

The Pharaoh's Favorite

Chapter 8

My world tilted on its axis as his smile shattered every illusion I'd built.

I stare at Amen – no, Pharaoh Amenhotep – as he smiles, so effortlessly composed while my thoughts churn in chaos. My knees weaken under the weight of realization.

The mysterious stranger who'd captured my thoughts, my dreams and nightmares, who'd made me dream of freedom on the market, was nothing but a carefully crafted lie.

This man, the one I had met by the Nile, the one who kissed me under moonlight, is now just my master.

He wasn't just any man – he was The Pharaoh of Egypt himself.

Then I lower my head, humility instinctive, though a storm rages within me.

"You seem lost for words, my sweet lotus flower," he says, his voice warm and teasing, as though this is some elaborate joke. His words tighten the knot in my chest.

I feel his presence move closer, the soft rustle of his robes brushing against the silence. Gently, he lifts my chin, forcing me to meet his gaze. His touch is warm, but it burns, and my pulse quickens.

"Do not hide those beautiful eyes from me," he murmurs. "They hold more truth than words ever could."

Anger and confusion twist inside me, but his gaze leaves no room for protest. Before I can muster a response, he gestures toward the open balcony.

"Come," he says. "Drink with me. The night is too beautiful for such heavy thoughts."

I hesitate, my feet frozen in place. The world I thought I knew is unraveling, and he stands at the center of it all. Still, the commanding warmth in his voice draws me forward. He hands me a goblet of wine, his fingers brushing mine, and I follow him to the balcony.

The city of Thebes stretches out before us, bathed in the soft glow of the moon. The sight should bring me solace, but my thoughts are a whirlwind.

"This is where I find peace," he says, his voice quieter now. "From here, I can see my people. They remind me of why I must rule with strength and wisdom."

His tone shifts, and for a moment, I catch a glimpse of vulnerability. It softens the anger within me, though not entirely.

“Why didn’t you tell me who you were?” I ask, my voice shaking despite my effort to remain composed.

His smile deepens, equal parts charm and mischief. “And spoil the surprise? What would have been the fun in that?”

His casual words only stoke the fire of my confusion and anger. “You lied to me,” I say, my voice gaining strength. “You let me believe you were someone else.”

“I never lied,” he counters smoothly. “I simply allowed you to draw your own conclusions.”

My hands clench at my sides, frustration and fear swirling within me. “Why did you... Why did you seek me out? Speak to me? Kiss me?”

He steps even closer, and I’m acutely aware of the heat radiating from him, the sheer force of his presence.

“Because you intrigued me, Neferet,” he says softly, his voice wrapping around me like a silken thread. “You still do.”

I should be furious, should demand answers or escape this overwhelming proximity. But instead, I am rooted in place, drawn to him like the tide to the moon.

“And also because I wanted to meet you as Amen, not as Pharaoh. The title changes everything. People see power, not the man behind it. But you...” He pauses, a faint smile playing on his lips. “You looked at me like I was simply a man. I wanted to hold onto that, just for a little while longer.”

His words leave me unsteady. A part of me wants to believe him, but the sting of his deception is still fresh.

“And now?” I ask, bitterness seeping into my tone. “Now I am your concubine, not a woman you met by chance. Do you expect me to still see you as Amen?”

“I expect nothing from you, Neferet.” He smiles, a mixture of amusement and something deeper. “But I would like it if you called me Amen when no one else is around.”

The truth spilled from him like honey – how he loved to shed his royal skin and walk among his people, how fate had brought us together.

Betrayal burned bitter in my throat.

Every stolen glance we'd shared, every flutter of hope I'd nursed during those sleepless nights in the harem – all of it poisoned by deception. The wine coursed through my veins, turning bitterness to reckless courage. I stood abruptly, cutting through his words like a knife.

My fingers tighten around the goblet, the wine's warmth doing little to calm my racing thoughts.

"I cannot," I say, my voice firm. "You are The Pharaoh, and now I am nothing more than a part of your harem. To call you by name would be..."

"...an act of defiance?" he finishes, a playful glint in his eyes. He steps closer, his presence overwhelming. "Or perhaps an act of trust?"

His words unsettle me, and the tension within me snaps. Setting the goblet down with trembling hands, I stand abruptly.

"I cannot treat you as I did before," I say, my voice rising. "I was sent here to serve Pharaoh Amenhotep, not the man who... who..."

"The man who kissed you by the Nile?" he finishes, his tone both teasing and challenging.

Heat floods my cheeks, but I hold my ground. "Yes. That man is gone. You are Pharaoh now, and I will do my duty as your concubine. Nothing more."

His smile turned wicked, predatory. "Then perhaps you should begin serving me now."

Before I can respond, he takes my hand. His touch sends a jolt through me, but I do not pull away as he guides me to the edge of the balcony.

The cool marble railing presses against my palms as he positions me to face the sprawling city. His hands rest on the railing, framing me, his presence a tangible force.

My breath catches as I feel his chest brush against my back, his warmth radiating through the thin fabric of my dress. I'm painfully aware of every movement, every breath, as he leans closer.

"Relax, Neferet," he murmurs, his voice a low caress near my ear. "I'm not as fearsome as the stories make me out to be."

I swallow hard, my voice barely above a whisper. "Then what are you?"

His chuckle is soft, the sound rich and warm. "A man who is curious about his newest concubine. Tell me, can the maidens of Isis read the stars?"

I frown, his question catching me off guard. “No,” I reply. “We leave such practices to the astrologers.”

“Hmm,” he muses. “Can you read the lines on your palms, then? Surely a servant of Isis must have some knowledge of divination.”

Something in me snapped. “The priests of Isis are not some street performers,” I spat. “We practice true magic. We commune with the gods themselves.”

Terror seized me the moment the words left my mouth. I’d just spoken sharply to Pharaoh himself – a crime worthy of death.

The silence that follows is heavy, and I immediately regret my sharp words. “I’m sorry,” I say quickly, glancing back at him. “I didn’t mean to –”

But when I turned to deliver my apology, I found only satisfaction in his eyes.

He smiles, slow and deliberate. “Do not apologize,” he says, his voice laced with amusement. “Your fire intrigues me.”

My heart pounds as his words challenge me.

“Show me,” he demanded. “Show me this true magic you speak of.”
