



Chapter 59



Amen and I sat at a low table, breakfast laid before us—plump dates, warm bread, and a bowl of pomegranate seeds glistening like rubies in the morning light.

He had been silent for most of the meal, his expression unreadable. But I could sense it—something weighed on him, something he was preparing to say.

And then, at last, he set down his cup, exhaling slowly.

"Tomorrow night," he said, his voice even, measured, but beneath it, something deeper hummed. "The full moon will be at its peak—an auspicious time for your first ritual."

The words settled over me like a shroud. I had known this moment would come, had braced myself for it. But hearing it aloud made it real. Final.

I met his gaze, steady and unwavering. "Then I will be ready."

He studied me for a long moment, fingers tracing the rim of his goblet.

"You must prepare, Neferet," he continued, "both physically and mentally. There will be purification rites. The priests will expect—"

"I know what will be expected of me," I interrupted softly. My voice did not waver.

Something flickered in his dark eyes, a shadow that had nothing to do with the morning light. And then, his expression shifted—softened in a way I had rarely seen.

"You do not have to do this." His voice was lower now, almost hesitant. "Our bond is undeniable—I do not need proof."

I straightened, fingers curling against the cool stone beneath them. "But they do." The others. The court. The ones who still whispered, who still doubted. "I will go through with this, just as the others did."

Amen's jaw clenched slightly. I knew he despised the comparison, hated the thought of me as just another name in a line of women who had stood where I would soon stand.

But I had made my choice long ago.

"I will silence every lying tongue," I said.

He searched my face, waiting for hesitation, waiting for fear. But I met his gaze unwaveringly.

"You have nothing to worry about," I assured him. "I am not afraid."

A breath. A pause. And then, the final words.

"I am ready to meet the fate the gods have prepared for me."

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The chamber was dimly lit, the flickering flames of the oil lamps casting elongated shadows against the gilded walls. Werel stood just inside the doorway, her expression impassive as she announced their arrival.

"The priestesses are here."

I turned.

They entered silently, moving like specters—two women, both young, draped in flowing black robes that kissed the marble

floor. They did not speak.

The air thickened with something unseen, something heavy with ritual.

One of them lifted a slender hand, gesturing. I understood.

I stood, unfastening my robe and letting it slip from my shoulders. The fabric pooled at my feet, cool against my bare skin.

The priestesses did not react. They stepped forward, their fingers smooth and practiced as they began the anointing.

Myrrh oil dripped onto my skin, slick and fragrant, its scent filling my lungs as they massaged it into my flesh. Their voices wove through the air, hushed incantations in a tongue I did not recognize.

Then, the inscriptions began.

A fine reed brush dipped into a pot of dark ink. One of them took my arm, steady and deliberate, as she began to paint.

Symbols unfurled across my skin—intricate hieroglyphs curling around my shoulders, trailing down my ribs, encircling my navel.

The ink was cool at first, but soon, it burned—only slightly, a tingling heat that seemed to seep beneath the surface, as if the markings were not merely painted on, but sinking into me.

I did not flinch.

The whispers deepened. They reached my face, careful strokes tracing my cheekbones, my forehead, the curve of my jaw.

jaw.

By the time they finished, I felt no different—yet I knew I was.

I was given no robes, no tunic. Only wide golden bracelets clasped around my wrists and a sheer, dark veil that concealed nothing.

And then, in silence, they led me from the chamber.

The Golden House did not breathe.

A dead silence followed us, as if the entire palace held its breath. The only sound was the whisper of my own footsteps against the cold stone.

We moved through the corridors, past towering columns carved with stories of gods and men, through open halls where the scent of night jasmine thickened the air.

Outside, the sky was vast and silver-lit. The full moon loomed above, framed perfectly between the towering pylons of the temple.

As we neared the temple entrance, I saw them.

Four figures awaited me.

Three priests stood in ceremonial robes, flanking a small circular pool—its surface as still as black glass. And in the center, waiting, was him.

Amen.

He stood waist-deep in the water, bronze skin glistening under the moonlight. Like me, he was marked—his body fully

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covered in hieroglyphs, his skin slick with oil. The crown of Pharaoh sat atop his head, gleaming in the pale light.

For a brief moment, I was struck silent.

Then, I stepped forward.

The moment my feet touched the water, the chill seized me, cutting through my flesh like a blade. I gasped softly, but did not recoil.

Above us, the full moon aligned perfectly with the temple's open ceiling, bathing us both in its sacred glow.

And for the first time—I felt something familiar to fear.

It struck me without warning, a slow unfurling in my stomach. This was real. This was happening. Whatever awaited me at the end of this ritual, I could not turn away from it now.

Amen noticed immediately.

His hands found mine beneath the water, his fingers curling around my own, warm despite the cold. His thumbs moved in slow, soothing circles against my skin.

"Trust me," he murmured, voice low, meant only for me. "I will not let anything harm you."

His gaze was steady, grounding me.

I nodded.

His fingers squeezed mine once before releasing me.

A priest stepped forward, lifting his hands to the sky. His voice

A priest stepped forward, lifting his hands to the sky. His voice rang through the temple, beginning the first recitation.

"Do not leave the water," Amen warned quietly. "No matter what happens."

The moonlight intensified, spilling down like liquid silver.

I swallowed. My heart pounded. But I nodded again.

I would not run. I would not falter. I was ready.

End of *The* Chapter

A Chance Meeting



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