



## Chapter 65



[POV Neferet]

I hear whispers even when no one speaks – they follow me now, slithering through the corridors of the Golden House like serpents.

It's the hushed murmurs of fear, the quickened heartbeats when I enter a room, the collective intake of breath when my gaze falls upon a servant.

They are afraid. *Of me.*

I had grown used to the stares of the palace servants – their whispered gossip tucked behind polite bows, their wary glances hidden beneath lowered lashes. But now, the change was undeniable.

They no longer merely whispered. They recoiled.

Even Werel, my faithful Werel, kept a distance from me she never had before.

She still performs her duties with meticulous attention, but she no longer meets my eyes directly. When I reach for something, she flinches almost imperceptibly.

I catch her watching me when she thinks I'm not looking, her eyes filled not with fear, but with a deep concern that somehow cuts more deeply than terror ever could.

This morning, as I prepare for the day, I find myself unreasonably irritated by everything – the sunlight is too bright, the scent of lotus oil too cloying, the chatter of the servants too persistent.

A harsh headache pounds behind my eyes, a constant throbbing that sets my teeth on edge.

"The blue dress today," I instruct, massaging my temples. "The one with gold embroidery along the high neckline."

I sat silently, letting them work, feeling their fear crackle against my skin like static. It coiled around me, tightening with each passing moment.

The servants move quickly, retrieving the garment with anxious efficiency. A young girl, new to the Golden House, approaches with a vial of scented oil, her hands trembling slightly as she prepares to anoint my skin.

"Careful," Werel warns her softly. "Lady Neferet prefers just a touch at the wrists and throat."

The girl nods, clearly nervous. As she uncorks the vial, her fingers slip. The oil cascades over my dress, the rich amber liquid immediately staining the delicate blue linen. The scent of jasmine and honey fills the air, suddenly overwhelming.

What happens next unfolds before me like a scene from someone else's life.

My hand flies out, striking the girl with such force that she crashes into a nearby table, sending combs, kohl pots and perfume vials clattering to the floor. The sound of breaking pottery echoes through the chamber.

The room falls silent. Everyone – including me – is too shocked to move.

The girl's nose bleeds and her cheek reddens where my hand connected. Tears well in her eyes, but she doesn't dare cry out. She simply stares at me with raw terror, as if I've transformed into something monstrous before her eyes.

"Get up," I murmured, reaching toward her instinctively, the apology forming in my throat.

The servants flinch away in unison, stepping back as if my touch might poison them.

Something breaks inside me at their reaction and the apology dies unspoken.

Instead, an unusual dark satisfaction blooms in my chest, spreading through my veins like honey wine. Let them fear me. They *should* fear me.

The thought feels foreign yet somehow right, like a garment I've never worn before that now fits perfectly against my skin.

*"Clean this up,"* I commanded, my voice unnaturally calm. *"And bring me the red dress instead. The one with the gold beading."*

No one moves for a heartbeat. Then Werel steps forward, helping the girl to her feet.

"Yes, my lady," she says, her eyes downcast. "Right away."

Throughout the day, my temper only grows shorter, my patience even thinner.

That evening, as I walk through the corridors, I encounter one of Heket's remaining allies – a thin, sharp-featured woman who has always regarded me with barely disguised disdain.

Today, she offers the customary bow, but her lips curl into the faintest sneer.

I moved without thinking with a speed that surprised even me.

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My hand fastens around her throat, pushing her against the wall. Her eyes widened in shock, her fingers scrabbling uselessly at my wrist.

"Listen carefully," I whisper, leaning close enough to smell the fear on her breath. "If I ever again find you in my path, I will ensure your suffering is slow and exquisite. Do you understand?"

She manages a frantic nod and when I release her, she gasps for air, clutching her throat where my fingers have left red marks.

"Good." I smile, straightening the collar of her dress with mock solicitude. "Now run along."

She scurries away like a frightened mouse, not daring to look back. A surge of power rushes through me at the sight, so intoxicating it leaves me breathless.

My skin tingles with it, my senses heightened, colors more vivid, sounds sharper.

*It feels magnificent.*

When I pass a large mirror in the corridor and pause, suddenly curious about my appearance after such a transformative day.

For just a moment – a heartbeat, no more – my eyes appear a burning crimson, my hair seeming to float around my face as if suspended in water. Or blood.

I blink, and my normal appearance returns. Yet the vision leaves me shaken, as if I've glimpsed something true beneath the illusion of my usual self.

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I hurry to my chambers, locking the door behind me. My legs give way, and I slide to the floor, my entire body trembling with the effort of containing whatever is awakening inside me.

"What's wrong with me?" I whispered to the empty room, feeling the hot tears running down my cheeks as my hands tangled in my hair near its roots.

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

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Comments

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Gifts

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