



## Chapter 60



The first words of the priests shattered the silence like a stone thrown into still water. Their voices wove together in a low, rhythmic chant, rising and falling like the breath of the temple itself.

The hieroglyphs on the stone walls seemed to flicker in the moonlight, their meanings shifting, elusive.

At first, it seemed as though nothing was happening.

I stood waist-deep in the sacred pool, the cold water biting at my skin, my body still tingling from the inked symbols painted across my flesh.

Amen remained before me, silent and watchful, the muscles in his shoulders taut as the incantation filled the chamber.

Then—something else joined the chant.

It was subtle at first, barely noticeable, a sound that whispered between the syllables of the priests' voices. A faint murmuring, distant and fragile, as though carried on the wind.

Then it grew. The whispers multiplied.

Soft at first, then stronger, until they pressed in from all directions, surrounding me.

I clenched my jaw, forcing my breathing to remain even. I had heard whispers before—the voices from beyond. I had always told myself I could withstand them, that I would not cower before something unseen.

But these voices were different. They were not formless, mindless echoes in the dark. These voices carried intent.

I swallowed, lifting my chin. I would not falter.

Just as I thought I had adjusted to the growing madness, I saw it.

The shadows began to move.

At first, it was no more than a flicker, a trick of the moonlight. But then they thickened, deepened—gathered.

They slipped across the walls, coiling like ink in water, spreading through the chamber with an unnatural fluidity. I watched, breath caught in my throat, as the shadows twisted into shapes—figures.

And then I understood.

The souls of Duat had come.

Summoned by their master, they had risen, drawn to the ritual like moths to flame.

The air grew dense, heavy with the weight of unseen eyes. The figures gathered in the corners of the chamber, pressing against the edges of existence, their forms barely distinguishable from the darkness itself.

I kept my breathing steady, kept my stance strong.

I would not show weakness.

Amen had warned me not to leave the water, and so I remained where I stood, my hands trembling just beneath the surface.

But then—one of the shadows moved toward me. I stiffened

as a smoky hand stretched forward, its fingers reaching toward my skin.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Amen tense, his breath catching.

Did he know what was about to happen? Or was he just as uncertain as I was?

The moment the shadow's fingers brushed my skin—

It shrieked.

A terrible, inhuman sound tore through the chamber as the shade recoiled, twisting away from me in agony. The others followed, their forms unraveling like torn fabric, wailing as though they had been burned.

The pain came without warning.

It started as a slow, simmering heat beneath my skin, just above my heart—where my birthmark had always been. Then, in an instant, it flared into a searing, agonizing burn, as if unseen flames were licking at my flesh from the inside.

A strangled cry tore from my throat, my hands flying to my chest in desperation.

Amen's head snapped toward me.

"Neferet!" His voice was sharp, urgent.

I barely heard him over the ringing in my ears.

Amen was in front of me in an instant. He pulled at my hands, forcing them away from my chest, his breath coming in quick,

forcing them away from my chest, his breath coming in quick, frantic bursts.

"Tell me what's wrong." His fingers dug into me, searching for a wound, for something tangible, something he could stop.

But there was nothing. Nothing except the unbearable burning beneath my flesh.

His gaze dropped—and then he froze.

I watched as the color drained from his face. His fingers loosened their grip, his body going utterly still.

My stomach clenched. Slowly, I followed his gaze. And everything inside me turned to ice.

My birthmark—the one I had carried since the moment I was born, the one that had always been revered as the blessing of Isis—it was changing.

Right before our eyes, the once-familiar symbol twisted, the dark curves shifting, morphing into something else.

Something unmistakable.

The was-scepter. The symbol of the god of evil, chaos and destruction.

I staggered back, my trembling fingers hovering over the twisted, cursed symbol. My skin felt raw, seared—defiled.

A heavy silence filled the chamber. I tore my gaze away from my skin and met Amen's eyes. He looked at me as if he did not recognize me. As if, in that single moment, everything had changed.

Then, the whispers—low, guttural, ancient—began to rise again.

Louder. Chanting. Unrelenting.

"Seth. Seth. Seth. Seth. Seth. Seth. Seth..."

It filled the temple, rattling the very stones, echoing from the depths of the beyond.

The chant seeped into my bones, into my very soul, relentless and suffocating. It devoured the silence, filling every crevice of the temple like a poison.

Every head turned toward me. Shocked. Terrified. Disbelieving.

Even the priests—men who had devoted their lives to the gods, who had seen the impossible—stood as still as statues, faces drained of color, eyes wide with horror.

I was unclean. I wasn't blessed by Isis.

I was touched by Seth.

Amen's gaze snapped up to mine, his dark brown eyes burning with something unreadable.

Fear? Betrayal?

I turned, heart hammering against my ribs, and found myself staring at him.

A man who had not been there before.

He stood directly behind the High Priest, motionless, his

He stood directly behind the High Priest, motionless, his presence so suddenly there that the air itself seemed to recoil.

He smiled. The curve of his lips was slow, wicked—a predator who had waited a very long time for this moment.

His eyes—crimson. They glowed in the darkness, burning like embers in the night.

Long waves of dark, blood-red hair framed his face, cascading past his shoulders. A black cloak draped over his tall form, the fabric shifting as though it was woven from the void itself.

Cold, paralyzing terror gripped me. Because I knew him. I had seen him before.

In my dreams.

A memory, fragmented but undeniable, surfaced in my mind—a dream I had dismissed as nothing more than the workings of my imagination. A shadowed figure watching me, waiting, whispering in a voice I had tried to forget.

He had been there all along.

My breath came fast, shallow, my mind struggling to make sense of what I was seeing.

Amen's hand tightened on my wrist. "Neferet," he said, low and urgent.

I barely heard him.

A slow, knowing smirk curled lips of red-haired man, as if he had been waiting for this moment all along.

The man from my nightmares. The shadow in the bloodstained waters of the Nile.

And his eyes were on me.

A pulse of fury slammed into my chest, so sudden and violent that it stole the breath from my lungs. Not fear. Not despair.

Rage.

Unbridled. All-consuming. Raw. Violent.

My vision blurred with anger, the roar in my ears drowning out the voices of the priests, the gasps of the temple-goers.

I turned my gaze back to Amen.

He was still staring at me—horrified, confused. But before he could speak—before he could even stop me—I moved.

Faster than I ever could have.

My hand lashed out—grabbing Amen by the throat. His body jerked in shock, his eyes widening, his hands instinctively flying to my wrist—but I did not let go.

I would not let go.

A deep, predatory foreign satisfaction burned in my chest as my fingers tightened, as I felt his pulse thrum against my palm.

Amen gasped, his body stiffening under my grip.

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"Neferet—" His voice was raw, strangled.

But I did not loosen my hold. I only squeezed tighter.

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

A Chance Meeting



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