PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter 1: The Chamber of Light

Darkness.

For a long time, there was only darkness.

No sound.

No sensation.

No awareness of time.

Neferet drifted through an endless void, neither asleep nor awake.

Then something changed.

A distant glow appeared.

Small at first.

Almost invisible.

But growing.

Brighter.

Warmer.

Closer.

The darkness began to retreat.

Pain followed.

A dull ache behind her eyes.

A heaviness in her body.

A strange pounding inside her chest.

Neferet gasped.

Air rushed into her lungs.

Her eyes flew open.

White light exploded above her.

She cried out and raised her arms to shield her face.

The brightness was unbearable.

For several moments she could see nothing.

Only light.

Endless light.

Slowly her vision adjusted.

The ceiling came into focus.

It was unlike anything she had ever seen.

Perfectly smooth.

Perfectly white.

Brighter than polished limestone beneath the Egyptian sun.

She blinked repeatedly.

Where I am?

The room slowly emerged around her.

White walls.

White ceiling.

White floor.

Everything white.

Everything unfamiliar.

Neferet pushed herself upright.

The movement sent dizziness crashing through her body.

She grabbed the edge of the narrow platform beneath her.

It felt smooth.

Cool.

Strange.

Not stone.

Not wood.

Nothing she recognized.

Fear tightened inside her chest.

She looked around.

Tall metal stands surrounded her.

Boxes covered in blinking lights.

Clear tubes.

Black cords.

Devices that hummed softly.

Objects that seemed impossible.

No oil lamps.

No torches.

No servants.

No priests.

Yet the room glowed brighter than the royal palace.

Was she dead?

Had Anubis judged her?

Had her heart been weighed against the Feather of Truth?

Was this the Hall of Judgment?

Neferet's breathing quickened.

She looked down.

The royal garments she remembered wearing were gone.

In their place was a simple gown of strange white fabric.

She touched it uncertainly.

Nothing made sense.

Then a sound startled her.

The door opened.

Three men entered.

Neferet immediately backed away.

Her pulse thundered.

The first man froze.

His eyes widened.

"She's awake."

The voice struck her like lightning.

She knew that voice.

Impossible.

It could not be.

The man stepped forward.

Tall.

Young.

Blond.

Familiar.

Neferet stared.

Her heart stopped.

"John?"

The name escaped her lips as little more than a whisper.

The young man smiled.

Relief flooded his face.

"Hello, Neferet."

Tears immediately filled her eyes.

It was him.

The stranger from the future.

The man who had appeared at Giza.

The man who had vanished through the Gate.

The man she had never expected to see again.

"You returned."

John nodded.

"I promised I would."

For a moment neither moved.

Neither spoke.

The years between them seemed to disappear.

Then the older man beside John cleared his throat.

His gray hair and glasses gave him an appearance unlike anyone Neferet had ever known.

"I believe she recognizes you."

The younger man beside him laughed.

"Good thing. I was worried we'd have to explain everything."

John smiled.

"Let's not do that all at once."

Neferet studied the strangers carefully.

Then looked back at John.

"Where am I?"

The room became quiet.

John pulled a chair closer and sat down.

"You are safe."

Neferet frowned.

"That does not answer my question."

The younger man laughed again.

John nodded.

"Fair point."

He glanced around the room.

"You're in a laboratory."

The word meant nothing to her.

"A temple?"

"No."

"A palace?"

"No."

"A house of healing?"

John smiled.

"Closer."

Neferet looked around again.

The glowing devices seemed almost magical.

One emitted a rhythmic pulse of light.

Another displayed moving symbols.

A third hummed quietly to itself.

She pointed toward them.

"What magic is this?"

The younger man grinned.

The older man elbowed him.

"Jack."

"Sorry."

John shook his head.

"No magic."

Neferet gave him a look that clearly said she disagreed.

John laughed softly.

"You've been asleep for a very long time."

"How long?"

Silence.

The older man folded his arms.

Jack looked away.

John took a deep breath.

"More than four thousand years."

Neferet stared at him.

Then laughed.

A nervous laugh.

A disbelieving laugh.

"No."

John's expression never changed.

The laughter faded.

"No."

He nodded slowly.

"Yes."

The room seemed to tilt.

Four thousand years.

The number was too large to understand.

Too large to imagine.

Her mother.

Her father.

Her sister.

Her friends.

Her world.

Gone.

Lost to time.

Neferet looked at her hands.

Tears blurred her vision.

Everything she had known had become history.

Silence filled the room.

At last she whispered:

"What year is it?"

"2026."

The number meant nothing.

Yet it sounded impossibly distant.

A tear slid down her cheek.

John leaned forward.

"You don't have to understand everything today."

Neferet lowered her head.

"I am alone."

"No."

She looked up.

John smiled gently.

"You have me."

For the first time since awakening, the fear loosened its grip.

Only slightly.

But enough.

The strange room still frightened her.

The unknown world beyond its walls frightened her even more.

Yet John Carter stood beside her.

And somehow that made the impossible feel bearable.

John stood.

"You've been through enough for one day."

Neferet looked around the room again.

"The Chamber of Light."

Jack blinked.

"The what?"

Neferet gestured toward the glowing room.

"The Chamber of Light."

Jack laughed.

"I actually like that."

Even Dr. Mitchell smiled.

John nodded.

"Then the Chamber of Light it is."

Neferet looked at him.

"What happens now?"

John's smile widened.

"There's someone I'd like you to meet."

"Who?"

"My family."

Neferet frowned.

"Your family?"

John nodded.

"They've been waiting to meet you."

The thought seemed strange.

Four thousand years had passed.

Everyone she had ever known was gone.

Yet John still had a family waiting for him.

"And they know who I am?"

Jack laughed.

"Oh, they definitely know who you are."

John shot him a look.

"What Jack means is they're excited to meet you."

Neferet considered this.

Then nodded.

"Very well."

She glanced toward the large white door.

It seemed as mysterious as the Gate itself.

"And how do we travel to your family's home?"

John hesitated.

A grin appeared.

"You're probably going to find this strange."

Neferet raised an eyebrow.

"Stranger than awakening four thousand years in the future?"

For the first time since she had opened her eyes, everyone laughed.

Even Neferet.

John walked to the door and opened it.

A brightly lit hallway stretched beyond.

A world unlike anything she could imagine waited on the other side.

He gestured toward it.

"Come on."

Neferet took a deep breath.

Then stepped forward.

Leaving the Chamber of Light behind.

And entering the future.

End of Chapter 1

Chapter 2: The Metal Chariot

The hallway seemed endless.

Bright lights stretched overhead.

Smooth floors reflected the light like polished marble.

Doors lined both sides of the corridor.

Each one identical.

Each one mysterious.

Neferet walked beside John.

Jack and Dr. Mitchell followed several steps behind.

Everything felt wrong.

Not frightening.

Not dangerous.

Simply wrong.

The air smelled different.

The walls were too straight.

The light too bright.

The silence too perfect.

It felt less like a building and more like a dream.

At the end of the hallway stood a pair of enormous glass doors.

Neferet stopped.

The walls were transparent.

She stared.

"What sorcery is this?"

Jack grinned.

"Wait until she sees automatic doors."

The glass doors suddenly slid open by themselves.

Neferet jumped backward.

"They move!"

Jack laughed so hard he nearly doubled over.

Even Dr. Mitchell smiled.

John tried not to laugh.

"They're harmless."

The doors opened again.

Then closed.

Then opened.

Neferet pointed accusingly.

"It obeys you."

"No."

"It sensed your presence."

Neferet looked horrified.

"The door is alive?"

Jack lost control completely.

The sound of his laughter echoed through the building.

Outside, the world exploded into view.

Neferet stopped walking.

The sky stretched endlessly overhead.

Brilliant blue.

Clouds drifting slowly in the distance.

The warm sun touched her face.

For a moment she simply stood there.

Breathing.

Fresh air.

Real air.

Not the stale stillness of tombs.

Not the cool atmosphere of the Chamber of Light.

Living air.

Then she saw the parking lot.

Hundreds of strange objects sat arranged in rows.

Some black.

Some white.

Some silver.

Some blue.

Each made entirely of metal.

Neferet frowned.

"What are those?"

John smiled.

"Cars."

The word meant nothing.

She pointed.

"The metal boxes?"

"Yes."

"They carry people."

Neferet stared.

"They carry people?"

Jack nodded.

"Like horses."

Neferet looked around.

"I see no horses."

Jack grinned.

"Exactly."

John led her toward a dark blue sedan.

The closer they came, the more suspicious Neferet became.

The thing looked enormous.

Its sides gleamed in the sunlight.

Its windows reflected the sky.

Its tires appeared larger than chariot wheels.

She stopped several feet away.

"It is asleep."

John blinked.

"What?"

"The metal animal."

Jack laughed.

It isn't an animal."

Neferet pointed toward the front.

"It has eyes."

Headlights.

"It has a mouth."

The grille.

"It has feet."

The tires.

She folded her arms.

"It is clearly an animal."

Jack looked at John.

"Honestly, I can kind of see it."

John opened the passenger door.

Neferet immediately stepped backward.

The creature had opened itself.

Without warning.

Without servants.

Without magic words.

The metal beast had simply opened.

"No."

John sighed.

"Neferet—"

"No."

"It won't hurt you."

"No."

Jack was laughing again.

Dr. Mitchell had wisely stopped trying to intervene.

John walked around the vehicle.

Opened the driver's side door.

Sat down.

Nothing happened.

The metal beast did not attack.

It did not move.

It did not eat him.

Neferet watched carefully.

Perhaps it was tame.

Like a horse.

A very ugly horse.

Slowly she approached.

Very slowly.

John extended his hand.

"I promise."

After several seconds she accepted it.

Then climbed inside.

The interior amazed her.

Soft seats.

Smooth surfaces.

Clear windows.

No dust.

No sand.

No leather reins.

It smelled strangely clean.

Neferet touched the dashboard.

"What is this?"

"The dashboard."

She nodded as if that explained everything.

It did not.

Jack climbed into the back seat beside Dr. Mitchell.

Neferet looked around nervously.

"Why are we inside the animal?"

Jack immediately buried his face in his hands.

John started laughing.

"It isn't an animal."

"We shall see."

Then John started the engine.

The car came alive.

The entire vehicle vibrated.

A deep mechanical growl filled the cabin.

Neferet screamed.

Her hands grabbed the seat.

"The beast awakens!"

Jack nearly fell out of his seat laughing.

Dr. Mitchell turned toward the window to hide his smile.

John struggled to maintain control.

"It's just the engine."

The vehicle began moving.

Neferet's eyes widened.

The parking lot started sliding past.

Faster.

Faster.

Much faster.

Buildings moved.

Trees moved.

People moved.

Or perhaps she was moving.

She couldn't tell.

"What is happening?"

"We're driving."

"This fast?"

John nodded.

Neferet gripped the seat tighter.

Outside, dozens of vehicles moved around them.

Metal creatures everywhere.

Silver.

Black.

White.

Red.

Hundreds of them.

Flowing together.

Moving in every direction.

Neferet stared through the windshield.

A transparent wall separated her from the outside world.

Beyond it stretched a river of metal.

Thousands of vehicles.

Flowing endlessly.

She whispered in awe:

"A river of metal."

No one laughed.

Because for a moment they all saw it.

The modern world through Neferet's eyes.

And suddenly it seemed just as incredible as ancient Egypt.

John glanced toward her.

"This is only the beginning."

Neferet continued staring through the transparent wall.

Watching the river of metal flow around them.

For the first time she truly understood.

The world she knew was gone.

And a new one had begun.

End of Chapter 2

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Three: John's Family

The closer they got to John's home, the more nervous he became.

Neferet noticed immediately.

"You are worried."

John glanced at her.

"A little."

"Why?"

John smiled weakly.

"Because my family is about to meet a four-thousand-year-old Egyptian princess."

Neferet considered this.

"That does sound unusual."

Even Jack laughed.

The automobile eventually turned into a quiet neighborhood lined with trees and neatly kept homes.

Everything looked peaceful.

Normal.

Ordinary.

To Neferet, it looked like magic.

The houses were enormous compared to most homes she had known.

The roads were smooth stone without cracks.

The grass looked perfectly maintained.

Even the mailboxes fascinated her.

"What are those little shrines?" she asked.

John looked confused.

"What shrines?"

She pointed.

"The small boxes near the road."

Jack nearly choked trying not to laugh.

"Those are mailboxes."

Neferet nodded politely.

She clearly had no idea what that meant.

A few minutes later, the car stopped in front of a two-story house.

John took a deep breath.

"We're here."

Neferet looked at the house.

Then at John.

Then back at the house.

"Your palace is smaller than I expected."

Jack burst out laughing.

John groaned.

"It is not a palace."

"It appears to be a palace."

"It's a house."

Neferet tilted her head.

"A modest palace."

There was no point arguing.

The front door opened before they could continue.

A woman hurried outside.

The moment she saw John, she smiled and rushed toward him.

"John!"

His mother wrapped him in a tight embrace.

Neferet froze.

Public displays of affection were uncommon among Egyptian nobility.

Certainly not in front of guests.

John hugged her back.

"Hi, Mom."

Behind her appeared a tall man with graying hair and a warm smile.

And beside him—

a young woman about John's age.

His sister.

Emily.

"You're finally home," Emily said.

Then she noticed Neferet.

Everyone noticed Neferet.

Silence.

A very long silence.

Emily blinked.

His mother blinked.

His father blinked.

Nobody spoke.

Finally Emily pointed.

"Who is that?"

John cleared his throat.

"Everyone..."

A pause.

"This is Princess Neferet."

Silence again.

Emily waited.

"So..."

John nodded.

"An actual princess."

Another pause.

"From ancient Egypt."

The silence somehow became even larger.

His father finally spoke.

"Ancient Egypt?"

"Yes."

"The ancient Egypt?"

"Yes."

"The four-thousand-years-ago ancient Egypt?"

"Yes."

His father looked toward the sky.

"Well."

A pause.

"I suppose that's one way to bring home a girlfriend."

John nearly choked.

"Dad!"

Emily immediately started laughing.

Neferet looked confused.

"What is a girlfriend?"

John closed his eyes.

"Please don't ask that right now."

The situation only became more awkward.

Neferet stepped forward.

If these people were important to John, they deserved proper respect.

She lowered her head.

Placed one hand over her heart.

And performed a formal royal bow.

The gesture was elegant.

Graceful.

Perfect.

"Greetings," she said.

"I am Neferet, daughter of Pharaoh Khufu."

Nobody moved.

Nobody spoke.

Even the birds seemed to stop making noise.

Then John's mother did something unexpected.

She stepped forward and embraced Neferet.

The princess froze.

Completely froze.

This woman had just ignored centuries of royal protocol.

Neferet looked helplessly toward John.

John smiled.

"It's okay."

Slowly, Neferet relaxed.

His mother pulled back.

"We're very happy to meet you."

The kindness in her voice required no translation.

Neferet smiled softly.

"Thank you."

Emily immediately appeared beside her.

"Oh my God, your dress is beautiful."

Neferet looked down.

"Thank you."

"Did you really come from ancient Egypt?"

"Yes."

Emily stared.

"That's so cool."

Neferet blinked.

"What is cool?"

Emily laughed.

"We're going to need a lot of conversations."

Inside the house, the introductions continued.

Neferet remained fascinated by everything.

The furniture.

The photographs.

The television.

The kitchen.

She stopped in front of a refrigerator.

The door opened.

Cold air spilled out.

Neferet immediately stepped backward.

"It breathes winter."

Emily collapsed into laughter.

John's father leaned against the counter.

"I like her."

Everyone did.

Because despite all the impossible circumstances, Neferet possessed a sincerity that was impossible to fake.

She wasn't pretending.

She wasn't acting.

She was genuinely seeing the modern world for the first time.

And through her eyes, everything seemed extraordinary.

Later that evening, the family gathered around the dining table.

Neferet sat quietly between John and Emily.

For a moment she looked around the room.

The warm lights.

The laughter.

The conversation.

The feeling of belonging.

Very different from her father's palace.

Yet strangely familiar.

A family was still a family.

Even separated by four thousand years.

John noticed the small smile on her face.

"What are you thinking about?"

Neferet looked around the table.

Then answered softly.

"In my world, I left my family behind."

The room grew quiet.

She looked at John's mother.

His father.

Emily.

Then at John.

"And in yours..."

A gentle smile appeared.

"I think I have found another."

Nobody spoke for a moment.

Then John's mother reached across the table and squeezed Neferet's hand.

No royal ceremony.

No formal greeting.

No title.

Just kindness.

And for the first time since stepping through the portal—

Princess Neferet felt something she had not expected to find in the future.

Home.

End of Chapter Three

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Four: The Talking Rock

The following morning, Princess Neferet made a remarkable discovery.

The future had trapped voices inside stones.

At least, that was the only explanation she could find.

The day began quietly enough.

John had left early to meet Jack and Dr. Mitchell at the laboratory.

Emily had taken the day off from work.

Her mission was simple:

Teach an Egyptian princess how to survive the twenty-first century.

So far, the results had been mixed.

Neferet had learned that refrigerators were not magical winter spirits.

She had learned that televisions did not contain tiny actors trapped inside boxes.

And she had reluctantly accepted that automobiles were not powered by invisible horses.

Emily considered this progress.

They sat together in the living room.

A notebook rested on Neferet's lap.

English vocabulary filled several pages.

House.

Door.

Window.

Chair.

Table.

Neferet carefully practiced each word.

"Chair."

"Good."

"Window."

“Perfect."

"Transparent wall."

Emily laughed.

"Technically not wrong."

Neferet smiled proudly.

She was beginning to enjoy these lessons.

The English language was strange, but not impossible.

Suddenly—

a sharp sound interrupted them.

RING!

RING!

Neferet jumped.

"What was that?"

The noise came again.

RING!

RING!

Emily reached into her pocket.

Neferet's eyes widened.

The sound was coming from Emily's clothing.

"Emily..."

"Yes?"

"Your garments are making noises."

Emily pulled out her cell phone.

Neferet immediately stood.

The object was small.

Smooth.

Dark.

And somehow—

it was singing.

Emily answered.

"Hello?"

Neferet froze.

A voice answered from the object.

A real voice.

A human voice.

Coming from a black rectangle no larger than a hand.

Neferet stared in horror.

"Emily."

Emily held up one finger.

Still talking.

"Yes, Mom. We're fine."

Neferet's eyes became enormous.

The voice continued.

The object replied.

The conversation continued naturally.

As though speaking to invisible people trapped inside small stones was completely normal.

Finally Emily ended the call.

The room became quiet.

Neferet slowly pointed.

"What was that?"

"My phone?"

Neferet nodded.

"The voice."

Emily smiled.

"It was my mother."

Neferet looked around the room.

"I did not see her."

"She wasn't here."

Neferet blinked.

"Then where was she?"

"Across town."

A pause.

Neferet stared.

Then stared harder.

Then looked at the object again.

Finally she reached a conclusion.

"You have trapped people inside rocks."

Emily laughed.

"No."

"You communicate with imprisoned voices."

"No."

“The rock contains souls."

"No."

"The souls answer questions."

Emily could barely speak through her laughter.

"No."

Neferet crossed her arms.

"Then explain."

Emily considered this carefully.

How exactly did one explain modern telecommunications to a woman from ancient Egypt?

After several seconds she gave up.

"It just works."

Neferet looked victorious.

"That is not an explanation."

Emily sighed.

"No. It really isn't."

Neferet carefully accepted the phone.

Holding it with both hands.

As if it might suddenly explode.

The screen lit up.

Neferet gasped.

"More trapped spirits!"

Emily laughed again.

"Those are photographs."

Neferet touched the screen.

The image changed.

She jumped.

"It moves!"

"It's a touch screen."

Neferet stared.

"Future magic is very confusing."

Several minutes later Emily decided to demonstrate further.

She selected John's contact.

Then pressed a button.

The phone began ringing.

Neferet immediately backed away.

"The rock is summoning another rock."

Emily nearly fell off the couch laughing.

A moment later John's voice emerged from the speaker.

"Hey Emily."

Neferet froze again.

The voice belonged to John.

Yet John was nowhere in sight.

She cautiously approached.

"John?"

A pause.

Then John's confused voice answered.

"Neferet?"

The princess nearly dropped the phone.

"He can hear me!"

Emily was laughing so hard tears appeared in her eyes.

For the first time in months.

Maybe years.

The kind of uncontrollable laughter that left your stomach hurting.

Neferet looked between the phone and Emily.

"I do not understand why this is funny."

That only made Emily laugh harder.

Eventually John ended the call.

The room finally settled down.

Neferet continued studying the device.

Turning it over.

Examining every angle.

Trying desperately to understand how voices could travel through empty air.

At last she handed it back.

"What do you call this object?"

"A cell phone."

Neferet nodded thoughtfully.

Then shook her head.

"No."

Emily smiled.

"No?"

Neferet pointed firmly.

"That is a talking rock."

Emily burst into laughter again.

And this time even Neferet smiled.

Because she still didn't understand the future.

Not really.

But every day it became a little less frightening.

A little more fascinating.

And a little more like home.

Meanwhile, somewhere inside the laboratory across town, John's phone vibrated.

He glanced at the incoming text from Emily.

She officially calls phones "talking rocks."

A second message followed.

And honestly, I think that's a better name.

John laughed.

For the first time all day.

And in the Carter household, Princess Neferet sat beside the window, staring thoughtfully at the strange little device.

A rock that could speak.

A world that moved faster than imagination.

A future filled with wonders she could never have dreamed existed.

And she had only been here four days.

End of Chapter Four

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Five: The Garden of the Gods

Princess Neferet had already accepted many impossible things about the future.

Metal chariots.

Talking rocks.

Transparent walls.

Invisible fire.

Electric suns hanging from ceilings.

What she was not prepared for...

was the supermarket.

The adventure began on a bright Saturday morning.

Emily stood by the front door holding a set of reusable shopping bags.

"Ready?"

Neferet looked up from her English notebook.

"Where are we going?"

"The grocery store."

Neferet frowned.

"What is a grocery store?"

Emily smiled.

"You'll see."

That answer immediately made Neferet suspicious.

An hour later, John parked the car in front of a massive building.

Rows upon rows of automobiles filled the parking lot.

People pushed strange metal carts.

Children ran between them.

Neferet stepped from the vehicle and stared upward.

The building seemed to stretch forever.

"What is this place?"

Emily grinned.

"The supermarket."

Neferet nodded politely.

She still had no idea what that meant.

Then the automatic doors opened.

Neferet jumped backward.

The doors had moved by themselves.

"No one touched them."

"They're automatic."

Neferet narrowed her eyes.

"The future enjoys making doors suspicious."

John laughed.

Inside, Neferet stopped walking.

Completely.

Her jaw slowly dropped.

The building was enormous.

Brightly lit.

Perfectly organized.

And filled...

with food.

More food than she had ever seen in one place in her entire life.

Fruit.

Vegetables.

Bread.

Fish.

Meat.

Rice.

Cheese.

Milk.

Juices.

Pastries.

Cakes.

Candy.

Hundreds.

Thousands.

Tens of thousands of items.

Entire aisles dedicated to a single category.

Neferet stared in silence.

People casually walked past mountains of food without even looking twice.

As if such abundance were completely normal.

Finally she whispered:

"John."

"Yes?"

"Is there a festival today?"

"No."

"A royal celebration?"

"No."

"A harvest feast?"

"No."

Neferet looked around again.

"Then why is all of this food here?"

Emily smiled.

"Because people need groceries."

The princess blinked.

"This is normal?"

"Very."

Neferet looked genuinely alarmed.

"How many pharaohs rule this nation?"

John laughed.

"No pharaohs."

"No pharaohs?"

"No."

She stared at the endless shelves.

Then at the crowds.

Then back at the shelves.

Her conclusion came quickly.

"Your people must be unimaginably wealthy."

Nobody answered immediately.

Because from her perspective...

they were.

In ancient Egypt, crop failures could threaten entire regions.

Food had value because survival depended on it.

Yet here...

bananas sat piled in mountains.

Bread filled entire walls.

Fruit arrived from lands thousands of miles away.

And nobody seemed particularly impressed.

To Neferet, it was astonishing.

She wandered toward the produce section.

Rows of apples stretched before her.

Red.

Green.

Yellow.

She picked one up.

Then another.

Then another.

"How many kinds of apples exist in the future?"

Emily laughed.

"Quite a few."

Neferet gently placed them back.

Then moved to the bakery.

The smell stopped her immediately.

Fresh bread.

Sweet pastries.

Cinnamon.

Sugar.

Her eyes widened.

"This room smells like happiness."

John smiled.

"That's the bakery section."

Neferet looked genuinely impressed.

"The future has entire sections dedicated to happiness?"

Emily laughed so hard she had to lean against the cart.

As they continued through the store, Neferet discovered frozen foods.

She opened a freezer door.

Cold air rushed outward.

She stepped back.

"Winter prison."

John chuckled.

"Frozen vegetables."

"Winter prison."

Several shoppers nearby smiled as they passed.

Neferet's wonder was impossible not to notice.

She treated every aisle like an archaeological discovery.

The cereal aisle.

The candy aisle.

The beverage aisle.

Each one larger than some ancient marketplaces she had known.

Finally they reached the center of the store.

Neferet slowly turned in a circle.

Food stretched in every direction.

As far as she could see.

She became quiet.

Very quiet.

John noticed.

"What are you thinking about?"

Neferet looked around the supermarket.

The abundance.

The comfort.

The security.

Then she answered softly.

"In my world, many people prayed for harvests."

John nodded.

She looked at the endless shelves.

"In your world..."

A pause.

"It seems the prayers were answered."

For a moment, nobody spoke.

Then Neferet smiled.

A warm smile filled with wonder.

And she announced her official conclusion.

"This place is not a market."

Emily grinned.

"No?"

Neferet shook her head.

"No."

She spread her arms dramatically.

“This is the Garden of the Gods."

Several nearby shoppers turned and smiled.

Emily immediately pulled out her phone.

"What are you doing?" John asked.

"Writing that down."

"Why?"

"Because that's the greatest description of a supermarket I've ever heard."

Neferet looked pleased with herself.

And honestly...

everyone agreed.

On the drive home, she sat quietly staring out the transparent wall.

The future still confused her.

Still frightened her occasionally.

Still felt impossible.

But every day she discovered something new.

Something wonderful.

Something that reminded her why she had chosen to stay.

Behind her, bags filled with food occupied the trunk.

Enough food to feed a small village.

Purchased in less than an hour.

Neferet shook her head in amazement.

The future was many things.

Strange.

Complicated.

Loud.

But one thing was certain.

The people here lived in a land of extraordinary abundance.

And if there truly were gods watching over this age...

they had planted a magnificent garden.

End of Chapter Five

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Six: The Metal Bird

By her second week in the future, Princess Neferet had developed a simple rule.

Whenever something impossible happened...

assume it was normal.

So far, this strategy had worked surprisingly well.

Talking rocks.

Transparent walls.

Winter prisons.

Gardens of the Gods.

Every day revealed some new wonder that would have been considered magic in ancient Egypt.

And every day someone patiently explained that it was "technology."

Neferet still wasn't entirely convinced there was a difference.

The afternoon was warm and pleasant.

John and Neferet walked together through a public park not far from town.

Children played nearby.

Families sat beneath trees.

Dogs chased tennis balls.

Neferet enjoyed parks.

They reminded her of the palace gardens back home.

Though these gardens contained far fewer servants and considerably more squirrels.

"What exactly is that creature?" she asked, pointing at one of them.

"A squirrel."

"It appears confused."

John laughed.

"They're always confused."

Neferet nodded.

"Then it is behaving correctly."

For a while they walked in comfortable silence.

The breeze was gentle.

The sky was clear.

Everything seemed peaceful.

Then a distant roar echoed overhead.

Neferet stopped instantly.

The sound was unlike anything she had heard before.

Deep.

Powerful.

Growing louder.

She looked toward the sky.

A massive aircraft crossed the horizon.

Its silver body gleamed in the sunlight.

Its wings stretched impossibly wide.

Neferet froze.

Her eyes widened.

"Oh."

John immediately recognized the tone.

Whenever Neferet said "oh" like that, trouble usually followed.

Before he could react—

she dropped to her knees.

Right in the middle of the park.

Several nearby people turned to look.

Neferet raised both arms toward the sky.

And began praying.

"Great protector of the heavens..."

John blinked.

"What are you doing?"

Neferet continued praying.

"May your flight be blessed."

John looked upward.

Then back at her.

The airplane continued across the sky.

"Neferet..."

She remained kneeling.

"The great metal bird flies above us."

John rubbed his forehead.

Of course.

"The what?"

"The great metal bird."

She pointed dramatically.

"It carries people through the heavens."

Technically...

that description wasn't entirely wrong.

But it wasn't helping.

"That's an airplane."

Neferet continued staring upward.

"It has wings."

"Yes."

"It flies."

"Yes."

"It carries humans through the sky."

"Yes."

She looked at him.

"Then it is clearly a metal bird."

John struggled to find a flaw in her logic.

There wasn't one.

"It's a machine."

"So are talking rocks."

John sighed.

She had him there.

The aircraft continued overhead.

Neferet lowered her arms slightly but remained kneeling.

"What if it becomes angry?"

"It won't."

"How do you know?"

"Because airplanes aren't alive."

She looked skeptical.

"That sounds exactly like something a person would say before being attacked by a giant metal bird."

Several people nearby were now openly listening.

One elderly man nearly spit out his coffee trying not to laugh.

John offered Neferet his hand.

"It's safe."

She accepted reluctantly.

Still watching the airplane.

Still unconvinced.

The aircraft gradually disappeared into the distance.

Only then did she finally stand.

"I do not trust it."

John smiled.

"Millions of people fly on airplanes every day."

Neferet stopped walking.

"Millions?"

"Yes."

She stared.

Then looked back toward the sky.

"Your people willingly climb onto giant flying metal birds?"

John nodded.

"All the time."

Neferet was silent for several seconds.

Then she shook her head.

"The future is far more courageous than I expected."

Or perhaps much crazier.

John wasn't entirely sure which she meant.

As they continued walking, Neferet kept glancing upward.

Just in case another metal bird appeared.

Half an hour later, it happened again.

A second airplane crossed the sky.

Neferet immediately stopped.

John looked at her.

She looked at him.

John raised an eyebrow.

"Don't."

Neferet considered it.

Looked at the airplane.

Then slowly lowered herself halfway toward the ground.

John groaned.

"Neferet."

"I'm compromising."

"Compromising?"

"Last time I performed a full prayer."

She gestured upward.

"This time I am only offering a respectful acknowledgment."

John burst out laughing.

Soon Neferet joined him.

The sound surprised her.

Not because she was laughing.

But because it felt natural.

For a moment she forgot she was thousands of years from home.

Forgot she was living in a world she barely understood.

Forgot the impossible journey that had brought her here.

For one brief moment, she was simply a young woman walking beside someone she cared about.

The airplane disappeared into the clouds.

Neferet watched it go.

Then smiled.

"Very well."

John glanced at her.

"Very well what?"

She folded her arms.

"I accept that it is an airplane."

John nodded.

"Good."

A pause.

Then she added:

"But I still believe it is secretly a metal bird."

John laughed so hard he had to stop walking.

And somewhere high above them, another airplane crossed the sky.

Unaware that it had just lost an argument with an Egyptian princess.

End of Chapter Six

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Seven: Emily's Project

Three weeks after arriving in the future, Princess Neferet had learned an important lesson.

English was not one language.

It was at least five languages pretending to be one.

The problem wasn't the vocabulary.

Neferet was actually progressing surprisingly quickly.

She could read simple books.

She could hold basic conversations.

She was beginning to understand television.

The problem was that modern people rarely said what they meant.

To Neferet, this seemed like a terrible system.

And unfortunately for Emily Carter, it had become her responsibility to teach it.

John called it tutoring.

Emily called it survival.

Neferet called it torture.

The lessons took place every afternoon at the dining room table.

A notebook sat between them.

Today's lesson was titled:

COMMON ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS

Neferet immediately frowned.

"I do not trust this title."

Emily smiled.

"That's because you've learned from experience."

“Last week you told me people 'break a leg' to wish each other success."

"That's correct."

Neferet stared.

"That makes no sense."

Emily laughed.

"Welcome to English."

Neferet sighed.

"Proceed."

Emily looked at her notes.

"Okay. First expression."

She pointed.

IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS.

Neferet blinked.

Then blinked again.

"No."

"What?"

"No."

Emily laughed.

"That's the expression."

Neferet folded her arms.

"Animals do not fall from the sky."

"Of course they don't."

"Then why would people say that?"

Emily opened her mouth.

Then closed it again.

After a moment she shrugged.

"Honestly, I have no idea."

Neferet wrote something in her notebook.

Emily leaned forward.

What she had written:

Modern people enjoy confusion.

Emily couldn't argue.

The lesson continued.

HOLD YOUR HORSES

Neferet frowned.

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why am I holding horses?"

"It means be patient."

"Then why not say 'be patient'?"

Emily sighed.

Another excellent question.

Next:

HIT THE HAY

Neferet looked horrified.

"Why would I attack hay?"

"It means go to sleep."

"Then why not say go to sleep?"

Emily dropped her head onto the table.

The princess was winning.

Again.

Several hours later, John returned home from the laboratory.

He found both women sitting at the table.

Neferet appeared frustrated.

Emily appeared exhausted.

"How's the lesson going?"

Emily pointed dramatically.

"Your girlfriend is too logical."

Neferet looked pleased.

"Thank you."

"That was not a compliment."

"It sounded like one."

John laughed.

Emily wasn't finished.

"She asked me why a person can be 'under the weather' when weather is above us."

Neferet nodded.

"A perfectly reasonable question."

John immediately turned around.

"I am not getting involved."

Smart decision.

The next day, Emily introduced another lesson.

Modern slang.

This proved even worse.

"Okay," Emily said.

"Suppose someone says, 'That's cool.'"

Neferet nodded.

"What about it?"

"It means they like something."

"But cool means not warm."

"Yes."

"Then why—"

"Don't."

Emily held up a hand.

"Please."

Neferet laughed.

For the first time, she was beginning to enjoy these moments.

Not because the lessons were easy.

But because Emily never treated her like a burden.

Never treated her like an outsider.

She simply helped.

Patiently.

Day after day.

The friendship grew naturally.

One afternoon they sat together watching television.

A commercial appeared.

The announcer smiled and declared:

"Piece of cake!"

Neferet immediately looked around.

"Where is the cake?"

Emily burst out laughing.

"There is no cake."

"Then why did he mention cake?"

"It means something is easy."

Neferet stared at the television.

Then at Emily.

Then back at the television.

Finally she made a decision.

"I have reached a conclusion."

Emily smiled.

"What conclusion?"

Neferet closed her notebook.

"English was created by people who enjoy making life difficult."

Emily laughed so hard tears formed in her eyes.

Again.

It was happening more often now.

Not because Neferet was trying to be funny.

But because she viewed the modern world from a completely different perspective.

And sometimes...

that perspective revealed how absurd ordinary things truly were.

That evening, Emily sat beside John in the living room.

Neferet was reading nearby.

A children's novel.

One of her favorites.

Emily smiled.

"She's doing really well."

John nodded.

"Yeah."

Emily watched the princess for a moment.

"She's brave."

John looked over.

Neferet was quietly sounding out unfamiliar words.

Determined to learn.

Determined to adapt.

Determined to build a life in a world she had never imagined.

A world four thousand years removed from everything she had ever known.

John smiled softly.

"Yeah."

"She really is."

Across the room, Neferet suddenly looked up.

"John?"

"Yes?"

She pointed at a sentence in her book.

"What does 'once in a blue moon' mean?"

Emily immediately burst into laughter.

John groaned.

And another English lesson began.

End of Chapter Seven

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Eight: New Clothes

Princess Neferet had faced many challenges since arriving in the future.

She had survived a portal through time.

She had ridden in a metal chariot.

She had learned to use talking rocks.

She had even accepted that giant metal birds regularly carried people through the sky.

Nothing had prepared her for blue jeans.

The trouble began on a Saturday morning when Emily announced:

"We're going shopping."

Neferet looked up from her English workbook.

"Shopping for what?"

"Clothes."

Neferet glanced down at her linen dress.

"I already have clothes."

Emily smiled.

"Not future clothes."

That statement immediately made Neferet nervous.

Two hours later they arrived at a large shopping mall.

Neferet stopped walking.

The building looked enormous.

People moved in every direction.

Bright lights reflected from polished floors.

Music drifted through the air from unseen sources.

She looked around cautiously.

"What is this place?"

Emily grinned.

"A mall."

Neferet sighed.

"Another future word."

"Basically, it's where people buy things."

Neferet nodded.

"So a giant marketplace."

"Exactly."

That explanation made sense.

For approximately three minutes.

Then they entered the first clothing store.

Neferet froze.

Clothes covered every wall.

Every shelf.

Every rack.

Thousands of garments.

Different colors.

Different styles.

Different fabrics.

More clothing than many Egyptian villages possessed collectively.

She stared in disbelief.

"How many outfits does one person require?"

Emily laughed.

"Less than this."

A sales associate approached.

"Can I help you ladies?"

Neferet immediately bowed.

The woman blinked.

Emily quickly intervened.

"We're fine."

The confused employee slowly retreated.

Neferet watched her leave.

"Was she a palace servant?"

"No."

"She offered assistance."

"That's her job."

The princess nodded thoughtfully.

"The future has become very complicated."

Emily led her toward a display.

"Let's start simple."

She picked up a pair of blue jeans.

Neferet stared.

"What are those?"

"Jeans."

The princess touched the fabric.

It felt thick.

Strong.

Almost like armor.

"People wear these?"

"Every day."

Neferet looked horrified.

"They appear uncomfortable."

Emily smiled.

"Try them."

"Must I?"

"Yes."

Several minutes later, Neferet emerged from the fitting room.

Slowly.

Very slowly.

As though approaching her own execution.

Emily looked up.

Then smiled.

"You look great."

Neferet disagreed.

The jeans felt strange.

Too fitted.

Too modern.

Too everything.

She tugged at them awkwardly.

"How do people sit in these?"

Emily laughed.

"The same way they've always sat."

"I am unconvinced."

She attempted to walk.

The movement felt unfamiliar.

Unnatural.

Embarrassing.

John, who had been waiting outside the store, glanced over.

Then promptly looked away.

Neferet noticed immediately.

"Why did he look away?"

Emily grinned.

"Oh, I know that look."

John groaned.

"I don't like where this conversation is going."

Neferet looked between them.

"What look?"

Emily's smile widened.

"The 'wow, she looks beautiful' look."

John nearly dropped the shopping bags.

"Emily!"

Neferet's cheeks turned pink.

Something she was still getting used to.

In ancient Egypt, royal courtship was governed by formal traditions.

The future seemed to prefer embarrassing people.

Several stores later, the situation improved.

Neferet began experimenting.

A simple sweater.

A casual blouse.

A light jacket.

Each new outfit felt a little less strange.

A little more natural.

Eventually she stepped from the fitting room wearing dark jeans and a soft blue sweater.

This time she didn't tug at the fabric.

Didn't frown.

Didn't complain.

Emily smiled immediately.

"There she is."

Neferet studied herself in the mirror.

The reflection looked different.

Not like an Egyptian princess.

Not like a visitor from another age.

Just...

a young woman.

Living in the modern world.

For a moment she was quiet.

Then she smiled.

A genuine smile.

"I think I like this one."

Emily clapped excitedly.

"Success!"

John smiled too.

Not because of the clothes.

But because Neferet looked happy.

That mattered more.

Later, as they walked through the mall carrying several bags, Neferet seemed thoughtful.

"What are you thinking about?" John asked.

She looked down at the shopping bags.

Then at the crowds around them.

Then back at John.

"When I first arrived..."

A pause.

"I felt as though I was visiting another world."

John listened quietly.

Neferet smiled softly.

"Today was the first time I felt like I might actually belong here."

John reached for her hand.

She squeezed it gently.

Around them, hundreds of strangers continued with their day.

None of them knew they were passing an Egyptian princess.

None of them knew she had traveled through time.

And for the first time...

Neferet liked that.

Because she was beginning to understand something important.

She would always be the daughter of Pharaoh Khufu.

She would always carry Egypt in her heart.

But perhaps there was room in her heart for another home as well.

As they reached the parking lot, Neferet glanced down at her jeans.

Then smiled.

"Very well."

John looked at her.

"What?"

She nodded decisively.

"I officially approve of future pants."

Emily laughed so hard she almost dropped her shopping bags.

And for the rest of the day, Neferet proudly referred to jeans as:

"Future pants."

The name would stick.

End of Chapter Eight

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Nine: The School of Words

By the third week, Princess Neferet had begun to notice something unexpected about the future.

It was not just filled with strange objects.

It was filled with words.

Everywhere.

Signs. Screens. Labels. Books. Voices. Instructions.

A constant river of language flowing through the world.

And slowly, she was learning how to swim in it.

Emily had stopped calling their daily lessons “survival training.”

Now she called them something worse.

“Reading practice.”

Neferet sat at the dining table with a small stack of books in front of her.

Children’s books.

Simple stories.

Colorful illustrations.

John leaned against the doorway watching.

Jack had stopped by to observe “the experiment,” as he called it.

Dr. Mitchell, of course, had already taken notes.

Neferet carefully sounded out the words.

“Once… upon… a… time…”

She paused.

Then smiled.

“I understand this one.”

Emily nodded proudly.

“Good. Keep going.”

Neferet continued.

But slower now.

More careful.

As if each word mattered deeply.

And to her, it did.

Because words in this world were not carved into stone.

They were alive.

They moved.

They changed.

They adapted.

And she was finally beginning to catch them.

Later that afternoon, Neferet closed the book.

Silence filled the room.

Emily looked up.

“So?”

Neferet thought for a moment.

Then spoke clearly.

“I read the story.”

John smiled.

“That’s kind of the idea.”

Neferet shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“I mean… I understood it.”

That changed the tone of the room instantly.

Even Jack stopped joking.

Even Dr. Mitchell looked up from his notes.

Emily blinked.

“You understood the whole thing?”

Neferet nodded slowly.

“It was about a child who was afraid of the dark… but learned that the dark was not empty.”

She looked at the book.

“It was full of possibility.”

A pause.

“I liked it.”

For a moment, no one spoke.

Then Emily smiled softly.

“Okay… that’s actually impressive.”

Neferet looked pleased.

Not proud.

Not arrogant.

Just quietly satisfied.

Like someone who had climbed a very tall staircase and finally reached the next step.

A few days later, John took her somewhere new.

“Where are we going?” Neferet asked as they walked through the city.

“You’ll see,” John said.

They stopped in front of a large building made of glass and stone.

People moved in and out quietly.

No shouting.

No chaos.

Just calm.

Neferet frowned.

“It feels… sacred.”

John smiled.

“Kind of is.”

They stepped inside.

And Neferet stopped completely.

The room stretched farther than she expected.

Rows upon rows of books.

Walls of them.

Entire worlds stacked neatly in silence.

She whispered:

“What is this place?”

John replied softly:

“Library.”

Neferet slowly turned in a circle.

Books everywhere.

Thousands.

Tens of thousands.

All silent.

All waiting.

“It is a temple,” she said.

John tilted his head.

“Temple?”

Neferet nodded.

“A place where knowledge is preserved instead of worshipped.”

She looked at him.

“In my world, knowledge was spoken.”

“Here… it is stored.”

A librarian guided her to a section for beginners.

Neferet sat at a table and opened a book.

Then another.

Then another.

Time stopped behaving normally.

John noticed it first.

She wasn’t looking around anymore.

Wasn’t asking questions.

Wasn’t reacting to anything outside the page.

She was gone.

Inside the books.

Emily whispered:

“I think we lost her.”

John smiled.

“No. We didn’t lose her.”

A pause.

“She just found something better than us for a minute.”

Neferet turned a page slowly.

Then another.

Her eyes moved carefully across the text.

Lips forming silent words.

And then—

a smile.

Not the polite smile she used with strangers.

Not the confused smile she used in the supermarket.

Not the cautious smile of adaptation.

This was different.

This was joy.

Later, walking home, Neferet carried three books tightly against her chest.

Like treasure.

Emily watched her.

“You really like them?”

Neferet nodded immediately.

“They are… voices without mouths.”

A pause.

“They speak even when no one is there.”

John glanced at her.

“That’s a good way to put it.”

Neferet continued softly.

“In Egypt, stories were passed from mouth to mouth.”

“If a voice was forgotten… it was gone forever.”

She looked down at the books.

“Here… nothing is forgotten.”

That night, Neferet sat alone in the living room.

Reading.

Quiet.

Still.

John stood nearby watching her for a moment.

Emily joined him.

“She’s changing fast,” Emily said.

John nodded.

“Yeah.”

A pause.

“Do you think she’s happy here?”

John looked at Neferet again.

The way she turned pages carefully.

The way she absorbed every sentence.

The way she frowned when she didn't understand, then tried again.

"I think…" John said quietly,

"she's discovering she can belong anywhere she understands."

Emily smiled.

"That's deep."

John shrugged.

"It's her, not me."

Neferet suddenly looked up from her book.

John?"

"Yes?"

She held up a page.

"What does this word mean?"

Emily groaned immediately.

"Oh no. Here we go again."

John smiled.

"Welcome to your new life."

Neferet nodded seriously.

and turned the page anyway.

Because she was no longer just surviving the future.

She was learning how to live in it.

End of Chapter Nine

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Ten: Invisible Fire

By the fourth week, Princess Neferet had developed a cautious respect for modern appliances.

Some were understandable.

Some were strange.

And some… were clearly magical.

The microwave oven fell into the last category.

It began during a quiet afternoon at the Carter home.

Emily was preparing lunch.

John was reviewing notes from the laboratory.

Neferet was reading in the kitchen, still practicing her growing English vocabulary.

Everything seemed ordinary.

Until Emily said:

“I’m just going to microwave this.”

Neferet looked up immediately.

“Micro… what?”

“Microwave.”

Emily placed a plate inside a small box on the counter.

A box with a glass door.

A box that hummed faintly even while still.

Neferet slowly set her book down.

“What does it do?”

“It heats food.”

Neferet frowned.

“That is what fire is for.”

Emily smiled.

“Not this kind.”

She closed the door.

Pressed a few buttons.

And stepped back.

Neferet immediately stepped closer.

“No flame?”

“No flame.”

“No wood?”

“No wood.”

Neferet stared at the box.

Suspicious.

Very suspicious.

“Then what feeds it?”

Emily hesitated.

“…Electricity.”

Neferet nodded slowly.

“Ah.”

A pause.

“So invisible fire.”

Emily paused.

“…I guess you could call it that.”

Neferet accepted this answer immediately.

As if it explained everything.

John looked up from his papers.

“That is not what electricity is.”

Neferet did not look at him.

“It is invisible fire.”

“It is not fire.”

“It heats food without flame.”

“That’s not—”

Emily raised a hand.

“John, let it go.”

John sighed.

“Fine.”

The microwave beeped.

Neferet flinched.

The machine sounded like a small signal from another world.

The plate inside began to spin slowly.

Neferet leaned forward.

“What is it doing?”

“Cooking.”

“With no fire?”

“Yes.”

Neferet shook her head.

“This is not cooking.”

Emily smiled.

“Oh, it definitely is.”

The microwave beeped again.

Emily opened the door.

A wave of heat escaped instantly.

Neferet stepped back.

Her eyes widened.

“It has captured heat.”

Emily blinked.

“…That’s actually a pretty good way to describe it.”

Neferet nodded confidently.

“I understand now.”

John looked skeptical.

“No, you don’t.”

Neferet ignored him.

She watched Emily carefully place the hot food on the table.

Steam rose gently from the plate.

No fire had touched it.

No stove had been used.

No visible source of heat existed.

And yet—

food was cooked.

Neferet sat down slowly.

“This is magic,” she said.

“It’s technology,” John corrected.

Neferet shook her head.

“In Egypt, we had priests who controlled fire in sacred temples.”

A pause.

“This is similar… but without priests.”

Emily laughed softly.

“So… less religious management system?”

Neferet nodded seriously.

“Yes.”

John leaned back in his chair.

“You’re officially calling microwaves magic now, aren’t you?”

Neferet didn’t hesitate.

“Yes.”

Emily grinned.

“That’s going to stick.”

John muttered:

“I can already tell this is going to be a problem.”

Later that evening, Neferet returned to the kitchen alone.

She stared at the microwave.

Quiet.

Still.

Patient.

Like a sealed altar waiting for invocation.

She slowly opened the door.

Looked inside.

Closed it again.

Then whispered:

“Invisible fire.”

She pressed a button.

The machine beeped.

She immediately stepped back.

Nothing happened for a few seconds.

Then the humming began.

Neferet watched in silence.

Eyes fixed.

Focused.

Almost reverent.

“If this is not magic,” she whispered,

“then my world did not understand what magic is.”

The next morning, John tried again.

“It uses microwaves,” he said.

Neferet nodded.

“Yes. Invisible fire.”

“It’s electromagnetic energy.”

“Yes. Invisible fire.”

“It excites water molecules.”

“Yes. Invisible fire.”

John stopped.

Neferet looked satisfied.

Emily laughed from the other room.

“I think you lost this argument permanently.”

John sighed.

“I hate that she’s consistent.”

Over the following days, Neferet expanded her theory.

Microwave ovens were “small fire temples.”

Phones were “talking stones.”

Cars were “metal beasts.”

Airplanes were “metal birds.”

And electricity…

was simply:

“Invisible fire that obeys humans.”

One evening, Emily found Neferet writing in her notebook.

“What are you doing?”

Neferet looked up.

“Recording the laws of the future.”

Emily smiled.

“Let me guess… chapter one is invisible fire?”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“It is the most important discovery your people have made.”

Emily sat beside her.

“And what does it say?”

Neferet turned the page.

She read aloud carefully.

“Invisible fire is everywhere.”

“It does not burn wood.”

“It does not require prayer.”

“But it answers when commanded.”

She closed the notebook.

Then added softly:

“So perhaps… magic did not disappear.”

“It learned new rules.”

For a moment, the room was quiet.

Even John didn’t interrupt.

Because for all her misunderstandings…

Neferet was not wrong about everything.

She was simply translating a world too advanced for her time into words she could understand.

And in doing so…

she was slowly revealing how magical it still appeared.

Just in a different language.

End of Chapter Ten

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Eleven: A Place Called Work

Princess Neferet had survived gods, kings, portals, and invisible fire.

But nothing confused her more than the idea of doing nothing all day.

It began on a quiet morning at the Carter home.

John was already gone.

Emily was at work.

And Neferet found herself alone.

She sat at the dining table for several minutes.

Doing nothing.

Then several more.

Still nothing.

Finally, she closed her notebook.

Something felt wrong.

In her world, everyone had a purpose.

Farmers grew food.

Builders shaped stone.

Servants maintained order.

Priests served the gods.

Even royalty had duty.

But here…

people seemed to simply exist between activities.

She stood up.

“I need to speak with John.”

He was at the laboratory when she arrived with Emily later that day.

Jack looked up from a console.

Dr. Mitchell raised an eyebrow.

John immediately noticed her expression.

“What’s wrong?”

Neferet shook her head.

“Nothing is wrong.”

A pause.

“That is the problem.”

The room went quiet.

Even Jack stopped typing.

John stepped closer.

“Talk to me.”

Neferet looked around the laboratory.

Machines humming.

Screens glowing.

People working.

Purpose everywhere.

Then she said it.

“I require a place called work.”

John blinked.

“…A job?”

Neferet nodded firmly.

“Yes.”

Emily smiled slightly from the doorway.

“I was wondering when this would happen.”

John looked confused.

“You don’t have to work. We can support you—”

Neferet immediately raised a hand.

“No.”

A pause.

“I will not be supported forever.”

Her voice was calm.

But absolute.

Dr. Mitchell exchanged a glance with Jack.

Jack mouthed:

“She’s serious.”

John sighed.

“Neferet, you’re adjusting to an entirely new world. You don’t need to rush into—”

“I am not rushing.”

She stepped forward.

“I am observing.”

She pointed slightly toward the city beyond the lab windows.

“Everyone moves with purpose.”

“Everyone contributes something.”

A pause.

“If I do not, then I am… out of place.”

That word lingered.

Out of place.

John softened.

“You’re not out of place.”

Neferet looked at him.

“Then give me a place.”

Silence.

Even the machines seemed quieter.

Later that evening, the group gathered at the Carter home.

Emily had made tea.

Jack had brought snacks.

Dr. Mitchell had brought notes.

John had brought concern.

Neferet sat at the table with perfect posture.

Waiting.

Emily spoke first.

“What kind of work are you thinking about?”

Neferet considered carefully.

“I do not know the names of your professions yet.”

A pause.

“But I have observed many things.”

She counted on her fingers.

“I can learn quickly.”

“I understand patterns.”

“I speak languages.”

“I adapt to systems.”

She looked up.

“I want to be useful.”

John leaned forward.

“You already are.”

Neferet shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“I am being cared for.”

“That is not the same.”

Jack muttered quietly:

“She’s got a point.”

Dr. Mitchell nodded slowly.

“She does.”

Emily set down her cup.

“Okay… let’s think practically.”

She gestured toward Neferet.

“She learns languages fast.”

“She notices patterns.”

“She adapts culturally better than most people I know.”

John frowned.

“Where does that lead?”

Emily smiled slightly.

“Lots of places.”

Neferet listened carefully.

Noticing everything.

Then she asked:

“What is the most important work in your world?”

That question changed the room.

Jack looked at John.

Dr. Mitchell looked at the ceiling.

Emily looked at Neferet.

John looked… uncertain.

Finally, Emily answered.

“There isn’t just one.”

Neferet frowned.

“In Egypt, importance was clear.”

John nodded slowly.

“I know.”

A pause.

“But here,” he continued, “people contribute in different ways.”

Neferet absorbed that.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Then she said:

“Then I will choose one of these ways.”

Over the next several days, Neferet tried to understand modern work.

Emily brought her to observe different places.

A library.

A small office.

A museum.

A café.

Each time, Neferet watched quietly.

Studying.

Learning.

Comparing.

At the café, she noticed something.

People were paid for serving others.

At the library, people preserved knowledge.

At the museum, people protected history.

She found it all fascinating.

But one thing stood out most.

Everyone had a role.

Even if it was small.

Even if it was invisible.

And Neferet realized something important.

In this world, purpose was not assigned by birth.

It was chosen.

That idea frightened her.

And excited her.

That night, she returned home with a notebook full of observations.

She placed it on the table.

John looked at her.

“So… what did you decide?”

Neferet hesitated.

Then spoke clearly.

“I do not yet know what job I will have.”

A pause.

“But I know what I will not do.”

Emily raised an eyebrow.

“What’s that?”

Neferet looked at John.

“I will not remain a guest in your life forever.”

The room fell silent.

John softened.

“That’s not how I see it.”

Neferet nodded.

“I know.”

A pause.

“But it is how I see myself.”

Emily smiled gently.

“Then we’ll find you something.”

Jack grinned.

“We’ve got time-travel princess career development now. Great.”

Dr. Mitchell added thoughtfully:

“She would excel in research environments.”

John looked at Neferet.

Still uncertain.

But supportive.

“Whatever you choose,” he said, “we’ll figure it out.”

Neferet nodded once.

“I will learn.”

A pause.

“And I will contribute.”

She closed her notebook.

For the first time since arriving in the future…

Neferet was not just adapting.

Not just observing.

Not just surviving.

She was preparing to belong.

End of Chapter Eleven

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twelve: The Interview

Neferet had learned many things about the future.

How to speak in English.

How to use invisible fire.

How to survive talking rocks and metal birds.

How to walk through a Garden of the Gods without being overwhelmed.

But nothing in her experience had prepared her for sitting in a small room and being asked questions about herself.

“This is called an interview,” Emily had explained earlier that morning.

Neferet repeated the word carefully.

“Interview.”

“It’s just a conversation,” Emily added. “They’re trying to understand you.”

Neferet nodded.

“I am good at conversations.”

Emily smiled slightly.

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

The building was smaller than Neferet expected.

Not a palace.

Not a temple.

Not even a laboratory.

Just glass, metal, and quiet confidence.

Inside, everything smelled like paper and coffee.

People moved quickly but quietly.

Each carried purpose in their eyes.

Neferet observed carefully.

“This place feels… focused.”

John nodded.

“It’s an office.”

Neferet repeated.

“Office.”

She filed the word away.

At reception, Emily spoke softly.

“We’re here for Neferet Carter’s interview.”

The receptionist smiled.

“Of course. She can go in now.”

Neferet stood.

John leaned closer.

“You’ll be fine.”

Neferet nodded.

“I know.”

A pause.

“I have survived worse than questions.”

John almost smiled.

“That’s… reassuring.”

The interviewer was a woman in her forties.

Professional.

Calm.

Observant.

She looked up as Neferet entered.

Then paused.

Just slightly.

“Please, have a seat.”

Neferet sat carefully.

Straight posture.

Hands folded.

Like royalty attending court.

The interviewer smiled politely.

“So… Neferet, tell me a little about yourself.”

Neferet considered this seriously.

“I am the daughter of Pharaoh Khufu.”

Silence.

The interviewer blinked.

Emily, waiting outside, covered her face with one hand.

Neferet continued calmly.

“I have lived in a place called Egypt.”

A pause.

“However, it was… earlier Egypt.”

Another silence.

The interviewer slowly looked at her notes.

Then back up.

“…Earlier Egypt?”

John, outside the room, whispered:

“Oh no.”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes. Several thousand years earlier than your present.”

A long pause.

The interviewer gently set her pen down.

Emily muttered:

“She’s committing to the truth too hard.”

The interviewer tried again.

“So… what skills do you have?”

Neferet brightened slightly.

“I learn languages quickly.”

“I understand patterns.”

“I observe people well.”

The interviewer nodded slowly.

“Okay…”

Neferet added:

“I also adapt to strange environments.”

A pause.

“I have been doing that recently.”

The interviewer glanced at Emily.

Emily nodded.

“Yes. That part is accurate.”

The interviewer continued.

“Do you have any job experience?”

Neferet thought carefully.

“I have ruled no one.”

A pause.

“I have built nothing in your world.”

“I have worked in no systems you recognize.”

She leaned slightly forward.

“But I learn quickly.”

The honesty was absolute.

And strangely… impressive.

The interviewer began to smile more genuinely.

Something about Neferet was disarming.

Not polished.

Not rehearsed.

Not artificial.

Just honest.

“So,” the interviewer said, “what would you like to do?”

Neferet paused.

This was the real question.

“I want to understand your world.”

A pause.

“And help where I am needed.”

She hesitated.

Then added softly:

“I do not want to be a burden.”

That last sentence changed the tone of the room.

Even the interviewer’s expression softened.

“I see,” she said quietly.

John stood in the hallway with Emily.

Jack had joined out of curiosity.

Dr. Mitchell was pretending not to eavesdrop.

John whispered:

“She’s either going to get hired… or arrested.”

Emily whispered back:

“Honestly? Could go either way.”

Ten minutes later, the door opened.

The interviewer stepped out.

She looked at Neferet.

Then at the group.

“We’d like to offer her a position.”

Silence.

Jack blinked.

“Wait… seriously?”

The interviewer nodded.

“She has an unusual background.”

A pause.

“But she communicates exceptionally well.”

“And she learns quickly.”

She smiled slightly.

“And frankly… she makes people think differently.”

Neferet tilted her head.

“That is good?”

The interviewer smiled.

“In this case… yes.”

Outside the building, Emily hugged Neferet.

“You got a job.”

Neferet processed this carefully.

“I am… employed.”

John smiled.

“Yeah. You are.”

Neferet looked down at her hands.

“I will contribute now.”

John nodded.

“You already do.”

She shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“Now it is official.”

As they walked back through the city, Neferet was quiet.

But not troubled.

Focused.

John glanced at her.

“So… how do you feel?”

Neferet thought for a moment.

Then answered:

“I feel… anchored.”

Emily smiled.

“That’s a good word.”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“In Egypt, I was anchored by birth.”

“In your world…”

She looked around.

“I am anchored by choice.”

John didn’t respond immediately.

Because for once…

there wasn’t anything to correct.

That evening, Neferet placed her new identification card on the table.

A symbol of her new life.

She looked at it for a long moment.

Then said quietly:

“I think I am beginning to understand your world.”

John smiled.

“Yeah?”

Neferet nodded.

“It is not built on kings or gods.”

A pause.

“It is built on decisions.”

She looked at him.

“And I have made one.”

John raised an eyebrow.

“What’s that?”

Neferet smiled softly.

“I am staying.”

End of Chapter Twelve

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Thirteen: The First Paycheck

Neferet had held gold before.

She had seen treasures stored in royal chambers.

She had lived in a world where wealth was measured in grain, stone, and divine favor.

But she had never felt what it meant to *earn* anything.

That was about to change.

It arrived on a quiet Friday afternoon.

Neferet stood in the kitchen when Emily walked in holding a small sealed envelope.

“This is for you,” Emily said.

Neferet tilted her head.

“What is it?”

“Your first paycheck.”

The word meant nothing to her.

“Pay… check?”

Emily smiled.

“It means you got paid for your work.”

Neferet accepted the envelope carefully.

As if it might contain something fragile.

Or sacred.

John watched from the doorway.

Jack leaned against the counter.

Dr. Mitchell, as usual, looked like he was documenting a historical anomaly.

Neferet opened it slowly.

Inside was a piece of paper.

And numbers.

She frowned.

“This is… currency?”

“Yes,” John said.

Neferet studied it.

Very still.

Very focused.

Then she asked quietly:

“This is from my work?”

“Yes.”

A pause.

“All of it?”

“Yes.”

She looked up.

“I earned this by doing tasks.”

Emily nodded.

“Exactly.”

Neferet looked down again.

Her expression changed slightly.

Not confusion.

Not surprise.

Something deeper.

Understanding.

She held the paper carefully in both hands.

“In Egypt,” she said slowly, “people were given roles at birth.”

John nodded.

“And they did not choose them,” she continued.

“Most didn’t,” John said.

Neferet looked at the paycheck again.

“But here…”

A pause.

“…I chose.”

Emily smiled softly.

“Yeah.”

“And then I was given this.”

“Yes.”

Neferet exhaled slowly.

“This is very strange.”

Jack chuckled.

“That’s the understatement of the year.”

Neferet ignored him.

Her focus was elsewhere.

“This means my effort… became value.”

John nodded.

“That’s one way to put it.”

Neferet looked up.

“In my time, value came from status.”

A pause.

“Here, it comes from contribution.”

The room went quiet.

Even Jack stopped smiling.

Even Emily stopped joking.

Because she had just described something fundamental.

Later that evening, Neferet insisted on going out alone with John.

Just a walk.

Nothing more.

They walked through the neighborhood as the sun began to set.

The sky turned orange.

The world grew soft and quiet.

Neferet carried the envelope in her hand.

Still.

Carefully.

Like it might disappear if she let go.

John glanced at her.

“So… how does it feel?”

Neferet thought for a moment.

“Different.”

“That’s vague.”

She nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“Intentionally so.”

John smiled slightly.

“Fair.”

They walked a little further.

Neferet looked at the houses.

The streets.

The people living ordinary lives.

Then she said:

“In my world, I was born into importance.”

A pause.

“I did nothing to earn it.”

John listened quietly.

“This world is the opposite,” she continued.

“I did nothing to belong here.”

A pause.

“But I am beginning to earn it.”

John looked at her.

“You already belong.”

Neferet shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“I am becoming someone who belongs.”

That distinction mattered to her.

Back at the Carter house, Emily had prepared something special.

Not a feast.

Not a ceremony.

Just dinner.

But Neferet noticed something unusual.

Everyone had gathered.

John.

Emily.

Jack.

Even Dr. Mitchell had made time.

Emily smiled.

“We’re celebrating your first paycheck.”

Neferet blinked.

“I did not know this was a celebration.”

John shrugged.

“We made it one.”

Neferet sat slowly.

She looked at each of them.

One by one.

“This is unnecessary.”

Emily grinned.

“Probably.”

“But appreciated,” John added.

Neferet considered this.

Then nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“It is appreciated.”

After dinner, Neferet stepped outside alone.

The night was calm.

Stars faintly visible above the city lights.

She opened the envelope again.

Looked at the paper inside.

A record of her effort.

A symbol of her contribution.

Proof that she was no longer just a visitor.

She whispered softly:

“I earned this.”

A pause.

Then again, quieter:

“I am real here.”

Behind her, John stepped outside.

He didn’t interrupt.

Just stood beside her.

Neferet didn’t look away from the paper.

“I think I understand something now,” she said.

“What’s that?” John asked.

She smiled faintly.

“In your world…”

A pause.

“…time is not the only thing that moves forward.”

John nodded slowly.

“Yeah.”

Neferet folded the envelope carefully.

“And I am moving forward too.”

She looked at him then.

Not as a princess.

Not as a stranger.

Not as a visitor.

But as someone building a life.

“I like this feeling,” she said.

John smiled.

“Good.”

Neferet nodded once.

“Do not let me stop.”

And for the first time since arriving in the future…

Neferet was not being carried by time.

She was walking with it.

End of Chapter Thirteen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Fourteen: The World in a Box

Neferet had already accepted many impossible things about the future.

Fire without flame.

Voices inside stones.

Birds made of metal.

And cities that never slept.

But nothing prepared her for a world inside a box.

It began in the evening.

The Carter household was quiet.

Emily was in the kitchen.

John was reviewing notes.

Neferet was sitting on the living room floor reading one of her library books.

Then Emily said casually:

“I’m going to turn on the TV.”

Neferet looked up.

“TV?”

Emily pointed at a large black rectangle mounted on the wall.

“It tells stories.”

Neferet immediately closed her book.

“That is not possible.”

Emily smiled.

“We’ll see.”

She pressed a button.

The black rectangle lit up instantly.

Neferet froze.

Color exploded across the surface.

Sound filled the room.

A moving image appeared as if the wall itself had opened into another world.

Neferet slowly stood.

“No.”

A city appeared on the screen.

People speaking.

Moving.

Laughing.

Living.

But trapped inside a glowing frame.

Neferet stepped closer.

“What is this?”

“Television,” John said.

Neferet shook her head slowly.

“This is a window.”

Emily laughed.

“Kind of.”

Neferet approached even more cautiously.

Her face inches from the screen.

The people inside did not notice her.

They could not.

They were elsewhere.

Yet visible.

Yet present.

“This is sorcery,” she said quietly.

“It’s broadcasting,” John corrected.

Neferet didn’t look at him.

“The dead speak from another world.”

John sighed.

The program changed.

A narrator’s voice filled the room.

Serious.

Calm.

Educational.

A title appeared:

THE HISTORY OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION

Neferet blinked.

“Civilization?”

Then images began.

Ancient cities.

Warfare.

Discovery.

Exploration.

Machines evolving.

Skies filled with aircraft.

Oceans crossed by ships.

Neferet sat down slowly.

“John…”

“Yes?”

“This is after Egypt.”

“Yes.”

A pause.

“After my Egypt?”

“Yes.”

She stared at the screen.

Thousands of years passed in minutes.

Entire kingdoms rose and fell.

Empires built and vanished.

Languages changed.

Borders shifted.

Neferet did not speak.

Not because she did not understand.

But because she understood too much at once.

The documentary continued.

The Industrial Revolution.

Electricity.

Space travel.

The Moon landing.

Computers.

The internet.

Neferet slowly raised her hand.

Not toward John.

Not toward Emily.

But toward the screen.

As if she might stop time itself.

“Stop.”

Emily quickly reached for the remote.

“Okay, pause it.”

The image froze.

Silence filled the room.

Neferet stared at the frozen world.

“I was… not there.”

John softened.

“No.”

She turned to him.

Her voice quieter now.

“I lived. I ruled. I existed.”

A pause.

“But all of this happened without me.”

John didn’t answer immediately.

Because there was no easy answer.

Neferet sat back slowly.

Her hands rested in her lap.

Perfect posture.

Still royal.

But changed.

“I thought I understood time,” she said.

John leaned forward slightly.

“What do you mean?”

She looked at him.

“In my world, time was a river that carried my life.”

A pause.

“But here…”

She gestured toward the screen.

“…it is an ocean that swallowed entire worlds.”

Emily whispered:

“That’s… actually poetic.”

Neferet didn’t smile.

Not yet.

She stood again.

Walked closer to the screen.

Studying frozen images of modern cities.

“So many people.”

“Yes,” John said.

“So many lives.”

“Yes.”

She turned slightly.

“And I was one small moment in their beginning.”

John nodded slowly.

Neferet finally asked the question she had been forming.

“Do they remember Egypt?”

John hesitated.

“Some do.”

“Not all?”

“No.”

A long silence.

Neferet looked at the frozen world again.

Then softly:

“Then I am not missing history.”

A pause.

“I am only missing memory.”

Emily looked at her.

“What’s the difference?”

Neferet answered without turning.

“History is what happens.”

“Memory is what remains.”

The room went still.

Even the television seemed quieter.

John stepped closer.

“You didn’t miss your life, Neferet.”

She finally looked at him.

“You are wrong.”

A pause.

“I missed all of theirs.”

John nodded slowly.

“That’s true.”

Then added:

“But you’re here now.”

Neferet studied him.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“And now I am part of what comes next.”

Emily smiled softly.

“That’s the idea.”

Neferet slowly sat back down.

The television resumed playing.

But she no longer stared at it with shock.

Now it was something else.

Understanding mixed with awe.

“So this is your world’s memory,” she said.

John nodded.

“Yeah.”

She watched a city move across the screen.

Then whispered:

“It is very loud.”

Emily laughed softly.

“Yeah. That too.”

Neferet tilted her head slightly.

“In Egypt, we carved memory into stone.”

A pause.

“Here, you make it move.”

John smiled.

“That’s one way to put it.”

Later that night, Neferet sat alone in the dim glow of the television.

It was off now.

Just a dark mirror again.

But she still saw it differently.

Not a box.

Not a window.

Not magic.

A record of time she had not lived.

She placed her hand gently on the screen.

“I was not forgotten,” she whispered.

A pause.

“I simply arrived late.”

Behind her, John stood quietly.

Listening.

And for the first time, Neferet did not feel erased by time.

She felt carried by it.

End of Chapter Fourteen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Fifteen: Ethan Blake

Neferet had learned to recognize many kinds of people in the modern world.

The hurried.

The distracted.

The kind.

The curious.

And the ones who looked at her as if she were a puzzle they intended to solve.

Ethan Blake belonged to the last category.

It happened at the office where Neferet worked.

A place of quiet desks, glowing screens, and controlled motion.

She was sorting documents when the atmosphere subtly changed.

People stood a little straighter.

Voices lowered.

Attention shifted.

“He’s here,” someone whispered.

Neferet looked up.

A man entered the office.

Well-dressed.

Confident.

Composed.

The kind of presence that filled a room without effort.

“This is Ethan Blake,” her supervisor said quietly.

“Executive director.”

Neferet inclined her head politely.

Not a bow.

But something close.

Ethan Blake noticed immediately.

Not just her greeting.

But her.

His gaze lingered for a moment longer than necessary.

Curious.

Measuring.

After the meeting, he approached her desk.

“You must be Neferet,” he said.

“Yes,” she replied.

A pause.

“You’re… new here.”

“I am learning your world,” she said carefully.

He smiled slightly.

“That’s one way to put it.”

Neferet studied him.

He was different from others.

Not afraid.

Not dismissive.

Interested.

“Do you enjoy your work?” he asked.

Neferet considered.

“I am learning to be useful.”

That answer made him pause.

“Most people don’t phrase it like that.”

“I am not most people.”

A faint smile crossed his face.

“I can see that.”

Over the following days, Ethan Blake found reasons to return.

At first, it seemed professional.

Questions about workflow.

Observations about performance.

General oversight.

But gradually…

it became something else.

He watched her work.

The way she listened before speaking.

The way she studied systems as if they were living languages.

The way she never pretended to understand what she did not know.

One afternoon, he asked:

“You always think before you answer.”

Neferet looked up.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“In my time,” she said, “words were not casual.”

He tilted his head.

“And now?”

“They are faster.”

A pause.

“But still important.”

He smiled.

“You’re not wrong.”

That evening, he walked her out of the building.

It was not required.

It was not scheduled.

It simply happened.

Outside, the city moved around them.

Cars.

Lights.

Noise.

Modern life in motion.

Ethan Blake glanced at her.

“You don’t seem intimidated by any of this.”

Neferet considered the question.

“I was at first.”

“And now?”

She looked at the skyline.

“Now I understand that your world is not stronger than mine.”

A pause.

“It is simply… different.”

That answer intrigued him more than anything else she had said.

They stopped near a café.

He gestured slightly.

“Would you like coffee?”

Neferet frowned.

“I have tried it.”

“And?”

“It is bitter water that pretends to be important.”

He laughed.

“I’ll take that as a no.”

She corrected gently:

“I will take tea.”

“Of course you will.”

Something like amusement crossed his expression.

But beneath it…

curiosity deepened.

Over the next week, Ethan Blake learned more about her.

Not through official channels.

Through observation.

Through conversation.

Through time.

He learned she was not simply foreign.

She was displaced across centuries.

A historical anomaly living in modern systems.

But what fascinated him most was not her origin.

It was her presence.

She did not behave like someone overwhelmed.

She behaved like someone adapting with intent.

One afternoon, he said quietly:

“You don’t belong to this era.”

Neferet looked at him calmly.

“I know.”

“Does that bother you?”

She thought for a moment.

“No.”

A pause.

“I am becoming part of it anyway.”

That answer stayed with him longer than expected.

Ethan Blake was used to impressive people.

Successful people.

Strategic people.

People who dominated rooms.

But Neferet was not like that.

She did not compete.

She did not perform.

She simply existed with clarity.

One evening, as they stood outside the office again, he said:

“You’re unusual.”

Neferet nodded.

“I am aware.”

He smiled faintly.

“That’s not a criticism.”

“I know.”

A pause.

“You are fascinated.”

That stopped him.

Only briefly.

Then he admitted it.

“Yes.”

Neferet studied him carefully.

Not alarmed.

Not impressed.

Just observing.

“Fascination can become distraction,” she said.

He nodded slowly.

“Or understanding.”

She accepted that without argument.

Later that night, Neferet returned home.

John noticed her expression immediately.

“Long day?”

She shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“I met someone who looks at me as if I am a story he wants to read.”

John’s expression tightened slightly.

“And how do you feel about that?”

Neferet thought carefully.

“I do not yet know.”

A pause.

“But I prefer those who try to read me… over those who ignore me.”

John said nothing.

But he understood the difference.

Far across the city, Ethan Blake stood in his office overlooking the lights.

Thinking.

Not about business.

Not about success.

But about a woman who spoke like she belonged to another century…

yet moved like she belonged nowhere else.

And for the first time in a long time…

he was uncertain what he was looking at.

A mystery.

Or a person.

End of Chapter Fifteen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Seventeen: Dinner Invitation

Neferet had become accustomed to invitations.

They were a modern invention she still found mildly suspicious.

In Egypt, invitations carried weight—political meaning, ritual obligation, hidden expectation.

In the present day, they often meant: *we are going to eat somewhere with chairs that cost more than they should.*

Still, when Ethan Blake invited her to dinner, she said yes.

It happened at the end of a workday.

Neferet was gathering her things when Ethan approached her desk.

“Would you join me for dinner this evening?” he asked.

No hesitation.

No overexplaining.

Just direct.

Neferet looked up.

Then tilted her head slightly.

“Is this a work matter?”

A faint smile.

“No.”

“Then it is personal.”

“Yes.”

She considered this carefully.

Then nodded.

“Very well.”

From across the office, John, who had been picking her up, heard the exchange.

He froze slightly.

Emily noticed immediately.

“Oh,” she murmured. “This is going to be interesting.”

Later, in the car, John tried to keep his tone neutral.

“So… dinner?”

“Yes,” Neferet said.

“With Ethan.”

“Yes.”

A pause.

“Just dinner?”

Neferet looked at him.

“Yes.”

Another pause.

Longer this time.

John nodded slowly.

“Okay.”

But it was not a very convincing “okay.”

Neferet noticed.

“You are uneasy.”

“I’m not uneasy.”

She raised an eyebrow.

He corrected himself.

“I am… mildly aware of possible complications.”

Neferet processed that.

Then replied:

“There are no complications.”

John exhaled.

“That’s what people always say before complications.”

She did not respond.

But she remembered that phrase.

The restaurant was modern.

Quiet lighting.

Carefully arranged tables.

Soft music.

The kind of place where conversations were expected to be restrained.

Ethan Blake stood when they arrived.

Polite.

Composed.

John noticed immediately:

No arrogance.

No performance.

Just calm presence.

“Thank you for coming,” Ethan said.

Neferet nodded.

“You invited.”

That made him smile slightly.

“Yes. I did.”

They sat.

John chose the seat closest to Neferet.

Subtle.

Not obvious.

At least to him.

Ethan noticed anyway.

But said nothing.

The waiter arrived.

Menus were placed on the table.

Neferet studied hers carefully.

“These words are decorative,” she said.

John glanced over.

“They’re describing food.”

“I understand.”

A pause.

“But also decorative.”

Ethan smiled faintly.

“I think that’s fair.”

She selected something simple.

John did the same.

Ethan chose last.

The conversation began cautiously.

Ethan spoke first.

“I hope your work is going well.”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

“And your adjustment to… everything?”

She thought for a moment.

Then answered honestly.

“It is ongoing.”

John relaxed slightly.

This was manageable.

As food arrived, the conversation became less structured.

More natural.

Ethan asked:

“What did you think of your first month here?”

Neferet replied without hesitation.

“I thought your world was magic pretending to be logic.”

John almost choked on his drink.

Ethan laughed softly.

“That’s… surprisingly accurate from your perspective.”

Neferet nodded.

“It remains partially accurate.”

John leaned back slightly.

“Okay, that’s going to be quoted somewhere, I just know it.”

As the evening continued, John observed quietly.

Ethan was attentive.

Not intrusive.

Not dominating.

Just present.

Listening more than speaking.

That was what made John uneasy.

Not behavior.

Intent.

Or lack of obvious intent.

Neferet, meanwhile, seemed relaxed.

Not guarded.

Not suspicious.

Simply engaged.

That was even more unsettling.

At one point, Ethan asked:

“What do you miss most about Egypt?”

Neferet paused.

Longer than usual.

Then answered:

“The certainty.”

Ethan nodded slowly.

“That makes sense.”

John watched carefully.

Waiting for something to shift.

But it didn’t.

Instead, Ethan asked:

“And what do you prefer about here?”

Neferet considered again.

Then said:

“Choice.”

A simple answer.

But it changed the tone of the table.

The meal ended without incident.

No tension escalated.

No conflict emerged.

Just conversation.

Outside the restaurant, Ethan thanked them again.

John shook his hand briefly.

Measured.

Careful.

Neferet looked between them.

Then said:

“I enjoyed this.”

Ethan smiled.

“So did I.”

John didn’t answer immediately.

Then added:

“Yeah. It was… fine.”

Neferet glanced at him.

“You are still uneasy.”

John sighed.

“I’m working on it.”

Ethan stepped back slightly.

“I understand,” he said simply.

No offense.

No challenge.

Just acknowledgment.

That, strangely, made John even more cautious.

On the drive home, Neferet looked out the window.

“That was different,” she said.

John nodded.

“Yeah.”

A pause.

“Different good?” he asked.

Neferet considered.

“I think so.”

John didn’t respond immediately.

Then finally:

“As long as it stays just dinner.”

Neferet looked at him.

“I believe it will.”

And she meant it.

But in another part of the city, Ethan Blake stood alone for a moment outside the restaurant, thinking not about dinner…

but about the woman who treated truth as naturally as breathing.

And how dangerous it was to misunderstand calm certainty as distance.

End of Chapter Seventeen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Eighteen: Loyalty

Neferet had learned that modern people often spoke directly, but rarely simply.

Ethan Blake was not most people.

And tonight, he spoke with unusual simplicity.

It was late.

The city lights blurred softly against the night sky.

Neferet had just finished her shift when Ethan asked if he could walk with her.

She agreed.

It had become a habit—these quiet walks after conversations that never felt finished.

They moved side by side along a quiet street.

No rush.

No pressure.

Just distance unfolding beneath their steps.

Ethan spoke first.

“You are difficult to understand,” he said.

Neferet nodded.

“I am aware.”

“That’s not a complaint.”

“I know.”

A pause.

“It is a reason people approach me,” she added.

Ethan glanced at her.

“Yes.”

That single word carried more weight than usual.

They walked a little further before he spoke again.

“I should be honest with you.”

Neferet slowed slightly.

Then stopped.

She turned toward him.

“In your world,” she said calmly, “honesty is usually followed by change.”

Ethan smiled faintly.

“Sometimes.”

A pause.

“This may be one of those times.”

He looked at her directly.

No hesitation now.

No careful distance.

Just clarity.

“I am attracted to you,” he said.

The words hung in the air.

Simple.

Undisguised.

Neferet did not flinch.

Did not step back.

Did not pretend not to understand.

Instead, she nodded once.

“I understand.”

That was all.

Ethan blinked slightly.

He had expected confusion.

Or discomfort.

Or uncertainty.

Instead, she gave him calm recognition.

After a moment, he added:

“I didn’t intend for it to become complicated.”

Neferet replied:

“It is not complicated for me.”

That surprised him.

He studied her carefully.

“And for you it is…?”

Neferet considered the question with precision.

“Clear.”

A pause.

“My loyalty belongs to John.”

The answer was not emotional.

It was factual.

Ethan absorbed that silently.

He looked away briefly, toward the streetlights.

Then nodded slowly.

“I see.”

Neferet continued, not unkindly:

“You have not done anything wrong.”

A faint, almost self-aware smile crossed his face.

“That’s usually the part that matters least in situations like this.”

Neferet tilted her head.

“Why?”

Ethan exhaled softly.

“Because feelings don’t require permission.”

She considered that.

Then replied:

“In my time, they often did.”

That difference lingered between them.

Ethan walked again, slower now.

Neferet matched his pace.

“Tell me something,” he said.

“Yes?”

“You say your loyalty belongs to John.”

“Yes.”

“Is that because he brought you here?”

Neferet shook her head immediately.

“No.”

A pause.

“It is because he did not treat me as something to possess.”

Ethan listened closely.

“He treats me as someone who chooses.”

A pause.

“And I chose him.”

The words were simple.

But absolute.

They walked in silence for a while.

The city continued around them—unaware of the conversation unfolding between two people who understood each other too well and not enough at the same time.

Finally, Ethan spoke.

“I respect that.”

Neferet nodded.

“I expected you would.”

A faint smile returned to his expression.

“You are very certain about people.”

“I observe carefully,” she replied.

“That sounds exhausting.”

“It is not.”

A pause.

“It is necessary.”

There was no confrontation.

No argument.

No emotional collapse.

Just acceptance of a boundary drawn clearly and calmly.

Ethan stopped walking.

Neferet stopped with him.

“I won’t interfere,” he said.

Neferet nodded once.

“I know.”

“And I won’t pretend I didn’t feel what I felt.”

She replied:

“I would not ask you to.”

That honesty, strangely, softened the moment rather than breaking it.

Ethan looked at her for a long moment.

Then said quietly:

“You are unlike anyone I’ve ever met.”

Neferet responded simply:

“I am from another time.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

She waited.

He continued:

“You don’t hesitate when you know something.”

“You don’t disguise your intentions.”

“And you don’t bend your truth to make others comfortable.”

Neferet considered that.

Then nodded.

“In Egypt,” she said, “truth was often dangerous.”

A pause.

“In your world, it is simply… rare.”

Ethan smiled faintly.

“That might be accurate.”

They parted near the edge of the street.

No tension remained.

Only understanding of limits.

“Goodnight, Neferet,” Ethan said.

“Goodnight,” she replied.

Then, after a pause:

“Thank you for speaking honestly.”

He nodded once.

“And thank you for not pretending.”

She turned and walked away.

Later that night, Neferet told John what had happened.

She did not hide it.

Did not soften it.

Did not dramatize it.

John listened in silence.

When she finished, he asked quietly:

“And you’re sure?”

Neferet nodded.

“My loyalty is not uncertain.”

John studied her face.

Then nodded slowly.

“Okay.”

A pause.

“That’s all I needed to know.”

Neferet tilted her head.

“That is enough?”

John gave a small, tired smile.

“For now.”

And in that simple exchange, nothing changed outwardly…

but something important settled quietly between them.

End of Chapter Eighteen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Nineteen: Admiration

After clarity comes something quieter.

Respect.

And sometimes, if one is not careful…

admiration.

Ethan Blake did not disappear.

He also did not overstep.

He simply adjusted.

Where once he had visited often, he now visited less.

Where once conversations carried curiosity with tension beneath it, they now carried ease.

Neferet noticed the change immediately.

“You are different,” she said one afternoon at the office.

Ethan looked up from a document.

“I am?”

“Yes.”

A pause.

“You are more… steady.”

That made him smile faintly.

“Is that good or bad?”

Neferet considered.

“Neutral.”

He accepted that without offense.

“Neutral is acceptable.”

Their conversations became simpler.

Less charged.

More balanced.

Ethan no longer tried to define her.

He observed instead.

Not as a puzzle.

But as a person with edges he would not cross.

One afternoon, he said:

“I respect your decision.”

Neferet nodded.

“I know.”

A pause.

“That is why you remain comfortable to speak with.”

He raised an eyebrow slightly.

“So comfort requires restraint?”

“In this case,” she said, “yes.”

That answer stayed with him longer than expected.

It did not happen all at once.

There was no single moment.

No revelation.

No emotional pivot.

Instead, it grew quietly.

Like something taking root in soil that had already been prepared.

He began to notice things he had previously overlooked.

The way she listened without interrupting.

The way she never sought validation.

The way she carried certainty without arrogance.

The way she chose honesty even when ambiguity would have been easier.

And perhaps most significantly—

the way she did not need anything from him.

That last part unsettled him more than he admitted.

They met again at the same café.

Familiar now.

Predictable in a comforting way.

Ethan studied her for a moment before speaking.

“You handled that conversation between us well,” he said.

Neferet tilted her head.

“Which conversation?”

“The one where I admitted my feelings.”

She nodded once.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“You did as well,” she added.

That made him smile.

“I suppose I did.”

He stirred his coffee slowly.

“Most people would have made it complicated.”

Neferet replied:

“Most people prefer complication when clarity is uncomfortable.”

He looked at her.

“And you don’t?”

“No.”

A pause.

“I prefer truth, even when it narrows possibility.”

Ethan absorbed that quietly.

“That’s rare,” he said.

Neferet corrected gently:

“It should not be.”

Later, as they walked outside, Ethan spoke more openly than before.

Not emotionally.

But honestly.

“I think I understand something about you now,” he said.

Neferet looked at him.

“What is that?”

He considered carefully.

“You are not trying to be exceptional.”

She nodded.

“No.”

“You simply are.”

That made her pause.

“That is not how I see it.”

“How do you see it?”

“I am adapting.”

A pause.

“To a world that already exists without me.”

Ethan shook his head slightly.

“That might be the most extraordinary thing about you.”

Neferet did not respond immediately.

She rarely accepted praise easily.

Instead she said:

“I am not extraordinary here.”

Ethan replied:

“You are to me.”

That was not a confession.

Not anymore.

It was observation.

They stopped walking near the edge of the street.

City lights reflected softly on wet pavement.

Ethan spoke quietly:

“I am glad we are still speaking.”

Neferet nodded.

“As am I.”

A pause.

“You are no longer pursuing anything,” she said.

“No.”

“That is good.”

He smiled faintly.

“I thought so too.”

A beat of silence.

“Then what are we?” he asked.

Neferet answered without hesitation.

“Friends.”

Simple.

Clean.

Uncomplicated.

Ethan repeated the word softly.

“Friends.”

He nodded once.

“I can accept that.”

Neferet tilted her head slightly.

“You do not sound disappointed.”

“I’m not.”

A pause.

“I think I understand now what I was actually drawn to.”

She waited.

He continued:

“Not a possibility.”

“But a perspective.”

Neferet accepted that without reaction.

It fit.

That evening, Ethan stood alone in his office afterward, looking out over the city.

He no longer felt conflict.

Nor pursuit.

Instead, something more stable had replaced it.

Respect.

Clarity.

Admiration without demand.

“She doesn’t bend to the world,” he said quietly.

“She moves through it.”

And for the first time since meeting her…

he understood that not all connections are meant to be possessed.

Some are simply meant to be witnessed.

Neferet returned home later that night.

John was reading.

Emily was cooking.

The house was warm with ordinary life.

“You are thinking,” John said.

“Yes,” she replied.

“About Ethan?”

She nodded.

“And?”

“He understands now.”

A pause.

“We are friends.”

John studied her expression.

“You’re okay with that?”

Neferet considered.

Then nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“It is enough.”

And for the first time in that part of her life…

there was no tension left to resolve.

Only balance.

End of Chapter Nineteen

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty: The Woman Out of Time

Neferet did not intend to become known.

In her experience, attention was something that found you only when you were tied to power, crisis, or ceremony.

But in the modern world, attention had a different logic.

It followed interest.

And Neferet had become… interesting.

It started quietly.

A comment overheard.

A story retold.

A moment misremembered in a way that made it more memorable.

“She said she’s from ancient Egypt.”

“No, seriously.”

“And she meant it.”

At first, people laughed.

Then they asked questions.

Then they started listening more carefully when she spoke.

Neferet noticed the change but did not fully understand it.

One coworker finally asked her directly:

“Do you actually believe you’re from ancient Egypt?”

Neferet replied calmly:

“I do not believe it.”

A pause.

“I remember it.”

The coworker walked away unsure whether to be amused or unsettled.

Ethan Blake watched this evolution with interest.

Not as an executive now.

Not as someone trying to define her.

But as someone watching a phenomenon develop.

“She’s becoming a reference point,” he said one afternoon to a colleague.

“A what?”

“People quote her.”

It was true.

Not formally.

Not publicly.

But informally, constantly.

Her way of describing things had begun to spread.

“Talking rocks.”

“Invisible fire.”

“Garden of the Gods.”

“The world inside a box.”

They were not jokes.

Not exactly.

They were interpretations.

And they stuck.

The more people interacted with Neferet, the same pattern emerged.

She did not flatter.

She did not exaggerate.

She did not soften meaning to make others comfortable.

She simply described what she saw.

And because of that, people began to trust her.

Not because she agreed with them.

But because she did not manipulate them.

At lunch one day, a colleague said:

“She’s weird… but she’s never fake.”

Another replied:

“That’s rare.”

And that became the quiet consensus.

Neferet began eating lunch with different groups.

At first out of politeness.

Later out of habit.

Eventually out of invitation.

One day, someone asked:

“What do you think of modern life?”

Neferet considered carefully.

Then answered:

“It is efficient.”

A pause.

“And emotionally complicated.”

Someone laughed.

“That’s… accurate, honestly.”

She continued:

“In my time, emotions were simple because survival was complex.”

She looked around the table.

“Here, survival is simple. So emotions become complex.”

Silence followed.

Not uncomfortable.

Reflective.

Then someone said quietly:

“That’s actually kind of deep.”

Neferet nodded once.

“I am told this often.”

Without her knowing, stories about her began circulating beyond her immediate workplace.

A colleague mentioned her in a blog post.

A visitor repeated her phrases online.

A short article appeared describing:

“The woman who speaks like history remembering itself.”

Neferet did not read it.

She would not have understood why it mattered.

But Ethan did.

And John did.

And Emily definitely did.

At home one evening, John brought it up carefully.

“People are starting to notice you,” he said.

Neferet looked up from her book.

“Yes.”

“That doesn’t concern you?”

She thought for a moment.

“No.”

A pause.

“They are not misrepresenting me.”

John frowned slightly.

“That’s not always how attention works.”

Neferet closed her book.

“I have been a princess.”

A pause.

“I understand attention.”

That ended the discussion more firmly than John intended.

Ethan Blake, however, saw something else entirely.

He spoke about it once with Neferet directly.

“You are becoming known,” he said.

Neferet tilted her head.

“I did not intend this.”

“I don’t think it matters whether you intended it.”

She waited.

“You are honest in a way people are not used to.”

A pause.

“And they are responding to that.”

Neferet considered this.

Then said:

“That seems inefficient.”

Ethan smiled faintly.

“Maybe.”

One afternoon, someone in the office referred to her quietly:

“The woman out of time.”

Neferet heard it.

She paused.

Then repeated it softly:

“Out of time.”

She did not object.

Did not embrace it.

Did not reject it.

She simply asked:

“Is that accurate?”

The coworker hesitated.

Then answered:

“Yes… I think so.”

Neferet nodded.

“Then it is acceptable.”

And that was how it stayed.

Not a title she chose.

Not a role she sought.

But a description others used when they ran out of simpler words.

That night, Ethan and John spoke briefly outside the house.

Neferet was inside reading.

“She’s becoming something of a figure,” Ethan said.

John sighed.

“I’ve noticed.”

“Is that a problem?”

John looked toward the window where her silhouette sat quietly with a book.

“I don’t know yet.”

A pause.

“She just wanted a place to work.”

Ethan nodded.

“And now she’s becoming something people interpret.”

John replied quietly:

“That’s what worries me.”

Inside, Neferet turned a page.

Unaware that the world around her was slowly reshaping itself around her presence.

Not because she demanded it.

But because she spoke in a language people could not ignore.

End of Chapter Twenty

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-One: Dreams

Neferet had learned to live in two worlds.

One was made of glass, electricity, and motion that never slept.

The other was made of memory.

But until now, the second world had only visited her while she was awake.

It began without warning.

No ceremony of sleep.

No gradual descent.

Just darkness—

then sand.

Neferet stood barefoot on warm ground.

The air was still.

Heavy with heat and something older than language.

Egypt.

But not the Egypt she had studied in history books.

Not the Egypt John showed her on screens.

Not even the Egypt she remembered from the portal's reflection.

This was her Egypt.

Alive.

Breathing.

Whole.

She turned slowly.

The horizon stretched endlessly.

Pyramids in the distance.

Workers moving like shadows of memory.

The Nile reflecting light like liquid time.

And then she saw her.

At first, only a figure.

Standing near the river.

Watching.

Waiting.

Neferet's breath caught.

Because even in dreams, recognition is immediate.

"Mother…"

The woman turned.

Her face was familiar in a way that bypassed time.

Not perfect memory.

Not imagination.

Something deeper.

Her mother smiled.

Not wide.

Not dramatic.

Just… present.

"You have traveled far," she said.

Neferet took a step forward.

“I did not choose to leave.”

Her mother nodded gently.

“I know.”

The words were not accusation.

Not grief.

Only understanding.

Neferet looked around again.

The world felt unchanged and impossibly different at the same time.

“I thought I would forget this place,” she said softly.

Her mother stepped closer.

“But you did not.”

“I have forgotten so many things,” Neferet replied.

A pause.

“Names. Faces. Sounds.”

Her mother reached out—not quite touching her, but close enough that Neferet felt it.

“But not this,” she said.

Neferet shook her head slightly.

“No.”

A pause.

“I remember everything here.”

Her mother studied her carefully.

“And there?”

Neferet hesitated.

The question meant the modern world.

The present.

The place she had been living.

“I am learning it,” she said.

Her mother nodded slowly.

“As you once learned this one.”

The river flowed beside them.

Slow.

Endless.

Unbothered by their conversation.

Neferet watched it.

“I thought time would feel different when I returned.”

Her mother replied:

“You did not return.”

Neferet looked at her sharply.

“What do you mean?”

“You are only visiting again,” her mother said softly.

“In memory.”

The words unsettled her.

Neferet shook her head.

“I live elsewhere now.”

Her mother smiled faintly.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“And yet you still come here.”

Neferet could not deny it.

Her voice lowered.

“If I stay there too long…”

A pause.

“Do I become less of this place?”

Her mother tilted her head.

“Do you think you have already become less?”

Neferet did not answer immediately.

Because she did not know.

Finally:

“I feel… divided.”

Her mother nodded.

“That is the price of movement.”

Neferet frowned slightly.

“I did not choose it.”

Her mother’s expression softened.

“Few who move through time ever choose all of it.”

The wind shifted slightly across the sand.

Not enough to disturb the world.

Just enough to remind her it was alive.

Her mother spoke again.

“You worry you belong nowhere.”

Neferet did not deny it.

“Yes.”

Her mother stepped closer now.

This time, her presence felt stronger.

More certain.

“Then you are mistaken.”

Neferet looked up.

“You belong to the places that remember you,” her mother said.

A pause.

“And you belong to the places you choose to return to.”

Neferet’s breath slowed.

“That is not how John explains belonging,” she said quietly.

Her mother smiled gently.

“John speaks of the present.”

A pause.

“I speak of memory.”

Neferet felt the world beginning to soften.

The edges of the river blurred.

The pyramids distant and unreal again.

“No,” she whispered.

Her mother shook her head slightly.

“Sleep does not keep things.”

Neferet stepped forward.

“Stay.”

Her mother smiled with quiet sadness.

“I am already with you.”

A pause.

“In everything you remember.”

The sand began to dissolve.

The light thinned.

The world of Egypt faded like ink in water.

Neferet woke suddenly.

Sitting upright.

Breath uneven.

Heart steadying slowly.

Dark room.

Modern silence.

The hum of distant electronics.

The present.

But her mother’s voice remained.

Not as sound.

As meaning.

“You belong to the places that remember you.”

Neferet placed a hand on her chest.

Not frightened.

Not confused.

Just still.

Outside her room, the modern world continued without pause.

Inside her, something older had stirred.

And would not fully quiet again.

End of Chapter Twenty-One

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Two: The Sister She Left Behind

Dreams did not come every night.

But when they did, they no longer felt like dreams.

They felt like return visits to a place that still knew her name.

This time, Neferet did not fall into sleep so much as step into it.

One moment: her room in the modern world.

The next: stone pathways warmed by sun.

But she was not alone this time.

Someone was running toward her.

Smaller steps.

Lighter movement.

Familiar energy.

Neferet's breath caught before she even saw her clearly.

"Sister…"

The girl stopped in front of her.

Young.

Bright-eyed.

Alive in a way only childhood allows.

And she smiled.

As if no time had passed at all.

Neferet knelt instinctively.

Not as a ritual.

As recognition.

“My sister,” she whispered.

The girl tilted her head.

“You came back.”

The words were simple.

Too simple for what they carried.

Neferet’s throat tightened.

“I did not choose to leave.”

Her sister stepped closer.

“You were gone.”

Neferet closed her eyes briefly.

“I know.”

The world around them was Egypt, but softened.

Not historical.

Not literal.

A version shaped by memory itself.

The river shimmered in the distance.

The air carried warmth without threat.

Time did not feel like something that passed.

Only something that waited.

Her sister walked beside her now.

Barefoot.

Unbothered.

“Everything changed after you left,” she said.

Neferet looked at her.

“I did not know.”

Her sister smiled faintly.

“You would not have been there to stop it anyway.”

That sentence struck deeper than accusation.

It was acceptance.

They sat near the riverbank.

Silence between them was not empty.

It was filled with years that could not be spoken aloud.

Neferet finally asked:

“Did you think I forgot you?”

Her sister looked at her.

“No.”

A pause.

“We thought you were taken.”

Neferet lowered her gaze.

“I was.”

Her sister studied her carefully.

“By what?”

Neferet hesitated.

The truth was too large for simple explanation.

Too strange for belief.

“A future that does not know you,” she said finally.

Her sister frowned slightly.

“That sounds lonely.”

Neferet did not deny it.

“Yes.”

Her sister picked up a small stone and turned it in her hands.

“Do they treat you well there?” she asked.

Neferet considered carefully.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“They are not unkind.”

“That is not the same as home.”

Neferet nodded.

“I know.”

A silence followed.

Not heavy.

But honest.

Then her sister asked quietly:

“Do you want to stay there?”

Neferet did not answer immediately.

Because the truth was not simple.

“I have built something there,” she said finally.

Her sister looked at her.

“And here?”

Neferet’s voice softened.

“Here I am remembered.”

The wind shifted across the river again.

This time colder.

Not threatening.

Just real.

Neferet’s sister reached for her hand.

This time, she held it.

“You look sad,” her sister said.

Neferet immediately shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

But her sister did not let go.

“You are,” she said gently.

Neferet looked away.

“I am not allowed to be.”

Her sister frowned.

“Who said that?”

Neferet hesitated.

Then answered softly:

“No one.”

A pause.

“Everyone.”

That was enough.

Her sister squeezed her hand.

“You can tell me.”

Neferet closed her eyes.

For a moment, she almost did.

Almost spoke of glass cities, metal birds, talking stones, and a man named John who held her present like it mattered more than her past.

But she stopped.

Because it felt impossible to translate.

“I am fine,” she said instead.

Her sister studied her carefully.

Then nodded slowly.

But did not believe her.

And that was the quietest kind of understanding.

Neferet woke in the modern world before dawn.

The room was still.

The air cold.

Her eyes open but unfocused for a moment.

She sat upright slowly.

Hand pressed lightly against her chest.

No tears had fallen.

She did not allow them to.

Not here.

Not where others could see.

But the sadness remained.

Not as emotion now.

As presence.

She moved quietly through the house later.

Careful not to disturb anyone.

Careful not to reveal what had been opened inside her.

When John saw her that morning, he paused.

Just briefly.

Then asked gently:

“Bad dream?”

Neferet hesitated.

Then answered:

“Yes.”

A pause.

“But not in the way you mean.”

John studied her expression.

He did not push.

He simply nodded.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Neferet looked away.

“No.”

A pause.

“Not yet.”

And for once, John accepted that without concern.

Only understanding.

Because some memories were not meant to be spoken immediately.

Only carried.

End of Chapter Twenty-Two

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Three: The Feast

Neferet had learned that joy in the modern world was often loud.

It arrived with laughter, overlapping voices, music from small speakers, and plates that never seemed to empty.

Tonight, the Carter home was full of it.

It was not a formal feast.

But it felt like one.

Emily had invited extended family.

John’s cousins arrived first.

Then friends.

Then people who arrived “just because they were in the area.”

Neferet observed it all from the kitchen doorway.

The movement.

The noise.

The ease.

In Egypt, gatherings like this were structured.

Even celebration had hierarchy.

Even joy had order.

Here, everything blended.

John noticed her standing still.

He approached gently.

“You okay?”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“I am observing.”

John smiled slightly.

“That’s your polite way of saying you’re overwhelmed.”

Neferet considered this.

Then replied:

“Yes.”

The dining table had expanded with extra chairs.

Food covered every surface.

Not ceremonial food.

Not symbolic offerings.

Just abundance.

People spoke over each other.

Laughed too loudly.

Recalled stories no one fully agreed on.

Corrected each other affectionately.

Neferet sat beside John.

Quiet.

Composed.

Present.

Emily placed a plate in front of her.

“You have to try everything,” she said.

Neferet nodded.

“I will try.”

But she did not begin immediately.

She watched.

She saw something unfamiliar beneath the noise.

Not chaos.

Not disorder.

Something looser.

Stronger in a different way.

There was no fear in disagreement.

No punishment for interruption.

No silence required for respect.

People spoke freely.

And were still accepted.

Neferet’s hand rested near her plate.

Still.

This was not her world.

But she was part of it anyway.

Laughter rose from the other end of the table.

A story about John as a child.

Everyone joined in.

Even John.

Especially John.

Neferet smiled slightly.

It was the correct response.

She had learned that.

But inside…

something tightened.

Not pain.

Not sadness she could name easily.

Something quieter.

A distance she could not close.

She remembered another table.

Another world.

Where gatherings meant duty.

Where presence meant role.

Where laughter was rare and precious.

And where absence remained permanent.

She blinked slowly.

Focused on her plate.

John leaned slightly toward her.

“You’re quiet tonight.”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

“Still just observing?”

“Yes.”

A pause.

Then more honestly:

“And remembering.”

John didn’t ask what.

He didn’t need to.

He just nodded.

“Okay.”

And stayed close.

Later in the evening, Ethan Blake appeared briefly.

Not expected.

Not intrusive.

Just… present.

He greeted the group politely.

Then noticed Neferet immediately.

“Evening,” he said.

Neferet nodded.

“Good evening.”

He observed the room.

“You have a large gathering.”

“Yes.”

“Is it always like this?”

Neferet considered.

“No.”

A pause.

“But often.”

Ethan smiled faintly.

“That must be… different from your time.”

Neferet replied simply:

“Yes.”

No elaboration.

No need.

As the evening continued, Neferet tried to remain present.

She ate.

She listened.

She responded when spoken to.

She smiled when appropriate.

But the feeling did not leave.

It settled instead.

Like something resting gently but persistently in her chest.

John eventually noticed again.

This time he didn’t ask.

He just placed a glass of water beside her.

A small gesture.

Anchoring.

Neferet looked at it.

Then at him.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

John nodded.

“Anytime.”

Later, she stepped outside into the quiet backyard.

The noise of the house softened behind her.

Still present.

But distant.

She breathed in slowly.

Cool air.

Modern night.

Her reflection in the glass door looked unfamiliar.

Not because of appearance.

Because of presence.

Inside, she belonged.

End of Chapter Twenty-Three

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Four: The Question

Neferet had learned how to answer many questions without revealing everything inside her.

She had become skilled at this in both worlds.

In Egypt, it was survival.

In the modern world, it was adaptation.

But some questions did not allow skill.

Only truth.

The house had finally quieted.

Dishes stacked in the kitchen.

Laughter fading into memory.

Footsteps upstairs.

The world settling back into itself.

Neferet stood alone in the living room.

Still dressed for the evening.

Still carrying the weight of it.

John found her there.

He didn’t announce himself.

He simply stood nearby for a moment.

Then spoke softly.

“You’ve been quiet all night.”

Neferet nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“That’s becoming your honest answer,” he said gently.

She looked at him.

“It is an accurate one.”

John hesitated.

This was not a casual question.

Not one meant for conversation.

Something else.

Something careful.

He stepped closer.

Lowered his voice.

“Neferet…”

She turned slightly toward him.

Already sensing the shift.

He continued:

“Do you miss them?”

Silence followed immediately.

Not empty silence.

Full silence.

Neferet did not ask who.

She already knew.

Egypt.

Her mother.

Her sister.

Her world before time split her life in two.

She stood very still.

For a long moment.

Then nodded once.

“Yes.”

The word was simple.

But it carried everything behind it.

John didn’t speak immediately.

He had expected honesty.

But not the weight behind it.

Neferet looked down.

As if checking whether the answer had physically changed anything in the room.

“It is not constant,” she said quietly.

A pause.

“I do not think of it every moment.”

John nodded slowly.

“Okay.”

Neferet continued, voice softer now:

“But it is always there.”

That sentence lingered between them.

John stepped closer.

Not touching her yet.

Just closer.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Neferet looked at him.

Confused, slightly.

“For what?”

“I don’t know,” John admitted.

A pause.

“I just… am.”

That answer surprised her.

But not in a negative way.

Neferet turned away slightly.

Not to hide.

But to steady herself.

“I thought,” she said carefully, “that if I built enough here…”

A pause.

“…it would replace what I lost.”

John listened.

Quiet.

Present.

“But it does not replace,” she continued.

“It only continues.”

Her voice remained controlled.

Almost steady.

Then she stopped speaking.

Because something changed.

Not in thought.

In body.

A tear fell.

Quiet.

Unexpected.

She froze immediately.

As if even she did not recognize it at first.

Then another followed.

She raised a hand instinctively to her face.

Not wiping.

Just acknowledging.

“This is inefficient,” she said softly.

John exhaled shakily.

A faint, sad smile.

“Yeah,” he said.

“It kind of is.”

He didn’t rush to comfort her.

Didn’t overwhelm the moment.

Didn’t try to fix it.

He just stayed.

Neferet stood still, as tears continued quietly now.

Not dramatic.

Not collapsing.

Just… real.

“I did not want this,” she said.

“I know,” John replied.

A pause.

“I did not choose to leave them.”

“I know.”

Another tear.

Then a breath.

“But I chose to stay here.”

John nodded.

“Yes.”

That distinction mattered.

He understood that.

After a long moment, Neferet spoke again.

“In Egypt, grief was a ceremony.”

A pause.

“Here, it is… private.”

John nodded slowly.

“Yeah. Mostly.”

She looked at him.

“I do not know which is better.”

John answered honestly:

“I don’t think either is.”

A pause.

“I think it’s just different ways of carrying it.”

Neferet considered this.

Then nodded.

“Yes.”

She did not stop crying immediately.

And John did not rush her toward stopping.

Time passed differently in that room.

Slower.

Softer.

Less structured.

Eventually, her breathing steadied.

The tears slowed.

Not gone.

Just less immediate.

She sat down carefully.

John sat beside her.

No distance now.

No roles.

Just two people sharing silence that finally meant something.

Neferet spoke quietly after a long pause.

“I thought I could carry both worlds without breaking.”

John looked at her.

“You didn’t break.”

A pause.

“You just feel both.”

She considered that.

Then nodded slowly.

“Yes.”

A long pause.

“That is worse.”

John gave a small, tired smile.

“Yeah.”

But he didn’t disagree.

Because sometimes truth is not something you correct.

Only something you sit with.

Outside, the world continued moving.

Inside, something had finally been named.

And it would not disappear just because it was understood.

End of Chapter Twenty-Four

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Five: The Decision

The cave had not changed.

Not really.

The same stone walls.

The same narrow passage.

The same distant sound of water dripping somewhere in the darkness.

And yet everything had changed.

Because years ago, this cave had been nothing more than an accidental discovery.

Now it was the center of a mystery that had reached across five thousand years.

John Carter walked slowly through the familiar tunnel.

Flashlights mounted along the walls cast soft pools of light across ancient stone.

Behind him came Jack Reynolds and Dr. Ethan Mitchell.

Neither man spoke.

There was something sacred about this place now.

At the end of the tunnel stood the chamber.

The chamber where it had all begun.

The massive stone arch rested in silence.

Ancient symbols covered its surface.

Dark.

Dormant.

Waiting.

John stopped in front of it.

For a long moment, no one spoke.

Finally Jack broke the silence.

"Hard to believe it started with a missing water bottle."

A faint smile appeared on Mitchell's face.

"The greatest discoveries often begin with the smallest anomalies."

John stared at the arch.

Remembering.

The storm.

The hike.

The fear.

The impossible disappearance.

And the moment his life stopped belonging solely to him.

Jack crossed his arms.

"So."

A pause.

"We're really here to talk about reopening it."

John nodded.

"Yes."

Mitchell studied the ancient symbols.

"You've made your decision."

It wasn't a question.

John answered anyway.

"Neferet misses her family."

Silence.

The cave seemed to absorb the words.

Mitchell nodded slowly.

"I suspected as much."

John looked down briefly.

"She tries to hide it."

A pause.

"But she dreams about them."

Jack sighed.

"Her mother."

John nodded.

"Her sister."

The words echoed softly through the chamber.

Mitchell stepped toward the stone arch.

Running his hand carefully across the carved surface.

"This place was never merely a portal."

Jack looked at him.

"What do you mean?"

Mitchell gestured around the chamber.

"The university funded the equipment."

A pause.

"The computers."

Another pause.

"The stabilization systems."

He touched the ancient stone.

"But this..."

His voice lowered.

"This is the Gate."

Silence.

"The cave is the true portal."

Jack nodded slowly.

"The lab was only helping us use it."

"Exactly."

Mitchell looked around the chamber.

"If our equipment vanished tomorrow, this place would still exist."

A pause.

"It existed thousands of years before us."

Another pause.

"And it will exist long after us."

John stared at the arch.

"Then we bring her back here."

Mitchell nodded.

"Yes."

Jack glanced toward several crates stacked against the wall.

Equipment had already begun arriving.

Cables.

Generators.

Monitoring systems.

Everything necessary to awaken the Gate one final time.

"You really think we can do it again?"

Jack asked.

Mitchell folded his arms.

"I think we can stabilize an opening."

A pause.

“Whether we can control everything afterward is another matter."

Jack laughed quietly.

"That's not reassuring."

"No."

Mitchell agreed.

"It isn't."

The three men stood together in front of the ancient arch.

John knew this moment was coming.

Had known for days.

Perhaps weeks.

He took a slow breath.

"I'm going with her."

Silence.

Jack blinked.

"What?"

Mitchell turned slowly.

The cave suddenly felt much smaller.

John repeated himself.

"I'm going back with Neferet."

Jack stared at him.

"John..."

"You don't have to."

"I know."

"You could stay here."

"I know."

Jack shook his head.

"This is your life."

John looked around the chamber.

Then beyond it.

Beyond the cave.

Beyond the modern world.

"My life changed the day I walked through that Gate."

A pause.

"And so did hers."

The cave was silent again.

Mitchell studied him carefully.

"You understand the risks."

John nodded.

"Yes."

"There may be no return."

"I know."

"The Gate could collapse permanently."

"I know."

Jack stepped closer.

"Then why?"

John looked toward the stone arch.

Toward Egypt.

Toward a world separated by five thousand years.

Toward the woman who had crossed time for him.

And finally answered.

"Because she crossed an impossible distance to be with me."

A pause.

"And I won't let her cross it alone going home."

No one spoke after that.

Because there was nothing left to say.

Mitchell looked at the ancient arch one final time.

Then nodded.

"What timeline do you want to send Neferet back to?"

John didn't hesitate.

"A couple of years after her disappearance. Long enough for Egypt to move on, but not so long that her family loses hope."

Mitchell quickly made a few calculations.

"With the time dilation ratio, that translates to about ten minutes here."

John nodded.

"Then that's our window. Send her home."

Jack looked at Mitchell.

"You're agreeing?"

Mitchell smiled faintly.

"I stopped believing this project was about physics a long time ago."

Even Jack laughed at that.

A moment later he sighed.

"Okay."

A pause.

"If we're doing this..."

He looked at the Gate.

"Let's do it properly."

The three men stood together before the ancient arch.

The same arch where a simple water bottle had vanished.

The same arch that had shown them impossible visions.

The same arch that had carried John across time.

The same arch that had brought Neferet into the future.

The beginning.

And now, perhaps, the end.

Far away, waiting in another age, was Egypt.

And soon the Gate would open once more.

End of Chapter Twenty-Five

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Six: Goodbye Earth

The morning arrived too quickly.

For weeks, the return had been an idea.

A discussion.

A plan.

Now it was a date on a calendar.

A day.

A reality.

Neferet stood alone beside the living room window.

Sunlight spilled across the lawn outside.

Children rode bicycles down the street.

A dog barked somewhere in the distance.

A car passed.

Ordinary sounds.

Ordinary moments.

When she first arrived in this world, everything had seemed impossible.

Now it felt familiar.

And that somehow made leaving harder.

Footsteps sounded behind her.

Emily appeared carrying two mugs.

One coffee.

One tea.

"I figured you wouldn't want coffee."

Neferet accepted the tea.

"Thank you."

Emily sat beside her.

For several moments neither spoke.

Finally Emily sighed.

"This is really happening."

Neferet nodded.

"Yes."

Emily stared out the window.

"When you first showed up, I thought my brother had completely lost his mind."

Neferet smiled softly.

"Many people thought that."

Emily laughed.

"Honestly, I still wonder sometimes."

The laughter faded.

Then Emily's eyes became moist.

"You know..."

A pause.

"I never had a sister."

Neferet looked at her.

Emily swallowed.

"But if I did..."

Her voice cracked slightly.

"...I think I'd want one like you."

For a moment neither moved.

Then Neferet embraced her.

Not formally.

Not carefully.

Like family.

Emily closed her eyes.

Holding on longer than usual.

"I'll miss you."

Neferet's voice was quiet.

"And I will miss you."

Later that afternoon John's mother found Neferet in the kitchen.

The older woman stood silently for a moment.

Looking at her.

Then smiled.

"You've changed this house."

Neferet looked surprised.

"I have?"

His mother nodded.

"When John brought you home, everything felt impossible."

A pause.

"Then somehow you became part of the family."

Neferet lowered her eyes.

"In Egypt, family is sacred."

His mother smiled warmly.

"It is here too."

She stepped forward.

Without warning, she hugged Neferet tightly.

The gesture caught her completely off guard.

But she returned it.

When they separated, both women had tears in their eyes.

John's father was waiting outside on the porch.

Neferet joined him.

For several minutes they simply sat together.

The afternoon breeze moved through the trees.

Finally he spoke.

"You know..."

A pause.

"I never expected my son to fall in love with an Egyptian princess."

Neferet laughed softly.

"Neither did I."

That earned a genuine smile.

Then his expression became serious.

"Take care of him."

Neferet nodded.

"I will."

His father looked toward the horizon.

"And let him take care of you too."

For some reason, that nearly made her cry again.

As evening approached, they began the drive toward the cave.

The same cave where everything had started.

John drove.

Neferet sat beside him.

Emily sat in the back.

No one spoke very much.

Some silences deserve respect.

The sun slowly descended toward the horizon.

Painting the sky gold.

When they arrived at the parking area near the cave entrance, someone was already waiting.

A black sedan stood beneath the trees.

John immediately recognized it.

"Ethan."

Neferet's eyes widened slightly.

The executive stood beside his car.

Hands in his pockets.

Watching them arrive.

He smiled when he saw her.

A sad smile.

But a sincere one.

John quietly gave them space.

Neferet walked toward Ethan.

For a moment neither spoke.

Then Ethan laughed softly.

"You know, when I first met you, I thought you were the most unusual woman I'd ever known."

Neferet smiled.

"That is because I am five thousand years out of place."

Ethan laughed.

A genuine laugh.

"Fair point."

The laughter faded.

The silence that followed was heavier.

More important.

Finally Ethan looked directly at her.

"I would have spent the rest of my life trying to make you happy."

The honesty of it hung in the air.

"But your happiness was never here."

Neferet's eyes softened.

She gently placed a hand on his arm.

"You are a good man, Ethan Blake."

He swallowed.

Looking away briefly.

"And John Carter is a lucky one."

Neferet shook her head.

"No."

A pause.

"I believe I am."

For the first time, Ethan's eyes filled with tears.

Not many.

Just enough.

Enough to reveal the depth of what he felt.

He took a slow breath.

Then straightened.

And gave a small bow.

Not modern.

Not Egyptian.

Simply respectful.

The entrance to the cave waited nearby.

Beyond the darkness of the tunnel waited the Eight Gate.

The doorway that had changed all their lives.

Tomorrow it would open one final time.

And after that...

Nothing would ever be the same again.

End of Chapter Twenty-Six

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Seven: One Last Choice

The rain had become a storm.

Wind howled through the forest above the cave.

Thunder rolled across the Indiana hills.

For John Carter, the sound felt strangely familiar.

It had been a storm like this that brought him here years ago.

A storm that had changed everything.

The ancient chamber glowed with an uneasy mixture of past and present.

Generators hummed.

Computer screens flickered.

Heavy cables stretched across stone floors carved long before modern civilization existed.

Jack Reynolds stood near one of the consoles.

He looked around the chamber and shook his head.

"You know what's crazy?"

Nobody answered.

Jack pointed toward the stone arch.

"All this started because two idiots went hiking."

A faint smile appeared on Mitchell's face.

"History has certainly begun with worse qualifications."

Even John laughed.

For a moment, the tension eased.

Then everyone looked toward the Gate.

And the reality of what was happening returned.

The ancient symbols carved into the arch began to glow.

At first only a few.

Then dozens.

Then hundreds.

Golden light flowed through the carvings like liquid fire.

The chamber vibrated.

Not violently.

But steadily.

Like a giant heart beginning to beat.

Jack looked at the monitors.

"Energy levels are climbing."

Mitchell moved toward another station.

"They should be."

"Everything stable?"

Mitchell stared at the readings.

"For now."

Jack sighed.

"You always know how to make a guy feel confident."

Neferet stood quietly beside the Gate.

The golden light reflected in her eyes.

Home.

She was closer to home than she had been in years.

Yet her thoughts were not on Egypt.

They were on the people gathered inside this cave.

Emily.

John's parents.

Jack.

Mitchell.

Even Ethan Blake.

People who had become family.

The realization brought unexpected sadness.

John stepped beside her.

"Nervous?"

Neferet thought for a moment.

"Yes."

A pause.

"And no."

John smiled.

"That sounds about right."

The hum inside the chamber suddenly deepened.

The air shifted.

Every hair on John's arms stood upright.

The center of the arch began filling with light.

Not reflected light.

Not projected light.

Reality itself seemed to fold inward.

A swirling curtain of gold appeared inside the stone frame.

The Eight Gate had opened.

The portal brightened.

Golden light filled the cave.

The ancient symbols pulsed in rhythm.

Outside, thunder shook the mountainside.

Inside, the doorway between ages stood fully open.

Waiting.

Neferet stepped beside John.

Together they faced the Gate.

Neither moved.

Not yet.

Because first there would be one final goodbye.

And then...

home.

End of Chapter Twenty-Seven

PRINCESS NEFERET

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Home

The storm raged above the Indiana hills.

Rain hammered against the mountainside.

Thunder rolled through the darkness.

Wind swept across the forest.

Deep beneath it all, inside the ancient cave, the Eight Gate stood open.

Golden light filled the chamber.

The portal shimmered within the stone arch like liquid sunlight.

For thousands of years, the Gate had waited.

For centuries, it had remained silent.

Now, for the final time, it stood awake.

Everyone who mattered was there.

Jack Reynolds.

Dr. Ethan Mitchell.

Emily Carter.

John's mother and father.

Ethan Blake.

They stood around the chamber in silence.

Watching.

Remembering.

Trying to accept what was about to happen.

The cave had become more than a location.

It had become a crossroads.

A place where impossible things happened.

And now it was about to witness one final miracle.

Mitchell studied the monitors one final time.

"Stability holding."

Jack looked at him.

"How long do we have?"

Mitchell glanced toward the portal.

"Long enough."

A pause.

"Not much longer."

The chamber vibrated gently.

The ancient symbols pulsed.

The Eight Gate waited.

Emily stepped forward first.

Her eyes were already wet.

She looked at Neferet.

Then at her brother.

"I hate this."

The honesty of it made everyone smile.

Even Neferet.

Emily wrapped her arms around Neferet.

Holding on tightly.

"You better remember me."

Neferet smiled through tears.

"I could not forget you if I wished to."

Emily laughed.

"Good."

Then she turned toward John.

For a moment she couldn't speak.

Finally she managed:

"Don't do anything stupid."

John smiled.

"You know me."

Emily wiped her eyes.

"That's exactly what worries me."

The room laughed softly.

And for a brief moment the sadness eased.

His mother embraced him next.

Holding him longer than usual.

A mother never truly believes she is ready to say goodbye.

"I love you," she whispered.

John closed his eyes.

"I love you too."

His father stepped forward afterward.

The older man placed a hand on John's shoulder.

Neither spoke immediately.

Some emotions are too large for words.

Finally he nodded.

"I'm proud of you."

John swallowed hard.

Those four words meant everything.

"Thank you."

His father pulled him into a brief embrace.

Then stepped back.

Ethan approached Neferet one final time.

Neither spoke for several moments.

Finally Ethan smiled.

"I was hoping you'd stay."

Neferet smiled sadly.

"I know."

Ethan nodded.

"But I always knew you wouldn't."

A pause.

"You belong somewhere else."

Neferet looked toward John.

"Yes."

Ethan followed her gaze.

Then smiled.

"You two deserve happiness."

Neferet gently touched his arm.

"So do you."

For a moment, emotion flickered across Ethan's face.

Then he stepped back.

"Goodbye, Princess."

Neferet smiled warmly.

"Goodbye, my friend."

Jack waited until the end.

Perhaps because he knew it would be the hardest.

The two friends stood facing each other.

Years of adventures.

Years of friendship.

Years of impossible discoveries.

All leading here.

Jack shook his head.

"You realize nobody is ever going to believe this story."

John laughed.

"Probably not."

Jack extended his hand.

John ignored it.

And hugged him instead.

Jack laughed.

Then returned the embrace.

"I'm going to miss you."

"Me too."

When they stepped apart, neither trusted themselves to say much more.

Dr. Mitchell approached last.

The scientist looked older than usual tonight.

Or perhaps simply tired.

He studied John and Neferet carefully.

Then looked toward the Gate.

"I spent decades searching for answers."

A pause.

"I never expected the answer to be people."

Nobody spoke.

Mitchell nodded once.

"Take care of each other."

John smiled.

"We will."

The portal brightened.

Golden light flooded the chamber.

The symbols on the arch blazed like stars.

Mitchell glanced at the monitors.

"It's time."

Silence settled over the cave.

No one moved.

No one wanted to.

Finally Neferet reached for John's hand.

He took it immediately.

Together they stepped toward the Gate.

The light reflected in their eyes.

Egypt waited on the other side.

A kingdom lost to history.

A family waiting unknowingly for their return.

A future that existed in the past.

John looked at Neferet.

"Ready?"

Neferet smiled.

A genuine smile.

The smile of someone finally seeing home again.

"Yes."

Together they stepped forward.

And entered the light.

The portal flared brilliantly.

The cave filled with gold.

For one breathtaking moment the chamber seemed brighter than the sun.

Then—

Silence.

The light vanished.

The portal collapsed.

The stone arch darkened.

The symbols faded.

The Eight Gate was closed.

Nobody moved.

Nobody spoke.

They simply stared at the empty arch.

The place where John and Neferet had stood only seconds before.

Gone.

Home.

Mitchell slowly reached toward the control panel.

One by one, the systems shut down.

Generators powered off.

Monitors went dark.

Indicator lights disappeared.

The hum that had filled the chamber for years finally ended.

The cave became quiet once more.

As it had been before they arrived.

As it would remain after they were gone.

Outside, the storm continued.

Inside, an era had ended.

The Eight Gate would never open again.

And somewhere beyond the reach of history, two travelers walked toward a future hidden inside the past.

FINAL LINE

Some people spend their lives searching for where they belong. John Carter had found it on the other side of time.

End of Book Two – Princess Neferet