



Chapter 88



Five days pass with Neferet unconscious in my chambers.

Each moment stretching like shadows at dusk – elongated, distorted and filled with portents I cannot fully decipher.

Palace physicians move around her still form with quiet efficiency, their linen robes whispering against stone floors as they apply poultices of sacred herbs.

I refuse to leave her side despite the growing pile of papyrus scrolls with reports brought by anxious scribes.

None of it matters if she does not return.

My eyes burn from lack of sleep as I watch for any sign of Seth's continued presence, a flicker of crimson in her eyes when they occasionally flutter beneath closed lids.

The priests speak of purification rituals and divine cleansing, but their careful expressions betray their doubt.

None have encountered a mortal vessel who survived possession by Seth himself.

"Your Majesty," High Priest Meriptah approaches in the morning, his aged face lined with concern. "You must rest. The kingdom requires its Pharaoh's strength."

"The kingdom requires its Pharaoh to know what he fights," I responded, not looking away from Neferet's face. "And I fight for her."

He does not argue, merely bows and retreats, understanding that some

battles cannot be delegated.

Some vigils must be kept personally, regardless of cost.

On the afternoon of the fifth day Neferet's eyes finally opened fully.

They are her own deep green, clear and focused as they find my face hovering anxiously above her.

"Amen?" she barely whispers, her voice hoarse but free of Seth's undertones.

The sound of my name on her lips – her voice alone, uncontaminated – unleashes something that has been coiled tight within my chest since the battle.

Her hand reaches up tentatively, as if uncertain of her own movements after so long under another's control.

The simple gesture, so human, so fragile, breaks through the last of my restraint.

Emotion overwhelms me with relief, joy, and lingering fear as I take her hand and press it to my lips. Her skin feels warm and alive, very different from the cold touch she had when Seth controlled her.

"You're safe now," I promise, though uncertainty stays heavy in my heart.

The words feel both true and false at the same time.

It was true in this moment but balanced precariously on the edge of tomorrow's unknowns.

Neferet's fingers trace the contours of my face, lingering on the new lines carved by worry and battle. Her touch awakens sensations I feared lost

forever, the simple comfort of skin against skin.

"I saw everything..." she confesses, barely audible.

Tears gathered in her eyes, turning them to liquid emeralds in the afternoon light. Her voice catches, weighted with memories I can only imagine.

"I was trapped inside my own body while he used my hands for terrible things. Heket—"

Her voice breaks on the name, grief constricting her throat.

"Don't," I soothe, drawing closer, my forehead touching hers. "That wasn't you. Heket knew that. I know that."

But even as the words leave my lips, I hear their hollowness.

Heket's final expressions suggested no such understanding, only vindication that her suspicions had been proven correct.

What Neferet needs now is absolution, not truth's sharp edges.

Our faces hover inches apart, breaths mingling in the space between. Something urgent builds between us, perhaps the relief of reunion.

Or the need to reclaim what Seth had defiled.

When our lips finally meet, it feels like coming home and discovering new territory simultaneously. The kiss begins tentatively, almost fearfully, but quickly deepens with hungry desperation.

My hands tangle in her hair, cradling her head as if it might shatter beneath my touch. Neferet's body arches toward mine, pressing against me with an urgency that speaks of long separation.

We cling to each other as if the physical connection might permanently

anchor her soul against any possession.

Tears mingle on our cheeks – whose exactly, it's impossible to tell.
Between kisses, we whisper broken fragments of comfort, apology, and
promise.

"I thought I'd lost you forever," I murmured against her mouth, tasting
salt and sweetness.

The admission costs me something; the façade of royal certainty, the
pretense that I had never doubted our victory.

"I heard your soul calling," she responds, her fingers tracing the line
of my jaw. "Even in the darkest moments, when Seth's control was
strongest, I could hear you. It gave me the strength to fight him at last, to
preserve some part of myself."

Her words shatter the last of my restraint.

The careful distance I've maintained since she awakened dissolves like
morning mist as I capture her lips with desperate hunger.

She responds immediately, her body arching into mine as if five days of
separation have left her just as starved for connection.

The kiss deepens, becomes something primal and consuming.

Her hands fist in my hair, pulling me closer as her lips part beneath
mine with a soft gasp that sends fire racing through my veins.

I taste freedom on her tongue, victory mixed with the unique sweetness
that is purely her. My hands roam her face, her neck, rediscovering every
beloved curve that Seth had tried to claim.

"Amen," she breathes against my mouth, my name a prayer that nearly
undoes me completely.

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I guide her back onto the silk cushions, following her down until I hover above her.

Drinking in the sight of her flushed cheeks, her lips swollen from our kisses, her green eyes dark with desire. Her hands trail down my chest, fingers working at the ties of my tunic with increasing urgency.

"I've missed you," she whispers, her voice thick with need. "All of you."

The want in her voice almost breaks my resolve. Almost.

But as my lips find the sensitive hollow of her throat, as she arches beneath me with a soft moan, I catch sight of the faint shadows still lingering beneath her eyes.

The subtle tremor in her hands that speaks of exhaustion she's trying to hide.

With tremendous effort, I catch her wrists gently, stilling her questing fingers. She looks up at me with confusion and no small amount of frustration.

"Not yet, my sweet lotus flower," I murmur, pressing a soft kiss to her palm before releasing her hands.

A teasing smile plays at my lips as I watch her expression shift from desire to indignation.

"You've been unconscious for five days," I continue, settling beside her and drawing her into my arms. "Your body needs rest, not... *exertion*."

"I feel fine," she argues, but I can hear the breathlessness in her voice, see how she relaxes against me despite her words.

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"Mmm," I hum against her hair, my arms tightening around her.

"Patience, my love. We have all the time in the world now."

Her body fits against mine as it always has, yet something has changed.

There was a new hesitancy in her movements, a watchfulness in her eyes, as if part of her remains alert for signs of Seth's resurgence within her own flesh.

I recognize the vigilance, for it mirrors my own.

Night falls fully, transforming the chamber into a landscape of shadow and silver.

In this liminal hour between day's certainty and night's mystery, truth emerges more readily than in harsh sunlight.

"What happens now?" Neferet asks finally, her head resting against my chest, listening to the steady beat of my heart.

My arms tighten around her, protective yet acknowledging the limitations of mortal strength against divine will.

"We heal," I answer simply. "And we prepare. I don't believe Seth has abandoned his plans so easily."

She nods against me, understanding the truth in my words.

"He will come again," she confirms, her voice steady despite the fear I feel trembling through her body. "I know his plans, there are more creatures waiting to cross from Duat – hundreds more."

End *of*

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