'd like to meet my father face to face instead of just hearing his voice inside my head."

Not right now. Once you have had the time to adjust to the idea of my being your father, and once you have things sorted out with Mehen, then I'll come to you. Mehen needs you more than I do right now, Blythe. I've waited this long to meet you, I can wait a little bit longer. Now go find your mate. Just call if you need me.

Blythe wiped away the single tear that slipped down her cheek. She turned to face the warriors who stood at her back. "I guess Apep didn't lie to Mehen about Ra being my father after all." She let her gaze linger on each of their faces. "Just to let you know, if any of you start treating me any differently because of this, I'm going to kick your butts."

"We promise," Set said with a smile. "Are you going to find Mehen now?"

"Not quite yet. I need to be alone for a bit and think." Before Set could say anything, Blythe held up her hand to stop him. "I'm not going to leave the headquarters. I'm going to walk outside around the warehouse. You have my promise I won't leave the property."

"All right. I guess it's safe enough for you to walk around outside as long as you stay inside the fence. Just one request though. Do you think you can fix us breakfast before you go for your walk?"

Blythe laughed. "I guess I can do that before I go. It wouldn't do to have you guys starve. I have to look after all my boys." She linked an arm through Set's and Kysen's arms and let them walk her back to the kitchen.

* * * * *

After she cooked enough food to feed the warriors and herself, Blythe outside. She still felt a bit knocked off balance now that she knew Ra truly was her father. For so long she wondered who he could be. When small, she'd pictured her father as a policeman or a firefighter. Someone big and strong who would come one day, scoop her up in his arms and tell her how he'd searched for her, how he hadn't been able to find her until now. Of course she eventually grew out of that fantasy. On the other hand, the reality didn't come close to what she had dreamed about.

Blythe stopped walking and glanced up at the sun that blazed down on her. Every time she felt the warmth of its rays she would think about her father. She still found it hard to accept that she had a blood tie with Ra the sun god. She wouldn't have guessed it in a million years. Now she had the hard job of getting Mehen to overlook that blood tie. The man seriously needed a smack to the back of the head if he thought that would put her beyond his reach. She'd be damned if she would ever let him go.

She continued on her walk. Blythe looked at the warehouse. Mehen would be in there somewhere hiding. He probably would try to avoid to her, hoping she'd eventually let him be, but that she couldn't do. The man needed blood. She knew he would let his blood hunger get so bad that it would cause him pain. That wasn't something she would tolerate. She would corner Mehen as soon as she finished her walk. If he ran from her, Blythe knew she would use the other warriors to pin him down while she force fed him her blood. Hopefully it didn't come to that, because it would be an uncomfortable situation for everyone involved.

Blythe made one complete circuit around the warehouse before she felt she'd gotten herself back on an even keel once again. She made her way back inside the docking bay and punched in the code for the security system. Hating the next part, she placed her hand on the stone set in the wall and pushed down. With a sharp indrawn breath, she pulled her hand away after the needle disappeared back into the stone taking a drop of her blood with it.

Walking back into the headquarters, Blythe eyed the drop of blood that welled from the spot where the needle had pricked her finger. She squeezed her index finger as she walked, which caused more blood to rise to the surface. This one little drop of blood would be Mehen's downfall and she intended to use it against him.

After she did a quick search for Mehen in the meeting room, the kitchen and the old warehouse part of the headquarters, Blythe made her way to his personal quarters. Much to her surprise, Mehen lay on the bed on his back with his feet still on the floor. It looked as if he'd just flopped down on the bed. Quietly as she could, she slipped inside the room, closed the door and locked it behind her. She knew the lock wouldn't be a deterrent for Mehen, but she hoped it would at least slow him down if he made a run for it.

On tiptoe, Blythe walked over to the bed. When she drew closer she squeezed her index finger once again. On the bed, Mehen clutched his stomach and hissed.

"Get out of here, Blythe." He pushed himself up on his elbows and glared at her.

"I can't do that."

Before Mehen could make another move, Blythe jumped him. She threw herself against his chest as she sat straddling his lap. When he opened his mouth to protest, she shoved her index finger inside his mouth. His tongue wrapped around her finger and his fangs dropped down. Blythe shivered with longing as Mehen's tongue lapped at the small amount of blood.

She pulled her finger out of his mouth and yanked her top over her head. Her bra fell to the floor next so she sat only wearing her Eye of Ra necklace on her upper body. Blythe lowered her head until her mouth hung a hairsbreadth above Mehen's. She looked deeply into his eyes. "We're going to get one thing straight right now. Just because I'm the daughter of Ra does not mean I'm any better than you. I'm the same old Blythe. This won't change who I am. I won't let it. And I'm sure as hell not going to let the man I love run away from me because of the blood that runs in my veins. You belong to me, and I won't give you up. So either you make love to me now, and feed from me while you do it, or I'm going to have the others tie you to this bed so I can have my way with you. One way or another I'm going to have you inside me. Which will it be?"

With a groan, Mehen put his arms around her and closed the distance between their lips. He rolled with her until he had her pinned under his much larger body. His tongue pushed past her lips as he swept the inside of her mouth. Blythe grabbed the bottom of his t-shirt and yanked it up his body.

Mehen lifted his head and pulled it the rest of the way off. He stared down at her. "Are you sure this is what you want, Blythe? You could have any Egyptian god as your mate just because Ra is your father."

Blythe lifted her hips and moaned as the hard length of Mehen's cock brushed against her pussy through her jeans. "Of course this is what I want. Why would I want an Egyptian god when I already have you? Besides, Ra told me himself that since the day of my birth I have been destined to be your mate."

As if a dam broke, Mehen took her lips in a hungry kiss. He sucked at her mouth as a starved man would. Blythe tunneled her fingers through his hair and kissed him back with all the love she felt for him. Mehen cupped her breast while he slid his lips from her mouth down to the side of her neck. Blythe turned her head to the side to give him better access.

"I want you to bite me, Mehen. Now."

"No. Not yet. I want my cock inside you, riding you, when I sink my fangs into you."

Blythe moaned as Mehen licked the large vein in her neck before he moved down her body. He rolled her taut nipple between his thumb and index finger while his lips kissed a trail across her collarbone to her breast. She arched her back as Mehen cupped her breast and flicked his tongue against her nipple. It tightened even more when he

gently blew on it before he opened his mouth and sucked it deep inside. As he drew on her nipple, Blythe felt her pussy clench. An ache built between her legs as wetness pooled, preparing for Mehen's cock.

Mehen released her nipple and moved to the other while his fingers trailed down her body to the top of her jeans. He worked the button free and unzipped them before he shoved his hand inside her panties. He worked his way down until he reached her slick folds. Blythe groaned and lifted her hips off the bed as a finger probed the entrance to her body. She clutched at Mehen's shoulders as the finger slid inside. When a second joined the first, she squeezed her inner muscles while Mehen slid them in and out.

"I need to taste you," Mehen said with a growl.

He pulled her jeans and panties down past her hips. Getting off the bed, he pulled her jeans the rest of the way off, taking her shoes and socks with them. Now completely naked, Blythe lay on the bed with her legs hanging over the edge. Mehen went down on his knees between her legs. He hooked her legs over his broad shoulders as his hands lifted her bottom off the mattress. With a growl, he pulled her closer to the edge then bent to lick her sex.

Blythe gripped the quilt beneath her while Mehen lapped at her pussy. She rocked her hips against his mouth as he pushed her arousal even higher. A strangled moan slipped past her lips when Mehen swirled his tongue around her clit before he sucked on it. The pressure built inside her core as she inched closer to her climax.

When she couldn't take any more, Blythe grabbed a fistful of Mehen's hair and yanked him up her body. Her other hand went to work on the button and zipper of his jeans. His erection strained against the zipper as she slowly pulled it down. His cock no longer confined inside his jeans, Blythe wrapped her hand around it. When she slowly pumped it up and down his length, it jerked. Mehen groaned in response. He pulled his jeans down past his hips and kicked them the rest of the way off.

Blythe released him so she could move to the middle of the bed. Mehen followed and came to lie between her spread thighs. Her lips met his in a heated kiss. She sucked his tongue into her mouth when the head of his cock came to rest against her slick opening. Needing to have him buried deep inside her, Blythe wiggled against him.

Mehen reared back then sheathed himself inside her core with one stroke. He rested his weight on his elbows and stared down at her. "I love you, Blythe. I don't want to ever lose you."

"You won't, and I love you as well." She reached up and tucked his hair behind his ear. "But if you don't finish what you started here I may have to bite you instead."

"Oh, I intend to finish."

He reared back once again until he almost pulled out of her body only to ram his full length back into her again. Blythe wrapped her legs around Mehen's waist and held onto his biceps as he started to ride her. She gripped his cock with her inner muscles

while he pumped his hips between her legs. She felt her orgasm start to build again, this time stronger.

Blythe met each of Mehen's strokes as the pressure built inside her. The feel of him stretching her, filling her to capacity had her moaning with pleasure. He rode her faster, harder, until her release tore through her. With a keening moan, she felt wave after wave of pleasure take her over. Her strong inner muscles clasped Mehen's cock in a tight fist.

Mehen waited until her climax receded before he started to move inside her once again. Blythe watched him open his mouth, his fangs extending, just before he sank them into the side of her neck. As he fed, he thrust into her. The wall he'd thrown up between them came crashing down. Blythe gasped when she felt Mehen's pleasure travel through the bond to her.

She climaxed a second time as Mehen's rose up to meet him. He sealed the bite mark on her neck with a sweep of his tongue before he threw back his head and groaned. His cock pulsed deep inside her while he came. Sated, she held Mehen tight when he collapsed on top of her. By slow degrees their breathing returned to normal. She kissed his sweaty brow, quite happy to have his heavy weight pushing her deeper into the mattress.

Mehen started to move off her, but Blythe didn't let him go. "You can stay right where you are."

"I'm too heavy for you."

"I don't care."

"Well, I do." With an arm around her waist, Mehen kept their bodies joined and rolled onto his back so she lay sprawled on top of him.

Blythe placed a kiss on his chest where Apep's gold snake had come out of his body. "How do you feel?"

"Better. My blood hunger is gone now."

She slapped his shoulder. "Stubborn man. If you'd fed from me yesterday like I had wanted you wouldn't have suffered at all."

"I had my reasons."

"Yes, well, at least you're over those now."

Mehen slapped her on the bottom. "You have set me straight." He grew serious. "You spoke to Ra?"

"Yes. I didn't want to believe you at first. I figured Apep could have lied to you. The others convinced me to go to the temple and ask Ra for the truth. It turns out Apep didn't lie."

"And he told you we were destined to be mates." Mehen said it as a statement.

Blythe nodded. "Yes. He told me if we hadn't met in that alley he would have arranged for us to meet another way. So no more running away, Mehen. You're stuck with me."

"You have my word that my days of running from you are over. In fact, if I have my way, you won't leave this bed for at least a week."

"Mmm, I think I could handle that." Blythe smiled. "But I think the other warriors would be banging on our door demanding to be fed."

"They could always get takeout."

"I suppose they could." Mehen's cock started to harden once again inside her. "I see you're still hungry."

Mehen lifted Blythe higher on his chest. Just before he took her lips, he said in a husky voice, "I'll always hunger for you."

Blythe soon lost the ability to think as Mehen devoured her mouth until she whimpered with her own growing hunger.

* * * * *

Mehen and Blythe spent the remainder of the day and night in bed. Kysen knocked once on their door asking if Mehen would let Blythe up for air long enough to cook dinner. Mehen yelled at him to tell the others that she wouldn't be doing any more cooking that day and to fend for themselves. Kysen chuckled and said they'd leave some food for them outside the door.

Hours later, Mehen found a bag of Chinese takeout sitting out in the hallway. Having worked up an appetite, Mehen and Blythe ate it all as they fed each other, which then turned into another bout of lovemaking when Mehen started to eat the food off Blythe's body. Just before they at last fell asleep, they decided the next day they would go to Ra's temple and ask him to make Blythe immortal.

They received a lot of good-natured ribbing from the other warriors when they arrived in the kitchen the next morning. Blythe ignored most of the comments as she set about making breakfast for her men. She let Mehen bring up the subject of what they wanted to do today.

After everyone had cleared their plates and sat back sipping on coffee, Mehen stood up from the table and waited until he had their full attention. "As you all know, Blythe and I have worked things out."

"About bloody time," Set said.

Mehen cleared his throat. "Yes, well, as I said Blythe and I have now worked things out. She has forgiven my stubbornness and pigheadedness, as she so eloquently put it."

Kysen bit back a laugh. "Boy, she has you pegged."

"Anyway," Mehen said a bit louder. "We decided that today we would go to Ra and ask him to make Blythe immortal. We'd like you all to be there when we do."

Denger pushed back his chair and stood up. "Well, what are you waiting for? Let's go. Once she's an immortal none of us will have to ever worry about losing her."

The other warriors nodded their heads in agreement as they too stood up from the table.

Blythe hid a smile behind her hand at their show of enthusiasm. She then cleared her throat to get their attention. "Don't Mehen and I have any say when we'll go to Ra's temple?"

"Not really," Set answered for them all. "Do you want to wait and have Mehen find some other reason why he can't be your mate?"

Blythe shot to her feet. "You have a point."

With the warriors following behind them, Mehen and Blythe left the kitchen and headed for the temple. Once inside, Mehen took Blythe's hand in his and then called out to the sun god. "Ra, Blythe and I have come to ask you to make Blythe immortal so we can be mates in all ways."

This time, Ra didn't just speak to them in their heads. With a bright flash of light, he appeared inside the temple. Out of the corner of her eye, Blythe saw Takan slowly back up, putting as much distance as he could between him and Ra while he pulled more of his hair in front of his face. Turning to stare at her father, she soon forgot about Takan's strange behavior.

Blythe swallowed against the lump in her throat as she got her first real look at her father. Ra was just as tall as his warriors, his body just as muscular, and just as good-looking. He wore a snow white linen kilt around his hips and nothing else. Around his upper arms he wore gold bands. His pale brown eyes, a match for Mehen's and the other warriors', stared down at her when he smiled. His straight black hair fell to the tops of his shoulders. To Blythe, Ra looked every inch an Egyptian god. When he held out his hand to her, she didn't hesitate to take it. She wrapped her arms around Ra's waist as he pulled her into his embrace.

"I've waited a long time to hold you like this, daughter." Ra kissed the top of Blythe's head before he cupped her face in his hands and made her look up at him. "You've decided you'd like to be immortal?"

Blythe nodded. "Yes. Given the fact that my father and my mate are both immortal, why would I want to stay a mortal?"

Ra smiled. "Then I give you the gift of immortality."

When Ra bent down and kissed her forehead, Blythe felt a jolt of energy shoot through her body. She then felt a burning sensation on her lower back and in her gums in her upper jaw. As Ra lifted her head, she ran her tongue inside her mouth and found she now sported fangs. "I'm immortal now? I don't have to drink your blood or anything?"

Ra shook his head. "No. You are of my blood. Only my warriors had to drink my blood. But I have marked you as my own."

Blythe lifted the back of her shirt, but without a mirror she couldn't see anything. She looked at Mehen. "What is it?"

"It's the same mark all of us carry on our backs—the winged sun with the Eye of Ra in the center. Except your mark is half the size and on your lower back."

Blythe turned back to Ra. "Anything else I should know?"

"Just as Mehen needs to drink your blood to survive, you must drink his as well." Ra gave her a wink. "Call it a safety measure in case Mehen ever decides to run again."

Going on tiptoe, Blythe kissed Ra's cheek. "Thanks, Dad."

"I'll see you again very soon, Blythe." With that said, Ra disappeared.

Blythe turned to face Mehen and the warriors as she flashed them her new set of fangs. "It looks as if I've now joined the club." She took Mehen by the hand and started to lead him out of the temple. Before she left, she looked over her shoulder at the others. "I suggest you start thinking of what you want to buy for dinner tonight. Mehen and I are going to be a little busy for the rest of the day."

As they walked down the hallway, Blythe gave Mehen a heated look. "I have a hankering to sink my fangs into you."

Mehen scooped Blythe up in his arms and took off at a run to their quarters. Once he had them safely behind the closed door, she sank her new fangs into the side of his neck. As her mate shook with pleasure, Blythe knew nothing would come between them again. She had everything she ever wanted.

Epilogue

Set walked down the street waiting to feel the telltale prickling of his skin to let him know an undead was nearby. He really didn't expect to find any. It had only been a few days since Blythe had wiped out all the ones they'd found at Sek's old lair. Even though that was the case, they couldn't afford to become lax. As long as Sek and Mot existed there would always be undead for Ra's Chosen warriors to hunt.

Passing a restaurant that had an outdoor patio, his gaze landed on a woman who sat alone eating. He stopped and watched her from across the street. She would make a good donor. Even though he'd fed two nights ago, his body craved more blood. It wasn't a strong craving, but it was making its presence known.

When the woman turned her head in his direction and met his gaze, Set sighed and moved on. He could ignore his blood hunger for now. He just couldn't ignore what his needing to feed again so soon meant. More prepared than Mehen had been, Set knew his time to find his mate was nearing. Not sure how he really felt about it, he continued with his hunt.

The End

About the Author

Marisa Chenery was always a lover of books, but after reading her first historical romance novel she found herself hooked. Having inherited a love for the written word, she soon started writing her own novels.

After trying her hand at writing historicals, she now writes paranormals.

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