



Chapter 54



Heket's screams tore through the grand banquet hall like the shrieks of a wounded jackal.

"She is a demon! A demon from Duat itself! You all saw it!" Her voice was shrill, filled with hysteria, her body trembling with rage as she pointed at me with a shaking hand. "She is a curse upon us! Upon Pharaoh! She seeks our destruction!"

Her golden bracelets clashed violently as she gestured wildly, her fury spilling into the air like venom.

She was losing.

I sit before her, unmoved, my expression carefully composed, my posture as still as a statue. I did not need to defend myself. I did not need to scream back at her like a commoner in the marketplace.

I simply waited. And then — "Enough."

The single word was absolute. The hall fell into silence.

Heket froze, her breath hitching. The sharp edge of her fury was now tinged with something else—something almost resembling fear.

Amen's gaze was unreadable, but the weight of it was crushing.

"Compose yourself, Heket. You forget yourself in my presence," he commanded, his tone measured. "Return to your chambers. I will not repeat myself."

She swallowed hard, her jaw tightening as if she wanted to argue. But there was nothing she could say. Not when she had just made a spectacle of herself before the entire court.

Her dignity was in tatters.

Her hands trembled as she bowed her head stiffly, the humiliation evident in the rigid way she held herself. With a final glare in my direction, she turned on her heel and stormed from the hall, her golden sandals clicking sharply against the polished stone floor.

Silence stretched in her wake.

I did not let the moment slip. I inclined my head gracefully, allowing a small, knowing smirk to curve my lips.

"I must apologize for my little trick," I said, my voice sweet with feigned innocence. "I never expected someone as strong-willed as Heket to be so... sensitive."

A few of the gathered nobles gasped. Others tried to suppress their smiles.

And Amen—his lips twitched.

Though it was barely visible, I saw it—the smallest ghost of amusement flickering across his otherwise unreadable face.

But Heket and Meritaten did not forget this night.

In the days that followed, the whispers grew.

The courtiers spoke of me in hushed tones, their words laced with suspicion and intrigue. I could feel it in the way their eyes lingered on me, in the way their voices dipped when I entered a room.

Neferet is unnatural. Neferet is dangerous. Neferet is a curse upon the Pharaoh himself. Neferet is responsible for Nebetta's

upon the Pharaoh himself. Neferet is responsible for Nebetta's death.

It started subtly—a murmur here, a hushed voice there. But soon, the poison spread.

Even the palace scribes recorded it—scrolls detailing strange happenings surrounding my rise to prominence, my "mysterious powers," my "unexplainable influence" over the Pharaoh.

And then—they made their boldest move yet. They convinced the court that I should be brought before Pharaoh. To answer for the whispers of treason.

On the morning of my summons, I received a message.

It came not from Amen. Not from Werel. But from Sahety.

He had intercepted a letter. A correspondence between Meritaten and Heket.

When I unrolled it, I felt the breath leave my lungs.

They had bribed an assassin. A man who would claim that I had hired him to kill Nebetta. That on one of my secret visits to the city, I had given the order myself.

The lie was so carefully crafted, so well-planned, that I knew instantly—they had been preparing this for a long time.

For the first time in my life, I saw red. A rage so deep, so consuming, that I did not think. I only acted.

I found her alone in her own chambers. Her guards had left for their morning drills. Her servants were elsewhere.

The moment I enter her chambers, I see it—that smug, knowing smirk curling at the edges of her lips.

She knows why I am here. And she does not fear it.

Heket barely has time to gasp before my hand connects with her cheek, the sharp crack of my palm against her skin shattering the stillness of the room.

I grab her by the hair and slam her into the nearest pillar. A breathless gasp escapes her lips as the back of her skull collides with the stone, her knees buckling under the impact.

I drag her back up before she can collapse. My nails dig into her scalp, ripping at her carefully styled hair, yanking her head back until her throat is bared to me.

"You would frame me for murder?" My voice was low, shaking with barely contained fury. "You would stand before Pharaoh and tell him a lie?"

Heket laughs—a wheezing, breathless sound. It only makes my rage burn hotter.

I yank her forward and throw her to the floor.

She crashes onto the polished stone, the force of the impact rattling the delicate vases on the nearby table.

Heket coughs, trying to push herself up, but I do not let her. I lunge forward, my knee pressing into her stomach, pinning her down as I pummel her with my fists.

My fist connects with her face. Once. Twice. Three times. Each impact sends a shock through my arm, but I don't stop.

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Can't stop. Blood sprays from her nose, staining my hands crimson.

"Not so clever now, are you?" The words tear from my throat, rough with hatred. "No more whispers. No more schemes."

She tries to speak, but only manages a wet gurgle. Good. Let her choke on her own blood like Nebetta did.

I slam her head against the floor again. The sound of bone meeting marble echoes through the chamber.

Her nails claw at my hands, her body writhing, but she is weak beneath me.

So weak. So powerless.

Her face is red—then purple—then pale.

I squeeze harder. I want her to choke on her own blood. I want her to beg.

Her eyes flutter, her lips part in a strangled, desperate gasp—but she cannot find breath to speak.

She is going to die.

"I should have done this months ago," I whisper, watching her eyes roll back. "I should have—"

Strong arms wrap around me from behind, yanking me away. I fight against them, wild with bloodlust, but the grip is iron.

"Enough, Neferet." Sahety's voice cuts through the red haze. "That's enough!"

Heket now lay on the floor like a broken doll, blood streaming from her nose and mouth. Her chest heaves with desperate breaths.

She looks small now, pathetic. Nothing like the serpent who's been poisoning my life.

I'm still shaking in Sahety's grip, my hands stained red, my breath coming in ragged gasps. The rage is still there, burning hot enough to consume us all.

But slowly, reality seeps back in. What have I done?

Sahety keeps his voice low and steady. "Werel," he calls to my maiden who hovers nearby, "take your lady back to her chambers. Now! I will handle this."

I don't resist as Werel leads me away. Don't look back at Heket's broken form. Don't acknowledge the horrified stares that follow me.

In my chambers, I stare at my blood-stained hands. They're trembling, but not from fear or regret.

I could have killed her. I wanted to kill her.

And some part of me—the part that burns with fire—is disappointed that I didn't.

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The **Chapter**