



Chapter 31



The weight of his confession lingers, pressing down on me. I see him not just as the Pharaoh, but as someone cursed and bound to an unchosen fate.

How does he endure this for so long, knowing every desperate attempt at survival is temporary?

I inhale sharply. "Then let me do it."

Amen's expression shifts, something unreadable in his eyes.

"I am ready to undergo the ritual. If there's a chance I can save you, we must do it."

His features soften—not with relief, but with quiet understanding. "You are willing to do this?" His voice is low, careful.

Without hesitation, I nod. "Yes."

He tilts his head slightly, contemplating. "Neferet... You are extraordinary."

My cheeks warm, but I hold his gaze. "I must do this, Amen."

He smiles—soft, yet tinged with something unreadable. "Fate is not so easily rushed."

"What do you mean?"

"When the time is right," he says, "I will ask you to participate."

My mind spins with questions. Why wait? What holds him back? But he speaks again, freezing me.

"I am almost certain that you are the one I've been searching for."

Almost certain.

The way he utters it—soft yet hesitant—makes my heart tighten.

Almost.

Before I can speak, Amen steps closer, our gazes locking with breathtaking intensity. "No one else has ever unsettled me like this," he murmurs. His fingers graze my jaw, tilting my face up toward his, the air between us humming with something powerful.

"No one else has consumed my thoughts like you," he continues, voice like warm honey and fire. "You're in my mind when I wake, in my dreams when I sleep." He leans in, breath brushing my cheek. "A need."

My heart races, body thrumming with desire. "I've never felt this way before, Neferet," he admits, truth shaking something deep inside me. "I don't know if it's fate or something far more dangerous."

The words should frighten me, but I don't want to think; I want to feel. So I reach for him, pressing my fingers against his chest, feeling our frantic heartbeats synchronize.

He pulls away just as our lips graze, gently but firmly stilling me.

A quiet breath of regret escapes him.

He smiles softly, guiltily. My heart twists. Something is wrong. This hesitance is new.

His thumb brushes against my wrist, attempting to comfort me. But I'm cold, pulse unsteady. I step back, concealing my frustration.

◆◆◆ "It's late," I say neutrally. "The Pharaoh should rest."

Something flickers in his gaze, but he doesn't argue. He nods silently in farewell.

I turn and exit, hiding my hurt before it consumes me. The palace corridors seem endless as I return to my chambers, each step measured, breaths restricted.

But once the door shuts behind me, the façade shatters—my hand pressed against my chest, grasping my dress for stability.

Why did he pull away? Did I do something wrong? Questions burrow into my thoughts like splinters as Heket's taunting voice whispers in my mind.

You think you're special to him?

No. No, it wasn't that.

I shake my head, forcing the doubt away.

It can't be that.

And yet, I cannot rid myself of the thought—something has changed between us. And I do not know why.