

# The Pharaoh's Favorite

## Chapter 3

I run like all the demons of Duat are at my heels.

I run until my lungs burn and my vision blurs, not caring where my feet take me.

I run until my legs give out.

When I finally stop, the temple of Isis looms before me, silver in the moonlight. No priests, no worshippers – just me and my shattered heart.

I fell to my knees before the altar, my cries echoing in the vast chamber.

“Why?” I whispered, my voice hoarse and broken. “Why have the gods allowed this to happen? What have I done to deserve this pain?”

The tears come hot and fast now. I press my face against the temple’s cool stone, letting sobs and loud cries wrack my body. The image burns behind my eyes – Kiya’s cold and terrifying smile, Sahety’s muscled back, their bodies tangled in the sacred reeds where he first promised to love only me.

The lightest touch on my shoulder made me freeze.

My heart leapt into my throat, and I spun around with my fists raised, a scream escaping my lips before I could stop it.

“Peace, young lady,” a calm, familiar voice said. “It is only me.”

Panic inside me ebbed as I recognized the man standing before me.

The stranger from the market.

His face, partially obscured by the shawl earlier, was now fully visible in the moonlight. His long black hair was braided into a single sleek braid, hung loose, framing a face that was both captivating and refined.

Skin a bit more tanned than my own, carried the glow of someone accustomed to the sun’s touch. His deep brown eyes held a warmth that contrasted with the sharp angles of his high cheekbones and the faint hump of his nose.

His plump lips were set in a gentle line, and his tall, fit build exuded quiet strength.

“You!” I said, my voice trembling. “What are you doing here?”

“Forgive me,” he says softly. “I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“How...” Cheeks burning like torch lights, heart thunders against my ribs. “Why did you come here?”

“I was nearby and heard someone crying.” He steps closer, silverlight catching in his dark eyes. “Could not ignore such... sorrow.”

“You should not be here.” I turned away, ashamed of my tears and vulnerability. “This is a sacred place.”

“I mean no disrespect to the goddess,” he said gently. “But it seems to me that you are the one in need of comfort tonight. What happened to you?”

His words broke through the fragile walls I had built around my pain, shattering them with a quiet intensity. My lips trembled as I began to speak, and once the words started, they came in an unstoppable torrent.

The betrayal I had witnessed – Sahety and Kiya – their names cut through me like a blade as I poured out the heartbreak that was consuming me. My voice cracked under the weight of my anguish, each sentence more desperate than the last.

Through it all, he listens with an intensity that makes my skin tingle. Without interruption, his expression was thoughtful and kind.

“Your sister sounds... complicated,” he says finally.

“That’s a kind way to put all of it.” I laugh bitterly.

When I finished, he knelt beside me, his presence steady and reassuring.

“You carry a great burden,” he said softly. “But you must not let their betrayal define you. You are worth far more than their lies and selfishness.”

These words touched something deep within me, even made me feel a glimmer of hope for some moment.

“Thank you,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper. I wipe my eyes, suddenly conscious of how I must look. “I don’t even know your name.”

“Amen...” He began without thinking and then abruptly stopped talking.

While settled beside me on the temple steps, he just smiled sweetly, but the smile did not reach his eyes.

“Amen?” I repeated his words.

“Yes, Amen.” He smiled once again, with a hint of mystery in his eyes. “My father is a merchant of jewelry in Thebes. But there is little else about me that is worth mentioning.”

I tilted my head, unconvinced. “You deflect my question. Why?”

“Because tonight is not about me,” he replied smoothly. “What is your name, young lady? Or perhaps you prefer the way what I call you?” Amen asked with a sly smile.

A small smile appeared on my face and simply answered, “Neferet.”

“Ah, ‘beautiful’.” He stretched out the meaning of my name like it was a compliment, savoring every sound of it with the same smile on his lips.

“Thank you, Amen,” I couldn’t help myself, but continuing his little joke, “your name also sounds very... ‘certain’.”

In response to this, he just laughed sincerely, his voice low and captivating, with a rich timbre that resonated deeply. When he laughed, it was a sound that seemed to wrap around me, warm and inviting.

Now I realized that Amen’s previous words about his father sound rehearsed, almost carefully. Before I can question it, he said, “Tell me about your service to Isis.”

I noticed this other deflection but didn’t press. There’s something comforting about his presence, like a familiar dream I can’t quite remember.

Reluctantly, I allowed him to steer the conversation elsewhere. We spoke of the stars above us, their constellations shifting like threads woven by the gods themselves, and of myths and legends that had fascinated me since childhood.

Amen’s voice carried the weight of a storyteller who had lived a thousand lives, and his words painted vivid pictures of gods in battle and lovers reunited across lifetimes.

When I shared my own thoughts about destiny and dreams, he listened intently, his dark eyes reflecting the glow of the temple’s sacred flames.

The air between us seemed alive, charged with something unspoken but deeply felt, as though the very night itself was holding its breath. I found myself leaning into his presence, not just hearing but feeling every word he spoke, as though he were filling spaces I hadn’t realized were empty.

We talk through the night. About everything and nothing. About dreams and destiny and the weight of family expectations. He never touches me, but his presence fills all the empty spaces my pain has carved out.

The sky begins to lighten, pink and gold bleeding into indigo. Dawn approaches like an inescapable truth. I turned to Amen, reluctant to see our time together come to an end.

“Will I see you again?” I asked, my voice tentative. “I have... enjoyed your company more than I can say.”

Amen’s expression shadows, he hesitated. “It is unlikely,” he said at last. “The gods weave our fates in ways we cannot predict. But I will cherish this night, as I hope you will.”

My heart sinks, but another emotion rises when I see him standing up – reckless, desperate. A pang of sadness tightened my chest.

“Then may I ask for one favor before you go?”

“Anything,” he said, his tone sincere.

“A kiss,” I said, the words tumbling out before I could second-guess them. “A kiss for goodbye. Perhaps it will help mend my heart and serve as... a small revenge for the betrayal I endured.”

Something dangerous flashes in his eyes. He studies me for a long moment, then slowly reaches out to trace my cheek with one finger.

“Are you sure that is wise?”

“No.” I lean into his touch. “But I don’t want to be wise right now.”

The first brush of his lips is gentle, tentative. But then – goddesses help me – he parted my lips with his hot tongue and the world exploded into fire. His hand tangles in my hair, pulling me closer. My fingers clutch at his shoulders, feeling solid muscle beneath heated skin.

This feels like nothing else in the world. The kisses of a stranger in my dreams felt different, like swaying on warm waves – pleasant, but not breathtaking, not leaving behind the ghosts of his touches.

But even that I couldn’t compare to any other real kiss, because Sahety never kissed me. He always said we should save it at least until we were officially engaged, that he didn’t want to tarnish my pure reputation.

And then he just fucked my younger sister on the riverbank. Bast–

As if sensing that my thoughts were suddenly gathered together and headed somewhere far away from this moment, Amen abruptly deepened our kiss and laid me down on the stone floor of the temple, hovering over me in a predatory manner.

My breath caught in my throat from the sudden tension that gathered in my stomach and tried to find a way out of my body. I wanted to be closer to him, to touch him more, to press myself against his strong body.

This is like being devoured by flame, like drowning in sweet wine.

This is...

He pulls back suddenly, holding me almost at arm's length. His breathing is ragged, eyes dark with something that makes my whole body tremble and left me sprawled out under him.

"If you keep looking at me like that," he says roughly, "if you lean toward me again... I'll have no choice but to find you and finish what we've started."

Speechless, I cannot respond and just keep opening my mouth to try to find a word, when he stands and steps away.

"May the gods bless you, sweet lotus flower. May you find the happiness you deserve."

Then he's gone, leaving me breathless and burning on the temple steps.

Wait, did he just called me a 'sweet lotus flo—'

A noise from behind the temple snaps me back to reality. I rise on shaky legs to investigate, though every part of me screams to run after Amen instead.

My heart stops. Kiya stands in the shadows, her perfect face twisted in a smirk.

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I turn away, unable to look at her, and start walking home. But her quick footsteps follow.

"My, my, sister." Her voice drips honey-sweet poison. "What would Father say if he knew his pious daughter was kissing a stranger at the temple?"

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