



Chapter 22



The scrolls in the harem's library had revealed nothing new about the prophecy, about my connection to Isis, or about the curse that bound Amen.

The palace walls felt like they were closing in on me. Three days had passed since I last saw Amen, and the weight of unanswered questions pressed against my chest like stone.

I paced my chambers as midnight approached, my fingers absently tracing the ankh birthmark beneath my robes. The mark that had brought me here, that had entangled my fate with his.

My mind kept circling back to the secret passage we'd used before, the one that led straight to the Temple of Isis.

"Just this once," I whispered to myself, gathering my courage. "Just to find answers."

The palace was silent at this hour, wrapped in the hush of sleeping bodies and the distant rustle of the Nile's gentle waves. Even the Golden House, usually teeming with whispers and soft footfalls, lay still beneath the watchful stars.

It was the perfect time to leave.

The night air wrapped around me like a cold embrace as I slipped through the palace corridors. Every shadow seemed to watch, every distant footstep made my heart stutter. But the gods must have favored me – I encountered no one as I made my way to the hidden entrance.

My heart pounded against my ribs as I slipped through the hidden passageway. It was the same route Amen had shown me before, the path winding through the bowels of the palace, long forgotten by most. Every shadow felt alive, every crack

long forgotten by most. Every shadow felt alive, every creak of stone beneath my sandals sent a thrill of fear through my spine.

The tunnel felt different without Amen beside me. Darker. More threatening. My hands trembled as they traced the rough stone walls, remembering how his touch had steadied me here before.

But I couldn't stop. Couldn't wait for him to give me answers. Not anymore.

I've already waited for far too long and I still had no answers. No sign of Amen. No explanation for the rituals. No clarity on what was happening to him, to me, to the women in the Golden House. Heket's threats, Meritaten's cold devotion, the rituals that left them all in pain—it all felt like pieces of a puzzle I wasn't meant to solve.

But I would. I had to.

I reached the temple district without incident, the air thick with incense and distant murmurs of priests offering midnight prayers. The Temple of Isis loomed before me, its grand columns rising like the arms of the goddess herself.

Slipping inside was easier than I expected. The guards stationed at the entrance were half-asleep, and the acolytes who tended to the temple at night were deep in their meditations. My bare feet made no sound against the cool stone floors as I moved swiftly through the sacred halls, heading toward the archives.

The Temple archives were exactly as I remembered from my time as a High Priestess' student. Scrolls lined the walls in neat rows, their secrets waiting in the darkness.

I moved quickly.

Isis. Osiris. Resurrection. Divine bonds. Anything that might help me understand what was happening to Amen.

"Forgive me, Great Mother," I breathed, feeling like a thief in my own temple. "But I must know the truth."

My fingers grazed the delicate parchment, my pulse racing as I grabbed several scrolls that bore the markings of the goddess and her divine consort.

Stuffing them into the folds of my robes, I turned back the way I came, weaving through the temple corridors with only one thought in my mind—get back before dawn.

The journey back to the palace was just as smooth, my feet carrying me faster than I thought possible. The tension in my shoulders didn't ease until I reached the hidden entrance and slipped through the concealed doorway leading back to my chambers.

Relief flooded me as I stepped inside, the faint glow of the torches casting flickering light against the silk-draped walls.

But then I froze.

He was waiting for me.

Amen sat in the center of my chambers, his posture relaxed, his hands resting on his knees and his presence filling the room like storm clouds before lightning strikes. But his stillness was deceptive. The air around him crackled with restrained energy, with something dark and potent just beneath the surface.

beneath the surface.

His eyes—those beautiful, haunting eyes—pinned me in place, and in them, I saw something I had never seen before.

Barely restrained anger.

"Did you enjoy your little adventure?"

His voice was quiet. Too quiet.

My breath hitched, my fingers tightening around the folds of my robe where the stolen scrolls lay hidden.

End *of* The Chapter

A Chance Meeting

