



Chapter 66



[POV Amen]

An emergency gathering had been called in one of the palace's secluded chambers.

Without my authorization. That alone told me everything I needed to know.

Inside, a dozen of officials sit in a perfect crescent, a formation that positions me as the focus of their collective scrutiny rather than their leader.

They rise as I enter, bowing as protocol demands, but there is a stiffness to their movements that speaks of resolution rather than respect.

"My Pharaoh," Vizier Ankhu begins, his aged voice steady despite the tension in the room. "We thank you for answering our summons."

"A summons I did not authorize," I reply evenly, making no move to take the seat clearly left for me at the center of their formation. "Explain this breach of protocol, Ankhu."

A glance passes between the council members – a swift, silent communication that confirms my suspicion that this gathering was planned well in advance.

"Circumstances demanded extraordinary measures, Divine One," the Vizier continues. "The matter at hand concerns the safety of Egypt itself."

"Indeed?" I maintain my position, standing rather than sitting, forcing them to look up at me. "And what threat is so grave that my most trusted

advisors gather in secret, circumventing proper channels?"

Ankhu gestures to a young scribe who quickly unfurls a long papyrus.

"We have compiled testimonies regarding Lady Neferet's increasingly disturbing behavior."

My expression remains neutral, though something cold settles in my stomach.

I let the silence stretch between us until it became unbearable. Only then did I nod once, seating myself at the head of the chamber, arms folded across my chest.

"Speak," I ordered.

For the next hour, I listen as they present their evidence – servants' accounts of violent outbursts, courtiers describing threatening encounters, priests reporting inexplicable phenomena that occur in Neferet's presence.

They speak of the banquet incident in hushed, fearful tones, recounting how lights extinguished at her command, how blood formed perfect patterns against nature's laws.

"The evidence is overwhelming," Ankhu concludes. "Lady Neferet is no longer herself. She has become a vessel for something ancient and malevolent."

"And what would you expect me to do?" I ask, my voice deliberately cool.

"She must be removed from the palace immediately," General Horemheb states bluntly. "The corrupting influence spreads daily."

The High Priest nods gravely. "We suggest exile to the Temple of Hathor at the southern border. The priests there are skilled in cleansing rituals

that might yet save her soul."

"Cleansing rituals?" Treasury Minister Paser scoffs. "You speak as if this is a simple matter of spiritual pollution. We are dealing with evil itself! More extreme measures may be necessary."

I observe how they speak of her – not as Neferet, not as a woman deserving compassion, but as *"it"*, *"the vessel"*, *"the corruption"*.

They have already stripped away her humanity in their minds.

"You hesitate, Divine One," Vizier Ankhu says softly. "We understand your... *attachment* to Lady Neferet. But with all respect, we fear your judgment in this matter may be compromised by personal feelings."

Several council members shift uncomfortably at this direct challenge, but none contradict him.

"Egypt must come before any individual," General Horemheb adds, his voice hardening. "Even one who holds the Pharaoh's favor."

For the first time since entering the chamber, I move, walking slowly around the crescent of seated officials. They follow me with their eyes, necks craning to maintain the appearance of deference.

"You believe my judgment is compromised," I state, stopping behind Ankhu's chair. "You believe I cannot distinguish between my personal desires and the needs of Egypt."

"We merely suggest that in this particular instance—" Ankhu begins.

"You suggest I am *weak*," I interrupt, my voice dangerously soft. "That I would risk my kingdom, my divine mandate, for the sake of a woman's company."

Silence falls, heavy and complete. Even the scribe's stylus stills against

the papyrus.

I continue my circuit around the room, each step measured, deliberate.

"Let me be perfectly clear about several matters, *my faithful council*."

I stop, turning to face them directly.

"First, I am fully aware of what is happening with Lady Neferet – more aware than any of you could possibly be. I have witnessed every change, every manifestation, every struggle that plagues her. Nothing in your reports comes as a surprise to me."

Their expressions shift from righteousness to uncertainty.

"Second, I acknowledge the potential danger. I have already taken measures to ensure the safety of the palace and its inhabitants – measures you were not informed of because they *did not* require your input."

General Horemheb's jaw tightens at this direct challenge to his authority over security matters.

"Third and it's final," I continue, my voice dropping even lower, forcing them to lean forward to hear me clearly, "I *will not* send Lady Neferet away. Not to a temple, not to exile, not to whatever 'extreme measures' some of you are barely concealing behind diplomatic language."

"But Divine One," the High Priest protests carefully, "the risk is too great..."

"The risk of what, precisely?" I ask. "Of evil's influence spreading? Of chaos taking root in the heart of Egypt?" I smile thinly. "Do you truly believe dark forces would be diminished by Neferet's absence?"

This gives them pause, as I knew it would. The logic is sound, appealing

to their strategic minds even as it serves my true purpose.

"At minimum," Vizier Ankhu ventures cautiously, "she must be confined. Secured where her influence can be contained."

I walk to the center of their formation now, claiming the position of power they had hoped to deny me.

"She will remain exactly where she is – in chambers adjacent to my own, under my personal supervision."

The council erupts in protest, voices overlapping in objection.

I raise my hand, and silence falls instantly. "This is not a negotiation. This is my decree as your Pharaoh, as the living embodiment of Horus on earth."

"With all respect, Divine One," General Horemheb presses, "your personal feelings for this woman—"

"Yes," I interrupt, my voice like steel. "Let us speak of *my personal feelings*, since you seem so concerned about them."

I look each council member in the eye, one by one.

"I love Lady Neferet. Openly and without qualification. I will watch over her day and night if necessary. And I will bear personal responsibility for anything that occurs as a result of her presence in the palace."

The admission stuns them into silence. Such a declaration of personal feeling in a formal council setting breaks every tradition of royal conduct.

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"This council is dismissed," I say into the shocked silence. "And let me be absolutely clear: anyone who attempts to remove Lady Neferet from the palace without my explicit order will be guilty of treason against Egypt and its rightful ruler. The punishment for such an offense should not require elaboration."

I turn to leave, then pause at the doorway, looking back at their troubled faces.

"I understand your concerns. I even appreciate the courage it took to confront me directly. But never again gather in secret to question my judgment. I am not merely your king – I am your god on this earth. Remember that."

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

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Comments

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Gifts

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