

The Pharaoh's Favorite

Chapter 2

The festival of Isis was in full bloom, the city alive with vibrant colors, music, and the energy of celebration. Everywhere I turned, there were sights to captivate the soul – dancers adorned with flowing silks that shimmered in the torchlight, merchants shouting over one another to entice buyers with their exotic wares, and children laughing as they chased each other through the crowds.

It was a day of joy and devotion, and yet I found myself struggling to shake the unease that had followed me since morning.

Sahety walked beside me, his presence grounding yet distant. He held my hand as we moved through the throng of people, Kiya flitting ahead of us like a butterfly.

Her laughter was infectious, drawing smiles from strangers who stopped to admire her beauty. She wore a pale blue gown that hugged her figure, the shade chosen to accentuate her striking features.

It worked.

Heads turned as she passed, and her confidence only seemed to grow with every glance cast her way.

For a time, I let myself be swept up in the festivities. Sahety humored me as I lingered at one particular stall, running my fingers over a necklace of turquoise beads.

It reminded me of the Nile in its most serene moments, and I imagined how it might look draped against my skin and compared to my eyes.

“Would you like it?” Sahety asked, his voice soft as he leaned close. I smiled, shaking my head.

“The ruby you gave me is enough,” I said, lifting my hand to show him the ring glinting on my finger. “I need nothing else.”

He returned my smile, but there was something restrained in his gaze, a flicker of hesitation that made my heart ache. Before I could ask what was troubling him, Kiya called out to us from further down the street.

“Look!” her voice cuts through people. “Those dancers – aren’t they magnificent?” She tugs at Sahety’s arm, pulling him toward the crowd gathering around street performers.

I start to follow, but a surge of festival-goers separates us. Bodies press against me from all sides, voices rising in a cacophony of haggling and laughter.

“Kiya?” I called out. “Sahety?” But they’ve vanished into the sea of people.

I turned in circles, searching for a familiar face, but it was no use. Panic began to creep in, my chest tightening as I realized just how alone I was.

That’s when I collided with him – solid chest, steady hands catching my shoulders to keep me from falling. I look up and my breath catches.

He’s so... beautiful.

Not in Sahety’s obvious warrior way, but something more refined, almost magical. A light linen shawl drapes over his head, partially obscuring his features, but I catch a glimpse of intense eyes that seem to look straight through me.

They were a deep, rich brown colour, warm yet piercing. For a moment, I forgot my purpose, caught in the quiet magnetism of his presence.

“My apologies,” I stammer, stepping back. We’re standing before a jeweler’s stall, precious gems glinting in the lamplight.

“No harm done.” His voice is rich, cultured. His gaze lingers on my face. There was a hint of amusement in his tone as he added, “Though it isn’t every day that one meets a priestess of Isis. Especially in such a setting.”

I blinked, startled by his observation. “How did you know?”

He gestured toward the small amulet hanging from a delicate golden chain around my neck.

“A sacred symbol,” he said. “And one that suits you well. Tell me, do all priestesses possess such remarkable eyes?”

Heat creeps up my neck. Despite that I’ve just chuckled. “A mark of Isis’s blessing, or so they say.”

He smiled, tilting his head as if to better study me. “The color is very unusual. Never seen something like that before. Like the depths of the Nile at dusk. It’s quite... striking.”

I looked away, flustered by his compliment. “You’re kind to say so.”

We fell into an easy conversation, speaking of the festival, the city, and the beauty of the evening. He had a way of making me feel at ease, his words weaving a spell that drew me in.

He moves closer, examining the jewelry display. "And you serve in a temple?"

"Yes, I'm training to become a true priestess."

Oh, dear goddesses, I should leave.

Find my sister and my betrothed, but something holds me here.

Something familiar about his presence, though I know we've never met.

"These stones match your eyes perfectly." He lifts a delicate gold bracelet, dark green emeralds catching the light. "A gift, perhaps? To honor the festival, of course."

"Oh, no— I couldn't possibly—"

"Please." He's already pressing coins into the merchant's hands. "Consider it an offering to Isis herself, through her lovely servant."

Before I can protest further, he's fastening the bracelet around my wrist. His fingers brush my skin, sending a shiver down my body that has nothing to do with the cooling evening air.

"Thank you," I said softly. "You're very generous."

He smiled again, a gesture that seemed to hold secrets I couldn't begin to guess at.

"Enjoy the festival, young lady," he said, stepping back into the shadows. Before I could say another word, he was gone, disappearing into the crowd as if he had never been there.

For a moment, I stood still, my heart racing for reasons I couldn't explain. Then, remembering my situation, I resumed my search for Sahety and Kiya. The bracelet on my wrist felt cool against my skin, a tangible reminder of the strange encounter.

The crowd has thinned somewhat, but there's still no sign of them. After what felt like an eternity of searching, I found myself near the banks of the Nile.

The noise of the market faded into the distance, replaced by the gentle lapping of water against the shore. I sat down on a patch of soft grass, allowing myself a moment to breathe. The air was cooler here, the scent of the river calming my restless thoughts.

As I sat in silence, a faint sound reached my ears. At first, I dismissed it as the rustling of reeds in the breeze, but then I heard it again – a soft moan carried on the evening breeze.

I freeze, embarrassment flooding my cheeks. Some couples have clearly found privacy among the river reeds. I should leave them to it, and return to searching the market.

But right then I hear my sister's voice calling: "Oh, Sahety... Ah! Please, make me... Yes, more-e!"

The world stops spinning.

My legs move without my permission, carrying me closer to the thick stand of reeds.

Please, let me have heard wrong.

Please, let this be some cruel trick of the gods.

Please, dear goddesses, please.

But there they are, tangled together in the growing darkness. My sister's perfect body arches beneath my betrothed, her fingers digging into his shoulders. Sahety's face is buried in her neck, his military belt discarded in the sand beside them.

I can't breathe.

Can't move.

Can't make a sound.

Kiya's eyes open, meeting mine over Sahety's shoulder. There's no shock in her expression, no shame. Only a sinister smile that curves her lips, looks like Sekhmet herself glimpsing at me beneath Sahety, as she pulls him into a deep possessive kiss.

Can't take my eyes off.

Kiya breaks the kiss, her eyes still locked with mine, and whispers something in Sahety's ear. He stiffens, starting to turn—

I ran.
