



## Chapter 87



Something shatters inside me – restraint, perhaps, or fear.

A dam breaking after years of careful, measured control.

Water erupts from beneath the desert floor, responding to my rage without conscious summoning. It surges around me in violent ribbons, twisting and curling like living serpents.

The remaining creatures of Duat hesitate in their advance, sensing a shift in the battle's energy.

Even Neferet pauses, Seth's confidence momentarily checked by this display of raw power. Her crimson eyes narrow, her head tilting slightly as if listening to internal counsel.

"You will not use her for *this*!" I growl, my voice deepened by emotion and the resonance of Osiris's power flowing through me.

The water around me takes shape, all responding to my will without conscious thought. Liquid forms solidify and dissolve, reforming in endless combinations that move with lethal grace.

Osiris's gift, dormant for so long, now fully awakens, amplified by my desperate need to save Neferet.

Neferet's eyes narrow, Seth's calculating mind reassessing the threat before him.

A muscle twitches in her jaw, a gesture so familiar, so uniquely *hers* that for a moment I glimpse the woman trapped within the god's possession.

"*Impressive trick*," she calls, her dual-toned voice carrying across the

battlefield.

The feminine melody of Neferet's natural tone undercut by masculine resonance that raises hackles on the back of my neck.

*"But water evaporates, young Pharaoh. Sand is eternal."*

She gestures sharply, and the remaining creatures of Duat charge forward, their unnatural limbs propelling them across the battlefield with terrifying speed.

Simultaneously, she commands the desert itself to rise against me, massive waves of sand threatening to engulf me and my surviving warriors. The golden grains surge upward, forming a towering wall that blocks out the sun before crashing toward us with devastating force.

But I have transcended conventional combat.

My connection to water – to life forces itself – flows through me with instinctive clarity. For each sand attack, my water responds, not just defensively but offensively.

Underground water spears impale the charging monsters, their unholy forms dissolving on contact with the blessed liquid.

Creature after creature shrieks as divine moisture penetrates their corrupted flesh, returning them to the nothingness from which Seth conjured them. Their bodily essence evaporates into foul-smelling mist that dissipates in the desert air.

Water tendrils snake through the sand itself, finding the moisture hidden deep beneath the desert and drawing it upward, transforming Seth's weapon into mud.

The massive wave falters mid-strike, its deadly momentum lost as it collapses into harmless, sodden earth.

For each beast that falls, I step closer to Neferet. The distance between us narrows, both physical and mental.

I can feel her presence, the true Neferet, *my Neferet*, flickering beneath Seth's domination like a flame struggling against wind.

She attacks with increasing desperation. Sand and blade working in concert, but water counters each assault, dousing her sand magic and deflecting her weapons.

Her frustration manifests in wild, powerful strikes that would have killed a lesser opponent instantly, the khopesh blades humming through air with lethal precision.

"*You cannot separate us*," she hisses, Seth's voice becoming more dominant as the god fights for control. "*She is mine now, her body and her soul!*"

"Liar," I respond, parrying a blade strike with a water whip that wraps around the khopesh, nearly yanking it from her grip. "If you truly possessed her fully, you wouldn't fear me!"

Our battle transcends physical combat, a clash of divine wills channeled through mortal vessels.

Seth's frustration manifests in Neferet's increasingly wild attacks, her movements losing their calculated precision as the god's desperation grows.

Egyptian and Duat forces battle around us, but for me and Seth in Neferet's body, the world has narrowed to our personal conflict.

This is more than combat. This is destiny unfolding, the ancient cycle of creation versus destruction playing out through us once more.

Finally, seeing an opening in Seth's defense, when Neferet's foot slips on mud-slicked stone, I create a sphere of water around her.

Suspending her in its center of it.

The liquid cocoon rises from the ground, lifting her body several cubits into the air. Her khopesh blades drop from suddenly nerveless fingers, splashing into the rising water at her feet.

Inside the bubble, Seth's sand magic becomes useless mud, swirling in aimless patterns that dissipate before forming.

Neferet's body convulses as Seth struggles to maintain control, her limbs thrashing against the liquid prison.

Her mouth opens in a silent scream, bubbles of air escaping instead of sound.

Her eyes – those beautiful eyes that once reflected temple flames with emerald brilliance, flicker between crimson and green when she blinks. The colors battling for dominance as the spirits within her wage their final conflict.

"Return to Duat," I commanded, my voice resonating with Osiris's power.

I force the water to constrict, not to harm Neferet but to squeeze Seth's presence from her.

"You have no claim to this world or my woman!"

Seth fights with millennia of hatred fueling his resistance.

Neferet's body contorts in painful angles, her back arching unnaturally, her fingers clawing at nothing and then finally she goes limp as the water dissipates.

The sphere collapses, releasing her from its embrace.

I catch her unconscious form before she hits the ground, cradling her against my chest. Her body feels lighter somehow, unburdened from Seth's presence. Her skin, moments ago unnaturally pale with corruption, now returns to its natural bronze hue.

Around us, the remaining creatures of Duat retreat, their master's presence weakened if not defeated.

Some dissolve into sand that blows away on desert winds. Others sink into ground that swallows them without trace. The few corporeal beasts flee toward the horizon, their unnatural forms diminishing with distance.

My warriors stand in stunned silence, those still able to fight lowering their weapons as the enemy vanishes before their eyes.

But I barely notice their retreat.

Every fiber of my being focused on the woman in my arms – *my* woman, finally returned to me.

Despite the bone-deep exhaustion that threatens to drag me into unconsciousness. Despite the divine power that has left me feeling hollowed out like an empty tomb, joy floods through my chest with such intensity it nearly brings tears to my eyes.

Her face, peaceful in unconsciousness, bears no trace of Seth's cruel smile.

The sharp angles that had appeared during her possession have softened, returning her features to the beloved contours. Her breathing is steady, natural – no longer the labored gasps of someone fighting an internal war.

I press my lips to her forehead, tasting salt and sand and something indefinably *her*.

My legs threaten to give out beneath me, but I cannot bring myself to release her. Cannot bear the thought of letting go even for a moment.

She is warm and solid and *alive* in my arms, no longer the hollow vessel Seth had made of her.

"Prepare to return to Thebes," I order, my voice hoarse with exhaustion.

The divine power that flowed through me moments ago recedes, leaving mortal weariness in its wake. Every muscle in my body aches, the price of channeling forces beyond human capacity.

Yet holding her makes it bearable, more than bearable.

It makes me feel invincible despite my weakness.

They move to obey, gathering the wounded and honoring their dead.

Two soldiers carefully collect Heket's remains, reuniting her severed head with her body, wrapping both in clean linen with the reverence due a fallen warrior.

I adjust my grip on Neferet, one arm supporting her shoulders while the other curves beneath her knees.

She weighs nothing to me now, light as a feather against my chest. Or perhaps it is simply that having her back gives me strength I did not know I possessed.

She is mine again. Whatever price we have paid, whatever battles lie ahead, she is mine.

And I will never let her go.

Commented [Ma1]: