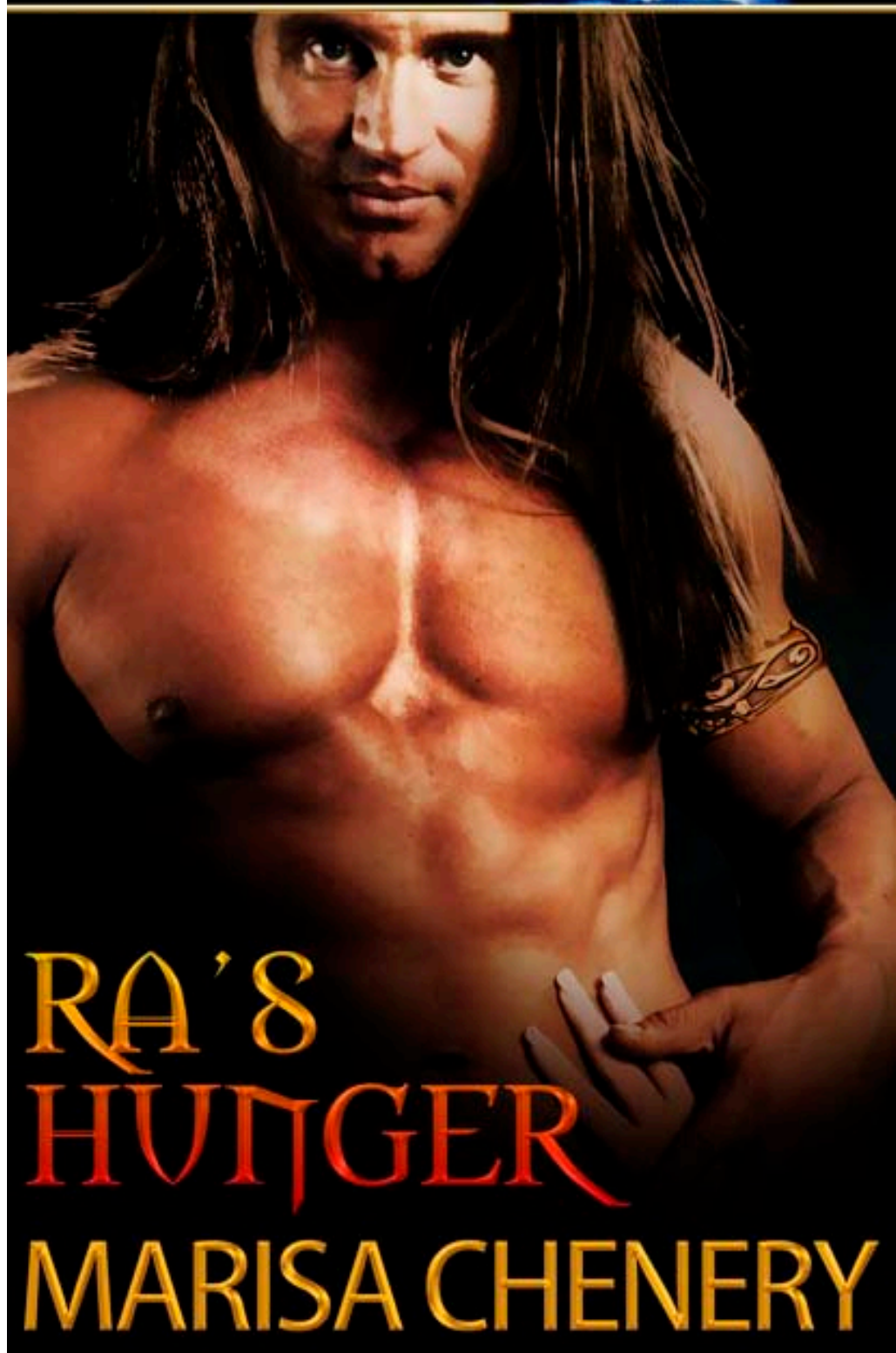


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



RA'S
HUNGER

MARISA CHENERY

Ra's Hunger

Marisa Chenery

Book seven in the Ra's Chosen series.

After watching all his warriors find their mates, Ra wants nothing more than to find his own. How hard can it be? He's an Egyptian god, for crying out loud. Women should fall at his feet—and into his bed. When he discovers his destiny, he's flabbergasted that she doesn't accept him at the word go. He must wrap his head, and arms, around this mortal woman. Fast.

Shanda doesn't want a man right now. No way, no how. But when the sexy stranger shows up at her museum, her sex-starved body doesn't care. It wants him...posthaste. She might have a chance in hell of resisting him, if he'd only stop kissing her.

With the pressure of having to tell Shanda what he truly is, Ra bumbles the job left and right. Very un-godlike. And when she does everything she can to stay out of his bed and his life, Ra must win her over the only way he knows how. With *seduction*.

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Ra's Hunger

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RA'S HUNGER

Marisa Chenery

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BMW: Bayerische Motoren Werke Ag

Phoenix Art Museum: Phoenix Art Museum

A New Legend

With the demon god Apep, the eater of souls, no longer having a foothold in the mortal realm, and his demons Set and Mot no more, Ra's Chosen can enjoy a new life with their mates. Even though they will stay ever vigilant to protect their mortal charges from the evil that would hunt them, theirs is now a simpler life.

Then there is the story of how an ancient Egyptian god, Ra, finds the woman who would be his mate...

Chapter One

Ra walked down one of Phoenix's streets, watching the mortals around him. Now that all his Chosen had found their mates, he longed to find the same happiness. To find that one woman meant for him.

Even though she hadn't been his mate, he'd once thought he'd found a lasting love in the arms of the mortal woman who was the mother of his daughter, Blythe. That had failed miserably once he'd revealed what he truly was – the Egyptian sun god Ra.

In the beginning, Tia had only known him as Ray. She'd even overlooked the fact he could never spend a night with her, and could only see her during daylight hours. It wasn't until she'd become pregnant with Blythe that he'd revealed the truth. He'd hoped her love for him would be enough for her to accept it all, even the immortality he'd wanted to give her, so they could always be together, but it had all been too much for Tia.

Ra had let her go, and after the birth of their daughter, she'd run. Using his powers, he could have easily found her, but with his ability to see the future, he'd known forcing her to accept him would have broken her. Letting her live out the rest of her mortal life without him was the best thing for both of them. He'd settled for watching over his daughter from the realm where the gods dwelled.

Now that Blythe was grown, no longer mortal and mated to the leader of his Chosen, Mehen, she didn't need his protection quite so much. Especially since his warriors had managed to end the demon god Apep's foothold in the mortal realm by vanquishing his two demons.

Then there was Takan, his son, also one of his Chosen. Born in ancient Egypt, Takan's mother had been one of the priestesses who had served in his temple in Karnak. Their one day of passion had borne fruit, giving him an immortal son who had

done his best to avoid him. That had become more so once Ra had picked his Chosen. Not wanting the other warriors to judge him by who his father was, Takan had hidden his ancestry, even allowing his hair to hang in his face to hide how much he looked like Ra. Having recently found a mate of his own, the truth had been revealed and Ra no longer felt as if he had to keep his distance.

Which was the reason why he now spent more time in the mortal realm than he had in the past. He enjoyed being with his son and daughter, but Ra still felt as if something was missing in his life. He'd lived alone for centuries and should be used to it by now. Seeing how happy his children were with their mates was more than likely the cause of why he wanted to change that.

Coming to the Phoenix Art Museum, Ra stopped and stared at the building. People came and went. Some brushed against him as they strode past him on the sidewalk. None of them knew an ancient Egyptian god walked among them. Having forgone his usual white linen kilt for a pair of blue jeans and a black t-shirt, he looked like any male mortal, at least he hoped. The only items from his previous attire he still wore around his biceps were two gold armbands with the Eye of Ra in the center of each. They were a symbol of his godhood, something he couldn't so easily shed.

Now always on the lookout for his would-be mate, Ra decided the art museum was as good a place as any to find mortal women. Long ago he'd given up the hope of one of the goddesses being meant for him. And to be honest, he was glad. He much preferred the company of a mortal woman over her immortal counterparts.

Inside the art museum, he walked to the first piece in the exhibition. It was a black-and-white photograph of a woman dressed in the style of the 1930s. It still amazed him how quickly the mortals had progressed from then until now, which was a relatively short period of time. In no other era had innovations changed their way of life so quickly.

Continuing on to the next pieces on display, Ra heard the sound of a woman greeting one of the other patrons of the museum. He turned his head in that direction

and spied a gallery attendant speaking to an elderly lady. As if the attendant had felt his gaze, she looked at him with clear interest showing in her eyes.

Ra felt his cock harden as he took in her long, dark-blond hair, hazel eyes and slim figure. With her pert nose and lush, kissable lips, he found her more than attractive. It had been a very long time since a woman had caused his body to come to life.

The longer he stared at her the stronger his libido became. Not knowing yet whether she could be his mate or not—although she stirred him like no other—he took a step toward her only to be brought up short when she tore her gaze away, turned her back to him and walked away.

A little flustered by what she'd done, Ra didn't at first go in pursuit of her. Had he read her wrong? He didn't think so. He usually didn't get that kind of reaction. Not to be full of himself, he knew what his face did to women. He'd had his fair share of them look at him with longing as he'd passed them on the street.

Not about to let her snub deter him, he followed her into the next room. No one else was there but her and him. He walked up behind her and cleared his throat. Once she spun around, their gazes met and her scent filled his nose. Ra sucked in a sharp breath when he felt a burning sensation in his gums and his canine teeth changed to fangs—the first sign he'd found his mate.

Shanda stared at a man who could make any woman forget herself. With his longish, straight black hair and brown eyes that looked at her as if he wanted to devour her, she found it impossible not to gaze back. And it didn't help that the man was built. At least six-foot-six, his muscular body towered over her. Given she was only five-foot-six, she had to crane her neck to look him right in the face. Not that she minded.

She'd seen him in the other room, and noting his hungry gaze even then, Shanda had done the smart thing and walked away. Garnering the interest of a drop-dead gorgeous man was the last thing she needed right now. If that made her a few short of a

load, then so be it. Her life was already complicated enough without having to deal with a new attraction.

Putting on her best gallery attendant smile, she asked, "Do you need some assistance?"

Shanda could think of a few ways she could assist him as she shot her gaze up and down his body, noting the snug-fitting blue jeans and tight black t-shirt he wore. And were those armbands he wore around his large biceps real gold? She lifted her gaze back to his face and waited for him to answer. The corners of his firm lips turned up as if he knew she'd been checking him out.

"You can start off by telling me your name."

His deep, accented voice made her pussy clench. God, even his voice was sexy as hell. Instead of answering, she pointed to the metal name tag pinned to her burgundy short-sleeved blouse, which turned out to be a mistake. His gaze dropped to her chest, looked at where she had indicated, then arrowed in on her breasts. Her nipples grew taut. Shanda resisted the urge to cross her arms over them to hide her reaction.

"Shanda Moser," he said.

Hearing him say her name did wicked things to her body. An ache pounded between her legs. It had been a while since she'd been intimate with a man. After her long drought, her body had decided this man was the one to end it.

She gave it a mental slap on the hand and told it the dry spell wasn't going to be ending any time soon, no matter how good-looking this guy was. Or how much her body begged her to change her mind.

"Yes," she said. Hearing a huskiness to her voice, Shanda cleared her throat. "Was there anything else?"

He took a step closer and his gaze seemed to focus for a brief second on her neck before it lifted to hers. "As a matter of fact, there is. When do you get off work?"

"Are you trying to pick me up?"

"Yes, though I hope I'm doing better than just trying."

Damn. Why now? Why couldn't he have come along, say, a few months from now, when her life would have settled back into a semblance of normalcy? It figured her luck would have a man she wanted nothing more than to get down and dirty with ask her out when she wasn't ready for it.

Shanda pasted on a smile and said while her body whimpered, "Sorry, but my answer has to be no."

He blinked a couple of times as if he hadn't understood what she'd said. Obviously, he hadn't been turned down many times, if ever. But the sexy closed-mouth smile he gave her, staring intently at her simultaneously, just about weakened her resolve.

"Are you sure there isn't anything I can do to change your mind?" he asked, his voice dropping an octave. "I'd like to get to know you better, much better. I know you complete me."

She just couldn't help it—she burst out laughing. Seeing his stricken look, and the other patrons in the room turning to look her in direction, Shanda covered her mouth with her hand to muffle her loud peals of laughter.

It took a few seconds to pull herself back together. Once she did, she said, "I'm sorry. That was rather rude of me. But really? That's the best pickup line you have, you complete me? For a guy as good looking as you, I guess it must work for you in most cases, but I'm not one of them."

His brow furrowed. "Pickup line?"

"Yes. You know, something a man tells a woman in the hopes he can get her into bed? And if it doesn't work on one, he keeps trying it with other women until it does." She had to bite the inside of her cheek to stop from laughing again when his frown switched to a look of indignation.

"That was never my intention."

“So you weren’t asking me out to see if you could have sex with me? You want to keep it platonic?”

“Well...no. I hoped it would lead to something deeper than just a one-time occurrence.”

And that was exactly what Shanda did not need at the moment. “Look, whatever your name is—”

“It’s Ray.”

“Look, Ray, I think I’m going to stop you right there. My answer is still no.”

Before she knew what he was about to do, he cupped the back of her head and brought his mouth down to hers. Shocked, Shanda at first did nothing, but when he slanted his lips over hers she brought her hands up to his chest to push him away. Encountering hard muscles beneath her palms, it ended up not being very forceful. Needing to get away before he turned her brain to mush, she opened her mouth to protest. Ray ended up using that as an invitation to push his tongue between her lips.

The feel of it twining with hers, stroking and exploring, made her sex-starved body go up in flames. Helpless to stop herself, she kissed him back. That only lasted a few seconds before the loud sound of someone clearing their throat had the sexual haze that had descended over her disappearing.

Using more force, Shanda pushed Ray away. He let her go and gave her a knowing smile. She soon wiped it off his face with the next words she spoke.

“Don’t do that again. You’d better leave now.”

“Why? You want me, and I want you.”

He’d gone too far with that one. “All right, it’s no longer funny.” She looked around and saw they’d garnered more than a little attention from the other patrons. All she needed was one of them to complain and she’d lose her job. “I do have to work here, you know. Are you trying to get me fired? I’ve already said no twice. Now take that for an answer and please leave.”

Ray stared at her silently for a few seconds, then nodded. "If that is what you wish, but I will be back." He leaned in closer and said for her ears only, "I know you liked my kiss. It just means I have to work harder to get you to change your mind."

With that, he stepped back and gave her one final hungry stare before he turned and walked out of the room.

Shanda stood staring at where he'd disappeared, not really seeing anything. Well, shit. There was no denying his kiss had made her want to strip him naked and ride him until she screamed his name in pleasure. God, couldn't she get her mind out of the damn gutter?

Giving herself a mental shake, she continued on to another part of the gallery. If Ray did come back, she'd have to remain strong no matter how much she wanted to fuck his brains out. Grr, she'd done it again. To distract herself from thoughts of a sexy, foreign, tall and dark handsome man, Shanda headed for the break room to grab a bottle of cold water. Since she couldn't take a cold shower, she'd have to settle for drinking the water instead.

* * * * *

Ra walked out of the art museum having no clue as to what had just happened. He'd found his mate. She shouldn't have rejected him. In a last-ditch effort to get her to change her mind, he'd kissed her, thinking she wouldn't be able to turn him away. And she had responded, kissing him back, causing his blood to heat even further. The scent of her desire had wafted around them, making him forget exactly where they were. He'd thought he'd won her over, until she'd shoved him away and told him not to kiss her again.

He continued down the sidewalk and ducked into an alley between two tall buildings. First making sure there weren't any mortals around to see, Ra flashed himself to his Chosen's headquarters.

It was located in the old warehouse district, and his warriors had renovated the older building into living quarters, along with a temple dedicated to him. Having flashed himself directly inside, he stood in a long hallway. The walls and floor had been painted to depict the same stone used in his temple at Karnak in Egypt. On either side of him, the walls had hand-painted hieroglyphs and pictures, telling of his many exploits. His son, Takan, had done them, had even painted them in almost every room inside the headquarters. Ra was proud of Takan's artistic, scholarly skills as much as his ability as a warrior.

Walking down the hall, he followed the sound of loud music to the kitchen. As he stepped into the room, Ra saw Kysen was there alone. His eardrums were then assaulted when the warrior sang along with the song playing on the boom box sitting on the counter. The ability to sing well and on key, Kysen did not have. Ra used his powers to turn off the music, causing the warrior to stop his caterwauling before he made his ears bleed.

Kysen, who'd had his back toward Ra while he did something on the counter, spun around. "Oh, it's you. I didn't hear you come in."

Ra grinned. "I can understand why. Between the loud music and what you consider singing, I'm not surprised." He looked around Kysen to the large sandwich he'd been putting together. "Does Blythe know you're in here making that?"

The kitchen was his daughter's domain. Ever since she'd come to live with his Chosen, she'd taken over the duties of cooking, something she loved to do. She also ran a tight ship when it came to the kitchen and didn't tolerate the warriors trashing it.

Kysen smiled. "She'll never know I was in here. I'd offer to make you a sandwich, but there really isn't any point."

And there wasn't. Ra didn't eat, ever. Nor did he require sleep. All part of his being a god. "No, there isn't."

"And I must say you're looking all modernized lately. You'd never know you were a god in those jeans and t-shirt, except the armbands stand out."

"Thanks, and they stay. Are you trying to butter me up so I won't tell Blythe what you were up to?"

"Is it working?" Kysen asked with a laugh.

"Not really. Where are the others?"

"Out. It's just me and Cena here." Kysen gave him a wink. "I needed some refueling, if you know what I mean?"

"In other words, you were having..." Ra let his words trail off.

Kysen laughed again. "Hey, I'm not one of your kids. You can talk about sex around me."

Blythe had a thing about him not discussing her or Takan's sex life in front of them. According to her, fathers and daughters, most especially, did not discuss it in any way, shape or form. Ra had to admit he brought the subject up from time to time just to see Blythe's reaction.

"Fine, you were having sex with your mate. How is Cena?"

Kysen and Cena hadn't been mates for very long. The warrior had loved his mate while she'd lived her first life in ancient Egypt. Kysen had lost her to sickness before he'd become one of his Chosen. When they had met in this time, Cena hadn't recognized Kysen at first, but he had recognized her. Now mated, Kysen was practically inseparable from Cena, probably from the fact he'd almost lost her for a second time when Apep had poisoned her with his venom.

"She's good. And waiting for me to get back." Kysen scooped up the plate with the sandwich. "I'm not sure when everyone else will return, but feel free to hang around until they do." With a smile that flashed a good amount of fang, he brushed past Ra and left the kitchen.

Ra sat at the table. He could with ease telepathically contact any one of the others if he wanted, but he chose not to. He didn't have any particular reason to speak with them. Instead, he thought about the woman who was to be his mate. Shanda. Just

thinking about her made him wish she was here with him now. He still had no idea what he'd done wrong. And he must have done something. That was the only explanation he could think of.

He'd be the first to admit he wasn't exactly up to date when it came to modern mortal women. But when he'd first started seeing Blythe's mother, he'd had no problem getting her to go out on a date with him.

Still determined to return to the art museum, Ra would try once again to win Shanda over. He wouldn't give up. Even though her rejection was a bit of a blow to his ego, he looked forward to doing everything he could to convince her he was the only man meant for her. For the first time in a very long time, he had something to look forward to and carry with him while he traveled the long hours of the night in the underworld. Somehow he'd make Shanda his.

Chapter Two

The next morning, Shanda stood in front of her closet still in her pajamas, trying to figure out what to wear to work. Normally, she grabbed the first blouse and dress pants that met her eye. That wasn't the case today. She found herself unable to make up her mind.

Even though she'd never admit it out loud, she knew her indecisiveness stemmed from the chance of Ray showing up at the art museum. Wanting to take extra care with her appearance had nothing to do with the fact she wanted him to ask her out again. No, it wasn't. *Really*.

Finally deciding on a sky-blue, short-sleeved silk blouse, black dress pants and black high-heeled pumps, Shanda pulled those items out of her closet. She dressed, applying a couple of squirts of her favorite perfume, and finished getting ready for work.

Twenty minutes later, she arrived at the art museum with plenty of time before her day started. She stored her purse in her locker in the break room and then headed for the coffeemaker. She badly needed her morning caffeine boost, especially since she hadn't slept all that well during the night.

Adding cream and sugar to the coffee, Shanda thought over why her sleep had been so crappy. It had a lot to do with Ray. For some reason, he'd been the last thing she'd thought of before going to bed. Of course that had led to her dreaming about him, and not in the way she should. In her dream, she hadn't told him to get lost. No, she'd told him a resounding yes, which had led to them being in bed together. As a dream lover, Ray had knocked her socks off. But of course he would, since it was her imagination supplying all the wicked things she'd wanted him to do to her.

Telling herself that no matter if Ray came back she still wasn't going to go out with him, Shanda took a sip of her coffee. Her boss, Mr. Thompson, walked in at that precise moment. He was in his late fifties and was always impeccably dressed in a suit and tie, no matter the weather or season. He also liked to keep a formal relationship with his employees.

"Good morning, Ms. Moser."

"Good morning, Mr. Thompson."

"I'm glad I caught you. It saves me from having to search you out." He walked over to the coffeemaker and stood beside her as he poured himself a cup. "I thought I should give you the heads-up about there being two groups of schoolkids coming today for a field trip. I want you to keep an extra eye out to make sure they don't touch the items on display. Between the teachers and parent volunteers, they should be able to keep things under control, but I don't want to take a chance."

"No problem."

"Good."

With that said, Mr. Thompson picked up his coffee cup and walked out of the break room. Shanda groaned to herself. Having the kids around would definitely keep her on her toes. There was always a couple in the group who for some reason couldn't resist touching everything, even though they were told repeatedly not to. Then there were the ones who wanted to run instead of walk. Shanda could already feel a headache coming on.

The first group of schoolkids arrived in the morning, and much to her surprise, behaved themselves fairly well. They listened to the docent who did the tour without too many interruptions.

All the while she kept a careful eye on the kids, Shanda also kept watch for Ray. She hated herself for it, but she couldn't stop. In the back of her mind she kept remembering how he'd said he'd have to try harder to win her over when he came back. What would he do? Letting him get close enough to kiss her again was out of the question. For one

thing, if Mr. Thompson happened to see it, she'd more than likely be fired on the spot. She was to remain professional at all times.

The first group of kids left, and still Ray hadn't made an appearance. During her lunch break, Shanda decided to eat in the break room instead of going to the coffee shop close by that had outdoor seating, as was her usual wont. It had nothing to do with the fact Ray could show up while she was out, and if he asked for her, she wouldn't be around.

By the time the second group of schoolkids arrived, Shanda had come to the conclusion Ray wasn't going to come. She told herself it was one less headache she had to worry about, and under no circumstances was she to feel disappointed. It wasn't as if she was going to go out with him, anyway. Admire him, yes, but not go out on a date.

This group was a far cry from the first. Upon their arrival, she'd had to remind not one but five kids to keep their hands off the items on display. At the start of the tour, the docent was interrupted no less than ten times with questions that had nothing at all to do with the art around them. Shanda had no idea how the woman kept smiling. The poor teacher looked as if her nerves were frazzled.

Shanda had been standing, keeping a close watch on a couple of boys who disregarded anything that was told to them when she heard a familiar deep, accented voice behind her.

"We meet again."

She spun around to find Ray giving her a closed-mouth smile. He looked even better than she'd remembered. He wore jeans and a t-shirt again, but this time the jeans were black and the shirt a dark gray. The same gold armbands circled his large biceps. She looked close enough at them to see the Eye of Ra was depicted in the center of each one. With Ray's accent, and what was on the armbands, she wouldn't be surprised to find out he was Egyptian. His black hair, tanned skin and brown eyes said it was a possibility that was his nationality.

Keeping to her attendant mode, she said, "Welcome back to the art museum."

He took a step closer. "I didn't come here to see the museum. I came to see you."

"Well, you've done that. You saw me. Now you can go on your way."

Ray got that confused look on his face again as he'd worn when she'd turned him down the first time. "I meant more than seeing you with just my eyes. I've done nothing but think about you since we met."

Oh god. Shanda should have found that last part a clichéd pickup line, but it had the opposite effect. It made her heart speed up and her body warm all over. "Ah...I told you I'm not interested in going out on a date with you."

"I'm not willing to accept that. We would be good together. You just need to give us a chance."

Before she could answer him, Shanda was shoved from behind and right into Ray. Considering how low on her back the hands were when she'd been pushed, it wasn't too hard to guess it had been one of the kids from the tour.

Ray wrapped his arms around her and held her close against him. She went to thank him, but his mouth descended on hers before she managed to get a word out. His lips moved over hers, his tongue sweeping along the seam as he sought entrance. Her mind filling with images of how he'd kissed her in her dream, Shanda opened her mouth despite her intentions to keep him away. Her pussy clenched, wetness pooling, as she found herself swept away on a wave of arousal.

Hearing a gasp from somewhere behind her, she suddenly remembered where she was. Shanda pushed at Ray's chest, but he didn't so much as budge, or release her lips. Desperate to get away before the wrong people saw their embrace, she bit down on his lower lip hard enough to break the skin. It had the desired effect, and Ray released her with a strangled moan.

Shanda gasped for breath as a sensation of being zapped by a small amount of electricity shot through her. She licked her lips, tasted blood, and felt it again. Looking at Ray, she found his gaze locked on her mouth.

"Ms. Moser!"

She closed her eyes. The annoyance in her boss's voice was all too clear. Shanda opened her eyes and turned in his direction. "Mr. Thompson, I can expl—"

He didn't let her finish. His face a mask of outrage, he said, "Not in front of the patrons. In my office. Now." He spun and walked away.

"Crap," she muttered. "There goes my job."

"Shanda," Ray said. "I didn't think. I apologize."

She turned on him. "You've done enough damage for one day. Leave. Now I have to go and see if I can save my job. Do me a favor. Don't be here once I come back from having my boss rake me over the coals."

Walking away, she went to Mr. Thompson's office without a backward glance at Ray. Once inside, she shut the door behind her. Her boss glared at her from where he sat behind his desk.

"Ms. Moser, you know that kind of behavior will not be tolerated at this museum. I expected better from you."

"It wasn't exactly what it looked like."

"So you weren't kissing a man?"

"Yes, but I didn't intentionally start out to do it. One of the kids from the tour shoved me into him."

"And your reaction was to put on a public display?"

"No. I apologize and promise nothing like that will ever happen again."

"It won't. I'll give you one last chance. But as of now, you are suspended for three days without pay. There is no need for you to finish your shift."

Gritting her teeth, Shanda nodded, then walked out of Mr. Thompson's office. What more could she say? She had kissed Ray back. But three days without pay was going to hurt, especially with the bills she'd been generating lately.

Catching the knowing smirk of one of the brats from the school group, Shanda ignored him and headed for the break room to fetch her purse. At least she didn't have to deal with him for the rest of the time he'd be at the museum.

* * * * *

Ra cursed himself in ancient Egyptian. He'd made a mess of things. He was supposed to be trying to win Shanda over, not piss her off so she didn't want anything to do with him. And causing her to lose her job would definitely piss her off.

He needed help. At the rate he was going, he'd never get any further with Shanda. And the best person he knew for the job was his son, Takan. Just recently mated, Takan had had to convince his mate, Falon, to accept him as well. At the time, Falon hadn't been one of his Chosen, but she'd been hunting undead for years. When she'd first met Takan and saw he'd had fangs, she'd stabbed him with her sword. At least Ra didn't have to worry about Shanda stabbing him.

Telepathically, Ra called to his son. *Takan, I have need of you.*

Takan quickly responded. *What's wrong? Do you need the others as well?*

No, just you. It's a personal matter.

How so?

Ra breathed an exasperated sigh. *I'll explain when you get here. I'm outside the Phoenix Art Museum. Just hurry up and get here. It's a timely matter.*

Not until you tell me what this is all about.

Instead of telling Takan, which would have taken time he didn't want to waste, Ra sent mental images of what he'd been going through with Shanda directly to his son's mind. Takan's laughter filled his head.

Oh, man. You screwed up, Takan said once he got himself back under control. *We're on our way and will see what we can do to bail your ass out.*

We?

Falon and me. We're on the sidewalk coming up behind you.

Ra turned to see Takan and his mate approaching. Once they drew even with him, he said, "Falon didn't need to come."

"Yes, I did," she replied for Takan. "If you want to win over a modern woman, you need the help of one. You two ancients are liable to make things worse."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Takan said as he put his arm around his mate's shoulders and pulled her close to his side. He turned to Ra. "I have to ask, why this woman? She's shot you down twice. The chances aren't very good she'll change her mind."

Ra debated whether or not to tell Takan what Shanda truly meant to him. In the end, he decided it was better to go with the truth. "She's my mate."

His son blinked at him a few times. "She's your what?"

"You heard me. Shanda is my mate."

"How do you know? Did you have a vision?"

"No. I didn't have to have one. There was another sign." Ra took a quick look around to make sure no mortals watched and flashed a large smile at Takan and Falon.

"Shit, you have fangs," Takan said.

"Yes, I know. When a god or goddess finds their mate, we get fangs. Along with the craving for our mate's blood."

"Well, I'll be damned. That's why you made it so all of us can only tolerate the blood of our mates."

Ra nodded. "Yes. For a god, it's a big deal to find a mate. We can wait centuries to find the one meant for us. Once we do, a mate bond similar to the one you have with Falon forms through the exchange of blood. I wanted to make sure my Chosen would have that closeness with their mates."

"Ah, guys," Falon said. "I think Shanda just came out of the museum. She's spotted you, Ra, and she looks none too happy about it. She's coming this way."

Sure enough, Ra looked toward the entrance to the museum and saw Shanda stomping her way over to them. She wore a scowl on her face, and if she had the power to kill with a look, he'd be dead on the spot.

"You," she said once she stood in front of him, completely ignoring Falon and Takan. "I thought I told you I didn't want to see you around here." For emphasis, she used her index finger to poke him in the center of his chest. "Because of you I've been suspended for three days." *Poke*. "Without pay." *Poke*. "Just something else to make my life even crappier than it already is." *Poke. Poke.*

Ra grabbed Shanda's offending finger and flattened her palm against his chest. "I apologize."

She yanked her hand away and crossed her arms over her chest. "An apology, Ray? You think you just have to say sorry and it makes it all better?"

"Well, ah, no."

"She has a point there...Ray," Takan said with smirk.

Shanda turned her head in Takan's direction. She ran her gaze over him. "Considering how much you look like Ray, I guess you're his brother. I suppose you'll take his side."

"Yes, we're family," Takan said. "As for taking his side, I think you two just started off on the wrong foot."

Shanda's gaze snapped back to Ra. "Obviously you told your brother about me. Did you also tell him I'd turned you down? And that as of right now you don't stand a chance in hell of ever getting a yes out of me?"

Falon cleared her throat, gaining Shanda's attention. "Hi. Why don't I start off with introductions, since Ray hasn't made any. I'm Falon, and this is my husband, Takan." She gave her mate a squeeze. "As you've probably already guessed from the accent and all, Ray isn't from around here. So forgive him for being a bit clueless when it comes to American women."

"Yeah, I can see that."

Ra shot a glance at Falon. *What are you trying to do, Falon? Make it so she dislikes me even more?*

Relax, she replied. *It's an excuse she's most likely to accept. Roll with it.*

"That being the case," Falon continued speaking to Shanda as if he hadn't said anything to her, "don't you think he deserves to be cut a little slack? Why don't you let him make it up to you? He really isn't a bad guy."

"What do you have in mind?"

"How about he takes you out for a fancy meal?"

"That would be a date."

"No, it wouldn't. Not if you order the most expensive thing off the menu, and get to eat it front of him while he doesn't get anything for himself. Even better, before that, take him clothes shopping and get him to buy you a whole new wardrobe."

Shanda seemed to think it over, but then shook her head. "I don't know. That could add up to a lot of cash. And I really don't know Ray all that well to let him do something like that."

Falon chuckled. "Honey, the man is stinking rich. I promise you, it wouldn't even put a dent in his wallet. What better way to know a man than through his wallet?"

Still seeing indecision on Shanda's face, Ra jumped into the conversation. "Just say yes, Shanda. I don't mind, at all. Falon is right. I can easily afford to do all she suggested."

He had no problem doing any of the things Falon had said. She made it sound as if it would be punishment for him, but that was the furthest thing from the truth, and she knew it. Taking care of his mate was instinctive. Feeding her and clothing her fell into that category. And telling Shanda to make it so he couldn't eat just made it easier on him. He wouldn't have to come up with an excuse as to why he didn't order anything.

Shanda groaned. "I shouldn't even be seriously considering this."

"If it will make you feel any better," Takan said, "Falon and I will go with you two. I'm sure Falon won't mind."

"Of course I won't," Falon said in return. "It should be a fun day."

Ra wasn't too sure if it was a great idea to have Takan and Falon tagging along, but it was too late to take it back. If Shanda agreed, he'd have to make sure he ended up alone with her at some point before he had to travel to the underworld that night.

"Well," Shanda said. "I guess with the two of you coming along, it wouldn't really be classified as a date."

"So your answer is yes?" he asked.

"I suppose so. I really shouldn't, but considering how things have been for me lately, an outing shopping won't hurt anything."

That was the second time Shanda had said something about her life not being exactly good. He could easily bring on a vision to find out what it was that caused it, but he'd rather she told him herself. It would be part of the bonding process, bringing them closer together.

"Great," he said. "Since you don't have to work tomorrow, how about we do it in the early afternoon? We can pick you up at your place."

Shanda nodded as she looked at him. At least she was no longer angry. "Sure, that sounds fine."

She told him her address, which he quickly memorized. "Then we'll see you tomorrow around one."

"All right. See you then." With one last look in his direction, Shanda said goodbye to them and walked away.

Once she was out of hearing, Takan chuckled. "Dad, you sure know how to pick them. I think Shanda is going to be a lot harder to win over than you think."

Ra turned toward his son and his mate. "I suppose I should thank you for making the suggestion of you and Falon accompanying us. I doubt Shanda would have agreed otherwise."

"I figured it would set her more at ease, but also cover up the fact you don't know how to drive. You wouldn't want to give Shanda the impression you're a loser. Women expect men to be able to drive and have cars of their own."

Ra had forgotten about his ignorance about the cars mortals liked to drive. He hadn't thought of it as a required skill, since he could flash himself wherever he wanted. Unlike his Chosen, he hadn't needed to fit in with the mortal world. Blythe's mother had accepted his story of him being a starving artist. Since Falon had already told Shanda he was rich, and he'd admitted it as well, that scenario wouldn't work.

"Thank you again," Ra said. He then remembered one thing. "I would appreciate it if you waited until after tomorrow to say anything to the others about Shanda, especially Blythe. I don't know how she'll feel about me finding a woman to take her mother's place."

Takan's face grew serious. "I don't think you have to worry about that, Dad. Blythe has no memories of her mother, and has never had any contact with her. She loves you. She'll only want you to be happy."

"Still, wait until after our outing tomorrow."

His son nodded. "All right, but after the stunt you pulled on me when it came to my secret with the others, I should tell you no."

Even though Takan had said it offhandedly, Ra knew his revealing Takan as his son to the rest of the Chosen was still a bit of a touchy subject. Takan had wanted to tell the other warriors himself in his own way. But if it had been left up to Takan, he would have found excuses to keep the secret. Ra hadn't wanted that to happen. Too many long years Ra had watched his son push him aside to keep what their relationship was from the others. He didn't regret a thing, or making Falon one of his Chosen.

"But you didn't. So you can't take it back."

Takan chuckled. "Well, if you don't need us anymore we're going to head back to the headquarters. Are you coming?"

"I will in a few minutes."

"See you later then."

Ra watch Takan and Falon walk away before turning into an alley. He hoped tomorrow would work out with a favorable end. The kisses he'd stolen from Shanda had only whetted his appetite for her. Running his tongue along his fangs, Ra longed to sink them into his would-be mate as much as he wanted to take her with his cock.

Chapter Three

The next day, Shanda sat at her kitchen table, forcing herself to eat the soup she'd made for lunch. She had too many butterflies bouncing around inside her stomach. Even though it really wasn't a date-date, the prospect of going out with a man made her nervous. Until six months ago, she'd been out of the dating pool for five years. The prospect of stepping back into those waters, even just the small amount she'd be doing this day, had her feeling unsure about her readiness for it. She'd known she'd have to do it at some point. At thirty, she was far from over the hill. She still had high hopes she'd find that right man out there to share the rest of her life with. She just didn't know if she could handle "dating" right now with the one aspect of her life far from settled.

After two more spoonfuls of soup, Shanda gave up on it. There was no point in force-feeding herself. Once she was out with Ray, Takan and Falon, she'd get over her case of nerves and would be able to relax enough to enjoy their dinner out. To be honest, she looked forward to getting to know Falon better. She'd taken to her at their first meeting. With no friends worth speaking of because of her past, Shanda welcomed the chance to make new ones.

Having cleaned up her lunch dishes, Shanda saw she had about ten minutes before Ray, Takan and Falon would arrive. She sat on the couch in her tiny living room to wait. Looking around, she sighed. Ray would more than likely find her place shoebox-sized compared to where he lived. Considering he was rich, he probably lived in a mansion or something.

Deciding it would be easier if she met Ray downstairs at the front of the building, Shanda grabbed her purse and keys. She locked the apartment door behind her and took the short elevator ride down to the lobby. She stayed inside where it was air-

conditioned, but stood near the glass entrance door, keeping any eye out for any cars pulling into the parking lot.

She shifted closer to the door when a sky-blue BMW sports car drove into the lot and headed for the visitor parking. As it drove past the apartment building's entrance, Shanda was able to catch sight of the driver. It appeared to be Falon.

Stepping outside, she shaded her eyes with her hand and watched Ray get out of the backseat of the BMW. She walked toward him as he crossed the parking lot and met him halfway.

He grinned. "I would have come inside to get you."

"I know, but I figured this would save some time."

"So I'll assume you're all ready to go."

"Yes."

"Come on. Takan and Falon are waiting."

Ray put his hand on the small of her back and guided her toward the car. Shanda was very aware of his touch. Her body seemed to soak up the heat from his palm through her t-shirt. It was no use denying she was attracted to him. Just looking at the man turned her on, pure and simple. His nearness made it impossible for her to not notice him. And the two kisses they'd shared, she remembered every nuance of them, which only made her crave more. Not that she would allow herself to taste Ray's lips again. At least not if she could help it.

Arriving at the car, Ray held open the back door for her. Once she got in, he shut it, walked around to the other side before sliding into the space next to her. Falon turned in her seat to look back once Ray had shut his door.

"Nice car," Shanda said.

"Thanks," Falon replied. "I just got it the other day."

Takan chuckled. "And she won't let anyone drive it."

Falon shrugged. "Hey, it's my very first brand-new car. You bought it for me, not you. So I get to decide who gets to drive it, and right now, that would only be me." She took a deep breath. "I love that brand-new car smell. I could sit here all day just breathing it in."

"And she would too," Takan drawled. "I've already caught her a couple of times just sitting in the car so she can smell it."

Shanda laughed. "I have to admit I love new-car smell as well, though I haven't been so lucky as to own one. The beater I drive smelled like old cigarettes and dog when I first got it. It took me months to get rid of it."

"Nasty," Falon said as she put the car in reverse and backed out of the parking spot.

"It was."

Ray cleared his throat. "So, Shanda, have you decided where you want to spend my money?"

"What about Outlets at Anthem? Just about every store is there."

As Falon drove down the street, she met Shanda's gaze in the rearview mirror. "That's where I thought to go. We can do a lot of damage there."

"You can go all out, but I'll just stick to a few things," she said.

"Why?" Ray asked. "You can get whatever you want."

Shanda turned to look at him. "No, I'll just stick with only a couple of things."

"I repeat, why?"

She sighed. "Because if I get too much you'll expect me to feel obligated to you."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Yes, you would. I know how it works, believe me. A woman lets a man buy her nice stuff, and the next thing she knows, he expects her to put out, whether she's in the mood or not." Shanda felt three sets of eyes staring at her. She saw Falon looking in the review mirror again, and Takan had turned in his seat to see her. Those two gave her a

perplexed look, along with Ray. “What? I have firsthand experience, so I know it works out that way.”

“Ah, Shanda,” Falon said slowly, “I don’t mean to upset you with this, but the man who put that idea in your head was a self-centered bastard. No self-respecting woman would put up with that.”

Shanda ducked her head as her face grew warm. She knew that—and constantly had to remind herself like in this instance—but six months ago, it had been such a part of her life she had accepted it as the norm. Along with a lot of other bullshit head games her soon-to-be ex-husband had put her through. It was bad enough she’d put up with him for five years. Embarrassed by that fact, there was no way she’d tell them she’d married the self-centered bastard, and technically still was. They’d been separated for the last six months.

Ray reached across the backseat, put his fingers under her chin and turned her head so she would look at him. He locked gazes with her. “It’s all right, Shanda. Forget anything was said, but I’m still going to buy you whatever catches your eye.”

The way he looked at her, Shanda wanted nothing more than to have Ray wrap her up in his strong arms and hold her close. To actually feel as if she could lean on someone. She had stood on her own for too long, since her soon-to-be ex had done everything he could to put her through the wringer, including not signing the divorce papers that had been served to him. The bastard.

She tried for a smile, but had the feeling she failed miserably. “Fine, you win, but I’m not going to go crazy with it.”

Ray nodded. “I find that acceptable.”

After that, they all sat in silence until they arrived at the outlet mall. Once they’d all piled out of the car after Falon had parked, Ray stood looking around as if this was new to him.

“Never been here before?” Shanda asked when she reached his side.

“No. And I had no idea there would be so many mor—people here.”

Falon snorted. "This is nothing. You should see it on a Saturday. There's usually twice this many people shopping."

"Then I know not to come here on that day," Ray said dryly.

As they headed to the first store, Takan and Falon took the lead. Shanda watched the couple as they walked hand in hand. They appeared to be happy, utterly devoted to each other. That's what Shanda wanted from the next man she let into her life, something she'd never gotten from her soon-to-be ex.

At the feel of Ray taking her hand and linking his fingers with hers, she looked down and then back up to his face. The way he looked at her made her insides go all mushy. She saw hunger in his eyes, which in turn, had an ache throbbing deep inside her pussy. She wanted him, more than she should, but with the hell her soon-to-be ex had put her through, Shanda didn't know if she was ready to trust another man. She wanted to, though.

Falon hadn't been kidding when she'd said they could do a lot of damage here. By the time they'd finished shopping, Shanda figured she just about had a new wardrobe with shoes to match. And much to her surprise, Ray had paid for every one of her purchases in cash. Apparently he didn't own a credit card, which was unusual for this day and age.

They'd been shopping for at least a couple of hours. Shanda had been right about she and Falon hitting it off. The other woman had a great sense of humor and seemed to think the same way she did. And Takan was a sweetheart. He could be on the quiet side. From time to time, she caught him trying to shake his bangs into his face, which Falon always seemed to notice and stopped him.

Then there was Ray. Shanda had to admit he was a great guy as Falon had said, and sexy as all hell. The more time she spent with him, the more she liked him. He was slowly breaking down the walls she'd put up after leaving her husband, and it had been her to leave him. It just felt right to be with Ray. He made it easy for her to relax around him. She didn't feel as if she always had to be on guard.

After stowing all their purchases in the trunk of Falon's car, Takan said, "All right, ladies, where would you like to go eat?"

"Isn't it a bit early?" Shanda asked.

"A little, but Ray, Falon and I have to work the night shift. So if it's okay with you, it would work out better to hit the restaurant now."

She glanced at all three of them before fixing her gaze on Ray. "I thought all of you were rich. If I was, I wouldn't be working."

Before Ray could answer, Takan said, "We are, but we still have obligations we have to fulfill, plus we like what we do. We're sort of in the protection business, and Ray is actually the CEO."

"It's just the three of you?"

"No, there are five others who work with us, though Falon is the only woman."

"Yup," Falon said. "I'm special. Do you like seafood, Shanda?"

"I love it."

"Then let's go to the Ocean View. It's upscale casual and has a covered outdoor patio."

"I could go for some seafood," Takan added.

Shanda looked at Ray. "What about you?"

He shook his head. "I won't be eating, remember?"

"You don't have to do that. I know Falon's suggesting you buy me the most expensive meal on the menu while you get nothing was just a ploy to get me to agree to go out with you all."

"I still won't eat. I feel terrible about you being suspended. This is the least I can do, and if I don't, I'll continue to feel guilty."

"You'll have me feeling guilty instead."

"We'd better get a move on," Falon quickly said.

The conversation obviously at an end, Takan and Falon got into the front seats of the car while Ray guided her into the back.

At the restaurant, they were seated at a table for four outside on the patio as Falon had suggested. After the hostess left, having given them each a menu, Ray looked through his and asked, "Do you like lobster, Shanda?"

"Yes, but it's too expen—"

He cut her off before she could finish. "You'll have that. Takan, what would go better with the lobster, wine or beer?"

"I would have to say white wine," Takan replied.

"Is that okay with you, Shanda?" Ray asked. At her nod, he continued, "And I'll have a beer."

Falon did a double take at him. "You can drink beer?"

"Of course I can. I've enjoyed it many times. People who would visit my...home brought it as a gift."

Shanda stared at Ray. Something about the way he'd talked about people visiting him, bringing him beer, sounded off. But she couldn't quite put her finger on why it did. And then there was the way Falon had looked so shocked about it. Sometimes he also had a formal way of speaking. She guessed it had to do with the fact English wasn't his first language.

They ordered their food, Ray ordering for her, and set about enjoying a great meal. If Ray seemed bothered that everyone else ate while he had nothing, he didn't show it. He contentedly sipped on his beer, ordering a second when he finished the first. By the time Shanda had eaten everything on her plate, and drank two glasses of wine, she felt more than a little mellow.

As they prepared to leave the restaurant, Ray leaned in to her and said quietly, "I enjoyed spending the day with you and I'm not ready to say goodbye yet. I still have some time before I have to go to work."

Shanda knew what he wanted. She gnawed on her bottom lip. She wasn't ready to see the day end yet, either, but should she? The thought of inviting Ray up to her apartment, to be all alone with him, had her heart beating faster and her libido kicking into high gear. She now knew him better, and realized he wasn't the pickup artist she'd first thought he was at the art museum. He just had a hard time expressing himself in English, so his words tended to come out not the way he intended. Takan and he had spoken in what Shanda thought was Egyptian a few times, obviously correcting Ray.

The wine more than likely giving her greater courage than she normally would have had, Shanda asked, "Would you like to come up to my apartment when Falon drops me off?"

Ray's whole face seemed to light up as he gave her a closed-mouth smile. Even the sun shining through the patio seemed to become brighter, or that could have just been her imagination.

"Yes," he said. "I'd love nothing more than to join you in your apartment."

The entire ride back to her place, her stomach seemed filled with butterflies. Once they arrived, Falon popped the trunk so Ray and Shanda could collect her purchases. As Shanda stood with her arms loaded down with shopping bags while watching Falon drive away, she hoped she wasn't making a huge mistake by asking Ray to stay with her.

* * * * *

Ra followed Shanda into her apartment building. He easily read the sudden nervousness on her face. She kept looking at him from the corner of her eye while they waited for the elevator to arrive. She also hadn't said a word since Takan and Falon had dropped them off.

He waited until they were inside her apartment before he spoke. "You're not very comfortable having me here, are you?"

She motioned for him to put the bags he carried onto the armchair near the couch. "It's been a while since I've invited a man over to my place."

After depositing the shopping bags where she'd indicated, he turned to face her and brushed a lock of hair off her forehead. "I'm not going to say I'm displeased you haven't had a lot of male company. My being here, does that mean you've changed your mind about me?"

Shanda seemed to lean in closer. "Maybe a little."

"Just a little? It seems as if I should do some more convincing then."

Having spent the afternoon with her, and only able to hold her hand from time to time, Ra craved closer contact. That she seemed to be lowering her guard around him a bit made him want to see by exactly how much.

Slowly leaning toward her, Ra lowered his head until their lips were a mere hairbreadth apart. He looked into Shanda's eyes and saw they had dilated, and her breathing had become more rapid. The scent of her arousal filled his head. His new fangs throbbed as he heard the sound of her blood rushing just under her skin. He waited to see if she would make the next move.

Shanda sighed and quietly said, "Screw it."

She closed the last remaining space between their lips, sealing them tight. Her first tentative kiss had him wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her against him. He hungrily kissed her back, loving the way her body molded to his. His cock hardened inside his jeans as he pressed it to her belly, letting her know exactly what she did to him.

Shanda let out a soft moan and put her hands around his neck, sinking her fingers into his hair. Pushing his tongue inside her mouth, he twined it with hers, exploring and tasting. Unlike the two kisses he'd stolen, she responded more passionately to his touch.

Ra dropped his hands to her ass and held her in place as he ground his erection against her. It throbbed in time with his fangs. He ached to strip Shanda naked and sink

his cock into the moist heat of her pussy. Having not felt any sexual urges for so very long, it was as if his body wanted to make up for lost time. He was so painfully aroused, it made him wish he could free himself from the tight confines of the jeans.

Shanda moaned into his mouth, heating his blood even further. After waiting centuries to find his mate, and to have her in his arms, Ra didn't think he'd ever get enough of her. He wanted her like he'd never wanted another woman before. He longed to hear her call out his name in the throes of pleasure.

Reaching between them with one hand, he cupped her breast, rubbing his thumb back and forth against her taut nipple. Shanda pushed closer and sucked on his tongue. That caused him to moan.

Ra left Shanda's mouth and dragged his lips to her jaw, licking and kissing a path to the side of her neck. At the large vein there, he gently nipped with a fang, making sure not to break the skin. "I want to get you naked and lick every inch of you." His voice was husky with arousal.

Shanda's hold on his hair tightened. "I don't know if I'm ready for that."

He lifted his head and looked into her eyes. "I won't do anything you don't want me to. It can be all for you. I can wait, but I want to touch you."

She chuckled. "First you did without food, now you would do this as well?"

He kept his face serious. "I'll do whatever it takes to make you feel comfortable around me. I'm not just looking for sex, Shanda."

Her gaze searched his face, and whatever she saw must have been enough. She nodded. "Okay. Just take it easy, all right? I haven't been with someone new in a while. I don't want to make the same mistake I did the last time."

Ra would have questioned Shanda about what she'd just said, but she stopped him from being able to say a word when she pulled his head down and kissed him thoroughly.

He lifted her off her feet and urged her to wrap her legs around his waist. Her pussy came in perfect contact with his cock through their jeans. Their kiss became hotter, more desperate. Shanda's arms tightened around his neck as she rubbed herself against him. His erection jerked, making his pants feel even more uncomfortable.

Holding Shanda up by her bottom, he walked toward the couch. He turned and sat, positioning her so she straddled his hips. Breaking free of her mouth, Ra lifted the bottom of her shirt and pulled it over her head. The sight of her more-than-a-handful breasts encased in a white, silky bra had him burying his face between them, breathing deep the scent of her skin. He reached behind her, undid the clasp and brushed the straps down her arms. With a toss, he threw it to join her shirt on the floor.

Ra returned his attention to Shanda's breasts. He lifted one and flicked the nipple with the tip of his tongue. As she arched her back, offering him more, he sucked the taut peak between his lips, mindful of his fangs. She panted and moaned, grinding her pussy against his cock, making him feel as if he would explode if she kept it up for too long.

Shifting to her other breast, Ra sucked the nipple into his mouth as he dropped his hands to the top of her jeans. He undid the button and zipper before shoving his hand down the front. It came to rest against her mound. Through her panties he felt the wetness that had leaked into them.

He released Shanda's breast and urged her off his lap to stand in between his legs in front of him. Ra looked up into her gaze and hooked his fingers into the belt loops of her jeans. With a couple of tugs, he had them past her hips and down her legs to pool at her ankles. Shanda stepped out of them and kicked them away.

Still keeping her gaze, he ran a finger along the top of her panties. "I want to see all of you, Shanda. Will you let me?"

She took her bottom lip between her teeth and nodded. "Yes. Just don't stop touching me."

"I won't."

Hooking his fingers into the top of her panties, Ra slowly pulled them down and off. He ran his hands up her legs, along the outside of her thighs to her curved-in waist. He reveled in her soft skin. Her body was a piece of art, one he wanted to explore and learn with his lips and tongue.

Ra gathered Shanda close and lifted her back on the couch, so she was flat on her back with him stretched out on top of her. After giving her a brief and thorough joining of the lips, he licked and kissed his way back down to her breasts. He gave them some more attention before working even lower.

Her woman's scent perfumed the air around them. He pressed his lips to her stomach, causing it to quiver beneath them. Lower he went, taking the time to gently nip at each of her hipbones. Shanda squirmed under him as her breath came in pants.

Ra tried to go even lower, but ran out of room on the couch. He shifted to kneel on the floor in front of it and positioned Shanda so she sat with her legs parted. He ran his hands up the inside of her thighs and pushed her legs open farther.

He shifted closer, then got his first taste of her. Ra licked her pussy from bottom to top, circling her clit with the tip of his tongue. Shanda cried out as she lifted her hips higher. He alternated between licking her pussy and sucking on her clit.

"Oh god, whatever you do, don't stop," she said with a moan.

Stopping wasn't an option. He wanted her to come against his mouth. Continuing to stimulate her clit with his tongue, he pushed one finger inside her. Her inner walls gripped it as he moved in and out. Shanda's cries grew louder when a second finger joined the first. She buried her hands in his hair to hold him as she rode his fingers.

"Yes," she panted. "Yes. Almost. There."

At the first flutter of her orgasm, he withdrew his fingers and replaced them with his mouth. He lapped at her pussy, wringing all the pleasure he could from her. As Shanda relaxed on the couch, he put his head on her stomach and wrapped his arms around her waist. She didn't know it yet, but he had no intention of ever letting her go.

Chapter Four

Shanda closed her eyes and waited for her breathing to return to normal. She'd never known oral sex could be so good. With her soon-to-be ex, not once had he been able to make her come in that way. All this time he'd had her believing there was something wrong with her. Obviously, the fault had been all his.

Still on a sexual high from the amazing orgasm Ray had given her, Shanda decided she couldn't leave him in the state he was. His cock had felt long and thick against her. Regardless of what he'd said, she didn't want to be one of those selfish women who expected everything from the men they slept with but gave nothing in return.

She shifted to a sitting position and pushed on Ray's shoulders until he sat on his heels while remaining on his knees. Without saying a word, she grabbed the bottom of his shirt and yanked it over his head. She dropped it to the floor. Shirtless, the gold armbands he wore looked even sexier.

Cupping his face in her hands, Shanda kissed Ray long and hard. Arousal pounded through her body once again. She wanted him, all of him. It was time to step out from the shadow her soon-to-be ex had shoved her into and take what she wanted for a change. Being with Ray opened her eyes to what she'd been missing in her life.

She slipped off the couch to kneel in front of him. Shanda shifted her lips from his mouth to his chin. From there, she dipped her head to lick the hollow of his throat before she placed a series of kisses across his hairless, muscular chest. She'd known he was built, but seeing just how cut he was turned her on even more.

As she reached for the button on his jeans, Ray placed his hand on top of hers to stop her. "Shanda, you don't have to."

She pulled back to look him in the face. "I know. Let me."

Once he took his hand away, she undid the button and tugged down the zipper. She parted the material and his cock sprang free. She didn't waste any time taking hold of it. He was big enough to fill her up and give her a good ride. Her pussy clenched, causing wetness to leak onto her inner thighs.

With her newfound courage, Shanda pumped her hand up and down his length and said, "Now I get to do to you what you did to me. Take your pants off and sit on the couch."

Ray held her gaze as he stood and shucked off his jeans. Shanda took him all in. Just like his arms and chest, his legs were thick with muscle. His cock jutted out from his body, more than ready to give her what she wanted. He stepped around her and sat on the couch as she'd instructed.

Shanda shifted her position so she knelt between his spread legs. She ran her hands up his thighs, the muscles clenched beneath her touch. Using the fingertips on one hand, she trailed them up his shaft to the flared head. A bead of pre-cum sat on the very tip. She used her index finger to rub it into his skin.

Taking a firm grasp of his cock, she bent her head and swirled her tongue around the head. Ray sucked in a breath and moaned. She did it a second time before she opened her mouth and took as much of him as she could handle. She sucked, her head bobbing up and down. She gave extra attention to the sensitive spot just under the flared tip.

"Shanda," Ray said in a strained voice. "That feels too good." He moaned again. "It has been a while for me as well."

She understood what he meant. Not prepared to have him finish in her mouth, she continued to pleasure him this way for a few more seconds before she released him. She was more than ready to take it to the next level.

Shanda stood, then climbed up onto the couch, straddling Ray's thighs. Holding onto the back of the couch, she positioned herself above his cock. She brushed a kiss across his lips before she slowly impaled herself on him.

They both moaned once she'd taken every inch of his shaft. She lifted herself on her knees, then sank back down on him. He felt as good as she'd thought he would. Shanda arched her hips to take him deeper, stroking him in and out of her. It didn't take long for another orgasm to build.

Ray leaned forward and sucked a nipple into his mouth. With each pull Shanda felt it deep inside her pussy, increasing her pleasure. She rode him faster, harder. Their moans filled the room. Ray cupped her bottom, squeezing, as he met each of her strokes. His cock grew even harder, rubbing in just the right spot to send her over the edge.

With a keening cry, Shanda let herself go. Her inner muscles clenched around Ray's thick shaft, clutching it in a tight fist. He released her nipple and surged up one final time. His strangled moan filled her ears as his cock pulsed deep inside her pussy.

Wrapping his arms around her back, Ray tugged her closer and nuzzled the side of her neck. She felt the sharp edge of a tooth dragged across her skin and she shivered. As if he'd realized what he'd done, he stiffened and jerked away from the side of her neck.

Shanda brushed the hair off his forehead and pushed his head back to rest against the couch cushion. She gave him a light kiss. "You don't have to do any more convincing. You've won me over."

Ray's expression was slumberous and sexy. "I guess I'm not as rusty as I thought."

She smiled. "I can attest to that. How about we move this to the comfort of my bed? Since we both seem to be out of practice, we could work on remedying it. And we do have some time before you have to work, right?"

"Yes, there is time. And I definitely could go for some more practice."

Ray held her close and stood with her in his arms. Shanda held on tight as he carried her to her bedroom as if she weighed nothing.

* * * * *

Ra looked down at Shanda. They lay in her bed in each other's arms. Her head was pillowed on his chest as she slept. After carrying her to her bedroom, he'd made love to her twice more. He would have liked to take her again, but his time had run out. And besides, he was just as content to hold her and watch her sleep.

He ran his tongue over his fangs. During their lovemaking, they'd dropped and he'd had the urge to bite her. It wasn't as strong as what his warriors had felt before they'd claimed their mates, since he didn't experience blood hunger. But the need was still there. The need to do the blood exchange and truly make her his.

Though that wouldn't be happening any time soon. He didn't want to make the same mistakes he'd made with Blythe's mother. Like his Chosen had done with their women, he would try to ease Shanda into his world. At least he hoped he'd be able to. The closer they became, the harder it would be for him to hide their differences. Eventually she would question his never eating in front of her. Consuming food was a big part of a mortal's life. Given his excuse of having to work at night, she'd not be able to figure out he didn't require sleep as well.

Ra reached up and gently stroked a hand through Shanda's hair and kissed the top of her head. It would be hard leaving her tonight, but he had no choice. He was only able to remain in the mortal realm so long as his sun was in the sky. Once they were mated, he'd move her into his Chosen's headquarters. Even though Sek and Mot, Apep's demons, no longer walked in this realm, the remnants of their undead still hunted mortals at night for their souls. His warriors were slowly eliminating their numbers, but since the "disease" was so easily spread—the victim becoming what had hunted them within minutes of being bitten—it would take some time to eradicate them all. He'd feel better having Shanda sleeping in a building he shielded with his powers from the undead.

There were also his chambers in the immortal realm. Shanda would be more protected there, but the other gods lived there as well. Some of them could make her

feel uncomfortable, especially when he wasn't around. Not all the gods thought a mortal made the perfect mate for one of their kind.

Shanda stirred, stretching along his side. She opened her eyes and looked at him. "I fell asleep, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't mind."

"Did you sleep?"

"No."

"Sorry. I'm real fun to be with. How long was I out?"

"About a half hour. And I didn't mind. We did do a lot of practicing, after all."

"Yeah, we did, didn't we? I could almost go for some more if you're game."

"I would, but I have to leave shortly."

Shanda propped herself on her elbow and turned her head to look toward the single window facing the end of the bed. The drapes were open and long shadows filled the room. "Oh. It's getting late already."

He sat up beside her and cupped her cheek in his hand. "Can I see you tomorrow?"

She nodded. "I'd like that. And it's not as if I have to go into work."

"What time would be good for you?"

"Well, since you're working all night, why don't you come over around one, just like today?"

"I'll be here."

With great reluctance, Ra slipped off the bed. Remembering his clothes were on the living room floor, he walked out of the bedroom to collect them. He heard Shanda join him a few seconds later. Tugging his jeans up to his waist, he turned to find her standing in a bathrobe, watching him. She seemed to be eating him up with her eyes. His cock stirred with interest, but he ignored it.

Ra picked up his t-shirt and pulled it on. Dressed, he crossed the room to stand in front of Shanda. She put her arms around his waist and lifted her face for a kiss. He

closed the distance between their mouths and took her lips with the passion only she stirred inside him.

Before things heated up between them once again, Ra lifted his head. Already he felt the pull of the underworld as the sun slowly dipped below the horizon. He had to leave. If he left it too late, he'd have no control of his departure from the mortal realm.

"I have to go," he said.

"Oh, I just remembered Takan dropped you off. Do you need me to give you a lift somewhere?"

"No, I'll be fine. I'll call him to pick me up once I get outside." He wouldn't be doing any such thing.

"All right. Then I'll see you tomorrow."

"Until then."

Ra gave Shanda one last kiss before letting himself out of her apartment. He hurried outside and headed to the very back corner of the parking lot where the deepest shadows were. With a sweep of his hand, he changed his modern clothes to his snow-white kilt. He also willed his sword onto his back. Ready to face another night of traveling the underworld, going against Apep, Ra flashed himself from the mortal realm.

* * * * *

With a smile on her face, Shanda walked from the hallway where she'd followed Ray to the door and into the living room. She looked at the couch, remembering everything she and Ray had done on it. Then everything they had done in her bed. He was far from a selfish lover, the opposite of her soon-to-be ex. Half the time she'd felt as if she'd had to hurry and catch up to her husband or be left behind. She didn't think she'd ever have to worry about that with Ray.

Shanda couldn't wait to see him again tomorrow. She just barely stopped herself from giggling like a teenager after making out with her first boyfriend. It was amazing

how fast he'd gotten to her. If it had been anyone else, she didn't think she would have been quite so receptive. There was just something about Ray she couldn't ignore, that made her want to get to know him better and be with him. And the way he held her in his arms, she felt cherished, loved.

She shook her head and turned toward her bedroom. As she walked the short hallway, Shanda shook her head again. She was going to stay clear of anything doing with love. That had been part of what had gotten her in trouble with her soon-to-be ex. She'd fallen too hard and too fast for him, not really knowing him as well as she should have before exchanging marriage vows. She'd known him for only four months before he'd slipped a wedding band on her finger.

Not being ready to declare her undying love for Ray didn't mean she didn't have feelings for him. She did. Ones she could easily see heading toward the big L word if they lasted.

Deciding to spend the rest of the evening in her pajamas watching some TV while she sipped on a glass of wine from the rest of the bottle she had in the fridge, Shanda took off her bathrobe. She smiled again when she felt all the places on her body that were still sensitized from Ray's touch. If tomorrow worked out well, she hoped they'd spend at least part of the afternoon in her bed.

* * * * *

The next morning, as soon as dawn broke, Ra appeared in his Chosen's headquarters inside the temple they'd built for him. He knew none of the occupants would be moving around this early, but he liked the idea of him being in the same realm as Shanda. All night while traveling the underworld, he'd not done much else besides think of her. It had been a good thing Apep hadn't tried any confrontations, as distracted as Ra had been, the demon god would have taken him by surprise. Not that Apep would have won, though.

Ra walked around the room, admiring his son's handiwork once again. He then looked up at the high glass ceiling above his head. To worship him properly, it had to be done in the light of his sun. The clear panes of glass made sure the temple was filled with its rays the entire day.

Leaving the temple, Ra went to the old section of the warehouse that hadn't been renovated. It was quite a large space. His warriors used it mostly for storage and to train with their swords. There was enough room for additional private quarters to be added on. After purchasing the warehouse, his warriors had decided to do the work of renovating it themselves rather than him using his powers to do it. Mehen had said it made this place in this new country they'd come to feel more like home if they used their own manpower to do the work. Since he knew nothing about using a hammer and nails, Ra would use his powers to create Shanda's quarters. Plus he didn't have the months it would take to build them when she agreed to be his. And once mated, her apartment would no longer be an acceptable place for her to live.

Ra spent the next few hours mentally mapping out where he wanted the quarters to be. As for decorating, he'd leave that up to Shanda to decide. The only thing he'd ask was for Takan to paint hieroglyphs and pictures on the walls as he'd done throughout the headquarters. He didn't think his son would mind.

By the time it was late enough in the morning for the others to have started to stir, Ra returned to the living area. He headed for the kitchen, which, since Blythe's arrival, had become the hub of the headquarters. The meeting room where his Chosen had, and still did, discuss battle tactics used to be what the kitchen had become. That was before all the mates had come into their lives.

Ra spotted his daughter as soon as he stepped into the room. She stood at the counter making a pot of coffee. He closed the space between them and kissed the top of her head. "Good morning, Blythe."

She turned and smiled, then kissed his cheek. "Good morning, Dad. You're here early."

"I've actually been here since dawn."

"Why? Is there something the matter? Did your night go okay?"

"No, everything is all right." He paused, then said, "Actually, I hoped to catch you alone so I could speak with you."

"About what?"

"Come sit with me." Once they were both seated at the kitchen table, he continued. "I have to tell you something, and I'm not sure how you will feel about it."

Blythe placed her hand on top of his and squeezed. "Dad, you can tell me anything, you know that."

Ra took a deep breath. "Okay. I've met someone."

"You mean like a woman."

"Yes."

"That's wonderful news. Why would you worry about how I would feel about that?"

"Well, for one thing, she's a mortal. And for another, she's my mate."

"Are you sure? No offense, but the whole mate thing didn't work out so well with my mother."

He swallowed. "Blythe, I never said your mother was my mate. I said I loved her and wanted to have a family with her, and was willing to give her immortality."

Blythe's brows furrowed. "Fair enough. Then how do you know this woman is your mate?"

"Because of these." Ra smiled big enough for his daughter to see his fangs.

"Fuck, you have fangs." Blythe then clapped a hand over her mouth. "Sorry about the F-bomb," she said through it, her voice coming out muffled.

He laughed. "You don't have to apologize. I've heard you swear before, at Mehen more than once, if I remember correctly."

Blythe took her hand away and joined in on his laughter. "That's very true." She sobered. "Fangs? You only get fangs once you've found your mate?"

"Yes. Just like you and Mehen, a blood exchange will form the mate bond."

"And will you continue to feed from your mate afterward, and she you?"

He nodded. "I'll have that closeness with my mate as you have with yours."

"Have you told her about you being an Egyptian god and all that yet?"

"No. I'm taking my time. With no blood hunger to ride me, there is no rush. I did spend most of the day with her yesterday."

"Does Takan know?"

"Yes. He helped me get Shanda to agree to see me. He and Falon joined Shanda and me for part of the day yesterday."

"That little bugger," Blythe said. "He never said a word to me, neither did Falon."

"I asked them not to. I wanted to be the one to tell you about Shanda."

"Because you were worried I wouldn't take the news well," she stated.

"Correct. I know you aren't close with your mother, but she was the last woman I'd loved."

Blythe patted his hand and sighed. "Dad, Dad, you worried for nothing. I'm happy for you. You've been alone too long. Yes, you loved my mother, but it didn't work out. It's time to move on. And considering she wasn't your mate, maybe it was for the best. All I want to know is when I'll get to meet your Shanda."

"Hopefully soon. As it stands right now, she thinks Takan is my brother."

"Considering you both look so much alike, I'm not surprised," Blythe said with a laugh. "Falon has said that at times, if it weren't for your armbands, she'd have found it hard to tell you two apart now that you're dressing in jeans and a t-shirt most of the time."

"So you're really fine with this."

"Yes. Having already found my mate, why wouldn't I want that kind of happiness for my father?"

He leaned in and kissed Blythe's cheek. "I couldn't ask for a better daughter." He stood. "Now that I've spoken to you, I'm going to go talk to Mehen about using a part of the old warehouse for Shanda's quarters. Once she agrees to be my mate, of course."

"Another mate to join the ranks. The boys are going to feel outnumbered. Mehen should be out of the shower by now."

"I'll seek him out at your quarters then."

Feeling as if he'd accomplished much already this day, Ra left the kitchen and went in search of the leader of his Chosen, and the mate to his daughter.

Chapter Five

Shanda got out of bed and looked at her alarm clock. She'd slept in longer than she'd planned, but she still had lots of time before Ray would arrive. After a small breakfast of toast and coffee, she took a shower. Even though she'd shaved a couple of days ago, she took the time to take a razor to her legs. She was totally primping and knew it.

Since it would be warmer than the day before, Shanda dressed in a pale pink cotton tank top and a pair of gray cotton shorts. Under them she wore her best panty and bra set—both white, lacy and sheer. She hoped Ray would see them soon after he arrived.

The phone rang after she took a seat on the couch in the living room. Shanda picked up the cordless sitting on the coffee table in front of her. She looked to see who called on the display and whispered a curse. It was her soon-to-be ex.

After picking it up, she said, "Hello, Hank. What do you want now?"

"That's a nice greeting."

"Be that as it may, I repeat, what do you want?"

"We need to talk in person."

"No, we don't. I told you I didn't want to. I know you've been served the divorce papers. Just sign them."

There was a long pause before Hank responded. "I don't want to sign them. I want another chance."

Shanda rolled her eyes and blew out an exasperated breath. "No, Hank. We've been over this before. I want out of our marriage, and nothing you can say will change my mind."

"I'm different now. All of this has opened my eyes to the way I treated you. I'll admit I was a bastard. Just give me a chance to prove to you I've become a better man. I'll be a better husband."

Her free hand curled into a fist. She hated when he practically begged, which he did right now. In the past, it would have worked, but not now. "It's too late. You treating me as if I were there only to make your life better had gone on for too long. The last six months have made me realize we were never really meant to be together. We're too different."

"We can make it work, Shanda. I've missed you. I'm not ready to end our marriage."

"But I am. Just sign the papers, Hank. Please." Before he could say anything else, she said, "I'm going to hang up now. Just do us both a favor and stop dragging this out."

Shanda hung up and put the phone back on the table. She rubbed her temples with her fingertips, feeling a headache coming on. Why the hell did Hank have to be so stubborn? Christ, he had nothing to complain about with the settlement. She'd barely asked for anything from him. She wanted to sever as many ties with him as she could.

After talking with Hank, her good mood had left her. As usual when she discussed the end of their marriage with her soon-to-be ex, it left her feeling a bit depressed. Sometimes she felt as if she would be hanging in this limbo forever. Hank had fought her just about every step of the way. Now his refusal to sign the divorce papers just added to it. She didn't know what she'd do if he continued to put it off. She wanted that part of her old life to come to a close, so she could start on her new one. Especially now since she'd met Ray.

Shanda jumped when her phone rang again. This time it was only someone calling from downstairs at the entrance. Hearing Ray's voice on the other end once she answered, she pushed the button that would buzz him through. A minute later, he knocked on her apartment door.

She opened it and stepped back to give Ray room. "Come on in."

He came inside. His gaze followed her as she shut and locked the door behind him. "Is everything all right, Shanda? You look a little down."

"It's nothing, really. I just was on the phone with someone I know who likes to annoy the hell out of me."

"Then let me see if I can help bring your spirits up."

Ray wrapped her in his embrace and brought his lips to hers. Shanda melted against him, enjoying having him so close. The headache she felt coming on disappeared. The aching desire Ray could stir inside her with a brush of his lips surged to life. Shanda could easily see herself becoming addicted to his touch.

He pulled away from her mouth and trailed kisses to her ear. Whispering into it, he said, "All night I couldn't stop thinking about you. About how much I wanted to make love to you again."

Shanda shivered with arousal. She put her arms around Ray's neck and pushed herself closer. The erection he sported pressed against her belly, making her pussy clench. "I thought about you too."

Ray nuzzled the side of her neck. "I promised myself I wouldn't be all over you as soon as I got here, but I can't seem to stop."

She gasped when he rocked his hips into her. Her body responded by readying itself to take the big cock pressed between them. "You're not hearing any complaints from me. Actually, I hoped you would be all over me."

With a groan, Ray claimed her mouth once again, pushing his tongue inside, their tongues mating as he feasted on her lips. She reached for his cock and stroked him through his jeans. It jerked in her hand, exciting her even more.

Against his mouth, she said in a husky voice, "Make love to me, Ray."

"I will. You make me ache for you."

He picked her off her feet and carried her right into her bedroom. She slid down his body as he lowered her to the floor. Becoming more aroused by the second, Shanda wasted no time taking off his shirt. She placed her hands on his sides as she laved one of his nipples with the flat of her tongue before gently taking the small nub between her teeth. Ray moaned. She undid his jeans and pushed them down. She moved to his other nipple and did the same as she fisted his cock. With long strokes, she worked him, loving how hard he was for her.

Ray rocked his hips, pushing into each of her strokes. "I want to strip you naked and lick every inch of you."

Shanda let go of his cock and took a step back. She quickly took off her tank top and shorts, leaving on her bra and panties. "I just gave you a head start. Why don't you finish the job?"

She soon found herself on the center of her bed with Ray stretched out beside her. He ran his hand down her side as he licked a path from her throat to her breasts. He laved a tight nipple, wetting the material of her bra before he blew on it, making it tighten even more. He did the same to the other while he worked on the hooks of her bra at her back. Once he had it off, he sucked the taut peak into his mouth. Shanda felt wetness leak into her panties.

As Ray continued to lick and kiss his way down her stomach, Shanda felt the same rightness she always seemed to feel while with him. The way he touched her was almost as if he knew what spots to stroke to wring the most pleasure out of her.

He licked her pussy through her panties, but once he'd taken them off, he made no move to continue. Ray kissed the top of each of her thighs, then with a hand on her hip, urged her onto her stomach. He placed trailing kisses across the top of her back before dragging his tongue down the indentation of her spine. At her ass, he gently nipped each globe.

"Get on your hands and knees for me, Shanda," he said in a husky voice.

Eagerly she complied. Once she'd gotten into position, Ray shifted to kneel behind her. She panted when he rubbed his cock against her pussy, coating himself in her wetness. She rocked back as the head stroked her clit.

"You're wet for me. I have to be inside you."

"Yes," she said on a moan.

The tip of his cock entered her. He took her with shallow strokes until he was balls-deep. Shanda rocked back against him as he pumped in and out of her. He pulled almost all the way out before he surged back into her. His thick cock filled her, deliciously stretching her pussy.

A few more strokes and he pulled all the way out. She whimpered at the loss, but he took her to her back and settled between her thighs once more. With one of her legs over his arm, he sheathed his cock inside her pussy. He pumped faster, his shaft rubbing her clit in just the right spot to have her climax building. She dug her fingernails into his back as it inched ever nearer. Then with a keening moan, she came, her pussy rhythmically clutching the thick cock buried deep inside her.

Ray's moans of pleasure joined hers when he reached his own release, filling her with his cum. When it was over, he released her leg and collapsed on top of her, breathing hard. Shanda closed her eyes as her heart beat at a rapid pace.

Once he'd caught his breath, Ray rolled to his back, taking her with him. She lay sprawled atop him, content to stay just where she was. "I didn't think it could get any better between us, but I guess I was wrong."

He chuckled, the sound echoing in her ear where it was pressed to his chest. "It must be from all that practicing we did yesterday."

"Maybe." She lifted her head to look at him. "You know I'd prefer to spend the rest of the day here with you, but I'm starved. I forgot to eat lunch. Do you want something?"

He shook his head. "I'm fine, but let's get you some food. I'm far from finished with you and I would hate for you to run out of energy before I'm done."

"Then let's get up and get me fed."

Shanda slipped away from Ray and got off the bed. She gathered up her clothes and headed for the bathroom to clean up a bit before she put them on. She returned to the bedroom to find Ray waiting for her, only wearing his jeans.

They'd just stepped into her small kitchen when a knock sounded on her apartment door. Thinking it had to be someone from the building, since she hadn't gotten a call from the lobby, Shanda went to answer it.

Unlocking the door, she swung it open to come face-to-face with Hank. "What the hell are you doing here?" she asked.

Not answering, he brushed past her and walked inside. "I told you I wanted to come see you."

Shanda closed the door. She didn't need to make a scene for her neighbors to hear and see. "And I told you I didn't want to. How did you get into the building?"

"I waited for someone to leave and caught the door before it shut. I'm not leaving until we've talked, Shanda."

"Yes, you are. Get out."

He crowded her until her back hit the wall behind her. "No. I'm staying."

At that moment, Ray stepped into the small entranceway and asked, "Is there a problem, Shanda?"

Hank turned in his direction. "Who the hell are you?"

Ray crossed his arms over his chest, his biceps flexing, causing the gold armbands to flash in the light. "I could ask you the same question. It sounds as if Shanda wants you to leave."

"I'm her husband."

Ray's gaze shot to her. "You're married?"

She shoved Hank out of the way and went to stand in front of Ray. "He's my soon-to-be ex-husband. We've been separated for six months. He just needs to sign the divorce papers to make it final."

"You never said a word."

"I planned to. I just wanted to see how well things would work out between us first."

"You're dating this musclehead?" Hank snapped. "We're still married."

Not bothering to turn around, Shanda said, "Only because a piece of paper says we still are. Our marriage is over. I can see other men."

"The hell you can."

Hank painfully grabbed her upper arm, causing her to cry out, and spun her around to face him. Before she could react, Ray had Hank by the throat and tore her out of her husband's grasp. Shanda gazed at Ray, not really believing what she saw when he curled his upper lip and two fangs dropped to touch his bottom lip.

He hissed at Hank. "You do not touch my mate, or come near her ever again unless you wish to lose your life, mortal. I'd gladly show you what happens when you cross an Egyptian god."

Shanda's mouth dropped open as Ray lifted his other hand and held it up in front of Hank's face. A ball of fire suddenly appeared, hovering above it.

"Let me go," Hank whimpered. "I promise not to come near Shanda again. I'll sign the divorce papers today."

"Be sure you do," Ray said harshly as he released his hold around Hank's throat.

Hank slammed open the apartment door and took off running. Shanda watched Ray wave his hand and the door shut behind Hank.

He turned toward her, and Shanda saw the tips of his fangs were still visible. The fireball he'd held had disappeared. "What are you? How? I don't understand any of

this." She held her hands out to stop him when he took a step toward her. "Stay away. One more step and I'll scream my head off."

"Let me explain. I never wanted it to happen like this. He touched you, and I lost it for a while."

"Because I'm your mate and you're an Egyptian god?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"Which one what?"

"If you are what you say you are, which Egyptian god are you?"

"I'm Ra."

"You expect me to believe you're the ancient Egyptian god Ra? I never knew you gods were fucking vampires as well."

"You don't believe me, do you? You don't think I'm Ra."

"Of course I don't. The gods aren't real."

Moving faster than she'd ever seen someone move, Ray – or Ra – captured her hand and placed it over the left side of his chest. "Don't I feel real? Can't you feel my heart beating beneath your hand? I am what I say I am, Shanda."

Chapter Six

Ra waited for Shanda to answer. He'd made a mess of things. Seeing her soon-to-be ex-husband, as she'd called the mortal, manhandling her had been enough for him to see red. All his possessive and protective instincts for his mate had surged to the fore. He hadn't thought, he'd just acted. Not only had he blundered with Shanda, he'd also have to search this Hank out and wipe all knowledge of himself from the mortal's mind. But that could be done later.

Shanda looked at him with fear showing in her eyes. The same look Blythe's mother had given him when he'd revealed what he was to her. History was going to repeat itself, except this time a loss of a mate would hurt him worse. He loved Shanda. She was his and he wanted nothing to come between them.

"Shanda, you don't have to fear me. When you were in my arms earlier, in your bed, did I do anything to make you think I would harm you in any way?"

"No, but that was before I knew you had fangs."

"I've had them since the day I met you. It was you, my mate, who caused their appearance."

"Why? So you can drink my blood?"

"To form the mate bond a blood exchange must be done."

"So the answer is yes, and you want me to drink your blood too. Sorry, but I'm not a vampire like you."

"I'm not a vampire."

As if she finally remembered her hand was still against his chest, Shanda yanked it away and took a step back. "No, you're just an Egyptian god."

Her sarcastic tone didn't lead him to believe she was any closer to accepting what he truly was.

"I don't want to lose you, Shanda. I've waited for thousands of years to find you."

"Okay, say I believe all this Egyptian god stuff you're telling me, I'm mortal. How can I be your mate?"

"I can gift you with immortality. I'd have you by my side for all eternity. And once the mate bond forms, we'll be able to feel what the other feels. Use the bond to see what the other sees. You'd be able to communicate with me telepathically, something I can already do."

To show her his words were true, he said directly into her head, *I love you, Shanda. We're meant to be together.*

She shook her head. "No. No. No. Don't say that. I promised myself never again would I fall for a man that quickly. You don't know me, and I sure as hell don't know you. I don't know if I even want to."

Ra sighed. History *was* going to repeat itself. At least this time he knew not to push. That was what had driven Blythe's mother to run. He waved his hand down his body and replaced the jeans he wore with his kilt. Shanda sucked in a sharp breath.

Before he left, there was one last thing he could do that could bring about Shanda accepting him as her mate. With a few whispered words in ancient Egyptian, he took off the armband on his right arm. He held a glowing hand over it, transferring a copy of his memories into it. That done, he slipped it onto Shanda's left upper arm and whispered the words that would lock the armband in place, shrinking to fit her.

"These armbands are a symbol of my godhood," he told her. "I gift you with one. You say you don't know me and don't wish to. If you change your mind, press your thumb to the center of the eye, directly on my symbol."

Giving her one last look, hoping this would not be the final time he looked upon her, Ra flashed himself to his chambers in the immortal realm.

He was gone. Just like that Ra had disappeared. Shanda stood there numb, her mind struggling to make sense of everything she'd seen, and what Ray – no, Ra – had told her. Lifting her left arm, she looked down at the gold armband circling it. She reached up and tried to take it off, but it didn't budge. It wasn't too tight so it felt as if it cut off her circulation, but there was definitely no space to slide it up or down. Feeling around to the back, she couldn't find any kind of catch or release. Remembering Ra's words about pressing her thumb against his symbol in the Eye of Ra engraved into the gold, she made sure not to touch it in any way.

Her head still reeling, she ended up in her bedroom. Her gaze landed on the man's t-shirt lying on the floor at the end of the bed. With a shaking hand, Shanda picked it up and held it to her nose. It still held Ra's scent. She sat on the mattress, breathing it in. Before she knew it, a tear trickled down her cheek, then another and another. *Damn.* Memories of her times spent with "Ray" kept flashing through her head. She'd gone and done it. She'd fallen for that man – hard. But had she fallen for the Egyptian god? Or were the man and the god one in the same?

There was only one way to find out, but Shanda wasn't prepared to use the armband right then. She had to do some serious thinking. Once she used it, there would be no going back. She'd have to accept she was the mate to an ancient god, one who would want her at his side for all eternity. She doubted there would be divorce papers for that.

Flopping back on the bed, she clutched Ra's shirt to her chest. At the time she hadn't appreciated it, but now she recalled the absolute look of horror on Hank's face when Ra had gone after him. He'd been scared shitless. And he'd said he would sign to make their divorce final that day. Shanda had a feeling she'd be hearing from her lawyer soon.

* * * * *

Two days had passed since Ra had revealed the truth about himself. During that time, Shanda had done a lot of hard thinking. She also found she missed him—a lot. He seemed to be constantly in her thoughts. They might have only been together a couple of days, but Ra had left his mark on her heart. The fear she'd originally felt had long since disappeared. Thinking back to all the times Ra and she had been together, he'd done nothing but make her feel comfortable around him. She'd felt protected, cherished.

And he had also done her a big favor. That last day she'd seen Ra, late that afternoon, her lawyer *had* called to let her know Hank had indeed signed the divorce papers. She was now a free woman. She could make a fresh start without that hanging over her head.

Shanda sat on her couch, not really watching the TV. As it had done too many times to count, her gaze lowered to the gold armband she wore. She'd also given in to the urge to touch it, stroke it, all because it was Ra's. Her thumb also itched to press his symbol.

Having come to the conclusion that the two days she had been with Ra had been better than any she'd had with her five years with Hank, she knew she'd be a fool to turn her back on Ra just because of who and what he was. All right, it wasn't a normal situation to find out the man you slept with was an ancient Egyptian god, but did she want to lose the one man she could see herself being truly happy with? The chances of her finding someone to take Ra's place in her heart weren't very good, especially not when she couldn't stop thinking about him. She'd compare every man she met to him.

Decision made, Shanda pressed her thumb against Ra's symbol on the armband. She gasped as her head filled with images of him. Like short home movies, she saw bits and pieces of Ra's long life. His nightly trips through the underworld, the joy he felt at the birth of his son, Takan, and the formation of his Chosen to fight the demon god's demons that'd been set loose on mortals. When she watched the relationship he'd had with a mortal woman, who eventually had become pregnant with his daughter, and

how she'd run in fear from him, Shanda found herself in tears. The guilt and loneliness he'd suffered afterward, silently watching Blythe grow to womanhood.

Then she saw when he'd met her. The joy Ra had felt to have finally found the woman to be his mate. At times that feeling had become overshadowed by the worry he'd felt about her not accepting him for what he was. Now she understood his reluctance to tell her how he truly felt about her, about the love he'd already had for her.

After the images stopped playing in her head, Shanda knew exactly what she had to do to make things right, to win back the man she loved. Seeing Ra's memories, getting to know him through them, she realized she did love him. The idea of being with another man besides Ra held no appeal, and never would.

She scrubbed the tears from her face, grabbed her purse and left her apartment. The drive to Phoenix's old warehouse district didn't take very long. Once she reached the one she knew from his memories was Ra's Chosen's headquarters, Shanda stopped her car in front of the high chain-link gate and lay on the horn. Seeing Takan step out of one of the docking bays of the warehouse, she got out of the car to stand at the gate.

"You finally came to your senses, did you?" Takan asked with a smile, flashing his fangs.

"I'll admit I reacted badly. But I've had time to think it over. With the help of the memories Ra put in this." She lifted her arm to show Takan the armband.

He smiled again. "I guess you already know I'm not his brother."

"Yes. He showed me everything."

"Well, just don't expect me to call you Mom."

"I'll smack you if you do."

The gate opened. "Drive your car through and I'll take you to Ra."

Shanda quickly did as Takan told her and parked just outside the docking bay where he waited for her. He took hold of her arm, and the next thing she knew, she was

inside the building. He'd flashed her. She'd learned all about the Chosen's powers from Ra's memories.

She looked around and saw she stood at the entrance of a room that had a high glass ceiling. Bright sunlight filled every inch of it. Takan guided her inside.

"This is Ra's temple," he said. "He's in the immortal realm right now, but he'll be able to hear you. Just lift your face into the sun and call for him." With that, he left her alone.

Suddenly feeling nervous, Shanda wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans. She looked around the temple. It looked like a place one would come to worship an ancient Egyptian god.

Taking a deep breath, she lifted her face into the sun and called out the name of the man she'd come to claim as her own. "Ra? Takan said you'd hear me."

There was a flash of bright light that had her using her hand to shield her eyes from it. Once it subsided, Ra stood in front of her, wearing a snow-white kilt. The way he looked at her with such hope in his eyes caused her to throw herself into his arms and hold him tight.

"I'm sorry," she said as she fought back tears that threatened to spill. "I'm sorry."

Ra cupped her chin and tilted her head back so she could look at him. "I'm the one who should be apologizing. I never meant for you to be afraid of me."

"I'm not anymore. I used the armband."

He smiled the first full one she'd ever seen from him. "I still want you for my mate, Shanda."

"And I want you for mine. I'm a free woman now. Hank signed the papers."

Ra's smile grew even bigger and the sun shone a little brighter around them. "Then I don't have to kill him."

She laughed. "No. Hank is just a bully, and I think he realized he met his match in you."

His face grew serious. "Can I make you mine now?"

"If you don't, I'll be pissed off at you."

Ra held her close and the floor dropped out from under her feet. Once Shanda got her bearings again, she found herself in a sumptuous chamber. One of the walls was made of pure gold with Egyptian hieroglyphs carved into it. A king-sized, four-poster bed draped with gauzy material appeared in the middle of the room. Ra took her hand and led her over to it.

"This is my chamber in the immortal realm," he told her. "Our chamber. I hope you'll wish to spend time here with me as much as you will in the mortal one."

Shanda spied the large bathing pool at the other end of the room. Lotus blooms floated on its surface. "I definitely can. And I definitely think we can put that pool to use."

"Yes, I have to agree. But first, I want to make you truly mine."

Ra waved his hand and their clothes disappeared. He took her in his arms and kissed her with all the longing and desire she felt for him. He lifted her and placed her on the bed. As he sank down on top of her and sheathed his cock inside her wet pussy, Shanda let herself get washed away on the desire he built inside her.

Just before she reached her climax, Ra sank his fangs into the side of her neck. While he drank, Shanda cried out as an intense release took her over. Once it faded away, Ra continued to move inside her. He brought the inside of his wrist to his mouth and bit into it before bringing it to hers. With no hesitation, Shanda latched on to it and drank. Drinking Ra's blood felt as if she sucked in pure energy.

She was automatically thrown into another orgasm just as Ra's cock pulsed deep inside her with his. As the last wave hit her, he pulled his wrist away. "Now to make us truly mates."

He kissed her forehead and Shanda felt a burning sensation in her gums. And where his lips touched, spreading outward, pure energy filled her entire body. Running her tongue over her teeth, she felt her new fangs.

Giving her mate a smile, she pushed him over onto his back. "I love you, Ra." She felt a wave of emotion that wasn't her own surge through her. She gasped. "Is that the mate bond?"

"Yes. What did you feel?"

"The love you have for me."

"And what else?"

She gave him a wicked smile. "You want me to sink my fangs into you. I think that can be arranged."

Bending to her mate, she kissed him hungrily. Once she had him buried deep inside her, she bit him, sending them both into ecstasy.

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.

Marisa lives in Ontario, Canada, with her husband and four children. She would love to hear from you, so drop her an email.

Marisa welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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Ra's Chosen 1: Soul Hunger

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Touched by a Gladiator



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