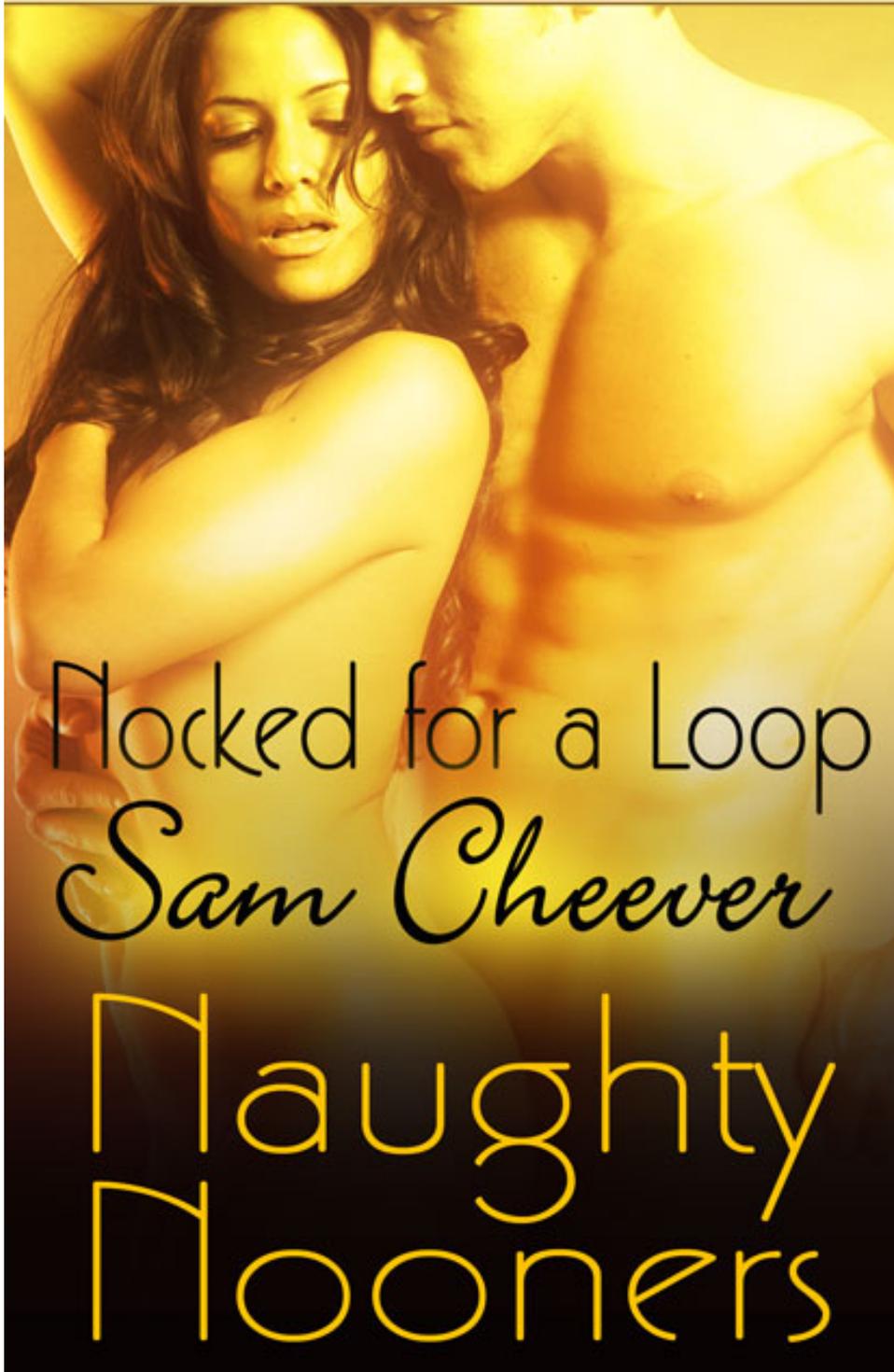


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



Knocked for a Loop  
*Sam Cheever*

Naughty  
Nooners

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Nocked for a Loop

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# *NOCKED FOR A LOOP*

**Sam Cheever**

## **Chapter One**

### *Summoned to Olympus*

Christian Kairos stopped at the bottom of the wide, marble stairway leading to the Building of Judgment, where all laws are made and carried out on Olympus. He had an appointment with Zeus and wasn't looking forward to it.

Generally Earth-based Cupids were allowed to stay remote, doing their business as necessary to help the human race. But occasionally – rarely – their services were needed on Olympus. Unfortunately for Christian, this was one of those occasions and the Fates had asked specifically for him.

He was not thrilled.

With a sigh, he climbed the steps and entered the cool, flower-scented building. His gaze slid toward the tall, golden doors across the granite lobby. They stood open, beckoning him like a siren call.

And possibly just as deadly.

He took a reluctant step toward the doors.

A young woman suddenly appeared in the doorway, apparently having been before the Council of the Gods. She floated toward him on tiny feet wrapped in gold silk slippers. She wore a traditional Council gown, which skimmed well-shaped ankles and rounded low on an abundant chest. Her hair was long, of the richest golden color and worn in a Grecian ponytail, with flowers from the Garden of Life threaded through it. Her face was heart-shaped and her eyes were downcast. A soft spot of pink colored each fair cheek.

She seemed deep in thought.

She looked up as she passed him and gave a little start, as if she hadn't known he was there. A tremulous smile danced across her full lips and she ducked her head as she continued past.

Drawn by some power he didn't understand, Christian turned to watch her leave the building. Something about the young goddess pulled at him, creating heat in his body where, before, anticipation of an audience with Zeus had filled him with an arctic kind of cold. He had to fight an almost overwhelming urge to turn and follow her out of the building.

He actually took one step in that direction in fact but a voice from the Council Chambers called him back to reality.

"We are ready for you, Christian Kairos."

Christian turned back, filled with feelings of regret he couldn't understand, and sighed. He moved toward the Council doors, determined to get his business over so he could return to Earth. Olympus always made his palms sweat.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christian looked at the woman standing next to him. She was beautiful, aside from the storm cloud that had settled over her pretty face. Her features seemed vaguely familiar. She was tall for a woman and elegant, with shoulder-length red-gold hair and rose-tinted lips that were full and kissable.

She certainly didn't look like she should need his services. "Majesty," Christian addressed Zeus, "If I may ask, why have you requested a Cupid's aid?"

Zeus bent a glare on the goddess Callista. "My granddaughter is determined to cavort with a warrior of the court. Because of her perfidy, I've told her she will marry a god of my choosing. She refuses to aid me in my search. But I am a fair god..."

One of Callista's red-gold eyebrows peaked at this and a less than ladylike snort emerged.

"And I wish my granddaughter to be happy..."

The young goddess stamped her foot. "Then let me marry whom I wish..."

Zeus pounded his ever present gavel and glared at her. "Silence!"

Christian grimaced. He hated forced matches.

"You will find my granddaughter her perfect match, Cupid. And she will marry this god, whomever he might be. I have spoken. Leave me!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"I don't suppose you can cook the books, Cupid?"

Christian looked up from the scroll and halted the magic pen he'd been writing with. Being seriously of the old school—literally—Zeus refused to bring computers to Olympus. But with magic scrolls and pens, Christian was able to do some form of his usual work. He smiled. "Cook the books?"

She nodded, crossing her slender legs with a swish of silk on silk. "Can't you just make it so Leander is my perfect match?"

Christian sighed, dropping the pen and sitting back in his chair. "I wish I could, Callista. I hate forced matches."

She stared at him for a long moment, apparently assessing whether he was telling her the truth. Finally she must have decided he was. "It's just so unfair. Leander is the greatest warrior in the Olympian army. He's tall and strong and brave and everything I've ever wanted in a mate. But because one of his parents had suspicious beginnings we can't be together. It makes me want to run away with him to Earth." She slanted a glance toward Christian to determine his reaction to this.

Christian tried to work up the appropriate outrage to her declaration but...he liked Earth. Aside from the loss of immortality the young goddess would be bringing upon herself, living on Earth didn't seem like much of a hardship to him. He finally settled for a frown. "Don't be silly, Callista. Now, let's stay on track. Describe yourself to me. What kinds of things do you like to do with your free time? What's your favorite color?"

Callista frowned and slumped dejectedly in her chair. She placed the pinkie finger of her right hand between her perfect white teeth and nibbled on it. The nail on that finger was a bit battered looking, telling Christian this was something she was prone to do. He made a notation on the scroll. When striving to find the perfect match, no detail was too small.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two hours later he'd come up with two young gods on Olympus who were semi-perfect matches for Callista. Neither one was perfect but they were close enough to pursue. He gave the names to the petulant goddess across from him and, predictably, she sneered at them.

"Philander is an oaf. He has hair everywhere. Dinos is nice enough but he's afraid of his shadow. I need a man who knows how to fight for what he wants, not a mouse or a hairy beast." She rounded her pretty shoulders and the pinkie finger slid back between her teeth.

Christian sighed and stood. "How about we have these meetings in the Garden of Life? This building makes me nervous."

Callista looked up and smiled, her pretty olive colored eyes sparking with renewed humor. She popped out of her chair and took the arm he offered her. "That's a wonderful idea."

The Garden of Life was warm and smelled of flowers. Birds sang gaily as Christian and Callista strolled along in companionable silence, lost in their individual thoughts. When they reached the meeting spot, Callista's pretty face clouded over again.

Christian waved a hand and a soft divan appeared in the lush grass. Callista sank onto it, sighing sadly.

The young god, Philander appeared first. Christian had to grudgingly admit that Callista's initial observation was dead on. Philander was a hairy beast. He stood tall and strong, with a square jaw and a large nose.

As he appeared before them in the Garden of Life the birds stopped singing.

Not a good sign.

Philander dropped clumsily to one knee in front of Callista and grasped her hand, placing it enthusiastically to his lips. "Goddess of my heart."

Callista just barely kept from rolling her eyes. She took back her hand and discreetly dried it on her robes. "Philander, how nice to see you again."

He took this as an invitation to sit down next to her. He did so with an enthusiasm that nearly sent her skyward. The feet of the divan on Callista's side lifted out of the soft grass and she toppled sideways, into Philander's lap.

As the two of them attempted to extricate themselves Christian had to look away. He coughed to keep from laughing outright. When he turned back Callista was giving him a double barreled eyebrow lift and she looked just a little bit desperate.

Philander, for his part, was completely oblivious to her alarm. He was busily sniffing her hair like a loyal pet.

Christian took sudden pity on the beautiful goddess. "Thank you for coming, Philander, grandson of Hercules. We'll get back to you."

Philander's nose was buried in Callista's tresses and he seemed to have put himself into a stupor with her scent. She rolled her eyes sideways in alarm and tried to nudge him away discreetly with her shoulder.

To no avail.

Finally Christian walked over and placed a hand on the young god's shoulder, squeezing just a bit harder than strictly necessary to get his attention. Philander looked up and his eyes were dull with lust. "Huh?"

"Time to go, Philander."

The young god's mouth slammed shut. "Oh. Yes." He stood. "I look forward to seeing you again, Callista." He grabbed her hand again and kissed it before disappearing into the Garden.

Callista scrubbed the back of her hand on her skirts and glared at Christian. "Just so you know. I will throw myself off Olympus' jagged peaks before I marry that oaf."

Christian nodded and made a show of scratching Philander off the list with his magic pen. "Gone. Let's see what Dinos has to offer us."

The short answer to that was, not much.

The young god appeared before them, stumbled over his overlarge feet when attempting to take Callista's hand and mumbled his way through the few moments of conversation Christian could stand to watch. He dismissed the shy young god and flopped down onto the divan next to Callista.

"Gods!" he grumbled.

Callista nodded. "Welcome to my world, Cupid."

They sat in companionable silence for a moment. Then Christian said, "I'll definitely have to widen my parameters."

Callista sighed. "You do that. And keep widening until my beloved Leander slides within them."

Christian chuckled.

Callista smiled at him. "It's my turn to play Cupid, methinks."

Christian narrowed his eyes. "What exactly does that mean?"

In lieu of responding, Callista reached for his hand. "Come." They shifted to another place.

## Chapter Two

### *Into the Maiden's Arms*

They landed in the courtyard of a castle built of sparkling white stone. Beneath their feet, lush grass, liberally speckled with flowers of all types and colors, waved vibrantly in a soft, fragrant breeze. Nearby, untethered horses cropped lazily on the juicy stalks of grass.

“What have you dragged home this time, Callista?” The voice was pure music, sliding up his spine like warm silk and quavering with amusement.

Christian turned and felt his heartbeat pick up hopefully in his chest. The lovely goddess from the Building of Justice was standing before him, with a tidy array of flowers in her arms. The way her beautiful green eyes widened, he knew she'd recognized him too. “We meet again, goddess.”

Callista gave a little trill of laughter. “You two know each other? Much the better. Have fun, sister.” Callista disappeared, her fading voice informing them, “I'm off to Leander.”

Behind him, a sigh of frustration broke the silence. Christian turned and was very surprised to find that a storm cloud had landed on the beautiful goddess's face.

She was glaring at *him*.

He was absolutely gorgeous. Arion had felt an instant jolt of sexual delight at seeing him in the Building of Justice and she'd recognized the spark that passed between them for what it was...fate. He was tall and well-built, with long limbs and big hands and feet, manly proportions. His face was broad too, with high, sculpted cheekbones and wide eyes of a true green. His lips were full and biteable, above a square chin. Thick,

black eyelashes shaped the green of his gaze and lush, black hair dropped in a silken fall to his broad shoulders. Yummy.

And she couldn't have him.

The goddess pursed her lips in agitation and shook her head, bringing the gold silk of her hair forward to rest against the peaches and cream mounds of a very healthy bosom. At a further sound of indignation, Christian forced his gaze to rise to her heart-shaped face, which currently looked as if she wanted to hit him about the head and shoulders with her pretty floral arrangement.

"Some Cupid you've turned out to be." The young goddess turned on her heel and stomped toward a gate at the far end of the courtyard.

Christian, telling himself he only wanted to recoup his good name, followed hot on her heels. "I beg your pardon, goddess..." He let the question hang hopefully, counting on her good manners to win him her name.

She cast him a quick glance as she slipped through the gate. The dense perfume of a million lush blooms assailed Christian's nostrils as they entered the castle gardens. He realized she'd probably been returning to the castle when he and Callista had happened upon her.

"Arion." She told him with a pretty pout. "And I'll not lie with you just because my sister wishes it."

Christian choked miserably at this, stopping on the spot to sputter and gag helplessly. Arion sighed in a long-suffering way and returned to smack him upon the back uselessly. Finally he gathered control of his esophagus and grabbed one of her soft hands, pulling it from his back.

"I..." He cleared his throat, "I have barely met you. Why would you think I expected you to lie with me?"

Arion eyed him with cynical if gorgeous green eyes and then, apparently deciding he was telling her the truth, finally lowered those dense golden lashes and blushed.

Christian found himself hardening on the spot as the blush crept down her long, white neck and into the soft mounds above her dress. He swallowed hard, realizing he was thinking exactly what she'd accused him of. He turned away and stalked off a bit too quickly. "I must find your sister. We have work to do. Do you know where she's gone?"

Arion fell into step beside him, shaking her head. "Nay. They have a secret place. No one knows of it."

"Except you."

She looked up at him, biting a lush, bottom lip. "She won't tell me where 'tis."

She looked so saddened at this that Christian gave her a soft smile to make her feel better. It seemed to work a little, she offered him a tiny smile in return.

Linking his arm with hers companionably, Christian turned them toward a small lake in the distance. "Tell me about this Leander. Why does your grandfather reject him as a suitor for your sister?"

Arion sighed. "He is very handsome and extremely accomplished as a warrior. But alas, his parentage has been called into question. His true father has never been proved."

Christian handed her down to a concrete bench in the shade of a beautiful flowering tree. "How is that possible?"

She shrugged, the movement causing the soft, white mounds of her breasts to mush together nicely and wobble. Christian licked his lips and sat down next to her on the bench. He looked out over the lake, studiously avoiding the mouthwatering view beside him.

"Aphrodite swears his father was Proteus."

Christian frowned, "Poseidon's attendant?"

Arion closed her eyes and leaned her head back on the soft bark of the flowery tree. "Or his son, depending upon which legends you believe."

Christian took the opportunity to stare at her while she wasn't looking. She was indeed a lush and succulent morsel. She was smaller than Callista and plumper, with skin like the finest silk and hair like spun gold. Her hands and feet were tiny, her features fine, with the delectable exception of those full, soft lips.

Her scent pulled at him like a drug. Almost in a daze, he leaned forward, scenting the air around her like a horny canine.

Before Christian knew what he was doing he was lowering his lips towards hers.

Arion must have sensed him because her eyes flew open. She shrieked in alarm and lunged upward, bringing her forehead into direct confrontation with Christian's nose. "Argh!" Christian jumped as blood shot from his nose.

Arion dropped back onto the bench, rubbing her forehead and groaning.

"Are you all right?" He reached for her as she appeared to swoon and then realized too late that his hands were covered with his own blood. He streaked it across the fine fabric of her gown as he pulled her into his arms. Lifting her chin with one bloody finger, he commanded her to open her eyes.

She did as instructed. Christian was alarmed to see that the beautiful green orbs were slightly crossed. He lifted her from the bench, fully intending to carry her to the castle for aid.

"What are you doing?" She pushed at his chest with her small hands, her face darkening with embarrassment.

"Taking you to get help."

"Why? I'm not the one who's bleeding, you are."

As if to prove her point, a large drop of Christian's blood landed on the bodice of her gown. They both watched it sink into the fabric. Then she glared at him. "I'm a mess."

He was relieved to see that her eyes, at least, had come uncrossed.

Reaching up, she touched his nose with a fingertip and the bleeding stopped.

“Dank you, I...”

She giggled.

Christian frowned. “By dnose ids sbelling.”

She giggled again. “Pardon?”

He glared at her.

She reached up and touched his nose again.

Christian wriggled his nose carefully. It felt more normal. “Thank you.”

“Now put me down. I must try to make myself presentable.”

Christian allowed her to slide from his arms until her feet touched the ground. But he didn’t release her. Instead he lowered his lips and claimed hers. She gasped and then stiffened as if trying to decide how she would handle his invasion. But she gradually softened against him, molding her soft curves into his body and bringing her arms up to twine about his neck.

Sensations he’d never felt before swamped Christian. All reasoning shut down as his senses took over. Her scent enveloped him in a sweet haze. The feel of her skin against his created electric sparks that made him harden with desire. He tangled his fingers in her hair and increased the intensity of his kiss. His other hand slid down to cup a soft, round buttock and drag her against his rigid cock.

She made a helpless little sound as he ground himself against her soft belly but she didn’t try to pull away.

Far from it.

She dropped her hands to his waist and held him tight, as if she were afraid he’d stop kissing her and move away. Her soft hands slipped under his shirt and caressed his back, making his cock throb with anticipation.

Suddenly, without warning, Arion pulled away. She ran giggling toward the lake, her gown disappearing from her as she ran. Christian's gaze hungrily devoured the newly exposed curves and, before he had time to consider his actions, he was after her. He ran full out toward the lake, pulling clothing off as he went. He hit the edge of the lake and dived, aiming for the spot where the last inch of her flawless white flesh had disappeared under the glistening water.

The water was warm against his skin and so clear he could easily see her swimming away from him, her long, slender legs kicking gently as she moved inexorably toward a dark shape in the distance.

Christian recognized it as the small island in the center of the lake. He smiled and increased the tempo of his strokes to try to catch up to her.

She slowed once and half turned in the water to glance back at him, her perfect lips spreading in a delighted grin. She surged forward with a squeal when she saw him closing the gap. As she swam, her hair streamed out behind her like a thick layer of gold silk.

Christian kicked harder and increased the pressure of his strokes in an effort to narrow the distance between them. Despite his best efforts, Arion hit the island well before he did and was waiting for him when he climbed out of the water.

She was lying on her side in the lush grass, her head propped up on one elbow and a smile on her full, soft lips. She was completely dry, her golden hair lying demurely over her breasts and her top leg bent at the knee to hide the soft curls at the juncture of her thighs.

Arion had to fight to keep from licking her lips as Christian emerged from the water. He had flawless olive skin and his ink-black hair glistened with purple highlights in the hot Olympus sun. His chest was hairless and smooth, with well-rounded pecs and tidy brown nipples.

His body tapered from wide, muscular shoulders to a narrow waist, smoothing over sculpted ripples at his taut stomach to narrow hips. And at the juncture of his long, muscular legs... Well, he was magnificent. Long and hard, his thick cock bobbed wonderfully as he moved toward her.

Arion gave up and licked her lips in anticipation. "You swim like a girl."

Christian frowned. "You had a head start."

She grinned. "I expected you to be more motivated, Cupid."

He flung himself to the ground over her, making her squeal in surprised delight. "I'll show you motivated." His lips lowered to within a breath of hers and he hovered there, drawing in the sweetness of her gasp as he pressed his rigid cock against her soft mound. Then his tongue slipped out and he caressed her lips, sliding deliciously along first her upper lip and then the velvet fullness of her lower lip.

Arion sighed against his mouth and reached soft hands to clasp his buttocks, dragging him more tightly against her body. She lifted her knees and wrapped her calves around his thighs, pressing her moist heat against his throbbing cock. Christian felt dizzy from blood loss to his brain as every ounce of blood he owned surged into his throbbing cock.

He lowered his lips to the smooth, white column of her throat and feathered kisses there, sliding inexorably toward the fragrant mounds of her breasts. His heart pounded hopefully in his chest as his tongue slid into the perfumed valley between her heavy breasts. His body throbbed in anticipation.

He pulled one puckered, pink nipple into this mouth and sucked gently, reveling in the way the tender bud hardened and pushed toward his tongue. Arion arched her back and moaned, her fingers sliding through his still-damp hair. Christian released the happy little nipple and captured the other one, already rigid and puckering with anticipation.

Arion seemed frantic with need. She wrapped her soft, lush body around him and rubbed her wet, hot pussy against him shamelessly. Christian slid down her body,

licking and nipping her softly rounded belly on the way toward the sweet heat of her mound.

She gasped as he covered her clitoris with his hot mouth and arched upward to drive the sensitive bud against his lips and tongue. Christian had intended to make gentle love to the special little bud but Arion had other ideas.

She cried out and pushed his head against her body, grinding herself hard against his lips. Christian increased the pressure of his sucking until she screamed, arching into a powerful orgasm. Her long fingers, wrapped tightly around strands of his hair, twitching helplessly against his scalp. Her legs tightened around his shoulders.

Christian licked his way up her gently quivering body and plunged his tongue into her mouth. She sucked it into the velvet heat of her mouth hungrily, as if the orgasm he'd given her had only served to enflame a much larger need that was demanding fulfillment. Christian settled himself between her plump thighs and pressed the thick head of his cock against her moist entrance. When she whimpered and opened her thighs wider he plunged deeply into her pussy. Arion's eyes flew open wide and she gasped as his cock slammed home, his balls slapping loudly against her body.

A half wild smile spread across her lush lips as he began to move.

"Oh yes, Cupid, love me hard. Yes, that's it, harder. Oh my gods!"

Christian increased the tempo of his strokes until they were both gasping from the intensity. They consumed each others' bodies, inhaling each others' breath as if they'd been suffocating for months.

Their passion built. Their bodies strained upward toward release. And their hearts thundered with the power of their mating. Christian felt himself sliding over that edge toward release but he gritted his teeth and held on, wanting to take her over first.

He changed the angle of his strokes so that his hard cock brushed against her clitoris with every stroke. Arion gave a little cry and her body slid over that wonderful peak, crashing into overwhelming sensation on the other side. She jerked and quivered in release, the throbbing heat of her pussy pulling Christian into release with her.

Their cries exploded into the silence of the peaceful lake and drifted across the sparkling water around the island.

Christian lowered his forehead to hers, panting. Arion laughed softly as she struggled to recapture her own breath.

Swamped with emotions he'd never felt before, Christian captured her lips in a gentle kiss, savoring the spicy taste of her breath on his tongue. He slid to his side on the crushed grass and pulled her into his body. They lay that way for a few minutes in satisfied silence.

Then Arion began to stir.

Christian sat up. "Where are you going?"

She turned a bright green gaze to him and smiled. Her heart-shaped face held a spot of color on each pale cheek. Her pouty lips looked swollen as if she'd been well kissed. It was all he could do not to pull her back to the grass and make love to her again. "I must go. They'll be wondering where I've gone."

Christian stood up. "I'll go with you."

She shook her head and lifted a hand to his face. "Nay. They must not know."

He frowned. "Why not?"

"I have been promised to another."

Deep, irrational anger filled Christian. He took a step toward her, his hands clenching with the need to grab her and hold her there. "That's not possible."

She laughed. It wasn't a happy sound. "Unfortunately it is. As the younger daughter I am to be dispensed with as quickly and easily as possible, with no care to whom I mate." Bitterness flavored her words.

Christian reached for her, pulling her into his arms. "I won't allow this."

Tears shimmered in her eyes. "It is done."

Stepping away from him, she moved to the water's edge.

"Who is it?"

She turned back, her soft mouth twisting with strong feeling. "Leander."

Then she disappeared.

Christian's mouth fell open in shock. "Gods!"

### Chapter Three

*Lies, Complexities and Difficulties*

Christian stood on the shore of the lake and watched Arion swim toward the far shore.

Suddenly the air around him changed and a small giggle caused him to turn. Callista was standing there staring at him with a spark in each beautiful eye.

He realized suddenly that he was still naked.

“Well, well. It looks like you and my sister got along famously, Cupid.”

Christian frowned. “What are you doing here?”

She shrugged, stepping closer. “Hiding from Leander.”

Taking in her slightly disheveled appearance for the first time, Christian closed the distance between them and grabbed her hands, instantly concerned. “Has he harmed you?”

She giggled. “Nay. We just argued. He can be very difficult at times.”

Christian dropped her hands and sighed. “You know he’s promised to your sister.”

Callista’s full lips formed into a pretty pout. “They don’t want each other. He and I belong together. That’s why I’m trying to get him to come to Earth with me.” She stopped and fixed a look on Christian, cocking her head. “You like Earth, don’t you, Cupid?”

Christian was loathe to answer her question. He didn’t want to have any part in encouraging her to defy her grandfather. It would not end well for any of them. “He’ll make you mortal if you flee to Earth.”

Callista turned away from him with a shrug. “I do not care. I wish only to be with the man I love.”

“And what of your sister? What would that defection do to her?”

Callista turned, her face transformed by a naughty smile. “She’d be free to marry someone of her own choosing wouldn’t she, Cupid?”

Christian felt joy surge under his breast. He quickly smacked it down. No point setting up false hopes for his future. “Cupids do not marry for love.”

Callista grinned. “Who knows what might occur in the near future.” She had a knowing smile on her beautiful face.

Christian couldn’t resist asking. “What do you know that I don’t, goddess?”

She shrugged. “Let us just say that things are occurring in the Garden of Love right at this very moment which may give you new opportunities for the future.”

Christian frowned. “I refuse to engage in yearning for that which I cannot have. And you must do the same, Callista. Your fate has been chosen by your grandfather.”

“That is why you must find a way around his demands.”

Christian shook his head. “I cannot, Callista.”

Her pretty face darkened and she clenched her fists. She took a step toward him and, in her anger, missed seeing a raised root on the ground before her. Her bare foot caught on the root and she fell forward with a little cry. She landed on Christian and they both hit the ground, hard.

Christian gently shoved her off his chest, onto the grass and propped himself up on an elbow to look down at her. He brushed a wave of red-gold hair from her face so she could see. “Are you all right, goddess?”

“You oversexed lout! I’ll see you dead for defiling her!”

Christian turned to find a young man standing a mere ten feet away from where he and Callista lay in the lush grass. The thick carpet of green was still crushed and warm from when he and Arion had made sweet love there only moments earlier.

The young god was dressed only in a warrior's breeches and soft boots, sword drawn, legs spread in fighting stance and handsome square jaw clenched in anger. The god's wavy gold hair was banded around his forehead with a gold strip of cloth and his smooth, naked chest glistened in the late-day sun.

He was the epitome of barely leashed violence, looking for a place to spend itself.

Christian sighed. "Leander, I presume?"

"Stand and meet your fate, lecherous Cupid."

Christian looked down at himself. "The only sword I currently possess would not do well against yours."

Leander gave an angry shout and lunged toward Christian.

Christian rolled away and leapt to his feet, supplying himself with breeches and a sword with just a thought.

"You misunderstand the situation, young god."

Leander stepped forward, lashing downward with his sword to engage the battle.

Christian met the god's thrust and held.

"Listen to him, Leander!" Callista begged, "He tells the truth."

Leander danced forward, brandishing his sword with breathtaking speed. It was all Christian could do to meet his thrusts and hold him off. "I find him naked, lying with you in the grass and you tell me 'twas an innocent affair!" His voice rose in anger and he increased the intensity of his attack.

Christian gritted his teeth and determined there was no reasoning with the young god. He'd have to start fighting back or he'd die. With a roar, Christian returned the attack, dancing forward with blinding speed and meeting each of Leander's thrusts with a stronger one of his own.

The clash and clank of steel filled the air over the small island and drifted across the water to the far shore.

Both men were covered in a fine sheen of sweat.

Both men had looks of such intensity on their faces that Callista despaired of reaching them with mere reason.

Both men seemed determined to win at all costs.

So Callista made the cost one they could not pay.

She leapt between their swords.

The beautiful goddess gasped and closed her eyes as the razor sharp point of one blade met her throat and the other touched her back.

Leander swore and dropped his sword immediately, gathering her against his chest and covering her face and blood-flecked neck with impassioned kisses.

Christian settled the point of his sword in the dirt at his feet and stood there, panting. "Well, I'm glad we got that behind us." He glared at Leander. "Now that we know our cocks are pretty much the same size, can we figure out how to fix this mess so everybody gets what he wants?"

Leander looked at Christian over Callista's head. "If you can fix this mess, Cupid, I'll be forever in your debt."

Christian grinned. "Prepare to draw up the ledger in my favor then, warrior, because I think I might have a way."

\* \* \* \* \*

Arion sat upon the gold divan and let her mind wander back over sweet kisses and soft caresses on a carpet of fragrant green grass. She knew the memory would have to sustain her through a long, long life without love.

She sighed.

She could live with the lovelessness, it was the anger and jealousy of her sister she couldn't bear to think about. Callista would grow to hate her for taking Leander away from her.

Even if it wasn't by choice.

Arion looked up as her grandfather entered the room. At eight feet tall and the breadth of two normal men across the chest, he was impressive, even by god standards. As was his custom, he had left his glossy, dark brown hair down, allowing it to flow in smooth waves across his shoulders.

“Glorious day, granddaughter.”

Arion gave him a sad smile.

He stopped before the fire and rested a large hand on the mantle, cocking his regal head at her. “Why so glum, little one?”

Arion shook her head. They’d gone over it a thousand times. There was nothing to be gained by going over it again.

He watched her for a heartbeat longer and then broached a subject he knew would interest her. “I’ve heard from the Cupid.”

Arion jumped, casting a guilty gaze toward Zeus. She found herself staring at his impossibly broad chest, unwilling to meet his eyes. “Have you?”

Fortunately, being a god and therefore almost completely self involved, Zeus didn’t seem to notice her guilty reaction to his mention of Christian. “He’s found Callista’s true love.”

Arion’s pretty lips twisted. Having had a recent taste of what it might be like to actually mate for love rather than duty, she was not in the mood to put up with Zeus’ dusty old ideas of propriety and duty. “There will be nothing of true love in it, grandfather.”

He turned his head with a jerk, narrowing startling silver eyes toward her. It was unlike her to speak to him so. “What do you know of love?”

Her smile was filled with such sadness. “I know more than you think.”

Christian and Callista walked into the room.

Christian's gaze slid immediately to Arion. He walked over to her and took her outstretched hand, favoring the velvety skin on the back of it with a kiss. The action was traditional and expected. The tenderness of the kiss was not.

Arion lifted her eyes and Christian saw the unshed tears in them. He gave her hand a tiny squeeze before letting it go.

Straightening, he turned to Zeus. "I have found Callista's perfect match."

As if she no longer had the strength to stand under the pain in her heart, Callista moved to the divan where Arion sat and sank down. Her pretty features were downcast and her skin was pale. With her head bowed, she looked totally beaten.

Arion took her sister's hand in a show of support.

Christian lifted a hand, palm up and the magic scroll dropped into it from thin air. He didn't immediately offer it to Zeus. "Before I give you this, Majesty, I would explain the trail I followed to reach its conclusion."

Zeus inclined his head in agreement.

Christian started to pace before Zeus, his handsome face creased in deep thought. "When setting my parameters for defining the goddess, Callista, I initially applied a combination of attributes, which I culminated from a variety of sources. Your interpretation of her strengths and weaknesses, her vision of herself and my own initial observations. I then added your special direction as to what you expected in a mate for Callista. Using these parameters I found two very likely candidates." Christian looked toward the door and Philander and Dinos were suddenly standing there.

Arion narrowed her eyes and realized they were simply visions of the two gods, not the actual gods themselves. She turned to see her grandfather's reaction to the choices. She was surprised to see that Zeus was frowning slightly.

Christian continued. "As you can see, they meet the strict parameters we set...barely. But each was missing an important component." He turned to look at the

vision of the two young gods. "Philander is missing your granddaughter's discernment and gentle nature."

The vision of Philander popped away and Callista smiled.

"The god Dinos is missing what I now consider to be your granddaughter's finest trait and one which we did not at first consider when setting the parameters for the search." Christian turned to Zeus. "He is missing the warrior spirit that infuses your granddaughter to the core."

Dinos popped away and Zeus' eyes widened with surprise. "What nonsense is this!" He roared.

Christian stood his ground. "Majesty, if you would allow me to continue?"

Zeus was obviously fuming but he finally inclined his head.

Christian turned to the doorway and Callista appeared. But it was a different Callista from the one they were used to. This Callista wore a warrior's breastplate, shaped for a woman, over a gown of white. She had a metal band around her red-gold hair and she held a petite sword in one hand. "This..." Christian stated with a lift of one hand toward the vision, "is the true Callista. A warrior goddess in the style of Athena. And this..." Christian turned to Zeus and offered the scroll, "is her true match."

Callista gasped as Leander appeared beside her vision.

Zeus' roar of outrage caused the room to shake. Marble dust filtered down upon their heads and the two goddesses nearly fell off the divan. But Christian stood tall before the angry god, his legs spread wide and his hands clasped behind his back. He looked ready and willing to fight the battle that needed to be fought for Callista's happiness.

At that moment Arion knew she was in love.

When the room stopped moving, Christian continued. "Your Majesty, true love needs no permissions to survive. Your granddaughter was willing to give up all and leave Olympus to be with her warrior. She would have fought you to the mortal death

to keep her heart intact. This is a strain that runs deep in her. It is much stronger than any superficial parameter such as quality of birth." Christian walked over to Callista and took her hand, pulling her to her feet. At that moment the real Leander appeared and Christian handed the tearful but smiling goddess off to him. Then he went to pull Arion to her feet, wrapping an arm around her waist. "I must also tell you, Majesty, that I love the goddess Arion with all my heart." He looked down at Arion and she gasped with pleasure and happiness. "And I fully intend to spend whatever time the Fates will allow with her." Christian looked at Callista and Leander. "Shall we all retire to Earth to live out our days, Majesty? Or do you bless these unions?"

Zeus' face turned purple and the room began to rumble again. Everyone braced for the worst. But, incredibly it never came. Zeus' body began to quake and quiver and a roar of laughter finally emerged from it. "By the gods! Cupid, you have performed the impossible feat. Sweet Arion has always spurned true love, fearing it as she would a poisonous asp. Callista would ever deny her fighting spirit. You have discerned the true natures of both of my granddaughters where even they could not."

"You have my blessings and more. It is about time these goddesses learned who—and what—they are. Good work, Cupid!"

Callista ran to her grandfather and flung herself into his arms, ecstatic in the knowledge that she would marry her true love.

Christian turned to Arion and touched her soft lips with his own. "I am sorry to speak for you in this, lovely Arion. I would fully expect you to tell me to bugger off."

Arion's laugh was the finest music. "Why would I tell the man I love to bugger off!" She leaned in and kissed him with her exquisitely soft lips. "Marry me quickly, Cupid, or I shall have to hold you as a naked hostage in my rooms until you do."

Christian pulled her into his arms with a laugh. "Don't tempt me, goddess. I'll dally just to enjoy the fruits of your punishment."

Her joyful laughter was just a foretaste of what was to come as two young, immortal couples began an eternal journey filled with joy and love.

## **About the Author**

Award-winning author Sam Cheever mixes in a little fun, a little magic and a little real-life spice to create her sexy fantasy characters. Sam's fun-loving creations fight their way through a dizzying array of dangerous challenges without letting little things like the end of the world, angry, manipulative gods, evil dark world denizens, or killing Furies dampen their zest for life and hot love!

The author loves to chat with readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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