Pharaoh's Taboo Gift

"Egypt? No, Mom. No freaking way. Please. Not again."

Zahira Collins sighed, having expected this reaction from her youngest child. "This isn't a negotiation, Chris. I'm going. So you and Sabah are coming with me."

"But why?" His voice was close to a whine. If she hadn't been so excited about the phone call she had just received, she would have almost laughed. Chris sounded as if he were six years old again, instead of being nearly twenty and topping six feet by a good three inches. He turned off the television, which he had been watching when she got back home from her office at the university, and tried to loom over her. She glanced up at him, amused by his attempt to intimidate her, and he backed off with an irritated shrug. "It's nearly June, Mom. Why do you want to go to Africa in the summer? We'll roast. Even I remember that."

Zahira cocked a sardonic eyebrow. "You do if an old friend calls you up and tells you that he might have stumbled across the archeological find of the century, and that he trusts you to keep your mouth shut."

Chris blinked, and she thought her son's skin went a touch pale, even through his tan. "Not...not Dad, right?"

A snort sounded from the other side of the room, where Sabah was reading a book and ignoring the debate. "She said an 'old friend,' genius," her daughter, twenty-two years old herself and in the masters' program at NYU, commented caustically. "Not, 'someone who I would happily drop-kick into a sausage grinder.' So I don't think it was Dad."

"No," Zahira grinned. "It wasn't. You guys remember Gonzalo, don't you? Professor Gonzalo Escobar?"

Sabah frowned. "Short fat guy? Curly hair? Told the world's worst jokes?"

She nodded. "That's him. He called me at the office this afternoon. This...if it's true...gods!" She shook her head. "It's huge. Gigantic. Everyone thinks that she never had a tomb of her own. That she was entombed with her father."

Her children traded long-suffering looks. They were used to their mother going off on one of her scholar's tangents without having any idea what she was talking about. "But come on, Mom," Chris said. "I can't go to Egypt for the summer. I need to earn money for school next year."

"Right," Zahira scoffed. "I didn't see you doing that last summer. And you know very well that my settlement with your father means that we've got plenty of money for school for you and for Sabah. Even if you *both* decide to go to graduate school, instead of just your sister."

"Not likely." Chris smiled crookedly. "But why can't we stay here, Mom? Sabah and I can take care of ourselves. We're not little kids anymore."

"Thanks for volunteering me, dumbass," Sabah muttered, turning a page.

"Or we could just stay with Grandma and Grandpa."

"Really?" Zahira folded her arms across her chest. "You're going to stay with my parents? You do remember that they're practicing Muslims, right? Are you going to pray towards Mecca five times a day? Go to the mosque every Saturday?"

"And stop eating bacon?" Sabah injected.

"Ummmm..."

"Right." She put her hands on her hips. "You're coming with me. Both of you. That's final."

"Auugh." Chris clutched his head. His fingers sank into his black, curly hair, a legacy he'd inherited from her. "Fine! If you want to drag us halfway around the freaking planet so we can spend all summer

in a freaking *tent,* that's fine. But just think about this." He wagged a finger in front of her nose in mock threat. "When I'm rich and famous and everyone wants me on all the talk shows, and they ask me who's responsible for my amazing success, I'm going to tell everyone what a horrible mother you were."

Zahira lifted her eyebrows. "That threat would be a lot more frightening if you weren't an accounting major, Christopher. When was the last time one of *them* was a guest on Jimmy Kimmel?"

"Come in, Chris," Sabah said as the knock sounded on her door.

"How did you know it was me?" her brother asked as he flopped down on her chair. It squeaked in protest, but didn't break. Sabah gave him an aggravated look, but he ignored it, oblivious as usual.

"Only three people live in this apartment, Chris," she pointed out as she dumped a suitcase on her bed. "And Mom's too busy packing. Which you should be doing. Or do you plan on catching the plane to Cairo with nothing but what you're wearing right now?"

"Ugh. Don't remind me." He closed his eyes and tilted his head back until it was resting on the wall behind him. "How long do you think we're going to be over there?" he asked.

"As long as it takes for Mom to research this big mystery of hers, I guess," she replied.

"Which means it could be anywhere from two weeks to two flipping years." Chris scowled down at his feet. "Crap. I thought we were done with this stuff when Dad split. Flying around the world looking for little bits of junk instead of having a vacation like normal people. Most kids get birthday parties. We got malaria pills."

"Well, you know Mom's ambitious," Sabah said. She opened her bureau, sorting through t-shirts and blouses. She picked out a dozen, lightweight and light-colored for the brutal African heat, and stowed them neatly in the suitcase. "Especially ever since Dad...well, you know."

Chris nodded grimly. Their parents' marriage had been one of those storybook affairs. Except in this case the fairy-tale had turned dark and nasty, and Prince Charming had been a devil in disguise. Their mother had been a graduate student at New York University, brilliant and with the dark-skinned Arabic beauty she had inherited from her parents, who had immigrated to America from Egypt after Sadat's crackdown and eventual assassination in the early nineteen-eighties.

Shy, studious Zahira Koury had fallen head-over-heels in love with Professor Gregory Collins, who had been her graduate advisor. Tall, lean, with a mane of prematurely silvering hair that gave him the look of an elder statesman, perhaps a senator, (or maybe even a president) in a made-for-television movie, Greg Collins had the sort of smooth, mellow voice and suave carriage that made him a favorite on the talk-show and lecture circuit when the occasion called for a discussion of ancient Egypt or Persia. He was able to parlay that minor-league fame into a trio of popular books about the Near East that were light on true scholarship but heavy on blood, gore, and anything that could titillate the common crowd.

Still, their mother had been content, Sabah thought. She had been born when Zahira was still working on her doctorate, and Chris less than two years later. Until she was fifteen her life had followed a simple pattern. Nine months of the year were spent in New York, where her mother clawed her way up the academic ladder, while her father seemed to be content in his life as an adjunct professor at NYU. But once school let out for the summer, it was time to get out into the field and do research. Egypt, almost always. And when the political climate allowed, other places that were usually hot, dry, dusty, filled with nasty insects, and hostile to Americans. She and Chris had celebrated Independence Day in nine different countries, by her count.

But that had all changed the summer she had turned sixteen. Her father had spent most of the past year working on another book. One

that, he claimed on one of his innumerable talk-show appearances, would at last "lift the veil and show the modern world what life had truly been like in antiquity."

What no one knew was that his work had largely been stolen, lifted wholesale in chunks, in some places pages long, from his wife's own notes, which he knew quite well she was intending to turn into a full-length monograph of her own at some point. How he had thought he would get away with it was beyond her understanding. Maybe he simply thought Zahira, who rarely bothered to conceal her disdain for the popularization of her field, would never read it.

If he did, he was dead wrong. Hilariously so. The plagiarism and resulting scandal had been cataclysmic, even by the standards of academia, where petty feuds could last for decades. On the day the book was published, her lovely, sweet-tempered mother, who rarely raised her voice and never, ever shouted or cursed, had belted her father across the face with a hardback copy of *Blood, Slaves, and Steel: The Rise and Fall of Persia* when he was barely three steps into their apartment.

"Do you know what a reference is, Greg, you titanic fucking *asshole?*" she had raged down at him, while he cupped his broken and bleeding nose in his hand. She kicked him in the side hard enough to make his ribs creak, while Sabah stared aghast and Chris, only thirteen, huddled at her side. "How about a footnote? Or maybe a little disclaimer? One that says, 'I'm a goddamn fucking *thief!*'"

Gregory Collins had moved out that night, both his academic reputation and marriage in ruins. The legal brangling had gone on for years, however. In the end, their father had been forced to forfeit all the royalties from the book. NYU had cut all ties with him, of course, and now he was teaching introductory anthropology classes at a community college in Beloit.

Wisconsin, ugh. That might be even worse than Egypt.

"Yeah, I know," Chris sighed. "Mom wants to make her reputation, since there are still some jerkwads who think that mess with Dad was all her fault. But why now? Why can't it wait until school starts back up? Then she can take off without having to worry about us."

"Maybe she's worried the university wouldn't give her a sabbatical." Sabah wrinkled her nose at him. "Or maybe the find is so hot that she can't risk someone else finding out about it. What's the big deal, Chris? New York sucks during the summer, anyway. It's hotter than hell and the whole city smells like pee. And this way we can spend one last summer with Mom." She chewed her lip. "You don't have anything crazy going on, do you? Like a girlfriend?"

It really was funny, how she could turn her younger brother into a blushing, stammering adolescent with only a few words. Even through his dark skin, mirror to her own, she could see the way the flush crawled up his neck. "No."

Sabah smirked. "Maybe you should make an offering to Hathor," she said, naming the Egyptian goddess of love and fertility.

"Maybe you should mind your own business, you godless heathen."

"Yeah? When was the last time you went to the mosque?"

He stuck his tongue out at her. "You can't make me. I want to hear nothing," he declaimed dramatically, spreading his arms and tilting his head back, as if he were staring through the ceiling and up to the sky, "about any of your puny, puling, late-arriving godlings. I worship the mighty Sun-God Ra, who has a better track-record than Jesus, Jehovah, *or* Allah, as far as I can see. At least we get to bask in the warmth of his munificence every day. What has Allah done lately?"

"Don't let your grandmother hear you saying that," their mother said, shouldering open the door. "And Christopher, you should be packing. Our flight is at seven. You both know where your passports are, don't you?"

"Right here, Mom," Sabah said, lifting hers from her nightstand.

"Chris?"

"It's around here somewhere," her brother said vaguely. "And can I just say that it's total bullshit that we're not Egyptian citizens? Just because you're not a man, Mom? If Dad was Egyptian, we would be."

Zahira leaned up and kissed him on the cheek. "What? What was that for?" her brother asked.

"You know what, Chris?" Her mother smiled. The smile that made her look twenty years younger. "Every time I think that you're completely hopeless, you say something that makes me realize that you're not a big dumb dope after all."

"Thanks, I guess." He rubbed the spot where her lips had touched his skin.

"Chris. Pack. Now." Sabah hid a grin. Her mother was practically *bouncing* with excitement. Whatever Professor Escobar had found, it had Zahira ready to fly halfway around the globe on less than a day's notice. And whatever else she was, her mother was not the sort of person who took crazy risks. Her academic reputation had been built brick by brick. She wouldn't endanger it for anything that was less than incredible.

Endanger it? she thought suddenly. *Or make it?* Zahira's climb up the ladder had been steady, but slow. Did she think that in Professor Escobar's call she had found something that could vault her up the ranks? Her brother's question echoed in her mind. What was really going on, anyway?

She realized her mother had been speaking. "I'm sorry. What, Mom?"

"I just wanted to make sure you were ready for tomorrow."

Sabah shrugged. "I haven't forgotten how to pack, Mom. But it's still a pain in the ass to have to rearrange my entire summer with barely any notice."

"Tell me about it," Chris grumbled.

"Yeah?" She prodded her brother in the rear with a toe. "Didn't Mom tell you to pack? Move."

"I feel bad for him," her mother said quietly, as he slouched out the door and into the hall. His footsteps faded behind him. "I remember what that age was like. Brain telling you one thing, body telling you another. It's no wonder I ended up with your father." She snorted. "And what a disaster that was."

Sabah smiled. "Well, seeing as how I would never have been born if you and Dad hadn't hooked up, I don't consider it a complete disaster, Mom."

Her mother hugged her, tight and fierce. "And don't you ever forget it. You and Chris are the two best things that ever happened to me."

"Chris? Really?" she joked. Even at twenty-two, it still surprised her that she was able to look her mother in the eye. Her presence always made her seem taller. "I'd hate to see what was in third place."

A smack on her arm, almost hard enough to sting, made her jump. "Chris is a good boy. No." Her mother corrected herself. "A good man. Or he will be, soon. He just needs time to grow into himself. I know he's ticked off at me right now. So give him a couple days before you start giving him the business, okay?"

"Fine, fine," she smiled. It really was impossible to stay mad at Chris. The big goof might look like one of the stars on the hilariously terrible Egyptian soap operas her grandmother devoured. But he was still, when everything was said and done, her little brother. And she loved him. "I'll give him forty-eight hours. But if he keeps acting like a little kid who just had his favorite toy taken away, I'm going to plant my shoe so far up his butt he'll be tasting leather."

"My daughter, the diplomat," Zahira laughed. Another hug, quickly released. "I know I can count on you. Now. I'm going to make sure

that Chris isn't packing his winter coat instead of socks and underwear."

"Good luck with that."

Chapter 2

"God." Chris blinked as he stumbled out of the jetway and into the main terminal of the airport. "What time is it?" His brow furrowed as he took in the darkness outside the tall glass windows that looked out over Cairo. "Hell. What day is it?"

"It's today," Sabah grumbled, slinging her carry-on over her shoulder. "Not quite midnight. The same day we left. Tuesday," she clarified. "We're seven hours ahead of New York."

Chris blinked. That sounded about right. His body was ready for supper, almost. But the difference between his internal clock and the deep night outside made his brain hurt. One thing told him it was after his bedtime. The other, that he should be sitting down to a meal.

"Customs," their mother said firmly, walking up beside them. "And then the hotel."

It was always weird, Chris thought, as they made their way through the bureaucracy that never seemed to change, no matter how many times governments rose and fell. The difference between the sleek, modern, glass-and-steel airport, and the knowledge that barely an hour away was a howling desert that would kill you stone dead from heat and thirst and winds that could scour the flesh from your bones if you weren't prepared for it. Civilization was a thin veneer. One they took for granted.

Not that weird, his mind supplied. *Think about America, for fuck's sake. Can you imagine what would happen if you dropped someone from Egypt into Miami? One look at the Everglades and they'd pass right out. Or what about Minneapolis or Buffalo? They'd run back home screaming when they found out what winter was* ***really*** *like.*

The bored official in front of him stamped his passport and handed it back to him. "Thanks," he grunted, tucking it into a pocket, not caring whether the man understood English or not. His mother and sister were waiting patiently, already done.

"Zahira! My love!"

Oh, God.

Chris groaned, Sabah smirked, and his mother laughed out loud as a short, barrel-chested man bore down on them. Thick black hair, shot with silver, crowned his head, the same color as his full beard. Below, a fat belly strained against the buttons of a horrifically loud Hawaiian shirt, though Chris had it on good authority that Professor Gonzalo Escobar had never gotten closer to Hawai'i than Chicago.

"Ah, my friends. It is so good to see you!" His English bore only a trace of the accent of his native Spain. He took Sabah's hand in his own, turning it to plant a kiss on her knuckles. "Zahira, my love. When will you marry me and make me the happiest man in Barcelona?"

"Professor," Sabah giggled. "My mother is over there!"

"No! It cannot be!" The older man goggled. "You cannot be little Sabah! The last time I saw you, you were no bigger than a minute. And now you are just as lovely as your mother!" He fell back, striking a pose. "Will you come and be my bride, lovely Sabah? My own wife has no charms that can compare to your beauty. I will put her aside, and lay myself at your feet. Please, say yes. And all that I have will be yours!"

"Yes, very likely, you shameless old man," his mother laughed, while Sabah flushed becomingly. "Which wife is it, anyway? Number three or four? I lose track, you old goat. And you probably do, too."

"Four," the professor said comfortably, grinning through his beard. Despite himself, Chris found himself liking him. "How can a man

stop at just one," he winked, "when there are so many lovelies around?

"And you must be Chris!" he exclaimed, shoving out a shovel of a hand. "By the Virgin! I haven't seen you in years!" His craggy head cocked shrewdly. "You've got the look of your father about you."

"God, I hope not," Chris said honestly as he shook the professor's hand. The only thing he had ever wanted from that detestable old man was his height.

"Well, just a touch." The older man ran a thumb down the side of his jaw. "My apologies. I know that things...did not end well."

"Come on, Gonzalo." His mother took the older man's arm. "We need to get the luggage. And then I want to hear *everything*."

"The Valley of the Kings."

Professor Escobar spread out the map on the table. The trip from the airport to the hotel had been mercifully swift. This late, there had been little traffic, even in Cairo.

"Not Giza?" Sabah asked.

"No." The professor spared her a quick smile. "Giza was built far earlier. Even so, this discovery is old. So old it's new."

Sabah's brows drew down in a scowl. "I'm studying antiquity, too, professor. Although," she admitted, "I'm concentrating on Rome and Greece."

"Don't concentrate. Spread your net wide, sweet Sabah," he grinned. "Specialization is for ants.

"But this might be before your time. Tell me. What do you know of Hatshepsut?"

Chris kept his mouth shut. This was so far beyond his knowledge that the three other people in the room might as well be speaking Greek. Which, for all he knew, they might actually start doing at any

time. His mother was fluent in at least six languages that he knew of, and he doubted that Professor Escobar was any less adept. And Sabah, of course, had to learn Greek and Latin in order to decipher the ancient texts which were her passion.

"Hatshepsut?" Sabah's forehead wrinkled. "She was a queen of Egypt, right? Way back?"

"Not just a queen." His mother's voice was reverent as she touched the map. "A pharaoh. The fifth ruler of the eighteenth dynasty of ancient Egypt. She was the wife of Thutmose the Second. And her child was too young to rule when her husband died. So she ruled in her son's name, and then later declared herself pharaoh in her own right. She was a woman who took power in a man's world. And kept it and wielded it, by the gods!"

"Exactly. We know a little about her reign. But not enough."

"Not enough," his mother agreed. She speared the shorter man with a keen glance. "All right, Gonzalo. You dragged me out here with a promise. Why shouldn't I turn around and fly back to New York?"

"Our lady was entombed with her father," the professor replied absently. "We have her mummified remains. But after her rule ended, her descendants did all they could to erase the knowledge of her rule."

"The *damnatio memoriae,*" Sabah whispered. "Pretending that someone important never existed. Destroying images of an emperor so his memory would be lost and forgotten. They did it in Rome, too."

"And not just back then," their mother added grimly. "Check out the Soviet Union or Communist China. It's amazing how many old photographs have mysterious blank spaces in them, where some poor bugger ran afoul of Lenin or Stalin or Mao."

"But what if I told you," the professor said, his eyes suddenly sharp, "that we had found evidence of a temple, dedicated to the worship of Hatshepsut?"

"In the Valley of the Kings? Impossible." His mother's voice was flat. "That area has been surveyed and re-surveyed a hundred times. There isn't one rock sitting on top of another that hasn't been studied. And I thought this was supposed to be a tomb, not a temple."

"Not in the valley. Here." The professor's thick fingers traced a line, up into the craggy foothills west of the valley, away from the wide Nile. "Satellite photography is really very useful, you know. One of my friends knows someone at the ESA and got them to point their cameras down here as a favor to me. I thought having a really good map of the entire area would be nice. But it turned into something bigger." A second map, more detailed, was laid atop the first. "See?"

Even to his untrained eyes, the small, rectangular outcropping was easy for Chris to see. It stood out from the surrounding landscape like a sore thumb.

"How has no one ever seen this?" he asked. "I mean," he faltered, as every other eye turned towards him. "People have to know, right?"

"The rulers of Egypt were tied to the river," the professor said. "That is where they laid their remains. This is miles away. No one looked here because no sane ruler would ever bother to build here."

"One did, it seems." Zahira rubbed her fingers over the map. "But where's our proof that this is a temple to Hatshepsut? All I see is a foundation."

In answer, the older man passed her a third, smaller photograph. His mother gave it an absent glance, and then a longer one. When she looked up, her eyes were wild.

"Is this a trick?" she demanded.

The professor grinned. "I took that picture myself, Zahira. Two days ago. Right before I called you." He sat down heavily. "No one else

knows. At least, not the details." He looked up, dark eyes sharp and worried. "I called you, Zahira, because you know more about that era than I do. And because I trust you. I need your expertise. But the credit goes to both of us, yes? Professors Escobar and Collins?"

"You could have kept this to yourself, and not even clued me in," her mother replied. "Agreed. Though if this turns out to be true, I think there will be plenty of fame for both of us." She studied the photo again. "A temple to Hatshepsut! It's incredible. Everyone knows the woman was ambitious as Lucifer. But she must have thought that she could rule even after her death, as a goddess."

Gonzalo rocked back. "I never thought of it that way."

Her mother patted his cheek fondly. "Of course not. You're a man. It takes a woman's eyes to see some things."

Four days later, they left for the Valley of the Kings. Although, Chris thought, his mother probably would have liked to leave immediately after that midnight conclave in the hotel.

But there were preparations to make: Food and water and transportation and the addition of three extra tents for his mother and Sabah and himself had to be purchased in Luxor, the nearest town to the site. Even though this wasn't a full-scale dig, but merely an exploratory reconnoiter, it was always better to be over-prepared than the opposite, his mother claimed. One never knew when something you thought would never be needed suddenly became crucial, dragging the entire process to a halt.

But four mornings later, as the sun rose over the river to the east, a small caravan left the city and headed west. Gonzalo drove the lead car, his mother in the passenger seat beside him, while Chris and Sabah sat in the back. In the rear of the large SUV were boxes and cases of supplies. Behind them were another three vehicles, driven by native Egyptians who had been hired for the task. Dust rose in a cloud as they left paved roads behind them and headed out into the desert.

"What about the government?" His mother spoke loudly to be heard over the rattling noise. Chris winced as they hit a particularly large pothole.

The professor's shoulders rose in an expressive shrug. "I've paid off all the right people. And I've kept the bribes low. It's when you start spending money like a sailor on shore leave that the officials start getting suspicious. All they know is that I'm doing some fieldwork up in the hills west of the valley.

"But we're going to have to be careful. You know what it's like around here. If word gets out there's a major dig going on, we'll have looters and poachers down on us quicker than hyenas on a fresh corpse. And then we'll have to hire armed guards to scare them off. Or even worse, ask the military to come in."

"*Ew*." Sabah curled her lip, looking out the window. Outside, when wind cleared the spiralling grey dust away, the sky was clear; a deep, rich turquoise. But as they left the city behind, the ground changed rapidly - greenery fed by the mighty Nile giving way to wind-scoured rock and bare sand, with only the occasional shrub breaking the monotony.

Soon they were out of the valley and beginning to climb into the hills. There wasn't a road anymore. Just a bare, dusty track that was little better than a goat-path. Up, over a cleft between two jagged spires of rock, back down again, and then a turn north, bouncing and shaking like peas in a tin can. Their speed slowed to a crawl as they wove their way between huge boulders.

And then, after a squeeze that Chris thought would surely scrape the paint off the sides of the SUV, they came out into a broad, sunlit expanse. To their left was a series of survey markers, bright red ribbons fluttering in the breeze.

"Last stop. Everyone out." Behind them, the other vehicles were coming to a halt.

The heat hit Chris like a blow as soon as he got out of the vehicle, even though it was barely nine in the morning. The sun was a white-hot coin in the sky. And under their feet, the rock soaked up the heat and threw it back at them in waves, so that it felt like he was inside an oven. Sweat broke out all over his body in seconds, and when he reached back into the SUV to pull out a hat to protect his head, the door-handle was hot enough to scorch his fingers.

"Why would anyone in their right minds build a temple way the hell up here?" he asked, joining his mother and the professor, who were talking quietly nearby. "It's hotter than the devil's asshole, there's not a drop of water in sight, and it's desolate as hell."

The two adults glanced at each other. "The boy has a point," Gonzalo conceded, his lips pursed.

"He always was the practical one," his mother agreed. "He's majoring in business. Has it in his head to be an accountant when he graduates."

"Well, someone has to make sure the numbers add up," the professor said. He grinned through his beard. The mere thought of having that much hair on his face made Chris itch. "Or hide the numbers, when they don't add up the way they should. But the temple? He's right. There was more than enough room to build down in the valley. So why do it way up here?"

His mother moved away from the survey stakes, looking east. At her feet, the land suddenly fell away in a cliff, rocks and scree littering the slope until it merged with the lower land below. Below her large, floppy hat, her hand shaded her eyes as she gazed towards the river.

"How far would you say, Gonzalo? Twenty miles?"

"About that, yes."

"Then there's your answer. It wasn't *meant* to be easy. This was built as a pilgrimage site. It would take all day on camelback to get here from the river. A person would leave at dawn, trek across the waste,

get here so grateful they survived the trip that they would be in a mood suitable for worship or penance, stay the night, and go back the next day. It was made hard on purpose.

"Besides," she breathed. Look at that view. Can you imagine watching the sun rise over the Nile at dawn, looking at it from here?"

Gonzalo nodded. "Maybe. It's something to think about, at least." He clapped his hands, once, and nodded. "Let's get the campsite set up. Then we can get to work."

Luckily, Zahira's children hadn't lost their ability to camp in the rough. When she got back from supervising the digging of the latrine trench, Chris was on his knees, pounding a metal stake into the sun-baked ground with a hammer. As she watched, he slid two rods together, twisting them so they linked with sharp snap. One end was wedged into the ground. The other, into a loop in the lightweight fabric that formed the tent. In just seconds the front of the tent was off the ground. A few yards away, Sabah's was taking shape just as rapidly.

"Don't forget to set your cot up off the ground," she advised her son. "Remember Petra?"

"I was eleven, Mom. And that scorpion had no business in my tent."

Sabah snickered from her kneeling position. "I remember that. God, you screamed like someone was trying to kill you."

"Yeah?" he shot back as he put another rod in place. "You try waking up and finding a horrible murder-bug six inches away from your face. There." He stepped back and surveyed his work with a satisfied expression. "All done. You need some help with yours, Mom?"

"Thanks, honey." She stepped over to her tent, which was on the other side from Sabah's. "I'd appreciate it."

The two of them made quick work of it. Zahira put the rods together and set them neatly to the side, while Chris staked out the corners.

She watched him admiringly from beneath her lashes as his strong young arms pounded the stakes into the ground.

Not like his father at all, she thought, a trifle smugly. Greg had rarely bothered to get his hands dirty when they were in the field, leaving it to other people, as if his exalted position meant that he didn't have to exert himself. But Chris didn't shy away from hard work at all. Like the rest of them, he was dressed sensibly in the heat. Jeans and heavy shoes were an unfortunate necessity when the surrounding countryside was full of biting bugs, stinging insects, and the occasional snake. But his white t-shirt was lightweight and his hat protected his head from both sunburn and overheating.

"Madam." He bowed gracefully, his long fingers sweeping out in a gesture towards the tent-flap. "The palace awaits your divine presence."

She smiled at her son. "You're a doofus." But she unzipped the flap and pushed aside the mosquito netting and entered.

Her tent was the largest of the three, meant to accommodate multiple people if necessary. The middle, unsupported, sagged down towards the floor.

"Hand in that last pole, will you, Chris?" she asked. Setting the butt-end on the floor, Zahira twisted, but the metal shaft stayed stubbornly inert. "What the hell?" she muttered. "This pole is supposed to extend, isn't it?"

"That's what she said!" Sabah's voice carried through from her tent next door, and broke off on a naughty giggle.

Zahira was grateful that the heat hid the flush in her face. "Chris, can you help me out, please?" she called, still twisting on the rod.

"What?" Chris asked, coming inside just as her finger pressed a metal button. She yelped in surprise as the pole extended to twice its length in a heartbeat, dropping it and stumbling back until she fetched up against her son.

"I've got you." His voice was a chuckling rumble in his chest as his arms caught her.

Zahira sighed. Just for a moment, she let herself savor this too-short moment of human contact. It had been so long. Nearly seven years since she had shown Greg the door. And almost two since she had broken off her last, ill-advised affair with the father of one of Sabah's friends. Caught up in the grind of career, where the motto was 'publish or die,' she had almost forgotten that sex was a thing.

Or that her body had needs. She closed her eyes, savoring the feel of being sheltered by a pair of strong arms.

But it couldn't last. She stooped, breaking Chris' unintentional embrace, and picked up the tent-pole. In seconds, the shelter looked the way it should.

"All right," she said, dusting off her hands. "Let's get the rest unpacked."

She led Chris out of the tent, and the four of them set up a bucket brigade, transferring their belongings to their tents. Meanwhile, their hired help unpack supplies and put them in yet another tent for safe-keeping, dug the latrine trench and a fire-pit, set up work-tables under a canvas awning, and hooked up lines to the huge water-truck. Professor Escobar supervised that chore personally, since any problems with their water supply would mean an immediate end to the project. Without fresh water, they would be dead in days.

Zahira was just unfolding a set of canvas-seated chairs and setting them around the tiny table in the middle of her tent when there was a burst of activity outside; a clatter, a sharp scream, swiftly cut off, and the pounding of running footsteps, punctuated by an outburst of profanity.

"Mom!" Sabah caught her arm as she left her tent. Her face was taut with worry. "Come quick! The professor's hurt!"

Zahira ran across the encampment towards the water-truck. When she arrived, it was at a scene of pandemonium. Gonzalo was lying on the ground, his normally florid face pale. One of their drivers, a small, mousy man, was being harangued by his countrymen, who surrounded him in a circle of angry Arabic invective.

"All right!" She strode into the circle, Sabah at her side. Chris came trotting up, his face concerned. "What happened?"

Four voices rose up at once. "Quiet!" she ordered, holding up a hand. "Gonzalo?"

"Stupid, lead-footed idiot doesn't know the difference between the gas and the brake," the professor swore. "I was trying to guide him to a level spot and he backed the damned truck right into me. Threw me into that son-of-a-bitching rock right there." He tried to shift where he lay. If anything, his face went even more chalky. "I think my damned leg is broken."

"Chris. Go get the med kit. We need scissors to cut away his pants."

Her son departed at a run. "Now, now. No need for that, love." Despite his pain, Gonzalo smiled up at her, eyes twinkling. "I've wanted you to undress me for years. But I don't think we need an audience."

Zahira swallowed back laughter, while Sabah snorted. "Like you could even do anything if you got me alone right now, you old fraud."

Chris hurried up with the medical kit, and Zahira opened it up, her hands sure. This wasn't the first time she'd been forced to do first-aid in the field. She eyed Gonzalo's leg dubiously. "I don't suppose we can take your shoe off?"

The small man gritted his teeth. "If you can do it without moving my leg, maybe."

She shot her eyes to the side. "Sabah. Hold his leg still. Chris. Untie his shoe." As her children obeyed her, she gently eased it off his foot,

ignoring Gonzalo's sulfurous swearing. Working quickly, she cut up the side of her friend's heavy canvas pants.

"Oh, yeah." She didn't need an x-ray machine to see the problem. The edge of the bone was actually pressing on the inside of the professor's skin, making it tent grotesquely. Sabah took one look, then turned away. "You definitely did some damage here. Looks like a fractured tibia to me."

"Are you a doctor?"

"No, but I play one on TV," she replied absently. "You and you." She pointed. "Get a couple of tent-poles so we can make a stretcher. You. Get one of the SUVs ready to go back into town."

She stood, dusting off her knees. "Well, old friend, guess you're getting a bit of a break. I'll take you into town and get you to a hospital."

"No!" He struggled up onto one arm, frowning. "You have to stay here, Zahira! If anyone comes, there has to be someone in charge. Can Sabah or Chris prove to the government that we have a right to be here?"

"Damn it," Zahira sighed. Gonzalo was right. "Fine." She looked at Sabah. "You're going back to town with him. Don't come back until you know he's in good hands. Wait as long as you have to. I don't want you trying to drive these roads after dark.

"You." She switched to Arabic and pointed at the man who had caused all the problems. "You're driving. And I want you to act as if you had your sweet old grandmother riding with you. Do you understand me?"

He bobbed his head. "Yes."

Good. Two of the other men came up, lugging a makeshift stretcher. "All right. Let's get to work."

An hour later, Zahira watched as the truck crawled back down the hill, wincing in sympathy at every jounce.

"He'll be all right," she told Chris, wishing she didn't sound as if she were trying to convince herself.

"Sure he will," her son answered. "He'll probably show up tomorrow on crutches, hopping around and giving us orders."

Her snicker was cut off as she spied the three remaining men. They were standing in a huddled circle near the vehicles. Over the faint sigh of the wind, she could hear their low-voiced mutters, and see the way they were casting nervous looks over their shoulders, up towards the low mound of the temple.

"Well?" she sighed. "What now?"

"We should leave, lady." A spokesman stepped forward. He jerked his head back at the temple. "This is a bad-luck place. All know this." His friends murmured agreement, and he made a superstitious sign with his fingers. "One man is hurt already. If we do not leave, maybe worse things happen. The spirits of this place are angry. Maybe we die."

"Fine," she shrugged, fishing a wad of bills out of her pocket. "Go. I can pay you now. We keep the supplies. You get one truck to drive back to the city."

The man grinned, displaying bad teeth. "And if we want to take all the trucks and leave you here? The man is gone. There is only this boy. Why should we not do as we wish?" His eyes traveled over her body, making her skin crawl. "Take what we wish."

His obscene smirk faded as she drew the revolver from the hidden holster in the small of her back. "Then no one will ever know what happened to you," she snapped as she lined the barrel up on his face. "There's all sorts of places around here where we could drop your body and leave it for the vultures."

"You wouldn't shoot me. You're just a woman!"

She cocked the hammer back with her thumb. The sound was very loud. "Come one step closer and find out. Chris."

"Mom?"

Zahira jerked her head at the stunned group of men. "Get the keys. Leave them one set. Make sure it's not for the water-truck."

Ten minutes later, cursing and swearing, the three remaining men were bouncing back down the hill. Zahira sincerely hoped that they wouldn't catch up to Sabah and Gonzalo before they got back to Luxor.

She turned around to find Chris staring at her. "You had a gun?"

Zahira grimaced as she replaced it in the holster. The weight was a comfort, even if the raw was awkward. "In a place like this, Chris, I *always* have a gun. All nice and legal and approved by the State Department, so I didn't get arrested when I took it on the plane. Out here, a woman sometimes needs the ability to say no and make it stick. Or were you looking forward to being held down while I got gang-raped?"

"I...I..."

"I know." She touched his cheek. "You're a good man. You would never think about taking advantage of a woman that way. But the world is full of men who *aren't* like you. Who would be happy to take what doesn't belong to them, just because they're bigger and stronger than I am.

"Well." She looked up at the sun, gauging how long the light would last. "This has been one hell of a start. But I would like to take a look at the temple before sunset. What do you say, kiddo?"

Chris shrugged. "So far we've already had a broken leg and a mutiny. What's the worst that could happen?"

Chapter 3

Chris followed his mother as they walked around the outside of what she assured him were the remains of an ancient Egyptian temple, dedicated to the worship of a female pharaoh who had ruled the land over three thousand years ago. Perched on the edge of a sandstone bluff above the Valley of the Kings, it was perhaps a hundred yards long, and half that wide, and loomed over their heads in a low, sullen mound.

"How do you even know that this is Hatshet...Hapshet..." He stuttered to a halt.

"Hatshepsut?"

"Yeah. Her. How do you even know this is her temple?"

"From that." His mother pointed. "See the hieroglyphs?"

He squinted. "Yeah," he shrugged. "Can't say that I understand them."

"That's her name. Right there. '*Khnemet Amun Hatshepsut*.' 'United with Amun, foremost of noble ladies.' Most of her temples and obelisks were defaced or destroyed after her death. But this one seems to have survived, somehow."

"Huh." He kicked at a loose stone, sending it bouncing away. "Seems a bit silly to put your name on the foundation. If *I* was a pharaoh and wanted everyone to know how awesome I was, I'd make sure my name was on the top of the temple, not the bottom."

His mother stopped, so suddenly that he nearly ran into her. "Mom! Watch out!"

Zahira turned to face him. "Say that again," she whispered.

"Huh?"

"What you just said." She was staring at the low, sandy hill that supported the foundation as if she could burn holes in it with her eyes. "Say it again."

He frowned. Why was his mother acting all weird? "I said," he repeated patiently, "that if I was a big hot-shot Pharaoh, I would have my name on the top of my temple. In big red letters twenty feet high. Not that they used letters in those days, I guess. It was all birds and arrows and squiggly lines."

"Yes! That's right!" Zahira jumped up and down with excitement. "Look, Chris!" She pointed across the valley. "Three thousand years. Three thousand *years* of storms blowing sand and dust and crap across the valley. It comes up here, gets trapped by the rocks, and settles around the temple.

"We're not looking at the foundations. We're looking at the *top*."

Chris stared at the mound of dirt and dust. "You mean...the temple is inside there? All of it? Crap. You're going to need a bulldozer to get inside."

"Not a bulldozer. Just a lot of people with shovels." She danced away, giggling. "Gonzalo is going to shit himself when he hears this!"

And that's when the ground opened up and swallowed her.

Zahira choked back a scream as she slid down the pitch-black slope. She spread her arms wide, trying to arrest her decent, but the stone sides of the passage were smooth as glass.

With a squeak and a thump, she landed on her backside, startled but unharmed.

What the fuck?

"Mom! Mom, are you all right? Are you down there? Mom!"

Turning, Zahira was able to see her son's silhouette at the top of the chute, or secret passage, or whatever it was that had sent her down here.

"Yes, I'm here," she called.

"I'm coming!" Horrified, she saw Chris turn and begin to stick his legs into the tunnel.

"No! Stop! If you come down, we'll both be trapped!"

Chris paused. "Oh." His chagrined voice floated down to her. "I didn't think about that."

"Besides, I don't want you clumping around down here and messing around with a site. Go get some rope. I know we packed some. It's probably in the supply tent."

"But what about you?"

"I'm fine, Chris. Not even a scratch. Now go. Get the rope!"

Zahira breathed a sigh of relief as his shadow disappeared. Her son was a good man. But sometimes he didn't look before he leaped.

She took a look around, seeing for the first time the chamber where she had been deposited. With the only light coming down from above, the impression she received was of a large, dark space.

One way to fix that. She pulled out her cell phone and hit the flashlight app.

Holy shit.

Gonzalo had been right. It was a temple, not a tomb. The furnishings were long gone, decayed by the slow erosion of centuries, and the doorways were blocked by dirt and rubble. But the brilliant colors on the walls and the elegant, bas-relief sculptures looked as if the artists had just finished their work yesterday.

And to her utter shock, it was a temple dedicated to sexual desire. Everywhere she looked, it was to see men and women depicted in the act of lovemaking. Even in a culture that was refreshingly open about sex, the effect was startling. Here, a woman knelt astride a man, his erect phallus clearly penetrating her groin. Here, a pair of nubile young maidens kissed ardently. Here, a man lowered his face between a young woman's thighs, her pleased smile telling the entire world of her pleasure. Here, a scene of pastoral beauty, with a well-

built young man embracing his lover, who was naked from the waist up. The stiff buds of her nipples made her desire obvious.

All this, and a dozen more, until Zahira's face was burning.

Something moved at her feet, and she jerked away, nearly dropping her phone. With a sigh of relief she saw that it was just the light reflecting off a pool of water. The basin that held it was the size of a large bathtub. But strangely, it gave off none of the stale, stagnant odor that she would have expected.

And water? Here, in the desert? Where they didn't measure yearly rainfall in inches, but in millimeters?

A spring. And with that realization, one mystery was resolved. And maybe more. Zahira smiled, imagining Hatshepsut, that clever, canny woman, using every weapon that came to hand to consolidate her rule. Somehow, she had learned about the spring, a rare resource in a land where water was life. Learned about it, and then used it as a symbol of her rule, building a temple devoted to sexual fertility on the spot, the spring to be set aside for the use of her holy priestesses.

No wonder her son tried to erase her from history, she thought, holding the light up high and examining the paintings and carvings again. They were absolutely exquisite. In none of them were the women in the classically subservient poses that was standard for this era of Egyptian art. *She wasn't just a radical. She was a* ***revolutionary****. She wanted women to be on equal terms with men, just as she was.*

Zahira brushed her fingers across the carving where the man was pleasing his lover with his mouth. The pale yellow stone seemed to be on the verge of springing to life, where the woman would cry out with the joy of her climax.

"Mom? You still down there?"

"No, Chris," she called back, irritated at the interruption. "There's actually a teleport machine that the ancient aliens left behind and I've been replaced by an evil duplicate."

"I've got the rope," he replied, ignoring her sarcasm. "Just give me a couple of minutes, okay?"

"Fine." She walked around the temple, trying to get a feel for its dimensions. This wasn't going to be a couple weeks' work, that she could tell. This might be the find of a lifetime. Her mind burned, imagining the size of the crew she and Gonzalo would have to recruit to restore this place. Or maybe she could get the Egyptian government to front some of the cost. God knew they could use the tourist money. And something this...*salacious*...was sure to be a huge draw, once they had pulled all the data out that they could.

Lost in her thoughts, she nearly walked into the altar. A single block of golden sandstone, it sat waist-high, directly in front of the pool.

This is where the priestesses worshipped. She could imagine them, clad in finery, lit by the sun that danced on the blue waters of the spring.

And there, on the altar, a single chain, wrought of heavy gold links, as clean and shining as if its owner had set it down mere minutes ago, instead of millennia.

Zahira picked it up. A medallion dangled from one end. Made of gold or bronze, a single flawless ruby was set in the center.

Worship me.

It was a whisper in her mind. A tiny breeze that stirred the air of that dark, shadowed room. A call that could not be denied. Without even thinking about it, Zahira undid the top two buttons of her blouse and lifted the chain over her head.

The instant the metal touched the skin between her breasts, she fell over in a dead faint.

"Mom! Mom! Wake up! Mom?"

Zahira blinked her eyes. Chris' panicked face was overhead, and his hand was shaking her shoulder. She winced as his fingers bit deep into her skin.

"Ouch!" She shoved the hand away. "I'm awake, all right?" She rubbed her shoulder. "That hurt."

Chris sat back on his heels. "Right. I call and you don't answer. I come down here and find you unconscious. And I'm the bad guy?" he scowled.

~A rude youth. But comely. Perhaps he can be trained?~

She blinked at the unfamiliar voice. It didn't sound like hers did when she talked to herself.

"I'm sorry, Chris." She apologized. With a start, she realized that her blouse was still undone and that her son was staring at her cleavage. Turning her back, she quickly did up the buttons, hiding the medallion. "Maybe there is some bad air down here. That could be why I passed out."

"Then we better get out of here as soon as we can." Her son shone his flashlight over the walls and whistled. "Nice."

"Get your mind out of the gutter," she replied, using his shoulder to lever herself to her feet. The room briefly spun, and she closed her eyes, fighting for balance. Her head...didn't feel right. It felt...stuffed, full, the way it did when she had a nasty head-cold.

~My apologies, my handmaiden. I will attempt to make my presence less...intrusive.~

The sensation receded. Zahira knelt by the pool, and took a quick drink, cupping her hands to bring the cool, sweet water to her mouth. "How did you get down here?" she asked Chris.

"On my butt, at about thirty miles an hour," he replied with a grin, his good humor restored. He pointed at a rope hanging out of the entrance. "I tied the other end to the bumper of one of the trucks." He waved with a hand. "Ladies first."

"You just want to look at my rear end on the way out," she laughed, and he flushed, shuffling his feet and looking like a middle-school kid who had been caught looking at a dirty movie.

*~When we should obviously be exploring the gifts that the gods bestowed upon **him,** instead. What strange garments you have! Do your men no longer wear the shendyt, the kilt? And why not? It certainly made lovemaking more convenient when all you had to do was lift the hem and...~*

Zahira shook her head as she crawled up the tunnel, one hand gripping the rope, as if she could rattle loose that dark, wicked voice, which observed everything with a wry, sardonic sensuality completely at odds with her normal thoughts.

Emerging into the evening sunlight was like being born again. She stood at the lip of the shaft, her chest heaving as her lungs fought for air.

Trying to concentrate on something else, she bent down and investigated the hole in the ground. It really was very clever, she thought. The shaft must have been built as an escape hatch for the priestesses in case of war or a raid on the temple. A counterweighted stone covered the entrance, only opening when someone stood on the correct spot, as she had.

Lucky for me. Otherwise, we might have spent weeks trying to find the main entrance under all that crap. Now I can still do work inside while everyone else is tossing dirt over the side of the cliff.

Chris emerged, coiling the end of the rope on his arm. "Well, that was interesting," he said. He squinted at her. "Are you all right, Mom? You still look a little...shaky."

She nodded. "I think I need to lie down," she whispered.

In an instant, he had her arm, steadying her as he guided her across the top of the bluff. All gods be thanked, the heat was finally starting to fade as the sun sank behind the western hills. But it was probably still over ninety degrees. The back of her blouse was stuck to her skin,

and sweat dripped between her breasts. The very skin of her scalp seemed to be on fire.

"Here." He handed her into the tent. "Lie down and rest. I'll start getting supper ready."

She lay down, her head swimming. "Call Sabah, too, will you?" she asked weakly. "I want to find out how the professor is doing. And if she's planning on coming back tonight."

"Will do," he nodded, and zipped the tent flap shut behind him.

Zahira closed her eyes and toed off her shoes. Despite the awning which was slung over the row of tents in an effort to shade them from the worst of the heat, it was stifling and breathless inside. With an effort, she tugged off her heavy, sweat-soaked slacks and dropped them to the ground beside the cot.

~*Much better.*~ The mysterious voice was approving.

Zahira's brow furrowed as she stared up at the ceiling. The roof of the tent moved in tiny eddies of wind.

"All right," she said quietly, hoping Chris couldn't hear her.

"Who are you? And what are you doing in my head?

Chapter 4

Chris pulled out his cell phone as he walked toward the main supply tent. This had definitely been a day to remember. Between the professor's broken leg, his mother's amazing threat of violence when their porters revolted, and the incredible discovery of the entrance to the temple, this was one for the books.

He just hoped his mother was all right. With Sabah, the professor, and everyone else gone, it was his job to protect her. Sure, Zahira had more experience in dealing with restless natives and corrupt government officials than he ever would. But when all was said and done, she was still his mother.

His call to Sabah went straight to voice mail, which wasn't surprising. Squinting, he turned and looked out across the valley. But even the dust of their passage was long gone. Instead, he typed a quick text message to her. *Hey. Things got **really** crazy after you guys left. Give me a call as soon as you can, all right?*

That job done, he started getting the campsite ready for the evening. This far away from the city, with no electricity it was going to be pitch-black as soon as the sun went down, so he lit a pair of kerosene lanterns, hanging them from hooks so that the area would have some light. After that, he washed up, using water sparingly, and started fixing supper.

The evening was too warm for him to even think about making a hot meal, though they did have a couple of portable propane-powered stoves. But there was bread and cheese and sausage for sandwiches, and a large selection of fresh fruit and vegetables. He hummed to himself as he chopped and sliced. The repetitive motions were soothing, especially after the craziness they had all just gone through. Five days ago he had been in New York City and looking forward to summer break. Now he was on a hilltop mesa outside of Luxor, near a temple dedicated to the worship of an Egyptian pharaoh who had been dead for over three thousand years.

And what a temple! Chris wasn't an expert like his mother was. But when he and Sabah were younger, their parents had dragged the two of them across half of the Middle East. And he had never seen anything like the artwork on the walls of the temple before. From the way his mother had been blushing, he didn't think she had either.

Maybe it was the equivalent of Pornhub, back in the day, he snickered, setting sliced apples, carrots, radishes and a bunch of grapes on a platter. *Guys who weren't getting any ancient Egyptian nookie could come out to the temple, see some naked tits, and have something they could tell their friends about when they went back to work the next day.*

What that job might actually be, he wasn't certain. But he was pretty sure that it wouldn't be any fun.

Maybe cutting stone blocks out of the side of a cliff using a fishbone, or something.

His phone rang, and he sat down at the table. "This is Chris."

"Chris!" His sister's voice was profoundly irritated. "What the hell is going on out there? The other three porters passed us when we were barely halfway back to town, honking their horn and screaming at poor Achmed. He bailed on us as soon as we got to the hospital. Said he needed to use the bathroom, and then he disappeared. At least he left us the damn keys to the SUV."

Chris laughed shortly. "He was probably afraid that we'd report the car stolen to the cops. They don't exactly have a warm and cuddly prison system around here, you know." Speaking quickly, he explained how the other men had tried to convince their mother that they should leave the site, considering it cursed, and how the mood had gotten ugly when Zahira had refused. Although he left out the bit where she had hinted that she thought the men might be considering rape, the parts he did tell her had his sister sputtering in fury by the time he was done.

"Those assholes," she seethed through the staticky connection. "So it's just you and Mom up there?"

"Yeah, he said. "But get this." And then he proceeded to tell the story of how they had inadvertently discovered the entrance to a temple that was seemingly devoted to sex, and how he had slid down the chute with the end of a rope in one hand to find his mother unconscious and curled in a ball at the base of the altar with a strange gold necklace around her neck. A necklace, he had noticed, that she didn't seem to want him to know that she was wearing.

"She can't be thinking of stealing it, can she?" he finished.

"Mom?" Sabah scoffed. "No way. Even if she was the kind of skeev who would try to smuggle an artifact out of the country, she's too smart to try. Remember the way the officials would go through our luggage every time we went home?

"Don't worry about it, Chris. She probably just wanted to try it on. There's nothing wrong with that. I bet she felt like Indiana Jones when she found it."

"Da-da-da-daaaah, dah-da-daaaaaa." Chris sang a bit of the theme music, and his sister laughed.

Though, to be honest, Mom looks a lot more like Lara Croft than Harrison Ford. Thank God. She's even got the gun. Though she has smaller boobs.

"So how is the professor doing?" he asked, belatedly remembering the reason his sister had been forced to go back to Luxor. "Is he going to be okay?"

"He's fine. He's got a broken leg, just like Mom said. I'm not sure if they're going to release him tonight or keep him around for a day or two. When I find out I'll let you know."

"Where are you going to stay?"

"I've got enough cash for a hotel room for a couple of nights. And my credit and debit cards." Through the phone, Chris could almost *hear* his sister's grin. "Or maybe I'll take the professor up on his marriage offer. I bet he hasn't forgotten how to show a girl a good time."

"Boy, you're something." He shook his head with a rueful smile. "All right. Let us know when you know what the plan is, all right? And keep us in the loop about the professor. I know Mom is just aching to tell someone about all this stuff, but most of it would go right over my head if she tried to explain it to me."

"Will do. I'm going to try to find something to eat. But I'll give you guys a shout before I go to bed tonight. You guys take care out there. I'll be thinking about you when I'm in my nice, clean, air-conditioned hotel room."

"I hate you."

"No you don't."

"No," he sighed. "I don't. See you soon. Love you."

"Love you back. Bye."

"Bye." His stomach gurgled as he hung up the phone. It was high time to eat, he decided. Quietly, in case his mother was asleep, he walked over to her tent.

The last light of sunset was bleeding out of the sky, gilding the white cloth of the tent in red and gold. Some of the light shone through, making her skin glow.

Not just her skin, Chris thought, as he froze in place, one hand raised to pull the tent-flap aside.

On the flesh of her long, brown legs.

On the ripe mounds of her breasts.

On the sweet curves of her buttocks.

And on her fingers, which were rubbing in slow, sensual circles on her groin, her soft purrs of pleasure easily carrying to where he stood, numb with shock.

Holy fuck. My mom is masturbating!

And it's hot as fuck!

~How long have I been asleep, my priestess?~

"I don't know," Zahira answered, pitching her voice low, so Chris couldn't hear. The last thing she needed was for her son to hear her talking to invisible voices. "Because I don't know when you fell asleep. Who *are* you? And how did you get in my head?"

~You can hear me because you are wearing the necklace and you are of the bloodline of the priestesses of Hatshepsut. Otherwise you would be deaf to me.

~As for who I am, I think you have already guessed. Now.~ The voice hardened. *~How long?~*

Zahira opted for brutal honesty. "If you are not merely a phantom of my imagination, my lady pharaoh, your reign ended thirty-five centuries ago."

~Thirty-five...~ Her mind-voice trailed off, and Zahira was filled with a sense of terrible loss. *~The gods, it seems, have a sense of humor. I thought I was so clever. That I could escape mortality by having my soul, my* ka*, bound to an object in the mortal realm. Anubis would never have the chance to weigh my soul. And I could still experience the joys of love and desire through my priestesses. Tell me,~* she asked, her tone sharpening hungrily. *~Have you a husband? A mate?~*

No.

~Then we shall have to find you one. How about the young man I saw earlier? So tall! Is the rest of him as...impressive?~

He's my son!

~So? That just makes it more enjoyable,~ Hatshepsut purred. *~What better way for a man to please his mother than in the bedchamber? We are priestesses and royalty, sweet Zahira. There are no taboos for the likes of us. We can do as we wish, and it is not proper that we sully our bloodlines with those of other mortals. My husband was my own brother, though he was born to a lesser wife than my own noble mother. I wish I had born a son of my own body. Then perhaps I could have put aside my brother's child and created a dynasty that would have been worthy of my name.*

~But Thutmose disapproved of my ambition. And of my...appetites. I don't know why. Desire is a gift of the gods, and one I explored to the fullest. Men or women, it mattered not to me. But even in a court not known for its restraint, I was considered...extreme.

~I thought I would be safe. How could he have known that I intended to cheat death? Perhaps he didn't. Perhaps he simply didn't want to leave any evidence of his aunt's unnatural lusts. One day soldiers came to the temple and ordered the priestesses to leave. I was sure they would come back

someday. But they never did. Eventually, I slept. Until today, when you woke me.

~And now that I am awake, I intend to enjoy myself again. With your willing cooperation, of course.~

With a start, Zahira realized that her hand, without her intending it, had moved between her legs.

~*So long,*~ Hatshepsut whispered. ~*Let me feel again, sweet Zahira.*~

She jerked her hand away, her belly shaking. "This is madness," she whispered.

~Is it madness to walk a path of pleasure? This harms no one. And gives us both joy. We are female. We are woman. How long has it been since you lived for yourself, my handmaiden?~

Her words were hypnotizing. For a moment, a vision swam in her eyes. A dark-skinned woman, middle-aged or a few years older, her face handsome rather than beautiful. Black hair, tightly coiled, hung to her bare shoulders.

But it was her eyes that caught her. Black as coals, they blazed in that haughty face. Blazed with a wanton, carnal hunger. A hunger that did not make excuses. A hunger that she obviously considered no less than a divine birthright.

~What is the harm, my child? How long has it been since you have let yourself truly feel the pleasure you deserve as a woman? No mate, no husband, no lover, nothing but your own hands to pleasure you? What kind of life is that? Trust me when I tell you this. Life is short. And when the cup of desire comes to your place at the table, only a fool would let it pass by.~

Zahira closed her eyes, tormented. But it was too hard to resist. Sitting up, she stripped off her blouse and bra, then lay down, slipping her panties down her legs to lay in a moist heap of satin on the floor of the tent.

Oh. When she touched herself, her fingers tentative, she didn't know whether the whisper of delight came from her own lips or

Hatshepsut's mind-voice. But the feeling of her nether-lips under her fingers was somehow more arousing than it had been in a very long time. For months, if not years, masturbation had been almost a chore. Something she did when it was late at night and she wasn't quite ready to go to bed. A jilling-off session could pass the time and relax her enough to go to sleep. But it wasn't as if she made a production out of it, either, like some of her girlfriends. No candles or incense, no bath-oils or perfume. Just a book and her own fingers or maybe a vibrator.

And her body was responding. Far more quickly and strongly than she was used to. Almost, it seemed, she was a teenager again. Or during those first few happy years with Greg, when neither of them could get enough of each other and they used any excuse to tumble into bed for an hour or two. The sweltering heat of the tent was not the only thing to blame for the dampness between her legs. It was not sweat that slicked her labia, but pure arousal.

~*Your customs are really quite strange,*~ Hatshepsut commented from her seat in the back of Zahira's mind. ~*You do not shave your head, but you have hardly any hair down here.*~ Fingers explored the rise of her mons, and the small strip of pubic hair that she allowed. ~*Are you too poor to purchase a wig? I can show you hidden treasures that will make you as wealthy as any woman in the kingdom.*~

*I am **not** shaving my head,* Zahira snapped. *Things have changed, my lady. People of this time do not fear lice. So there is no need to scrape our skulls bald.*

~*You are quite pert, for a commoner.*~

If you don't like it, I can take the necklace off and leave you on the altar, Zahira retorted. *Or maybe just leave you in a display case in a museum. Good luck finding anyone who will listen to you then.*

Her only answer was a grudging silence, and Zahira allowed herself to relax for the first time since she had awoken in the temple, with Chris' face hovering worriedly over her.

My son. As her fingers danced across her labia, she turned to the side, lifting her leg to give her fingers a better angle on the narrow, uncomfortable cot. He was so handsome, a true son of Egypt, not a pale, pinch-faced academic like her husband had been. Chris had the body of an athlete - tall, long-legged, and lean-waisted, with a strong chest and shoulders that were beginning to fill out as he reached maturity.

Mature. And virile. She moaned, her fingers seeking out the sweat-slickened flesh of her breasts. Her nipples were achingly sensitive, and she toyed with them in turn, teasing them into a stiff rigidity that made her cleft grow even wetter. Chris would be able to plow her furrow, fill her with his strong male seed. Her own fertility would waken in response to his call. Together, they would create new life where all had been barren. Yes. Perhaps even tonight. She panted, imagining his face over hers as he labored, his shaft filling her channel.

Zahira never knew why she chose to open her eyes just then. Perhaps it was fate. Or perhaps Hatshepsut, with her otherworldly senses, was able to feel his presence. But when she opened her lust-glazed eyes, it was to see Chris standing just outside the flap of the tent, one hand frozen in the air.

Her breath caught, but she gave no other sign that she knew her son was out there. Eyes barely cracked open, she watched him as she continued to masturbate. She was close now, the muscles of her belly trembling in anticipation of her climax.

And Zahira would have had to be blind to miss the bulge in her son's pants. It almost seemed to throb in her sight, an imprisoned treasure that wanted only a word to bring out into the light. Chris stared at her, his eyes wide, his fingers twitching. He almost seemed to lean towards her, as if it would only take the smallest nudge for him to stumble into the tent.

~His mind is fighting it. But his body has already made the decision. He wants you. Badly.~

His body would react the same way if it was any naked woman, Zahira retorted weakly. But even she did not believe it. And she could not hide the boiling tide of lust that threatened to unmoor her mind.

It would be so easy. All she had to do was let Chris know she was watching, and that she approved of his desire for her. A minute would see the deed done. He would walk in, take off those horrible, confining pants, and slide his long, thick cock deep into her. She would fuck him, fuck her son, her own flesh, and bind him to her with chains of desire. It would be won-

Two things happened at the same instant. Zahira's climax, long delayed, broke over her like lightning from a midnight sky, searing her senses. Clenching her thighs shut on her hand, she was barely able to keep her scream of release from breaking past her lips.

And her son's cell-phone rang. Jumping like a scalded cat, he whirled and took a spinning jump away from the tent, clearly terrified that she would hear and discover that he had been watching her masturbate.

~Well. That was completely unacceptable,~ Hatshepsut commented. Though Zahira thought that some of her waspish tone had been alleviated by the satisfaction of sharing her orgasm. *~We almost had him, and then he was scared away. What **was** that hellish noise, anyway?~*

Naked, sweating, and with her body singing with the results of her best climax in months, Zahira sank back onto her pallet. How was she going to be able to sum up thirty-five hundred years of progress for this woman?

"Mom?"

She snatched up her shirt and tried to cover herself. Luckily, Chris was hanging back, away from the tent, out of her eyeline. "Yes?" she answered, jumping off the cot and jerking on her panties.

"That was Sabah on the phone. She has some news."

"All right." She ran a hand through her hair, wishing for a comb. "I'll be right out."

~*What is that?*~ Hatshepsut's voice was almost a snarl as she picked up her clothes and began to dress.

This? It's called a bra. It...supports my breasts. So they don't sag as I get older.

Blank incomprehension met this statement. ~*And are your breasts in need of such support? They are of a goodly size, but not so large that they will hang down to your navel when you age. And think you, sweet Zahira. I am* Hatshepsut. *My power is small. But it is still mine. I will keep time's ravages from your body as long as I am able. I absolutely forbid you to chain yourself in such a hideous device. Your body is lovely. Do not hide it. Flaunt it.*~

But...

~*No.*~ The bra dropped from her fingers as her hands came up to cradle her breasts. Even now, in the aftermath of her climax, Zahira could not keep a soft, breathy moan from escaping her lips as she tugged at her nipples. ~*I will concede to your wisdom in some places. But not in this.*~

Fine. She picked up her discarded blouse. *I hope you can find some way of explaining this to Chris.*

~*Explain? We will explain nothing. Let him draw what conclusions he will. He is your son, and therefore under your command. His job is to obey.*~

Oh, boy. Do ***you*** *have a lot to learn.*

When Chris' cell phone rang, he didn't know whether to scream in frustration or be secretly grateful. The buzzing noise had nearly caused his rock-hard cock to erupt in his pants, so aroused he had been by the incredible sight of his mother masturbating.

It was wrong, he knew. Wrong and perverse and twisted. But somehow he could not force himself to look away. There was just something that was so incredibly arousing about watching a beautiful woman masturbate. Something that went beyond the sexual. Chris had never considered himself a romantic, but in his mind, there was nothing on Earth that was more lovely than the site of a naked woman enjoying her own body. The fact that it was his own mother fingering the lips of her pussy and squeezing her breasts just made the experience more perversely arousing.

Because Zahira *was* beautiful. The setting sun, shining through the white walls of the tent, cast everything in a bronze glow. It picked out the baby-fine hairs on her arms, brought out copper highlights in her night-black hair, and gilded the tips of her erect nipples in gold. His cock stiffened, growing achingly erect in a matter of seconds.

His mother turned, rolling to the side. Chris shifted, ready to bolt if her eyes opened. But what could he possibly say if he was discovered peeping on her like a dirty old man sneaking around the side of his neighbor's house?

"Ah." It was barely more than a whisper, a mere puff of breath between her lips. But it was hot and carnal and needy. Chris stared as a leg rose, exposing the place between his mother's legs. His mother's labia were thick and puffy, and unless his eyes were deceiving him, were slick with her female nectar.

Oh, fuck. His cock was hard as steel, straining at the zipper of his pants. It would only take a brush of his fingers to make him explode.

A brush of his fingers. Or, his traitorous imagination hinted, the feel of his mother's skin. He stared, enthralled, as a hand softly kneaded her breasts, dancing from one to another in a pattern that only she knew the rhythm to. Not huge, no. But more than enough to fill a lover's hands. More than enough for him to worship as he ought. He could imagine what her skin would taste like, lightly salted with sweat, and thick and tangy between her legs. He should go in right

now. Yes. Go in and bow before her, become her lover in truth, lower himself to his knees and worship at the altar of her holy, divine sex.

His weight was actually shifting forward, his cock guiding him, as if his mother's body was a magnet and his groin a piece of steel, when his phone rang. The trembling vibration made his shaft tickle pleasantly, but the sound dashed cold water across his fevered mind.

*What the fuck am I **doing?***

Chris jumped away, his leap turning into a scrambling, stumbling crawl as his feet went out from under him and he sprawled face-first on the ground.

Swearing under his breath, he turned over and dug his cell out of his pocket. "Yeah," he snapped.

"It's me," Sabah said.

"Yeah, I know it's you." Somehow he forced calm into his voice. "Who else would be calling me? What's up?"

"Well, they're going to hang on to the professor for tonight," his sister said. "But unless there's some sort of crazy complication, they'll release him tomorrow or the next day. But he's not going to be going anywhere for a couple of weeks, at least. I was in his room when he asked the doctor how soon he could come out to the dig, and the guy just stared at him and shook his head.

"So then he gave me a list of things a mile long to look for that I should give to Mom. I guess he thinks he's going to run things from his hospital bed or the hotel room. I told him he should go back to his apartment in Cairo, and he damn near bit my head off."

"What?"

"Oh, he's just cranky and hopped on painkillers, is all. And when he wasn't hitting on the nurses, he told me the worst joke," Sabah giggled. "Did you hear about the farmer who married a prostitute?"

"No," Chris said warily.

"Yeah." Sabah was snickering now. "She stole all his tools and ran off. So now the poor guy is completely hoeless."

"Oh, God."

"Right?" Chris knew that if Sabah was in front of him, she would have tears of laughter rolling down her cheeks.

"All right." He sat up, running his hand through his hair. He wrinkled his nose as he caught a whiff of his own smell. "So when are you going to be able to get back here? Tomorrow?"

"Maybe. Once they release Gonzalo, I'm going to help get him set up at a hotel. As soon as that's taken care of, I'll be heading out. Do you guys need me to pick up anything, since those creeps bailed on us?"

"A couple coolers full of ice and some soda would be nice," he suggested. "All we have here is water and juice."

"You got it. How's Mom?"

"Last I saw she was taking a nap," he lied.

"Good. You take care of her, hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," he drawled.

"And don't forget to...oh, crap. Here comes another doctor," his sister said disgustedly. "God, it's like I'm his mother or something. All I want is to get a decent meal and go to bed. I'll call you tomorrow, okay?"

"Sure. Be safe out there."

"You too, little brother. Bye."

"Bye." Chris cut the connection and sidled over to the short row of tents. "Mom?" he called out hesitantly.

"Yes?" his mother answered.

"That was Sabah on the phone. She has some news."

"All right. I'll be right out."

Thank God. Or whoever. Somehow it seemed that he had not been caught. Chris couldn't imagine how uncomfortable that conversation might have been.

By the time his mother came out, he was back at the table, setting out plates for their belated dinner.

"Thanks for taking care of this, honey," Zahira said, picking out some vegetables and loading her plate. "So what did your sister say?

"Well, Chris?" she added irritably when he didn't answer. "What's wrong with you, anyway?"

"You..." He waved at her blouse, which was completely unbuttoned. In the gleam of the kerosene lamp, he could see the inner swells of each of her breasts, and her flat, toned stomach. "Are you feeling okay, Mom? Your blouse isn't...you know."

"Chris," she replied wearily. "It's been a long day. I'm still jet-lagged, it's hot, I smell bad, and I'm fucking exhausted. So if I want to feel comfortable when I'm eating my supper, I'd appreciate it if you didn't bug me about it, okay?"

"Sorry," he muttered. "It's just...you never do this at home."

"At home we have air-conditioning," she replied with a shrug. The motion made the gold chain around her neck gleam, and struck hypnotizing sparks from the surface of the medallion, which was cradled between her breasts. The ruby stared at him like an accusing eye, able to read his thoughts. "Hey," she added, and he realized he was staring. "Your sister? The professor?"

"Sorry," he repeated, feeling like an idiot. As his mother listened, he repeated Sabah's information, including that Professor Escobar would be laid up and unable to come to the site for several days, if not weeks.

"Good," she nodded. "The last thing we need is for him to up here. We'd spend more time worrying about him than actually working. Once he's able to travel, I'll browbeat him into going home. He can't

do anyone any good from a hotel room. He can sit in his apartment and we'll send him all the information we find." She tapped her chin with her finger, her eyes far away. "In fact, it might just work out for the better. Gonzalo can handle everything on the logistical side of things, and also start applying for permits from the Egyptian government." She grimaced. "Though some of the people in the antiquities department aren't much better than thieves with university degrees."

Chris shrugged as he ate. With sunset had come a respite from the day's baking heat. This time of year, it never actually got cold in the desert. But now, at least, the temperature was tolerable. With the cooler air, his appetite returned, and he found himself eating hungrily. Two sausage and cheese sandwiches, fruit and veggies, and cups of warm juice. It wasn't a gourmet meal, but when he pushed his plate away, his stomach felt comfortingly full.

Zahira, on the other hand, ate slowly, taking long pauses between bites. At times, her eyes went hazy and distant, and Chris knew that she was thinking about tomorrow's schedule.

He tilted his head back, looking up at the night sky. The city haze of Luxor was a mere smudge on the horizon, a soft glitter of winking lights. But above, the sky was perfectly black, lit with stars like jewels. Without the fog of pollution to dim them, they shone hard and clear. Ruby, topaz, sapphire, and amethyst. Far to the east, the moon, only a day or so past full, was rising above the Nile, casting a sheen like quicksilver on the distant thread of the river.

"It's beautiful up here," he said quietly, and surprised himself by meaning it.

His mother glanced at him, a sardonic smile lifting one corner of his mouth. "Don't tell me that you're getting fond of your mother-country, Chris. I won't believe it."

"Well, no," he admitted. "I'm American. I'm from New Yawk," he added, emphasizing his accent. "And this isn't really my country.

Any more than it's yours. I mean, you were born in America, too, right?"

"True. Though...I don't know. I feel a connection." She tapped her sternum, between her breasts. "Deep inside. God only knows how long my family had lived in Egypt before your grandparents left. How many generations."

Chris nodded, careful not to stare at his mother's body. All through the meal, her bare flesh had been a constant, tempting presence. Though he knew it was wrong, he had hoped for a sudden breeze to flip the thin layer of cloth aside and reveal Zahira's chest.

*And then what, you idiot? What would you do? Nothing, that's what. If you even **tried** to touch her, there wouldn't be enough of you left to make into fertilizer. Old ladies would scare their kids at night with stories about what mom and Sabah did to you if you tried to seduce your own mother.*

Zahira yawned and stretched, the motion accentuating her lovely chest. For a single, heart-stopping second, Chris thought that he could see the twin impress of a pair of erect nipples before they were hidden again by the natural folds of the blouse.

"Well, I'm done for tonight. I'm going to bed." His mother smiled deeply, holding his eyes just a fraction of a second longer than necessary. "Can you clean up?"

He nodded, not trusting his tongue.

"Good." She stood and leaned down, brushing his cheek with her lips. They were cool and soft, and Chris was wracked by a sudden shudder of longing. "I'll take care of things tomorrow," she whispered in his ear. "It's not right that you have to do all the work, just because I had a silly little fainting spell this afternoon."

"I don't mind," he stammered. Was his mother actually...teasing him? Did she know how the feel of her breath in his ear, soft and hot, made his groin ache with unbearable, taboo lust? Or was she completely oblivious to the way her gorgeous body was making him burn? "You

know how men are," he joked feebly. "Strong backs and weak minds."

She hugged him around the shoulders, her breast pressing into his side. "Don't you believe it," Zahira said. "No son of mine is stupid." She ruffled his hair, something she hadn't done since he was a kid, and kissed him again before straightening. "I'll see you tomorrow, all right?"

"Unless a pack of hyenas comes up here and drags me off, I'm not going anywhere."

"Good." A deep smile dimpled her cheeks. "I've got plans for tomorrow."

Chapter 5

~*What are you doing?*~ Hatshepsut raged as Zahira walked across the camp to her tent. ~*He's there. He's right there! If you weren't such a spineless, craven* ***coward****, his mouth could be between our legs right now!*~

All right, Zahira thought as she entered her tent. *The gloves are coming off. No more Miss Nice Archeologist. I'm going Lara Croft on this bitch's ass.*

It really was a pity that she didn't have a door to slam. But she made up for it by closing her eyes, fighting with weapons she didn't know she had until Hatshepsut's face floated up in her mind's eye.

You listen to me, my queen, she snapped, as the older woman's eyes went wide with astonishment. *And you listen good. Maybe this hasn't occurred to you. But you are a* ***guest*** *in my body. I didn't invite you in. I didn't ask for you. And if you don't start treating me with some respect, I'll take this damn necklace off and toss it in the darkest, deepest hole in the Western Desert I can find.*

And this isn't ***our*** *body. It's mine. You don't get to make the decisions about who I do or do not choose to take to my bed. You can advise. You can suggest. Hell, if you actually have some magic and aren't completely full of shit, you*

can use it on me. I wouldn't mind having a great set of tits for the rest of my life.

~You...you...~

Oh, Zahira was on a roll now. She hadn't lost it like this since she had kicked Greg out of the apartment. Not even when Sabah had come home from her freshman year of college with a skanky boyfriend, a tattoo, and a B-minus GPA. She hated to lose her temper, hated to shout, hated the shrill, screechy, fishwife sound of her raised voice, like one of her mother's innumerable female friends, who hated the twenty-first century and everything in it. But she would be damned if she would let this refugee from the Bronze Age run her life.

Right. Me. Because no matter how bad-ass you were back when wheels were a shiny new invention, right now you are in charge of Jack and shit. And Jack just left town.

A sense of puzzled confusion. *~I beg your pardon. What?~*

What I mean, she snarled, *is that any choices about my lovers will be decided by myself. Not you. Though,* she added, throwing a sop to the ex-pharaoh, *I wouldn't mind some advice, once in a while. But I am not taking Chris to bed tonight.~*

~No matter how much you actually agree that your son has a certain...physical charm?~

Zahira snorted laughter. *Yes. Even that.*

~So what is the problem, my priestess?~ Hatshepsut's spirit seemed honestly confused. *~You want him. He wants you. What could be simpler than letting your desires have their way?~*

*Because people do not **do** that. Not anymore. Women do not...copulate...with their sons. If I do, and I am discovered, I will be shunned, cast out, unable to earn a living and care for my children.*

~Ah, yes. That is a problem. The solution, it occurs to me, is quite simple.~

Right. Even on short acquaintance, Zahira was fairly sure that any 'simple' solution that Hatshepsut suggested was quite likely to be obscene at best.

The woman was a walking contradiction. At least, she would be, if she had a body. On one side was the calculating intellect of a woman who had seized power from her adopted son and ruled Egypt as its uncontested ruler for the better part of thirty years. On the other was a constantly simmering sexual arousal that reminded her of nothing so much than how she had felt herself when she had thrown off the bonds of her parents' conservative household and left for college. Her body had craved one thing, constantly, and didn't give a damn about anything else.

~Well, of course. You are of the bloodline of my priestesses, after all. And they would have hardly chosen to pledge their service to me if they didn't agree to the tenets of my worship.~

Spare me. All through supper, Hatshepsut had been torn between avid curiosity and a terror that was almost palpable. Every morsel of food was closely inspected. Zahira had never thought that she would have to explain the concept of a *sandwich* to anyone, let alone the origins of carrots or apples. The only items which had been met with unqualified acceptance were bread, cheese, and surprisingly, radishes. Hatshepsut's spirit had been impressed with the quality of the thick brown bread, but had been bitterly disappointed when told they had neither beer nor wine, thinking juice a very poor substitute.

~Barely better than water,~ she sniped. *~And fit only for peasants.~*

Still, she had to admit that if *she* had found herself transported forward in time, she might have fared little better. It was almost as if she were living in an episode of 'Futurama,' and Hatshepsut was a latter-day Philip J. Fry, at once astounded and terrified by the world she found herself in.

And the one thing that she can control is sex. Well, that helps things make sense.

What was more disturbing, at least for Zahira's own peace of mind, was the way Hatshepsut's attitude seemed to be...infecting her. During the meal, she saw Chris through another pair of eyes. A pair of eyes that saw her son not as the baby that he had been, nor the child she had nursed through a dozen illnesses, or even the gawky, clumsy, gangling teenager with whom she had shared triumphs and disasters alike - everything from high-school breakups to his college acceptance letters.

Hatshepsut saw Chris as a man. And now, so did Zahira. A man with an attractive body and a pleasant, easy-going attitude which was almost instinctively comforting. Almost against her will, she found herself undressing him during the meal, her loins wet and nipples tingling, even though his body held no mysteries for her, who had known him since the minute of his birth.

Well, ***almost*** *no mysteries,* she amended, while Hatshepsut snickered. Zahira wasn't a sexual prude, unlike her mother. Knowing that bitter old woman, sometimes she wondered how she and her brothers had even been conceived. But she had never been the sort of person who was comfortable with casual nudity, either. She probably hadn't seen her son naked since he was seven or eight years old.

~*A wasted opportunity, to be sure,*~ the pharaoh sniffed.

Enough, she decided. *This decision will be mine. You don't like it, you go in the dumpster.*

~*The what?*~ But Hatshepsut quailed when Zahira formed the image of a rusty, stinking dumpster in her head, the lid gaping like a hungry mouth. ~*Very well,*~ she conceded, her mind-voice grudging. ~*It's your choice. But if you fall and break your neck tomorrow without having tasted that lovely boy's cock, I hope you feel like a fool!*~

Chris woke early the next morning, clawing his way out of an uneasy sleep plagued by dreams where his mother, dressed in her skin and nothing else, had invited him into her tent, which by some benign, mysterious magic, had been transformed into something that

resembled a harem as imagined by a Hollywood script-writer on acid.

After shaking out his shoes to make sure no murderous insects had crept in during the night, he gathered up a precious roll of toilet paper and visited the latrine. The flap of Zahira's tent was still closed when he came back, though there were some stirring noises coming from inside.

My turn again, I guess. He washed his hands carefully, the routine drilled into his head by the time he was nine years old, then began to get breakfast ready. When his mother emerged from the tent, heavy-lidded and yawning like a cavern, he already had one of the portable stoves lit and water ready to boil.

"What would you like, Mom?" he asked. "Juice? Tea? Coffee?"

She pointed at the trench, well downwind of their tents. "The bathroom."

"Here." He tossed her the roll of toilet paper. "It's the good stuff," he grinned. "Two-ply."

"Oh, bless you." Zahira rubbed her eyes. "Back when your father and I were doing work at Tanis, I would have gotten into a knife-fight just so I could wipe my ass with something nice and soft."

"Ooo-kay."

His mother blushed, her skin darkening even in the early morning shadows. "I'll have something ready when you get back," Chris said, trying to save her from embarrassment. "Would you like coffee or tea?"

"Tea," she said, then walked quickly away. "Oh," she added, looking over her shoulder. "If you hear from your sister, could you ask her to bring some things with her? Food, mostly. Dates, figs, that sort of thing? And I would love to have some good Egyptian honey. That would be nice on the bread in the morning."

Chris blinked. "Sure."

"Cool." She shifted her weight, and smiled. "Back in a few."

He filled a pot with water and set it on the stove to boil. By the time his mother got back, wiping her hands on a clean towel, the tea was ready. He poured it into a pair of mugs, then set out bread and fruit for breakfast.

"It's crazy," Zahira said, cradling the mug in her hands and taking a deep sip, "how I probably eat healthier out here than I do at home. No cruddy microwave meals, no junk food."

"No dorm food," Chris nodded, though he had already signed a lease with two friends to move into an apartment when the next school year started. "So what's the plan for today?" he asked.

"Ugh. I can't think yet. Let me get some caffeine into my bloodstream, okay Chris?" she begged.

"Fine." He recalled, with amusement, that his mother had never been remotely what might be called a morning person, to the point that when she signed her new contract with NYU, one of the provisions was that she not be required to teach any courses before ten AM. "I guess there's no one watching to make sure we're working." He popped a grape into his mouth. "We can just laze around here in the sun all day and cash a check at five, right?"

"Chris." Zahira pushed back her hair, fixing him with an irritated stare. "You're my son and I love you. But could you please shut up for a few minutes?"

He grinned back at her, undismayed. "All right."

For a few minutes, silence reigned, broken only by the soft sigh of the breeze rippling the fabric of the tents, and the occasional harsh cry of a hawk high overhead. It was a little cooler today, Chris thought, though he was sure it would be unbearable later. He turned on his phone, making a mental note to keep track of the battery and charge it up with the car-adapter later. Sabah had sent him a text, he

discovered, and he shook his head and chuckled when it turned out to be as a picture of her, wrapped in a bathrobe, with wet hair and the gleaming expanse of a hotel bathroom behind her.

"What's funny?" Zahirah asked.

"Your horrible daughter was taunting me with a picture of a bathroom, and reminding me that she was living in civilization with running water and air conditioning." He mimed a sniff at his armpit, and shuddered. "Meanwhile, pretty soon I'm going to smell so bad that I'll be able to knock over a hippo at thirty feet."

His mother cocked her head to one side. "There's no reason we can't have a bath." She sighed. "And I know what you mean. I would love to feel *clean*."

"A bath? Seriously? How? Did the professor get us one of those collapsible canvas tubs?" He frowned. "We probably don't have enough water to spare, though."

"Not up here. Down in the temple. Didn't you see the pool down there yesterday?"

He shrugged. "I was more worried about you. And would it be...right...for us to take a bath there? I mean, it's a temple, right? I'm not going to go into the Vatican and drink out of the baptismal font. And I bet that the professor would pitch a fit if he found it that we were doing this sort of thing."

"The professor isn't here. And right now, I'm making the rules. And I'm hot and smelly and filthy and I want to be clean."

She stood up, her mug in her hand. "That settles it. We're taking baths first thing. That spring is a gift. We'd be silly to waste it."

She drank down her tea and strode away to the supply tent. In only a couple of minutes she was back, towels draped over one arm and a small cloth bag in her other hand. "Well," she asked, frowning at him impatiently. "Let's go!"

Chris blinked. "Together?" He tried to keep his voice from rising in a startled squeak.

"Well, of course together," Zahira replied in a voice that strove for reason. "What happens if there's still bad air down there and I pass out again? I could drown. We need to be there to watch over each other."

There seemed to be something wrong with that logic, but Chris wasn't brave enough to say so. He followed his mother over to the gaping hole in the ground, took a grip on the rope, and slithered down the passage behind her.

There was something oddly...*sexual*...about the entrance, he thought. Notwithstanding the erotic carvings to be found below, he wondered if it had occurred to his mother that the journey into the temple, by this route at least, almost resembled the path of a sperm into the womb.

Yes. Good way to convince her you're ***not*** *a pervert,* he thought. *Can you imagine saying that out loud?*

Once down into the temple itself, his mother quickly busied herself providing light to push away the clammy black darkness. Fat white candles were set out and lit around the rectangular pool, bathing the area in a warm yellow glow.

"Where do you suppose the water comes from?" Chris asked, squatting down to examine it. The water seemed higher than it had been the day before, trickling down stone channels and off into the darkness. "And where does it go?"

"At a guess, I would bet that there were quarters for the priestesses back there." Zahira waved a hand. "And that the people who lived here didn't waste a drop. Drinking, cooking, cleaning, washing, I bet that once we have a chance to study this place properly, we'll see how there was an entire cycle of how the water was used.

"As far as how it got here," she added, as she started to unbutton her blouse, "there are several groundwater oases in the area. This is probably another one. Small, yes. But large enough for a dozen or so people to live on, and whatever worshippers might visit."

Chris nodded, then turned his back. Behind him he could hear the faint rustle of clothes as his mother undressed.

"Chris?"

"Yeah?"

"Aren't you going to get undressed? It's going to be hard to take a bath with your clothes on."

He shrugged. "When you're done, yeah."

"Chris." Even with his back turned, he could sense the way his mother was rolling her eyes. "We're inside a temple in the middle of the desert. There's no one around for twenty miles in any direction. And I don't think that you've never seen a naked woman before." Her voice sharpened. "So can you stop acting silly and get undressed? The pool is big enough for two, and the more time we waste bathing, the less time I have to actually do what we came out here to do."

There was no arguing with his mother when she took that tone of voice. Sure, Chris could refuse, and then they would be locked in a battle of wills that would leave them both losers.

And there was also the shameful, sneaking desire. What he didn't want to admit even to himself. That he wanted to see his mother naked again.

So Chris kicked off his shoes and pulled his t-shirt up over his head. In less than a minute, his pants and socks had joined them on the floor.

"All right," he said, turning around and shoving his boxers down to his feet. "Have it your way."

"I intend to," his mother smiled.

Chris caught his breath. Candlelight shone on the curves of his mother's body, making her appear as if she had been gilded in gold leaf. Her black haired tumbled in waves around her shoulders and her chest. Thankfully, it covered her breasts. But there was no hiding the womanly cleft between her legs, or the rapt look in her eyes as she gazed deep into the waters of the pool.

With a slow, graceful motion, she stepped in. Water covered her leg to the shin. And then another, and the opposite leg was bathed to the knee.

"There's steps here," Zahira said happily. "Oh, that makes things easier. This must have been a ritual bathing pool. Think about it," she said, as she immersed herself completely. Standing, the water reached the bottom of her ribcage. "A person comes out here to worship. But before they can, they have to be shriven." Her voice went low, almost chanting. "Purified. Sanctified. Water has always been seen as a cleansing force in religion. They step out of the sacred pool and..."

"And what?" Chris asked, when the silence had become almost unbearable.

His mother smiled at him. "Well, that's what we are to find out, isn't it?" She held out a hand to him, water dripping off her fingers. "Come in, my child."

Luckily, by concentrating on his mother's voice, Chris had been able to keep his body's instinctive rection to a naked woman from occurring. As the warm water closed around his legs, his cock felt fat and heavy. But was not, thank every god in Egypt, erect. The flagstones of the pool were gritty under his feet, and he thought he could sense the faint pressure of water welling up between them. What a miracle it must have seemed. This gift of water in the desert.

Averting his eyes from his mother's naked chest, he began to scrub himself down, using soap from Zahira's bag. Part of him felt vaguely guilt about dirtying the waters of the pool. But the soap and grime

was quickly carried off in the channels, and pure clean water appeared from below to take its place.

"Ah, this is good," he sighed. There was something deeply, intensely satisfying about being *clean.*

"It sure is." His mother turned, pulling her hair over her shoulder so her back was bare. "Wash my back?"

"I..."

A cake of soap was slapped into his hand. "Just do it, Chris."

He pressed his lips together, but lathered up his hands and began to soap her back. Her skin was soft and warm, unlined by age. "Oh, that's good," she sighed. "A little higher, please? There's a spot that I can never quite reach. Yes. Right there." Her voice sank into a sigh, redolent of hedonistic pleasure.

To Chris' shame and mortification, he felt himself growing aroused. The feel of his mother's soap-covered skin under his fingers, the warm water lapping around his waist, the small purring sounds she made as he washed her, all made his body grow hot and tense. Unbidden, his cock stiffened, until the tip was poking above the surface of the water.

His eyes looked down. Even through the water, he could see the cleft of his mother's buttocks. And near there, he knew, was the place that could make him feel the greatest ecstasy a male could achieve. God, it was so tempting. Just inches away! He could rub himself against her, make her know how much he wanted her. What could possibly be more right, more *natural?*

His hands had stopped moving. With a gasp that was almost painful, he pulled them away from Zahira's waist and splashed water over himself, washing away the soap on his arms and chest.

"All done," he said. His voice was a hoarse croak.

"Not quite." The goddess in front of him moved to the side of the pool, uncapping a glass bottle. "Now the oil."

"Oil?"

"It's for my skin." She poured a healthy dollop into her palm and began to rub it into her front. The candlelight gleamed on her body. "Too hot, too dry out here. If I don't take care of myself, in a few days my skin will look like an old baseball glove." She held his eyes calmly as she began to massage her breasts. "And a woman needs to look beautiful, Chris."

He stared at her. His stomach was queasy with desire, his skin breaking out in goosebumps as his body warred with his mind.

"Oh, dear." A soft smile curled Zahira's lips as she looked down. "You're hard, Chris." She took a tiny step closer to him, water rippling around her waist. "For me?"

Hard? The word was meaningless. He wasn't just hard. He was rigid, aching with desire. He had never been more consumed with lust in his life. "Who else could it be?" he whispered.

"Who knows?" Very slowly, his mother reached out and clasped the stiff bar of his cock in her fingers. "You could have been thinking about an old girlfriend. A lover. Some sexy woman from the movies or television. Maybe even Sabah. Your sister is a lovely young woman, you know."

"I know." He jerked a nod, barely able to control his muscles as her fingers explored him with loving curiosity.

Closing his eyes, he gave in to his destiny. "It was you, Mom. You're so gorgeous, so sexy. And it's been a long time since I...you know. Had sex."

"You think I'm sexy?" He watched, disbelieving, as his mother's nipples peaked. "Oh, sweetie." Her grip on him tightened. "That makes me so happy. And you," she continued, her light, teasing voice belying the dark fire in her eyes, "are an extraordinarily handsome

young man. So tall." She stood on tiptoe, brushing his cheek with her lips. "So strong." Her other hand caressed the water-speckled hairs of his chest, then dipped to stroke his rear.

"It's been a long time for me, too," she whispered. "But this place..." She cast a look around at the erotic carvings on the wall, their forms half-revealed, half-shadowed by the wavering candlelight. "It makes me want to do things I've never done before. With people who I would never have done them. Like you."

He choked on a laugh. "Me?"

"You." Her hand moved to his chest, tracing an invisible pattern. "Chris, this might sound a little silly, but will you...worship me?

"I need a man," she continued as he stared. "But I don't just want sex. I could get that from almost anyone. I know I look good. But I want more. Need more." Her look turned inward, pensive. "I want to be treated as a woman should be. Where sex isn't something cold and impersonal. But a rite. A sacrament." Her eyes hooded as she stared at his erection. "Holy."

"Mom." He thought of and discarded a dozen answers. "I will do anything for you. You know that." He took her hand with shaking fingers. "And if it makes you happy, I'll do anything you want me to."

"Do you mean that?" Her voice was gentle, but her eyes were sharp. "Or is that just sweet-talk so you can get your dick wet?"

Chris snickered. "My dick is already wet. But," he said, somehow sensing that now was not the time for making jokes, "I'll do anything you want."

Dark fire smoldered in the depths of Zahira's eyes. "Anything?"

He nodded. "Anything."

She looked deep into his eyes, as if she were examining his soul. At last she nodded. "Very well. Hold still."

"What..." His voice trailed off as she set her fingers across his lips. With her other hand she reached out to pick up the glass bottle of oil.

"Be thou sanctified," she whispered as her fingers glided across his chest. The feel of the slick oil on his skin was pleasant, and his nose picked up a faint hint of cedar and citrus.

"Be thou blessed." A nudge of her shoulder moved him to the shallow end of the pool, and Chris gasped aloud as she anointed his shaft with oil. Her hands were tender, gentle, but he could sense the urgency beneath, the heady pleasure she took at his body's obvious arousal.

"Be thou mine," she murmured, and now her mouth was on him, her tongue darting out to taste the skin at the hollow of his throat, at the angle of his neck.

With a movement that was all womanly grace, she lifted herself out of the pool. Water sheeted down her body as she sat on the lip, clinging to the ends of her hair, the tips of her nipples, the curve of her hips.

Chris felt his mouth go dry with want. If he had been watching this on his laptop, his cock would have already been in his hand. "My God, Mom."

"Your goddess, you mean."

"Huh?"

"Never mind." She gave her head a quick, impatient shake, and spread her legs. "Come here, my child. And worship me. I want to feel your mouth on my nethers, to feel your tongue on my lips."

Oral sex. With my mother. In an abandoned temple. In Egypt. Sure. Why not? Chris fought a hysterical urge to break out into mad laughter. But the look in Zahira's eyes told him this was no joke.

So he put his hands on his mother's thighs, knelt on the floor of the pool, bent his head, and kissed the soft brown skin of her inner leg.

One kiss. And then another. Her flesh was firm, underlaid with a faint scent that could be the bathing-oil, or her own aroma, or the musk of her arousal. Opening his mouth, he began to sweep his tongue up and down her inner thigh, every stroke drawing him nearer her cleft. And when Zahira hitched and gasped above him, her body moving in slow, rippling waves, he moved to the other leg, repeating his caresses. Every time he neared her cleft, he backed away, teasing her with soft, open-mouth kisses that made his mother roll her cleft towards him.

"You dare," she gasped. One hand tangled in the hair at the back of his head, pulling him closer. "You are supposed to worship me, foolish boy, not torment me!"

Can't I do both? But in response to the grip on his hair, he moved closer and closer, until his lips were a hair's breadth away from his mother's pussy. The angle was awkward, but that was easily fixed. Chris slid his hands under Zahira's bottom, lifted her, and fastened his mouth on her hot, slick lips.

"Oh, fuck!"

As she teased and flirted with her son, Zahira found herself merging with Hatshepsut.

Or, perhaps, it would be better to say that their goals had become the same. The sight of Chris' strong young body inflamed senses and desires that she had thought long-dead. Or, at the very least, dormant. His body, his chiseled physique, and especially his rock-hard staff, rising from the water like a fantasy made flesh. Yes, he was her son. And they were committing incest. But that didn't seem important. Not when compared to the reality of his eager manhood. The long-dead pharaoh who was sharing her mind had practically drooled over her son, her demands that she seduce him diminishing to needy whimpers as she touched him. Zahira, in turn, had found herself taking command, using words that spilled easily from her lips, even as they sounded strange in her own ears.

But they seemed to have the desired effect. And when Chris set his mouth on her pussy, his strong tongue splitting her lips, the cry of pleasure which pierced the air of the temple came from one mouth but two minds.

~*Oh, he is skilled,* Hatshepsut sighed wantonly, as her son held her rear above the basin's stone lip. *I know women who would have paid gold to add him to their households. And when their husbands were away, he would have been summoned to please them in the bedchamber. 'Chris,*'~ she pondered. ~*Such a* ***dull*** *name. Why that, when your daughter's is so pleasing to the ear, as well as your own?*~

It was the name of his father's father, Zahira replied. *His family was of a different race, and it suited me to allow him to name his son after his own people.*

~*Hah.*~ Hatshepsut's voice was mildly irritated, though her habitual ill-temper was being swayed by her son's gentle assault on her pussy. ~*Twould have been better if you had set down your foot and reminded him whose will ruled in your home.*~

Hush. Zahira shivered happily as her son's tongue hit a particularly sensitive spot, and purred her pleasure. Carefully, she eased herself back until she was propped up on her elbows. *You're getting what you want. What we both want.*

~*I am.*~ Hatshepsut's voice chuckled, dark and replete. ~*Though I'm not satisfied yet.*~

Neither am I. Zahira stared down between her spread legs. Her son was an amazement. And not just with his skill at eating her pussy. Unlike some men (her husband, for one) he did not wrinkle up his nose in distaste at the task. Instead, he focused on her with a sort of single-minded devotion that was at once endearing and incredibly arousing. How long had it been, she thought, since someone had thought that pleasing her wasn't a chore, or something they had to do to in order to get laid themselves, but something rewarding in its own right? She closed her eyes, leaning back, concentrating on the

lovely feelings flowing through her. Chris' tongue was soft and gentle, and when he licked the button of her clit (and how nice it was that she didn't have to give him *directions*) her core trembled, sending spikes of pleasure through her body.

~We could have him now.~

No. By damn, she was going to enjoy this. The strength was ebbing out of her, along with any desire to do anything else but *feel.* She sprawled flat on her back, her thighs spread wide, shamelessly wanton, and her hands kneaded her breasts, her fingers tugging the turgid nubs of her nipples as she humped her mound slowly up into her son's face. She was molten, melting, all thought wiped from her mind before the force of her impending climax. The only thing that mattered now was cumming.

"Oh, Chris, Chris baby," she sighed. Why had she denied herself this for so long? Her son was young, and virile, and would please her for years to come. Between his prodigious endowment, and her own experience and skill, she could not imagine how her life could be any better.

~Beloved, are you...~

Yes, she sighed. The signs were there, flickering through her body like stripes on a highway. She closed her eyes, then opened them again, wanting to see her son's face when she came to her peak. "Yes, Chris," she whispered. Her voice echoed back from the stone walls. The sculptures on the walls seemed to open their arms, welcoming her into their erotic embrace. "I'm going to cum. Going to cum all *over* your sweet face."

Her heels began to drum rapidly on the stone lip of the basin. Her hips lifted, locked, then bucked upward wildly. Chris fought to keep his mouth on the folds of her pussy, his hands gripping her hips. And then with a hoarse keen, she *climaxed*, ripples of sensual, erotic joy spreading through her body like the circles from a stone cast into a pool. A gush of liquid burst from her channel, coating Chris' face,

and if she hadn't been caught in the transports of her orgasm, she would have giggled at the startled look on his face.

Slowly, how slowly, the tide of pleasure receded. Zahira stretched out on the cool stones, indolent as a sunbathing cat. The heat of her pussy was abated, but not quenched, and her breasts throbbed lazily, still eager for her lover's touch.

"Was that...did you..."

"It was," she smiled down at her son, still waist-deep in the bathing pool. "And I did." She stretched out her hand, wiggling her fingers in command. "Come out of there before you turn into a puny, wrinkly raisin."

He grinned and lifted himself out, water streaming down his thighs. Zahira was pleased to note that his long, thick erection had not subsided in the least. Though, unlike most men of her acquaintance, he seemed to have learned a measure of discipline. At the least, he didn't start humping away at her like a randy stallion.

"That was all right, wasn't it?" he asked, when he had sprawled out beside her. Zahira was happy to see that he had lost most of his earlier shyness.

She kissed him once. And then again, more lingeringly, her lips exploring his mouth. ~*Yes. He will do nicely. A firm mouth, and strong. But willing to let us lead.*~

Hush.

Chris put his hand on her hip. Quite willing to feel him all over, Zahira casually moved closer, until the tips of her breasts were almost touching his strong chest. "Mom?"

"Yes?"

"What was that, at the end?"

She smiled at him, tracing the curve of his lip with one finger. "What? You've never been with a girl who squirted before?" At the shake of

his head, her smile widened. "Well, it's been a while for me, too. I used to have to be *really* excited for it to happen. So that can tell you a bit about how good you were at going down on me."

"Oh." He glanced down, embarrassed, but she could feel the warmth of his pride-filled flush. "It tasted...good," he admitted.

~*The nectar of the gods,*~ Hatshepsut said smugly. ~*With, thanks to me, certain...aphrodisiacal...properties. He will be a tireless lover for you*.~

Zahira smiled, accepting the pharaoh's gift. Though she didn't really think, at his age, that Chris would be needing any help where that was concerned. Indeed, his erection was a hard, throbbing presence against her thigh. "Poor boy," she whispered against his lips, kissing him warmly. "Does it hurt?"

"Hurt?" He blinked at her. "No, not really. Though...it has needs."

"For me?"

"Yes," he returned. He pulled her closer, until his cock was burning against the hollow of her belly. So big! Bigger than any man she had ever been with, including her son's father. Even Hatshepsut, with decades of lovers in one of the most decadent courts in the world, was forced to admit that Chris was...exceptional.

"Well." She threw a leg over his hips and straddled him. Her son groaned as the motion trapped his shaft between their bodies. "Let's do something about that."

She leaned down, cupping his face in her hands, and kissed him. As her tongue slipped into his mouth, tasting him, she drew her cleft up the length of her son's staff, groaning deep in her throat as her fat, flushed labia parted and her clitoris dragged along his pole. Her wetness coated him as she paused at the top, letting his cockhead nestle in her opening for a few seconds before she reversed the process. When she reached his base, she gave her hips a sudden twist, and just that alone was almost enough to make her cum again.

Her clit, sensitive and throbbing with arousal, ground against his thick, rigid shaft.

"Oh, God, Mom." Chris' hands cupped her breasts, weighing them in his palms. "You're so beautiful. So fucking hot." His eyes rolled back in his head as she repeated the process, teasing both of them by bringing them to the brink of their deepest, darkest desire before she backed away. He squeezed her breasts lightly, and when she smiled down encouragingly, more strongly. The brush of a finger across her nipples made her bite her lip. They were hot, throbbing urgently, rigid with arousal, and when her son lifted up, his avid mouth opening to take one between his lips, she held his head close to her breasts, almost weeping with delirious joy. *This* was what she had wanted. A man who would love her for herself, who would always respect her, who would never turn on her for his own petty ambition.

~*A man who will swive you until you can't stand up,*~ Hatshepsut put in naughtily.

That, too.

Chris' lips were firm and gentle, but still passionate. As he circled her nipple with his tongue, then tugged on it with his lips, bolt after bolt of sexual desire echoed in her pussy, flooding it with moisture. If Zahira hadn't been so aroused, she would have been mortified by the faint but audible sounds of her wet lips squelching as they rubbed against Chris' rod.

He lifted his mouth, and she dropped hers, their tongues entwining in a passionate kiss. Zahira writhed against her son, rubbing on the lovely bar of his manhood. Even too much wouldn't be enough. Not now. Not in this place, with Hatshepsut's holy desire inflaming her. She wanted her son in every way, in every position, all at once. In her pussy, in her ass, in her mouth, with his cock and his tongue and his fingers. If she could have made him triplets right now, she would, and would have happily prostrated herself on the floor as he violated her in every possible way.

~*Sorry, beloved.*~ Even Hatshepsut seemed a little shaken by the force of her passion. ~*I'm not that powerful. When all is said, I'm just a little goddess, after all.*~

But you've done things. To me. To him. The medallion swayed on her neck, then stuck to the sweaty skin between her breasts. Ignorant of her conversation, Chris switched to her other breast, his hands lovingly cradling her ass.

~*Yes, but...*~ Hatshepsut sighed, reluctantly drawing her attention away from Chris, and what he was doing to them. ~*Think about it this way. Because I have worshippers, I have power. But only a little. But what I have, I can* ***concentrate****, and give to you and that lovely boy. I'm not plagued by thousands upon thousands of petitioners, making demands for miracles. Otherwise it would be like a hundred people holding up cups and asking for a drink of water, when I only have enough for one.*~

Huh. Maybe that's what it's like for some of the stronger gods. They grant miracles, but no one knows, because so many people are asking.

~*Enough philosophy. More fucking. Are you going to let that gorgeous young man suck on your teats all day, and not give him his reward? He has served us quite well thus far.*~

Zahira brought herself back to the here and now and looked down. Her nipples were shining in the candlelight, her skin slick with sweat and Chris' saliva. They throbbed in time with her heartbeat, a steady, maddening rhythm. As she slid up and down her son's rigid pole, his hands dug into her ass each time she reached the top of her stroke. He wasn't forcing her, no. But there was just the smallest hint of pressure, as he suggested the direction he wanted her to move.

"Chris, baby." She whispered into his ear, her beath stirring the baby-fine hair on his neck. "I'm so wet I can't stand it. Is it okay if I put you inside me?"

"Is it okay?" Chris repeated, and huffed a silent laugh. "Mom," he said, kissing her neck. "There have to be a thousand ways of saying this. But I'm only going to use one. Yes! I want to be inside you!"

"Oh, good," she said happily, and moved up one last time. A subtle cock of her hips, and then Zahira bit her lip as the tip of her son's penis breached her gates for the very first time.

But not the last.

Oh, God. To Zahira, it almost seemed that as Chris' shaft entered her, it was more than just sex. She could feel herself opening, as his wonderfully long, thick cock pushed apart her inner walls. Not just physically, but spiritually, as well.

~Yes, sweetheart. My handmaiden, my priestess, my love. Open to joy, to life, to desire. Too long you have sat in the shadows, poring over the dry, dead, dusty past. Live again! Your son shall be your lover, and let the rest of the world be damned!~

"Yes," Zahira groaned, as Chris' cock came to rest deep inside her. By every god and goddess in Egypt, she had never felt so full, so wantonly replete. She sat on his lap, her legs crossed behind him, and smiled into his eyes, level with her own. They echoed with a desire which was the mirror to her own, and filled with soft wonder.

"You feel..." She wiggled, then gasped as she slid down that last fraction of an inch, impaled. "Incredible." Reaching down between them, she gave her clit an exploratory caress, and shivered. "So big. You fill me up just right. Better than anyone ever has." She rocked slowly, her arms looped around her son's neck. "We are going to have *so* much fun together. There are so many things I want you to do to me." Her smile deepened as her son's eyes grew wide. "And so many things I want to do to you. Tell me," she said, kissing him again. "Have you ever had a girl tie you up?"

He blinked at her. "Do what?"

"I'm sure you understood me." Oh, she was getting close again. She bent her head to the angle of Chris' neck, closing her eyes as the delicious ripples began to manifest in her belly. "Oh, Chris!" she gasped. "Fuck me! Now!"

With a swoop that left her dizzy, her son dropped and rolled. When she opened her eyes again, she was lying on the stone floor, her head cushioned by his forearm. His wild-eyed face was only a few inches above her head.

And Chris began to *plow* into her, obeying her orders. His free hand, the one that wasn't making sure she wasn't getting big nasty bruises all over her skull, lifted her left leg high, exposing her tender lips. And with long, firm strokes, Chris hammered his long thick cock into her dripping crevice. Every pistoning drive made her bite her lip, and her back arched, lifting her breasts like an offering on the altar of desire.

"More," she growled, and she wasn't sure if it was her voice speaking, or that of Hatshepsut. "More, baby. More!" She *came* again, her sheath clenching around Chris' shaft, squirting all over him for the second time that morning.

"Mom." It was a gasp, a plea for mercy, for completion. Chris was laboring over her, driving his cock into her over and over and over again. His black hair was stuck to his forehead in sweaty ringlets, his lips were swollen with kisses, and his eyes were crazed, hazed by lust and want. "I need...I have to..."

"Then do it," she commanded. "Come for your mother! Come for me!"

And he did. Zahira could feel the instant he let loose, his gorgeous manhood twitching as he dumped a torrent of his seed into her hungry, fertile womb. Chris groaned, his face going slack with release, and when he slumped down on her chest, she held him tight and stroked his head, whispering words of comfort and love.

After a minute of respite, he propped himself up on one elbow and stared at her. The imprint of her medallion was stamped on his cheek, and Zahira bit back a smile.

"We just..."

"Yeah. We did."

"Um..."

"Tomorrow," she whispered. With a squeeze of her inner muscles, she coaxed a last spurt out of his cock. "We'll talk about this tomorrow."

Chapter 6

Chris woke up the next day with his cock trapped between his mother's warm, loving thighs.

He leaned forward, pressing a kiss into the back of her neck, and was rewarded with a happy, sleepy murmur and a squeeze which threatened to make his gloriously abused organ wake up again.

God, I need some vitamins. Or something. After that first, incredible lovemaking session by the pool in the temple, he and Zahira had gone a little bit...crazy. Afterward, they had decided to clean up again. But that had turned into a stand-up screw in the pool, his hands holding his mother out of the water as she writhed to multiple orgasms on his cock. And then, before lunch, she had blown him, her mouth wonderfully skilled and surprisingly inventive. Just the memory of her licking his semen off her lips was enough to make him squirm.

After a long, comfortable nap, they had gotten up to make dinner. Chris would never have believed that anyone could make freeze-dried stew appealing. But the sight of his mother striding around the campsite, dressed in sandals, a pair of sheer panties, and nothing else, soon put that idea to rest. The meal had been wonderful, and when they sopped up the last of the gravy in their bowls with hunks of bread, it was to fall into each other's arms in Zahira's tent. The cots were too small for one person to sleep on comfortably, let alone two. But with two cots shoved together, the legs lashed tight with duct tape, they were able to make a canvas suitable for the art of their lovemaking, which had lasted late into the night. And when they had

finally fallen asleep, it was with the sweat of desire cooling on their bodies.

Chris snorted, amused despite himself at his own melodrama. *A canvas suitable for the art of our lovemaking? Dude. You fucked your mother last night.*

And yesterday afternoon. And yesterday morning. The number of times that the two of them had screwed, in one way or another, seemed almost unfathomable. Ordinary people didn't *do* that.

As if in response to his thoughts, Zahira wiggled and turned over. "Good morning," she said, a sleepy, indolent smile curving her lips. "What time is it?"

He looked up at the roof of the sunlit tent. "Late. At least nine."

"Mmmm." Her smile deepened. "Best night's sleep I've gotten in months. I was *very* tired." Her breasts flattened against his chest as she pulled him close. He bent to kiss one firm slope. "But it was in a good way. Do you feel like talking now?"

"Talking? Oh. About us?" He recalled her promise from the previous morning. "Maybe in a bit. When I've had a chance to...I don't know. Process all this."

"All right. So what *do* you want to talk about."

"I don't know." He cast about for a subject, which wasn't easy when you had a double handful of delightfully curvy woman in your arms. "The temple. You said it was dedicated to Hatshepsut. But what was it really for? What was her worship supposed to do?"

Zahira pushed a lock of his hair up over his eyes. "Well, I can't be sure," she said. "But I strongly suspect that it was for women."

"Women?"

His mother nodded, her dark eyes deep and fathomless. "At least, that's what the little voice in the back of my head is telling me." A strange smile crossed her lips, and she reached out to stroke his flank.

"Think about it, Chris. It was a long time ago, sure. But people are still people. And you probably had lots of young women, married to the upper class, the nobility, who weren't getting what they needed at home."

"Lonely trophy wives?"

She nodded. "Exactly. Their men might be older, might be called away to war, or sent elsewhere as diplomatic envoys, or have duties somewhere else in the kingdom.

"So they come out here, to the temple of Hatshepsut. They make a small donation to the temple, stay a night or two, and while they're here, they have their pick of handsome young men to sate their carnal urges. Urges their husbands can't or won't satisfy."

Despite himself, Chris felt himself getting hard again. His fertile imagination brought up a scene.

He was standing naked in a line of slaves. His mother, clad in Egyptian finery, was walking down the row, examining all of them with a jaded gaze. At last she pointed to him. "That one," she said, her voice echoing hollowly in the temple. "He's my man." A skillful hand dipped below the hem of his kilt and fondled him. "Yes." A wicked smile curled her painted lips. "Definitely my man."

"Hmmmm." A teasing voice brought him back to the present. "It seems that *something* isn't satisfied to just lie here and talk." A warm hand grasped his stiffening penis. Chris caught his mother's mouth with his lips as she began to stroke him. "Are you sure you're not hungry? For me?" she groaned.

"Totally." He pulled her close, then winced as his elbow burrowed through the hopelessly inadequate mattress and clanged off a metal rod. "God, this sucks. We should have just slept on the floor."

"Yes. And woken up with snakes and sand fleas and scorpions. No, thanks." With a graceful move, she slipped out of his arms and stood

up. "But there's nothing that says we can't screw on the floor. Come on, get up."

She shook her head at the cots. The duct-tape lashings were already starting to give way, and the pallets that they had pilfered from the other tents were in a cluttered heap. "What I wouldn't give for a nice, clean harem. Or even a hotel room," she mused.

"Oh, well." With a snap of her wrists, she spread the light blanket on the canvas floor of the tent, then grabbed a pair of pillows from their cots. "This will do for now. But we'll have to figure something better out soon."

"Soon?" Chris asked, as he knelt down beside Zahira, running his hands over her gorgeous breasts. "I don't think we're going to have a whole lot of time, Mom. What happens when Sabah gets back?"

His mother nodded. Their communication with his sister had been sporadic. But it seemed that Professor Escobar would be allowed to check out of the hospital soon. And when he did, Sabah would be rejoining them. "We'll deal with that when it happens," she shrugged.

"Mom..."

"We'll deal with it when it happens," she repeated. A small smile curved her lips, making her unbearably sexy. "Stop talking," she whispered against his mouth. "And start doing something else."

Chris groaned as they kissed. Would it always be this way? Their desire for each other like a heap of oil-soaked rags, needing only the slightest spark to set it alight? He hoped so. Right now he couldn't think of anything as perversely arousing than the thought of fucking his mother. Zahira was a wonder, more unbridled and wanton than any woman he had ever been with. It was as if as soon as he thought of another way of making love, she plucked it out of his mind.

He leaned into her, cupping her firm, large breasts in his hands, his fingers stroking the thick buds of her nipples. He was ready. Ready

to push her on her back, spread her thighs open, and take her yet again.

"Wait." With a touch, she stopped him. "My back is sore from yesterday, sweetie. Do you think..." She lay down on the ground, putting a pillow under her belly. The sweet brown curve of her rear made an incredibly sexy target. "Doggie?" she suggested, looking over her shoulder. "Or do you not like it that way?"

Chris stroked her firm buttocks with his hands. And leaned down to kiss the nape of her neck. "As long as I can be with you," he whispered, "then any way is a good way."

"You're so sweet," she cooed, then groaned as he ran the thick length of his cock from the base of her spine and into the crevice of her ass. For just a second, his crown was at her asshole, and he wondered what she would do it he tried to take her that way. The bath oil, he remembered hazily, was only a few steps away...

"No," his mother said, her light voice amused. A firm hand guided him away, and he moaned as her hot warmth enveloped his shaft. "Not yet, Chris. Maybe later. When we have a real bed. And we..." Her words faded into a sweet sigh as he bottomed out, filling her. "Not yet," she repeated.

"Now," she commanded. "Make love to me."

Fucking Egypt.

Sabah swore to herself as the SUV rattled up into the hills west of the Valley of Kings. *Stupid, superstitious, goat-fucking thieves. God. Nearly two fucking days lost because of those assholes.*

The hospital had finally, reluctantly, allowed Professor Escobar to check out earlier that morning. Sabah had wasted no time in getting the older man settled in a hotel room, though she had hinted as strongly as she could that her mother thought it was a very good idea if he went back to his rented apartment in Cairo.

"What can you do here that you can't do there, Professor?" she had asked as she settled him into a sagging chair with a book and a huge mug of sugar-laced tea. She moved a hassock under his bad leg, plumping the cushions in an encouraging manner, and put the crutches within arm's reach. "All you'll do here is go stir-crazy. And I bet that inside of three days, you'll be trying to hire somebody to haul you out to the site. And then you'll either be robbed and dumped out in the desert to die, or stuck in a tent while me and Mom and Chris take care of you."

"No one would dare to rob Professor Gonzalo Escobar," he said, with a feeble attempt at humor. "I would give them a terrible on-line review. 'Robbed me and dumped my carcass near Al-Fahadi Canyon. No stars.'"

Sabah snickered, but put on her most fearsome face. "I mean it, Professor. You show up, and we'll just knock you on the head and drive you back here. And do you want to get a tongue-lashing from my mother of she finds out you've done something silly like that?"

"I want something from your mother," he said wearily. "But I don't think I'll ever get it." He opened his eyes. "Of course," he twinkled, "you'll do in a pinch. How about you stay here and keep me company? We can order some room service, get good and drunk, take our clothes off, and see what happens."

"Nice try." She leaned down and kissed his whiskered cheek. "Maybe next time."

Ugh, she thought, coming back from memory as she maneuvered the vehicle around a sandstone boulder. *The professor is sweet. But I can't abide men with beards. Especially in this heat.* She scrubbed at a phantom itch on her cheek.

The professor had tried to convince her to stay, that the desert was no place for one woman alone. But she had scoffed at his warnings. Luckily, the tracks from their previous trip out to the temple were clearly visible. All she had to do was follow them.

Her hands gripped the wheel tight. It *was* scary out here, her brave words to the contrary. If she broke down, she could die. She had heard stories. Of people who thought they could walk back to civilization, but who had died within a few miles of their cars, brought down by thirst and sunstroke.

Luckily, it seemed she would not be one of them. Her tense fingers relaxed as she squeezed through the final bottleneck and crested the rise, the campsite opening in front of her eyes. Only five tents, now. Two for the supplies and three for the people. The other ones, she assumed, had been packed up and put away by Chris and her mother. Sabah's lips thinned as she recalled her brother's story about how the other men had betrayed them.

She got out of the vehicle, closing the door behind her. The air was hot and dry and almost still. Not a sound crossed the campsite. Even the constant breeze was muted.

Where the hell are they? She would have thought that the sound of the engine would bring her mother and brother running. Shivering, despite the heat, she wondered if the men had come back for revenge.

Don't be stupid. If they had done that, they would probably have stolen everything that wasn't nailed down. They're probably working in the temple.

Squinting in the harsh sunlight, she made her way across the barren ground. The hole that led to the temple was just as Chris had described. A rope led down into the ground. The other end was securely tied around the bumper of one of the cars.

"Hello?" she called, leaning down to shout down the stone lined passage. "Mom? Chris? You guys down there?"

No one answered, and she couldn't pick up the faintest sound from below. "What the hell." She put her hands on her hips, glaring around the dusty, rock-littered ground as if she could conjure her relatives out of thin air. *Maybe around back?*

But a complete circumnavigation of the temple didn't turn up anything more than a pair of startled hawks, who left off savaging a snake carcass and took flight. "Mom? Chris?" she shouted, when she got back to the main campsite, now truly worried.

"In here, honey."

She sagged with relief. But why had her mother not come out of her tent? A cold fist clutched her heart. Had someone else gotten hurt?

"Thank god," she said, striding towards the cloth shelter. "Didn't you guys hear me?" she added, pulling aside the flap. "I was wondering if something..."

Sabah broke off, her mind unable to process what her eyes were showing her.

Chris and her mother were naked. And that wasn't even the most disturbing thing about the tableau. That would be the fact that her mother was propped up on her elbows, a cheerful smile on her face, with her rear end high in the air, in a pose of almost provocative obscenity.

And her brother's groin was flush with her ass-cheeks, with just enough room for Sabah to see the base of what was obviously a very impressive erection.

"What the..." Her voice trailed off, one hand a bloodless claw around a tent-pole. Her knuckles showed white under her dark skin. "Mom. Chris. What the fuck are you two *doing!*"

"I thought that would be obvious to an intelligent young woman like yourself, Sabah. Your brother is fucking me. Or, at least, he was," she added aggrievedly. One hand reached back and slapped her brother's hip. "Get going, baby. Yes." Her eyes closed, as Chris began to rock against her. "Such a good boy."

"So." She swallowed, her voice ringing hollow in her skull. "You're just going to screw? Right here in front of me?"

"Only until Chris cums. It shouldn't be long. He was almost done when you pulled in, and I've cum already. Twice. But we thought it would be better to be honest with you, Sabah. And it's hard to hide love. Especially from people you also love."

"Love?" Sabah laughed jaggedly. Her mind was a seething turmoil, and even she couldn't tell whether it was from disgust or envy. The sun glittered off the bronze medallion that hung between her mother's swaying breasts, stinging her watering eyes. "He's your son!" She glared at Chris. "She's your mother!"

"And I love her," Chris replied placidly. His hands moved up Zahira's torso, until he was cupping her breasts. Then he leaned forward so he could kiss the curve of her ear. "I mean, don't you?"

"Of course! But I...I wouldn't...I can't..." She glared at the two of them. "Will you just *stop* it so we can talk?"

"Nope."

"No way."

Sabah closed her eyes. Maybe if she ignored them, it would all go away, would prove to be a nightmare brought on by spicy Egyptian takeout. This could not be happening. Chris, her sweet little brother, wasn't *really* fucking their mother. Not with a really big, thick cock. And his body *definitely* wasn't flat-out gorgeous, with a rippling six-pack and a tantalizing honey-trail leading from his navel down to his-

"Mom! I'm going to cum!"

"Do it," her mother groaned, her voice deep and rich. "Cum for me. Fill me up with your spunk!"

"Cumming...now!"

Sabah's eyes popped open as she realized that her hand had been tracing slow, languorous curves on her belly. She bit her lip and

turned away, unwilling to have anyone see how much the blatant display of incestuous intercourse had aroused her.

It didn't turn me on, she thought, letting the tent flap fall down behind her, hiding the scene. *It's just that I haven't been laid in* ***weeks.*** *And seeing a guy as cut and handsome as Chris would make any straight woman a little hot in the crotch.*

She stalked around the campsite, trying to work off some of her furious energy. But, unfortunately, there was nothing to straighten up and put away, nothing that would make her feel any better. Sabah sensed Zahira's hand in that. Left to his own devices, her brother was a tremendous slob.

I bet I know how she did it. "Wash the dishes and pack up the food, or I won't fuck you tonight."

A few minutes later, Chris walked out of the tent, dressed in sandals and a pair of threadbare shorts. His black hair was tousled, and he wore an expression of vacuous cheer on his face that made her ball up her fists.

"So," she sniped, as he came over to where she was sitting. "Does Mom have some sort of benevolent magic that makes you immune to sunburn? Or did you just lose what little brains you had when she let you start screwing her?"

Even in her own ears, her sarcastic voice was shrill and unpleasant, and she hid a wince. Chris just let it slide off his back, the way he did when he didn't feel like listening to her. "We're going down into the temple after breakfast," he said mildly. "Not much chance of getting burned down there."

"Oh," she muttered. As Chris started the stove and began making tea, she couldn't help but sneak glances at him. It didn't really help that her brother really *was* good-looking. His belly was flat, his shoulders strong, and his ass was to die for. And now that she'd gotten a glimpse of his cock, she wondered what it would feel like inside her.

"What?" She flushed guiltily as she realized she had been staring at Chris, mentally undressing him as if she hadn't seen pretty much all of him just a few minutes ago.

"I asked," he repeated, "if you'd gotten the stuff Mom asked for. Figs and dates and honey and all that."

"Oh, sure!" Grateful for something to occupy her mind, she went and got the packages out of the SUV. By the time she got back, Zahira was coming out of the tent, combing out her long black hair with an expression of utter contentment on her face. Sabah thought that Eve might have looked the same way, after she bit into the apple and she and Adam got down to some serious sinning. Right before God decided to put the brakes on all that shit and remind everybody who was in charge.

"Mmm." Her mother sat down on the bench opposite her, dressed in leaf-green panties and absolutely nothing else. "That smells wonderful, baby." She took the mug of tea from her son, spooned in some sugar, and took a long sip. "Ah." Her eyes sharpened as she saw what Sabah had brought. "Dates? Figs?"

"And honey, too," she answered awkwardly.

"Fantastic." She filled a plate with fruit, then drizzled honey over bread and took a huge bite. "That's what I call an old-fashioned Egyptian breakfast. People ate the same thing three thousand years ago." Her brow furrowed. "Though some wine would be nice."

"Mom." Sabah tried to keep a tight rein on her patience, though it was hard, with her mother sitting bare-chested across from her as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "This is *Egypt*. You know. A Muslim country? You can't just go and pick up a bottle of red at the corner store."

"Stupid Abrahamic religion," the older woman muttered. "All worship and no fun. Almost as bad as the stupid Jesus-shouters back home. What we need is to get the old gods back. Set and Bast and

Odin and Freya and Minerva and Diana and Aphrodite. *They* knew what people actually wanted. And it wasn't prayer and fasting and penitence. Give me a goddess who remembers that people like to eat and drink and screw."

"Good luck," Sabah replied, nibbling on a date. It was chewy and sweet, and she found herself eating hungrily.

As she did, she examined her mother. There wasn't anything outwardly *different* about her, despite the fact that she was practically bare-ass naked. But there was an ease to her movements, a liquid grace, that Sabah had never seen before. As she licked honeyed crumbs from her lips, it was with a slow, indolent sensuality that made even the simple act of eating one that fired the blood.

"Are you...feeling all right, Mom?" she asked.

Zahira's eyes flickered open. "Never better," she replied, with some of her customary briskness. Her glance slanted to her brother, who had the grace to blush. "Chris has been taking care of me very well, since you've been gone."

"Yeah. I saw that." She tried to fix her mother with the same disapproving look which had worked on her since she was two, but apparently she was bulletproof or something, since it just bounced off of her. "Mom." She shook her head. "Why?"

Her mother didn't pretend she didn't understand. She simply smiled. "Because your brother is a lovely man. And sweet and gentle and a fantastic lover," she replied steadily, her eyes open and honest. "And because I hadn't been laid in a really long time. Too long."

Sabah waited, but there was nothing more. "That's it?"

Her mother shrugged. "Why not? Does there need to be anything more? I love your brother. He loves me." She glanced over at Chris, who seemed to be doing his male best to ignore the entire conversation. "I am not going to spend hours rationalizing the taboo,

Sabah. Even if I could, you wouldn't believe me. Can I rip out my heart, open it for you, and have you read it like a book? No. I can't.

"All I can do is swear to you that I would never willingly hurt Chris. And I will do all I can to protect our secret." Her lips curled in a tiny, feral smile. "And you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Because if someone finds out about us, Sabah, you are going to find yourself tarred with the same brush as me and Chris."

She got up, reaching out to pick up Sabah's plate. "So think about that before you start wondering how you can get me and your brother to stop what we're doing."

Chapter 7

"Well," Chris said, as they followed their mother to the temple. "I bet that didn't go the way you thought it would."

She glared up into her brother's grinning face. "You're an idiot."

"Why? For loving Mom?"

Sabah sputtered, but couldn't find anything to say. "It's just...gross."

"What? Sex?"

"No."

"Loving Mom?"

"Chris. You *know* what I mean."

He stopped, pulling her arm so she was forced to face him. "Yeah. I know what you mean." His normally pleasant face was almost angry. "Listen to me, Sabah. I know you're dealing with some shit right now. It was a hell of a surprise for me, too, when Mom let me know she thought I was attractive.

"But don't go dumping all your hang-ups on us. We're happy. Mom is *happy*. Have you seen her happy since Dad left?"

"*My* hang-ups?" Her voice rose with disbelief. A few yards away, Zahira was entering the tunnel to the temple. "Chris! Listen to yourself! You're screwing your own mother!"

"Times change," he shrugged. "So do attitudes. Anyway, I'm not going to spend the rest of my life scared of what *might* happen. Life is short. I'm going to grab all the happiness that I can."

He turned and walked away, the sun striking bold highlights from his black hair. "Are you coming?" he threw over his shoulder, as he crouched and grabbed the rope. "Or are you going to sulk up here all day?"

Sulk? Her lips pressed together tightly, Sabah stalked over to the opening. The tunnel was a black hole, leading down into darkness. Cooler air hit her face, and she shivered. The voices of her mother and brother floated up, sounding like the whispers of damned souls from some forgotten spiritual underworld.

Fuck it. I'm going. If I don't they'll probably spend all day humping away like rabbits down here.

Th tunnel was terrifying. Halfway down, Sabah had to stop and collect herself. She had never liked dark, enclosed spaces. And here, with the weight of half the damn hill right over her head, it was easy to think that one wrong move could bring it all crashing down on her.

Bilbo did it. And all that was at the other end was a dragon.

"Ah." Zahira smiled at her when she emerged from the opening. She reached into a carry-bag and handed her a laptop. "You're the quickest typist, Sabah. Can you take notes while Chris takes pictures?"

"Sure," she shrugged.

"Good. The altar might be a good pace for you to sit." She gestured at a waist-high block of yellow sandstone, perhaps two paces long

and half of that wide, that sat behind a pool of dark water. "We haven't brought anything down that might contaminate the area."

"Except ourselves," Chris laughed.

"Hush." But Zahira smiled. "Let me know when you're ready, honey. And Chris. Less talky, more snappy." She flicked a fingernail against the camera that hung from a strap around his neck.

"Henpecked, that's my problem," Chris grumbled good-naturedly. But he wandered away, taking pictures of the sculptures on the walls.

As he did, Sabah turned on the laptop and sat on the altar, ignoring the faint feeling that she was somehow desecrating a place of worship. Her specialty was classical literature, rather than archeology. But even she couldn't deny the raw power of the temple. The stone was gritty under her rear, but she tuned it out, watching her mother.

Zahira was staring at a sculpture as if she thought she could see through time, and travel back to when it was created. When she began to speak, her voice was detached and clinical, and Sabah started to type, taking down her words.

"The first sculpture in the north wall describes a man and woman in the act of lovemaking. The style is in line with the period when Hatshepsut ruled, although the subject itself is quite unusual for eighteenth-dynasty artwork, and is very well rendered. Most of the paint is still in a state of high preservation, and might be used to accurately date the time the temple was in use. The clothing is representative of the period, with the man wearing a kilt-like garment, and the woman in a *kalasiris*. However, the woman is nude from the waist down, and the man is apparently sexually stimulating her breasts with his mouth."

As her mother's voice went on, describing each sculpture in painstaking detail, Sabah began to feel herself grow aroused. And

the feeling was almost *because* of the matter-of-fact tone in Zahira's voice, rather than despite it. If she had been crude or lascivious, it would have repulsed her. Warmth seemed to creep up through the stone of the altar, heating her groin. She found herself, as her mother paused, searching for the right word or phrase, watching Chris and Zahira. One woman exquisitely curved, a stunning representation of the female form. The other, tall and strong and lithely muscled, abundantly male.

Sabah shifted uncomfortably, trying to cool the heat in her blood. Next to Chris and her mother, she felt almost ridiculously overdressed. Her heavy beige slacks and plain white blouse seemed to cling damply to her body, stifling her. It would be simplicity itself to take them off, to free her body from its chains, to taste the free air on her skin.

~*Yes,*~ a voice murmured in her ear. ~*Two are better than one, after all.*~

She started, swearing under breath as her fingers slipped on the keys, typing out a line of gibberish. "Hold on, Mom," she said. "Need to back up a second."

Zahira waved. "No bother. We've got all day. Though I wish we could get some better light down here."

"Didn't the professor bring a portable generator?" Sabah frowned.

"Yes. But I'm not stringing power cords down here. Not with that pool. All it would take is one mistake, and we'd be on our way to the next world."

"I can just imagine that," Chris said, stowing away the camera. "We'd show up at the Pearly Gates, and Saint Peter would ask us how we died. And we'd say we got electrocuted in the middle of a desert, in a temple dedicated to Hatshepsut. And he'd send us to hell for being such terrible liars."

Sabah laughed, then grimaced as a cramp raced up her back. "Ow! Shit!"

"You okay, baby?"

"Yeah." She reached around, massaging her spine. "But it would be nice to have a chair with a cushion."

Chris waved at a pair of doorways at the back of the temple. "Maybe you can find something down there."

"Yeah. Gross things with fangs and pincers and way too many legs," she shuddered. "No way."

"Here." A hand pressed into her chest, and Sabah found herself lying flat. "Stretch out," her mother said. "Relax. We're not on a clock, so we can take our time."

Sabah obeyed, and found the cramp easing. She made a happy sound deep in her throat, and was rewarded by her mother's warm smile. "Told you."

"Yeah, mother knows best."

"You better believe it, missy." Zahira shifted her weight and cocked a hip against the altar.

Sabah flushed and turned away. There was something...indecent...about looking at her naked mother. Even in the half-light of the temple, she seemed to glow with her own inner light. As if she had looked into the dark mirror of her own soul and had come to terms with her desires.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

"It's just..." she waved a hand. "Why are you walking around half naked?"

"Well, first of all, I'm almost *completely* naked. And second, it's damn comfortable. There is something *fine* about warm air on bare skin." The black-haired woman swept her hands from her belly to her

breasts, cupping them and giving her nipples a tiny tug. "So sexy. And your brother seems to like it."

"I'm sure he does," she muttered. Indeed, Chris was staring at their mother as if she were the most breathtakingly gorgeous woman on the continent.

Well, maybe she is.

"Why don't you take your clothes off, too?" The voice was gently persuasive. "It's just us, you know. We're family. You don't have to be scared."

~Yes. Join us. Two will become three. Then more.~

She should resist, she knew. This wasn't normal, wasn't right. But her arms and legs felt leaden, unresponsive. And the medallion her mother wore swayed hypnotically, clouding her mind. So as she struggled feebly, she found her shoes and socks pulled off, her belt undone, her slacks removed, and her blouse and bra stripped away by warm, loving hands.

"Oh, Sabah." A pair of warm lips brushed her cheek. "You were made for a lover's delight."

"I'm not...I don't look as good as you do," she protested.

"Lies," her mother declared firmly. A loving hand palmed her naked breast, and she yearned into the touch, surprised at how good it felt. "Chris. What do you think?"

"I think," her brother said, all joking gone from his voice, "that Sabah looks a lot like you must have, twenty years ago." His fingers undid the tie that kept her hair in a pony-tail, and he spread it over her shoulders as she sighed with relief. "A little taller. A little skinnier. But if we feed her up right," he continued, a smile creeping into his voice, damn him, "she'll probably get a little extra boobage. If she wants it."

"Boobage?" The two women's voices rose in dual disbelief."

"Yeah. Boobage. That's the medical term for it."

"You're the worst," Sabah decided. And was it just her mother's hands on her body that was making her ache so sweetly? A single finger traced a line of fire from her breasts to her groin, and she arched her back, her hips raising helplessly, as it slithered down her panties and between the lips of her cleft. The damp outline of her pussy was perfectly visible. "Oh, damn, that feels good."

"I can make you feel even better." Zahira's face was shadowed. But her voice was warm and loving. Her hands settled on her thighs, softly stroking.

Her intent was clear, but Sabah wavered. Oh, sure. She had experimented in college, once or twice. And girls were fun, when there wasn't a nice stiff dick around. But her mother?

Still. She was horny, as wet as she had ever been in her life, the candle-light and the altar and the seductive pull of the erotic temple tempting her to wild, forbidden acts. She wanted to *feel,* to step outside her drab existence. Her finger twisted in the elastic of her panties, pulling, making the material dig deep into her crotch. The sensation was almost painful, but still carried a measure of pleasure as the hot wet cotton rubbed against her needy clit.

"You're going to...eat me?" she quavered.

"No." Zahira smiled as her face fell. "I'm going to make love to your hot, horny pussy. And maybe," she added, shooting a look over her head. "Chris can do something besides stare at your tits."

"But they're such gorgeous tits, Mom." Despite herself, despite that she knew what they were doing, the attraction she was feeling to her mother and brother was deeply wrong, Sabah felt a rush of pride. "You can't blame a guy for looking."

"I can blame you if all you do is look," Zahira replied pertly. Sabah gasped as she felt her panties being dragged off. Now she was completely naked, bound by her own desire on this altar, a willing

sacrifice. Her mother leaned down, examining her with a keen eye. "Yes. She's horny. Ready to fuck. Aren't you?"

"Yes," she panted. "Please, Mom. I want it. Want you. Both of you!"

"Good." And then her mother leaned down, her back as graceful as the arch of a bow, and planted a deep, tongue-wet kiss square on the seething mouth of her vagina.

"Oh, shit." It wasn't a scream. More of a panting gasp, as her mother parted her nether-lips with her tongue, stabbing it deep into the hot, steamy core of her cunt. Her knees lifted, her thighs parted, wanting more of the incredible sensation. "How did she get so good at this?"

"I don't know." Chris' voice was mildly awed, as if he had just witnessed a minor miracle. Such as an angel moving an inconveniently placed mountain. "I didn't even know she'd ever been with a woman."

"Maybe I haven't," the woman in question responded, lifting her head from between Sabah's thighs. "And are you going to waste your time talking about me, or making love to your sister?"

"Well, you're down there. What am I supposed to do?" Her brother's voice was faintly aggrieved.

"Use your fucking imagination." And then the head disappeared, though promising slurping noises took her place, and Sabah's pussy-lips tingled from her tongue.

"Use my imagination. Right." But there was a thread of humor running through Chris' voice. "Sure."

He began to massage her, his large, strong hands firm but kind. Sabah moaned under his touch, as he stroked every part of her body he could reach, from belly to breasts to shoulders and back again. Her nipples peaked, and she writhed in shameful desire as his fingertips danced across them and made her middle boil with desire.

It was awful and shameful, terrible and perverse and glorious. As Chris massaged her breasts, his hands stoking her arousal until she thought her mind would explode, she found that she had somehow inched her way all the way across the altar, and that her head was now hanging off the edge.

Whoa.

She had known that Chris was...big. One glimpse in her mother's tent had been enough to assure her of that. But to see it, bobbing in her eyes, only a few inches away from her face, was something else again. And the fact that she was seeing it upside down didn't help matters.

Still. As its rigid, tumescent length strained in front of her, rigid with passion, her belly knotted with hunger, and saliva squirted into her mouth. She wanted to touch him, suddenly, urgently. Wanted to learn the shape of his desire with lips and tongue and fingers, the taste of his flesh.

Sabah reached behand her, knowing that the motion made her breasts even more prominent, and hooked her fingers in the tight muscles of her brother's ass. She pulled him toward her, her mouth opening eagerly.

Just when the tip was within the reach of her questing tongue, Chris pulled back. "What?" she whined. She licked her lips hungrily, putting all the desire she could into the simple gesture. "What's wrong?"

He looked down at her. "I just want to make sure this...is, you know...what you want. Not just something you feel you have to do."

Oh, God, she groaned, and the silent voice in her head agreed with a snort of disgust. *Men. Can't live with them, can't shoot them out of a cannon and into the sun.*

"You listen to me," she stated, making sure her voice was clear, despite the absolutely *wonderful* things her mother was doing down

in her crotchal region. "You've got an absolutely *lovely* dick. And I want to feel it in my mouth *right now*." She spanked his ass for emphasis. "So stop fucking around, okay?"

Chris, she decided a minute or so later, didn't so much *fuck* her mouth, as he allowed her to make love to it. Which was, actually, a bit of a relief. She'd been with men who thought that a blow-job gave them carte blanche to hammer away at her mouth the same way they would at her pussy. Sabah pulled him into her, then away, all the while groaning as his wonderful taste exploded on her tongue. He was hot and hard and thick and tasted of sweat-salt and pre-cum, and it was the most wonderful thing ever. She concentrated, breathing through her nose, as she took him deeper and deeper into her mouth, the taste of his pre-cum thick and salty.

Her head was swimming. Though whether that was from trying to give someone a beej when her head was hanging off the back of a stone altar or whether it was from the three-way she was in was almost beside the point. "Fuck this," she said, letting her brother's spit-slickened length slide out of her mouth. "Mom, watch out."

Sabah flipped over, lying on her stomach. *Oh, yeah. This is way fucking better.* For one thing, she could reach out and pull her brother's hands to her breasts. For another, she didn't feel as if she was about to pass out from blood loss. For a third, Zahira had taken the opportunity presented by her change of position to slide under and start tonguing her from below. *Fuck. Three-ways are the best fucking thing* ***ever.***

A warm, indulgent chuckle filled her mind. ~*Just wait.*~

Sabah scowled in frustration, even as she continued her bobbing assault on her brother's cock. *You know what? I'm too old to have an imaginary friend. Who the hell are you?*

~*A friend of your mother.*~

The voice was that of a woman near to her mother's age. Somewhere inside it, Sabah knew, was an answer to the mystery. To why her entire family, including herself, was acting so strangely, as if they

were little more than conduits for sexual desire. But the demands of her body were taking control. It was too much. She swallowed her brother's enormous, jutting cock into her mouth, the spongy tip hitting the back of her throat. Chris' hands cupped her breasts, tugged her nipples, making her shut her eyes and moan in wanton desire. And lower, her mother pulled her ass down, lapping at her seething mound.

She was close now, so very close. Her lower body sagged, pushing her molten core into her mother's mouth. As she rocked back and forth, rubbing her clit on the older woman's tongue, whimpering noises escaped the lips that circled her brother's shaft. She braced on one elbow, using her free hand to jack him. As her head lowered, her hand pulled up, as if she could coax his hot, salty seed out of his testes by brute force.

"Oh, man." Her brother's hands left her breasts to tangle in her hair. "Jesus, Sabah. You're so good. Such a wonderful little cocksucker."

Ordinarily, the word would have made her furious. But Sabah embraced it, reveled in it. *Yes. I'm my brother's cocksucker. Like he will be* ***my*** *pussy-licker. Tit for tat. And tits,* she snickered, barely able to keep her teeth from scoring the sensitive skin of Chris' penis.

Oh! She was getting close. She spread her thighs, until she was almost doing the splits. All of her being, her very self, shifted until it was concentrated on the few inches of her pussy, her breasts, her mouth.

Cum for me, Chris, she commanded silently, though she didn't dare lift her mouth from his rod for even a second. *Cum at the same time as me!*

~Oh, he will.~ The voice was lazily confident. *~What good children you are. And your own children will be even better.~*

"Sabah." She looked up. Her brother's neck was corded, his voice tight with strain. "If you don't want me to shoot off in your mouth," he grated out, "you better stop now."

She shook her head, a tiny jerk, willing him to see the lust in her eyes. It was too late for that. Too late to stop. Too late for anything but the tidal tug of passion inflaming their minds and hearts and bodies. Lava-hot heat pooled in her belly, wanting only the slightest shift to set it off. She let her brother's cock-tip escape from her mouth, but she kept jacking him. She didn't just want to feel her brother cum. She wanted to see it.

There! Not a sad little spurt, but an explosion, a white jet that blew out of his slit and leaped across the gap between his cock-head and her lips, filling her mouth with his taste. Sabah closed her eyes, keening, as the first heady rush of her brother's cum spurted into her mouth. It was hot and thick and salty and she swallowed it down, swallowed his cock again, ravenous in her taboo hunger. At the burst wonderful burst, her body sagged, and her mother took her clit between her lips, flicking the tip of her tongue across the throbbing, sensitive bud until the tense spring of Sabah's desire unspooled in a thunderous orgasm that made her hum around Chris' cock, fisting load after load of his seed down her eager throat. The rush of it hitting her belly made her cum *again*, something she had not even thought possible, coating Zahira's face with her feminine fluid, and she sagged down onto the altar, limp and boneless, completely overcome by passion's price.

"What?"

A muffled shout from between her thighs.

She rose up an unsteady inch. "What?" she repeated.

"Damn it, Sabah! Let me out before you asphyxiate me!" Her mother pushed her aside, and struggled out from under her groin. "Whew! That was hot as fuck," she panted, coming to rest beside her on the altar. "So," she smiled, giving her a tongue-wet kiss on the mouth, which she heartily returned. "You're a squirter, too?"

"I guess, yeah."

"Guess?" she hooted. "No guessing about something like that! I thought I was going to choke to death there for a second. That would have made for one hell of a Darwin Award. 'Woman Drowns in Daughter's Cum.'"

"Room enough for one more?" Chris asked, shouldering onto the altar. Sabah had to clutch at the side to keep from rolling off.

"Chris!" Zahira swatted ineffectually at one shoulder. "Get off! You're going to kill us!"

"No way." He reached along arm over both of the women, pulling them close into a snuggling, loving heap. "Would I hurt the two tastiest pieces of ass in Africa? I don't think so."

"Mom?"

"Yeah?"

"When we were..."

"Making love?"

"Yeah. There was this woman. Talking. In my head."

"Ah." A finger stroked her cheek. "I should have known. The horny bitch wouldn't settle for one of us when she could have two."

"What?"

Zahira rolled off the altar, coming to rest in a graceful crouch. The medallion on her chest glowed with it own inner light. "We'll talk about this. Outside."

She started for the tunnel, then paused as if a terrible thought had struck her.

"You did save all my notes, right?"

Two weeks later

The Cairo airport was crowded, innumerable people making it a veritable hell.

Especially, Zahira thought, as they wound their slow way through Customs, if you were burdened with the spirit of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh who was so terrified of flying across the ocean that you were about to barf in sympathetic response.

Just calm down, she thought at Hatshepsut, *I've done this dozens of times.*

~*Easy for you to say,*~ the older woman moaned, burrowing deeper into her mind. ~*Men weren't meant to fly through the air like birds!*~

Zahira grinned. It was nice to have the demigoddess on the defensive, just once. *Let me tell you about a man named Icarus. It'll be all right. Ten hours. Twelve at most. And we'll be safe at home.*

~*Safe in a land I've never seen! Across an ocean three thousand miles wide! Separated from everything I've ever known! Why did I let you talk me into this?*~

Because if you hadn't agreed, Zahira said cheerfully, *I would have left you in the temple. Egypt is very nice, but-*

But there's no place like home. Sabah's mind voice was blurred, but recognizable. Zahira still wasn't used to sharing her thoughts with her daughter, but it was getting easier every day.

"Name?" She started, and realized that they had finally come to the head of the line.

"Zahira Collins," she responded.

"Right." The man began to sift through her paperwork, then stopped. "Where did you get that necklace?" he asked.

"Oh, this?" she fingered the heavy gold chain. "It's a family heirloom. Generations in the family, you know. Mother to daughter."

"Right." His thick-fingered hands leafed through her papers, and he scowled in suspicion. "You didn't bring it into the country. Do you have proof that you're not trying to smuggle it out?"

Zahira sighed. She had known it would come to this. *Help me, goddess.*

She waved a hand in front of the man's eyes. "You don't need to see my documentation," she intoned slowly.

"I don't need to see your documentation," he repeated, his face slack and eyes dull.

"These aren't the droids you're looking for," Sabah added with a grin. Zahira shot her a scalding look and she subsided.

A trio of official stamps on the passports, and they were on their way.

"What would have happened, Mom?" Chris asked quietly, as they sat and waited for the boarding call. "If he had made you leave the necklace behind?"

She smiled, taking his hand. "Well, I would hope that the link between Hatshepsut and me and your sister would be strong enough, by now, to render the need for any mere physical object unnecessary," she said. "After all," she added, lowering her voice, "we have made love a *lot* over the past couple of weeks. That should be enough. Even for our horny guest."

"*EgyptAir announces the boarding of flight 301 for LaGuardia Airport in New York City, United States of America,*" came the call from the overhead speakers.

Zahira smiled at her children, her lovers. Somehow, over the last two weeks, they had smoothed out the rough spots. They were not just family. Their very souls were entwined. And Hatshepsut, while at times a royal pain in the ass, was a bracing dash of cold water, whenever their mortal bickering got too intense.

"So. Ready to go back home?" She dropped her voice, teasing.

"And maybe join a very...*exclusive*...club on the way?"

The End