



Chapter 83



I stand before the creature wearing Neferet's skin, willing my hands not to tremble. Every instinct screams to retreat, to gather my forces, to plan with cold calculation rather than rash emotion.

But I cannot leave her. Not like this.

"Your ambitions died once before, Seth," I declare, drawing myself to my full height, shoulders squared beneath the weight of my pectoral collar.

I summon the voice of Pharaoh, not the man who has whispered love against Neferet's skin in countless hours.

"They will again. Egypt's armies stand ready – men who have pledged their lives to protect these lands from threats both mortal and divine."

My words echo against polished limestone walls, but the impact dissolves into hollow bravado as Seth laughs, the sound all wrong coming from Neferet's mouth.

"Armies of men?" Seth's voice deepens with power, resonating beneath her natural timbre. *"I now command legions of Duat – creatures that feed on fear and flesh alike. Beings that do not fear pain or death because they have already transcended both."*

Her arms extend with theatrical flourish. The impossibility that follows drives ice through my veins – sand erupts from the solid marble floor, defying natural law.

It rises in spiraling tendrils, coiling around her body like serpents before coalescing into deadly spikes aimed directly at my heart. Time slows.

The fragment within me pulses once, twice, and suddenly my awareness expands beyond mortal limits.

I sense water. Everywhere.

In the decorative pools that line the throne room's edges. In abandoned wine chalices left by frightened servants. In the very air around us, invisible yet present, waiting to be called.

My hand rises without conscious thought, fingers splayed in a gesture both commanding and beseeching. The water answers, streaming through the air at my command, defying gravity with the same contemptuous ease as Seth's sand.

The elements collide in midair, water meeting sand just before it would pierce my flesh.

Nature reasserts itself. The sand absorbs the water, becoming heavy and cohesionless. What would have been my death collapses into muddy heaps between us, rendering Seth's attack useless.

Surprise flashes across Neferet's face – a moment of genuine emotion breaking through the god's control.

Her eyes narrow as she reassesses me, calculating new strategies like a desert predator facing unexpected resistance.

"Capable of wielding the water as well as him? Impressive, young Pharaoh," she purrs, backing toward the balcony that overlooks the sprawling expanse of Thebes.

Gold and amber light bathe her form as she steps into the setting sun's glow.

"Osiris's powers may grow stronger in you, boy. But not fast enough."

With a violent gesture that contorts Neferet's gentle features into a mask of malice, she summons power beyond the palace walls.

The sky darkens unnaturally, the golden evening transitioning to ominous twilight in mere heartbeats. Sand clouds form where none should exist, swirling into a monstrous storm above my beloved city.

The distant screams of my people rise on the wind as homes and market stalls are lashed by the unnatural tempest.

My heart tears between duty to them and the desperate need to save the woman I love before me.

"Find me if you can," she taunts, standing at the balcony's edge, sunset light gleaming against her copper skin.

The sacred amulet of Osiris still dangles from her fingers, a reminder of all that hangs in the balance.

"Your people will suffer while you search. And when my army rises, they will know true terror."

I lunge forward, but too late. She steps backward off the balcony with serene confidence.

But instead of plummeting to the courtyard below, her body is caught by currents of sand that rise to meet her, lifting her away from the palace like the hand of an invisible giant.

"Neferet!" The name tears from my throat.

I reach the balcony's edge in three strides, but the sandstorm intensifies, forcing me to shield my eyes against the stinging assault.

Through squinted lids, I watch her form carried away on rivers of sand, becoming a distant speck before disappearing into the gathering

darkness.

I summon water again, creating a protective barrier around myself, but even with my growing power, fighting an entire sandstorm proves beyond my current abilities. The fragment of Osiris within me burns hot with exertion, its divine energy not yet fully integrated with my mortal form.

I am forced to retreat inside, anger and impotence boiling in my veins.

From the relative shelter of the throne room, I watch my city endure Seth's wrath. Rooftops tear away under the lashing sand. Market awnings collapse. Pillars of dust rise where buildings crumble.

"My lord!" A voice calls from the corridor, and General Ahmose appears, flanked by dust-covered soldiers. "The city is under attack! Some kind of sorcery—"

"I know," I cut him off, my voice calmer than the storm raging inside me. "Gather the high priests of Osiris, Thoth, and Isis. Bring them to the war chamber immediately. And send riders to secure the Temple of Hathor. I need their High Priestesses as well."

As he rushes to obey, I turn back to the balcony.

The storm has intensified further, a swirling vortex of destruction with Thebes at its center. Yet beneath my fear, beneath my rage, something else takes root – determination crystallizing into diamond-hard resolve.

I will find her. I will free her. Even if that cost my life.

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