

B A D

K A R M A

THE EGYPTIAN GODDESS SERIES

Book 1

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First Edition

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To my dad, Colvino, who always believed in me and encouraged me to never give up on my dream of writing this book.

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Prologue

December 22, 1998
Winter solstice

With all the turmoil in the world, it is the heroine's desire to save the world. She—a divine being, having the wisdom of the sages and being loved by many—feels innately that it is imperative to do so. How does one accomplish this with all the challenges that must be faced? The heroine who knows herself can save herself and others. Her quest is both an inner and outer journey. Our story begins on a day that would change the universe forever.

* * * * *

Lord Ra, the sun god, looked on with pride at the beautiful, glowing goddess and the baby she cradled in her arms.

“You have given me the most precious gifts tonight, my love,” he crooned as he rocked another baby in his arms. In his mind, he thought, *Mine*. Hathor, his queen, had given birth to twin girls.

Karma, the firstborn, had a full head of shocking red curls and was squirming restlessly in her father's arms. Destiny, her younger twin, with her obsidian curls, lay quietly in her mother's arms.

“This one has your temper,” exclaimed a smiling Ra proudly as Karma let out a lusty cry.

He shifted the infant from one arm to the other, all the while gently rocking her, and she immediately calmed down. It had been a speedy delivery, the girls obviously eager to enter the world. So speedy, in fact, that the queen had no time to go to the *mammisi* (birth house) situated in the temple to the east of the court to deliver the babies.

Hathor had been ready to deliver after only two hours of labor pains. The girls had come in quick succession, heralding the world with hearty cries. At that moment, Dalila, the midwife, returned with fresh linen.

"My lord, I need to tend to my lady and put the angels to bed," explained the woman. She placed the linen on a shelf in the intricately designed armoire on the left side of the queen's inner chamber, where two large bassinets also waited for the royal newborns. She turned back to Hathor's bed, where she gently took first Destiny and then Karma from their loving parents' arms and carried them back to their bassinets.

Ra bent over the bed to kiss his wife. "I will let you get some rest, my love, and I will see you and the girls later," he promised.

"Yes, my lord. Your daughters have worn me out. There is a reason it is called labor, for labor it was indeed." She sighed tiredly.

Her husband smiled down at her indulgently and then turned and exited the room. Shortly after he left, two maids entered with a large basin of warm water, soap, and clean towels to assist Dalila in washing the queen and changing the bed linens. Once she was comfortably back in her bed, the maids left her to the ministrations of the midwife.

"I'm a little thirsty, Dalila," Hathor said yearningly.

"What would you like to drink, my lady?" Delilah inquired.

"Guava with milk, please."

"As you wish," she said enthusiastically. She pressed a gold intercom button on a panel designed with hieroglyphs.

A high female voice answered. "Can you please send a glass of guava with milk for the queen?"

"Right away, ma'am," came the answer. Moments later, a young scullery maid entered the room carrying a circular gold tray with a

cold glass of guava and milk perched atop it, beads of condensation appearing on the sides of the glass.

The tray was inlaid with an intricate design of the twelve signs of zodiac and had been a wedding gift from the god Thoth.

"Put it over there on the nightstand," directed Dalila.

The young girl quickly complied and gave a short curtsy to the queen, and then, just as quickly, she departed.

Dalila withdrew a vial of clear liquid from her apron and poured it into Hathor's glass. "This restorative elixir will have you feeling better very quickly, my lady." She then adjusted the pillows behind her mistress as Hathor moved into an upright position in the bed. She slowly drank the delicious concoction and sighed with unabashed pleasure. Dalila waited on her until she was through and then retrieved the empty drinking glass and placed it back on the tray.

"Now you rest, my lady. I will be right over here in the rocking chair." She motioned to her left, where a rocking chair stood just a couple of feet from the bassinets. She adjusted the pillows once more as Hathor slid back down into the fluffy mattress. Moments later, Hathor was asleep.

When Hathor awoke four hours later, it was to the cry of Karma. Dalila was changing her nappy, and the infant was putting up a fuss.

"There, there, little one. See, much better," Dalila crooned to the fussy baby.

"Do you think she's hungry?" Hathor queried.

Dalila started, "Oh, my lady, I did not realize you were up. Would you like to try feeding her?"

"Oh yes," Hathor exclaimed, "before she wakes up her sister."

Dalila brought the babe to its mother, and Hathor took the infant to her breast. Immediately, Karma quieted and concentrated on feeding from her mother.

Hathor looked down at her daughter. "You're going to be quite a handful, aren't you?" she teased lovingly.

The days following the birth of Karma and Destiny had continued without darkness for seven cycles of the sun. On the seventh day of the twins' birth, the Sebou, a ceremony to officially name the girls, was held. Many of the gods were in attendance. These included but were not limited to Isis, Thoth, Horus, Nephthys, Ma'at, and Imhotep.

Osiris had not been able to attend the Sebou. However, he sent his son Anubis in his stead to gift the mother and children with all sorts of curative ointments and potions to restore their health and vitality.

It had been many decades since any of the gods had been able to bring forth children. However, Hathor, being the goddess of fertility and childbirth, seemed to be the exception to that rule. The girls were dressed in white silk gowns and were carried in white wicker bassinets. The priests stood in attendance, carrying candles in long golden holders as they chanted in the old language, a blessing to ward off evil.

Hathor was instructed to dance around the babies seven times to complete the ritual. Gifts of gold, platinum, and silver were presented to Ra and Hathor for the infants. For the ear-piercing ceremony, Isis had offered beautiful earrings in platinum and gold of Hathor's symbol, which consisted of a round sun disk and cow horns on each side of the disk.

Thoth's gift honored Hathor's symbol as well. He had fashioned a gold and platinum necklace of a sun disk with cow horns. The round disk was gold, inlaid with a platinum design of the eye of Ra. The surrounding horns were platinum with a gold design that extended from the disk. The necklace, in truth, was actually two necklaces that separated at the disk and horns.

He said a blessing over the pieces and placed the disk in Karma's bassinet and the horns in Destiny's bassinet. He then handed a scroll to the attending priest to be read aloud.

Tonath, the attending high priest, declared in a strong, clear voice, "On this most sacred and auspicious day, two luminaries have entered the world. They will bring light and hope to the universe and will crush the evil that threatens to overtake it."

Many cheers were heard after this proclamation. Tonath handed the scroll back to Thoth, who then bowed and gave the scroll to Ra. "My lord, what are they to be named?" inquired the high priest.

"They will be called Karma and Destiny," Ra proclaimed, "and will bring vengeance and destruction to our mutual enemy, Seth." All in attendance applauded in assent, save for two.

As the throng left the temple and proceeded to the dining hall for the customary dinner of lamb, two of the guests hung behind. They were actually two of Seth's spies, Montu, the god of war, and Khonsu, the moon god.

"Light and hope indeed," Montu scoffed. "The only two weapons that can truly kill our kind, and they call that good," he continued. All through time, there had always been two weapons that could kill the gods—the sword of light and the spear of truth. These weapons had been created by Atum, god of gods, as a failsafe against corruption.

Seth had spearheaded a rebellion that had destroyed the original weapons after exile two thousand years before, but Atum had made plans for this contingency as well. When the physical weapons were destroyed, the essence of the weapons had returned to Atum, who had, in turn, reincarnated them in spiritual form. This meant that the essence of the weapons could inhabit any god or demigod, ultimately making that person a living weapon.

"The prophecy has begun," said Khonsu.

"You know what to do," Montu replied in a low voice.

Khonsu nodded. "Indeed."

"Shall we go in to dine? Suddenly, I'm famished," he said with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

Khonsu smiled conspiratorially, and they both proceeded to the dining hall for the celebratory feast.

Seth had been exiled from the celestial kingdom thousands of years before when he tricked his brother Osiris into a sarcophagus and then killed him. Just as Ra was the king of the gods, Osiris was given the kingdom of men to rule. With Isis by his side, he ruled for many ages in peace and security.

Seth had been covetous of Osiris's throne and had plotted along with other lesser gods to kill Osiris and seize the throne. After his uprising, Ra exiled him to the desert in the earthly realm for his trickery and deception. However, Seth still had allies in the heavenly realm. There had been many who, like him, felt that the sword of light and the spear of truth should be destroyed so that they would not be a threat to godkind.

Seth's underground allies were, at that moment, waiting in the kingdom for the signal to put a well-orchestrated plan into action. Seth wanted those weapons for himself. He had loftier goals in mind and had set his sights on Ra's throne.

The dining hall was decorated for the occasion. Rugs of the finest wool covered the stone floor, and garlands of spruce, cedar, and holly graced the walls, along with lilies, roses, and amaryllis. The aromas coming from the dining table were robust and mouthwatering. The dignitaries and their guests were seated. Along the walls sat beautiful nature nymphs with harps, lutes, and drums, playing sublime music to elevate the heart.

Ra was seated at the north end of the table, and Hathor was seated at the south end. Thoth was seated on Ra's right and was presently speaking in low tones to Ra. Isis was seated on the southeast corner of the table, which put her on Hathor's right.

"What do you suppose those two are talking about?" mused Isis.

"One never knows with them," admitted Hathor. The babies were situated at the northeast corner of the room, where they were being attended to by three nursemaids. Montu was seated five seats to Hathor's left and had a clear view of the infants. Khonsu was seated directly opposite of Montu, so his back was to the new members of the realm. Yet the two of them were communicating with pointed looks and signals.

As each course was served, conversations of the babes' futures and that of the realm were debated around the table. Shortly before

dessert, Dalila and the other two nursemaids arose and proceeded to take the babies up to their nursery. About twenty minutes later, after dessert, Thoth slipped away from the table and the dining hall. Ten minutes later, while the gods and goddesses were retiring to the drawing room for wine and cigars, Montu and Khonsu stole away to the nursery.

On their way up to the nursery, they were met with several obstacles and had to dodge a security detail which was monitoring the royal apartments by slipping into an empty guest room. There were two sentinels directly outside the nursery. Khonsu used his mood power to make them lethargic and sleepy, and they were overtaken with minimal effort. Montu stayed outside to look out as Khonsu entered the room.

"Cutting it a little close, aren't we?" commented Thoth. The babes were in their cradles, and Dalila was seated in her rocking chair nearby.

"Well then, you'll understand my wanting to hurry this along," retorted Khonsu. He moved over to the cradles and looked inside each one. There was only one baby. "Where's the other one?" he inquired in a concerned voice.

"She is not part of the deal," Thoth informed him. "We can't have both weapons in Seth's possession."

"What am I to tell Montu?"

"Tell him the truth. The baby wasn't in her crib." Thoth smiled coldly.

Montu and Khonsu stole out of the castle using a secret passageway that the king used to travel clandestinely through the castle and to the outside grounds. They emerged from an iron gate covered with ivy to the outer wall of the royal grounds. The drop in temperature alerted them to another presence as a charcoal black dragon with golden eyes materialized six feet away from them. They mounted the beast with the basket containing the baby in between them.

The beast soared on gusts of cool air and traveled south toward the circle of stones found in the middle of the kingdom. Meanwhile, back at the castle, the alarm had been sounded that Karma had been abducted. The royal guard was dispensed to pursue the kidnappers

and retrieve the infant. Ra himself joined in the chase with his personal guard, while Hathor stayed behind to watch over Destiny, along with Thoth and Isis.

As the two abductors alighted from the dragon, several rebels slithered out of the darkness. One of the rebels guided the dragon toward a darkened alley near the kingdom square. Two more escorted Khonsu and Montu to the interdimensional portal situated in the middle of six tall surrounding stones reminiscent of Stonehenge. The portal was a circular stone ring with three flat stone slabs which served as steps at its base. There were six hieroglyphic symbols carved into the ring and one large sun disk embedded into the ground facing the steps.

Khonsu stood in the middle of the sun disk. He started chanting a spell to open the portal. As he chanted, the symbols, one by one, began to light up in a blue iridescent glow. High above, swarming in from the north, Ra's forces were in hot pursuit. A swirling wormhole appeared in the middle of the portal as all the symbols lit up. Bolts of lightning rained down from the captain of the guard, who held a golden trident in his outstretched hand.

Unfortunately, he was still too far away, and Khonsu, who was still holding the babe, was the first to escape through the portal. Following closely behind were Montu and two rebels, who by now had been recognized by the oncoming army. As the forces swooped in to alight and pursue, the portal closed.

Shortly afterward, Ra and his personal guard plunged into the circular dais. Ra stood in the golden circle as his adversaries had just done and started to chant, but to no avail. The symbols would not light up. He called for the high priest to come and assist, but he did not have any more success than Ra had. The portal between Sirius and Earth was closed. No one could leave or enter.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Seth awaited the dissenters with his own priestess who had been instrumental in locking the portal. To say that he was displeased that there was only one babe was an understatement. He railed and ranted and had his guard take the insurgents away to mete out his punishment. Karma was now completely at his mercy.

Chapter 1

March 2019, *Villa D'Angelo, Barbados*

"Again," declared the man to the young girl.

"Khonsu, I need a moment," Karma protested.

"C'mon, *princess*. You can't ask your enemy for a time-out," he chided.

Man, she should not have had that sweet bread before her workout. She was paying for it now, she agonized. That was not the only thing she agonized about. The reason she had eaten the sweet bread in the first place was to comfort herself from the disappointment of the night before.

She and Khonsu had been playing senet in the lounge. He had beaten her thoroughly, and she had not been a very good sport about it. Add to the fact that of late, he was not touching her, and she felt spurned. Just the thought of her dejected state brought up her defenses, and she unleashed her energy as she leaped out of the crouch she had been in, flew up, and did a side kick while in the air, striking Khonsu and knocking him down. She landed solemnly and walked over to help him up.

"Better." He grinned as they saluted each other. "Oss."

Karma D'Angelo gathered her towel which was laid across a lawn chair a few feet away. "After that workout, I'm ready for a good soaking in the Jacuzzi. You coming?" she teased invitingly.

“Unfortunately, *princess*, I have some business to attend with your father, but do enjoy yourself.”

“Oh, I will,” she countered. She tried to hide her disappointment as she eyed the octagonal Jacuzzi which adjoined the dodecagonal pool only a dozen feet away. Khonsu proceeded to go up to the main house of the Villa D’Angelo, the family’s Barbados retreat and one of many abodes worldwide.

Karma shed her gi down to her swimsuit, which she always wore underneath, and stepped into the warm, welcoming Jacuzzi. Her curly reddish-brown hair was a striking complement to her smooth copper skin as she lowered her curvaceous five-foot-eight body into the awaiting spa. She closed her hazel eyes and lifted her visage to the sun as she leaned back in the warm whirlpool. The sun against her skin felt wonderful, and she could feel the vibration of light coming from the gaseous ball as it entered her body.

She *was* the water, and she surrendered to the bubbling jets until her mind drifted to ecstasy. It was good to get away from Columbia University, where she studied art history and archeology. She relished the respite from traveling to digs and cataloging artifacts. The family usually came here for winter solstice, the spring equinox, and the summer solstice. It was one of the larger villas in Sandy Lane, sporting nine bedrooms, nine bathrooms, an open living and dining room, and grounds that stretched all the way to a private beach.

As she relaxed in the whirlpool, her gaze followed Khonsu’s retreating back as he made his way to the house. Khonsu had come to mean so much more to her than just her protector, her guide, and her confidante. Since her twentieth birthday just a few months ago, their relationship had taken on a more intimate nature, and she found it increasingly difficult to be around him given all these intense feelings. She sensed a change in him as well, as the easiness with which their relationship had always thrived had become more tense.

On top of all that, she had started having strange dreams about a girl that seemed familiar yet she was sure she had never met. The girl was trying to tell her something, but what she was saying sounded muddled and warbled like there was interference, and she always awakened before the girl could relay her message. She had dreamed

about the girl again last night, her dark cocoa skin a contrast to her coppery hue. She was saying, “We’re coming.” She had awoken then, sweat drenched and breathing heavily. It was the same girl she had seen in her mirror on her twentieth birthday, just a few months ago.

Now she watched Khonsu with his warrior’s body ascend the patio stairs to the second floor, where he disappeared inside to get to Lord Seth’s floor. She looked up to see her father on the third-floor patio looking down at her, and she thought about the little incident that morning when she was leaving her room. She had seen Winston and Vadera leave her father’s suite in their nightclothes looking all disheveled. She could only imagine what happened there last night.

From above, on the third-floor terrace of the main house, Lord Seth watched the beautiful water nymph relaxing in the Jacuzzi. He had thought of possessing her himself but thought better of it because of the terms of the betrothal between her and Khonsu. It had been arranged since her birth, and he was sure that Ra would have seen to it that it was magically binding. That was why it had been so important to acquire Khonsu.

While Ra was focusing on his goddesses, Seth had been focusing on Khonsu as one of the keys to controlling the living weapons. It had been easy bringing Khonsu over to his side, as many of the gods feared the goddesses and wanted them neutralized. It was believed that they were indestructible but could shred the spirit of the gods and send them back to the All. Khonsu had been no exception, but he had shown him his shortsightedness and had made him an ally.

Khonsu was literally the only one that could have her in the carnal sense, and even still there was no guarantee he would survive it without losing his mind. He surmised it was better for Khonsu to fall on his sword, as it were, than for him to attempt it. Still, it was intoxicating, the thought of possessing all that power.

He had developed a healthy respect for the girl, as any warrior would his weapon, yet he felt he had the mastery of her and could bend her to his will. She was sharp and unassuming, an interesting

combination that never ceased to amaze, and he had to stay on his toes when playing chess with her, for she was the only one that could beat him. She did not pacify him with false modesty. He chuckled to himself as he thought of the last time she had defeated him. She had roared with triumph and had gotten a blue sapphire necklace out of it.

Still, he needed to rein her in until he was ready to unleash her. Ra would be here soon, and he needed the road ahead to be clear and smooth.

Khonsu reached the patio of Seth's chambers. "My lord." Khonsu bowed to Seth curtsy.

"How is she doing?" inquired the lord.

"She is almost as good a fighter as I am."

"High praise coming from you, Khonsu. She seems a little distracted, although that might not be a bad thing considering what comes next."

"Agreed. I should probably capitalize on her distraction," Khonsu suggested.

"Yes, yes! It's time to get her ready," Seth proclaimed. "This calls for a toast. Join me," he invited.

The men proceeded to Seth's private bar. He reached behind the bar for a bottle of Mount Gay sugarcane brandy and proceeded to pour the amber liquid into two brandy snifters.

"Success," he saluted.

"Success," Khonsu responded.

"On the spring equinox, it must be done."

"I will not disappoint, my lord," Khonsu promised.

"See that you do not," Seth rejoined.

* * * * *

Karma slowly rose out of the Jacuzzi and took the circular path to the west side of the gazebo. There, she showered off the chlorinated water. As she turned to retrace her steps, her personal maid appeared as if from thin air with a fluffy white towel.

"Thank you, Nan," she offered. She took the towel and proceeded to dry off.

"How about something cool to drink?" proffered Nan.

"Oh, some coconut water would be heaven," exclaimed Karma. "I'm going to sit for a while in the gazebo. If you could bring it up there, that would be wonderful," Karma continued as she followed the path of circular stones that led to the stairs of the cozy gazebo.

"I'll be right back," Nan promised.

"Oh, and could you bring my tablet as well?" she threw over her shoulder as she sauntered away.

"No problem." She smiled indulgently at her young charge.

Nan had been taking care of Karma since she was a babe and was the closest thing to a mother she had ever known. She was responsible for dressing her, fixing her hair, and any other demands Karma had for her. In truth, she loved Karma as if she were her own and was very protective of the young goddess. The rest of the household was just as devoted to her. Everything seemed brighter when she was around, and she filled the days with light.

The maid hurried off to do her lady's bidding with a determination that rivaled that of a guidance missile seeking its target. Meanwhile, stretched out on a resin wicker couch with white cushions and brown and white striped stuffed cushions, Karma looked out over the grounds at the Jacuzzi and swimming pool she had just vacated.

The white and green wooden gazebo was nestled in an array of coconut trees and afforded a vista of the main house, pool, and most of the grounds. The amber jeweled ceiling fan spun dizzily, creating a nice breeze in the cozy space. There were several white cotton curtains that were pulled back to allow an open view but could be closed for privacy on the pergola.

Karma found herself daydreaming again about the dark-haired girl. She surmised that it had something to do with the necklace Khonsu had given her for her birthday, for that was the first time she had seen her, but she could not figure out how or why. What had been disturbing was that she had called her sister, which was quite impossible seeing as she was an only child. Maybe she had meant it

in a more symbolic way. After all, she thought of Felicia and Nila as her sisters.

Her father had told her of the beautiful Bajan woman who had died giving birth to her, and as far as she knew, she was Seth's only heir. His children, save for Anubis, had been killed during the War of the Gods. Even so, it was whispered at court that Anubis was not biologically his and was Osiris's son. He claimed Anubis, nonetheless, but had stipulated that he would not inherit his kingdom. She stood to inherit everything and was confident that Seth would not withhold a sister from her. In fact, it was solely because of him that she had her two sisters and best friends.

Still, it was eerie just how much they looked alike. The girl seemed like a darker version of her, and she wondered if maybe she was seeing her shadow self. Whatever it was, she felt instinctively that it was important. Maybe the next time she saw her, whether in a dream or magically, she would try to talk to her.

She would talk to Khonsu about it, she decided. After all, it had all started after he had given her that necklace. Maybe if she confided in him, it would bring back some of the intimacy they seemed to have lost. She could also take it to Ms. Mabel and get her take on it. She decided to do just that the next time she saw her. She was still deep in thought when Nan returned with all her requests and laid them out on the table for her perusal.

"Thanks, Nan," Karma said appreciatively.

"Is there anything else you need?" Nan inquired.

"No, Nan. I'm good. Thanks," Karma countered.

The maid nodded and went back down the gazebo stairs to the main house. Karma watched as she left, remembering the many times Nan had been there for her. She looked around to make sure there was no one in view, and then, with her mind, she untied the curtains, allowing them to expand and cover the open spaces like puffs of white clouds. Once she had her privacy, she got up from the settee, peeled off her damp swimsuit, and put on the white cotton robe that Nan had provided her. She picked up her tablet off the table and reclined once again on the sofa.

Her telekinetic power had presented itself shortly after her twentieth birthday. She had been sitting at her vanity and reached for her hairbrush when it traveled into her hand like metal to magnet. She was so startled she had dropped the brush on the floor, staring incredulously at it before picking it up. She wondered if seeing the girl and her powers were connected somehow. For some bizarre reason, she had hidden her power from everyone, but she was starting to wonder if that had been wise. Surely that would have brought her and Khonsu closer together.

She scrolled through her tablet and selected "Love on the Brain" from her Favorites playlist. As the music began, the soul-stirring melancholy notes resonated through her. Rihanna was crooning, "What you want from me? And I tried to buy your pretty heart, but the price was too high." She started swaying to the soulful melody as she searched her gallery for some recent pictures. She found the one of Khonsu she'd been looking for. He was standing on the beach in blue swim trunks, his six-foot-two ebony frame and thick muscles glistening in the afternoon sun.

She remembered the night he had given her the necklace, the night of her birthday. They had been here in Barbados as they usually were from the second week in December to the second week in January. Her father's birthday was three days after hers on Christmas Day, and there was usually a grand ball to celebrate both. However, last year, her father had pushed up the ball to fall on her birthday, explaining that it was a special year. She had hoped for a pool party with her friends, but he had put any notion of such a folly out of her head.

Nevertheless, her best friends, Nila and Felicia, had arrived earlier in the day, much to her father's chagrin. She suspected he was a little in awe of them and tried to appear as if unaffected, but she could see through the facade. There was a soft spot he tried to hide from the others, but she saw him.

He was like any other father, overindulgent to make up for the loss of her mother. He gave her whatever her heart desired, so he tolerated the twins, as he called them. Of course, they looked nothing alike and weren't even sisters, but since one was rarely seen without

the other, the nickname had stuck. Lord Seth had them investigated as any good father would have done and had found that although they were natural-born witches, there had not been a practicing witch in their respective families for three generations.

They had arrived for brunch since Karma slept in on her special day and had enjoyed their meal on the downstairs patio with a full view of the pool. The girls had chattered excitedly over the upcoming party later that evening and were predicting how many of Karma's male admirers would be there.

As indulgent as Father was, that was the one area in which she could not seem to get her way. Dating humans, he had told her, was strictly forbidden. Dating anyone, he had further clarified, was strictly forbidden until he deemed her ready, which she thought was hypocritical considering the human lovers Father took to his bed.

Nonetheless, over the years, Karma had had an attachment to Grandison Anderson, a boy from her school at St. Michael's. It was a great secret, of course, and Father had been none the wiser. Grandison was currently in his third year at Oxford and had not come home for the holidays but had opted to stay in London.

He had broken up with her over the Thanksgiving holiday, claiming that he could no longer handle the distance. She had been devastated and sought the comfort of her witchy friends. She had put on a bold face, however, and pretended not to be as heartbroken as she was and wished him well. He wanted to remain friends, and she clung to that, hoping to win him back, but what happened at the birthday party changed all that.

Around the Christmas holiday, David Lorenza, a college friend of Felicia's, had caught Karma's eye. However, for all the world, he didn't even notice Karma as he had eyes only for Lucy Armstrong, a fellow coed at the university. That fact did not deter Karma, however, as she was determined to get over Grandison and planned to make her move that night at her birthday bash.

The girls plotted on how they would separate David from his *objet d'amour* and were still giggling when one of the kitchen maids came to remove the dishes. In the end, she never did get the guy. He was too hopelessly in love with Lucy, and she ended up bringing

them together. What a hopeless romantic she was. Plus, something else had distracted her from her purpose that night.

An hour before the guests started to arrive, Karma was in her room getting ready with the assistance of Nan. There was a knock on the door. It was Khonsu. He had come to deliver a very special present, he explained. Karma had attempted to get up from her dressing table, but he had insisted she remain seated.

At some point, Nan left the room and entered the dressing room to collect the gown Karma had chosen for the night, along with accessories. She would never forget how he seemed to fill the room. His handsome beauty shone as bright as the burning sun. He had smiled then, a smile that said he was up to something, and she found herself smiling with him, completely caught up in his exuberant charm.

He had come to stand over her and urged her to turn around. While his eyes met hers in the mirror, he said, "Karma, I've known you all your life. I have watched you grow into this beautiful woman that sits here before me. Tonight, I give you this unique gift made especially for you because you're so special." He had then withdrawn a golden necklace with a round golden disk and an intricate design made of platinum.

The moment it had touched her skin, Karma knew this was no ordinary piece of jewelry. For one thing, it was very warm, and it sent a hot charge of energy throughout her entire body. His fingers had lingered on the back of her neck and shoulders after he had clasped the necklace around her neck.

She reached and clasped his hand with hers. "Thank you. It's beautiful," she exclaimed as their eyes met in the mirror. She turned around in her seat and rose to stand before him. "I will treasure it always," she said as she gazed upward into his warm brown eyes. He reached for her and gently stroked her cheek with his thumb.

"*You* are my treasure," he said huskily.

Her heart started a staccato beat at his touch, and her knees felt weak like warm rubber. She gazed at his generous lips and found herself drawn to him. She did not realize what she was doing until her lips sought his in a sweet, enduring kiss.

It started out soft and sweet, her lips softly brushing his as she reached up to put her arms around his strong neck. The soft innocent kiss began to take on a life of its own and swiftly morphed into heat and desire. He groaned as she deepened the kiss and held her even closer to him, molding her to his masculine body.

Her mind was reeling, and she could not contain one coherent thought in her head. His tongue brushed her lips, and he coaxed them open to explore her sweet mouth. She opened to him without hesitation and drew him into her mouth with her own tongue. She tasted like warm honey and sunshine, and it was all he could do not to grind himself into her soft sweetness. It was he who broke off the kiss.

She mewled in protestation and reached for him again. He chuckled as he gently disentangled himself from her.

“You need to get ready for your party, *princess*.”

She moaned in frustration. Why was he talking about the stupid party when all she wanted to do was kiss him some more?

“Oh, before I forget,” he continued as he reached into his left pocket. “There’s more.” And he presented a pair of matching earrings with a gold disk and platinum horns.

It worked. She became distracted with the new offering and sighed dramatically as she took them from him.

“I love them,” she said breathlessly and proceeded to put them in her pierced ears. She went back to her dressing table to examine herself in the mirror. “Thank you, Khonsu,” she said sheepishly. She was starting to feel a little embarrassed about her brazen kiss. After all, it was *she* who had kissed *him*.

“I’ll let you finish getting dressed. See you downstairs, birthday girl.” And with that, he left her.

She scrutinized the jewelry once more in the reflection. The disk had an intricate design of the eye of Ra in the middle, and as she touched it, she felt a sensation of warmth traveling through her fingers, up her arms, and throughout her body. At the same time, something strange was happening with the mirror.

It started to liquefy, rippling from the middle to the outer corners of the mirror, as if it was a lake and someone had dropped a

pebble in it. A face started to appear at the beginning of the ripple, her face. But then a thick mass of obsidian hair, not red, started to emerge. She drew back from the dressing table in alarm. Just then, Nan returned from the dressing room, and just as suddenly, the mirror returned to its previous state. Karma blinked and then looked closely at the mirror, but all she could see was her own reflection.

Nan came into the bedroom holding a beautiful burgundy Zuhair Murad gown of satin duchesse. The gown was strapless with red-toned crystals embroidered on the bodice and side sash. The skirt had a long slit in the middle which showed off her beautifully curved legs. It had been flown in from Paris for the occasion. Karma looked at the gown appreciatively as Nan laid it across the bed. She disappeared into the dressing room again and emerged with a pair of matching strappy red slingback sandals.

Karma looked in the mirror a little apprehensively, but whatever was there before was absolutely gone. She relaxed as Nan came to style her hair and apply her makeup. Forty-five minutes later, she was transformed into a stunning vision and looked more the goddess than she had ever appeared before.

Her hair had been swept up into a loose chignon with loose waves in the front and sides of her face. The gown fit her perfectly, and she was sure to outshine every other female at the party. Sweet steel band music wafted up from the great hall downstairs, beckoning her to join the festivity.

With nervous excitement, she alighted from her room and proceeded down the hall to the main stairs. Guests were mingling in the open living room, but all stopped and stared at the vision in red at the top of the stairs. As she looked down at all her guests, she could see Khonsu approaching the stairs to escort her down.

Her stomach did flip-flops on seeing him again since the kiss, and she could feel the blood rush to her face as she relived the intimate moment they had shared earlier.

“You look amazing,” Khonsu acknowledged as he put her hand on his arm and escorted her down the flight of steps.

“You’re quite dashing yourself,” she returned. The two made quite a handsome couple as they descended the staircase.

Her father was forefront among the guests, and more servants had been hired to cater the affair. Every guest had a glass of champagne in their hands, and a servant stood at the base of the stairs holding two flutes on a silver tray for the descending couple. As they finished the last step, each took hold of a glass and waited in anticipation as Seth came forward to give a toast.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my extreme honor to present to you my daughter, Lady Karma. It seems like only yesterday, I was holding her in my arms, and now she has grown into a spectacular woman. My dear, on your twentieth birthday, I wish you continued happiness and success and many, many more birthdays to come."

"Hear! Hear!" the crowd cheered and raised their glasses to Karma.

"Thank you, Father," she beamed. "And thank you all for coming to share this special day with me. In the words of wise King Solomon, 'Eat, drink, and be merry,'" she proclaimed.

At that, the steel band started to play the birthday song as she raised her glass to her lips. They all drank to that as Karma came to stand beside her father.

On the farther side of the room were stacks of presents piled up on a table from all the well-wishers. As Karma moved into the throng, she stopped and greeted her various guests, asking after this one and that until she reached her posse. Nila looked dazzling in a green Dior gown with a ribbed silk strappy bodice, a slim belt of the same color at the waist, and a diaphanous pleated silk skirt that reached to the floor. Felicia was breathtaking in a Valentino, royal blue, sleeveless, silk romper gown with a scooped neck.

"Wow, you guys look amazing," Karma complimented.

"And you look... what was the word your father used? Oh yes, *spectacular*," Nila quipped, giving a good imitation of Seth.

"Where is your prince charming?" Felicia inquired.

Karma looked around for Khonsu and then realized the girls were referring to David. "I don't see him."

"Oh, look," Nila pointed. "He's over by the bar with Lucy."

"Shall we cast a spell on him?" asked Felicia teasingly.

"I'm not feeling it. The situation has changed," Karma said as she heaved a sigh.

"Since this morning?" queried Nila incredulously.

"Yes, something has happened. I'll tell you about it later. In the meantime, what say we put poor David out of his misery? An attraction spell on Lucy should do the trick. Are you guys game?" encouraged Karma.

"Princess, you are feeling generous this evening. I can't wait to hear what has happened to change your mind," Nila rejoined.

They moved over to a solitary area off the living room. Felicia grabbed some stationery paper from a nearby side table. Nila plucked a rose from a bouquet perched on another table. While Felicia wrote Lucy's and David's names on the paper, Nila removed the petals from the flower. They placed the petals inside the paper, rolled it up, and held it as they said, "Love's light, shining bright, shine your light on these lovers tonight."

A sheer red mist escaped the rolled-up parchment and floated to where the lovers stood. Then it dissipated right above their heads.

The trio smiled as they saw their magic working. Lucy reached out and touched David on his arm. Pleased with themselves, they sauntered off to mingle with the other guests.

Khonsu cornered them only to comment, "I see you three are playing Cupid tonight."

"Oh, Khonsu, we're just having a bit of fun," Nila said coquettishly.

"Just see that you don't have too much fun. Remember, Lord Seth is always watching," he said ominously and then walked off.

"He does have a flare for the dramatic, doesn't he?" observed Felicia.

Yes, thought Karma as she came back to the present. Khonsu certainly had a flare for the dramatic, but they had been careful not to engage in anymore high jinks for the rest of the evening. No sense getting on Father's radar, especially where magic was concerned. She had a feeling he would not have approved. As much as she loved him, she feared him that much more. There was something quite forbidding and dangerous about her father. She had seen how he dealt

with others when he was displeased, and she did not want to be the recipient of his anger.

Khonsu had not attempted to kiss her again after that night, and she had noticed, like today with the Jacuzzi, that he did not want to be alone with her outside of training. She really wanted to explore these feelings she was developing for him, but how was she to do it if he wouldn't cooperate? She had finally confided to her two best friends that her interest had shifted to Khonsu, and they were very supportive of the match.

They, of course, wanted to cast a love spell to hasten things up, but she had refused. She wanted him to come to her freely and of his own volition. She just had to figure out a way to make that happen without magic. She looked at the picture again, admiring his broad chocolate brown chest and his washboard abs. His almond-shaped eyes were exotic. His handsome and angular face and generous lips promised wicked things.

She felt herself getting warmer, and her hands became sweaty. Her breath came in short gasps, and her heart beat rapidly as she became more aroused. She closed her eyes and imagined that Khonsu was there with her, kissing her, tasting her, teasing her. Just then, Khonsu appeared in the entrance of the gazebo.

"What are you doing up here, *princess*?" he asked.

Startled, her eyes flew open, and she quickly tapped the power button on her tablet to hide his picture.

She clutched her heart. "You almost gave me a heart attack," she reprimanded. "Don't you make noise when you're coming up on a person?" she continued.

"That would defeat the whole purpose, wouldn't it?" He grinned mischievously. His mood seemed to have changed from earlier, and she relaxed a little.

He came to sit on the other end of the sofa she was lying on by moving her feet and putting them on his lap. She tried to pull up her legs, but he restrained her.

"There's no need to get up. Stay, relax," he said as he started to rub her feet. Suddenly, her mouth became dry, and she reached for the coconut water on the table in front of her. "Mm, that looks

good," he said yearningly. Nan had left a carafe and a glass which Karma was drinking out of.

"You're welcome to some if you don't mind drinking out of the decanter," she offered.

He looked at her and shook his head in wonder. "Pass it here," he demanded.

She reached for the decanter, still holding her glass in her right hand. Her tablet was prone on her lap, and he took that moment to grab it.

"Give it back," she commanded.

"What is it you don't want me to see?" he chided. She rested both the carafe and her glass back on the table and tried to reach for her tablet.

He tapped the power button to turn the screen back on and swiped the screen to unlock it. A picture of himself stared back at him. He looked up at her in a discerning way, and she closed her eyes in mortification.

His voice softened. "*Princess*, open your eyes," he persuaded. "It's actually a good picture of me, if I do say so," he said lightly.

She opened her eyes. "You conceited beast!" she yelled at him as she grabbed one of the pillows to throw at him.

"Temper, temper," he chided as he let out a chuckle and tried to duck. The pillow found its target, however. "You're going to pay for that," he said playfully. He put the tablet on the floor, and as he did, she drew up her feet. "Oh no, you don't." He grabbed for her feet again and slid up the length of the couch until she was practically in his lap. She tried to pummel his big muscular arms, but he grabbed her by the wrists, put her arms above her head, and soundly kissed her.

She slowly stopped struggling and started responding to his kiss. He tasted of brandy and heat, and she felt herself melting under his exquisite lips. He released her hands as he slowly caressed down her arms to the sides of her midriff and, from there, the sides of her breasts through the robe. Even through the thick robe, she could feel the warmth of his powerful hands.

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She brought her arms down and encircled his neck but made no attempt to deepen the kiss as she had before. His tongue started to tease her lips open, and surprisingly, it was she this time who broke the kiss.

“You’re a very confusing man,” she said softly.

“Are you not enjoying this?” he queried huskily.

“Yes,” she said hesitatingly. “But you’ve been distant since the night of my birthday. What gives?”

“We can talk about it later,” he ground out as he bent to take her lips again.

She was properly quieted as his warm lips took hers in a more insistent kiss. It was a good thing she was already prone, as her knees felt weak and shaky. His tongue started to open her lips, and she acquiesced as she put her arms around his strong neck. He tasted of warm brandy, and his hands moved to her sides as he spanned her midriff. Then his thumbs were gently caressing the bottom of her breasts.

She arched into his hands, her body wanting more as a throaty moan escaped her lips. He untied her robe with nimble fingers as he continued to lay siege to her mouth, doing a dance as old as time with her tongue. She wanted him. She wanted him in the worst way,

About the Author



W. S. Burrowes was born on the sunny island of Barbados in the Caribbean. Even from a young age, she could be found with her nose in a book. She has been a technical writer for over fifteen years. At the age of twelve, she moved to New York with her mother and resided there until 2004. She currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with her two sons.

While in New York, she attended New York University and graduated with a computer science degree, much to the surprise of her counselor, who told her the first time she met her that based on her entrance essay, she was looking forward to reading her first novel.

That was many years ago, but that counselor obviously knew something then that Wendy would discover later in life. Writing has always been a passion, and now Ms. Burrowes has turned her passion for writing nonfiction to writing fiction.