

The Pharaoh's Favorite

Chapter 6

“So they’re sending you to the Golden House?” Amen’s voice carries an edge I can’t quite read. His shoulder brushes mine, sending sparks through my skin.

“Not by choice.” The words taste bitter. “My sister’s actions changed everything...” My voice breaks.

Amen’s expression darkened slightly, though he quickly masked it. “That’s a heavy burden,” he said carefully. “But you seem strong, Neferet. You’ll endure it. You’ll thrive.”

His words were meant to comfort, but they only deepened the ache in my chest. “Do you really believe that?” I asked, glancing up at him.

“I do.” He met my gaze, his dark brown eyes steady. “The gods wouldn’t have given you this path if you weren’t meant to walk it.”

The sincerity in his voice stirred something within me, though it was tinged with frustration.

How could he be so calm, so assured, when my world felt like it was crumbling? And yet, there was something about him – a quiet strength that made me want to believe him.

We continued walking in silence for a while, the only sound the faint rustle of the breeze through the palm trees. Then, without thinking, I spoke.

“I’ve been having dreams. Visions, maybe. They’re... unsettling.”

Amen slowed his pace, turning to look at me. “Dreams? What kind of dreams?”

I hesitated, unsure if I should share them. But something about him – his presence, his patience – made it easy to trust him.

“The Nile runs red with blood,” I said quietly. “And you... you’re always there. But something terrible happens. Shadows gather, creatures drag you under, or you... shatter. And I can’t save you.”

Amen stopped walking, his brows furrowing as he studied me. “You see me?” he asked, his voice low.

I nodded. "I don't know why, but yes. It's always you. And I feel like the gods are trying to tell me something, but I don't understand what."

He was silent for a moment, his gaze distant. Then he turned back to me, his expression serious.

"Tell me about yourself," he said after a stretch of silence. His voice was soft, curious, as though he were unraveling a mystery one thread at a time.

I hesitated, unsure of where to begin.

"There's not much to tell," I said with a faint smile. "I've spent most of my life studying at the temple of Isis. I thought I'd dedicate my life to her service. But now... Now I must give up the temple, my dreams of serving Isis – "

"And these dreams mean much to you?" He watches me carefully, something sharp behind his casual tone.

"They're everything. The magic, the connection to the gods..." I stop walking, struck by another vision as our hands accidentally touch.

Blood. So much blood in the Nile.

Amen struggling against dark figures, their faces hidden by shadows. His body dissolving into crimson water while I scream –

"Neferet?" His hands steady me, warm against my shoulders. "What did you see?"

I blink, surprised by his instant understanding. "How did you know I saw something right now?"

"Your eyes..." He traces the air near my face, not quite touching. "They changed color for a moment. Like jade caught in sunlight."

Fear claws at my throat. "You must be careful," I whisper. "I keep seeing... darkness around you. Danger. Something trying to destroy you."

Instead of dismissing me, he leans closer. "Tell me about these visions. About your connection to the otherworld."

"I don't understand them myself. They come without warning – more frequently now." I shiver despite the warm night. "The priests say I'm touched by Isis, but..."

"But?"

"Sometimes I think they're afraid of what I might see."

We turn onto my street, my family's grand home rising before us like a judgment. Amen whistles low.

"The High Priest of Amun lives well." His lips curve. "What's a respectable noble lady like you doing with a common merchant's son?"

"Common?" I can't help but laugh, sliding my eyes over him from head to toes. "Your linen is finer than what my father wears to the temple." I reach out, touching his golden ring. "And this... no ordinary merchant's son wears such craftsmanship."

His eyes lock with mine, dark and dangerous as sin.

"Perhaps I'm a very successful thief," he murmurs, his voice low and intimate, each word wrapping around me like a silken thread.

I tilt my head, my lips curving into a smile I can't quite suppress. "Perhaps you're not what you seem at all."

The silence that follows is thick, charged with something unspoken yet undeniable. My chest tightens, the ankh birthmark there burning faintly as though the gods themselves are listening.

His gaze lingers on me, heavy and intent, and for a fleeting moment, it feels as if we're the only two people in the world.

"I should go," I whisper, the words trembling on my lips. Every part of me aches to stay, to let the night stretch endlessly between us, but duty pulls at me like an iron chain.

I take one step toward home. His hand catches mine, his grip firm but gentle, his warmth bleeding into my skin.

"A bargain," he says softly, his voice like a caress. "One kiss, and I promise we'll meet again."

My heart stutters, then races, each beat loud and insistent in my ears.

I should refuse.

Should run inside and lock the door, burying his mysterious smile and careful lies in the recesses of my mind.

But instead, I turn back to him, drawn by a force I can't explain.

The kiss begins as a whisper, his lips brushing mine so lightly it feels like a dream. But the moment stretches, deepens, and a wildfire sparks between us. His hands slip to my waist, pulling me closer as my fingers find the solid strength of his chest.

There's no hesitation now, no uncertainty – only the intoxicating taste of him, wild and irresistible.

“Neferet!”

We break apart at Kiya's sharp voice. She stands in our back doorway, her perfect face twisted with spite.

Kiya's eyes narrowed as they darted between me and Amen. “Who do I see? The pretty boy from that night,” she demanded, her voice dripping with venom. “First the temple, now our own street? Or perhaps you're just practicing for the Golden House. Tell me, sister – were you always such a shameless wh – ”

“Enough.”

Amen's voice changes. It's not the gentle tone I know – this voice carries weight, carries power. It makes the air heavy, and makes Kiya stumble back like she's been struck. For a heartbeat, I see something ancient and terrible flash behind his eyes.

Amen stood tall, his expression calm but unreadable as Kiya unleashed her tirade. His composure only seemed to inflame her further.

“And you,” she hissed, turning her attention to him. “You dare to loiter near our home? You have no business here.”

“Kiya, that's enough,” I said firmly, my cheeks burning with anger and embarrassment. Turning to Amen, I added softly, “I'm sorry for my sister's behavior.”

“It's okay, lotus flower.” He smiles, and for a moment I see something ancient in his eyes, something that speaks of power beyond mortal understanding. “Until we meet again.”

And just like that, he's gone, melting into the shadows as if he had never been there at all. The ghost of his kiss lingers on my lips, a reminder of the dangerous pull he exerts over me.
