



## Chapter 53



The court's disdain for me grew by the day, though they still hid behind their masks of civility. They thought their whispers went unheard, their glances unnoticed.

But I felt them. Always. Their gazes clung to me, lingering too long, their voices slithering through the halls like venomous snakes.

Still, none dared to show outright disrespect. Not to the Pharaoh's favored concubine.

Not yet.

Sahety's presence loomed over me like an unshakable shadow. He no longer attempted to speak with me, yet he was always there—watching, lingering at a distance.

Whether in the harem or the palace, he remained within sight, a silent specter following my every move.

I hated it. I hated knowing he was near. Hated that no matter how much I ignored him, he would not simply disappear.

And yet, even I could not deny the changes that followed his arrival.

The strange whispers outside my door had ceased. The eerie footsteps in the night—gone.

Even Heket had stopped her constant provocations. For now.

Perhaps Sahety thought his presence would protect me. Perhaps he believed I should be grateful. But I refused to see it that way. I refused to owe him anything.

One evening, the main palace hosted a grand banquet for diplomatic envoys and political figures from neighboring nations.

The banquet was grand, as all royal gatherings were, filled with laughter that never reached the eyes of those who laughed. Diplomats, generals, and high priests filled the vast hall, gathered to discuss matters of the kingdom under the guise of merriment.

The conversation shifted, as it always did, toward the state of the kingdom—the unrest at the borders, the troubling signs emerging from the south.

"The villages are frightened," one of the envoys reported, his voice tinged with unease. "They whisper of shadows moving through the fields at night. Of voices calling to them from the dark. Some claim to have seen creatures, things that do not belong in the land of the living."

A heavy silence followed his words. I could feel the tension thickening in the room, pressing against the walls like an invisible weight.

"The common folk are prone to superstition," a general scoffed, swirling the wine in his goblet. "Let one man see a jackal in the night, and by morning, the entire village will swear it was a monster sent from Duat."

"Yet the disturbances continue," another official countered. "It is not just frightened peasants seeing shadows. There have been disappearances. Entire caravans vanished without a trace. And livestock found... mutilated."

At that, the murmurs grew louder, uncertainty rippling through the assembled nobles.

"These matters require a firm response." Heket leaned forward, her voice smooth and authoritative. "We cannot allow panic to fester in the hearts of our people. The army must increase its presence along the borderlands, establish order before these foolish rumors gain too much power."

"And if they are not just rumors?" The question came from a high priest, his expression unreadable. "What if these omens are a warning from the gods? Signs of divine displeasure?"

At that, Meritaten folded her hands in her lap, her face a picture of serene contemplation.

"If the gods are speaking," she said in her soft, measured voice, "then we must listen. Pharaoh is their chosen vessel. He will know their will. We must not be hasty in assuming this is merely a mortal affair."

"His Majesty has already decreed that additional forces be sent south," Heket said, brushing off Meritaten's words with an elegant flick of her fingers. "The military will handle it. We cannot afford to appear weak in the face of these... disturbances."

I listened, silent as the conversation played out around me.

I had no intention of involving myself in these matters—not when I already knew how little the court valued the voices of women, concubine or not. And yet...

They were fumbling. Debating endlessly, grasping at solutions without understanding the true nature of the problem.

I exhaled slowly, setting down my goblet. And then, before I could stop myself, I spoke.

"You will not solve this with swords."

A ripple of surprise spread across the table. I felt their attention shift toward me, their gazes sharp and assessing.

Heket arched a delicate brow. "Oh?" she mused. "And what would you suggest instead, Neferet?"

I met her gaze evenly, unbothered by the challenge in her tone.

"The disturbances are not natural. You said it yourself— shadows that whisper, disappearances without explanation, creatures of Duat seen walking among the living." I leaned forward slightly, my voice steady. "These are signs of an imbalance between worlds. Not a rebellion. Not a human threat. And if that is the case, then sending more soldiers will not be enough."

Silence.

A few of the men exchanged uncertain glances. A younger noble, likely the son of a general, frowned at me. "You speak as though you know these things firsthand."

I tilted my head, allowing a small, knowing smile. "I was once meant to become a priestess of Isis. I studied the texts, learned the rites. I know how the boundaries between the worlds are maintained. And I know when they begin to break."

A murmur of interest passed through the room.

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But then—Heket saw her opportunity.

"Yes..." She smiled—sweet, harmless. But her eyes gleamed like a viper's. "But you never did become a priestess, did you?"

The atmosphere shifted.

"Relying on her expertise in such matters," she continued smoothly, "might prove... unwise."

I should have expected it. Should have known she wouldn't allow me a moment of triumph without trying to strike me down.

But if she thought I would cower, she was mistaken.

I smiled, tilting my chin slightly, letting my eyes linger on her.

"You would do well not to underestimate the knowledge of priestesses and their disciples." My lips curled into a small, knowing smile. "Especially those who have studied the art of blood magic."

Heket froze.

For just a moment, hesitation flickered in her eyes. But then she scoffed, rolling her eyes with a dismissive smirk.

Lifting her golden goblet, she took a slow sip of wine. And then—she jerked upright, hissing in pain with a strangled sound, her body seizing as if struck.

The goblet slipped from her fingers, clattering onto the table. A gasp rippled through the room. Dark red liquid spilled across the polished surface.

across the polished surface.

It was not wine. It was blood.

Thick. Dark. Unmistakable.

The table erupted into movement. Nobles pushed back from their seats, priests muttered hurried prayers, the scent of iron filling the air.

Heket clutched her lips, her eyes wide with horror and fury.

A burn mark—seared into her skin.

Slowly, her gaze lifted to mine. And I met her stare without fear. Without hesitation. Her eyes burned with undisguised hatred.

The room erupts in chaos—servants rushing forward with cloths, courtiers backing away from the bloodied table. But I remain still, watching as Heket's carefully constructed composure crumbles.

I know it was no accident. The magic that lives in my blood, that responds to my emotions, is growing stronger. More unpredictable. More dangerous.

Part of me should be frightened by this display of power. But all I feel is a dark satisfaction.

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