



## Chapter 84



Seven days have passed since Seth's sandstorm ravaged Thebes, and still I taste grit with every breath, feeling it grinding between my teeth with every swallow.

The scent of dust and desperation clings to my skin like a second layer of kohl.

My city, my beloved jewel of the Nile, lies half-buried beneath golden dunes that shimmer with malevolent beauty in the merciless sun.

I stand atop the palace roof, watching workers clear sand from temple entrances below.

Merchants salvage waterlogged papyrus and shattered pottery from ruined stalls. Children with bandaged eyes are led by parents through streets made unfamiliar by nature's violent rearrangement.

My Egypt bleeds, and I cannot stanch the wound.

"Divine One." General Ahmose's voice behind me is gravel-rough from shouting orders these past days. "The priests of Thoth have arrived."

I do not turn. "Send them to the council chamber. I will join shortly."

His footsteps retreat, leaving me alone with the horizon and the knowledge that somewhere beyond it *she* waits.

My Neferet. Imprisoned within her own flesh, a vessel for chaos incarnate.

Sleep has become a foreign country I rarely visit. When exhaustion threatens to claim me, I see her eyes... Crimson where emerald should be

– and find renewed strength to continue.

My days blur into one endless cycle: organizing relief efforts at dawn, consulting with priests through scorching afternoons, poring over ancient texts by guttering lamplight until my vision blurs.

All to answer one impossible question: How does one separate a god from mortal flesh without destroying both?

The palace now feels hollow without her presence.

Each corridor, each chamber haunts me with echoes of her laughter, the remembered cadence of her steps, the ghostly impression of her scent lingering in corners where we once stood.

My chambers, once a sanctuary we shared, now mock me with their emptiness.

I avoid them when possible, preferring to collapse on cushions in the war room when exhaustion finally overcomes determination.

Tonight, after dismissing the priests of Thoth with their useless theories and impossible rituals, something breaks within me. A dam of composure crumbling under the weight of seven almost sleepless nights.

I stagger to my chambers, barring the doors behind me.

Her presence lingers here most powerfully – in the small cosmetic jar she left on the dressing table, in the faint impression her body left on cushions we once shared, in the linen shawl draped across a chair.

I press the fabric to my face, inhaling deeply, seeking some trace of her beneath the pervasive dust.

"I will bring you back," I whisper to the empty room. "I swear."

Exhaustion claims me before I can remove my dust-covered robes and my body surrenders even as my mind rails against the weakness.

Sleep drags me under, and the dream-vision seizes me immediately.

I stand upon a vast desert plain under a blood-red sky that hangs low and heavy, pressing down like the lid of a sarcophagus.

My feet sink into sand that burns through sandal leather, yet I feel no pain – this body is both mine and not, a vessel through which I observe but cannot act.

The figures resolve as they near, and my soul cries out in silent anguish.

Neferet approaches astride a beast that defies nature's laws – half-jackal in the wicked curve of its snout, half-crocodile in the armored scales that plate its massive body.

Obsidian-black hide drinks in the crimson light, reflecting nothing. Its clawed feet leave smoking imprints in the sand, wisps of darkness rising like malevolent incense with each bounding step.

But it is Neferet herself who tears at my heart. Her transformation continues, her body becoming a canvas for Seth's corruption.

Her hair, once black as midnight, now streaks with ribbons of dark red that writhe like serpents in the hot wind.

Her skin, the color of honey and gold that I have traced with reverent fingers, now bears strange symbols painted in what can only be blood – hieroglyphs so ancient even I cannot decipher their meaning.

Her eyes remain the most terrible change. No longer the warm green pools I have drowned in willingly, but twin orbs of burning crimson.

In this vision-state, I can only follow as she guides her monstrous mount

eastward, toward Egypt's frontier lands where civilization gives way to wilderness.

The beast bounds across massive dunes with impossible speed, and yet I keep pace without effort, carried by the dream's strange logic.

We halt before a structure half-devoured by sand, its columns cracked and leaning like broken teeth.

An ancient temple, long abandoned, its façade still bearing the worn likeness of Sobek, the crocodile god. The desert has reclaimed most of the structure, but its entrance remains perfectly visible.

Neferet – no, *Seth* – dismounts with fluid grace.

He stepped toward the temple gates, one hand raised in silent offering.

The markings on Neferet's skin shimmered with a sickly light, each symbol pulsing as she spoke. Her voice carried a strange weight, every syllable cutting through the heat like a blade.

From the broken thresholds of the temple, horrors began to stir.

Figures emerged from the gloom, shaped from shadow and malice. Some took the form of jackals, taller than a man, striding on powerful hind legs. Their muzzles were long, jaws slack with thick cords of saliva that sizzled when it touched the sand.

Others scuttled forward, monstrous scorpions the size of horses, their chitinous bodies clicking with every step. Their stingers arched high, glowing faintly, promising a death drawn out over hours, perhaps days.

Above them rose the serpents. They moved like smoke, silent and deliberate, their eyes fixed on the living with a hunger older than memory.

Their venom drips and sizzles on the sand below, each droplet birthing writhing black scarabs that scatter like living darkness.

One by one, these abominations bow before the slight figure of my beloved.

They pledge allegiance not to the woman but to the god wearing her flesh, their twisted voices forming words that sound like stones grinding against one another.

Neferet's face, that beautiful face I have kissed a thousand times, wears Seth's triumphant smile as she accepts their fealty.

Her gaze turns eastward, toward the distant glow that marks Thebes on the horizon, and her smile becomes something terrible to behold.

*"Let my beloved Pharaoh watch from his throne as his kingdom burns. Let him see what his precious love has wrought." Her laughter rings out like breaking glass. "For I am Seth, master of storms and chaos, I shall remake Egypt in my image."*

On command, these beasts of Duat begin to march westward, their footsteps shaking the very foundations of the earth.

Toward the heart of Egypt. Toward Thebes.

Toward me.

I wake with a violent start, a scream lodged in my throat, sweat drenching my body despite the night's cool air. My heart hammers against my ribs like a prisoner demanding release.

This was no ordinary dream. Its clarity, its visceral detail – this was a message, a warning perhaps from Osiris himself, showing me Seth's next move in our eternal conflict.

next move in our eternal conflict.

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As the council assembles in the war chamber, sleep-clouded eyes and disheveled appearances betraying the hour, I describe my vision with precise detail, omitting nothing.

The temple scholar, wizened Amenemhat whose knowledge of sacred architecture spans years of devoted study, nods with growing horror as I describe the structure from my vision.

"The ancient shrine of Sobek at the western frontier," he confirms, voice trembling. "Abandoned centuries ago after dark rituals corrupted its sanctity. It was buried by a great sandstorm in the time of your great-grandfather – a divine judgment, we believed."

"Or a strategic retreat," I counter, the implications crystallizing like salt from evaporating water. "A temple corrupted once can be corrupted again."

I turn to the small bronze calendar disc that tracks the lunar phases, calculating swiftly.

"We have sixteen days until the full moon," I announce, the weight of certainty settling across my shoulders. "Sixteen days to prepare for war against creatures from beyond death itself."

## End *of* The Chapter

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