



## Chapter 36



Amen's gaze burns into me, his expression taut with something unreadable. The torches flicker behind him, casting shifting shadows across the sharp angles of his face.

"Neferet," he says, voice low yet firm, laced with something I can't quite name. "Why did you avoid me tonight?"

I force myself to meet his eyes, even as my heart twists inside my chest. The question is simple, yet it carries the weight of so much more. I let out a slow breath, steadying myself before answering.

"Because I didn't want to make another mistake," I say, my voice quieter than I'd intended, but no less certain. "I didn't want to push you even further away."

His brows draw together, the faintest crease appearing between them. "Push me away?" he echoes, as if the very thought is unfathomable to him. "Neferet, nothing about you could ever—"

"Then why won't you touch me?" The words spill from me before I can stop them, raw and aching.

Amen stills.

The flickering torchlight reflects in his eyes, those deep, unreadable depths that have haunted my dreams for days, for weeks. He says nothing, but I press on, the emotions rising in my chest, too powerful to hold back any longer.

"Do you even realize what you've done to me?" My voice trembles, but I refuse to waver. "How you consume my thoughts, my dreams? How your absence feels like a wound I can't heal? And yet—you have been pulling away from me, avoiding me like I am something to be feared, like I have done

avoiding me like I am something to be feared, like I have done something wrong."

His jaw tightens. He opens his mouth as if to speak, but I don't let him.

"And I don't understand," I continue, voice rising. "Because you were the one who told me that I might be the one. That I might carry the energy of Isis. If that is true—if you truly believe that—then why haven't we performed the first ritual yet? What are you so afraid of?"

Silence.

A deep, deafening silence.

The weight of my own words crushes down on me, but I don't stop.

"Or have you lied to me all along?" My voice is barely a whisper now. "Do you not truly believe that I am the one? Or is it the truth that terrifies you? That you might finally have an answer and that answer might not be the one you want?"

A sharp breath escapes him.

I see it—the way his hands curl into fists at his sides, the way his shoulders rise and fall with the effort to contain something boiling beneath the surface. And then, something else—something in his expression falters.

Pain.

A kind of torment that mirrors my own.

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I shake my head, the lump in my throat tightening. "If I have done something wrong, tell me. If I have failed you, tell me how I can fix it. Because I—I do not want you to leave me. Not in my dreams. Not in reality."

A sharp exhale leaves him, as if the words have physically struck him. His eyes darken with something fierce, something agonizing.

And then—he moves.

His hands lift toward me, toward my face, but they hesitate—hovering just shy of my skin, trembling, as if some unseen force restrains him. His fingers twitch, aching to close the distance. But they don't. They won't.

Something is wrong.

A shudder passes through him, his body rigid with strain, his breathing uneven.

"Amen?" I whisper.

His jaw clenches, his expression twisting into something that looks like pain. For a moment, I swear I see his entire body tense as if fighting against something invisible, something unseen. And then—

As if something inside him snaps—

His hand lashes out, grabbing my shoulder, gripping the silk of my dress with an intensity that steals my breath.

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I barely have time to react before he turns sharply, pulling me with him. His grip is unrelenting, his pace unyielding as he strides forward, leading me away from the corridor, from the balcony, from the familiar paths of the palace.

"Where—" My words catch in my throat as I struggle to match his pace. "Amen, where are we going?"

He does not answer. He only tightens his grip, his silence heavy, his steps purposeful.

And I do not resist.

## End of The Chapter

A Chance Meeting



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