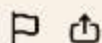




Chapter 79



[POV Neferet]

"You look tired today, my lady," Werel says as she enters, carrying an earthenware jug of water. Her voice holds no judgment, only quiet concern.

She moves with calm purpose, arranging fresh lotus blossoms in a turquoise vase without glancing away from me. Unlike the others, she does not hover at the edges or avoid my gaze.

The royal chambers have become both my sanctuary and my prison. I pace them like a caged lioness, restless and watchful, my footsteps wearing paths into polished stone.

"Did you sleep at all?" she asks gently.

"For a few breaths. Long enough to dream someone else's memories," I say, not bothering to hide the bitterness in my voice.

Each day bleeds into the next, marked only by shifting light through the alabaster screens and the struggle that consumes my waking hours, the battle to keep the god of chaos inside me contained.

In the bronze mirror, I barely recognize the face that stares back.

My eyes are dull, the emerald of it clouded with exhaustion. My cheekbones jut out more sharply now, and my neck bears raw self-inflicted crescents where my nails dig into flesh during moments when Seth surges forward.

"The voices were too loud," I admit, watching her deft fingers arrange the white petals with practiced ease.

the white petals with practiced ease.

Most of the servants would flinch at such an admission, but Werel simply nods, accepting this reality as one might acknowledge a changing season.

"Shall I bring a sleeping draught tonight? The kind scented with jasmine that you prefer?"

Something breaks inside me at this simple kindness.

Before I can master myself, tears well in my eyes, spilling over with shameful swiftness. Werel steps forward without hesitation, taking my trembling hands in her steady ones.

"My lady," she says softly, "what troubles you so?"

"Everything... Especially what I'm turning into against my will." I whisper.

The admission feels dangerous, like opening a floodgate that should remain sealed.

I expect her to recoil, to make the protective signs the other servants use. Instead, she tightens her grip on my fingers.

"I have served you since you first came to the Golden House," she said, guiding me to sit on the edge of the bed.

"I have watched the changes, seen the struggle in your eyes. But you are not the monster." Her voice drops lower. "You are simply a woman battling something beyond mortal understanding."

The relief that washes through me is so intense it threatens to unmoor me completely.

To be seen, truly seen, as something more than a vessel of evil force... it is a gift I had not known I craved so desperately.

"Tell me about something ordinary," I request, desperate for distraction.

"Tell me about the palace gossip, the everyday things I miss now."

Werel smiles, settling beside me as she launches into tales of kitchen rivalries and romantic intrigues among the servants. Her voice washes over me like cool water, momentarily drowning out Seth's persistent whispers.

For a few precious moments, I remember what it feels like to be simply human.

After she leaves, promising to return with an evening meal, I allow myself a rare moment of stillness.

The chamber feels lighter somehow, as if Werel's acceptance has temporarily lifted some of the oppressive weight that constantly bears down upon me.

"How touching," comes a voice like desert wind over ancient stones.

I stiffen, my momentary peace shattered.

Seth's figure appeared in the corner of the chambers – not physically present, but a manifestation visible only to me.

"Such faith in a simple maid," he continues, circling me with predatory grace. *"How... quaint."*

"Leave me be," I hiss, though I know it is futile, but it only makes him laugh.

"She sees your humanity? Your struggle?" His voice drops to a seductive whisper. *"Or perhaps she sees opportunity. Gold. Advantage. The comfort*

that comes from serving the one closest to Pharaoh himself."

"You know nothing of her," I snapped, rising to my feet.

"I know humans," he counters. "I have watched them scramble for power and position since the first kings ruled this land. Do you truly believe her loyalty is to you rather than what you represent?"

The doubt he plants takes root despite my resistance. "She has been kind to me since the beginning."

"Kindness can be purchased," Seth replies. "If you doubt me, follow her. See where your faithful servant goes when she leaves your presence."

I should ignore him. I know this is manipulation, another of his endless attempts to isolate me further, to cut the remaining threads that connect me to my humanity.

And yet... The seed of curiosity cannot be uprooted once planted.

When Werel leaves later that evening, I follow her through the corridors of the palace. The white linen of her dress gleams in the flickering torchlight, making her easy to track despite the darkness.

She moves with purpose, taking paths I have never traveled, slipping through servants' passages that circumvent the main halls.

Eventually, she reaches a secluded alcove near the eastern palace wall. And there, waiting in the shadows, stands Heket.

My blood turns to ice. I press myself against a column, heart hammering against my ribs as I strain to hear their hushed conversation.

The distance is too great to make out words, but their body language speaks volumes. The familiarity between them, the furtive glances, the way Heket reaches into her sash to withdraw something that gleams in

the dim light.

Gold coins. Payment.

Werel accepts them, tucking them quickly into her own garments before nodding and turning away. Their meeting lasts mere moments, but its meaning crushes me with the weight of a temple stone.

Betrayal.

The rage that explodes within me is both mine and not mine – human anger amplified a thousandfold by Seth's divine fury. It rushes through my veins like liquid fire, scorching everything in its path.

The world takes on a crimson tinge as Seth surges forward within my consciousness, feeding on my pain, using it to strengthen his hold.

Hours pass in a haze of rage and grief as I wait for Werel's return, Seth's whispers a constant accompaniment to my darkening thoughts.

When she finally appears in an empty corridor near my chambers, I step from the shadows.

The smile she offers freezes as she registers my expression.

"My lady?" she asks, concern replacing her usual composure.

"How much did she pay you?" The words taste like bile on my tongue.

"How much was my trust worth?"

Understanding dawns on her face, followed quickly by alarm. "It isn't what you think—"

"I saw you!" I snarl, advancing on her. "With Heket. Taking her gold."

"Please," Werel says, raising her hands placatingly. "Let me explain. I've been feeding her false information, keeping her away from your true

secrets—"

But I am beyond listening. Seth's presence floods through me, drowning out reason and compassion beneath waves of blinding fury. My hands move of their own accord, seizing her by the shoulders as she tries to back away.

"My lady, please!" Her voice rises in panic, but it cannot penetrate the roaring in my ears.

With strength that is not entirely human, I push her toward the balcony edge. She struggles against my grip, her eyes wide with terror now.

"I would never betray you! I swear it!"

Something in her desperate plea nearly reaches me, nearly breaks through Seth's influence.

For a heartbeat, I hesitate.

But Seth will not be denied. With a final surge of power, he pushes my consciousness aside. My hands deliver a violent shove, and Werel's body pitches over the stone railing.

Her scream cuts through the night – brief, terrified, and abruptly silenced by the sickening impact below. The sound breaks Seth's hold.

I gasp, stumbling back as if struck, my mind suddenly, horribly clear.

"No..." I whisper before the scream bursts out of my throat next, "No!"

I race down the nearest stairway, desperate, knowing already what I will find. Servants and guards converge from all directions, drawn by the commotion, but I reach her first.

Werel lies broken on the courtyard stones, her limbs at unnatural angles,

Werel lies broken on the courtyard stones, her limbs at unnatural angles, her eyes staring sightlessly at the star-filled sky. Blood pools beneath her head, black in the moonlight, spreading like a halo around her tangled hair.

I fall to my knees beside her, gathering her cooling body into my arms.

"Werel..." I sob, rocking her like a child. "Werel, forgive me."

But there is no forgiveness to be had from the dead.

As guards surround us, as horrified whispers rise from the gathering crowd, the terrible truth settles over me like a burial shroud.

Amen should have locked me away.

He should have chained me, confined me, sealed me in darkness where I could harm no one. His love for me – his belief that I could fight this – has cost an innocent woman her life.

I have become exactly what they feared: a monster wearing a woman's face, a vessel of evil, a danger to everyone around me.

And as Seth's laughter echoes in my mind, I know with sickening certainty that Werel will not be his last victim.

The **End of Chapter**

Chapter 79



Comments

3



Gifts

1038