



Chapter 34



From the moment the first rays of dawn filtered through the lattice screens of my chambers, there was no peace.

The palace had awakened with the hum of servants, the rustle of silk, and the scent of fragrant oils—preparations for the grand festival had begun.

Werel, ever watchful, commanded the attendants with the precision of a general leading an army. No detail was spared as I was bathed, my skin polished to a soft glow with scented balms.

My hair was carefully braided and adorned with delicate golden threads, styled to perfection by the deft hands of the palace's finest attendants.

The layers of fine linen and flowing silk draped over my body, shifting with the subtlest of movements, accentuating every curve. Exquisite gold cuffs encircled my wrists and upper arms, their cool weight a reminder of the evening's significance.

"You must outshine them all," Werel declared, her eyes burning with determination. "Especially Heket."

I allowed her to fuss over me, adjusting the folds of my sheer outer robe, ensuring the effect was alluring yet regal. She wanted me to leave my face uncovered, but I insisted on veiling it with a fine silk that concealed half of my features, leaving only my eyes exposed. I did not wish to present myself too openly tonight.

Mystery, I decided, was a far more potent weapon.

Yet none of it could distract me from the restless turmoil within

me.

And yet my thoughts dwelled on Amen—our midnight hunt and his withdrawal at the final moment. The warmth of his breath and his hesitation haunted me. What caused it? Had I displeased him or had rumors influenced him? Or was it something else entirely?

The questions left me uneasy, but there was no time to dwell.

As the sun descended, the palace transformed into a celebration. Music and laughter filled the halls, accompanied by the scent of roasted meat and honeyed wine. High priests recited ancient verses before Pharaoh and noble guests proceeded to the grand banquet hall.

Gilded columns and torches cast golden light upon polished stone walls. Exotic delicacies crowded platters while servants poured wine into lapis and gold goblets. Melodies from lyres and flutes filled the air.

Finally, the concubines were summoned. Silence fell as the dancers occupied the center, anticipation rippling through my body. Heket commanded attention with her powerful movements; Meritaten displayed cool refinement; Nebetta danced dreamily, light as air.

And then there was me.

My silken veil fluttered as I moved, my eyes—lined in dark kohl, emerald against gold—fixated only on him.

Amen.

He sat at the head of the grand table, adorned in royal splendor, his posture composed, unreadable. Yet the moment

our gazes met, the world around me faded into nothing.

He never looked away. Not once.

The music pulsed through my veins, guiding my movements as I surrendered to the rhythm, each step precise, each turn fluid.

I did not falter. I did not hesitate. It felt different this time, far removed from my first hesitant performance. I moved with intent, not merely following a routine but embodying something deeper.

And I knew—Amen saw it, too.

The dance ended, the final notes of the music lingering in the air before a thunderous applause erupted throughout the hall. The energy was electric, the weight of every noble's gaze pressing upon us.

But I did not care for their admiration.

Only for his.

And still, he did not look away.

A servant appeared at my side, instructing me to join the Pharaoh at the grand table.

We're led to our places at the grand table, seated near him as befits his favored concubines. The proximity is both blessing and torture.

He's close enough that I can smell the familiar scent of him, see the subtle rise and fall of his chest. But that careful distance remains - an invisible wall I can't seem to break

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End of The Chapter

A Chance Meeting



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