



Chapter 30



I stare at him, my thoughts spiraling as I try to grasp the weight of his words.

A fragment of Osiris's soul lives within him.

Not just a metaphor, not just divine favor—something real, something that devours his humanity bit by bit, something that weakens him.

He watches me in silence, his gaze heavy, as if bracing for my reaction.

The revelation is staggering. Every fragment of knowledge I have been piecing together over the past weeks suddenly fits into place, forming a picture far more horrifying than I ever imagined.

I take a breath, steadying myself. "And this... this fragment, it's killing you?"

Amen exhales slowly, fingers threading through his long hair.

"It weakens my mortal body. If left unchecked, it will consume what is human in me entirely, and I will no longer belong to this world." His voice lowers, solemn. "The priests foresaw it when I was still a child. I was never meant to live long enough to take the throne."

His words send a chill down my spine.

"You mean... you were meant to die before now?" He didn't answer. I swallow hard, my hands curling into the fine linen of my dress. "Then the rituals—they're what's keeping you here?"

"Yes." His tone is even, controlled. "When I was younger, the previous high priests of Amun realized the gods' will was unclear. They did not know what should be done to preserve me. So they sought answers in divine communion, desperate to protect the future Pharaoh."

I frown. "But they discovered the way, didn't they? The rituals... they sustain you."

Amen's jaw tightens slightly. "There is no perfected ritual, Neferet. No single ceremony that guarantees success. The priests continue their search, trying to refine the process, to strengthen its effects." His dark eyes meet mine. "With each ritual performed, its power diminishes. Its effectiveness weakens over time."

A cold weight settles in my stomach.

"That means... you require them more often?"

A slow nod. "The life energy I gain from them does not last as long as it once did." A muscle in his jaw twitches. "And that is why I do not want to involve the concubines more often than absolutely necessary."

His voice drops to something almost fragile, something guilty.

"In some way, the rituals harm them."

I stare at him, unable to form words at first. I had suspected as much, but hearing him confirm it sends my thoughts reeling.

"Then why must it be them at all?" I press, my voice sharper than I intend. "Why this way? If the priests have been searching for alternatives, why not—"

"Because a normal human would die from such rituals, Neferet."

His words cut through the space between us like a blade.

I go still.

His expression remains steady, but there is something bleak in his eyes, something worn.

"The bearer of a god's blessing has a far greater life force," he continues. "It prevents them from perishing, even though they cannot fully resonate with Osiris's energy."

I shake my head, trying to make sense of it. "So that's why the concubines are chosen. Because they—because we—are marked by the gods?"

"Yes." He exhales, rubbing his temple. "But even then, the ritual rejects them. All of them. Because none of them are blessed by Isis."

My breath catches.

Osiris's wife. The only one whose energy was meant to be intertwined with his.

I close my eyes for a moment, the weight of everything pressing down on me like stone.

"The priests believe that if someone with Isis's true blessing performs the ritual, their energies would merge," Amen says, voice quieter now, watching me carefully. "That over time, I could finally rid myself of the curse's effects in this mortal life."