



## Chapter 44



By the time I returned to the palace, the sun had long since disappeared beyond the horizon, leaving only the soft glow of torches and the silver light of the moon to guide my steps.

My heart thrummed with anticipation as I weaved through the halls, my fingers tightening around the scrolls I carried.

I needed to see Amen. Now.

My conversation with Merneith lingered in my thoughts. The confirmation that my dreams held meaning—that they were not mere fragments of my subconscious but messages—only deepened my urgency.

I had to tell him. He needed to know.

Without hesitation, I approached his chambers, only to be met by the imposing figures of two guards standing at the entrance. They shifted slightly at my arrival, but neither moved to let me through.

"I must speak with Pharaoh," I announced, keeping my voice steady.

One of them, an older man with a broad chest and a scar running down his cheek, inclined his head but did not step aside. "Pharaoh has not summoned you, my lady."

I lifted my chin. "He will not be pleased if I am kept waiting."

A faint smirk tugged at the corner of the lips of another guard.

"A good attempt," he mused, "but Pharaoh isn't in his chambers right now."

The words hit me like a gust of cold wind.

Not in his chambers.

That was all I needed to know.

I turned on my heels, leaving before they could question why I wasn't pressing the matter further. As I stepped away, I caught the quiet muttering between them—the irritated voice of the older guard scolding the younger one.

"You weren't supposed to say that, idiot."

Ignoring the tangle of nerves tightening in my stomach, I followed my instincts, my feet carrying me through the winding halls of the palace. There were few places he could be, even fewer where he would seek solitude.

And then, I knew.

The oasis garden. The place where we had shared our first private dinner together.

I quickened my pace, my sandals barely making a sound against the smooth stone floors as I slipped through the side corridors leading to the gardens.

The scent of night-blooming jasmine filled the air, mingling with the faint, lingering warmth of the day. The sound of the water flowing from the fountain reached my ears, soothing, rhythmic.

And then I saw him.

At first, he was nothing more than a shadow in the moonlit clearing. A lone figure, hunched over, motionless. The glow of

At first, he was nothing more than a shadow in the moonlit clearing. A lone figure, hunched over, motionless. The glow of the torches along the palace walls did not reach him here, and yet, even in darkness.

I could see the way his body curled in on itself, his long, unbound hair cascading over his face like a curtain of midnight silk.

Something was wrong.

I stopped at the edge of the clearing, my breath slow, measured, but my pulse quickened with unease.

"Amen?" No response.

The garden was eerily silent, the rustling of the leaves subdued, as if the wind itself held its breath. The scent of night-blooming flowers, usually sweet and calming, now felt suffocating.

I stepped closer.

"Amen," I called again, firmer this time.

Still, nothing.

A flicker of hesitation held me in place, but only for a moment. Then I moved forward, quickening my pace. It was then that I saw it.

The grass. The flowers. The vines that once curled along the marble columns. All of it—dead.

The earth beneath him was stripped of life, the soil cracked and dry. A perfect circle of desolation surrounded him, as if

and dry. A perfect circle of desolation surrounded him, as if something had drained every last breath from the land itself.

A shiver ran down my spine.

I didn't stop. I dropped to my knees before him, my hands hovering just above his shoulders, uncertain if I should touch him. His head remained bowed, his fingers tangled in his own hair, his breath slow but uneven.

"Amen," I whispered, softer now, pleading.

And then, I heard it. His voice. A rasped murmur, low and hoarse. Words so faint I almost didn't catch them.

"Silence..." I froze. "Leave me be," he whispered.

Not to me. Not to anyone I could see.

A wave of cold passed through me. The kind of chill that had nothing to do with the night air.

"Amen," I tried again, my throat tightening.

His breath hitched. But he did not look at me.

"Be silent," he whispered once more, his voice raw, broken.  
"Leave me alone."

I couldn't.

Something in his voice—something cracked and desperate—drove me to act before I could second-guess myself. I reached forward, cupping his face in my hands, tilting his head upward, forcing him to meet my gaze.

And the moment our skin touched the world imploded. A flood of voices crashed into my mind.

Not his. Not mine.

A chorus.

Whispers—horrific, unrelenting, clawing at the edges of my consciousness.

Moans. Cries. Wailing screams.

I gasped, my body locking in place as the sounds spiraled around me, twisting, writhing, pleading, cursing, weeping.

The pain in their voices was unbearable.

So cold. So unbearably cold.

I felt their despair. Their fear. Their rage.

My fingers trembled against Amen's skin, but I couldn't pull away. The voices only grew louder, pushing against my thoughts, clawing for space within me.

My breath came in ragged gasps. My body shook with the weight of it all.

The spirits of Duat.

They were here. And they would not let go.

**End** *of*