

James

Sue, the towering Tyrannosaurus Rex was the first thing I saw as I walked through the front doors of the Chicago Field Museum. I had been here a hundred times, but I was always amazed by the dinosaur skeletons and the flying pterodactyl that dominated the main hall. The sheer size of those magnificent creatures was awe inspiring. I spent time walking around and stopped to stare up at the head of the T-Rex.

There was a new exhibit on Egypt and King Tut at the museum, and I was early for my timed ticket, so I strolled through the gems exhibit and then the animal dioramas. Around me, children squealed with excitement as they tried to look at everything at once.

History was a part of my life, and it was not just because I lived so much of it, much more than the ordinary person. My last stop was the Ancient Egypt exhibit to get myself in the mindset for the special exhibition. I walked over to look at one of the mummies when an unfamiliar but very pleasant scent caught my attention. I turned and saw an incredibly beautiful woman. She was tall and slender. She wore a short, navy skirt, a museum tee-shirt, and white sneakers. Her silky light brown hair was secured in a high ponytail and still her hair went past her mid-back. She walked backwards and spoke to a group of children.

She opened her arms wide. "And here are the mummies!" she announced with exuberance. She turned and our eyes connected. She smiled and turned back to the children who now peered into the cases.

I stared at her for much longer than was prudent. I was captivated and could not move my feet. Her scent filled me and seemed to call to me.

A loud squeal by one of the children snapped me out of my haze, and I moved back to the edge of the room. I sat on a bench, but I continued to watch as she explained about mummies and how they were made to the children who hung on her every word. And who could blame them. She was enthusiastic and charismatic. She led them to the dioramas depicting mummification and then took them into the chamber room.

Only when she was out of sight was I finally able to walk away. I went back to the main desk and asked a question about my timed ticket as a way to inquire about the woman I saw. "There was a very enthusiastic guide with a group of children in the Ancient Egypt Exhibit," I said as casually as possible to the older woman at the information desk.

“Yes, Arianna. She is an intern with us for the Summer. Her knowledge of ancient cultures is quite extensive.”

“Well, you are fortunate to have her.”

“Thank you,” the older woman said. I locked eyes with her and asked her a few more questions. I knew I shouldn’t compel a human unless it was necessary, and I justified my actions by telling myself it was necessary to know more about Arianna.

“Did you say I could get in line now?” I asked after she gave me more information.

“What?” she stuttered. “Oh, yes, your ticket will allow you to enter the special exhibit in about five minutes.”

“Thank you.”

I walked away thinking about Arianna.

I knew it was crazy, but since I saw Arianna, I felt myself drawn toward her. I went to the special Egyptian exhibit and stayed long after my timed ticket expired. I figured Arianna’s shift ended at four pm, so I made my way out of the exhibit and positioned myself on a bench where I could see the employee’s entrance.

Arianna came out the door at 4:03 talking excitedly to another museum employee.

“You are coming tonight, right Arianna?”

“Absolutely. I haven’t had a girl’s night since I came to Chicago.” Arianna waved and walked to the path that led to the front of the museum and the bus stop

“Great. See you later.” The woman headed in the other direction toward the side of the building.

I quickly caught up with the other woman. “Hello,” I said to her as I approached. When she looked up at me, I looked into her eyes and compelled her. I knew it was pathetic and wrong, but I needed information.

Later that evening, I went to O’Connell’s pub on the waterfront. It was crowded and noisy, but it had tables and chairs and a stage on a deck overlooking the water. I smelled Arianna as soon as she came into the pub. She was dressed in a yellow sleeveless top and a pair of form fitting jeans. On her feet were black stilettos that lengthened her already long shapely legs. She was

gorgeous. Heads turned in her direction and several men followed her with their eyes. I felt a rumbling build in my chest. I shook my head; this was no time for my vampire instincts to emerge.

She saw her friend and walked over to the table on the left side of the stage. The women hugged, and her friend introduced Arianna to the other women at the table.

A waitress came over for their order. The women smiled and laughed, swayed to the music, and watched the band. Clearly, Arianna and her new friends were having a good time.

The waitress returned with drinks and heaping plates of loaded nachos. They thanked her and dug right in.

“Hey, James. I didn’t expect to see you here tonight.”

“Hi Joey. I thought I would get a drink.”

“Mind if I join you?”

“Sit down. Sorry, I am a little distracted.”

Joey’s eyes followed my gaze. “Pretty group of girls. Anyone you know?”

My mind raced to decide what to tell him. I didn’t want to admit I was just following Arianna, but I also didn’t want him to think she meant nothing to me.

“You ok, James,” he asked. “You are beyond distracted tonight.”

I let out a sigh. “Ok what I tell you stays between us. Right?”

“Sure. You know you can trust me.”

“Ok.” I explained everything to Joey. He listened without interrupting me. “What do you think?” I asked when I finished.

Joey thought for a moment. “You are a good looking guy, James. You are smart and well mannered. Why don’t you just go introduce yourself and ask her to dance?”

I shrugged. I knew that was what I should do, but part of me wanted everything to be perfect when I met her.

“Ok, so I know you are not shy or afraid, so I’m guessing you want to impress her the first time you meet her.”

Yes, someone who understands. I nodded. “Exactly.”

“And a bar isn’t a place to meet a woman you want a long term relationship with.”

“Yes. That is my thought.”

Joey looked at Arianna. “I can’t say I blame you. You said she works at the museum and is getting her PhD., so she probably wouldn’t take you seriously if you approached her at a bar.”

He paused and continued to look at Arianna. “She’s beautiful and obviously smart. She’s graceful and poised. Classy. She seems perfect for you, James.”

“And that’s why our meeting can’t be in a bar.”

We ordered another beer, and we watched. Several men approached the women and asked them to dance, but so far, none of them accepted. “They seem to be having a girl’s night,” Joey commented.

“Is it creepy to watch her?” I shook my head. “I’m not a stalker.”

“Are you following her home, staking out her apartment, following her everywhere?”

“No. I have never been to her place.”

Joey laughed. “So, it’s reconnaissance. No, not reconnaissance; research is more like you, professor. Think of it as research.”

I smiled. “Yes, research. I’m doing research to figure out the best way to meet her with the best odds of success.”

“There you go.” Joey raised his bottle of beer, and I tapped it with mine.

“I like how you think, Joey.”

“And if you want, I could help with research, so you don’t turn into a stalker. I’d hate for Sam to have to get involved. We can’t stalk humans.”

Sam, the clan leader, would not be happy if she called the police, and he had to come get me out of trouble.

“I’m keeping my distance.”

Joey nodded and took another swig of beer.

I smelled the vampires who walked through the door before I saw them. Two women sauntered in. Their looks commanded attention, and many men’s heads turned in their direction.

Joey stretched his neck to get a look at the women. “Ah, Joselyn and Simone.” His eyes glistened, and he slid his hands through his black curly hair. “Maybe forget the human and pick up a vampire instead.” He watched as they sat down at a table near us. A waitress took their drink order, and before she returned with the drinks, several vampires had maneuvered themselves closer to their table.

“You and I can beat the competition tonight, James. You sure you wouldn’t prefer an uncomplicated vampire.”

I snorted and lowered by beer. “Uncomplicated? Since when are female vampires uncomplicated?”

He laughed. “You’re right, but man they have to be easier to deal with than a human. Sam always says relationships between vampires and humans never work.”

“Well, I am going to do my research, figure out the best way to meet her, and try for a relationship despite the odds.”

Joey stood up. “Well, good luck. Call me if you need back up.”

I reached out and shook his hand. “Thanks. Just talking about it has given me clarity and made me realize I need to be more cautious.”

“Glad to help. Now wish me luck.”

“Good luck.”

Joey made his way to the two vampire women. He pulled up a chair and engaged Simone in conversation. I looked over at Arianna and her friends. They were up dancing together. It amazed me how women didn’t hesitate to dance with one another. I knew Joey was right. Vampire and human relationships usually did not work. In fact, I didn’t know of any relationships that lasted more than a couple months.

Just before last call, I drank the rest of my beer and left the bar. I gave Joey a discrete thumbs up as I passed by. It looked like he and Simone would be leaving together. I stood outside and waited then watched as Arianna came out of the bar. She checked her phone, looked around, found her uber driver, and got in the car. The driver was a woman, and Arianna seemed to know her. That put me at ease. I was tempted to follow and make certain she got home safely, but I resisted. I decided to walk home, and if I happened to walk by Arianna’s apartment later, so be it.

Arianna

I got into the car. “Hi Jennifer. I was glad to see you were working tonight.” Driving in Chicago was a nightmare, and parking was expensive. Therefore, I often took the train or called an uber. Jennifer had picked me up several times to take me to or from the museum or the university library.

“You are my last fare. How was your night?”

“Great. I was out with Meg from the museum and two of her friends. They are really nice women. It was strictly a girl’s night, and I really needed a night to unwind.”

“Sometimes those are the best nights. How’s the dissertation coming along?”

“Good. I should finish in the Fall.”

“You spend a lot of time at the library.”

“The research library at the university is amazing. The museum at the university is amazing. Between those two places and the Field Museum, I have access to an incredible array of artifacts, papers, and research materials.”

“That’s great. Are you still going to be at the museum in the Fall?”

“No. I will be teaching at Weymouth University in upstate New York in the Fall.”

“That’s fantastic.”

“I’m excited. How is your job search going?”

“So far, I have struck out, but I have an interview next week.”

“Good luck. You are smart and well spoken. You will get something soon.”

“Thanks, Arianna. I appreciate the vote of confidence. Here you are. I will wait until you are inside.”

I paid for the ride, and I left Jennifer a generous tip. “Thanks for the ride. Be careful going home.”

“I will. Night.”

“Good night.” I went up the stairs, unlocked the front door, closed it, and waved to Jennifer. She waved and left. I went into my apartment and kicked off my shoes. I washed up and changed into pajamas. I walked past my desk. I intended to go to bed, but I wasn’t tired, so I decided to check my email and work on my dissertation.

I suddenly woke up out of a dream. I leaned over and looked at the clock. I sighed. It was early, but I knew I would not get back to sleep. This was the second night I had a very unusual dream. I was walking in a foggy, dark forest. I could hear strange noises all around me. I'm scared, but I continue to walk toward something laying on the ground. I don't know what it is, and before I get close enough to see it, I wake up. I got a little closer to it in this dream. I shook myself. It's just a weird dream.

I got out of bed, went to the kitchen, and put on a kettle of water for tea.

Normally, I would not work on Sunday, but I had the opportunity to work in the special Egyptian exhibit at the museum. I showered and dressed. I put my computer and research envelope in my backpack. I planned to go to the library after my shift.

I took the bus to the museum, but I got off a stop early and went to a café for a cup of tea and a chocolate croissant. The sun was shining, and although it was pleasant now, it was going to be a very hot and humid day. It was a good day to be in a dark air conditioned museum and then in a cool library.

On the way to the museum, I stopped at a dress shop. I saw a dress in the window every time I drove by on the bus. I had to try it on.

"Do you have the white sundress in the window in a size 6," I asked the saleswoman.

She led me over to a rack of dresses. "We only stock one dress in each size. You are in luck. A size 6. Would you like to try it on?"

"Yes, please."

She opened the door to one of the dressing rooms and hung the dress on a hook. "There's a three way mirror out here."

I nodded and closed the door. I slipped on the dress, and then I went to look in the mirror. The dress had thin straps, was fitted in the body, and it flared out from the waist. I turned from side to side and the dress swung as I moved.

"The dress is perfect on you," the saleswoman commented as she adjusted the dress on me. "A pair of sandals, and you are set for a day in town or a dinner date."

"I'll take it."

I went back into the dressing room and took off the dress. I probably did not need a white sundress, but it was pretty.

After making my purchase, I made my way to the museum employee entrance.

“Hi Arianna,” Shelley, one of the museum guards said as I walked into the employee area. She looked at the bag on my arm. “Oooh, did you stop at Jacqueline’s?”

“I bought that white sun dress in the window display.”

“That’s a beautiful dress, but it’s white.” She made a face.

“So. You have a nice tan. You would look nice in white.”

“White is not my color. I’d have it dirty in an hour.”

I laughed.

“You are always so stylish, Arianna.” Shelly looked at my cream linen slacks and white sleeveless chiffon blouse. “I need to go shopping with you.”

“Anytime, Shelly. Let’s make plans to shop this week.” I put my backpack and shopping bag in my locker. I took out my museum badge and jacket. I put my hair in a ponytail, and then I snapped the lock closed on the locker.

I was able to look around the exhibit on my own before the exhibit opened to guests and my shift started. One of the perks of working at a museum was time alone with the exhibits. My doctoral dissertation was on ancient Greek and Roman art, philosophy, and civilization, and Egyptian art and culture had an impact on the Greeks and Romans.

I made notes and by special permission, I was allowed to take a few photos.

“Will this information make it into the dissertation,” Derek, the museum curator asked.

“Yes. I will add this information to my section on the influences of other cultures. Thank you for allowing me time to be in here alone and to take pictures.”

“You are doing me a big favor working a shift today. All times are sold out.”

I took more notes and looked at the exhibits until Derek told us to take our positions. The doors opened, and the first group of timed visitors flooded in.

Four hours later, I returned to the employee room. I took my purse out of the locker and went upstairs to the cafeteria. I stood in line for a soda, bag of chips, and a sandwich. Shelly and Meg waved me over.

“Hi.” I sat down. “It’s packed in here today.”

“We were thinking the same.” Meg looked around. “There’s a lot of families with small children.”

“Probably because it’s supposed to be up near 100 degrees today, and the parents want to do something inside where it’s cool,” Shelly commented.

“The special exhibit is sold out today,” I added.

“Are you finished for the day, Arianna?” Shelley asked.

I took a drink of my soda. “I am. Today is my day off, but I took Jackson’s shift so he could pick his mother up at the airport.”

“He said she was coming out for a week this Summer.” Meg raised her eyebrows. “No doubt she wants to meet his girlfriend.”

We ate in silence for a couple minutes.

“Well, I should head to the university library.” I finished my soda.

“Working on the dissertation this afternoon?” Meg asked.

I nodded. “I have really good information from the exhibit to add, and I want to spend time in the special collections room. It’s a treasure trove, but that’s expected since the University of Chicago has a noted archaeological program.”

“Shelley told me you are going to take her shopping this week. Can I come along?”

“Of course, Meg. What day is good for the three of us?” We took out our calendars and started planning our shopping trip. We were all off on Thursday, so we planned to go to the mall and have lunch.

“Are you going out to visit your parents before you start your teaching job this Fall?” Shelley asked.

I shook my head, no. “I’m not planning to go to California. I finish here just a couple weeks before the semester starts at Weymouth University, and I want to get there and get settled before I start teaching.”

“You will be ready, Arianna. You are the most organized person I know,” Shelly assured me.

“You must be excited to be teaching on your own this Fall,” Meg commented.

“I am. I love to teach, and Weymouth University is a small close knit university. I’m excited to be a part of that community.” I picked up my tray. “I’m off to the library.”

They waved. I dumped my tray and went to get my backpack and call for a ride.

James

I sat in the museum cafeteria all morning and hoped Arianna would stop here for lunch after working.

My hunch was correct, and Arianna came in the cafeteria. She bought food and sat down with her friends. I listened to the women's conversation. I heard she was going to work on her dissertation. I expected a library would be her next stop. They talked about shopping.

Then I sat up straighter in my chair. The cafeteria was noisy, but I thought I heard Arianna say Weymouth University.

Did I hear her correctly? Was it wishful thinking? Maybe my mind was playing tricks on me since I sat up all night trying to think of the best way to meet Arianna.

I focused on Arianna's voice. Then I heard her say Weymouth University again very clearly.

I couldn't help the euphoric feeling that came over me. It looked like now I had my answer to how to meet her.

Weymouth University. My old alma mater.

Was it fate? I was never one to believe in fate, but this was some coincidence. Arianna was going to be at Weymouth University in New York in the Fall. Weymouth was the perfect place to officially meet her. I knew the university well. Dean Branson would be happy to have me back. This would give me an opportunity to start the novel I wanted to write. I still had details to work out, but at Weymouth, I would be in familiar territory with people who knew me.

Fate or luck, it didn't matter.

I suddenly felt empty. It had been several days since I last hunted. I had a plan, and now I needed to take care of my needs.

I left the museum and headed to the clan gathering place.

"James, where have you been," Sam asked. "I thought you would be here a couple of days ago."

"I was caught up in a project," I answered in a sharp tone.

He scrutinized me. "You ok? You look ragged."

I ran my fingers through my hair. “Yeah, I’m ok. I was caught up in a project. Is there game around?”

“A herd of deer maybe two miles from here.” He pointed East. “Come back when you finish, so we can talk.”

I nodded and took off in the direction he indicated. I knew I would have to go back and talk to Sam. When the local clan leader said to come talk, you really did not have a choice. I quickly found the herd of deer, selected one, and then leapt on the unsuspecting animal.

When I finished feeding, I felt better, and the idea of talking to Sam was more appealing. I made my way back to the meeting place. Sam sat on the ground and leaned against a tree. His legs were stretched out, and he held a beer in his right hand. He sat up and reached into the cooler beside him and handed me a beer. “Take a seat.” He took a long drink. “Better?”

“Yes.”

“So, what’s got you so holed up that you forget to hunt? You know that is not healthy.”

“There’s this woman,” I began.

Sam coughed out a loud laugh. “Should have known. Who is she?”

“An intern at the Field Museum.”

“Human?”

“Definitely human.”

He raised his eyebrows and shook his head.

I continued, “she is here for the Summer. She’s beautiful and intelligent.”

“Sounds like someone you would be interested in.” He took another long swig of beer.

“She’s a Classics major getting her PhD. She likes to shop, makes friends easily, and spends a lot of time working at the library.”

“Wow. That’s quite a resume. How often have you been out with her?”

“I haven’t actually met her yet.”

Sam narrowed his eyes. “Well, what are you waiting for? Go up to her, say hello, and see if she’s interested.”

“I want to meet her under the right conditions.” I paused, and Sam stared at me waiting for further explanation. “In the Fall, she is teaching at Weymouth University in upstate New York.”

He lowered his beer. “You went to school there, right?”

“A couple of times, yes.”

“And.”

“And, I am thinking of going back there.”

“I thought you had a thing in California for the Fall.”

“A post doc, yes.”

Sam sat up and leaned toward me. “Let me get this straight. You are thinking of changing your plans. Plans I will remind you that you have been working on for months. You are going to abandon those plans to follow some woman you have never met to New York where you what? Hope you will run into her on campus?”

“It’s a small town. It should be easy to meet her.”

Sam did not say anything for a few moments. I waited patiently.

Finally, he shook his head. “Let me give you some advice, relationships between vampires and humans never work. You’ll either violate the treaty and kill her, or you’ll bite her and scare her off. My advice is to go to California and forget about her.” He stood up. “Think about it, James. There is a lot at stake.”

I nodded and stood up. “Thanks for the advice.” I started to head back to my apartment.

“James,” he called, and I turned to look at him. “Let me know when you decide on the date you will leave for New York.”

I nodded and left.

New York

I pulled up in front of the house just before eight pm. It was late August. The sun was beginning to set, and it cast an orange glow throughout the sky. On the sidewalk, a woman in her mid-fifties dressed in an off white suit jacket and skirt waited. When I opened my door and stepped out of the car, she approached me.

“James Merden?”

“Yes. Mary Rosen from the leasing office?”

“Yes.”

I reached out and shook her hand, but she quickly withdrew it.

“Nice to meet you,” she stuttered and looked down. She was clearly uncomfortable touching me, but I took no offense. My touch is colder than normal, and people often have an instinctive uneasiness around me and my kind.

“Shall we go inside? I want to make certain the apartment is to your liking.” She pointed to the stairs that led up to a dark green front door. “I have others, but this close to the beginning of the semester, the only apartments still available are further out of town. You said you preferred to be closer to the university.”

“Yes, I prefer to be closer.”

“You are lucky. The graduate student who originally rented this apartment decided not to come to the university. Are you a new professor?” she asked.

“No. I studied here for my Bachelor’s degree, and when I decided against a post-doctoral program in California, I decided to return here. I’m thinking of writing a novel.”

“Oh, that sounds wonderful.” She unlocked the front door and opened it to let me in. “This is a two bedroom apartment. It has a small galley kitchen.”

I looked around to appease her. I already decided that I would take the apartment. “I don’t do much cooking,” I commented. I looked in the bedrooms. “I’ll take it.”

“Fantastic.” She put her briefcase on the kitchen counter and took out the lease. “It is a standard lease. There is an early release option. This landlord is generally fine with an end of June departure. As you can see, the rooms are freshly painted, and the carpet has been cleaned.”

“It is perfect for me. I am certain I will be very comfortable here.”

She went out to her car to allow me time to read the lease. “Any questions?” she asked when she returned.

“No.” I signed the document, and she gave me the keys and a welcome basket containing assorted snacks, two bottles of water, and coupons for local restaurants.

I walked her to the door. “Thank you, Mrs. Rosen.”

“Give me a call if you need anything. The rental office handles any mechanical problems that you might have at the apartment. You don’t have any furniture for tonight?” she inquired eyeing up my small, sleek, black sports car.

“I’ll camp in the living room tonight. My furniture is on its way,” I assured her.

“Good luck, and welcome back to Weymouth.”

I closed the door behind her and let out a sigh. There was no turning back now. Soon, I would find out if all this effort was worth it.

Find out what happens when James meets Arianna.

Inheritance Revealed is available on Amazon.

More information at: <https://www.cherylahunter.com>

