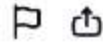




Chapter 74



[POV Amen]

My blood turns to ice, though I keep my expression impassive.

The fragment of Osiris burns within me, responding to its ancient enemy, to the one who once tore its original form into fourteen pieces and scattered them across Egypt.

I feel its rage, its recognition, its desire for vengeance burning alongside my own need to reclaim Neferet from this abomination.

I do not loosen my grip on her shoulders, though her skin now burns hot enough to blister my palms.

If Seth wants this confrontation, he will have it – but on my terms, not *his*.

"Release her," I commanded again, my voice steady despite the fear coiling like a serpent in my belly.

Seth smiles with Neferet's lips, an expression unnaturally cold on features I have seen warm with passion, bright with laughter, soft with tenderness.

The sight of it, this perversion of her beauty, ignites a rage so profound I feel it in my bones.

"*Release her?*" Seth's voice emerges from her throat. "*You misunderstand, boy. Your precious Neferet is not blessed by me – she is possessed by me. There is a profound difference.*"

The distinction strikes like a blade between my ribs.

Not merely influenced, not simply marked – but *possessed*. Claimed entirely.

"That's impossible," I argue, though doubt clouds my conviction. "Her birthmark—"

"Was *Isis's*, yes," Seth admits.

He uses Neferet's body to stand upright, her movements fluid yet wrong, like a master puppeteer animating a beloved doll. Each gesture contains a grace that is not hers, a deliberate control that mocks her natural movements.

"That's what made her so perfect," he continues. "A vessel already touched by the divine power of my sister, already accustomed to carrying a god's energy."

His words hit me like a burial shroud settling over my shoulders. I've studied the old texts since I was a child, learned the hidden histories that don't appear in common scrolls. I know he's telling the truth – divine energy leaves channels, pathways through mortal flesh.

Once marked by a god, that marking makes further divine influence possible.

"Why her?" My voice thickens with emotion I cannot fully suppress.

Seth begins to circle me, using Neferet's body like a predator stalking wounded prey. Sand shifts beneath her feet, leaving impressions too deep for her slight weight – as if something massive walks in her footsteps.

"Who better to use against Osiris than someone bearing his beloved wife's mark?" he purrs. "The divine energies resonate, creating pathways I could exploit easily."

He begins to pace around the ancient altar, Neferet's hips swaying with an unnatural fluidity, her fingers trailing across weathered stone with possessive familiarity.

"Do you know how rare such blessings are?" Seth continues. "To find one in a bloodline already predisposed to blood magic, the most powerful conduit for divine energy, was extraordinary."

He stops abruptly. His eyes fix on me with a predatory stare that holds none of Neferet, only the ancient malice of the chaos god.

"But the most delicious part?" His smile widens, revealing teeth that seem too sharp in Neferet's mouth. "You delivered her to me by yourself. Right here, to my sacred ground, where my power runs deepest."

The realization crashes through me like the Nile in flood season, drowning all other thoughts in its wake.

Horror follows close behind, a cold wave that leaves me breathless. "The night we came here..."

Memory returns with painful clarity: Neferet's delight at the abandoned temple, how we had sat beneath the desert stars speaking of everything and nothing.

What I had intended as a romantic gesture, a sharing of a place that had once brought me solace...

"When you both sat beneath my stars, in my sacred space," Seth confirms, satisfaction evident in his tone. His hand, Neferet's hand, gestures broadly at the temple ruins. "While your mortal bodies rested, I began my work. Subtle at first, a whisper here, a nudge there. She never noticed my presence taking root inside her until it was far too late."

My face drains of color as understanding deepens.

I had unknowingly brought her to the very place where Seth could claim her. I had led her, like a sacrifice, to this altar.

Seth laughs, the sound chilling from Neferet's throat – too deep, too resonant, the echo lingering unnaturally in the still desert air.

"How poetic that love, that most celebrated emotion you mortals prize so highly, would be the instrument of your downfall."

I stand motionless, each word striking like a physical blow. The fragment of Osiris burns in response, a searing pain beneath my breastbone.

"Had you taken her anywhere else," Seth continues, clearly enjoying my suffering, "and my influence might have been unsuccessful. But no, you chose the one place in all of Egypt where I could most easily take root in her soul."

His smile widens, stretching Neferet's lips way too far. *"And now there's nothing you can do to stop what's already begun."*

For a moment, something changes. Neferet's eyes shift from crimson back to their natural green, bright and full of life, entirely her own. Her body shakes violently as she clutches her head, as if two souls battle for control inside her.

"Amen," she gasps, her voice her own again, strained with effort. "I'm sorry... I tried to tell you... couldn't speak of him..."

Her hands reach toward me, fingers trembling like lotus petals in the wind. I step forward instinctively, though the fragment of Osiris pulses a warning I ignore.

"Not your fault... mine for being weak..."

Before I can respond, before I can touch her outstretched hands, Neferet's body convulses violently.

She collapses to her knees, a silent scream frozen on her face, back arching at an impossible angle.

When the seizure passes, she crumples to the ground, unconscious.

I rush forward, gathering her limp form in my arms. Her skin burns with unnatural heat, yet her breathing is shallow but steady, her face peaceful in unconsciousness as though the battle within has granted a temporary reprieve.

With infinite tenderness, I lift her from the temple floor. Her head nestles against my shoulder, dark hair spilling over my arm like water.

Despite everything, despite the god who claims her, despite the revelation of my unwitting role in her possession, she feels right in my arms, as though she always belongs there.

I carry her from this cursed place, this shrine to evil that has brought us both so much suffering.

My sandaled feet leave deep impressions in the sand, weighted with both my physical burden and the heavier knowledge I now bear.

My guards straighten at our approach, alarm visible in their expressions though they dare not question their Pharaoh.

I have brought her here, however unknowingly, and delivered her to Seth.

The guilt of it settles in my chest beside the divine fragment, twin weights that threaten to crush my heart between them.

Now I must find a way to save her – no matter the cost, no matter the sacrifice required.

If I must challenge Seth himself, if I must defy the gods themselves, I will

Now I must find a way to save her – no matter the cost, no matter the sacrifice required.

If I must challenge Seth himself, if I must defy the gods themselves, I will do so without hesitation.

She is mine to protect.

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

Chapter 74



Comments

6



Gifts

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