



## Chapter 42



The moment the envoy spoke, I understood.

This was not merely an offer—this was a message. A carefully disguised strike against Amen's rule. They wanted to stain his name, to add fuel to the whispers already circulating in the shadows.

I had heard them before.

The murmurs of unease, the hushed voices of servants and courtiers—claims that the Pharaoh was becoming unstable, cruel. That concubines and slaves alike had vanished in the night, their bodies discovered near or inside his chambers, drained of life in ways no one could explain.

To the outsiders, it was not a curse binding him to the remnants of Osiris's soul—it was something far more insidious. A bloodthirst. A growing hunger.

I had dismissed those rumors before. But now? This was deliberate. A calculated attempt to cast doubt upon his rule.

Amen did not react—not in anger, not in outrage. He remained composed, his expression cool, unreadable.

But I knew him too well now.

Beneath his unshaken mask, he was furious. Not because they dared to insult him, but because they sought to use the suffering of others—of women offered like cattle—as a means to manipulate him.

His response came measured, precise. His voice, though polite, was sharpened like a blade.

"I am not in the habit of accepting gifts wrapped in chains."

One of the envoys let out a short, nervous laugh. "Ah, but my Pharaoh, such matters are common—"

"No." The word rings with finality. With fury barely contained. "Egypt does not need more slaves. If these women wish to serve in the temples, they may do so by choice. If not, they will be given means to return home."

Pride blooms in my chest, fierce and bright. This is my Amen - the man behind the crown, the one who sees people where others see possessions.

But the diplomat isn't finished. "Your Majesty, forgive me, but your advisors have expressed concern about... succession. A ruler of your divine status must consider his legacy. These women could-"

"My legacy," Amen cuts him off, voice like thunder, "will not be built on broken bodies and stolen lives."

The man stammered, scrambling for a response, but Amen did not give him the chance.

"If you wish to present me with a gift, let it be something of value." He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in. "Not human lives."

A heavy silence followed.

For the first time since I had started listening, I exhaled.

Silence filled the chamber.

The envoy hesitated, searching for a response, but Amen had already turned his attention elsewhere. It was done. The insult had been returned, subtle yet undeniable, a message of its

had been returned, subtle yet undeniable, a message of its own.

And then—his gaze flickered.

Straight to me.

I froze behind the column, my heart stammering in my chest as our eyes met.

He had known.

How long had he known I was there? Had he sensed my presence from the beginning?

The answer came in the form of a slow, knowing smirk. My breath caught, heat curling low in my stomach.

Panic seized me. I turned on my heel and fled down the corridor, my scrolls clutched tightly to my chest.

Would he scold me for eavesdropping? Tease me? I did not know. And at this moment, I did not care.

Because one thing was clear—Amen was playing a dangerous game, and the entire court was watching, waiting for him to make one misstep.

The realization sent a chill through me.

Later, as I made my way back to my chambers in the Golden House, my mind still swirled with the weight of what I had witnessed. I barely noticed the figure in my path until it was too late.

"Nebetia?"

The younger concubine started at the sound of my voice, her dark eyes widening as if I had caught her in the middle of something forbidden. She shifted on her feet, hesitating before offering me a weak smile.

"Neferet." Her tone was soft, but there was something beneath it. A tremor.

I frowned. "Is something wrong?"

She hesitated again, glancing down the corridor as if searching for someone, her fingers twisting in the silken fabric of her dress.

Then, before I could press further, the sound of approaching footsteps echoed down the hall.

Without thinking, Nebetta grabbed my hands.

"Come with me," she whispered urgently, pulling me into her chambers before I could protest.

The door shut behind us, enclosing us in the dim candlelight of her private room. My pulse quickened as I turned to her, searching her face.

"What's going on?" I demanded, my voice low.

Nebetta hesitated, her fingers knotting together before she finally spoke, her voice hushed but insistent.

"I overheard something," she admitted. "A private conversation. Between Heket and Meritaten."

I inhaled sharply, my spine straightening.

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I inhaled sharply, my spine straightening.

"Go on," I urged.

She swallowed, glancing toward the door before meeting my gaze once more. "They're angry, Neferet. Furious that Pharaoh has granted you privileges they believe you do not deserve. They—" She hesitated again, lowering her voice even further. "They're planning something."

A slow, creeping cold spread through my veins. I had known, of course, that my status had earned me no allies among the other concubines. But this?

This was different. This was no longer mere jealousy or whispered spite. This was a warning.

Nebetta's lips pressed into a thin line, her worry palpable. "You need to be careful," she whispered. "More than ever."

I exhaled, nodding slowly, forcing my mind to remain sharp.

"I appreciate your warning," I told her, and I meant it.

For the first time, I realized that, among the others, Nebetta was perhaps the only one who had never shown me anything but quiet kindness.

She gave me a hesitant look before nodding. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

I offered her a small, reassuring smile, despite the unease curling in my stomach.

"Neither do I," I murmured.