



## Chapter 45



8:35

I whirl around, desperate to find the source of voices, but there is nothing—no figure, no shadow, only the deafening chorus of wailing and whispers that scrape against my senses like jagged stone. It is endless, filling the air, pouring into my ears, seeping into my very bones.

I stagger, my vision blurring.

Where are they coming from? What are they?

Then—warm fingers tighten around my own, grounding me.

Amen.

His grip is desperate, his breath ragged, his dark eyes wild and unfocused as they lock onto mine. He clutches my hands against his face as though I am the only thing tethering him to this world.

"You hear them too?" His voice is hoarse, breaking at the edges. "Do you see them—the unrested souls? Can you stop them?"

His desperation is raw, bleeding into every syllable.

"Please, Neferet. Do something. Help me."

I open my mouth, but no words come. The weight of the unseen specters presses harder, suffocating, threatening to drag me under.

My heart pounds, a frantic rhythm against my ribs, my pulse hammering in my throat. My knees buckle. And then—I feel it.

The familiar pull, the weakness creeping through my limbs, leeching the strength from my muscles.

His power. Even in his agony, even in this moment, his very presence is draining me.

No. Not again.

A memory flashes before me—the night in the desert, the sandstorm curling around us like a living force, the way my blood had bent to my will, reshaping the world with its power.

My blood.

The answer strikes like lightning.

Without thinking, without hesitation, I rip my hands from his grip and reach for the dagger sheathed at his hip. The cool metal glints in the moonlight as I draw it free.

Amen flinches, confused—but I do not give him time to react. I raise the blade to my thumb, press down, and slice.

A sharp sting. A warm trickle.

Then, before doubt can creep in, before I can second-guess, I lift my hand to his lips. His breath hitches, his pupils dilating as he realizes what I am doing.

"Drink," I command, voice firm despite the shiver in my veins.

He hesitates. "Neferet—"

I press my bleeding thumb against his mouth, silencing him. The moment his tongue meets the wound, everything shifts. The air, thick with unseen voices, trembles.

The pressure that had been crushing my chest dissipates like mist in the morning sun.

The whispers—once a deafening tide—begin to ebb, their cries retreating into the distance.

And then—silence. A deep, eerie silence.

Amen stiffens against me, his breath coming fast and heavy as the last echoes of the spirits fade into nothingness. For several long moments, neither of us moved.

Then, slowly, his grip on me loosens. His chest rises and falls in slow, steady breaths. The wildness in his eyes fades, replaced by something I cannot name—something dark, something exhausted.

Finally, he releases me and staggers to his feet.

I watch him, still shaken, my thumb throbbing as a bead of blood drips onto my wrist. My mind races to make sense of what just happened.

"Amen," I say, forcing my voice steady. "What was that?"

He doesn't answer.

He turns away, his shoulders tense as his gaze sweeps over the garden—the withered plants, the lifeless flowers, the unnatural stillness hanging in the air like a specter.

"Amen," I repeat, firmer now. "Tell me what just happened."

His jaw clenches.

"You shouldn't have done that." His voice is quiet, troubled. "You shouldn't have spilled your blood for me again."

Frustration flares in my chest. I push myself up, stepping

Frustration flares in my chest. I push myself up, stepping closer, unwilling to let this moment slip away unanswered.

"I saw you suffering!" My voice rises, thick with emotion. "I couldn't just stand by and do nothing."

His shoulders stiffen, his hands curling into fists.

"You think I wanted this?" He turns to me, his expression raw, torn between anger and something deeper, something heavier. "You think I wanted you to see me like this? To feel what I feel? To hear what I hear?" His voice is sharp now, cutting through the silence like a blade. "I told you to stay away."

"No." I shake my head. "You told me nothing. You never tell me anything." I take another step forward, refusing to back down. "You hide behind your silence, behind your distance, but I see it. I see the way this is consuming you." I lift my hand, the blood still staining my skin, proof of what I had just done. "And I am telling you now—I will not stand by and watch you destroy yourself."

Amen exhales sharply, his expression unreadable. For a long moment, he says nothing. Then, finally, his voice drops—quiet, almost resigned.

"I am tired, Neferet."

The way he says it—the weight in those words—makes something inside me ache.

He turns his gaze away, his expression unreadable. "Tired of others suffering for the sake of my life."

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His fingers twitch at his sides, his throat bobbing as he swallows thickly.

"If this curse is my fate..." His voice is softer now, almost like a whisper carried away by the wind. "Then so be it."

## **End** *of* *The* **Chapter**

A Chance Meeting



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