



Chapter 26



The Festival of Khoiak preparations have begun, but my thoughts are consumed by a lingering dream. Crimson Nile waters, bloodstained shores, the Temple of Isis. A voice spoke to me, deep and rich like honey spiced with venom. "You may resist your fate, but you cannot escape it."

In every free moment, I attempt to decipher its meaning, but the festival whirlwind leaves no time for introspection. The Golden House buzzes with silk, incense, and golden adornments as we craft Osiris figurines from sacred Nile clay.

We sit in the grand chamber, hands coated in cool earth, molding the god's divine form. Our offerings will be placed in the temple during the great procession. The scent of burning myrrh fills the space as soft squelches of clay mix with hushed whispers.

Heket sits across from me, her sharp gaze lingers; her fingers mold her figurine with precision. I pretend not to notice and focus on shaping Osiris's serene features. But my mind drifts and I press too hard—a crack runs along the figurine's surface.

A bad omen.

My heart pounds.

Quickly smoothing the crack, unease lingers despite my steady breath. Soon, we're ushered into the dance chambers for the ritual dance of Osiris—a sacred reenactment performed before Pharaoh and his court. The instructors are unyielding as they drill the steps into us.

"Again," calls the instructor, pacing like a watchful jackal.

Bare feet on cool marble, I execute each movement: a step forward with outstretched arms; a slow turn and undulating hips. These motions represent devotion and surrender to Isis' grief as she searches for her lost husband. But my mind is consumed by the vision of crimson waters and an unseen truth weighing on me.

"You must act."

The words send a shiver through me, causing a small stumble. I exhale sharply and refocus on the present, telling myself I'll deal with it later.

But I barely had time to think or breathe, with preparations consuming me. Yet, Amen's presence lingered in my mind like a thorn. We shared brief encounters between council meetings and palace corridors – close enough to touch but never daring to.

His distance spoke volumes: the lingering gaze that quickly darted away, hands previously eager to touch now restrained behind his back. Our night on the balcony remained unmentioned, as did my visions and unspoken words.

I couldn't deny the sting of realization – I had done something wrong. Maybe my persistence for answers or acting without his permission pushed him away. Or perhaps...

A shiver crawled down my spine, recalling the memory of my blood on his hands and his unreadable expression. I needed to ask him about it.

Day after day, I sought an opportunity for a private conversation, but it never arose. His time was always occupied as a Pharaoh, but there were moments he could have spoken with me if he wanted to. Yet he wanted nothing more with me.

with me if he wanted to. Yet, he evaded being alone with me at all costs. The uncertainty gnawed at me like a festering wound.

My thoughts wandered to the scrolls in my chambers containing hidden answers and to Amen's reaction upon seeing my blood. I pondered over the dream, its warning in an unrecognizable voice, and his refusal to touch me.

The festival loomed closer. On that night, our relationship would transform into something far greater than before. When that moment came, I knew my silence would be impossible to maintain.

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

A Chance Meeting



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