



Amen and I move silently along the banks of the Nile. The temple's towering pillars fade into the darkness behind us, their sacred presence a distant comfort as we search for a place where no prying eyes will follow.

Finally, we find it—a secluded patch of riverbank, hidden between a cluster of reeds and the twisting roots of an old sycamore tree.

The water here is calm, lapping gently against the shore, reflecting the moon's pale glow. It is here, far from the weight of expectation, that we will try again.

I lower myself onto the soft earth, kneeling in the cool sand as I lay out the ritual components with meticulous care.

The sleeping draught, the sacred oils, the charm I had taken from the temple archives—each item placed with precision, each step performed exactly as the scrolls had instructed.

Amen kneels beside me, silent but watching, his presence grounding me even as anticipation coils tightly in my chest.

"This time," I whisper, more to myself than to him. "It must work."

Amen says nothing. He only reaches forward, his fingers brushing over my own as he passes me the cup.

I hesitate for only a moment before drinking.

The liquid is thick, bitter against my tongue, carrying the faint metallic taste of my own blood. A shiver courses through me as warmth spreads outward from my core, seeping into my limbs, heavy and intoxicating.

My vision wavers. And then—darkness.

When I open my eyes, I am no longer on the riverbank.

I am inside a vast hall, grand and empty, stretching infinitely in all directions.

A thin layer of crystal-clear water covers the marble floor, rippling softly around my ankles as I take a hesitant step forward. The air is impossibly still, the silence so profound that I can hear the faint sound of my own breathing.

I know this place. I have seen it before. My dreams before.

I turn my head—and there he is.

Amen.

He stands at the far end of the hall, watching me with an expression that sends a strange ache through my chest. He looks... relieved. As if he has been waiting for me. As if he has always been waiting for me.

I move toward him without thinking, my footsteps barely disturbing the water beneath me. And when I finally reach him, the moment unfolds as if following a script I have lived before.

His hands find my face, his fingertips tracing my cheekbones with reverence.

His lips press soft kisses along my jaw, my temples, my eyelids—tender, worshipful, a devotion that makes my breath falter.

"Finally, you are here," he murmurs against my skin.

Something about his words stirs an emotion so deep, so aching, that I cannot speak.

He kisses me. And this time, he does not close my eyes with his hand. As the 'stranger' did back then in my dreams.

This time, he lets me touch him, my hands sliding over the warm planes of his chest, the strong curve of his shoulders. His body hums beneath my fingertips, a living, breathing contradiction—both familiar and utterly foreign.

When he finally pulls away, he cups my face between his palms, his gaze filled with something I cannot name.

"At last," he whispers, his voice like silk, smooth and full of wonder. "My sweet lotus flower has found me."

For a moment, there is nothing else. Only his warmth. His presence. The feeling that I belong here, in his arms, as if I have always belonged here.

Then everything changed.

I see it in the way his serenity fractures, in the way his shoulders tense, his breath hitching ever so slightly. His gaze flickers past my shoulder, and a shadow of unease passes over his face.

A chill skates down my spine.

Slowly, I turn.

The water at my feet—pristine and still only moments ago—begins to darken. A deep, inky crimson spreads across the surface, blooming outward like veins beneath the moonlight.

surface, blooming outward like veins beneath the moonlight.

My breath catches as I watch the sickly tendrils snake through the pool, staining the reflection of the temple walls, poisoning the clarity of the space we stand in.

The air grows thick, pressing against my skin like something unseen, something wrong.

Then, from the shadows, they begin to appear.

It starts as nothing more than a ripple in the darkness. A shift. A stirring. Then shapes—distorted, unnatural—begin to rise, twisting into forms that barely resemble human figures. Dozens of them. More than I can count.

I feel their presence before I hear them.

A whisper, delicate as a breath, curls around my ears. Then another. And another. Like strands of thread weaving into something larger, something darker. The voices multiply, overlapping in a low, menacing hum, speaking words I do not recognize.

I do not need to understand their language to feel the weight of their malice.

A sharp, cold terror grips me, coiling in my stomach. My breath comes faster, my pulse hammering against my ribs as I stare at them—hollow sockets where eyes should be, their mouths twisted in expressions of something ancient and hungry.

Then, they move. Slow, deliberate steps. A silent advance.

I step back instinctively, my heel skimming the edge of the

I step back instinctively, my heel skimming the edge of the pool. The cold of the water barely registers.

"Amen," I whisper, my fingers curling into fists at my sides.

He moves before I can react.

He steps in front of me, his body an unyielding wall of strength, shielding me from whatever these things are. His arm lifts, his voice sharp, commanding.

"Enough." His authority rings through the air, absolute.

But the figures do not stop. They keep advancing. The whispers rise, shifting into something else.

A chant. A pulse. A rhythm that makes my skin crawl. The voices tighten around me, pressing against my skull, thick and suffocating.

The water churns violently around us, the once-serene hall transforming into something darker, something dangerous.

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

A Chance Meeting



Comments

0



Send Gift

0