



Chapter 17



Amen stands across from me in the vast bathing pool, water gliding over his bronzed skin, highlighting every ripple of muscle. Droplets cling to the hard planes of his chest, running in lazy streams over his broad shoulders and down his abdomen before disappearing beneath the surface.

He is bare before me. Truly bare.

No robes, no golden adornments, no carefully controlled mask of Pharaoh.

Just Amen. And I cannot breathe.

I know I should avert my gaze, show modesty, pretend as though I am not acutely aware of every flex and movement of his body. But I cannot look away.

His presence fills the chamber, making it feel much smaller than it is. The usual weight of his power is still there—undeniable, suffocating—but it is different now.

This is not the Pharaoh who commands armies, who holds the fate of Egypt in his hands.

This is the man who kissed me beneath the stars, who whispered my name like it was a prayer, who looks at me now like he is ready to devour me.

"You are staring, sweet lotus," he murmurs, his lips curving in amusement.

My throat tightens. Heat floods my cheeks as I realize how obvious I am being, how I have been caught admiring him like some breathless maiden.

I quickly drop my gaze, but that is a mistake—because now I am looking at the rest of him.

At the water clinging to his powerful thighs.

At the way the dim lighting casts his body in sharp relief, every ridge of muscle accentuated.

I swallow hard and force myself to look away, suddenly self-conscious of my own bare form beneath the water.

"Perhaps," I manage, my voice unsteady, "but you are hardly innocent of the same crime."

His slow, wicked smile sends a thrill through me. He does not even pretend to deny it.

"Can you blame me?" he murmurs, stepping closer.

I freeze as he nears, the warm water shifting around us. His gaze trails over my shoulders, my collarbones, the barely hidden curves of my breasts beneath the water's surface.

"I have dreamed of you like this," he admits, voice thick with something dark. "And yet reality far surpasses any vision."

A shiver runs through me, though the bath is warm.

"You speak as if I am something divine," I whisper.

His eyes burn into mine. "You are."

I cannot answer. I do not know how to answer.

Amen drew me deeper into the pool, where steam wrapped around us like a veil. I noticed changes in him I hadn't seen

before.

His skin seemed to glow from within, like an alabaster catching moonlight. The muscles of his shoulders and chest appeared stronger, more defined. Even his presence felt different – more intense, more otherworldly.

"Come," he says softly. "Let me care for you."

Before I can protest, his hands move with deliberate slowness, reaching for a jar of scented oil resting on the edge of the pool. He scoops a small amount into his palms, warming it between his fingers before bringing them to my shoulder.

I stiffen at the first touch of his hands, but then—gods.

Heat flooded my cheeks. "You're different tonight."

"Am I?" His hands settled on my waist, drawing me closer. "Or are you just seeing me clearly for the first time?"

The water made everything feel weightless, dreamlike. His touch anchored me, kept me from floating away into the steam and shadows.

"I want to understand you," I whispered. "Not just the curse, not just the prophecies. You."

Something shifted in his eyes – a flash of raw need that made my breath catch. "Understanding can be dangerous, sweet lotus flower."

"I don't care." My fingers traced the line of his jaw, feeling the strength there. "I'm tired of being afraid."

His fingers knead into my skin, coaxing away every trace of

tension. The mixture of warmth from the bath and the hypnotic pressure of his touch sends me into a trance-like state.

"You are wound too tight," he murmurs, working down my arms, over the delicate curve of my wrists. "Do you not allow yourself rest?"

I sigh, letting my head fall forward as his hands trail lower, gliding over my back with careful reverence. "I do not know how to rest anymore."

A quiet chuckle rumbles in his chest. "Then allow me to teach you."

His touch lingers, moving down to my ribs, the sides of my waist, exploring but never crossing the line into something improper.

Until I realize—I want him to cross it. I want him to keep going, to never stop.

"Turn," he commands softly.

So I do. And now I am facing him again, our bodies barely inches apart. The silence that follows is thick, suffocating with unspoken desires.

Amen's hands drift lower, brushing over the dip of my stomach, then—slowly—he lifts my leg, draping it over his thigh.

My breath catches.

"You are trembling," he observes, his voice quiet, husky.

I wet my lips, pulse hammering. "Perhaps I should not be

here."

"Then leave." It is a challenge. A test.

I do not move. Amen smiles—slow, knowing, triumphant.

He knows I do not want to leave.

"Amen..." His name is barely a whisper. And then, he moves.

His lips capture mine in a slow, devastating kiss.

I gasp into his mouth as his arms wrap around me, pulling me flush against his chest. The heat of his body is unbearable, searing through me as his hands begin to wander.

His fingers trace the curve of my waist, down to my hips, teasing the sensitive skin there before sliding lower—gripping, exploring, claiming.

The kiss deepens, turning desperate, hungry.

I press into him, my body molding to his as his lips move to my jaw, then my throat, trailing fire in their wake.

"You are mine," he growls against my skin, teeth grazing my pulse point. A moan escapes me. "Say it."

I barely recognize my own voice when I do. "I am yours."

Amen exhales sharply, like he has been waiting for those words. His hands tighten, lifting me effortlessly as he turns, carrying me through the water with ease.

Then, with a wicked smile—he lifts me from the bath and sets me on the edge of the pool.

The cool marble against my bare thighs is a stark contrast to the molten heat burning between us. I grip his shoulders, gasping as he spreads my legs, stepping between them, his hands gliding up my thighs.

We are there. On the edge of something I cannot take back. And I do not want to.

His hands slide higher. His lips curve against my throat.

The glow beneath his skin grew stronger, making him look almost divine. At that moment, I understood why the ancient stories spoke of gods taking mortal lovers. How could anyone resist this? How could anyone walk away?

"Are you sure?" he asked, his voice rough with need. "We can stop—"

"Don't you dare." I pulled him closer, letting my body speak what words couldn't express.

End *of* *The* **Chapter**

A Chance Meeting



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