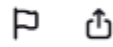




## Chapter 18



The moment I whisper those words, Amen's control snaps.

His lips crash against mine with a hunger that ignites a fire deep in my core, searing through every nerve in my body.

Amen's kiss is not gentle—it is raw, demanding, claiming. His hands glide up my thighs, spreading them wider as he steps between them, pressing against me, his body heat radiating through the cool marble where I sit.

I gasp into his mouth as his hands roam freely, tracing over my damp skin, mapping me with reverence and possession all at once.

"You are trembling again," he murmurs against my lips.

"I am not afraid," I whisper, though my body shudders at the intensity of the moment, at the sheer force of his presence, his want.

"No," he agrees, a dark smirk tugging at his lips. "Not afraid—wanting."

A breathy moan escapes me as his hands travel higher, fingertips teasing over the sensitive skin of my inner thighs. I arch into him, heat pooling in my stomach, my body already aching for him in ways I never imagined possible.

"You do not know what you do to me, Neferet," Amen growls against my throat before his teeth graze the delicate skin there. "You undo me."

His lips move lower, leaving wet kisses along my collarbone, over the swell of my breasts, his tongue tracing fire over my already overheated skin.

I cannot think. I do not want to think. I only want him.

I reach for him, my fingers tangling into his soft, long black hair, pulling him back up to me. I meet his gaze—those dark, smoldering eyes burning with desire—and whisper, "Then let yourself be undone."

A sharp breath leaves him, and then—he lifts me.

His strong hands sliding beneath my thighs, pulling me effortlessly against him. Spreading me open as he steps deeper into the bath, carrying me effortlessly.

I gasp as the heated water rises around us, the warmth licking up my skin, but it is nothing compared to the fire between us—the feverish need that coils low in my belly, that pulses with every touch, every breath.

My hands clutch at his broad shoulders, nails biting into his slick skin as he lowers us deeper into the water, his muscles flexing beneath my touch. I feel him—hard, ready—pressed against me, the aching promise of what's to come making my breath catch in my throat.

My arms loop around his neck, my lips barely brushing his ear.

He stops, his forehead pressing to mine, his breath ragged, his lips just a whisper away. His voice is rough, laced with restraint, with hunger barely held at bay.

"Tell me, Neferet," he murmurs, his hands tightening on my hips. "Do you crave me as much as I crave you?"

A shudder runs through me at the way he says it, the way his words stroke along my skin like a physical touch. I meet

his gaze—those dark, knowing eyes that have haunted my dreams, that now smolder with something far more dangerous, far more consuming.

"I need you, Amen." I confess, my fingers splaying across his broad chest, feeling the frantic beating of his heart beneath my palm.

A sound rumbles deep in his chest, a groan that sends heat pooling between my thighs, and then his lips crash into mine.

His hands slide up my spine, pressing me impossibly close as his lips claim mine again, this time with no restraint. His tongue teases mine, deepening the kiss as his fingers knead into my hips, adjusting my position, and then—

I feel it. The slow, aching push of him, stretching me, filling me in a way that makes my breath stutter, my nails digging into his shoulders.

"Amen—" My voice is a plea, breathless, desperate, as he sinks deeper, his body guiding mine, claiming every part.

He moves slowly at first, reverently, his hands gripping my hips, guiding me against him as he worships every inch of my skin with his lips, his teeth, his tongue.

His grip tightens, fingers branding my skin, his movements reverent—long, measured strokes, each one deliberate, each one coaxing me closer to the edge of madness.

There is only the rush of water around us, the slick heat of his body moving against mine, the way he fills me so completely that I feel as though I will shatter beneath him.

"Gods, you feel like heaven," he groans, his voice hoarse, his

hands shaking against my skin.

Amen's hands guide me, lifting me slightly before pulling me down onto him again, drawing out every sensation, every dizzying spark that ignites between us.

"Amen—" I whispered, my nails digging into his back, desperate for more, for everything.

He groans my name like a prayer, his hands tightening on me, his control slipping further with every stroke, every moan that escapes my lips.

A curse slips from his lips, low and rough, as he thrusts deeper, his control breaking, his movements turning more urgent.

"You are mine," he rasps against my ear, his teeth grazing my jaw. "Say it—let me hear you."

A broken moan escapes me as pleasure coils tight in my belly, the intensity unbearable, unstoppable.

"Say it," he demands again, his voice raw, desperate. "Say my name when you shatter for me."

And gods help me—I do.

I cry out his name as pleasure crashes over me in waves, my body convulsing against his, my vision going white with bliss. He follows moments later, his arms locking around me, holding me so tightly I feel as if I am melting into him, into this moment, into us.

The world blurs. Time ceases to matter.

There is only the afterglow, the warm embrace of water, and the steady, grounding presence of the man who has just unraveled me completely.

I feel weightless. Boneless.

Amen holds me close, his lips pressing against my temple, his breath still ragged as he whispers something in a language I do not understand.

I do not need to.

I feel it in his touch, in the way he cradles me against his chest, his hands smoothing over my back with a gentleness that makes my heart ache.

"You are exhausted," he murmurs, pulling back just enough to search my face. His fingers brush over my cheek, then down to my swollen lips. "Did I hurt you?"

A soft laugh escapes me. "No." I am drained, spent, but I have never felt more whole.

His lips press against my forehead in a slow, lingering kiss.

Before I can protest, he lifts me once again, his arms steady and unyielding as he carries me out of the bath. Water drips from our bodies, pooling onto the marble floor as he walks us toward a nearby bench, where a stack of fresh linens waits.

He sets me down gently, kneeling before me as he reaches for one of the linen cloths.

Then, to my surprise—he begins drying me.

I stare at him, breath caught in my throat, as he runs the cloth over my arms, my shoulders, then lower, taking his time, tending to me with the same devotion I have only ever seen in priests caring for sacred relics.

"Amen, you do not need to—"

He silences me with a kiss, pressing his lips against mine in a way that leaves no room for argument.

"I want to," he says simply.

A lump forms in my throat, and I let him.

Once he is satisfied, he wraps a thick, soft robe around my shoulders before standing and drying himself with another cloth. I watch him through heavy lids, my body still humming with the aftershocks of pleasure, with the lingering imprint of him between my thighs.

I do not know how I will walk after this.

As if sensing my thoughts, Amen lets out a low chuckle before gathering me into his arms once more.

"Rest, my sweet lotus," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to the crown of my head.

I do not fight it. I do not want to fight it.

I let him carry me through the dimly lit halls of the harem, my head resting against his chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heart.

For the first time since arriving at the Golden House, I do not feel like a possession.

I feel... cherished.

By the time we reach my chambers, sleep is already tugging at the edges of my consciousness.

Amen lays me down with care, tucking the sheets around me before slipping in beside me, his arm draping protectively over my waist.

"Are you staying?" I murmur, barely able to keep my eyes open.

"I will not leave you tonight," he whispers against my hair. "Sleep, Neferet."

I do. And as sleep claims me, one final thought lingers in my mind, curling deep into my soul.

I am glad to belong to him.

Even if only as one of his concubines.

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

A Chance Meeting



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