



Chapter 33



I dress swiftly, pulling a dark cloak over my shoulders before slipping through the quiet corridors of the Golden House. My steps are light, silent, each breath tight in my chest as I make my way through the palace's outer halls.

The scent of night-blooming jasmine lingers in the air as I reach the garden gates.

He is still waiting.

"You are predictable, my sweet lotus flower," he murmurs as he helps me onto the horse. His hands linger at my waist, his touch burning even through the fabric of my tunic. "I knew you wouldn't resist."

I arch a brow, feigning indifference despite the heat his closeness ignites within me.

"Then perhaps you should be concerned about how well you think you know me."

He chuckles, mounting his own horse with effortless grace. "Oh, I am concerned," he admits, his voice rich with amusement. "I find that you surprise me in ways I never expect."

Without another word, he kicks his horse into motion, and I follow.

The crisp desert air clung to my skin as I guided my horse alongside Amen's. The night stretched endlessly around us, the stars scattered across the heavens like shattered jewels.

There was a thrill in the chase, in the way the sand foxes darted through the dunes, their swift movements challenging

us as we pursued them. I laughed as I leaned forward, urging my horse into a faster gallop, the rush of the wind teasing my hair loose from its braid.

Amen rode beside me, his dark eyes filled with mischief, his lips curled into a smile that sent warmth curling through my chest.

There was something intoxicating about him tonight—lighter, freer, as though he had shed the weight of his curse, if only for these few stolen hours.

I had never seen him like this before.

He was no longer the Pharaoh weighed down by divine burdens, no longer the ruler of Egypt trapped in an endless cycle of rituals and duty. Here, beneath the moonlit sky, he was simply Amen, and I was simply Neferet.

But there was something else, too. Something I could not ignore.

He still did not touch me.

Not once.

At first, I told myself it was nothing. He was focused on the hunt, caught up in the moment. But as the night stretched on, and we exchanged playful taunts and lingering glances, I became painfully aware of the absence of his touch.

I had grown used to the way his fingers always found mine, the way his hands rested on my waist as if I belonged there, the way he traced slow circles against my skin when he pulled me close. But tonight...

Tonight, there was only space between us.

The absence of his warmth left a hollow ache in my chest, one I could not shake.

Just as I gathered my courage to ask him why, he suddenly halted his horse, his attention snapping toward the horizon.

I followed his gaze, and my breath caught.

A sandstorm loomed in the distance, a golden wall of chaos rolling toward us, devouring the desert in its path. The wind had gone still, an unnatural silence settling over the dunes.

Amen exhaled a slow breath, shaking his head in amusement. "Tell me, do the priestesses of Isis happen to know any magic to stop sandstorms or protect travelers from them?"

There was teasing in his voice, but beneath it, I sensed something more—a quiet challenge.

Without hesitation, I turned to him. "Give me your knife."

He stills, surprise flickering across his features. For a moment, I think he'll refuse. But then he guides his horse closer, drawing a blade from his belt. The metal gleams in the moonlight as he offers it to me.

My fingers close around the hilt, and I can feel my heart pounding.

I took it, the cool hilt pressing into my palm. I inhaled deeply, steadying my thoughts, focusing on the pulse of magic thrumming just beneath my skin.

I had never done this before. I had no idea if it would work.

"This might not work," I warned him. "Blood magic... I'm still learning. If it fails, we'll need to run."

But Amen doesn't look worried. Instead, he leans close - closer than he's been in days - his lips brushing my ear as he whispers, "I place my life in your hands, Sat net Aset."

Daughter of Isis.

His words send shivers down my spine, but I force myself to focus.

Our eyes lock, and I hold his gaze as I speak the ancient words. The blade bites into my palm, sharp and clean. Blood wells up, dark against my skin.

I turn toward the approaching storm, letting my blood fall onto the sand. For a heartbeat, nothing happens. The wall of sand looms closer, threatening to swallow us whole.

But then - something shifts. The storm begins to unravel, like a tapestry coming undone thread by thread. Where there was chaos, order returns. The howling wind softens to a whisper, carrying the promise of rain.

I exhaled, the tension in my body releasing all at once.

When I turn back to Amen, his expression steals my breath. He's staring at me with wonder, with hunger, with something that looks almost like fear.

Without warning, he leans in.

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My heart stops. His breath ghosts over my lips, and I can almost taste him. Almost feel the kiss I've been craving for days.

But then he freezes.

His body tensed, his expression shifting in an instant. His dark eyes flickered with something sharp, something unreadable. Something troubled.

Then, just as quickly, the look vanished. It's gone in an instant, replaced by his usual warm smile, but I saw it. I know I did.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my voice barely a whisper.

For a moment, he hesitated.

"Nothing," he says, too quickly. "Just a trick of the light." He's already turning away, putting that careful distance back between us.

I didn't believe him.

But before I could press further, he turned his horse toward the city.

"Come," he said lightly, his voice returning to its usual teasing cadence. "It's time to go home."

End *of*
The **Chapter**