As Long As You're Mine

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As Long As You're Mine

by Anonymous

Summary

Seth lost the trial for the throne, and now he is King Horus’ prisoner, to do with as Horus pleases. As Horus works through his hatred, he slowly finds punishing Seth more complicated than he imagined, especially when he uncovers more secrets in Seth’s past. And when new threats to Egypt arise, Horus will need Seth’s help to face them.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own.

The fanfic title is from the song of the same name from "Wicked" the musical.

Chapter 1: Walk Alone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Why did you visit me that night?” Horus asked as he lowered a bloody flail.

Seth was breathing hard as he leaned his chest against the pillar his arms were bound around. His back stung from the many times Horus had struck it, and he could feel places where he was bleeding. It was either late or early, he didn’t know. Horus had simply tied him to the pillar and began striking him apropos nothing in particular, like most of Horus’ punishments.

“Answer me or it’s more strikes,” Horus said. He flicked the flail so that Seth could hear the now-familiar noise. Seth had used them before to try them out, as he’d used all weapons. But he’d never been on the receiving end of one.

He had to admit, he didn’t like it much.

But Horus had asked him a question, and he grasped in confusion for what it was for. All his recent memories were pain and refusing to scream, because he knew Horus wanted to see the personification of evil broken, and Seth was petty enough to try to deny him. “What night?”

Horus chuckled. “The night of the second match, Uncle. What other night did you voluntarily visit me?”

Seth tried to think back, but it was so hard these days. He’d been Horus’ prisoner for weeks now, maybe months, or so it seemed. He rarely saw sunlight and it was difficult to track time otherwise. Horus’ punishments kept his mind too occupied to do much.

Seth almost wondered if Isis had given him all the books on how to fuck and torture someone, or if Horus was just naturally inclined to be creative that way. He was still crude and inexperienced, but even a crude and experienced tyrant could cause pain.

Seth knew that firsthand.

Horus pressed the tails of the flail into Seth’s back, near one of worse cuts, making Seth grunt in pain. “Answer me, Uncle.”

Seth swallowed. The sentencing Maat had created gave Horus control over Seth’s powers, so crushing the stone column he was tied to was out of the question. And he could never forget it: the rare time he slept, he could hear the snakes of the spell hissing in his nightmares. It didn’t stop him from squeezing the column in hope it would suddenly give way, and he could make what was likely another doomed escape attempt. “I wanted to beat you.”

Horus laughed. Seth hated his laughter. “I know. But why then? Why choose that?” Seth’s eyes were blindfolded again, but he could well imagine Horus’ patronizing head tilts, his

cruel smile. Horus was nothing but mockery. “You always look at me with such disgust, yet you specifically chose to try and violate me in this manner.” Horus lowered the whip to above the cleft of Seth’s ass.

Seth bowed his head and gave up on crushing the column with his weakened arms. He was shaking a bit, too. He barely slept, and Horus always wore him down with one new torment or another. It was pathetic.

The only thing he could be grateful for was that because of the blindfold, Horus couldn’t see *his* eyes. Horus couldn’t see the exhaustion, or the occasional times Seth teared up.

“But it didn’t work out, did it?” Horus said, moving the tails carefully over Seth’s bruised flesh, making Seth gasp. He leaned forward and kissed Seth’s right shoulder, making him shudder. “You *enjoyed it.*”

“I didn’t *enjoy* it.” The memory was murky, but still there, amongst Seth’s other failures. After the second match, with Seth’s humiliating defeat, Seth meant to make up for it, ruin Horus forever, and end the trial simply. But Seth’s body had betrayed him that evening. Afterward, as he lay there in bed with a sleeping Horus sprawled over him, he’d damned Sekhmet for putting the idea in his head in the first place.

“You know what would humiliate him the most. That stoic boy would never be able to handle it.”

But when it came to it, Seth hadn’t been able to go through with it. He’d made a fool of himself seducing the boy, thinking it’d be easy... but then he’d hesitated. And he didn’t know why.

And Horus had taken the initiative, pushed him down and… Seth hadn’t been able to fight back. He’d tried and been too weak, just like now. And his body had *responded* to Horus’ ministrations, like it always did in his captivity.

Eventually he’d mustered enough strength to turn into sand and float away, too weak to even strike his nephew in slumber, and wanting only to bury himself in a dark place where no one could see him, and perhaps even he could forget the humiliation beneath alcohol and incense. Of course, that wasn’t the end of it. Because, as Horus so often said, Seth’s choices didn’t matter.

“You responded so beautifully,” Horus said before moving his lips down Seth’s back to lick over the stinging cuts. “Just like you do now.”

Seth grunted at the feel of Horus’ tongue on his injuries. It *hurt*, and made his limbs twitch.

Horus leaned his head against Seth’s right shoulder. “I was only seven years old when a playmate at one of our hiding places was stolen by slavers and raped to death.”

Seth stiffened.

“Mother and I couldn’t save them. Though Mother tried.” Horus opened his jaw and bit down into Seth’s shoulder, making the older god gasp. When Horus let go and pulled away, he licked the wound, and then said, “Not everyone perished. Some were captured. I have reports from families being reunited. Egypt is slow to recover. It likely never will. You cannot undo that kind of trauma. That loss.”

Seth’s hands twitched in their bonds.

Horus shoved his fingers into Seth’s ass, making Seth grunt in pain. He was still filthy from their previous sessions, but Horus never seemed to care. He even seemed to enjoy it. “You can’t bring back dead parents. Dead children. A whole, un-assaulted mind. Those are gone forever.”

“Does it satisfy you, then?” Seth said as Horus worked away. “To rape me over and over for them?” Seth laughed. “Do you think this makes up for it? Balances Maat’s scales? One rape for another? Or a dozen or more, really?” He’d lost track at this point. His body was a worthless thing meant only for Horus’ amusement.

Horus was quiet for a time before replying, “No. It doesn’t.” Horus leaned in close to Seth’s left ear. “But killing you is too quick for what you deserve. For all the pain you caused.”

“Do you think I regret it?” Seth demanded as Horus replaced his fingers with his cock. “Do you think I give a single fuck about them? About your pain? Or theirs? They’re just humans!” Horus shoved himself in like he always did, and Seth gasped through it. “None of them matter!”

“Is that why you hurt them, Uncle?” Horus asked, not thrusting yet. “Because they’re nothing to you? You abandoned your duty as Egypt's protector and became her destroyer?”

“They were a means to an end,” Seth replied. “I just wanted to hunt down Isis.” He grunted as Horus pulled out and thrust back in, hard. “I don’t care about any of you. I’m not a king, after all.” His cheek banged against the pillar with the power of Horus’ thrusts, and he remembered another night, with a different body at his back. “I'm not anyone's *protector."* He couldn't protect himself, let alone anyone else. "You’re all *nothing* to me.” Every name, every story Horus told him, all of it was just *noise.*

“This nothing likes the way your ass feels around me, Uncle.”

Seth scoffed as his hips banged into the pillar. When Horus came inside him, Seth winced in disgust. He wondered how much of this it would take before he was broken. He didn’t understand why he wasn’t already gone. Nothing Seth did seemed to push Horus hard enough to finish him off at once. It was just slow torture. It was exhausting.

I don’t care, Seth thought as Horus pulled out of him, letting Horus’ seed leak out of Seth’s ass onto the floor. *I wasn’t a king.* In the many long lists of victims and their injuries, Seth simply turned away. He had to listen, of course, Horus made him listen. But so what? Seth was a monster. Monsters hurt people. They killed people. It made sense.

“It’s good you admit it,” Horus said, patting Seth’s left cheek before he stepped away.

Seth's bruises stung. Shortly, he heard the desk chair scrape over the floor, and shortly after that, the sound of a quill on papyrus.

Seth sagged against the pillar. A short reprieve, perhaps. Before Horus came back for more.

"I just think it's funny that you planned that," Horus said, surprising Seth. "Thinking it would, what? Break me?" Horus laughed. "You have no idea what I went through while Mother and I were on the run."

Seth had heard much of it before, so he had some impressions. And certainly he'd tried to kill Horus on a few occasions. They would not have been easy deaths, either. But thinking about what Horus asked, Seth wondered. "Were you raped?" Was *that* why he chose this manner of revenge?

Horus snorted. "No. But if not for Mother, I likely would have been. And I lost more than one friend to your animalistic followers."

Seth snorted. "So, it's just revenge after all."

"For them and others, yes."

So was what I tried to do, Seth thought. Though it felt empty and pointless. What did Horus care about Seth's concerns? He'd said he was king, and his opinion was all that mattered. Seth's job was to be the warm thing that Horus stuck his fingers or cock into.

"You'll have to speak up if you want me to hear you, Uncle."

Seth snorted. "Why? You'll fuck me to near-death anyway."

Horus chuckled. "Of course, Uncle. But I like hearing you run your mouth. You have a pretty voice." The tone sounded just like Osiris.

Seth's heart raced, and he called a weapon to his hand, any weapon… but nothing came to him. "Fuck off." Seth reminded himself that even though Osiris had managed to revive himself, he was still in Duat, dead. And Horus seemingly had no intention of sending Seth there any time soon.

"So ungrateful. You know you're kept warm here. Sheltered."

Seth scoffed. "Such warmth. Getting fucked half to death or beaten on the regular…"

"You have a roof over your head. No animals come after you at night. Me to care for you. Most of your victims didn't get that."

Seth leaned his head against the column. Of course. More about how terrible Seth was to the humans. He recalled his followers calling out to him over the years, and others still, begging for mercy. What mercy could Seth provide? He couldn't save anyone.

"I could just kick you out into a mob of your followers and see what they do with you. Without your powers, after all… They'd rip you to pieces. They're little better than animals,

and rip each other apart if they can't rip apart others."

"Why don't you, then?" Seth asked, idly curious. Would this be a new torture? "Wouldn't that be easier for you? Letting someone else do the grunt work?" At this point, it was preferable. He couldn't imagine the humans were this imaginative.

"You're mine," Horus said, with some venom. "To do with as I please."

You're no different than your father. So much had happened to Seth that he wondered if Osiris' ministrations were being eclipsed. Seth still had nightmares about that night Osiris had assaulted him. And this wasn't the only time Horus had sounded like his father. But in a way, *this* all made more sense. After all, Seth had spent hundreds of years hunting Isis and Horus down. Seth had never wronged Osiris, other than to reject his advances. Vengeance from Horus made sense. It was Seth's lot: as the loser, he was no different than any of the winner's other subjects, and would be used as Horus pleased.

Seth's choices didn't matter. And he wished he'd realize that at some point, so that he'd stop fighting. Perhaps this would all be easier.

Why did I take Sekhmet's advice? Seth asked as his back throbbed. If he hadn't, he might not be here right now. He might even still be king. Still tearing Egypt apart until it eventually collapsed. And then there would be nothing. No one. Silence.

"Judging by all this," Horus said, "You made a terrible king."

Seth laughed.

"Do you find that funny, Uncle?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"If I was so terrible, then why did you need an army to defeat me?"

Horus chuckled. "Oh, Uncle. I didn't need an army, remember?" Seth heard Horus push back the chair and walk over to him. There was hot breath on Seth's ear. "You practically *let* me defeat you."

Seth felt his heart race as Horus stood there, emphasizing his point, until he finally felt satisfied and returned to the desk.

"No, I didn't," Seth said, quietly.

"Louder, Uncle. I can't hear you properly."

"I didn't *let* you defeat me." He wasn't *weak.*

Horus laughed. "Of course, Uncle. A king is always right, after all."

Seth clenched his hands together in impotent fury. *"Fuck you."*

"We both know that's not something you'll ever manage."

Seth's cheeks burned and he yanked at the column. There was a slight *creak*, but it didn't budge. "I'll kill you! If it's the last thing I do!"

"Are you threatening me, Uncle? Your king?"

Horus was up and back over by Seth almost immediately, and grabbed his hair, yanking it back.

"Why?" Seth replied, wishing his mouth was wet enough to spit. "Are you going to rape me again for it? Or whip me? Stuff me with another ridiculous contraption overnight?"

Horus was quiet for a while before he finally added, "One would think you *want* me to punish you, Uncle."

Seth snorted as he tried to ignore the pain in his scalp. "Pointing out you're predictable isn't the same as asking for punishment." He wanted to bury his claws in Horus' skin and *tear.* If he was free—

Horus hummed. "You're right. I am a bit predictable. But that's okay." He let go of Seth's hair, allowing Seth to breathe more easily. "Because I've got all the time in the world. And soon enough you'll realize that this isn't a game wherein you eventually get to argue or fight your way out."

Seth frowned.

"You're my *toy*, Uncle. My prisoner. So yes, I'm going to keep you here for stress relief when I'm too exhausted and furious to continue to clean up the mess you left behind you. And that is all you ever will be, since you insist on learning nothing from your wrongs." There was a laugh. "Oddly, I always find our time together inspiring for my work. So really, this is generally good for me." There was scratching on papyrus, and Seth realized Horus was back at his desk. "It's best you accept that. Or continue to whine. I'm sure I can make the guards keep quiet while they watch me fuck you."

Seth leaned his head against the column and shut his eyes. He wondered if Horus could see his shaking now. And Seth tried to remind himself it didn't matter anyway. Nothing did.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 2: Overheard

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth woke to the realization that although Horus had removed his blindfold at some point, he still couldn't see anything: all around him was darkness. For a moment he panicked, thinking he'd been blinded, but after taking a moment to breathe and studying himself – as gods were able to, even if they were being punished – he didn't find anything different than the usual bruises and injuries from Horus' ministrations. Unless Horus had somehow blinded him in a way he couldn't detect. He realized he was somehow in some small, enclosed space without a light source. He reached out and discovered the part he faced was barely a hand's breadth from his face, and the sides were only fingers apart from him. His wrists and ankles were bound before him. He banged into the ceiling with his bound hands, thinking to break it, forgetting again in his desperation that Maat's punishment and Horus' control over it meant he couldn't break stone easily anymore.

The lid didn't budge, and his hands actually *hurt* from the attempt, but he could tell from the sound that it was a relatively thin barrier, like a stone coffin lid, and it didn't seem to be trapped under anything else. This was abnormal even for *Horus.* Seth would take getting fucked all day to getting trapped in a *coffin*.

"Horus, you fuck, let me out!" He assumed Horus wouldn't go far. The man refused to leave Seth alone.

"Uncle Seth, you're going to attract attention that way," Horus said from the other side of the lid. Seth pushed down the rush of gratitude that Horus hadn't abandoned him to rot away in a box he couldn't escape. "This is only temporary."

Seth tried to calm his breathing. If he could hear Horus, he thought there was a high chance he was still trapped in the office. He'd been too out of it from Horus' ministrations the previous evening to be aware, but he *should* have woken for however Horus got him in here. Had he really been so out of it that he'd missed Horus drugging him or something? And dragging him to this box? "Let me out!"

"Just wait a while, Uncle. It would be poor form for you if you were found in this state, and I've got a surprise for you." After a moment, the voice was closer. "I highly suggest you remain quiet while you wait." There was a threat in that voice, and a hint of amusement. So this was yet another of Horus' games. Of course, Horus didn't say how *long* Seth had to wait for whatever it was.

Seth refused to panic further, and shut his eyes, calming his breathing. During war campaigns, he'd learned how to meditate to pass the time, as a way to focus himself. He hadn't done it in many years, but it used to be a skill he was good at.

Eventually, he either figured it out again or came to accept the reality of the situation. His breathing calmed. He was still.

After a time, he heard a faint knock, likely on a door, and Horus said, “Enter.”

“I have more reports from Isis for you.”

Seth stiffened. *Horus, you asshole.…*

“Some of the temples are asking for more supplies to accommodate refugees,” Anubis added.

“Yes, that makes sense,” Horus replied.

Seth’s heart raced. *Why is Anubis here?* It made some sense he’d work for Horus now, since Horus was king, but why was Anubis meeting Horus here? Horus seldom, if ever, met anyone here, save Isis, on rare occasion.

Seth’s face burned, wondering if Horus had cleaned the room up. What would Anubis think if he saw it? And even if it was clean, Anubis had trained his senses under Seth. Could he smell anything? He was still a demigod, but… What would Anubis think if he saw Seth like *this…?* Seth didn’t even dream of trying to get Anubis’ attention. Anubis couldn’t help him, even assuming he’d *want* to. And Seth couldn’t bear Anubis seeing him like this…

Seth had made a mockery of himself over the centuries, burning away what little goodwill he had left in alcohol, incense, and drunken tantrums. But being Horus’ *toy* was another level of degradation he couldn’t stomach Anubis seeing him in.

“How are things otherwise with you?” Horus asked with a little bit of warmth. Seth knew that Horus was aware that dragging this out was wrecking Seth’s nerves and ability to remain still, so he was clearly doing it to hurt Seth. Taunting Seth with what he couldn’t have and what Seth himself would be afraid to have.

Seth hated the asshole even more.

“I’m well. I appreciate you and Isis giving me more duties.” After a moment, Anubis continued, “I didn’t really have any under… Father.”

Seth winced. That’s because Anubis was *young* and still a demigod. Seth had trusted him with relatively little in order to allow him to grow into who he wanted to be. Once Anubis was a god, his life would be nothing but duties. Why spend his youth that way? But from Anubis’ tone, it seemed like Anubis had *disliked* that. Seth recalled Anubis’ desire to helpful, to be around Seth, but Seth had always pushed him away, not wanting Anubis to follow in Seth’s footsteps. And then after Osiris, Seth had been too ashamed of what he’d done, and didn’t want to contaminate Anubis with his own filth.

But Anubis hadn’t known Seth had pushed him away out of shame. All Anubis would have seen was rejection.

“You were a valuable help during the trial,” Horus replied. “Without you, I wouldn’t have been able to defeat your father during the second match.

Seth scowled, but reminded himself not to move. He *knew* that Horus had cheated! But it also meant Sekhmet was right…

The pain of a confirmation of another betrayal from Anubis was lessened because Anubis had already helped bring the Ennead to Heliopolis to unseat him. Seth had been cruel to him any number of times. It was mostly surprising that it'd taken so long for Anubis to try unseating him properly.

He must truly hate me. Seth's throat felt tight. Perhaps it would save him from going down Seth's path. Under Isis' tutelage, he'd be stronger. She'd raised Horus, which, well… Seth just had to hope enough of Nephthys was in there to supplant whatever produced Horus.

Seth shut his eyes, thinking of Nephthys, or any of his family, was a mistake of a different kind.

"How is your mother?" Horus asked.

Seth nearly bit his lip.

Anubis sighed. "She's still staying in her cell, refusing to leave. She still thinks she's better off serving *penance* there. As if Father isn't serving his own penance on the sun boat."

Seth scowled. Horus was such a liar. A part of him hated that Nephthys still stayed this way, but another part of him wanted to laugh. What good did her sitting in a cell do? It hadn't done either of them any favors in all these years… And Seth had no room in himself to feel sorry for her self-enforced isolation. All he felt for her was emptiness.

"We all have our burdens to bear," Horus said, cryptically. "Thank you for these. I'll call if I need you."

"You're welcome." After a time, the door closed again, Seth knew that Horus was alone.

Horus of course waited a while, making Seth try to glare a hole in the lid, before saying, "Well? Did you like that?"

Seth hated Horus even more, somehow. He didn't care for this little nonsense, whatever it was, and he wasn't going to reward Horus by explaining as much. Horus just liked goading him for reactions.

"Did you fall asleep?" Horus asked. His voice drew closer. "That's terribly rude if you did, Uncle Seth, when I had Anubis come here just for you. I can call him back if you wish." There was a heavily obvious layer of false hurt in his voice.

"I'm awake," Seth finally said, a bit worried Horus might *actually* call Anubis back, and not wanting him to. "And that was hardly meant as some kind of *present*."

Horus laughed and the lid was removed, revealing Horus' smiling face under his bright blue falcon headdress with its golden beak in the lamplight. From this angle, Seth could see Horus' bright blue eyes, and the hint of obsession always present in them. "Ah, there you are, Uncle Seth. Are you comfortable?"

Seth glared at him. “Get me out of here!”

Horus laughed and reached out to pick Seth up and out of the coffin. “I’ll admit, I dislike keeping you in there because it means I can’t see you, which is such a pity.” Horus settled Seth on his lap on the floor.

Seth couldn’t even really kick Horus, bound and held as he was, and he knew that hitting Horus never did much good other than antagonizing him a little.

Horus rested Seth’s head against his own left shoulder and lightly carded fingers through Seth’s red hair, almost like a lover. Seth had gone through the same thing with Osiris, and Horus had done it even more often at this point.

Although Seth hated it all the same, he knew there was little he could do about it. So he simply avoided biting his lips because he knew that would either infuriate or please Horus somehow.

“Do you miss him?” Horus asked. He squeezed Seth’s right thigh, making Seth’s hands twitch.

Seth didn’t reply. Yes, he missed Anubis, a little, in times when he was sad. But he hadn’t been able to be around Anubis properly since the night Osiris had nearly killed him. Seth hadn’t even been able to look at Anubis properly. It was an old ache, one he’d adjusted to with time.

Horus grabbed Seth’s chin, making him meet Horus’ gaze. The king’s eyes shone. “Answer me.”

Seth glared at him. “No.”

Horus laughed and let him go. “See? That wasn’t so hard.” Horus’ right hand drifted over Seth’s calves. “He speaks of you a bit more than he believes, you know. He likes to think he’s made a big deal of himself and shown off his abilities by betraying you, but he has a great many grievances against you and that’s just about all he talks about.”

A part of Seth was surprised Anubis even talked about him more than they’d heard here, but it wasn’t surprising. Seth was the God Supreme, and one of the gods who raised Anubis. Of course thoughts of him would take up a lot of Anubis’ time, even after Anubis was free of him.

“You were quite cruel to him,” Horus said. “Why, because he was an easy target? You do so enjoy targeting the weak, and those who trust and care for you.”

Seth’s cheeks warmed. Yes, the cruelty another reason for Anubis to talk about him. Perhaps to complain. Seth didn’t care if Horus thought about him this way. Horus already thought of him as dirt or a cock-warmer, depending on his mood.

“Even cruelty to your son doesn’t get a rise out of you,” Horus said with a quiet laugh. “How unsurprising.”

“You’re the one cradling the evil god you despise to your bosom,” Seth muttered.

“Because you’re being so obedient,” Horus said, squeezing Seth even closer. “You didn’t even try to escape once the lid was off. Have I tamed you after all?”

Seth tried to pull away then, but Horus held him tightly. Seth moved his head back to bash Horus’ head in, but Horus moved, so that Seth only lightly knocked Horus’ headdress askew.

“And you were being *so* good,” Horus said before he stood up and carried Seth back to the coffin.

Seth struggled as he realized what Horus was doing. “No! Stop it!”

Horus dropped him inside and shut the lid.

Seth again refused to panic or injure himself further. He knew it was useless. He tried to calm his breathing.

“Well,” Horus eventually said. “It seems I found something you’re afraid of, after all.”

Seth shut his eyes and tried to focus. He was still a god, he wouldn’t die here. And at least here Horus wasn’t raping him. And no one would see him.

But then for some reason, Seth recalled when Osiris had drugged him, making him fall to the floor, feeling helpless as Osiris gloated over him. The whole situation with Horus was too similar, but something about this coffin, being trapped in the dark, or some mix of fear and thinking about Anubis in particular… it *got* to him in a way that Horus’ other torments hadn’t.

Seth forced himself to count, to try and calm himself. His breath was loud, shaky, and damning. He wondered if Horus was listening, waiting for him to beg for mercy, and Seth was tempted.

But he realized he couldn’t ask. He didn’t know how to beg for help. Osiris hadn’t helped him, after all. Isis had rejected him. Nephthys had seen a problem he didn’t know of and hadn’t even told him about it, using it for her own gain.

No one other than Sekhmet had helped him. And she hadn’t seen him since the second match. He doubted she was interested in rescuing him after he ripped her arm off. Too much effort.

His eyes watered, and he felt distant from himself. It was almost like defeat, or at least acceptance. If Horus left him here, so be it. He deserved it, and no one would care. Anubis, Nephthys, and Isis were better off.

His breathing quieted.

Eventually, Horus opened the lid again, and Seth was so buried in himself he almost didn’t notice that Horus’ headdress was gone, better revealing his bright blue eyes and short hair. If things were different, Seth might have said he was attractive. Horus raised an eyebrow at Seth. “Calmed down, have you?”

But if Seth knew anything about his family, it was that beauty hid the worst monsters imaginable. But Seth had also learned that compliance – to a degree – got people to stop attacking him, at least until Seth could make a proper move. So Seth only glared, but didn’t fight when Horus reached for him again.

Chapter End Notes

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My ENNEAD fanfics

Chapter 3: Decisions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

“It’s this army from Greece that worries me,” Isis said. She and Horus were sitting in Isis’ rooms, discussing the latest reports from the military. It was early afternoon and the sky was clear. Afternoon sunshine gave the room a bright and warm feeling. They were both buried under a great deal of paperwork as they repaired all the damage Seth had caused during his reign.

“They still refuse to come back to negotiate?” Horus asked. He’d left most of that to Isis, given her longer history with negotiations and desire to take the lead on things. Horus was better left to handling paperwork as he learned what was needed to run a kingdom. It also meant that he had more free time to focus on Seth as he wished, not that he’d ever let his mother know, since she still believed Seth was off on the sun boat.

It had been over a month now, and Horus was beginning to realize there might be more to his side project than he initially realized. And Horus actually welcomed the distraction of actual work now. He was getting a bit frustrated dealing with Seth. The coffin trick did odd things to Seth, making him go quiet in a way that threats and physical punishment didn’t get out of him. Seth became something of an empty sack of god flesh, like he often did when Horus had fucked him for too long. The fear Horus had seen the second time Horus had placed him in there hadn’t returned, and Horus wasn’t sure what had changed. Had he simply already acclimated to the new torture?

The whole affair made Horus feel stymied in unusual ways, and he went back to leaving Seth out of the coffin, where he was highly accessible and could be subjected to anything Horus pleased. But that led to an odd discovery one morning, when Seth had mocked him by saying, “What, can’t keep your hands off me for five seconds?” Horus had punished him, of course, but also realized Seth was right: Horus kept *touching* Seth a lot lately, almost like he was hungry for the touch. Desperate, even. Horus wasn’t sure what to do about that: of course Seth was an attractive god, even beaten down and pathetic as he was now, and Horus assumed his body was responding to that. But it was a distraction, as well, and Horus wanted to focus on improving Egypt, to make up for Seth’s mistakes and failures. He was, after all, meant to restore Egypt.

So he went for the route of leaving Seth alone in the office more often while Horus went to meet in Isis’ office to talk affairs of state, hoping it might get his head back in the game of what he was *supposed* to be doing. Up here it was obvious he was allowing the distraction of Seth to get the better of him.

Yet somehow, despite Horus sitting at a desk beside Isis, looking over paperwork with her, a part of Horus seemed down in the office, where Seth was tied to a column and powerless,

likely wondering where Horus was, and when Horus would let him go. It was tantalizing and frustrating, because Horus had much time with his mother yet, and didn't plan to leave any time soon just to satisfy his own carnality.

Isis shook her head. "The Greeks are upset I called off using them to attack Seth, and seem to believe that now that Egypt is in a transition period, we are weaker." She frowned. "And I hate that they're right, in a way." Close up, Horus realized Isis looked a bit tired, and he didn't blame her. Even after a month, they were still figuring out who to trust and how to adjust to being in charge. Gods and administrators were learning their roles and figuring out how to help, and not everything was a success. There was more of a burden on Isis' shoulders to manage things, especially since Nephthys refused to emerge from her cell to help Isis, and Isis' sister would have been Isis' best support in this situation.

But there was worse than that. "The army isn't yet ready to face a powerful enemy force," Horus said. They'd been reorganizing it, and trying to get it under control, but many of the soldiers were still loyal to Seth, and much of the army was devoted to dealing with the caravan problem rampant in the kingdom. Soldier numbers had dwindled as people went home to care for families. Horus had no experience leading an army: the gods he'd come with to Heliopolis had been led by Isis or stuck to their own agendas. Horus was there largely as a symbol, to use against Seth.

Horus wasn't averse to the idea of leading an army, and thought of it as an interesting way to prove himself as a new king. But it wasn't exactly something he looked forward to. And he was woefully aware of his lack of familiarity with the role. The soldiers he'd met were skeptical and wary of him. He'd led a few skirmishes against the slaver caravans - mostly to get himself out of Heliopolis and try to prove his mettle - and while he was powerful, he didn't work well with the humans as a unit, and he knew he wasn't earning their trust. He didn't like thinking about what would happen if he was in charge of a whole army.

Isis snorted. "It's days like this I almost wish Seth was still here."

Horus blinked, but didn't otherwise react. "What do you mean?"

"He knew how to rally troops like no one else," Isis said. She smiled ruefully. "Osiris and I could rally politicians, the public… But soldiers followed Seth. He was their protector as much as Egypt's. And he could kick them into shape easily enough."

Part of Horus grated at the idea that he apparently wasn't considered *good* enough to lead the army himself. But much as Horus hated relying on others, and willing as Horus was, he knew his own inexperience paled in comparison to Seth's prowess as a war god. For all Seth's faults, he'd definitely won many war campaigns in his day. This task would likely be trivial for him. Even as Horus thought about leading the army himself, his intuition told him that would be a terrible idea and would only end in disaster. Egypt would suffer. The Greeks were right: they were weak now, even with the land being restored with Ra's help.

The problem was, Seth *was* here, to be used. Usually by Horus, of course, but he was *available*, not stuck on the sun boat. But it was a ludicrous idea… until his intuition told him that Seth was the one who had to be sent to do his duty: protecting Egypt from her enemies.

He glared at the table, not seeing the scroll he'd been reading. The idea was preposterous, not only because Horus wasn't able to lead Egypt himself against invaders, but also because it meant he'd have to let Seth travel beyond his sight to some degree. Horus liked keeping the god of chaos properly contained, where he couldn't harm anyone. Seth would likely need more control of his powers to help, and that had risks of his own. What if he simply turned on their army?

I'll have to find a way to properly control him, Horus thought as he considered it more and more, moving towards the apparently inevitable reality of it. He had a few punishment ideas he'd been thinking over recently, but they might help with controlling him in the field, too.

Funnily enough, revealing to Isis that Horus had Seth on hand was the *least* of Horus' concerns. He was confident he could continue the deceit. She never turned her truth powers on him, after all, and trusted him more than she perhaps realized was good for her. And if Horus *did* have to reveal the truth, that was no burden, either. He was king now, and he'd been punishing Seth as he wished.

Part of Horus imagined Isis wouldn't mind what Horus had been doing to Seth, outside the fact that she felt Horus owed *Osiris* the honor of punishing Seth. Certainly during their travels, Isis had wished many a horrible end on Seth, even more so than Horus could imagine. She'd be more frustrated he'd kept it from her, and lied about his arrangement with Ra. She might even be proud of him.

Another part of Horus imagined Isis would see him as just another monster: the kind she'd railed against, god or otherwise, and encouraged him to not grow into. But although Horus did his best to honor her wishes and be a *just* god, Horus felt the monstrousness was necessary when one dealt with monsters. What they'd gone through in their travels made people do horrible things to survive and support those you cared for, and Horus was willing to be horrible himself to take justice for his mother, their people, and himself. After everything Seth had done, particularly during the trial, it was his just desserts.

Horus wasn't sure what he'd do if Isis hated him for it. He just focused on performing his duties and keeping up the deception. Seth was on the sun boat. That was all. Until now, anyway. And if she was furious or upset with him... he'd manage it. Like he'd managed everything in his life.

All this whirled around his brain, even as the question of *why* Seth did all that he did rankled at Horus. Horus' mother had been so good to Horus, yet Seth turned his back on his own son, his wife, and his siblings. He'd abandoned his people when they needed him. Isis insisted that it was in Seth's nature to be like this, but if so, why had he lived alongside his siblings for so long in harmony? And how were so many humans still loyal to Seth if he only killed and enslaved them? Not all of them were growing wealthy off of the slave trade. If it were just in Seth's nature, then why did Seth go quiet and distant when Horus demanded answers, as if he was hiding something?

Or perhaps he was mocking Horus' ineptitude. Horus' left hand tightened on his thigh. The more Seth refused to answer, the more he moved away, the more Horus felt compelled to chase after him, and pull free all his secrets. "Horus?" Isis asked, clearly wondering at his silence.

“Horus?” Isis asked, clearly wondering at his silence.

Horus considered the papers he was looking at anew, as he was reminded he was still with Isis, and had again been distracted by Seth. For the first time in a while, he thought how wearying it was to have responsibilities. But instead of saying as much, he said, “It would indeed be… *convenient* to have Seth back here.”

“You’re acting so serious about it,” Isis said with a raised eyebrow. “I was merely joking.”

“And if you weren’t?” Horus asked, meeting her gaze.

Isis’ eyes widened. “Horus, it’s… It’s a *terrible* idea. It would also likely make things *worse*. Who knows what trouble he’d get up to?”

“Yes…” Horus said. “Though perhaps, if the situation is as dire the messages seem to say, we should consider asking Ra to return Seth here to help with this matter.”

“But you could lead our troops,” Isis said, surprising him, and pushing back on his own frustration at trying to prove himself and not being allowed to. She looked up at him with a frown. “You’re our king.”

Much as Horus appreciated her support, he couldn’t ignore his intuition, as it had never led him astray. So he shook his head and replied, “I’m still young and inexperienced. They won’t follow me. And those who will aren’t powerful enough to make an army, or strong enough to withstand one. It would be disaster.”

Isis’ eyes widened. “…Are you certain? It might be worth a try.”

“I know it’s true. All that will happen if I try to lead is that we will have lost valuable time and troops. But Seth is a prisoner of the gods, now. We lose nothing by using him as a servant.”

Isis grimaced. “He’s serving his sentence, though.”

“This could be him working off his sentence, as well. He’s still serving Egypt, either way. And this is what he’s meant to do.”

“We wouldn’t be able to control him!” Isis said, a bit more alarmed.

“I can manage it. I have a few ideas.” He needed to ask around for advice. Follow up on some of his own ideas.

“…Well, Ra would never agree to it.”

Horus smiled. “You might be surprised on what she’ll allow.”

Isis raised an eyebrow. “I’m surprised you’re so for this. You hate him almost as much as I do.”

Horus touched a scroll nearby. “I’ve seen the troop movements and letters you’ve been sending. I know what’s ahead of us if we wait too long on this.” He smiled grimly. “I’m willing to play with a tamed lion if it means we save Egypt from more disaster.”

Isis snorted. “Seth is hardly tame.”

“Perhaps,” Horus said with a soft smile. “Perhaps he just needs the right tamer.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 4: Insurance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth hadn't learned much of the nature of how gods dreamed. That was usually Isis' purview, and he'd never taken the time to speak to her about it all that much. After the night Osiris died and they fell out with each other, Seth hadn't exactly had the time to discuss the nature of dreams with her, or any other god who might specialize in it. Generally, Seth more frequently had nightmares since then, which he typically attempted to drown with alcohol and drugs. With time, he had fewer nightmares, and the time between experiencing them grew longer, and he simply slept with no dreams or nightmares at all, which was at least more blissful than the nightmares. But under Horus' ministrations, the nightmares came back with a vengeance. Nightmares of hands grabbing Seth in the dark and pulling him to pieces. Mocking laughter. Pain, both physical and emotional.

The issue was that waking didn't seem to make a difference. Horus' cruelties sometimes seemed worse. Perhaps the only current benefit was that Horus' magic had been thus far limited to his wind abilities and Maat's punishment. Horus used regular ties to keep Seth bound, and he had no power over aging. He didn't even use drugs all that much. It was practically tame by comparison. But it still meant Seth began to doubt his state of mind when he was awake, and the doubt made things even worse.

In recent days, though, Horus spent more time away, leaving Seth with little to do other than attempt to sleep or stare at the room, unable to move from where he knelt or lay on the floor, the ache of his bonds a constant and frustrating reminder that he was never getting out of here, even if Horus wasn't around to supervise his imprisonment. The absence itself was odd: at first Seth assumed it was a new kind of torture, leaving Seth isolated to make him *want* Horus back… But *that* definitely wasn't happening. Perhaps Horus would have been a distraction from Seth being left alone with his thoughts when he couldn't sleep, since his thoughts often went to Anubis, likely happier without Seth there, or Nephthys, still serving her self-made sentence in her cell. Perhaps she'd left it while Seth was stuck here, and figured out what to do with herself. Or Seth tormented himself with his own failures: Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Anubis, the trial… Everything.

But it didn't mean Seth *missed* him.

Seth also began to wonder if Horus was simply distracted by something else, and had grown bored of dealing with Seth, and certainly didn't care enough to untie him. Would Seth be left to rot here, alone in this windowless room? Or was Horus merely thinking up new tortures for him?

From the darkness, Horus said, "Wake up, Uncle Seth," with a slap on Seth's face to accompany the words. "I have a gift for you."

Seth sat up slightly, even though it hurt a bit. Horus would be mad if he didn't. Seth felt Horus reach out to undo the blindfold around Seth's eyes. After it was gone, Seth blinked his eyes open in the bad torchlight. The room looked little changed, save for the horrid coffin in the corner that Horus still liked to threaten him with. Horus was kneeling before him, smirking as usual, looking little different for his absence. His bright blue falcon headdress was a clean spot in the mess of a room, and Seth was too worn out from sitting in place for days to even fantasize about ripping it off of him.

"Let me guess," Seth replied, meeting Horus' gaze drolly, "it's something to fuck me with."

Horus laughed. "Not quite, Uncle Seth." Horus leaned in close. "Did you miss me?"

Seth simply glared at him. Horus didn't move to untie Seth from the pillar. Even if he was a *distraction* from Seth's torturous thoughts, it still wasn't enough to change the fact that Horus was *back* with more stupid games to make Seth suffer. "Hardly."

Horus pouted. "That hurts a bit, you know. I always think of you."

"Sounds like you need better hobbies," Seth replied. Like ruling the country. Talking to his beloved parents. Dealing with the humans Horus seemingly loved so much.

Horus grinned, "I think I'm perfectly content. In fact, *this* hobby," Horus tapped Seth's right knee, sending a brief burst of pain through him, "just proved a boon for Egypt."

Seth refused to visibly react to the pain, and focused on whatever Horus was on about *now*. "What?"

Horus' expression grew serious. "A Greek army is going to invade our shores, led by some people Isis attempted to ally with during the trial. The Greeks believe Egypt is weak and plan to strike at an opportune time to take power here."

Seth scowled. Even during his reign, no foreigners had invaded them. They didn't dare. "So send the army."

Horus shook his head. "We're not strong enough to stand against them. Too many of our soldiers are scattered after your reign, and none of the war gods we have are strong enough to rally them together."

"…Do you expect me to give you some secret about winning a war?" Seth asked, confused. "It's about power, numbers, and knowing strategy. I can't exactly teach you the last part while bound to a pillar, even if I cared to. And I can't exactly call in troops or supplies for you from here."

"No," Horus said. Then he smiled. "I expect you to lead our forces to victory yourself."

That got a laugh out of Seth. But when he realized Horus wasn't laughing, too, Seth frowned. "What are you talking about? I'm your prisoner."

"You are still a servant of Egypt," Horus said. He took hold of Seth's chin. "And you obey Egypt's king. And I command you to take charge of our armies to defend Egypt from

invaders."

Seth scowled at Horus. "You're a fool if you plan to simply unleash me on troops with nothing but an order. At least your father had my trust when he did that." *Even though he was a damn liar.* "And Ra is more powerful than you are. If I'd been on her sun boat, I'd have had no choice but to defend it."

Horus smiled and let go of him. "Of course I'm not planning to merely *order* you. But you're going to obey, because I have insurance." Horus reached out behind him and grabbed something that he held out before Seth. It was a small, unremarkable wooden box.

Seth simply stared as Horus opened the lid, revealing a large blue ring with writing on the outside. But it was strangely designed, with a second, connected loop. The material seemed to be some kind of leather.

"…Are you proposing marriage to me?" Seth asked. "The answer is no." He snorted. "Not that I imagine you care."

Horus took the ring out of its box. "Please, Uncle Seth, that's hardly what I'm doing." He reached out for Seth's ratty white loincloth and pulled it aside, making Seth's face heat. Even after all this time, he hated how casual Horus was about touching Seth in his most intimate places, and giving him nothing at all in terms of privacy. Horus took hold of Seth's flaccid cock, and inserted it through one of the loops.

"What are you doing?" Seth demanded as Horus moved the ring down the base of Seth's cock, and then reached out with the second loop, wrapping it snugly around Seth's balls. It wasn't exactly *painful*, but it was *present*.

Horus studied the fit thoughtfully for a while, then nodded. "It fits perfectly. Good."

Seth glared at the new item, and his eyes widened as it *vanished* from sight. But he could still feel it there, on his skin.

Horus smiled. "This is neat little item I got from Sebek and Ptah. I'd been wondering about some new toys to use on you, and this one in particular was one I've wanted to try." Horus moved his hand over Seth's cock, to touch the top of the ring. "It responds to my magic, no matter where you are."

"Your magic to do what?" Seth demanded.

Horus smiled and pulled his hand away.

The ring tightened, and Seth cried out, falling onto his side. Horus had kicked his cock before, and beaten him, but it was nothing like this. It was worse than even some of the rougher hand jobs Horus had given him. It was just so *sharp*, and it cut right to the core of him.

The pain abruptly stopped, leaving Seth panting through the aftershocks.

“If you disobey me,” Horus said, “You will experience that, and none of your soldiers will know what is wrong. And I imagine you will not wish to explain to them.”

Seth wanted to strangle the god before him. *Fucking asshole.*

Horus reached out to grab Seth’s chin again, so their eyes met. “You will lead our armies to victory. The ring remains on, as does Maat’s punishment. Your powers will still be limited, and my birds will watch your movements to ensure you don’t turn your abilities on our people, or allow Egypt to fall.” He held up his free hand and a feather appeared in it. Before Seth’s eyes, it transformed into a small falcon, who hopped up on Horus’ shoulder, and watched Seth with those same bright blue eyes. The grip on Seth’s chin tightened. “If you begin to move against us, in any way, the ring will leave you insensate, until I come to collect you. And you will regret it.”

Seth swallowed. “And you think this will convince me to lead your armies for you?”

“You’re getting freedom from your cage,” Horus said, smiling down at him. “You get to do what the god of war is meant to do: protect Egypt. Surely that’s what you most desire?”

“That doesn’t mean I want to be your leashed pet in public,” Seth said with a snarl.

“No one will know about this,” Horus said. “But perhaps they will begin to trust you a little more if you can show your obedience to the throne again.”

Seth scoffed.

Horus’ grip tightened again. “Every evening, you will return to my side. Try to run, and the ring will take you.”

Seth didn’t know where Horus expected him to run *to*, with Maat’s punishment in play. “Some battles last late, especially if they bring their own magical creatures.”

“Then you had best stay on the battlefield,” Horus said. “And hope they end quickly.” Horus let Seth go and stood up to walk away.

Seth glared at the floor. “And if I let the Greeks get to me first?” If Seth could outmaneuver Osiris, surely he could out maneuver some Greek soldiers. If nothing else, they’d at least kill him, even if Horus wouldn’t, and Seth was currently open to trying his luck with Osiris again, especially since Seth had escaped him once.

“Maat’s punishment isn’t going away,” Horus said before walking back with a large ceramic pitcher, two small bags, and a thick cloth, which he set down on the ground near Seth. Horus smiled darkly at Seth. “You could let them get you, but I doubt they’ll be kind to the god of war and former king of Egypt. At best they’d kill you. At worst, they’d display you as a trophy and let their soldiers use you for sport.”

Seth looked at the pitcher as Horus wet the cloth with the liquid within. It seemed to be water.

“Then again, you’ve suggested gang rape as an alternate to what I do, so maybe that’s preferable?” Horus opened one of the small bags to show a bar of soap, and rubbed the wet

cloth over it. Then he reached out to rub the wet, soapy cloth over Seth's chest.

Seth didn't think replying to the comment about what the Greeks might do to him was worth responding to, so instead he frowned as he realized Horus was… *cleaning* him. "What are you doing *now?"*

"A general needs to look properly presentable for his troops, does he not?" Horus said as he focused on his task. "I'll present you to Mother tomorrow. But we need to get you cleaned up before then."

"I can clean *myself,"* Seth said.

Horus chuckled. "Of course you can. But I haven't seen you in so long and want to spent more time with you. An owner needs to spend quality time with their pets after all. And I don't trust you to do this properly before you go to war. Looking like a mess during combat is at least acceptable."

Seth glared at him, but resigned himself to Horus' strange ministrations. "How are you planning to get Isis to agree to this? What lie did you bake up for her this time?"

"Mother actually suggested you lead our troops in the first place, after a fashion." Horus wasn't gentle as he scrubbed, being sure to get all the dirt off. But Seth bore with it. It was hardly worse than anything else Horus had done. "And I just told her I'd negotiate with Ra for your release for this venture, which isn't untrue. When I was negotiating for Ra's help to restore Egypt after the trial, I *did* get your release."

Seth frowned as Horus wiped a freshly wet towel over Seth's nose. "How? Even Isis could never get much of anything out of Ra."

Horus grinned. "I was *persuasive.* It helps that I'm king now, and beat you." Horus rubbed more soap over the towel. "I told Ra that if she wanted her temples properly rebuilt, she'd abandon the idea of you going to her sun boat, and help restore Egypt, so her followers could return."

"…You *threatened* an ally?" It was a bold, dangerous move, and Seth had to admit Horus seemed arrogant enough for it.

Horus shrugged and began focusing on Seth's left shoulder. "We were cautious allies at best. Ra always mocked Isis when Isis went to her for help. Besides, Ra found it amusing. And she continues to *be* a strong ally because of it." As Horus moved the towel down Seth's arm, he added, "Besides, I left it open for me to give you into her custody at some point in the future."

Seth didn't allow himself to react to that. The sun boat wouldn't be the worst punishment in the world, and it would likely be better than *this.* It would probably grind Seth down, but no worse than what Horus was doing. And if Seth wasn't allowed to die, then…

The idea of freedom *was* appealing. Seeing the sun again. Feeling wind. Being able to actually *fight* someone and maybe get rid of them entirely if he wanted, to offset some anger

at what Horus was doing. But Seth didn't trust Horus. He didn't like the ring, and he knew there would be worse involved down the line. Horus was ensuring that Seth wouldn't forget that he was an *owned* creature, and Horus' to do with as he pleased. There was no escape from that.

In that moment, Seth realized the whole thing was perhaps the worst torment of all: allowing Seth the illusion of freedom, knowing every day he'd have to crawl back to Horus and likely receive more abuse.

And this is meant to tempt me to obey, Seth thought, glaring at Horus' mask. *But what choice do I have? It's better than sitting here in the dark, unable to move much.*

"You're being oddly obedient," Horus said as he lowered his towel and reached back for the other bag. "I supposed the ring actually worked. Or else you're so desperate to get outside that you'll take anything."

Seth kept his lips pursed an didn't reply.

Horus laughed. "If you think you'll escape, you're wrong. Maat's punishment and the ring are a good tracking device, as well. And you won't like what happens if you try to remove the ring on your own."

Seth scoffed at that.

Horus sat pulled a small vial from the bag, unstoppered it, and poured some of the liquid on his fingers before moving his hand to an old cut on Seth's shoulder.

Seth's eyes widened as he recognized what Horus was holding. "You stole Isis' *medicine?!"*

"Mother gives me a supply of it for my work," Horus replied, clearly focused on his task.

The pain faded almost immediately as Horus worked, and Seth realized this was to hide all his injuries. Likely Seth would have been covered in injuries from the sun boat, but not as bad, or as specific as these.

"Plus, unlike you and Mother," Horus continued, "Mother and I have a good relationship. I *can* simply ask for things as I wish."

Seth remembered that horrible night when he'd asked Isis for help, and Isis had rebuffed him. She would never believe her precious Osiris would go behind his back with Nephthys, and she'd berated him for what happened, and for lying to her about his reasoning, claiming he'd done what he did out of jealousy.

No, he wasn't that excited to have anything from Isis, anyway. But he found what Horus was doing was ridiculous. "A good relationship predicated on lying about raping her brother every day," Seth said in reply as Horus worked on a set of cuts over Seth's ribs.

Horus paused and looked up at Seth thoughtfully. "You know Mother wanted me to give you to Father, instead. She insisted on it, in fact. I don't think she'd mind all that much."

Seth felt his throat tighten at the thought, but pushed on, “So why lie to her about it? Why not just say you’re doing what your father would have done?” Seth knew Horus wasn’t his father, but he couldn’t exactly imagine the treatment would be all that different. The gloating, the rape… It would just be a different flavor with Osiris, no doubt.

Horus scoffed. “I don’t want her interfering in my business.”

“…You think she wouldn’t approve of this.” When they’d been happy siblings, Seth could never have imagined a time when he’d have wanted Anubis to grow into what Horus was, now. He couldn’t imagine Isis would want this for him, either. But surely she’d accept anything her precious son did to her most hated enemy?

Horus glared at Seth, startling him a little. “If you think for a second about telling her about this, then rest assured: the minute you tell her, I’ll declare to all of Egypt that you’re my whore. I’ll have monuments carved about what I do to you and left as signposts on roads. Keeping the truth from my mother is a minor issue, but one I know she’ll get behind once I say something.”

Seth was chilled at the idea of what Horus was threatening. What would Nephthys think of it? What would Anubis think? It was also incredibly near-sighted. “You’d destroy my ability to lead your army? For your *pride?”* No one would follow a general degraded in that way. Seth wasn’t even sure he could face them under the lie of it all. But with it in the open? It was a fool’s game.

“Your leading our army is the best case scenario we have. But there are alternatives. They would be difficult, but I’m willing to do them.” Horus smiled brightly. “There is no way out of this, Seth. Perhaps you’ve forgotten how to be a god of war, but you’re going to re-learn.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 5: Preparations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

"You really *have* tamed him. I'm impressed."

Seth tried to focus on Isis rather than the wonderful way sunshine felt on his skin from his travel here, or the smell of fresh air from the Nile that always surrounded Isis. Seth was back in his usual outfit, with a fresh black shendyt, his gold armlets, leglets, and usekh, and even his headdress, which he'd been allowed to form from sand so as to not encumber him in combat. Horus had tight control over Seth's powers with Maat's spell, so Seth couldn't dissolve himself into sand exactly, or at least at present form much out of sand. And much as the idea of forming a fine sand dagger and stabbing it into Horus appealed, Seth didn't want to revisit the pain of the cock ring any time soon. Seth was only allowed this much when he noted that his leading troops would be undercut by people being able to see his face: he had to present himself as a powerful god, after all, one who'd led their troops to victory after victory over the millennia, and could do so again. The spells on him already kept him physically weaker, they didn't need to make his appeal even less in the eyes of their soldiers. Horus had cautiously obliged, with limitations to Seth's abilities going forward.

Seth chafed at the leash, but he knew it was unavoidable. He'd just enjoy it while he could and just figure out some way to escape it in future. Perhaps he had nowhere to go and no one to accept him, but tasting freedom like this was too much for him to lay down and accept the status quo.

Isis and Maat had made camp with their troops a short distance from where the Greeks had moored their ships, to give negotiations for the Greek departure one last shot – which none of them expected to work – and Horus and Seth had to leave Heliopolis to meet them. When Horus had considered carrying Seth there while flying to save time, Seth argued that it would make Horus look more in charge to have Seth following in his wake. Plus, people might consider Horus carrying Seth as something a servant would do.

Horus agreed with the idea, and allowed Seth to make a sand chariot with sand crocodiles to carry himself instead. As Seth got into it, Horus said, "Don't forget to stay close to me, Uncle Seth. We wouldn't want you losing control, would we?" Then he'd flown up into the air to lead the way. The cock ring didn't activate, but it was obvious what Horus was referencing.

You wanted me to re-learn how to be a god of war? Seth thought with a glare at Horus' back. *Perhaps you should recall who my main enemy is.* He'd stayed silent during the trip, while Horus talked, half-listening, and half luxuriating in the return of some of his abilities, and feel of the wind in his hair as they raced across Egypt towards Isis and Maat. He thought he'd be over this, after so many years of feeling empty and defeated, and the levels of despair Horus

had pushed him to during his punishment. But like this… he felt alive in a way he hadn't in some time.

Now Seth stood just behind Horus while Horus, Isis, and Maat stood in their command tent, with a table of battle plans, administrative documents, and assorted materials between them. Seth longed to go racing across the desert, but he could feel the cock ring on him like a brand. He also had no idea what Maat might do with her spell if she sensed Seth acting out of line. He knew it could smother his powers, but he had no idea if it could do *worse*, and he had no desire to test it.

“I told you it was possible, Mother,” Horus said with a smile. “It helps that his punishment has weakened him even more than usual. He won’t be as powerful as he was before the punishment, but he’s still strong enough to fight.”

Seth flattened his lips at Horus’ audacity. Seth was only weak because of the damn cock ring and Maat’s spell, not because of time on the sun boat. It wasn’t exactly a lie, but it was definitely overly vague in way that allowed Horus to skate the line of honesty and dishonesty. Maat was seemingly completely oblivious, and simply watched Seth with mild curiosity. Horus might say he had a good relationship with Isis, but a part of Seth wondered if the man *enjoyed* tricking her this way. Horus didn’t seem like Osiris, who seemingly hadn’t cared enough about Isis’ opinion of his behavior for it to be a going concern.

Seth recalled Horus’ threats and wondered if Horus *wanted* the truth to come out. Yes, *Seth* was afraid of what would happen, but Horus treated so much of this like a game. He almost seemed *hungry* for it back in Heliopolis. Or perhaps he really didn’t really care and liked the opportunity to belittle Seth more. Either was a possibility.

“As long as he can send the Greeks running home,” Isis said with a frown at Seth. If looks could kill, Seth knew hers would. He remembered hearing her wish to send him to punishment under Osiris. He remembered the night he’d gone to her for support and she turned her back on him. She was no ally, and Seth had burned any bridges he had left with her in the hundreds of years between then. Being this close to her set him on edge, but it was no worse than being constantly around Horus was. “Do you understand that?”

“Yes,” Seth replied. Simple enough. She already hated him. And if he was meant to play the cowed general, so be it. The sooner he got this over with, the sooner he could go to the battlefield and focus on plans for getting out of the cock ring.

Isis gave him an odd look, as if he’d still done something wrong, but didn’t say anything else.

“Seth will also be helping to train me in the ways of war,” Horus said.

Isis frowned at him. “What?”

“Osiris’ teachings were limited,” Horus said, making Seth’s eyes widen in surprise. “He wasn’t a trained military strategist and had little thought for using actual soldiers: he only relied on himself. You saw that yourself when you had to negotiate for people to help us during the trial, Mother, because Osiris’ plans were too small-minded.”

“He’s your father, Horus, you shouldn’t speak of him that way.”

Small-minded?! Seth wanted to burst out laughing. He wondered what in the world Osiris had planned versus what Horus and Isis chose to employ for the trial. *It’s good to know he’s still an idiot and even the son he acknowledges thinks as much.*

“And Ra is your great-grandmother,” Horus said. “I’m just being honest.”

Isis sighed.

“Seth, on the other hand, is actually a god of war,” Horus said. “And if I can learn from him, perhaps I can lead our troops on my own in future.”

“You trust him to not lead you astray?” Isis asked with a glare at Seth.

“It’s all we have,” Horus said. “And I trust myself to know what is bad advice and what is not.” Horus smiled at Seth. “Besides, if Ra trusts Seth on her sun boat, I believe I can trust him not to get our troops killed. It would make him look bad, after all, and self-interest is a core tenet of his mindset.”

Seth kept his expression blank. Horus hadn’t made it seem like he wanted Seth’s advice on how to win a war. He just wanted someone convenient to win it. This was likely just some cover for spending as much time with Seth as Horus wanted to. Seth dreaded being free in the day and returning to Horus’ side at night, but he currently had little choice, at least until he figured out how to undo the ring. Perhaps Horus was wiser than his father, but neither of them had dealt with Seth in the field. Seth would have more opportunities, hopefully. And if Seth managed to escape, even if Horus still followed up on his threat to tell the world what he’d done to Seth in private, they’d merely be the ravings of a new and somewhat weak ruler trying to rewrite the narrative of having lost his alleged pet soldier.

Seth promised himself that Horus would *regret* giving Seth so much leeway and making such stupid threats. He clearly had no idea who he was dealing with, even now.

Their army wasn’t ready to jump immediately into the fight: Seth had to get their troops back in order, shocking the humans with his reappearance. Many were alarmed at his return, but thankfully Horus’ presence helped assuage them to some extent, making them see that Seth answered to *Horus.* Not the other way around.

Many soldiers were actually *elated* at his return, and quickly fell back into formations or set out to clean up their camps. Seth imagined they felt their chances of victory were higher, better increasing their odds of returning home alive to their families, rather than under an unblooded king and the goddess who’d been Seth’s primary enemy for hundreds of years. The good news was, for all they clearly weren’t as together being behind Horus and Isis, Horus and Isis had done a decent enough job getting things organized. And barking orders at least let Seth vent a bit, especially with no Horus to grab and punish him, at least during the daylight hours.

As Seth met with the commanding officers and saw their loyalty to him, a part of him wondered about biding his time once this conflict was done and calling them to his side, to take back the throne for himself somehow. But another part of him thought, *to what end?* He had no desire to hold the throne. He'd hated every moment he'd had control over it. And the humans would be useless dealing with the spells on him. He'd have to find some other way to get back at Horus. He would just have to be more patient. At least he had sand underneath his feet, sunlight on his back, fresh air surrounding him, and the charged tension of approaching battle filling the people around him. It was familiar and grounding.

The first night, Seth reported to Horus' tent for "more lessons", which meant walking through his decisions for organizing their troops while kneeling at Horus' side. Horus listened and took notes, which was surprising. Seth expected him to just fuck Seth to unconsciousness or something, even if Horus wanted to avoid leaving marks for their troops to see. Horus asked about Seth's future plans, which Seth detailed based on what he'd learned of the army's status.

"Hmm… Good," Horus said, making more notations on the scroll he had open. Eventually he looked at Seth and said, "You know, seeing you working today, I can see why the soldiers follow you. You must have been something when you were a proper general."

Seth's hands stiffened on his thighs.

"It's a pity you wasted it on killing my father and slowly letting Egypt rot," Horus continued.

Seth rolled his eyes. Of course. More lectures. As if Horus had any idea what he was talking about.

"Then again, you're now kneeling obediently before someone your soldiers failed to kill," Horus continued. "But at least you did good work today."

Seth waited for Horus to grab him and fuck him against the floor or something, to remind Seth of his place or just because Horus was bored. But nothing happened. "…Is that all?"

Horus glanced at him. "I'll ask more questions when I have them. But you've given me much to consider." He smiled. "Unless you want more?" Horus reached out and took hold of Seth's chin in a strong grip. "Do you miss my cock so much after being parted from me for the day?"

Seth didn't rise to the bait.

Horus laughed and let him go before turning back to his paperwork. "Consider this a gift for good behavior. It would hardly make sense if I punished you for doing as I commanded, would it?"

Something about being out and about must have made Seth foolish, because he muttered, "That's never stopped you before."

Horus chuckled. "You're right. Perhaps I'm in a good mood, then." Horus glanced down at him, a heated look in his gaze. "Seeing the god of war all these soldiers worship being so

obedient to you will do that."

Seth kept himself still, even though he wanted to yell instead. People would hear them.

Horus snorted. "Train our troops properly and make sure I stay in a good mood. It wouldn't be that hard to fuck you while you're gagged in a way that wouldn't leave marks, after all, even here, and everyone has orders to leave me alone at night, so we'd be undisturbed except in an emergency." His eyes moved down to Seth's crotch, pointedly. "And I don't have to touch you at all to hurt you, do I?"

Seth recalled that burst of sharp pain from when Horus first gave him the cock ring, and breathed in and remained still, knowing Horus was just looking for an excuse to do something. In a way it reminded him of Osiris, and that terrible night, which brought to mind Horus' comments earlier. "Do you really not support Osiris?"

"I support my father," Horus replied, clearly confused by the change in topic. "What gave you the impression I didn't?"

"You were so critical of him when we arrived," Seth replied. "But he helped you during the trial." It should be Osiris whom Horus was seeking aid from, not Seth.

Horus studied Seth for a moment before replying, "You mean my comments to Mother about his skills as a strategist?"

"Or lack thereof," Seth commented with a slight smirk, recalling Osiris' frustration when he'd realized he'd been tricked.

Horus snorted. "That he fell for your tricks speaks volumes of his incompetence. If he were better skilled, he wouldn't have done so."

Seth's smirk faded and his face burned. The little upstart sure had some ridiculous ideas about things he knew nothing about!

"Osiris was apparently a wise king," Horus said, ignoring Seth's fury, as he often did, "who led Egypt well, and was beloved by all. But not even Ra was perfect at everything when she ruled Egypt. Mother was the better strategist of my parents when we prepared for the trial, and Osiris often ignored her contributions to focus on his own anger, even more than Mother can be at her worst. It was self-defeating." He was clearly disgusted by the attitude and gazed angrily at his desk, with his hands clasped tightly on his thighs. "While I'm grateful for Osiris' aid on our path back to the throne, Mother is the main reason we made the headway we did. Not Osiris."

"But he's your father," Seth insisted.

"I'm confused how my parentage is meant to change my opinion of his skills," Horus replied idly. "After all, you're one of the most powerful gods of war in Egypt, and yet your son is a weakling."

Seth's eyes widened. "What?"

“He’s good at many types of combat,” Horus allowed, “And useful for administration. But all those years and he couldn’t take his mother away from Heliopolis, find his own path in life, or even try to unseat you, despite his hatred of you? It’s pathetic.”

If Seth hadn’t spent so much time with Horus, the odd callousness might have shocked him. But perhaps Anubis’ reputation was tainted by association with Seth. “He’s just a demigod,” Seth said, angrily. That he’d accomplished so much *just* as a demigod spoke volumes. Nephthys had practically abandoned him and Seth had *actually* abandoned him. He didn’t have someone like Isis at his side, supporting him. Or even someone as minorly helpful as Osiris apparently was for Horus.

“He’s older than me and failed to ascend,” Horus said. “I’m sure at some point he’ll figure it out. Perhaps even during the war. I’m willing to let him prove himself in combat, anyway.”

Seth paled as he realized what Horus was saying. “You can’t bring him here!”

“He’s already here,” Horus said. “He came with Isis to help her manage affairs here.”

Seth’s heart raced. He hadn’t spotted Anubis at all, but he'd been distracted by his newfound freedom, small as it was, and Anubis had grown deft at staying out of sight in recent years. Likely he’d hidden himself when Seth was around, particularly since Seth hadn’t known to look for him. “He’s not a war god!” Anubis was a good learner, and seemed to enjoy weapons practice, but he’d never given any indications his leanings as a god would be towards war. He had shown no inclination of anything, actually, much as Nephthys and Seth had tried to figure things out. He was just a gentle boy, that was all. Eventually twisted by Seth’s abuse. Despite his time in the arena at Seth’s orders, he wasn’t trained for a battlefield in war, and didn’t belong there.

“We don’t know what he is,” Horus said. “But he’s a trained soldier, and we need to turn back the Greeks. A demigod is better than a score of humans.”

“He could be killed…” Seth said, squeezing his hands on his thighs, trying to keep himself from shaking in fear.

“Since when do you care?” Horus asked, gazing down at him thoughtfully. “You nearly killed him yourself any number of times over the years.”

Seth pressed his lips together and didn’t reply, focusing on calming his breathing.

Horus tilted his head at Seth thoughtfully. “Then that will be another encouragement for you to finish this matter up quickly, won’t it?”

Seth pressed his hands down against the skin of his thighs. He refused to further rise to Horus’ goading. This was worse than everything else Horus had done. Seth had to end this all as fast as he could. For Anubis.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 6: Meetings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth tried to focus on preparing his soldiers for battle, but he was constantly worried any moment that he'd run across Anubis on some errand. Only a few months before, he'd have ignored the boy if they crossed paths, in part because at least Anubis was safe in Heliopolis, away from Osiris, the battlefield, and often away from Seth. Now it gave him more fear than when he stepped into Horus' tent every night, even after Horus' good mood faded. The time it took to train up their army was seemingly frustrating Horus, and his conversations with Isis grew more heated. Seth and Horus' conversations about strategy were still oddly peaceful, but one night after Seth swore he saw Anubis passing between tents at a distance, Seth was even more restless than usual, and Horus noticed. After their debriefing session, Horus grabbed Seth's chin and said, "You're too distracted. Do you think this is for sight-seeing? I think you're forgetting this isn't meant to be fun." Then he pushed Seth under the desk and shoved his cock so far down Seth's throat that Seth knew he'd feel it in the morning. It was startling, especially after Horus had been almost distant in their time at camp.

Seth hated it, but in a way he was grateful to have his mind focused on hating Horus than terrified of running across Anubis somewhere in the camp. Plus, it gave him more incentive to dive harder into battle preparations, just as Horus apparently wished. Though Seth wondered if he was the *only* person whom Horus was working off steam at.

Isis barely spoke to him, other than to watch critically as he directed their troops. Only in one briefing he attended did she speak to him directly, to say, "Be wary of their leader. He's a fearsome, powerful god, and someone I believed could rival you at full strength." She detailed their negotiations before the trial and up through the point of negotiations falling apart, ending with, "Don't underestimate him."

Seth was unused to her talking to him and asked, quietly, "Does he have any weaknesses?"

Isis snorted. "His pride, perhaps. You have that in common."

Seth felt proud of himself for not visibly reacting, even as he recalled the night he'd begged her for help, and she'd clung to Osiris' reputation. *If pride is a fault I have, I'm not the only one.*

"Do we know if they have other gods leading their forces?" Horus asked, guiding the discussion in a different direction, which Seth was almost grateful for, though he imagined Horus didn't do it for *him.*

On the first day of real battle against the Greeks, Seth cut through their camps like a knife through soft cheese, with Horus at his side. Seth still had no idea where Anubis was in their formations – Horus wouldn't tell him – but he fought like he would take on the whole army himself anyway. Horus thankfully wasn't an encumbrance, and used his wind powers and swift blade to cut down anyone in his path. Seth couldn't shapeshift walls of sand or sand soldiers to fight, but he could form his fingertips into claws, and between that, his khopesh, and his bow, he was practically unstoppable.

The Greeks fell before him, seemingly surprised the Egyptians who gave up on negotiations were attacking like this, particularly with a different god to lead them than the ones who'd led negotiations, on top of Horus joining the field of battle for real.

It was almost pleasant, to be able to just *attack*. To face no punishment. No Isis to glare at him. Just Seth and his powers, being used to the fullest he was allowed. When the Greeks used their own magic against him, he moved around it. Horus practically brushed off magical attacks, and sent tornadoes crashing through the Greek encampment.

The human troops followed in their wake, mopping up stragglers and cheering whenever Seth or Horus came to their rescue. Their commanders kept good control of the situation, but Seth could feel the thirst for battle still in the air. They followed where Seth led, like they had when this had been all he'd been in charge of doing. Simpler times.

I don't need to remember how to be a war god, Seth thought as he cut down humans and the strange magical beings the Greeks brought with them to help in the fight. Blue, green, and red blood and gore soaked the sand beneath him, and Seth imagined he could reach the Greek ships soon enough, whether or not he had Horus at his back. *This is what I've done for centuries before you were even born.*

"So you're the one who's been annihilating our forces," an unfamiliar voice said from nearby.

Seth had sensed someone unfamiliar watching him besides the mortal archers who kept trying and failing to shoot him. Seth could sense power from the newcomer, and was glad the man was seeking Seth out, rather than potentially focusing on somewhere Anubis was. He stepped back from the human he'd decapitated to flick his khopesh clean.

The newcomer was largely covered in a large brown robe, and walked barefoot, like Seth. Gold flashed at his wrists and calves, and he had shoulder length, wavy brown hair, and a beard. He smirked at Seth, and his eyes flickered gold. "I don't recall anyone mentioning you at the negotiating table. Are you Isis' husband?"

Horus was busy dealing with some monster the size of four tall people, and so Seth faced this strange god alone. Seth merely looked him over and recalled Isis' warning. He tried to keep it in mind, given Isis and Seth used to strategize all the time, so he trusted her judgment. But this foreign god just looked like a furry irritant.

Furball tilted his head slightly in confusion. "Not going to talk? Do you just enjoy slaughter, then?"

“You refused to negotiate with Isis,” Seth said, watching for any surprises at his back. He hadn’t spotted Anubis at all as he moved across the battlefield, and hoped that meant Anubis was safe wherever he was, since Seth was in the thickest of the fighting. All he could hear was the sound of soldiers fighting, shouts of pain, and the sound of metal on metal. “What do you want to talk about?”

“Perhaps your surrender?” Furball offered, with an almost swagger, as if he thought it was a joke of some kind.

Seth felt his anger boiling. All the gods around Seth thought he was a joke. And maybe he was, given what had happened to him. Horus thought he was throwing tantrums and just needed to be brought into like an unruly child. Isis thought he was a liar and a bother. Osiris thought he was a pathetic weakling with no one to support him. Nephthys… Seth didn’t know what she thought of him, but it clearly wasn’t much of anything.

But Seth refused to prove them right anymore, no matter how much Horus ground him into the dirt, and he wasn’t going to take this nonsense from this trumped up furball. He wanted to protect Nephthys and Anubis, and that meant protecting Egypt from the invaders. “If you want an end to this conflict, take your soldiers, retreat to your ships, and leave Egypt, before I destroy your ships, too.”

Furball laughed. “I don’t think so. This place is too interesting for that.”

“Then die,” Seth said, raising his khopesh and leaping forward.

Furball leapt aside, clearly quite fast, too.

Seth spun and turned his khopesh into a bow and arrow, shooting at Furball. The other god was far too fast, and in a burst of speed, Furball punched down at where Seth had been crouching before leaping aside to dodge the punch. They played a game of cat and mouse for a time, both targeting each other and dodging aside. Seth grew frustrated, because he was making no progress to the boats, and he had to rely on the mortal army commanders to lead their troops.

As both gods landed a distance away from each other, Furball raised his hand up, “I realize I’ve been terribly rude. I forgot to ask your name.”

Seth raised his bow to aim for the god’s head.

Furball laughed. “Of course I should have introduced myself first. I’m—”

Seth fired an arrow at him, which the man dodged.

“I’m talking, you know!” Furball said with some annoyance as he ducked around the area, not staying still for long. “Don’t you want to know who you’re fighting?”

“I don’t care,” Seth said as he fired more arrows.

Furball made an overly dramatic wounded sound and then dove straight at Seth… only to move right into one of Horus’ tornadoes, which whirled off into the camps.

Horus was there in a moment, looking harried. He looked Seth over, demanding, “Are you hurt?”

Seth was surprised at the concern, given Horus’ lack of caring about any injury or ignominy Seth faced at Horus’ own hands. “I’m fine. You didn’t need to interfere.”

“You were wasting time with him,” Horus said with some vehemence. “Come on.”

They made good progress that day, but there were too many Greeks to get to their ships before it grew too dark, so Seth called a retreat, and their soldiers returned to their camps to rest and recover. Isis walked among the healer tents, distributing medicine and working over injuries. Seth would have asked why she could stand to be around soldiers who until recently had hounded her and her followers for years, but he knew Isis was practical: she needed these troops to expel the Greeks and maintain her own rule. She’d have let them die otherwise.

There was little Seth could do other than rally their troops for another day of fighting on the morrow. He returned with Horus to Horus’ tent and sat in his usual place by Horus’ desk.

Horus walked over to a small table where there was a large basin of water and towels. “Come here.”

Seth frowned and stood up, walking quickly over.

When Seth was close enough, Horus grabbed his chin, turning his face left and right to inspect it. Horus’ expression was angry, though Seth couldn’t pinpoint why. Was he still annoyed that Seth had *wasted time* fighting one of the generals of their opposing armies? Finally, Horus let go and said, “Clean yourself up. You’re a mess.” Horus, as a god, was already clean, but Seth’s powers were weakened, so his body was slower to do so.

Seth walked over to the basin, confused, but used the towel to wipe himself down.

“I didn’t expect to see you struggle like that with the foreign god,” Horus said from behind him.

“If I’d been at full strength I wouldn’t have,” Seth said, wiping a particularly annoying bit of blood off of his lower chest. “He wasn’t that powerful.”

“He was holding back,” Horus said angrily. “I met him while Mother was negotiating with him. Even then I could tell he was strong.”

“You hate him,” Seth said, glancing over at Horus, who was staring at Seth’s back.

Horus snorted and put out a hand. “Give me the towel.”

Seth hesitated, recalling the *last* time Horus had bathed him, which resulted in the irritating cock ring Seth still wore. Thankfully Horus hadn’t used it, and it hadn’t distracted Seth in combat.

Horus scowled. “Give me the towel. Your back is filthy.”

You never cared whenever you made it filthy, Seth thought as he handed over the towel, knowing there would be punishment if Seth refused.

Horus reached out to scrub it over Seth's back, peeling off dried sand and other muck. "Yes, I hate him. I hate that Mother went to him. Thankfully I ascended around the time, so she felt we wouldn't need them in the end. But it was too late by that point. They knew Egypt was potentially weak, and were ready to come here to invade."

Horus seemed like the jealous sort, so that made sense. But beneath that he felt something else. "…You blame yourself for the army being here?"

Horus' hand paused. "I'm not the one who made them decide to come where they're unwanted."

"Of course not," Seth said, quietly. That would be stupid, after all.

Horus continued scrubbing.

One spot he rubbed stung, and Seth winced.

Horus pulled the towel away, and Seth jerked slightly as he felt lips on the spot that stung. Finally Horus said, "You were incredible today. I can see why the soldiers revere you so much."

Seth simply stared ahead, not sure what part of this would be punishment. He was tired from the day's fighting: fighting Furball had particularly gotten to him, and while cleaning up the troops, he still hadn't seen Anubis at all. He hoped Isis would tell him if anything happened to Anubis, if only to mock Seth for failing to protect him, but she hadn't said a word.

"I dislike when you're injured, though. Be more careful not to do that in future." Horus grabbed Seth's shoulder and turned him around so that they faced each other. Horus dissolved his headdress so that Seth could clearly see his bright blue, angry eyes. "I'm the only one who's allowed to hurt you. Understand?"

Jealousy indeed, Seth thought. "I'm a warrior," Seth reminded him. "And I'm weakened. I can only do so much fighting like I know how to fight, which is with a stronger body with more power than what I have, bound down by Maat's spell."

Horus' grip on his shoulder tightened. "Then I'll punish you for every cut, and maybe that will teach you to do better."

Seth scowled. "That doesn't make any sense. I fight at the skill I have, I'll only be weaker if I try to avoid ever getting hit."

Horus dragged Seth to the cot Horus never used and pushed him down on it. Horus knelt overtop Seth, his gaze fierce. "If I could, I would just drag you back to Heliopolis and bury this place in a windstorm until there was nothing left. But the destruction to Egypt would be worse than if we stay here longer. And I hate it." He leaned down and pressed his lips to Seth's, hard, making Seth grunt in pain. When Horus pulled back he was still glaring. "Do

you do it on purpose? Let yourself get injured so you can die this way? Like you let me beat you during the trial?"

Seth's face burned. "I didn't *let* you beat me."

Horus smiled. "You're still lying."

Seth glared at him.

Horus laughed. "There you are. I'd wondered if I'd beaten you somehow. My great uncle, the war hero, somehow cowed at my feet by a ring on his cock and the son he despises hidden away somewhere in the camp. Anubis survived the battle just fine, you know. I had my birds watching him for you. Because I'm such a good master."

Seth was a mix of overjoyed at the news and furious at Horus' language.

"You should thank me," Horus said with a smile. "For my kindness."

"Or what?" Seth demanded. "You'll put him on the front lines so he can die?"

Horus' gaze narrowed. "Why? Would that make you more biddable?"

Seth looked away, trying to hide a spike of fear. Considering what Horus had said of Anubis, Seth wouldn't put it past him. "He's gone through enough. He doesn't need that."

"Is that shame I hear?" Horus asked thoughtfully.

Seth pursed his lips.

"Are you ashamed of what you did to my mother?" Horus asked idly, running a hand over Seth's left cheek. "Or what you did to my father?"

Something about the whole situation was so similar to what Osiris had done with Anubis that Seth involuntarily stiffened on the second question.

Horus lowered his face to Seth's ear. "Ah. You have regrets. Why? Do you feel sad you killed him?"

"*No,*" Seth half-snarled. "I don't regret anything that I did to Osiris."

"You hated him so much?" Horus asked. "Do I remind you of him?"

"You're worse than he was," Seth said. "But at least I respected him once."

Horus laughed. "You don't respect me at all. The ring and my threat to reveal your status was the first time you granted me any thought in that direction, because you've realized there are *real* ways I can hurt more permanently and publicly." His gaze grew angrier. "My mother always compares me to him. But he'd have lost this war if he were here on his own. I know it."

Seth snorted. “Yes, he would have. At least some of the time you’re smarter than him in some ways. So there’s that for you, if you’re so desperate.”

Horus considered him for a moment, before asking, “How am I worse than him?”

Seth blinked in confusion, and then recalled what he’d let slip earlier. He wasn’t like Horus. He wasn’t good at lying in that way.

Horus’ hand went to Seth’s neck, pressing lightly. “How am I worse than him?”

Seth’s heart was racing, but he refused to reply. This was too close to everything else.

After a time, Horus said, “I’m going to gag you, and you’re going to present your ass to me, and open yourself up for me. Or I’ll turn the ring on until after you fall unconscious.”

Seth shut his eyes. That was at least more bearable. Horus left and returned with a gag, which he wrapped around Seth’s mouth, to keep him quiet. Seth stayed still only because he knew it'd be easier to keep quiet, and not call attention from the rest of the camp. Horus was going to hurt him anyway, Seth might as well make it easier for himself. As Horus moved away again, Seth dissolved his shendyt and turned over on the bed. He got up on his elbows and knees on the cot.

“You would rather let me fuck you than talk about Osiris?” Horus asked with a snort. “Spread yourself then.”

Seth let his head fall on the cot and reached back to grab his ass, spreading his cheeks. He’d done this a few times already for Horus, so at least he was getting some hang of it. He felt the air on his hole, and it wasn’t all that pleasant.

Horus stepped up to him and shoved a finger unceremoniously inside, making Seth wince. The finger was at least slick with something, either saliva or water from the basin, Seth assumed. “What makes you so unwilling to speak of my father? I’d expect you to bad mouth him all the time, but all you ever say is that you hate him, not *why*. I find that rather strange.” Horus thrust his finger in and out, making Seth bounce back and forth on the cot. “You could talk about his arrogance, his weakness, anything. Instead, whenever he comes up, you go silent. Perhaps you’re silent because how you killed him is embarrassing.”

Seth snorted at that.

Horus pulled out his finger. “Ah, found that amusing? Perhaps that’s not why then.” Horus’ cock replaced his finger, always never giving Seth enough time to adjust. He shoved himself inside Seth’s hole, making Seth grunt against the gag and his hands tremble. Horus placed his hands over Seth’s, pushing them to spread his ass more. Then he began to thrust leisurely in and out. “You know I asked him how he died, and he said you used a cowardly trick on him, but he would never explain what it was, which I chalked up to him being ashamed for falling for it. He always said he wanted to focus on punishing you for it. That’s what mattered.” Horus snorted. “He was patronizing, as well. Treating me like a child instead of his vehicle to get revenge. Mother never explained, either. She was just furious with you. I’m so. Very.

Tired.” He emphasized each word with a hard thrust, making Seth gulp on each one. “Of being kept in the dark on these matters. I am *king*, and I should know them.”

Like a spoiled child with a toy. He hated how much it reminded him of the years he’d spent after discovering the truth about Nephthys and Osiris. How furious he’d been about being lied to. Was he any better than the spoiled wretch behind him? At least Horus focused all his fury on one person, not a whole country. Not everyone he ever cared about.

For a time, Horus was silent, clearly focusing on angrily thrusting in and out of Seth’s ass, sometimes shifting the angle of his cock to make Seth’s grunts louder. When he finally came, he pushed deep, squeezing Seth’s ass around him.

Seth breathed hard, tired from the day’s events, worrying about Anubis, and knowing he’d made a mistake revealing as much as he had about Osiris.

“I’m going to figure out what you’re hiding,” Horus said, his hands still resting over Seth’s. “Even if I have to tear you apart to do it.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 7: Balance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Horus was eventually sated, and returned to his desk to work, leaving Seth a sticky, pained mess on the cot. He was too tired to do much other than remove the gag and toss it aside. He knew that Horus was hardly exhausted at all. A battle like they went through earlier that day, even facing another god, would be nothing to Horus.

“You keep saying you didn’t let me beat you,” Horus said with his back to Seth. Seth resisted the pointless urge to attack the other god. “But I saw the way you fought. I’ve been watching your training methods. Someone who fights like that as a god unencumbered by any spells wouldn’t have lost to an upstart like me.”

Seth wished the oaf would give up. He’d already beaten Seth and was using Seth as a toy. But Seth oddly found Horus’ wording fascinating. “You think so little of your own abilities?”

“I know my own limitations,” Horus replied neutrally. “Or did you miss the part of this whole debacle where you’re in charge of things and I’m not, *because* this isn’t my area of expertise?” The annoyance came back, then.

Seth frowned. He truly didn’t know what Horus was getting at now.

“It was amazing, honestly,” Horus said after a moment. There was an odd note of wonder in his voice. “Watching you attack the Greeks like it was nothing. The power you wield, even now… It makes me wonder what you were like as a god when you were at war.”

It was easier back then, Seth thought. Not as tiring. And he had more freedom to move and fight. What he was doing now was nothing by comparison.

“It’s a shame you had to ruin it,” Horus said.

Seth snorted. Of course, more mockery.

“It was also why watching you struggle that foreign god was so odd. It was like…” Horus frowned. “It was *annoying*. You should have been able to deal with him easily. But you weren’t.”

“It couldn’t have possibly been because I’m trapped by Maat’s spell and your stupid *gift*,” Seth mused. Had the oaf *forgotten?*

“I know that,” Horus said. “But it felt like… you shouldn’t have been. Like he should have been nothing.” Horus shook his head. “You represent Egypt’s martial capabilities. Seeing you

struggle like that against the leader of an invading force is frustrating and embarrassing for us. He was toying with you."

"Well, there's an easy fix for that," Seth said. "But I don't see you implementing it."

Horus grinned. "No, I don't think I'll be giving your full powers back any time soon. I'm not that foolish."

Seth snorted. "Then you'll have to live with the frustration. Threatening me isn't going to get me to make up for the powers I don't have access to. I want this stupid little war over as much as you do." Being outside was good, but it wasn't worth the risk of Anubis getting injured. Plus, there was a small chance Horus would take the cock ring off once they were back in Seth's cell, though there was no guarantee of that… Seth almost wondered if it was a permanent addition to his clothing, given Seth was now more worried about disobeying.

But if nothing else, making things safer for Anubis meant something. He could go back into that tiny windowless room and go through more of Horus' punishments for that. His body didn't matter, really.

Horus didn't reply to him. He just went back to his work.

Seth shut his eyes, hoping for sleep.

The next three days were difficult. The Greeks called out their magic users to create vines to grab at the Egyptian attackers and their chariots, strangling, crushing, and tearing apart any who walked nearby. More monsters the size of three humans with many arms walked among the mortals cutting down anyone who came near, and sometimes picking up horses and tossing them aside. On the third day, as the Egyptians neared the beach, creatures in the water began sending giant waves onto the shore, crashing among the mortals. Isis stepped in at that point, ordering the waters to fight back against the Greeks. But the sea wasn't her area of expertise, so it was a hard battle. Seth cut down a Greek monster that looked something like a giant human with a bull face, who had been targeting commanding officers. Then he continued onto the next giant monster.

The god who'd led the Greeks didn't reappear. Seth imagined the tornado Horus had used had thrown him for some distance. Since the problem hadn't returned, he focused on getting to the ships. If he could cut the soldiers off, they'd be trapped and helpless, whether or not they had people in the water using that to cut at their army. Their forces couldn't hold out forever, anyway.

Seth still didn't catch sight of Anubis. He hoped Anubis was okay, wherever he was. Their soldiers were tired, too, but rest had served them well. They were all ready to beat back the invaders.

Horus stayed by his side as well, using his powers more often to cut through anyone who got close, and to throw off stronger enemies. Seth thought Horus could say that Seth was formidable, but there was an interesting kind of competency in what Horus did. He didn't

waste time with these soldiers: he just cut right through things. In another life, Seth might even be happy to have someone like that at his side.

The second evening of battle, when Horus and Seth were back in Horus' tent, Horus demanded once again that Seth tell him what made Horus worse than Osiris.

Seth remained silent, kneeling on the ground and wishing Horus would get whatever he planned over with.

Horus said, "I can still activate the cock ring, you know. I know you hate it."

"So do it," Seth spat out. And then pain filled him so suddenly and sharply that he fell over on the ground. It was like someone was stabbing hot pokers into his lower chest and strangling him all at once. If Horus was still talking to him, he couldn't hear it, because everything was just the *pain*. He twisted on the dirt ground, trying to get purchase on something, to ease himself, but there was no relief.

But he'd dealt with pain before. He'd survived it. He couldn't attack Horus in his current state, but he could *survive.*

He woke sometime later not realizing he'd fallen unconscious. His head was in Horus' lap, and the younger god was petting his hair. It was so strangely tender that Seth wanted to weep. Horus had done this before, and Seth had yanked himself away, only for Horus to pull him back. But now Seth felt too weak: exhausted from dealing with the agony. Seth didn't want this faux tenderness: it was almost worse than simple torture.

"What is so powerful about this that you refuse to tell me?" Horus asked, moving his left hand over Seth's hair, gently carding the bright red strands. "What are you so afraid of sharing?"

Seth was glad he was too weary to respond. It was better than trying to force himself to be quiet. For some reason, Horus stayed that way for a time, just carding fingers through Seth's hair. Seth wanted to bite his fingers or something to get him away, but even that was beyond him. Instead he shut his eyes and let sleep take him.

The next night, after Horus and Seth discussed the day's events, Horus said, "I have often wondered what my life would have been like if you hadn't killed my father. If I'd grown up in the palace in Heliopolis like Anubis. You'd have likely trained me just like him."

Seth could easily imagine it, too, though he wondered Horus was going down this line of questioning. Horus would often meander when they were in that dingy little office/cell of Horus', but out here for some reason, Horus did it even more often. Seth still expected things to change to hurting Seth at any moment, though. He wasn't fooled by their "calmer" conversations.

"But I was born for revenge," Horus said, gazing thoughtfully at Seth. "For my mother's revenge, for my father's revenge. I don't think either of them wanted me for anything else. So you see, in a way, *this*, between us, is all that I am."

Seth simply stared at him, confused.

“In a way, it’s because of you that I live at all, Uncle Seth,” Horus continued, gazing at him. “It is because you hurt my parents. And because you spent all my life hurting me along with them.”

Seth grimaced. It’s not like he’d *told* Isis to fuck Osiris again, or take his seed from the Nile or whatever it was she did to have Horus. Seth had begged her to help him against Osiris because of what he’d done to both of them, after all, and she’d refused. But he could see an idiot like Horus coming to this conclusion.

Horus looked to the tent wall ahead of him. “When I first realized that, I was angry, you know. It seemed such a stupid reason to exist. But now I see you fighting out there, even like this. And… I can understand how such a god would inspire fear and rage. Why they call you a god of chaos as much as war.”

They only do that because they hate me, Seth thought. He’d certainly called Osiris any number of things since that hateful night.

“If I only exist to balance such a god,” Horus continued, “Then perhaps…” He frowned. “Perhaps it’s not all stupid. Perhaps it’s almost an honor.”

“Careful,” Seth said quietly. “That almost sounds like respect.”

Horus chuckled. “Am I not a student learning from a teacher? Some respect is owed.”

Seth snorted. “Respectful students don’t treat their teachers the way you treat me. They don’t use children as hostages.”

Horus laughed. “Anubis is older than I am: he’s not a child. And grateful as I am to you for my existence, Uncle Seth, we are still what we are. You are the ruination of my parents’ lives, and my life. And I am your balance, meting out punishment, not just for us, but for all of Egypt.”

“If you really wanted that, you’d have killed me and given me to your father to punish.”

“You are not *his* to punish,” Horus said, darkly, glaring at Seth. “Ever since that night you came to my rooms to assault me…” Horus sighed. “I thought I’d kill you then. All my life had been bent towards one purpose: to be rid of you. To save Egypt. You were *my* enemy. Yet here you were, using your body to try to dominate me. All my life I’d known you as an all-powerful god, but in my bed you were lust incarnate. And I knew… you were mine there, too.”

Seth glared at him. Horus had used this language before in different ways, but he hadn’t really laid it out like this, as if it was *pre-destined* or something. And tonight Seth was awake enough to fight back. “I don’t belong to you.” Seth knew Horus was obsessive, but to come up with such a weird scenario in his head? Why? It was ridiculous. And it grated more than ever, as, in the past, Horus hadn’t been using Anubis in the way he was. He hadn’t been marking Seth with the cock ring. Now he practically had Seth trained to kneel by his side.

Seth could feel all the ways he was changing himself to be an obedient pet, and in that moment, when Horus was sketching out another of his ludicrous fantasies, it frustrated him even more.

Not just a spoiled child with a toy, not just a man desperate for answers. But too much like… like…

Seth felt chilled.

Horus watched him. “Don’t you? You’re mine to do with as I please. As much as I was designed for you, it’s almost as if you were designed for *me.*”

My desert. You are my soil, and I am your tree.

Seth was up off the floor and had his hands wrapped around Horus’ throat before he realized it. He cried out when pain hit him in the crotch and he collapsed back on the ground. He curled in tightly on himself, trying to crush the pain away somehow, but couldn’t escape it. It was like fire was blooming in his core and burning him apart. His attempts to dissolve into sand failed, and the pain only *worsened.* When he could barely see anymore, the pain vanished, and he sagged into a heap, weeping onto the floor, the left side of his face resting in the dirt. He was too weary to be ashamed.

“That was stupid,” Horus said. “And here I thought you’d been brought to heel.”

Your body is now mine.

He was too weak to fight back now. But he *had* to. He had to make the man see how insane this was. “You lunatic… Osiris…” Didn't he have any memories of Seth when they were young? Did he ever even listen back then?

“…What?”

“I’m not *yours.*” He'd rather die than be a toy.

For a moment, all Seth could see was Osiris, gazing dispassionately down at him, that dangerous confidence like the world was his to do with as he pleased. Like Seth was his to do with as he pleased. But then Seth blinked and he could see Horus with his blue falcon headdress eyes, kneeling over him, a thoughtful expression on his face. Seth could feel the floor of the tent, smell the battlefield. He was in the present, not trapped in that night with Osiris.

Or had he never truly even left that night?

Seth was too exhausted to do anything more than let the darkness take him.

In the morning, the fourth day of fighting, Horus didn’t say anything to him. Seth knew he’d given away more than he planned, and doubtless Horus would bring it up again. In the sunshine, everything of Osiris was burned away. The god was in Duat, that was all. Seth was Horus' prisoner, and he'd get through it as he got through anything in his life. For now, they

had a battle to win. Horus stood at Seth's side throughout it all, and Seth focused on killing. Making it to the beach was a bloody slog, but they finally made it near enough for Seth to use the sand to rip many of the large ships to pieces, while the soldiers who could observe from nearby cried out. Many of them fled the hungry sands, but some fell with their ships.

Horus used his tornadoes to mop up soldiers as Seth worked.

Seth reasoned that at least he was useful. Osiris never stepped onto the field of battle, but here Horus was, putting himself in harm's way, though no soldiers even touched him. Isis was doubtless proud.

Horus let another of his tornadoes go, and a small red bird landed on his shoulder. He listed for a moment, and then called to Seth, "Cease. Mother has met with some of their remaining leaders. The Greeks are calling for a surrender."

Seth pinched his lips together. That made sense. These warriors were outmatched. They'd come here to face one war god, and instead gotten an admittedly weaker Seth, but also Horus with his abilities, Isis with her resources, and whatever Maat was doing behind the scenes. Let alone whatever havoc Anubis was up to. He was only a demigod, but he was strong.

The area around Seth and Horus was empty of living fighters for some distance, as the sands calmed. Body parts, abandoned weapons, arrowheads, and broken pieces of equipment littered the ground. In the distance, the sounds of yells and metal on metal quieted, and Seth breathed in the open air, savoring it while he could. A surrender meant his time of semi-freedom was nearing an end. He glanced to his left when he sensed movement, and saw a lone person walking towards them.

Seth frowned. No soldiers should be here. The Egyptian commanders had their orders, and the Greeks were dead, fleeing, or possibly surrendering. Though maybe this person was just trying their luck while Seth and Horus were still.

But then the person's silhouette became clearer, and Seth's eyes widened in shock.

"…What is Osiris doing here?" Horus asked at his side.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 8: Unwanted

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

Horus stepped closer to Seth as Osiris walked across the battlefield to them. It was like the world had gone quiet and it was just the three of them. The sun shone down on sand covered in blood and gore, but the three gods were clean and calm. The bird Isis had sent still sat on Horus' shoulder, observing. He wasn't sure if he should dismiss it, or keep it to send back to his mother with a message about whatever was going to happen here.

Osiris looked no different than ever, with his tall Atef sitting on his green head, his pointed gold and black beard ornament, his thick usekh covering his upper chest, humans might have considered him intimidating and authoritative. It was obvious as he neared that he had a slightly angry expression on his face, one Horus was rather familiar with. While Horus was training to face Seth, Osiris would rarely visit them, mostly to spend time with Isis, or else teach Horus about how best to fight Seth. Osiris would smile sometimes when he was talking to Isis, and put on an unreadable expression when he was listening. But too often his anger overcame him when he spoke of Seth and what they needed to do for the trial, and it seemed he sometimes vented that frustration while he and Horus sparred. For a young god, it made for a difficult time, but Horus liked to think it at least made him stronger. He just learned to always watch his back around the older god.

Horus hadn't heard anything from Osiris since the dead god testified about the night he was murdered. Isis had been worried about his silence at times when she and Horus talked in Heliopolis, but noted in private that, despite the fact that they won the trial, Osiris *was* still trapped in Duat. As she phrased it, it was a bitter victory, since vengeance was really all he had to celebrate.

"And given Seth is being punished on Ra's sun boat, it's not like Osiris can even wreak his own vengeance," Isis had added with a pointed look at Horus.

Horus had met her gaze unflinchingly, refusing to change his mind, and she'd swiftly changed the subject. Osiris wasn't the only one with vengeance on the brain. After everything he'd gone through, Horus had a right to his *own* punishment of Seth. If Osiris wanted to punish Seth himself, he should have been more active in winning the day for them, but instead it was up to Horus to put his life on the line for it. It was Horus whom Seth targeted during the trial. And it was Horus who defeated Seth soundly, twice. While Horus appreciated Osiris' guidance in the lead up to the trial, he felt nothing other than basic filial duty towards the older god. Horus had seen the way humans cared for each other as families, and while Isis raised and loved Horus as good as any human mother, if not better, Osiris was distant, even during his rare visits when he wasn't working off some anger.

Horus thought that it might be hard to know that you would never again bear the crown being fought for, and perhaps that was what bothered Osiris. Perhaps that bother had even transferred to Horus, and perhaps Osiris was even *jealous* in a way, but chose to be distant rather than cruel. So Horus had respected Osiris' wishes and given him a wide berth when they weren't interacting. But it didn't exactly build any loving feeling in himself for Osiris.

There also seemed to be some strange expectation for how gods treated their children, with Isis and Nut being exceptions. Horus rarely ever saw his grandparents, and he knew a little about the war with Ra. And then of course Horus had seen some of Anubis and Seth's interactions, and Isis had said that Seth attacked Anubis, nearly killing him, the night Osiris was murdered. It didn't seem that the brothers were that different in their parenting philosophies, though at least Osiris had never outright beaten Horus in anger or punishment, let alone tried to actively kill Horus; Osiris was just unrelenting in sword practice. Horus thought it would help build feeling between him and Anubis the more they worked together, with two difficult fathers who were brothers, as some of the Isis' followers who escaped cruel families grew together because of it. Instead, all Horus saw when he looked at Anubis was a beaten dog. Anubis had lived all his life in Heliopolis, in luxury, as the son of the God Supreme, and only after some very long time did he decide it was time to leave.

And even though Horus knew that Anubis *had* suffered under Seth… it was obvious that Seth cared for him to some degree, for reasons Horus couldn't understand. Horus initially thought to taunt Seth with Anubis being health and flourishing – as much as the demigod was as essentially one of Isis' secretaries – but he had seen how Anubis was like a knife twisting in Seth's gut. How much Seth would sacrifice for his son, given Seth's good behavior at the camp, even with his brief rebellions and the alternative threat of the cock ring. Something had *changed* in Seth with the mention of Anubis being there, something that gave him a strange determination that Horus hadn't seen before.

Horus had the feeling that Osiris would never sacrifice as much for him. Osiris was already dead, and it cost him nothing to send off Horus and even Isis to sacrifice themselves in Osiris' place for *Osiris'* vengeance.

It was cruel, but a bitter part of Horus reveled seeing Anubis working himself to the bone on the battlefield, and Horus often sent Anubis on difficult tasks to keep him busy on the excuse it was making Anubis useful. Isis could modify Anubis' duties as she wished, and yet she didn't. Mostly it just meant Horus rarely ran into him, and so he rarely had to think about how the mighty war god who was making such a spectacle of himself on the battlefield was doing it all for *that* little demigod.

Horus had proven himself time and again under difficult circumstances by winning the throne of Egypt back for his family, knocking Seth from his place, and punishing Seth. Like he'd told Seth, here was an opportunity for Anubis to prove himself.

Meanwhile, Osiris stayed in Duat, while Isis and Horus took care of the bigger matters that involved Egypt, like invading armies and rebuilding. When Horus refused Isis' suggestion to send Seth to Duat for punishment, it was in part because Horus knew it was unfair to *reward* Osiris. It was rightfully Isis and Horus who reaped the rewards of their labors, and Horus knew no small part of that was just annoyance at Osiris leaving the dirty work to him, but

also Osiris leaving the dirty work to *Isis*. Osiris was there for her *at times*, but not a substantial portion of it. It was really only near the end of things when he'd bothered to show up at all.

Yet here he was now, for no apparent reason. The war was already seemingly won. Osiris was no longer needed. The bitter part of Horus wondered if *that's* why he'd shown up, because there was nothing to lose. He knew he should be more understanding: Osiris had been murdered by his own brother, after all. It made sense that Osiris would look for opportunities to confront Seth, even if he seldom had before this. But the more Horus learned about Seth and his increasingly odd relationship with Osiris, the more Horus only disdained his father. Osiris had been lauded as one of the wisest gods, and yes, what Horus had seen of Seth in combat had shown him that Seth was a powerful god. But Seth was self-defeating more often than not. How had Osiris lost to *that* if he was so wise?

It was additionally frustrating that Seth insisted on comparing them. Horus was worse than Osiris? How? Because Horus was intelligent? Because Horus didn't give murderers second chances?

Horus glanced at Seth, recalling Seth attacking Osiris right before the trial. There was no Ra to intervene this time, but Horus had Maat's spell and the cock ring. Would Seth's fury overcome him? Would that anger that made Seth insist he wasn't *Osiris'* return?

Yet Seth was so very still. The wind picking at his headdress might as well have been touching a statue. The hand holding his khopesh was slack.

Osiris continued to approach them.

Horus felt a kind of itch in his back. He didn't like this.

"What are you doing here?" Horus demanded, glaring at his father as the man finally came to a halt a short distance ahead. "You're supposed to be in Duat, leading your subjects." He tried to keep his tone neutral, but a bit of anger was inescapable. This was a difficult situation and Osiris' presence was not helping. "If you could come here of your own volition, why didn't you appear earlier?" They could have used Osiris' help fighting the Greeks. Perhaps more bloodshed could have been avoided. *And perhaps I would have learned more about whatever is between you and Seth sooner, if Seth had to confront you here.*

Osiris met Horus' gaze. "Seth should have been given to my custody after the trial. It is my right to punish him, as the wronged party. I've come to collect him."

Horus' gaze narrowed and he stepped forward slightly, in front of Seth. "Seth attacked all of Egypt, not just you." He disliked Osiris' patronizing tone. Osiris should recall he wasn't the only king present, and they were in the land of living at the moment, where Horus ruled. "He is carrying out his punishment for *all* of that."

"You would speak to your father in such a way?" Osiris asked, frowning at him.

Horus returned the frown. *I'm your son, and you treat me like an annoyance. I'm not some naïve child anymore, stumbling around trying to block sword hits. I succeeded where you*

failed. “I am the ruler of Egypt. You are the ruler of Duat. Your being my father has no bearing on my decision for how Seth is to be punished. If that frustrates you, you can go back to Duat where your commands matter.”

Osiris was *glaring* at him now. “You are on a battlefield, Horus, where mortals and immortals alike can die. Be careful to remember that.”

Horus should have been scared that Osiris was actually *threatening* him, but it only left him curious. Why was Osiris reacting this way? “And where were you when we could have used you before?” Horus demanded. “You come here to fetch your murderer after all the hard work is done, but weren’t here when we could have used you to fight the Greeks?” Horus tilted his head. “Some god of the living you were.” Isis would be furious how he was acting.

The ground rumbled under Osiris. “If you refuse to give me Seth, then I’ll simply *take* him.”

Giant vines burst from the earth, racing towards Seth, who leapt aside. Sand spikes burst from the ground, cutting at the vines.

Horus used his wind to cut into the earth and yank the vines up and away, tossing them into the sea. More vines burst from the ground around Osiris, racing towards Seth and Horus. Horus flew into the air, cutting down with his sword and wind at any vines that went for them.

Seth twirled and used his khopesh to cut at vines as well, leaping into the air on dunes sporadically to get out of the way.

“Come back to Duat with me, Seth,” Osiris ordered as he watched the two gods move around him, as if he was unaffected by it all. His gaze stayed on Seth. “You know it’s where you belong.”

“Fuck you!” Seth yelled as he raced in. “Why don’t you just die again?” He turned his khopesh into a bow and arrows and shot at Osiris. Vines blocked two of the arrows, but the third cut heavily at Osiris’ arm, taking a chunk of flesh with it.

Horus recalled how that arrow felt flying past when he and Seth fought during the second match of the trial, cutting even the air in its wake. Horus frowned when the cut also revealed… was that pale skin beneath Osiris’ flesh, which dissolved like green sand around it?

Seth was focusing on dodging vines, and seemingly hadn’t seen it.

Horus sent slices of wind over Osiris’ other arm, cutting thickly. The god bled green “flesh” … revealing more of that pale skin. And Horus’ intuition struck him: if Osiris wasn’t able to come up here from Duat himself, particularly without Isis’ magic at play, how *did* he come here? He’d need a living body for it. And a human was a likely answer, or perhaps even a demigod of some kind. …And Anubis, the little demigod who sometimes reported Osiris’ orders to Isis during the final lead-up to the trial, was in the camp. Almost always out of sight, where Horus couldn’t see him, getting up to who knew what. Speaking with who?

He wouldn't dare, Horus thought, staring at Osiris and Seth battling. A part of him wanted to stay in the moment, watching them go to toe to toe. It was quite the sight. Osiris made up for his lack of combat skills with pure power and force, trying to trap and stab Seth to keep him still. Seth made up for a lack of power with speed and creativity, calling up sand spikes and soldiers to cut down the vines, and shooting at Osiris to make him dodge aside.

But a sensible part of Horus knew something incredibly *wrong* was happening here. He wouldn't ordinarily think it of his father, for all the obvious enmity between them, but Osiris was also ready to kill Horus, too. Who knew what he'd get up to with the son of his enemy?

Horus looked up at Seth and said, "Uncle Seth! We need to change tactics!"

But Seth kept firing, ignoring him. The sand whipped around him, hungry to fight Osiris. He was ready to kill Osiris again. Horus knew it.

Horus called to Seth again, "Uncle Seth, Anubis is in danger."

That pulled Seth out of his focus on Osiris, and Seth dodged more vines to land by Horus' side and say, "What?!" There was a slight madness in his red eyes. And fear. Horus had grown able to smell Seth's fear over their time together. To recognize it, even when Seth tried to hide it. Clearly, Seth was afraid for Anubis.

"We need to subdue Osiris without killing him," Horus said, summoning a tornado to wrap around Osiris, briefly trapping him and his vines without harming him. "I believe he's using Anubis to manifest in this world."

"…That's impossible," Seth said, even as he raised his bow to shoot down the few vines that hadn't been caught in the cyclone.

"Did you see where you've attacked him, and skin shows? He has green skin, Uncle Seth, not pale white. Anubis is trapped beneath Osiris' skin."

Seth only gazed at Osiris through the haze of wind. He was thinking, at least, not caught in whatever madness kept him focused on Osiris. "…I can trap him, then. With sand. And you can use your wind to scrape Osiris off."

Horus nodded and dropped the tornado, letting Seth leap over more vines and shoot at Osiris, causing a distraction. Meanwhile, sand mounds rose up around the green god, trapping his legs. More sand grabbed his arms, and Horus sent fine winds in, cutting at the god's skin to where he'd seen that pale skin beneath, revealing more of it.

Osiris glared at Seth, even as he dissolved. He was losing, and he knew it. "You can't escape me forever. You're, mine, Seth."

Seth sent an arrow straight at Osiris' head, and it knocked out a chunk of his crown, allowing the rest of Osiris' body to dissolve faster.

"I was never yours," Seth muttered angrily, loud enough for Horus to hear. "And if you've harmed Anubis again…"

Again? Horus thought as he watched the Osiris shell dissolve, leaving an unconscious Anubis trapped in Seth's sand. Seth had been conscious when Isis told Horus to give Seth to Duat for Osiris to punish, but there was something in the way Seth spoke here and in Horus' tent... something about *how* Osiris had tried to claim him...

Seth rushed to Anubis and pushed the sand away, catching Anubis as he fell into Seth's arms. Seth knelt on the ground and cradled Anubis against himself gently.

Horus walked over, studying the unconscious demigod, who was covered in light bruising and scratching from their battle. Whatever Osiris did, it wasn't good for him, and he seemingly felt some effects of the fight. He said nothing about the way Seth was vibrating in fear and worry.

"We need to get him to Isis," Seth said as he wiped away some dirty from Anubis' forehead. "She healed him last time. She'll know what to do." He sounded desperate and afraid.

Horus sent Isis' bird away to let her know they were coming with an injured Anubis, and then focused on Seth. Isis had said that she healed Anubis after Seth attacked him the night Osiris was murdered, and Seth had blamed the injury on Osiris. Yet here Seth was, holding Anubis like he might shatter at the slightest movement. Why did Seth care about him this way? What had changed?

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 9: Spill

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth held Anubis and tried not to crush him. He wanted to cling to Anubis and keep him out of Osiris' clutches for as long as he could. If Osiris could use Anubis to come out of Duat, there wasn't anything that Seth could do to protect him. Could Osiris just come back any second, and take Anubis over again. A tiny part of Seth wanted to let go of Anubis and flee, but he couldn't do that. He couldn't abandon Anubis again.

When Sekhmet said that Anubis' soul was restored, Seth thought that whatever Osiris was planning with Anubis was over. He thought Sekhmet had somehow taken care of it, and Osiris taking his own life, trapping himself in Duat, had managed the rest. Anubis would be safe in the land of the living, free of Osiris. Yes, Osiris had injured Anubis, but Isis had then healed Anubis, so… what happened? Had Osiris done something like he'd tried with Seth and planted something in Anubis while they didn't know? How had Isis not seen it and removed it?

He picked Anubis up and formed a sand dune to carry them back quickly to camp, but realized he had no idea where to meet Isis. He glanced at Horus, who was watching him curiously.

"Where is Isis?" Seth asked, keeping his voice stable. Otherwise he'd rip the whole camp apart to get to her, and that wouldn't help anyone.

"She's still negotiating the ceasefire. You can't take Anubis to see her like that. The Greeks will view this as more weakness to take advantage of."

"I'm *aware*," Seth half-snarled. "Does Anubis have a tent we can put him in, and then Isis can meet us there?" He could send one of his sand soldiers to contact her or something if he had to.

"Yes, that'd work," Horus said. He called one of his feathers, which turned into a small falcon and flew off. "Come on." Horus spread his wings and took off, and Seth raced after him on the sand dune. Seth didn't know what Horus had heard from himself or Osiris, but at least Horus wasn't saying anything about it. Horus was bound to have questions about it all. Seth certainly did.

The camp itself was chaotic, with soldiers rushing to the front lines or the healer tents. But they made way for Seth and Horus, who went to a quieter area near Isis' planning tent. There was a small tent set aside with an empty cot inside, and Seth set Anubis down on it, being gentle with his head. On the cot he looked too pale and vulnerable, and Seth hated it. Usually

Anubis was glaring at him or ready to do something. Now, Seth was afraid to leave him alone.

He'll hate me later, Seth thought. They last time they'd been so close, Seth was beating him nearly to death. *It wasn't only Osiris who nearly got him killed.*

"Mother is on her way," Horus said, standing to the side. There was a small red bird on his shoulder. There wasn't all that much room, so he and Seth were still close. But the tent was at least quiet.

Seth imagined he should be worried, but he doubted Horus would do anything strange now. After a while Seth said, "Thank you. For stopping me from hurting Anubis." He hated thanking Horus, but… it meant Anubis was safer.

"You're welcome," Horus said.

Seth grimaced.

"Why the change of heart with him?" Horus asked. "He betrayed you."

"It makes sense he would," Seth said, sitting back on the ground and hoping Isis was hurrying. "I nearly killed him, he tried to get rid of me. It's fair."

Horus snorted. "Do you see what I do to you as fair, then? You tried to kill me a lot of times."

Seth scowled. "Fuck off." There was no similarity. Seth was facing his punishment for the trial.

"It does strike me as a bit odd," Horus eventually continued, "That you attacked him before and *didn't* kill him, even though you came close. You could have just killed him outright. You usually do with your enemies. What set him apart?"

"He's my son. Not some random human."

"I've seen what you and your brother think of your sons," Horus said with some skepticism. "You'll have to forgive me for not thinking the familial connection makes a difference."

Seth snorted. "Didn't your father help you prepare to fight me?" It was odd that Osiris had attacked Horus, but Osiris was a liar and a manipulative monster who hadn't cared for Isis' feelings, either, or his living nephew and biological son. Why would he care for another son he'd had with a goddess he didn't care about?

"He did what he had to do to prepare me to take revenge," Horus said. "But he was absent a lot, since he couldn't be far from Duat for long." Horus frowned at Anubis. "Anubis sometimes came to Isis with messages from Osiris. I wonder if even then, Osiris was using him to appear before us."

Seth was about to say that was absurd, but he hadn't exactly kept track of Anubis after becoming king of Egypt. He'd been too lost in everything and ashamed of what he'd learned about Anubis' origins. He'd hoped over time that Anubis would find another path for himself,

away from Seth. A path not tainted with failure and embarrassment. But he knew that it meant forgetting Seth forever, and Seth was afraid of that, too, even if Seth sometimes thought it'd be better that way. If Nephthys didn't care for him, Isis couldn't stand him, and Osiris was someone Seth had never really known after all…

It meant Seth was alone. With Horus, but otherwise… and maybe there was a reason for it. Maybe he deserved it.

But ignoring all of Seth's self-recrimination, the idea of Osiris doing this all along, right under his nose, because Seth was too buried in himself? It infuriated him. "All this time…"

"I can't say for certain," Horus said. "I was certainly never aware of how Osiris came back from Duat, nor was Mother. Perhaps he used someone else, or some other method."

"If Isis couldn't figure it out," Seth said, quietly, "then guarding against him may be next to impossible." He sighed. "Maybe if she knows what to look for, it'll make a difference, to stop him from doing it again." When he thought about how Isis might not be against Osiris returning, and how Horus didn't care for Anubis. Would Horus even help with this?

Seth glanced at Horus, "Unless you *want* to fight Osiris some more when he returns?"

Horus snorted. "He can *try* to come back. He's neither needed nor wanted here."

So maybe Seth would have support there. Seth shook his head, oddly amused, and secretly grateful. Perhaps staying around Horus meant Seth would be far away from his brother, and Anubis would be a bit safer, too.

Isis pushed through the tent flap, and both gods moved aside to let her take in the scene. She was wearing one of her finer gowns, and more jewelry than normal, which Seth knew she meant to intimidate the Greeks during negotiations. But she looked a bit tired, too, and Seth imagined she'd probably been busy healing and arguing. "I've left Maat in charge of negotiating with the Greeks, but we don't have a lot of time. Anubis!" She knelt by Anubis' side, putting her hand over his chest to scan him with her glowing palm. "You said Osiris attacked you?"

"He was using Anubis as a puppet," Horus explained, watching her. "Using Anubis' body to walk on the land. We had to remove the shell of him to free Anubis."

Isis' lips twitched at that, but she stayed focus on Anubis. Finally she lowered her hand and pulled some medicine out of a pouch around her waist. "He's dehydrated and will need to eat. The cuts are mostly superficial. He'll need to rest. But he should be fine."

"You need to put a spell on him or something," Seth said, "to stop this from happening again. The next time Osiris takes him, it could be worse."

"Without knowing exactly what happened, there's not much I can do, since I don't know what to guard against," Isis said, but her free hand moved away, and bands of blue water magic surrounded Anubis' bed, like a protective circle.

It meant Seth could breathe a bit easier. But it also meant... “You believe Osiris did this to him this time?” Seth felt the sting of old rejection. The angry, accusatory way she’d looked at him, like he’d lie about what Osiris did. That night was burned into his brain: when he’d gone to the person he knew would be on his side, and she’d turned her back on him completely for a backstabbing, manipulative, nightmare of a god.

Isis frowned, but stayed quiet and focused.

The old dread returned to Seth. “Or do you think your own son and savior would lie to you on my behalf?” *Ha, as if that isn’t a joke…*

“Perhaps Anubis was helping his uncle…” Isis said, still watching Anubis as she spread the medicine over the cuts. Her tone was nervous, like she knew she was making up excuses.

“This violates so much,” Seth insisted, furious she was hiding, and tried to refuse to see the truth, even now. “No matter how much you love him, you can’t look aside from that!”

Isis glared at him now, finally meeting his gaze. “Even if Osiris used Anubis *now,* like this, it doesn’t mean that Osiris hurt him back then!”

Seth snorted. “Yes, Osiris, the loving uncle, just suddenly stopped caring about Anubis after he died.”

“Why wouldn’t he?” Isis said, glaring at Seth. “He’s *your* son. You hate Horus for being *his* son.”

Seth laughed. She couldn’t be more wrong. “I hate Horus for a variety of reasons, Isis, mostly in that he humiliated me publicly and fought me for the throne, which he won.” He grinned and knew it looked horrifying. He was glad of that. “But I love that you have such a low opinion of Osiris’ feelings for his family that he’d hate Anubis *just* because of me.”

Isis’ glare hardened.

“Some god of life,” Seth said. “Some noble protector. Some *king.*”

Isis looked away, angry and upset. Seth tried to feel bad about that, but he couldn’t.

He’d spent too many years hoping she’d change her mind and realize the truth. But even now… it didn’t matter. He was done being the brother whose life focused so hard on making all his siblings happy.

“Why do you believe that Osiris attacked Anubis before?” Horus asked, drawing their attention to him.

For a moment, Seth felt a chill. But Horus didn’t know anything else. He wouldn’t… he couldn’t figure it out. If Isis hadn’t told him what she knew, then… He looked back at Isis, and was surprised at the look on Isis’ face. It was frozen, and he could sense her fear. But what was she afraid of?

Seth realized… “You believe me.”

Isis shook her head. “No.”

“You know I’m right. You’ve *known.* That’s why you never told Horus the truth. When did you realize he was a liar?” Who had convinced her? Or what?

“It’s not true,” Isis said, looking at Anubis angrily.

“Why?” Seth demanded. “Because it would mean you sided with a monster?”

Isis glared him. “It was a monster who hunted me for hundreds of years! And nearly murdered my son!”

“And why do you think I did that?!” Seth demanded, furious. Feeling the old pain of it all. It felt so distant, after everything he’d gone through, but still there, under the surface of everything. He could still remember the night freshly, as if she had pointed at him anew, screaming, “How dare you accuse your own brother of attacking Anubis?! How could you, Seth?!”

Isis scoffed. “You repulse me. If you were telling the truth, you’d have come to me *first.*”

Seth laughed and covered his face. “Ah yes, I should have been thinking rationally after learning what he and Nephthys did behind our backs. I should have… I…” He’d thought it over again and again. If he *had* gone to Isis instead. Maybe nothing bad would have happened. Maybe he would have avoided everything. Maybe…

But he couldn’t turn back time. If it was his own fault, fine. But Osiris had been the one to attack *him* in such a revolting manner. And he’d already attacked Anubis before Seth got there. Would waiting around with Isis have just made things worse for Anubis?

“Nephthys was involved?” Horus demanded, cutting through Seth’s thoughts and sounding increasingly angry. “With what?”

Seth shut his eyes. *Idiot. Always letting your anger get away from you.* Did it matter if Horus knew? Horus knew so much worse about him, barely respected him anyway, and had worse blackmail on him. Did running around like this matter anymore? But he couldn’t bring himself to just *say* it. It froze his throat.

He looked at Isis, wondering what choice she’d make now. More recrimination? Or more silence?

Isis hugged herself. Her fear was even more obvious, and her hands were leaving marks on her skin, she was holding herself so tightly. Finally, she said, quietly, “Seth said that Nephthys and Osiris were together without telling or asking us. And that Osiris is Anubis’ father.”

Seth felt an odd quiet around him, to hear it said that like. To know someone else knew. Horus, of all people. But Horus had already seen the worst of him. And there was no going back now. He already hated Isis for so many reasons. And something cut through all the pain

in him to be reminded. "…Is that why Osiris used him? Because he's a demigod related by blood?"

Isis' eyes widened.

"So *that's* why you killed Osiris?" Horus asked Seth.

Seth ignored that, focusing on Isis.

"It's never been attempted before: escaping Duat that way. But… it is possible for such blood connections to help with magic like that, but…" Isis frowned. She looked back at Anubis and reached out to scan him again.

"Mother," Horus said after a while, "How was Anubis injured the night you found him? The night Osiris was murdered?"

Isis scoffed, focused on Anubis. "Why does it matter?"

"I need to know."

Isis lowered her hand, "Anubis was asleep on his bed in Heliopolis. There was… a hole in his chest." She shuddered. "His soul had left him. It slowly returned to him as I tried to figure out what to do, and I healed him."

Horus shook his head, "Seth isn't that good a liar. Saying that Nephthys and Osiris went behind your backs and had Anubis is too complicated for him."

Not a good liar? Seth thought. *I've kept what happened that night a secret all these years, haven't I?*

"Plus, Seth wouldn't attack Anubis that way," Horus said. "And Seth wouldn't try to kill him."

It almost hurt more knowing that *Horus*, his enemy, believed that of him more than Seth's own sister did. His closest ally. But then again, Nephthys hadn't believed that talking to Seth would change things.

"You would believe such things of your own father?" Isis demanded, angry. "Osiris was kind, he was…"

"Osiris just tried to kill me to get to Seth," Horus said. "I'll believe a great deal of him."

Isis stared at Horus in shock. "He tried to kill you? Why?"

It was Horus' turn to go silent.

Seth almost laughed. *Because your son is obsessed with me and doesn't like sharing.*

"You're not talking to *me* now?" Isis demanded.

“Osiris’ motives are complicated,” Horus said. “But he wants Seth.”

Isis snorted. “Of course he does. Seth murdered him. He still deserves to be the one to punish Seth.”

“I think it’s more than that,” Horus said.

Seth watched Horus, curious about how far he’d go. What would he admit?

Horus met Seth’s gaze. “He begged you to come to Duat with him. As if you would *want* to go. With *him.* A man you murdered out of alleged jealousy.”

To get away from you? Almost. “Your father is a sick freak.”

Horus’ eyes suddenly widened. His lips mouthed the words, *Worse than him.*

Oh fuck, Seth thought, suddenly feeling like the tent was too small. “Whatever you’re thinking is wrong.”

“What?” Isis demanded, looking between Horus and Seth.

“It all makes sense, Horus said, ignoring Isis. “Of course you’d kill him for that.”

“For what?” Isis demanded, louder.

“Stop it,” Seth begged, refusing to meet Isis’ gaze.

“Osiris assaulted Seth,” Horus said. “The night he died.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 10: Reveal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

“What did you say?” Isis demanded, staring at Horus now.

Seth was frozen as he gazed at Horus, who stared *right back*, tall and intimidating and inexorable, as if the younger god saw everything Seth was trying to hide. It had been years, so many long years, and Seth had been good at hiding it, he *had*. It was an embarrassment. Degradation. And it was *his*. Osiris was dead and it was over with, that was all, wasn’t it?

No one else needed to know. Because if they did, particularly if Isis did, then Nephthys…

“Osiris sexually assaulted Seth,” Horus repeated, not looking away from Seth as he spoke. “Before he died.”

“He would never do that,” Isis said, her voice quiet. “How could you say such a thing?”

“My intuition,” Horus replied. “I know that’s what Osiris did.”

“No you don’t,” Seth said, finally getting his voice back. Was Horus being honest? Did Seth just watch his intuition at work? It was that fast? Or was he just connecting the dots? Seth was too out of his mind with worry over Anubis. With fighting Osiris, Anubis being hurt, Isis in distress… it felt just like that night all over again, and Seth had to fight back the fear, and that meant he was saying far too much.

Horus only watched him. “Yes, I do, Seth.”

“Maybe you’re misunderstanding it,” Isis insisted. She sounded afraid.

Horus looked at her, a little annoyed. “I’m not misunderstanding it. Osiris assaulted Seth that night. He was lusting after Seth for some time.” Horus frowned at Seth. “So is *that* why you killed him?”

Seth almost laughed. That must have meant Horus didn’t know *everything.* Just part of it. Would it make Osiris happy, to know that his other secret was still safe?

“That’s impossible,” Isis said, still horrified. “He… He wouldn’t do that.” Isis glared at Seth. “You tricked Horus somehow, didn’t you?”

“He’s still under Maat’s spell, Mother,” Horus said as he looked at her with a frown. “And I still have control over him. He can’t affect my powers. But it’s nice to know that you have answers to questions I’ve had all my life, but *kept* from me.”

Isis' eyes widened. "You think I kept *this* from you?! I didn't! I…" She swallowed and clutched her hands together, nervous. "The night Osiris died, I woke up from a bad dream where Anubis was hurt, and so I got up to go see him, just to check that he was all right. He often got into scrapes with Seth and sometimes, well…" A fond, nostalgic look came into her gaze for a moment. "I just wanted to be sure. I didn't think the dream was a vision of the future, but I worried it might be." She shut her eyes. "I found him with a hole in his chest, his soul departed. I was horrified. I healed him, like I said. And I reached out to test the wards on Heliopolis, assuming we had an attacker. I used to maintain them, for protection. But none of them were broken, there was no sign of intruders. And then I went to go find Nephthys, Seth, Osiris, anyone, to find out what was going on. And then I ran into Seth."

Seth remembered walking through the halls of Heliopolis that night. Osiris' last words from Duat were still running around his head, taunting him. Seth wanted to check on Anubis and see how he fared. And he wanted to stave off talking to Nephthys as long as possible. And then Seth ran into Isis, whose face was tear-stained

"Seth, Anubis has been attacked!"

Seth had panicked then, because now he had no time to come up with something to say. After all, Sekhmet said things were fine, right? But what could Seth say to Isis?

"I explained that I'd healed Anubis," Isis continued now, "but we needed to find who did it. And then Seth said…" Isis breathed in deeply. "He said Osiris and Nephthys had gone behind our backs to have Anubis together, and now Osiris was hiding the evidence out of embarrassment, so he attacked Anubis, and attacked Seth as well. Seth fought back and killed him." Isis shook her head. "But Osiris would never do such a thing. Never. But Seth… Seth admitted to murdering his brother. It made sense that he'd attack Anubis, too."

"I didn't. Not… Not then," Seth finally said, acknowledging what he'd done *later*. "Osiris *did* attack Anubis then. He showed me proof of it."

"Proof of what?"

Seth pursed his lips. He still didn't want to explain.

Isis scoffed. Then she covered her face. "It's not possible. He *wouldn't."*

"Osiris is a monster," Seth said, quietly.

"You *lied!"* Isis said, tears in her eyes as she glared up at him. "Even then, you *lied!* And you're *still* lying, I know you are!"

"What was I supposed to do?!" Seth demanded, glaring back at her. "Tell you everything he did to me?! Tell you how I barely survived him? Tell you that Nephthys gave him the power of creation in exchange for his seed, and Osiris tried to use that power and Anubis' stolen soul to try and have a child with *me?"*

"No…" Isis said, putting her hands over eyes.

“Tell you that I *begged* him to let Anubis go?!” Seth continued, stuck in how she was *listening* now. Listening, after years of turning her back on him and calling him a *murderer*. “Tell you that he drugged me to keep me in line? Tell you that he spoke to me as if we were *lovers?* As if I should be *happy* even as I screamed at him to get away from me?” Seth had cried himself out over the years on his own behalf over everything that was lost: his relationships with Nephthys, Anubis, Isis, Osiris... He buried himself in alcohol and drugs to forget it all. How the man he’d trusted most had destroyed everything, and Seth had failed to recover any of it. He had no tears left for himself now. He just felt tired. “What should I *have* told you Isis? What would have convinced you to take my side, rather than spitting in my face and fleeing?”

Isis didn’t say anything for a long time. She knelt on the ground by Anubis’ side, holding her face in her hands.

Horus was still watching them both, his hand clenched. He was tense, and Seth felt that *something* would break it all any second. The world was just the four of them, and one of them wasn’t even awake to be part of it.

For that, Seth was glad. He didn’t want Anubis to go through the pain of all this. How his family had failed him in so many ways. He’d gone through enough. But Seth knew something had to change: if Anubis agreed to help Osiris willingly, Seth had to warn him. Osiris couldn’t be trusted. Anubis’ current injured state alone was proof of that.

“Anubis is my half-brother,” Horus said, quietly. “How strange.”

Seth shut his eyes. Horus had instigated all of this, in his own way. No matter how hard Seth tried, it had all come up. It was all over. But he needed to know… “Isis, what finally convinced you?”

Isis didn’t reply for a while, but finally she pulled her hands down and gazed over Anubis with a bleak expression. “I took Anubis from his room and went to Nephthys after I fled from you. I planned to warn her about you, and what had happened with Osiris and Anubis, and asked her to come with me to flee from you. The three of us could go together.” She laughed bitterly. “Nephthys confessed to giving Osiris the power of life in exchange for his seed.” Isis shook her head with a rueful smile. “I screamed. I hit her. I left Anubis and fled. I didn’t want anything to do with any of you. But I wanted answers from Osiris.”

“You knew…” Seth said, quietly, and angrily. All those years… She’d known what Osiris had done. But still sided with him!

“Nephthys was your wife,” Isis replied, angrily. “It made sense she’d take your side! And I couldn’t take Anubis with me if Nephthys insisted on staying in Heliopolis with you.” Isis shook her head. “But Osiris… Osiris would be honest to me. I brought him back to life and talked to him. He insisted you attacked him unprovoked, that you’d wanted the throne for yourself.” She looked down at Anubis. “He said Nephthys was desperate to have a child for you, but was unable to bear children, and so he helped her with Anubis. But he didn’t expect you to get so upset about it.”

Seth wanted to rip the sands beneath them apart, but Anubis was there. Seth couldn't hurt him. "You knew it all…" Had Osiris explained *why* Nephthys couldn't bear Seth a child? The thought sent chills through him.

Isis scowled at him. "That you took advantage of a bad situation to take the throne for yourself? Yes, I knew that."

Seth laughed, suddenly unafraid. Unafraid of anything, even the darkness in his own head. What did any of it matter, really? He was damned either way. If Isis wanted to spit her accusations, and everything else was laid bare, then what was the point anymore of hiding? "I didn't *take* the throne, Isis. Osiris practically *gave* it to me."

Isis frowned. "What?"

"He refused to let me go," Seth said. "He couldn't *die.* Not then, anyway. He was the god of life. I needed Sekhmet's help to even escape him, briefly, the first time, because he'd drugged me so badly. And the only way I could keep him away from me was to kill him." Seth snorted. "That didn't work. So I tricked him." He smiled, still remembering. Osiris with all his plans, all his manipulations. All his patronizing comments about how Seth was nothing without him. "I could see how *obsessed* he was with me, to the point he'd murder his nephew and son, lie to you, and drug me to get to me. So if I was the thing that mattered most to him, then I'd see how far he'd go, because I refused to stay and be his toy. I made a bet to see whether I could kill myself before he healed me."

Isis' eyes widened in horror, and Seth tried to feel something for her then, anything like the sibling bond they'd once had to make him stop, to let her rest and thinking things through properly, to spare her what was left. But he couldn't, really. What was begun had to be finished.

"So I killed myself over and over," Seth continued, "while Osiris kept bringing me back to life, refusing to let me die *without his "consent*." Eventually I pretended to enter Duat, and Osiris sacrificed his immortality to *join* me in Duat." Seth met Isis' horrified gaze. It felt vindicating, and like Seth was stabbing himself once more with knives. He hadn't wanted to hurt her this way back then. He'd hoped they could comfort each other, as they had before. He'd hoped that maybe, one day, they could talk about it, like they talked about so much.

But she'd refused to listen. And gone to her precious Osiris and forgiven everything, apparently. If Nephthys took Seth's side, then Isis took Osiris'.

"He sacrificed his throne to follow me in death," Seth said. "I didn't kill him. He killed *himself* because of his madness."

"No…" Isis said, tears in her eyes. "Why? *Why?"*

"Because he's a monster," Seth said, recalling the obsessive looks on Osiris' face. How they'd made Seth's skin crawl. How Osiris felt *entitled* to Seth's body and mind. "I tried to understand. I asked him why he went so far." Seth shook his head. "He was too far gone. He insisted it was love. To the very end." He still remembered gazing into the waters of Duat

then, listening to Osiris spew his poison into the space between them, even as he slowly faded into Duat. *What a fool,* Seth thought.

Isis covered her eyes. Seth considered all these years and she knew Osiris lied to her about Anubis and Nephthys until she finally confronted him about it, and she *let* his new lies sway her, and only now was she choosing to see it clearly. A part of Seth still wanted to comfort her. And a part of him was hurt anew. It was like nothing between them had ever meant anything. Like Seth had to hurt himself to make a difference in her eyes.

Perhaps that's how I know I really am a god of war, Seth thought, bitterly. *I'm always the one who has to go to the front lines to deal with these things. Getting injured isn't surprising. It's even expected. I just heal afterwards, anyway. There's nothing to worry about.*

"…You didn't kill him," Horus said, quietly.

Seth's lips thinned. Horus was still there, listening to it all. So many of Seth's secrets laid bare. So many of Osiris' secrets, too. But Seth still felt scraped raw by them.

"You didn't murder Osiris," Horus repeated.

"I didn't," Seth said, quietly. "He killed himself." Seth snorted. *With Nephthys' help, after a fashion.*

"I know," Horus said. "I can tell you're not lying."

Seth blinked, unsure what to say to that. He expected Horus to use the cock ring, or to knock the tent aside and declare Seth's actions to all of Egypt, to humiliate him. He wondered if Osiris' recent actions had actually been more to Seth's benefit than Seth realized.

Seth blinked, unsure what to say to that. He expected Horus to use the cock ring, or to knock the tent aside and declare Seth's actions to all of Egypt, to humiliate him. He wondered if Osiris' recent actions had actually been more to Seth's benefit than Seth realized. It almost amused him, to know Horus was leading to Osiris' downfall in the way Anubis had with Seth. One final act of revenge, perhaps, on Seth's part.

"…I'll have to speak to Maat," Horus said. "This changes things. Not everything, of course, there are still the crimes you committed against Isis and myself, and against Egypt."

Seth smiled bitterly. "Of course." He was still Egypt's monster, at the end of the day. Almost her destroyer, too.

"And Nephthys will have to speak to Maat, as well," Horus said, surprising Seth. "She's spent too long in silence."

Seth's face paled. He had no right to demand Horus leave her alone. And there was nothing to be gained in begging. He knew it'd happen. He knew she'd learn everything if he told anyone…

So he stayed quiet. Because what else could he do? He and Nephthys were strangers at this point, and had been for hundreds of years, and even more than that. It shouldn't bother him

what she knew about him. She already went to Osiris behind his back, and hid Anubis' true parentage from him. She couldn't trust him. She couldn't speak to him properly. She just hid.

He wished he'd stop caring about it. But even if he did, there was nothing he could do. Even attacking Horus now would get him nowhere.

Horus gazed down at Anubis. "And Anubis will have to be questioned. This puts Anubis' connection with Osiris in a new light." He looked at Isis. "We'll have to discuss what's to be done with Osiris, as well. After the talks with the Greeks… there will need to be a new trial."

Isis' face was wet, but her tears had stopped. She gazed up at Horus with a defeated expression. "Yes." She looked at Seth, her expression unreadable. Pain, sorrow, anger… all lost in the whirlpool of her gaze. "There will be."

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 11: Distance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Isis finally left Horus and Seth alone with Anubis to rejoin Maat to negotiate with the Greeks. She was clearly still shaken, but she'd wiped her face of tears, stood up, told Seth to let Anubis rest for a while and she'd be back before evening, and walked to the exit of the tent. She paused by Horus, but then shortly left.

Horus didn't say anything.

Seth was glad she was gone. He didn't know what else to say to her. He felt emptied out. She'd listened... but what had she really heard? What had she taken in? He looked at Horus eventually, slightly surprised Horus didn't go with her. "Don't you want to be part of the grand conclusion of the campaign? Your first real war?"

Horus tilted his head. "My first real war was defeating you."

Seth snorted and knelt by Anubis' side and watched him sleep. Seth's thoughts were vague and everything in his world seemed to focus in on the rise and fall of Anubis' chest. Anubis seemed so small. Seth had told Nephthys that when Anubis was born, and how Seth was afraid of crushing him sometimes, he just seemed so small.

"You love him already," Nephthys had said with a gentle smile. "Just be careful. You won't hurt him. You may be a god of war, but it's not like you hurt any of us, right?"

He wondered what she'd think of him now, when he was turning the other gods on her. Isis and Maat would have questions. Horus would have his own. And what would come out at the trial? What would Anubis be forced to do?

Seth knew it was Osiris who had done much of this to them, but Seth also knew that *he* held much of the blame, too. If he'd just fled to the desert away from it all, perhaps things would have been better for everyone… But leave Isis in the lurch? He couldn't have done that. Instead, he'd tried to get help, and she'd abandoned *him.*

"You said I was worse than him," Horus said, evenly.

Seth looked up at the tent wall, wishing he could just turn into sand. But he could still feel Maat's spell around him, keeping him caged. Calling a sand dune over the place or even to emerge from the ground and swallow Horus wouldn't do much good. With his luck, Horus would activate the cock ring and Seth's thrashing would wake up Anubis and *that* was definitely not a scenario he wanted to deal with.

“You said I was *worse* than Osiris,” Horus continued, as if Seth didn’t know who he meant.

“Yes,” Seth replied. He didn’t think Horus would assault him while Anubis was in the tent, but he was risking things just by talking with Anubis there. So Seth had no idea what Horus would say. Would Horus reveal everything now? He’d revealed so much else.

“Because I did more?” Horus asked. “Because I had you for longer?”

“Osiris wanted me longer, too,” Seth said. “I just stopped him from keeping me. But you like causing pain. Osiris doesn’t care about anyone’s pleasure but his own. And you have that, too.” *At least with me, anyway. May Isis protect anyone Horus is with who’s not a god.* “But while Osiris just wants control and to bend people to his will, and will happily push people if it means his own pleasure, you like *suffering*. Osiris is just negligent. You have intentionality.” Seth laughed. “Osiris doesn’t consider other people significant enough to care if they’re in pain or not. His will is what matters most, and if he’s pleased, then the subject he’s focusing on should be pleased, as well.” He remembered the way Osiris seemingly *expected* Seth to give in. In part because Osiris had overpowered him. In part because Osiris expected Seth to accept his gestures of “love”, as if simply shoving things at someone would cause them to accept you.

“Osiris desired me,” Seth continued, “so he trapped me and forced himself on me. And that matched his fucked-up definition of love. By his logic, simply because he wanted me, and did things that gave *him* pleasure, I should have been pleased, and happy to be with him.” He scoffed. “It was pathetic.” Perhaps Nephthys had never loved Seth after all, if she’d been so willing to go to Osiris without telling him. If there was something more to why she agreed to be with Seth. But if she’d ever once told him to back off or leave her alone… he’d have gone. In a heartbeat. *Because the people you love aren’t toys*, Seth thought, *to be used at your whims. Osiris, for some reason, didn’t realize that.* “But you’re not negligent in that sense. You have all his pushiness, and you use it to destroy.”

“…I don’t enjoy causing pain,” Horus said.

Seth scoffed. “Your new kingdom should hope not, at least generally. After all, that’s one reason you overthrew me, isn’t it? Because you didn’t like how I was gleefully destroying Egypt.” He smiled. “But you certainly enjoying causing pain to me.”

“I have my reasons,” Horus said. “You know that.”

Seth glared at him. “I never said you didn’t. But as someone who’s spent most of *your* life causing pain of his own, I know it marks you for life. Maybe you think how you are around me ends when you’re not around me. But just look at yourself. Look what you’ve done since the trial. Since becoming my jailer. Look at who you are and tell me you don’t *like* it.”

Horus’ expression was unreadable. Probably he was too determined to follow his own path.

Seth didn’t know why he was bothering. Like father like son: both too stubborn to listen to anyone else. “Can you honestly say that at some point you’ll just… turn off the part of you that does this and become some friendly little pigeon? Or does the part of you that comes out around me come from somewhere deeper? Something that’s being well fed by what you do?”

"…By that logic, are you saying that your real personality is one who butchers humans and allows them to become slaves?" Horus asked.

Seth snorted. "I'm a god of war. I fight and kill until the other side is defeated. Do you think suffering isn't a part of that? Do you think all the humans I killed in battle were *happy* to die at my hands? Or died painlessly?" He gazed down at Anubis. "There are many ways to win a war. I just don't use all of them because I don't need to." He looked at Horus with a smirk. "But there are other methods to punish me. And you made your choice on that, Horus."

Horus' expression finally turned into a slight scowl.

"Oh, are you upset?" Seth said, as mockingly as he could. "Why? I thought you *enjoyed* yourself." Was he just mad that he realized Seth was right? "Or are you just upset that with all that you've been mocking Osiris, you finally know that you're not just as bad as he is, but you're actually *worse?"*

Horus chuckled, surprising Seth. "I didn't assume my father acted like I did. I always assumed we were different in that respect. Save at least in his desire to torture *you*." Horus' voice went quieter. "He had a hungry look in his eyes whenever he spoke about punishing you. Now I know why."

"I doubt whatever he has planned for me is anything like what you imagined," Seth said. He snorted. "Well, maybe it is at this point. He seems rather wroth with me over ignoring and tricking and refusing him." He grinned. "But is that better, really? Knowing that, at the very least, you're just as bad as the man as you despise most?"

Horus gazed back at Seth steadily. "I may hate him, but the man I despise most is you."

"I'd expect nothing less," Seth replied, gazing coldly at Horus. There was nothing between again, but all the pain. But he also realized Horus was getting away from the point. "You're just like your father in other ways: neither of you understand anything about affection or how to treat people you like. Just look at how you've treated Isis."

Horus seemed a little perturbed at that. "She kept information from me. Information that could have changed things. I have a right to be angry."

"She's your mother. She supported you with everything she had."

"Are you so respectful to your parents?" Horus demanded, angry again. "Nut and Geb practically abandoned you four when you were young. You relied on each other to survive, even in the war against Ra."

Seth sighed, recalling old memories. "Nut sacrificed a lot to have us. I can't say that she did more or less or the same as Isis did for you." He smiled. "But I never treated her the way you have your mother. She may despise me for all that I've done. But I've never hidden it. I wouldn't be able to." All through the years he wondered if she'd tell the truth. What did she see, the night Osiris attacked him? Or did she turn her gaze away, as she so often did? Seeing everything happening under the sky would drive even a goddess mad, so maybe Nut hadn't been looking that night. "If she didn't see something, it was her choice not to see it."

“Then you’re lucky,” Horus said. “That your mother didn’t choose to hide things from you for what she perceived as your own good. And her selfishness.”

Seth scoffed. “*Lucky.* If she’d bothered checking on me that night, she’d have seen what was wrong. Perhaps she could have done something.” Once, he’d wondered if *she* was the reason Sekhmet had arrived when Sekhmet had. But no, Sekhmet had probably kept an eye on things ever since warning Seth, and Seth ran off to confront Osiris. Nut had been silent until the trial. “Perhaps things would be different.” He shook his head. “But there’s no point in dwelling on such things.”

“You don’t resent her for it?” Horus demanded.

“I would be lying if I said I didn’t,” Seth said, brushing back some of Anubis’ hair. He hoped Isis’ healing magic was doing the trick, and was glad at every second Osiris didn’t return. Hopefully it meant Isis’ wards were working. “But I know it was Osiris who chose to do what he did to me. And I know it was Isis who chose to turn her back to me. And I know it was Nephthys who chose to go to Osiris and not tell me. And I know it was my own actions that caused all the rest.” He was weak. If he’d been stronger… Well. Much might have been different.

“…Then I envy you,” Horus said, making Seth startle in surprise. “I wish I had that clarity of vision.”

“You have magic that lets you see things you shouldn’t,” Seth said, confused. “What more do you need?”

“Forgiveness doesn’t come easily to me,” Horus said. “It’s always been that way. Part of it was something Mother encouraged, with her hatred of you. And Osiris as well, with what I believed was the same. Part of it was growing up in the wreckage of your crimes. I was born to be their vengeance. Forgiveness doesn’t really factor into that.”

“…No, it doesn’t,” Seth said, quietly. He almost felt pity for Horus in that moment, which was strange. Being born to be a weapon, or a force of will for other gods… It was difficult. Seth had borne it all his years, and grown weary of it. It was part of why Nephthys’ betrayal had hurt so much. All that he’d done, and what had it brought him? The realization that he’d been an idiot all along.

Horus stared at Seth thoughtfully. “I can see parts of your time with Osiris.”

Seth felt chilled. It was bad enough experiencing the event with Osiris. Knowing Horus could see Seth, too... It made Seth nauseous.

“I see how he drugged you. His plans. How you tricked him.”

Seth imagined Horus knew part of it instinctively, but what he saw or how he knew… Seth shook himself. *He’s seen me at my worst,* Seth thought. *It hardly matters.*

"What he did was cowardly," Horus said, surprising Seth. "I expected better of him. Apparently even the little expectation I had was too high."

Seth snorted. "You really hate him."

"He had all that power and used it for *that*," Horus said. "Pathetic."

Seth smiled. "Definitely. I can't imagine any other king having a lot of power and using it to torment me in a despicable fashion."

Horus gazed coolly at Seth. “I try to reconcile what you went through with what I know you deserve.”

Redirection, Seth thought with a laugh. *Cute.*

Horus leaned back against the tent wall. “For all the other suffering you’ve caused. I ask myself: does being punished before you committed a crime mean anything? Am I allowed to feel horror at what Osiris did, since what he did is so much less than what I’ve done?”

I imagine if you give yourself a bit to just want to fuck something again, you won't care anymore what you are or aren't allowed to do, Seth thought.

Horus smiled. “Osiris’ murder was so little of what I blamed you for. It justified my core purpose. Drove me here. Drove *you* to seek me out that night during the trial.”

It struck Seth how similar they were after that second match: both out for vengeance for people they didn’t fully understand, and Osiris in particular. It was unnerving.

“But so did so many other things along the way,” Horus continued. And I cared for them more.” His smile vanished. “I am not just the vengeance of Isis and Osiris. I was conceived in the waters of the Nile. Raised among humans, and by a number of gods, and harmed by your actions, even outside what you did to my father. I am Egypt’s vengeance, too.”

Seth only gazed back at Horus steadily. He knew that. He’d known that since Horus’ identity had been revealed. And he’d been *happy*. Because here it was at last. He could finally rest.

Horus breathed in and out deeply. “She was so horrified by the idea of him doing that to you.”

Seth blinked. “What?”

“Isis. You saw the look on her face. I think if she could fall on the floor and weep, she would. But it’s not like her now. She’s a ruler of Egypt again. She doesn’t have the time.”

Seth frowned. *Why does this matter?*

“I knew when I decided on what I wanted for your punishment that Mother would not approve,” Horus said. “It’s part of why I kept the secret. I knew she might despise me for it. I knew I’d weather it.” Horus frowned. “But knowing how much she sacrificed for him, even after learning what he’d done to her? And knowing how much she’d done for me… And knowing… just how hard it hurt her that he did that to you…” Horus gazed at Seth for a long while.

“What?” Seth asked. “Don’t tell me you feel remorse? Or embarrassment? After everything that’s happened?”

Horus smiled.

A gentle breeze whipped through the tent and Seth’s lower body abruptly felt a little lighter. There was a thunk on the ground beneath Seth. He looked down to see the cock ring laying in the sand. His eyes widened, especially as it flew upward and into Horus’ hands. The weight of the ring was gone, but Seth wasn’t otherwise injured.

Horus pocketed it. “Anubis’ life is the better threat to keep you in line. I’ve seen that every day since you knew he was here.” He smiled down at Seth. “After everything you’ve done to him, you still feel for him. If I must strive to be better than my father, and someone like you can feel remorse or at least some regret for your actions, then why can’t someone like me feel remorse, too?” His gaze grew distant. “Perhaps even my purpose has its limits.”

Seth was wary of this, even as he felt he could breathe a little easier. “What are you saying?”

“There’s more than one way to win a war,” Horus said with a smile. “As my teacher said.”

Seth glared at him. What was between them wasn’t over. Horus was just being realistic. Probably he wasn’t getting all that much fun out of the cock ring. He knew Seth would gladly fall unconscious than respond to Horus’ demands with it. And yes, Anubis was keeping him in check better. “Anubis isn’t a toy. He’s your half-brother! If you can feel remorse of any kind, feel some for him and keep him out of this!”

“I’ve done nothing to him,” Horus said. “I am his king, and he wishes to follow me. He can always leave for better shores as he wishes. In fact, he listens to Mother. I think that says enough.”

Seth glared, wanting to hit him. “Do you expect gratitude for the ring, then? Do you think that makes any difference?” After everything they’d gone through, was that really what he thought would happen?

“I think you’re already stressed even without the ring on,” Horus said, neutrally. “Which proves the ring isn’t necessary. Besides, I can always put it back.”

Seth scoffed and looked aside.

“Anubis will wake soon,” Horus said, surprising him. “How things will or won’t change moving forward is a topic for another time.”

Seth didn’t even know why he cared to argue. It was a thing for Horus to decide in the end. Maat’s spell was still there to cage him. Everything and nothing had changed.

He looked back to Anubis.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 12: Hearts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Anubis stirred and blinked his eyes open. He was still laying on his cot, and a bit dirty, but Isis' protection was strong. Seth could feel it.

"Anubis?" Seth asked, leaning over him. "How are you feeling?" He was vibrating with worry and trying to repress it. But if Seth had known earlier that Osiris was doing this…

Anubis blinked up at him for a bit. "Father?"

Seth smiled, feeling warmth in his chest at that. "Yes, it's me. We rescued you from Osiris."

Anubis frowned, and then pushed himself up into a sitting position.

Seth reached out to help, but hesitated, and then let his hands drop. Anubis wouldn't want that.

"You rescued me from him?" Anubis asked with a frown. He looked up at Horus, who merely gazed back at him. Then Anubis looked back at Seth. For a moment, there was a bit of fear. "You… You know…?"

"That he's using you to appear in the land of the living?" Seth asked, his tony icy. "Yes, I know."

Anubis winced, but then his expression hardened and he gazed back at Seth with a slight glare. "So what? Are you going to punish me for it?"

Seth blinked in confusion. "Punish you?"

Anubis smiled darkly. "I'm helping your enemy, aren't I? You kill anyone involved with him."

That's why you think…? Seth resisted rolling his eyes. "Anubis, you nearly *died* helping him."

Anubis' expression became confused. "What do you mean?"

"He fought Horus and I," Seth explained. "And we didn't know it was you in there initially. We thought it was just Osiris. He can't die, exactly, so we assumed killing him wouldn't be an issue. But if we'd managed to actually *kill* that form… You'd have died."

Anubis' lips parted, and Seth could tell he hadn't considered it at all. "But… he saved me."

Seth's eyes widened. "Saved you? From what?"

Anubis lowered his gaze, clearly embarrassed.

"Answer his question," Horus ordered, making Anubis look up at the falcon god in surprise. "That is an order as your king."

Anubis grimaced. "And if I refuse?"

Seth recalled Nephthys saying how Anubis had inherited Seth's stubbornness.

Horus stepped forward and loomed over Seth and Anubis. "Osiris may show you some favor, Anubis, but he doesn't hold sway here anymore, even were he possessing you right now." Horus tilted his head slightly. "You are still a *little* demigod, as well."

Anubis swallowed and didn't meet Horus' gaze. He was clearly aware of how stupid it would be to defy Horus, but he was still considering it.

Seth wanted to tell Horus off, but to what end? He needed the answer anyway. If Anubis was going to be difficult, then—

"He saved my life," Anubis said, quietly.

Seth felt chilled. "How?"

Anubis was still gazing at his pale, dirty knees. His hands were clasped over them. "There was a time during your reign when I begged you not to go to Khemmis and kill more people in the hunt for Isis."

Seth frowned. Looking back, he couldn't recall the event precisely. He'd gone off to go hunt for Isis so many times that they all blurred together.

"You struck me offhandedly and left anyway."

Seth grimaced. Of course he did.

"I… had been despairing for some time during your reign," Anubis said. He looked up at Seth in anger. "You turned your back on your brother! You turned your back on Mother! And why? For helping Isis?!"

Seth forced his expression in neutrality. "You wouldn't understand." There was too much to explain to him. And it would break him to learn.

Anubis scoffed. "Yes. I didn't understand. So I left. And I took my life."

Seth stiffened. *No…*

"Osiris found me then," Anubis said. "He wept over me. He told me he'd been watching over me and all I'd gone through. And that it wasn't my time to die. But that he'd protect me from you. And that if I needed something to live for, I could live for the restoration of Egypt."

Drivel, Seth thought, angrily. *The worst drivel, to inspire a boy who always wanted a grand destiny he could never have.* Seth hated that he hadn't been able to give that to Anubis. All his years of trying to help Anubis ascend, and in the end, Osiris took advantage of the failure and used it for this.

"So he brought me back," Anubis said. "And I've served him since."

"You let him use you for this?" Seth asked, quietly. "Like a puppet?" It was disgraceful.

"I was *helping* the rightful ruler of Egypt," Anubis said, with anger that made Seth recoil slightly. "I have so little power of my own. My body is scrawny and pathetic even compared to the weakest of gods. If it could be put to use like this, why not?"

"You're not scrawny and pathetic," Seth insisted. Seth had watched him fight, he was a good fighter.

Anubis scowled. "Then why, in all the time I've been your son, have you always told me to be like Mother? Never like you!"

Because I'm a war god. "I trained you to fight, didn't I?" Seth demanded. "I took you hunting. I—"

"A pittance," Anubis said. His right hand on his leg was tight. His eyes were wrathful. "You never listened to me after you killed Uncle. Or after you pushed Mother to isolate herself. You hate me. You've attacked me. You see me as *nothing*." He smiled bitterly. "At least Uncle saw me as someone of value."

Horus laughed, making both Seth and Anubis look at him in confusion. Horus rubbed his eyes. "I really must give Osiris more credit than I thought he deserved. He is a terrible strategist. And a fool, all the same. But he's far more cunning than I thought." Horus smiled at Seth. "You are so furious about my placing Anubis out of your reach. And yet here Osiris is, using him against you a second time. In a way you cannot even *touch*."

Seth paled, realizing what Horus was thinking of. "Horus, don't, please…"

"A second time?" Anubis asked, confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Nothing," Seth insisted.

"Your… *uncle…"* Horus said, leaning over Seth, "Has lied about everything he's ever told you."

Anubis stared at him in confusion. "What are you saying?"

"I'll rip this camp apart," Seth said, quietly. He reached out for the sand, and it was ready for him, always welcoming. "I'll destroy it."

"What will that accomplish?" Horus asked, looking down at him with something like pity. "Anubis will just ask you if you escape with him. Assuming I don't use Maat's spell to crush you to the floor."

He's enjoying this, Seth thought. *The unending torment of it all.*

Horus looked back at Anubis, who was staring at Seth in confusion. "You are the child of Nephthys and Osiris."

Seth shut his eyes.

"They've been lying to you – and your father – for almost your entire life. Up until the night Osiris died." Horus' words were clear and loud.

"…You're lying."

"Why would I lie?" Horus asked, smiling at Anubis. "What benefit does that get me?"

"They wouldn't do that."

"I don't admit to knowing my aunt very well," Horus admitted, "and I've learned a great deal more about my father in the last afternoon than I have in all the years I've known him. But it is the truth."

Anubis looked at Seth. "Father…?"

Seth's hands tightened on his legs. A million times, he'd thought of this moment. Of how he'd explain it all. Of what he'd do. But no response had ever been appropriate. Nothing had made sense. It was all senseless.

"Is it true?" Anubis demanded, louder.

Seth was silent.

"The night he died," Horus continued, "Osiris used you as a bargaining chip against Seth, to rape Seth and have a child with him."

"What?" Anubis' face was horrified.

"He would have killed you, just to take ownership of Seth," Horus said. "And Seth fought to save your life. So he killed Osiris, to save you both." Horus chuckled. "In a way, he saved Egypt, too. From what Osiris was. Such a king would have destroyed this land, perhaps more than Seth did." Horus knelt next to Seth and grinned at them. "You know it's almost ingenious. You beat him. Soundly. And what did he do? Destroy the thing you held most dear. The thing you sacrificed everything for."

Seth was sunk within himself. Horus was just mocking him now for the fun of it, that was all.

"I couldn't do better than that," Horus said, almost with sadness. "There's nothing I've done that's worse, is there? Because you already sacrificed it to save this ungrateful brat." He stood up as Anubis glared at him. "I'm going to go check on Maat and Isis, and see how negotiations are going." He looked down at Seth. "I can tell wherever you are in this camp, Seth. Flee, and I'll find you, and make you regret it." Then he turned and walked out of the tent.

Silence filled the air.

Seth felt chilled in his core. Horus was right, there was nothing that Horus had done that was worse than this. Osiris had his revenge. He claimed everything of Seth's that mattered: Nephthys, Anubis, Seth's closest friend, his sense of family… and then Osiris' son had destroyed what little was left. It was pitiful.

"…Father?" Anubis asked, quietly. "Please tell me that wasn't true."

Seth could sense Horus just outside the tent, though. The fucker hadn't left. He probably wanted to listen to whatever Seth and Anubis had to say to each other while they thought Horus was gone, because Horus was a little *spy*. Did he think Seth was a complete incompetent? Perhaps Osiris did all this, perhaps Horus was some sadistic mastermind of his own, but Seth was still a god of war.

"Why aren't you saying anything?"

Anubis was wise, but he was only a demigod, and he was letting his emotions take control of him even more than Seth was letting *his* take control of him. Seth hadn't finished training him in the end. Life had gotten in the way of that, and Seth regretted it so much. Perhaps if he'd paid more attention… well. What's done was done, wasn't it?

Anubis scoffed and looked away from him. "You sacrificed for me? Against Osiris? Am I supposed to believe that?" Seth was shocked to see his eyes filling with tears. "After all the times you hit me and pushed me away. All the times you ignored me. You expect me to believe that you'd kill your own *brother* on my behalf?" He laughed, with a hint of insanity. "And what, is that supposed to make me feel better?! Is your madness *my* fault?!"

"No," Seth said, his heart wrenching at the pain in Anubis' voice. He wanted to reach out and comfort Anubis. Let him know it was okay. But Seth had never been good at this. Not really. "It's not your fault. Osiris was the one who masterminded it all. You're innocent."

"…So it's true, then," Anubis said, looking at him in horror. "He used me to… to control you?!"

Seth grimaced. "Yes. He did." A noxious weed until the very end, and not even the end. Osiris was out there, waiting for them, likely planning something worse. And every second that passed gave him more time to prepare.

"Why did you never tell me?"

"It would have hurt you." *And I was afraid.* "It is hurting you." *And I'm still afraid. You knowing will make it all so much more real.*

"…Was Mother part of it?" Anubis asked.

Seth lowered his head. "Your mother wanted to be with Osiris. But other than that, no, she had nothing to do with it." Seth didn't think very highly of Nephthys in many ways anymore, but he didn't imagine she would have agreed to give the power of creation to Osiris if she'd

known that's what he'd use it for. She was too compassionate, so long as her compassion didn't interfere with her own desires, anyway.

"And you didn't know? Or did you lie to me all these years, too, pretending I was your son?"

Seth's eyes were watering. Would there be anything of him left at the end of this day for Horus to torment more? "You *are* my son. You…" He swallowed. "If you want to be, of course. And I never lied to you about that. I didn't know about Nephthys and Osiris until that night. And then I…" His voice grew quieter. "I turned away from you because I couldn't bear to lie to you directly. For either of them. And I was ashamed. Ashamed of what you would think of a father so pitiful he couldn't even face you with that little truth. I hoped you'd turn your back on me and find something better for yourself, without ever having to learn the awful truth from me. Because… Because I'm a coward."

"…You are a coward," Anubis finally said. His voice was thick. "You should have told me."

"I know." *I'm sorry,* he almost said. But would it change anything? Would it make a difference? In the end, he hadn't been able to save Anubis, his main role as a father. He'd only been able to partially halt what Osiris had done, and then Osiris had succeeded even worse by recruiting Anubis to this horrible plan. Seth had done so much damage and failed so much, was there any way to heal from it?

"I hate you," Anubis said, cutting right at Seth's heart. "For lying to me. For thinking *hurting* me was the better solution than just *talking* to me."

Seth shut his eyes. It was no less than he deserved.

"You can't even apologize for it," Anubis said, surprising Seth. "Your pride is always getting in your way. It always got in the way even before the night Osiris died."

Seth frowned. "That's… That's not… What do you mean?"

"You were ashamed I was so weak. You couldn't accept me as your heir."

"No, that's… That's not why…" *That's not why I kept my distance on matters of my role and yours.*

"Then why?!" Anubis yelled at him. "Why did you always turn your back on raising me in your way? Why did you always start, stop, and then go away?"

"I had duties, I… I wanted to protect you." He gave Anubis tools to survive. But he hoped that Anubis as a god would be someone more like Nephthys. Someone with a better role than the god of war.

"You didn't respect me enough to teach me properly outside basic martial techniques, and then you didn't respect me enough to tell me the truth about *all this,* even though it's my *life,* and I have a right to know!" Anubis' eyes were covered in tears. "And now I can't even be grateful for what you might have saved me from because you ruined it all! And because of that lack of knowledge, I ruined the rest!" Anubis put his head in his hands to hide his tears.

Seth reached his arms out and froze. Would Anubis reject him? Would Anubis attack him?

He already ran from me. He knows how to get away if he wants to. Seth's heart hurt too much. So he reached out and wrapped Anubis in his arms, holding him close. He felt Anubis' shaking, heard his sobs.

Anubis didn't pull away. He leaned into Seth, in the way he used to, when Seth comforted him.

Seth used his left hand to rub Anubis' left arm, and squeezed his back. "I'm sorry, Anubis. It's my fault. I'm sorry." His own tears were falling. He was making a mess of Anubis' hair. "I failed you so much. I'm sorry."

Anubis' breath hitched, and his legs curled into Seth, just like he had when he was younger, until he was over Seth's lap. His arms wrapped around Seth's middle, holding him tightly.

Seth held him tightly in return, wanting to protect Anubis from everything that might hurt him. Even though Seth knew he'd failed, and even worse, become one of the things to protect Anubis from. But he could be there, if Anubis wanted him there. And neither Osiris nor Horus were there to take this from them.

Because inside the tent was Isis' protection circle. And outside of the tent was empty.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 13: Needs

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

Horus *didn't* feel ice in his heart as he walked to the tent where Maat and Isis were negotiating for the end to the short war with the Greeks. Horus was the ruler of Egypt, beloved by his one of the most powerful gods – Isis – and powerful his own right, and he had one of the most powerful gods collared beneath him whenever he wished, figuratively and literally.

But seeing Seth holding Anubis… something in Horus had snapped. He could never recall Osiris ever holding him like that, and whenever Isis had held him in such a fashion, she'd only whispered about vengeance, or apologized for how little she could offer him. The dissonance and similarities were both things he didn't want to think about.

Horus pushed open the tent flap and everyone inside looked at him. It had grown dark, and the tent was filled with torches, highlighting the large table covered with drinks and food. Maat stood beside Isis, across from the Greek god whom Horus had dealt with before, who raised his eyebrows at the sight of Horus now. Even having lost to Egypt's forces, the man didn't look afraid or worried.

He even smirked.

Horus wanted to strangle the Greek where he stood, but Horus knew that wasn't a good idea. Perhaps the Greek had held Seth off temporarily, but that was all. It wasn't a *defeat*. Only Horus was allowed to defeat Seth. And he didn't use tricks like poison or attacking while his enemy was partially disabled with a spell to do it.

Horus plastered a half-smile on his features as he walked to Isis and Maat.

Isis kept her expression nearly as neutral as Maat's, but when her eyes met Horus', he could see some of her worry. She was still thinking about what they'd learned from Osiris and Seth and Horus' intuition. What Horus had learned from *her*.

Given what he'd heard from Anubis, Horus wondered if Isis was hiding anything *else.* She was the god of magic and a strategist, doubtless there was much more.

"I'm just checking in to see how things are going," Horus said quietly, coming to stand beside her. He knew the firelight made him look more intimidating, and he hoped the Greek was offput by it. The Greek was already an idiot to not bring more people with him.

"We're finishing up for the day," Maat said, nodding to their Greek counterpart. "The Greeks will prepare to depart tonight."

“Good,” Horus said, now keeping his eyes on the smirking god, who seemed to be unaffected by this. He’d be happy to be rid of all this, and able to return to Heliopolis. With Osiris lurking, they were too exposed. “The sooner we can all return to our lives, the better.”

“I must compliment you,” the Greek said, smiling still at Horus. “You showed great power on the field of battle. Egypt is led by intimidating gods.”

I don’t need your compliments, Horus thought. This man had been chosen because Horus was too weak to fight Seth in Isis’ eyes, once upon a time. And now he’d been defeated by Horus’ forces. But Horus said nothing. He didn’t want to ignite a new war.

“I think your people will be in need of their leader,” Maat said as the silence began to stretch a bit too long. “You’ll not be harassed, so long as you stick to the terms of the contract.”

The Greek bowed his head. “Of course.” He nodded to Isis, glanced at Horus, and then turned and left.

Maat waited for a time, when Horus could sense that the other god was gone, and then she breathed deeply and rubbed her nose. “At least that’s taken care of.” She looked at Isis and Horus critically. “What of Seth? Where is he?”

“He’s looking after Anubis,” Horus said before Isis could speak. “Anubis was injured in a battle with Osiris.”

“Osiris?” Maat said with a frown. “What are you talking about?”

“Horus—” Isis began.

“Osiris gave Nephthys his seed to have Anubis,” Horus explained, ignored her and gazing at Maat, who was clearly confused by the subject change. “They lied to Seth and Anubis about it for years, until Seth learned on the night of usurpation. When Seth confronted Osiris about it, Osiris drugged him, and attempted to use Nephthys’ gift of the power of creation to have a child with Seth, while sexually assaulting him.”

“What?” Maat asked, horror filling her.

Apparently neither Nut nor you noticed that, Horus thought absently. Perhaps the wise gods around him weren’t so wise after all. “Osiris also attacked Anubis, in an attempt to use his soul for the new child. Seth fought back, and tricked Osiris into killing himself by pretending to enter Duat, and having Osiris follow him voluntarily.”

Maat glanced at Isis, who put a hand over her eyes.

“During Seth’s reign,” Horus continued, calling Maat’s gaze back to him, “Anubis killed himself, and Osiris brought him back to life. Osiris then used Anubis to step back into our world, as a sort of puppet. Earlier, Osiris appeared using Anubis’ body, and attacked Seth and I, in an attempt to kill me and drag Seth down to Duat. We subdued him, and Mother used a spell to stop Osiris from returning to Anubis’ body.”

“I don’t know how long it will last,” Isis said. She looked up at Horus in horror. “Anubis… killed himself?”

“He despaired over Seth’s treatment of him, and actions,” Horus replied, and then he smiled. “I can’t imagine what it’s like to have a father who spends most of his time being absent or hitting you.”

Isis glared. “That’s not—!”

“These are heavy accusations,” Maat said, gazing directly at Horus, who met her eyes fearlessly.

“I know they’re true,” Horus said. His abilities let him verify truth. “Seth, Isis, and Anubis have confirmed them.”

“Anubis is awake?” Isis asked, surprised.

“Yes,” Horus said.

“Osiris must explain himself,” Maat said with a frown. “What he’s done here… It needs explanation.”

“And punishment,” Horus added. He couldn’t think about what would be best, but Osiris had earned it many a time by now.

Maat sighed. “If he has broken our laws as you say, then yes. Punishment.”

Horus watched Isis, who was staring at the abandoned wine on the table. Was she thinking of that night so long ago, when everything had slipped from her control entirely, at least in a way she could see it? He looked at Maat. “Nephthys must also be questioned.”

Maat nodded. “She will be drawn out from her cell.”

“And Seth will remain here longer,” Isis said with a sigh. “Ra will not be happy.”

Horus remained very still. He could say something and stop this, but his mind was blank as he focused on other things.

Maat raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“She’ll want her newest pet back,” Isis explained with a snort.

Maat frowned. “Seth was never Ra’s pet.”

Isis stared at her, clearly confused. “He’s been working on Ra’s sun boat.”

“No he hasn’t,” Maat said. “Ra did want him there, but I’ve been able to feel where he is with my spell on him. He’s stayed in Heliopolis since the trial, and then he came here with Horus.”

Isis blinked, and then looked at Horus, confused. “Horus…? What…?”

“He’s mine to do with as I please,” Horus said, meeting her gaze unflinchingly. “I defeated him. I get to decide his fate.” After everything he’d heard, she had no right to reproach him for it. Was he not his father’s son, after all?

Isis’ eyes widened. “You said he went to Ra. You said… You *lied* to me?”

“I said I made a deal with Ra,” Horus answered, meeting her gaze, unafraid, not after everything he’d learned. “She knew it was a stupid idea to let Egypt rot, and agreed to help restore the land, now that Seth wasn’t worsening things. Ra wanted him on her sun boat, but she will be satisfied without him.”

“That’s not the same thing,” Isis said, glaring at him. “And you know it!”

“What do I know, Mother?” Horus asked, looking down at her as if from a distance. It felt like they were so far from each other now. Farther than they’d been for his entire life. Not just because she was an older, more powerful god. Not just because she was his mother. But also because he could see all the ways she’d failed as a god in her duty to steward Egypt, and had failed him in particular as a mother and advisor, in ways that harmed him.

For Osiris.

“I am your vengeance,” Horus continued, gazing at her still, and watching as confusion filled her expression. “I am the vengeance created from your short-sighted final tryst with Osiris. I am hatred personified, to deal with Seth. You were the one who wanted him sent to Osiris to punish. How is my punishing him instead any different?” *Am I no less deserving? Is the vengeance I mete out only meant to be on the behalf of others?*

Anguish filled Isis’ gaze. “Horus, what are you saying? This isn’t you.”

“This is *exactly* me,” Horus said, feeling the ice in his heart melt beneath hot flames of rage. Part of why he’d hidden his actions with Seth from his mother was because he was afraid of this: his anger unleashed could hurt her, too. Better it go to a god he didn’t mind hurting with it. “This is who I am when you’re not distracted by Osiris or Seth or anyone else. You just didn’t choose to look before.” He looked in the direction where the Greek god had left. “I brought you Seth, like you wanted. I brought Egypt back, like you wanted. I even helped defeat the army you brought to our shores.” He looked at Isis again, and saw she was clasping her hands together, and had stepped away from him. “What part of this isn’t what you wanted? Covering up your missteps, making sure Egypt recovers from all the stupidity you and your siblings wrought?”

“Horus, you’re out of line,” Maat said. But she was hesitant. Horus could see it.

“I rule Egypt,” Horus said, dismissively. “My father got away with far more than I do, for centuries. Because *he* ruled Egypt. Because you trusted him.” Horus looked at Isis. “Do you trust me, Mother? To do what is right for Egypt? What is right for *you?* Because I am set on bringing justice to Osiris, who wronged you *and* Egypt. I am set on bringing justice to Nephthys, who did the same.”

Horus had never seen Isis afraid of him before. And a part of him quailed at it. He didn't want to frighten her. But he wasn't a child anymore. He needed her to see that.

Isis didn't say anything. She simply lowered her head.

"…The other gods will have to be called," Maat finally said. "Another public trial will have to be made. We'll return to Heliopolis and prepare for it, once the Greeks are gone."

"Good," Horus said. He met Maat's gaze, and saw her startle at the look in his eyes. "It's time to clean up the mess *you* left to fester, as well."

"Are you accusing me of something?" Maat asked with a frown.

"You are the goddess of truth and justice," Horus said. "All those years, and Osiris crawled right under your nose. Nephthys, too." *And my mother, who knew some of it and said nothing.* "All those years, and Seth was left to run rampant. Do not speak to me again about being out of line when I'm the one who finally stepped up to do something about it all."

Maat's hands clenched into fists, and her face was as stern as a statue. "You are right in many ways, Horus. Grave injustice was done here, and much was left unchecked. But you gain nothing by attacking everyone around you."

"Is it an attack?" Horus asked her in return, making her eyes widen slightly. "You speak of the truth, whether this or that alleged *accusation* is truth. Yet you, a god of truth, act as if it's something to fear. Something to cut people down with." Horus chuckled. "Perhaps that's what it should be for, if it's so terrifying to be truthful." Horus walked away from them, wanting to be as far from them both as could. Before he became king, he'd been young and untested, and now everyone looked to him for leadership. Was he becoming more like them, or less? And should he be proud of it? Was this better, or worse?

Given the way the two goddesses didn't follow him or say anything, he had some ideas on that.

Horus gazed at the tent flap. "All my life, and only a fraction of it was in pursuit of the truth and justice. Because people were so afraid of the *truth* that they did *nothing.*" He glared at Isis, who would not meet his gaze. Then he looked at Maat, who did not look away. "And I found out that part of this is because my life was built on *lies*. Ancient, painful lies that you are all still afraid to confront." He smiled. "Anubis and I are similar in that respect. Forced to inherit your *rot.* Forced to make up for it all."

"Horus, I didn't mean to hurt you," Isis said, quietly, finally meeting his gaze. Her eyes were wet. "I didn't mean that."

"I imagine you didn't," Horus said. If he were better, perhaps he would give in and try to comfort her instead. "But weapons can only be blunted or broken, not *harmed*. They don't feel emotions."

"You're not a *weapon*, Horus," Isis insisted, worry entering her gaze. "You're my son. I love you."

"…I can tell you're telling the truth," Horus said with a soft smile.

That made Isis' eyes widen in alarm.

"What a change of pace," Horus said.

Isis lowered her head.

"My mother will also submit testimony," Horus said to Maat. "She has her own recollections from the night of usurpation, which are necessary for all of this to be made clear." They would drag it all out into the sunlight, where it could burn.

Maat nodded, without even glancing at Isis. "Yes. That would make sense." She gazed at Horus for a time, and finally said, "Perhaps you should learn from your predecessors, Horus."

I have, he thought. *Though I don't know that you'd like the lessons I took away.*

"Tyrants," Maat continued, "don't have good ends."

"Is that what you think I am?" Horus asked. "A tyrant?" He smirked. "Your mother created the throne, didn't she? You didn't have to place me on it."

"I think that your parents' generation of gods failed you," Maat replied neutrally, "and the rest of us did as well, you have poor role models to follow. And I hope you take a better path in the world than they did." She glanced at the tent flap. "I will return to my tent and write summons for the trial." She looked at Isis. "Contact me if you need anything."

Isis nodded, and Maat left, leaving Isis and Horus alone in the tent.

Horus suddenly felt emptied of purpose. He'd said so much and even challenged Maat in her own way. Was he truly any different from Osiris in that respect, pressing against the line between life and death, purely for his own ambition?

"I am still your mother," Isis said, quietly. She met his gaze, and there was a fire in it. "Do you even remember that?"

Horus kept his expression neutral. "I never forget." How could he? It was his purpose in life.

Isis stared at him for a long time before she finally said, "I didn't raise you to abandon you to everything I failed at. And everything your father failed at." She looked away. "I have always regretted all the things I couldn't give you. Things… I don't know how to give."

Horus stayed silent, unsure what she was getting at. Isis had raised him to be at her side as her weapon. Is that all she meant?

"Don't be like your father, Horus," Isis said. "Don't harden your heart to your family in pursuit of little things that don't matter." She smiled sadly. "I know you have a heart still. You're not a weapon. You're a god. And you defeated Seth not because you're sharper than he is, but because you knew what he did to me, and to Egypt, and you said *no more.* Because you *cared* about us. Not like Osiris, who only cared about himself."

Horus smiled sadly back at her. “I’m worse than Osiris, Mother. I’m just not an idiot.”

Isis frowned. “What do you mean?”

Horus chuckled. “I want Seth for my own. I have ever since he tried to take me after the second match. And ever since the trial ended, I’ve been ensuring he’s mine. I’ve just made sure he can’t trick me like he did Osiris.”

Isis’ eyes widened again. “What are you saying?”

“I am a weapon,” Horus insisted. “A weapon that Egypt needs in these times. If I have a heart… perhaps we both killed it. Because the only time I feel anything anymore is when I’m with him.” The night Seth came to his chambers, Horus had been shocked. He assumed it was assassination. But then Seth had unwound before him, and Horus had been spellbound by this beautiful god. And beneath Horus’ hands, Seth had been power and pleasure. Yes, Horus used Seth for rage as well, but sometimes… sometimes it was because everything else seemed so empty of color. At least with Seth, things felt *real.*

Was that proof he was like Osiris? That the only feelings he could were destructive? Looking at Isis, in the moment, Horus felt like it was the only way he could show how he felt. And that made him feel weak and pathetic.

“Horus…” Isis said as she stepped forward to reach out and cup his left cheek. “Don’t say that.”

You don’t even know what I’m saying. She didn’t see it, just like she hadn’t seen it with Osiris. “You want me to be your son,” Horus said. “I’m doing my best. Ruling Egypt, keeping Seth in line, ensuring our border is safe. What else do you want me from me? The silence Osiris gave you?” *The silence I’m giving you?*

Isis shut her eyes briefly, and then reopened them, looking up into Horus’ eyes with determination. “I want you to know that I love you. And I’m here for you. And whatever this is… We’ll figure it out.”

“And if what I’ve done is worse than what Osiris did?” Horus asked, thinking of Seth’s words.

Isis’ face was pained. “Somehow I doubt that. But even then, you wouldn’t be the only one in this family who has hurt someone. And perhaps… there’s time to make it right.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 14: Refusal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth stayed by Anubis' side through the night, long after Anubis cried himself out and fell asleep, still curled in Seth's arms. The tent was largely quiet, save for the gentle sound of Anubis breathing. Through the sand underneath them, Seth could sense humans in the camp busy with various duties: helping the wounded, gathering the dead, preparing food, and even celebrating with the battle over.

Seth wondered if they'd stay to clean up and ensure the Greeks truly left, or if Horus would insist on returning to Heliopolis. Seth's hands tightened at the thought of being pulled from Anubis again. Perhaps that's all this was: letting Seth soak in what he shortly wouldn't have again.

But he wanted to enjoy it while it lasted, even if it was painful.

Eventually, he fell asleep himself, weary from the events of the day in a way that his fear couldn't overcome. Perhaps part of it was having Anubis in his arms again.

In his dreams, he was running from Osiris' death in Heliopolis, and heading to Anubis' rooms to check on him. Seth was too shaken to just turn into sand, but he moved quickly. He wasn't sure he trusted Sekhmet's assessment about Anubis being back to normal. Seth didn't know what Osiris had done to get Anubis' soul out of him.

And he had to find Isis and tell her what happened. She didn't know about Nephthys or Osiris or *Anubis…* He had to check on Anubis! But Isis was his closest friend, the person he strategized with. Surely she'd know what to do. And she could heal Anubis if he needed it!

He ended up running into Isis in the middle of a hall, and grabbed her arm to keep her still, wondering if she was a figment of his imagination. She was in her nightgown and looked like she'd just woken up. But this meant she could come with him to check on Anubis. "Isis, you have to help me!"

"Seth, Anubis was attacked!"

She knows, he thought immediately. But she couldn't know about Osiris. No one had been around. "Is he okay?" Had Sekhmet lied? Was Anubis already dead?

"I've healed him," Isis said, putting a hand on the one Seth was using to hold her arm to make him let go, "and he's recovering well. But do you know who hurt him? Is that why you're here?"

“It was Osiris,” Seth said with venom. “He’s trying to cover his tracks.” Seth tried to tamp down his fury, but he was too full of adrenaline and rage at what Osiris had said, even in death. “He and Nephthys have betrayed us, Isis.”

“Betrayed…? What do you mean?” Isis rubbed her arm where he’d grabbed her - there was a dark mark there - and was still frowning at him. “Osiris wouldn’t attack Anubis!”

“Osiris… attacked me,” Seth said, his voice oddly stiff. Who knew what Osiris would or wouldn’t do at this point? “I found out he and Nephthys were sleeping together behind our backs, and I confronted him. But Osiris, he—”

Isis’ eyes widened. “Osiris and Nephthys?!” She leaned against a nearby wall, covering her mouth in horror. “They would never do that… Not…” She paused, and then looked at him in confusion. “Wait, you said Osiris attacked you. What happened?”

“…He’s dead,” Seth said, feeling an odd distance in himself at the thought. His brother, dead. Dead because of Seth. *No, it was his fault, he did this to himself!*

Isis froze. “…Dead? How?!”

Seth’s lips parted, and for a moment he didn’t know what to say. Finally he started, “I… He attacked me. So I…”

Isis stared at him for a time before her eyes filled with horror. “You killed him?!”

“I did what I had to do to defend myself!” Seth said, his voice rising. They were on the precipice of things. It felt like he was again looking down at Osiris in Duat, laughing at him and his failures. Seth hoped he rotted in pieces.

“You killed *Osiris…”* Isis put a hand over her mouth, tears rushing to her eyes. “*You…”* Isis stepped away from him.

“What’s wrong?” Seth asked, confused. If she knew, surely she understood! They’d both been wronged, and Seth had to get free from Osiris and his schemes.

“You’re trying to trick me,” Isis said. “*You’re* the one who attacked Anubis!”

Seth gazed at her in shock. “What are you talking about?! I’d never hurt him!” He couldn’t explain what *else* Osiris had planned. Not yet. But did he need to? One thing would lead to another and she’d ask about it all and then…

And then he would truly be nothing, just like Osiris said.

“You murdered our brother, my lover and husband, and now you expect *me* to help you?!” Isis’ shook her head. “Did you attack Anubis out of jealousy? Or madness? Those marks could only be made by a god of war!”

“What are you saying?” Seth demanded. “I didn’t touch Anubis!” Seth looked around in alarm. “Where is he? Is he really okay? Sekhmet said—”

“You’ve been talking to *Sekhmet?!”* Isis nearly yelled. “You idiot! You know she’s just a puppet for Ra!”

Seth’s face burned. “She was the only one who told me the truth!”

“And that truth made you kill *Osiris?* Attack *Anubis?”* Isis backed away from him even further, raising her magic protectively around her. “Are you working for *Ra* now?!”

“You’d know I’d never do that!” Seth said, glaring at her.

“I don’t think I can trust anything you say!” Isis said. There were tears in her eyes. “Stay away from me, you monster!”

“Isis, this isn’t what you think!” Seth begged, watching the distance between them lengthen, feeling like everything was being cut off from him. “Please!”

“Father?”

Seth blinked open his eyes to see Anubis staring up at him. Anubis’ hand was on Seth’s cheek, and he was worried. Seth could smell the human camp around them. The sand outside was heated: it was late morning. They were hundreds of years from that night in Heliopolis.

“You were crying,” Anubis said quietly, wiping Seth’s face.

Seth blinked, and realized Anubis was right. He pulled up his right hand to wipe his face. “It’s nothing. Just… bad dreams. How are you feeling?” Anubis’ head was still pillowed on Seth’s lap. He looked better than he had the previous day, though. His wounds were more healed.

“I’m feeling better,” Anubis said as he moved off of Seth’s lap to sit up on his bed again. He rubbed his eyes of tiredness. “Don’t you have duties to attend to?”

It felt like a dismissal. “The soldiers mostly manage the camp themselves, and their commanding officers will keep charge of them.” Seth said, watching Anubis for any signs of discomfort or Osiris possession. “Maat and Isis are likely in the middle of negotiations still, and that’s not something they probably want me involved with.” Isis likely never wanted him anywhere near such things. “And if there are more battles to deal with, Horus knows where to find me.”

Anubis’ eyes widened. “You don’t have to stay here, though. I’m okay.”

“I want to,” Seth said. Then he grimaced. “But I can leave if you don’t want me here.”

“No,” Anubis said before he winced and looked away. “I… don’t want you to go away.”

That warmed Seth, in the face of everything that happened. He didn’t know that they were fixable, but it had been a long time since he felt anything like hope for something. Likely, Horus would be in at any moment to smash it, but… he apparently hadn’t shown up yet. It mostly just made Seth nervous about where Horus was. Was he planning some new, gruesome torment?

“When you were away on the sun boat,” Anubis said, making the warmth in Seth’s heart die, “I missed you. Every day.” He smiled bitterly. “I didn’t tell anyone, though. I thought I wasn’t supposed to. I thought I was supposed to be happy you were gone. But I wasn’t.”

I can’t keep up Horus’ lie. Horus would end Seth for sharing it. But did it matter anymore? Nephthys was going to be told everything. Soon, all Egypt would know. That was worse than anything Horus had done to him.

“I guess I’m not used to being on my own yet,” Anubis said, apparently not noticing Seth’s mood. He was staring at the hands on his knees. “I feel like Horus saw me as annoying…”

Seth sighed. “Horus is… complicated. But Anubis…” Seth reached out and touched Anubis’ arm, making Anubis look at him. “I wasn’t on Ra’s sun boat.”

Anubis simply blinked at him, confused. “What?”

“I wasn’t sent to Ra’s sun boat. Or to Ra at all. I was in Heliopolis. As Horus’ prisoner.”

“…You were in Heliopolis?” Anubis simply stared at him. “This whole time?”

Seth grimaced. “Yes.”

“Then Horus… *lied* to everyone?” His expression was filled with horror.

“I imagine,” Seth said. Were people really so shocked their savior wasn’t perfect? *Like father like son.* He smiled bitterly. “I haven’t spoken with anyone in the court during my imprisonment. And the soldiers here don’t know about that.”

Anubis pushed himself up to a standing position, and Seth followed him, worried about Anubis pushing himself too much too soon. “That…! That…! How dare he!!” Anubis’ gaze was furious now, and he was gazing at the tent wall.

Seth’s eyes widened. “Anubis!”

Anubis glared at him, making Seth think he made a mistake in staying. “Where did he keep you? I’ve been all over Heliopolis. I know where everything is.”

“…In his office.”

“His office?!” Anubis said, his glare growing brighter. “But I’ve been there! I never saw you!”

Seth grimaced. “You weren’t supposed to. He hid me.” *Right in front of you. To mock me.*

“…He kept you like a pet, hiding you so no one could see you.” Disgust filled Anubis’ expression.

Seth looked away. He had to get used to this. It was only going to get worse.

“Isn’t that what Osiris did?”

Seth sighed, feeling like he hadn't slept long enough for this. "In a way."

"How dare he," Anubis said, surprising Seth. "If you were to be punished, it was meant to be in the betterment of Egypt, not… not *this.*"

Seth realized that Anubis was madder at Horus than at Seth, which was a strange situation. Horus had never abused Anubis or neglected him. Perhaps if Seth were as selfish as everyone thought he was, he'd use the moment to get Anubis more on his side, but the whole situation wasn't about that. And Anubis needed Horus and Isis' protection to keep away from Osiris. Turning on them was bad. So Seth… had to be reasonable. "Horus suffered greatly under my reign. He feels he's only getting what he's owed." Seth sighed. "Plus, he's king. It's his right."

"That didn't stop you from fighting back against Osiris," Anubis said.

"…Yes, but that was different."

"How is it different?"

"Osiris is just… a monster who does as he pleases. Horus is meting out the Ennead's justice." He hated this so much. But it was for Anubis' own good.

"How? By keeping you chained to his desk?"

Rarely. It's too inconvenient to do that.

Anubis kept watching him, and finally said, "If he tries to take you back, I'll fight him."

"You'd lose," Seth said, trying to hide his frustration. "You're just a demigod. He's a god."

"I'll fight him anyway!" Anubis said, righteous fury filling him.

"Anubis, please," Seth said, putting a hand on Anubis' shoulder. He was genuinely worried about where things were heading. "Horus has promised to ensure your safety if I cooperate."

"He even threatened me to get to you?!" Anubis demanded, his eyes sparking. "How dare he!"

Well if you consider what I've done to him and his mother… He hadn't remembered grabbing Isis that night in Heliopolis. So much else had been on his mind. But he did remember trapping her in the labyrinth, and all the years of trying to hunt her down…

"I'm tired of always being the thing that holds you back," Anubis continued, still angry. "The reason Osiris was able to go after you. I'm going to defend *you* for once!"

Seth was a little touched by that, even if he knew it was foolish. If he couldn't hold up against Horus and Maat's spell, then Anubis definitely couldn't, either.

"I see everyone's awake for the morning," Horus said as he pushed the tent flap back. He looked calm and clean and ready for whatever faced them. "The soldiers are still cleaning up

the battlefield and keeping an eye on the Greeks. Mother and Maat have successfully concluded negotiations to get the Greeks to leave. There's still some final preparations we need to take care of, and then we need to get ready to return to Heliopolis."

"Are you here to collect my father?" Anubis demanded, calling Horus' gaze.

"*Anubis,"* Seth warned. He was fearful now.

"He is a general," Horus said, meeting Anubis' gaze with a thoughtful look. "The humans will be heartened to see him lead them at the end."

And be happy to see you as a winner, Seth thought. But he was focused on Anubis more.

Anubis glared at Horus. "He's not your pet! You shouldn't be treating him like one!"

Horus glanced at Seth, who kept his gaze neutral. Seth wondered if his intuition was working away again. Horus smiled. "I see Seth saved me some time explaining things. Mother and Maat already know anyway."

This startled Seth and he gazed back at Horus in horror.

Horus shrugged. "It was bound to happen." He looked at Anubis. "But you're a few centuries ahead of yourself if you think you can give me orders." Horus reached for Seth's shoulder.

"Leave him alone!" Anubis yelled.

Wind whipped up around them, making Seth cover his eyes and back away, shielding himself with sand. Darkness filled the air, and the tent was ripped from its moorings. There were cries in the camp. The sand itself was rent and shook. The air burned.

"Anubis!" Seth called, afraid to step back too far. What power was this? It had come from Anubis, so… *Was it Osiris?!* Seth lowered his arms, terrified Osiris had taken Anubis again.

A cocoon of shadows covered the spot where Anubis had been standing, and several nearby tents had collapsed as well. There was more shouting in the distance. The cocoon faded, and a tall god stood before Seth. He wore a black shendyt, an intimidating black jackal mask, and a long black collar. He was taller than Seth and muscular, and gazed at Horus angrily. The air around him was at once hot and cold, but powerful.

"You will not *touch* him," the new god growled.

"…You ascended," Horus said from nearby, lowering his wings. He gazed calmly at the newcomer. "And it only took you actually hearing the truth to do it." Horus laughed. "Incredible." Horus glared at Seth. "This is why you don't *hide* such things!"

Seth blinked. This… was Anubis?

"Stop talking to him like that," Anubis said, stepping forward and calling a long yellow and black heka staff to his hands. "He's the god of war. One of the most powerful gods in Egypt.

You should show respect!” Dark smoke seemed to rise from his skin, which alarmed Seth. Was that an ability of some kind? What did it do?

“He hunted my mother and I for centuries,” Horus said. “I’ll show what respect I feel like.”

Seth was still shocked at the vision of Anubis ascended, but he pulled himself out of it and stepped between them, putting his hands out. “Stop it! Don’t fight! This doesn’t accomplish anything!” He wasn’t sure this new version of Anubis could win against Horus, and he didn’t want to risk it.

“I won’t let him take you away again,” Anubis said, which caught at Seth’s heart.

“It’s funny how you think you could decide otherwise,” Horus replied, “even after your ascension.”

“What is going on here?!” Maat demanded.

Seth looked towards her, and saw Maat and Isis running forward from a distance. The humans who hadn’t yet fled and were watching from a distance, parted for them. The two goddesses stopped nearby to look at Anubis in surprise.

“A dispute between half-brothers,” Horus said, still glaring at Anubis. “Pay it no mind. It will be done soon. Anubis is going to realize what an idiot he’s being soon.”

“Horus that’s enough,” Isis said, looking angry. She glanced briefly at Seth with an unreadable expression before she looked at Anubis. Her eyes filled with confusion. “Anubis, is that…? Is that really you?”

“Yes,” Anubis said, not backing off. But not moving forward either, which was a comfort to Seth.

“God or not,” Horus said, “You will respect the decisions of your king.”

“I don’t know that I see a king worthy of the title,” Anubis replied.

“Enough!” Maat said, stepping forward. “We just ended one war! We’ll not start another!”

For once you’re talking sense, Seth thought, still watching Anubis and Horus.

“Anubis,” Maat said, glaring at him, “you are new to your godhood. You need teachers. And to settle into your role. The power can be overwhelming on a first experience.”

“…I feel fine.”

You're still stubborn, Seth thought.

“You don’t look well,” Isis said, looking at the smoke rising from Anubis’ shoulders. “You need to learn your abilities first.”

Seth frowned and took a closer look at the smoke on Anubis' shoulders. It almost looked like he was burning up. With the shadows earlier… Was he safer in shadow? Seth glanced up at the sun in alarm.

"I'll get Khnum to teach you," Isis said. "He often looks after the younger gods, and can be trusted with this kind of thing."

Anubis only grimaced. He was still glaring at Horus.

"Meanwhile, we have clean-up followed by packing to leave," Maat said. "And a departing army to keep an eye on. And your tearing this place up doesn't make that any easier."

Anubis bowed his head and lowered his staff, seemingly mollified. "Apologies."

"How are you feeling, really?" Isis asked, walking up to Anubis and gazed up at him. "Like yourself?"

"Yes." Anubis gazed down at his hands, seemingly a bit surprised. "I feel… *good* for once. Like things make sense."

Isis looked down at the ground, where her spell could barely be seen. "He hasn't returned yet, that I can sense. Perhaps your new god body is blocking his powers. Or he's busy with something else."

Seth was hopeful on that front. With this, Anubis would be safer from Osiris.

"Whatever the case," Isis said, "be *careful.* New power is a dangerous thing."

Anubis inclined his head slightly.

Seth stepped forward and touched Anubis' arm, needing to know it was real. "You really ascended. Incredible." He was even taller than Seth now, which was a bit strange. All those years of hoping something would happen, and now this? This had made him ascend? Horus' comment about honesty cut at him. Was he the one holding Anubis back all this time?

Anubis actually smiled a little. "It really feels good, Father. Is this how you feel all the time?"

"When I'm at full power, maybe. It depends. But your powers might not be the same." He looked at Anubis' shoulders and grasped Anubis' arm properly. "I think we should get you under cover, though."

"The sun does burn more than it used to," Anubis said thoughtfully as he let Seth pull him away.

"This way," Isis said, gesturing. "To a *non*-collapsed tent." There was criticism in her words, and Anubis grimaced.

Seth held Anubis' arm as they walked, and saw Horus fall in beside him, on Seth's open side. He felt Anubis stiffen, but focused on walking ahead. Whatever Horus had planned would keep.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 15: Mirror

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth stood behind Anubis in Isis' tent while Isis looked him over. Anubis was sitting on a stool and no longer literally steaming once he was under tent cover, and they could hear humans outside setting the camp to rights.

Maat stood nearby, watching the proceedings with an unreadable expression.

Horus stood behind Seth, probably glaring at him. Seth chose to ignore the younger god. Horus would probably take it out of him later, but that was that. Seth was still overwhelmed by the sight of Anubis ascended. After all the years he and Nephthys had worked, and *now* of all times? Because… why? He'd sensed Seth was in danger?

"Everything looks orderly," Isis said as she pulled her hand away. She smiled down at Anubis. "And you really feel fine?"

Anubis nodded. "I do."

This close, Seth was surprised to realize that Anubis' mask actually resembled his own in a way. Even ascended, Anubis had kept some of the connection between them. Or it was pure coincidence. He liked to think it wasn't.

"You should wait until it's darker to test your powers properly," Isis said. "You have a slight weakness to sunlight. I could feel your skin regenerating from being burned."

Seth frowned. That was a major weakness, in a way. Seth didn't know of many gods who couldn't travel freely during the day, though he didn't know of many who preferred the nighttime, either. If Osiris caught him during the day…

"Okay," Anubis simply said.

…*Then again he can clearly survive for a little while in sunlight,* Seth thought.

Isis looked at Khnum, the river god with the ram mask who was standing in the corner. His robes turned into water, and he had been quiet ever since he'd appeared at Isis' call. Seth didn't know him very well, other than he was one of Isis' servants, and Seth was a little worried about him teaching Anubis, but it wasn't like Seth was skilled in training new gods, whereas Khnum was.

Khnum stepped forward at Isis' look.

“Just help him figure out what’s going on with his abilities,” Isis ordered. “He’s just ascended, so most everything will be new to him.”

Khnum bowed his head. Then he looked at Anubis. “It will be a pleasure working with you, Anubis.”

Anubis studied Khnum for a moment before saying, “And you.”

“Before that, though,” Isis said, turning to look at Horus. Her expression grew hard and angry. “What were you two arguing about?”

Seth thought about what he should say to excuse them. Anubis was clearly caught up in a lot of things, and—

“I won’t let Horus take Seth for his own use,” Anubis said, cutting off all lines of thought that Seth had. “He has no right to that.”

Isis blinked at him.

Seth would have slapped his own face if he hadn’t been in public. *Do any of you people know how to not spill things at the slightest provocation?!* But he was surprised when Isis only frowned slightly. She didn’t look surprised or all that alarmed.

He glanced at Horus, who looked completely unfazed.

The little shit really told her… Seth’s face burned. What had Horus said? How much did she know?

“I am your *king,”* Horus said, primly. “I have all the right. You’re both my subjects.”

“You’re no better than your father.” Seth was surprised to hear Anubis say *that.* He supposed that when you found out just how much someone was abusing you for their own ends, that did tend to end your goodwill towards them. At least Anubis had finally realized… And Seth had been withholding the truth from him for years over it. *That* was hard to swallow. Particularly given how it also meant Horus was right, which Seth hated.

Horus seemed to get annoyed at that. “You’re merely an infant godling who can’t even step outside this tent.”

“You’re the one treating people like toys,” Anubis replied, turning his head to glare at Horus. “Who’s the infant, exactly?” Power made the air crackle.

“Enough!” Isis said, glaring at them both. “You are both ridiculous. Seth will—”

“Be returning with me to Heliopolis,” Horus finished, making Isis’ eyes widen. “Once the Greeks are gone and the campsite can be cleared, and the army returned to normalcy.” He looked at Anubis and said, “Or perhaps Anubis will recall that the main reasons humans here are so forgiving of Seth’s past actions is because they were fighting a war and needed someone to save all of their lives. Perhaps Anubis would like Seth to sleep among the

humans who, without a war to distract them, might recall lovers and children taken during Seth's reign, perhaps sold into slavery or slaughtered? Is that what he wants?"

Anubis frowned. "No."

Horus smiled, clearly pleased. "Then he'll stay with me, where he's *safest.*"

"You're repulsive," Anubis said, still frowning.

"And you're still clinging to your father's shendyt even after your ascension," Horus replied. "I'll survive your disgust." Horus looked at Seth. "Come with me. We need to walk the camp and make sure the humans aren't going to riot after all that's happened lately, particularly since we're asking them to remain here even longer."

Seth knew it would probably be a good idea to walk among the humans, who were liable to panic at the slightest breeze, and the Greeks would be quick to take advantage. And with Maat's spell still on him, Seth couldn't work as quickly to counteract the damage. But still, he didn't want to put Anubis at risk. So he looked at Isis and asked, "But is Anubis really safe from Osiris?" he was willing to risk Horus' wrath and ignore orders to be sure. "Even as a god, perhaps the connection Osiris has…?"

"His body is completely different to what I went over previously," Isis said, meeting Seth's gaze calmly, and definitely not like someone who was shocked that her son was revealed to be using his uncle as a sex toy. "He *is* a god now, completely different than his weaker demigod form. Even Osiris doesn't have the ability to keep whatever hold he had through that." She sighed. "Though I didn't get a chance to fully examine Anubis properly to try and figure out what specifically Osiris was using. There's just… too big a difference between his body from before and now for Osiris to do something like he used to."

Seth was at least a bit reassured by that.

Isis glanced at Horus. "Horus is right, though. The soldiers need the uplift. I'll watch over Anubis while he practices with Khnum."

Seth wondered if she just wanted Horus and Seth out of the tent, especially to try and push Khnum into the role of Anubis' confidante, rather than Seth. Whatever the case, it meant that Horus and Anubis wouldn't be snipping at each other, and he was grateful she was looking after Anubis' health. So he met her gaze again and said, "Thank you." He reached out and set a hand on Anubis' shoulder. "I'll be back soon."

Anubis smiled slightly at him. It felt hopeful and a bit warm, and Seth hoped that meant they were still okay. Anubis wouldn't have done so much on his behalf otherwise.

Seth followed Horus out of the tent, wishing he was free to go where he wanted. He hadn't cared much in many years for where he went, so long as he could do anything, and he'd felt resigned to his punishment. But now more than ever, he wanted… well… what he couldn't have.

He and Horus walked side by side for a time, surveying the camp and greeting the humans. They met up with the commanding officers in their main tent, who'd gathered to discuss plans going forward. The humans were happy to see Horus and Seth, and bowed and offered thanks for their continued protection, and then expressed worry about what was going on, and needed updates to ensure negotiations had still gone well.

Horus stepped forward and began to talk, given a very clipped version of recent events, excluding Osiris' attack, but mentioning that Anubis had been injured defending the camp, which Seth was somewhat grateful for and surprised to hear. But this also meant that Horus talked about the negotiations, which let Seth hear more details about it all.

The officers were relieved, and one even offered Seth condolences about Anubis, which Seth wasn't sure how to deal with. The officers also reported on the status of the camp, as well as what the Greeks were presently up to with their ships.

By the time they were done, the sun was lower in the sky, and Seth followed Horus out of the tent to survey the rest of the camp. The soldiers had worked fast, and the camp was back in order, with people going about their day to deal with the aftermath of war. The medical tents were still decently full, and cries of pain and yells for help could be heard. With Isis' help, it was quieter than usual, but there was still some noise.

"We had fewer injuries and deaths than we might have," Horus said as they went up to the tents and surveyed things. Humans bowed to them, but kept on with their tasks. "The commanding officers noted that."

"I heard," Seth said. He recalled the gratefulness in the voices of the humans who were so happy Isis was there to heal them. But injury and loss were just the way of war, and Isis was not a god of war.

"You made a difference here," Horus said before he kept walking, passing the cooking areas. "These soldiers will sing your praises and spread legends about how you fought of the Greeks."

"And how you leashed me for it," Seth said quietly, keeping a neutral expression as humans bowed to him.

Horus snorted. "Perhaps. Perhaps they'll imagine me as your cruel jailor, keeping you back from your potential. There were rumors about you not using your powers to their full extent."

Seth scowled, a bit nervous about this. Anubis voicing his foolishness to Isis, Maat, and Khnum was one thing, but the humans being aware of it? That was… worrying. "It's not up for humans to judge gods."

"They *do* worship us," Horus said as they neared the ships, and stopped on a hill to observe the Greeks cleaning up. "It does some good to pay attention to them."

"I pay plenty of attention to them," Seth said. "But we gods use our power as we wish. No human has ever been able to guess all that I can do. How can they claim I'm underusing my abilities?"

"...Perhaps they just know. Somehow."

Seth snorted, given his lack of believe in human capabilities. He kept too many tricks close to his chest, anyway.

"Anubis certainly takes after you," Horus finally said.

"Because you hate us both?" Seth asked, gazing at the sea thoughtfully. He'd never been the biggest on water travel, but a part of him thought about it now. At least it was away from Horus and all the bad memories here.

"Because both of you are obstinate idiots," Horus said.

Seth rolled his eyes. Horus had used worse before.

"I know Osiris," Horus said, which was a weird turn of conversation in Seth's mind. "At least in the little I can know a man who rarely visits and likely didn't want me to exist, and would like to have me killed for keeping you from him. Anubis isn't like that at all."

Seth blinked and looked at Horus, who was gazing ahead, as well. "Why are you telling me this?"

"…My intuition says that you're afraid of him following in Osiris' footsteps. Of forgetting all that you had together when he was younger. But that's not going to happen. Anubis is his own man, and he'll walk a path different from both you and Osiris."

That was oddly comforting, but didn't really explain anything. "Are you trying to comfort me?" That was more disturbing than anything else. Perhaps that was why he said Anubis would walk a different path: to destroy any chance it was comforting.

Horus simply gazed ahead. "I know what it's like to wish to be more like a parent… and then to wish to not be. I think one reason I hate Anubis is because… he still wants to be like you. And I'm… jealous."

Seth blinked at that. "You're being rather honest."

Horus smiled at him. "When am I not honest with you?"

"Don't you have friends to be honest to?" Seth asked. Surely someone else would be interested in chatting with him. Someone Horus actually liked, for instance.

"I think at the moment," Horus said, "You and I are two of the most hated people in this camp among our fellow gods. If I'm not honest with you, I have no one else to be honest with."

"…You're the king," Seth said. "Isis loves you. Maat respects you." Maybe even Khnum liked him, surely.

"Mother is angry about my hiding what I did with you. And Maat can respect someone and keep her distant." He laughed. "And I've made her angry."

“So you really have just been all talk all this time,” Seth said, shaking his head. “You told the truth and look where that got you.” His confidence had just been a front to get at Seth while he had power. Take that away and what was he left with? Nothing.

“I knew I’d probably end up here,” Horus said, surprising Seth. “But I thought I’d be alone.”

“…I’m only here because I’m your prisoner. You’re my king, remember?” Did Horus really think there was something more to this than that?

“Yes,” Horus said. “It is rather pathetic, isn’t it?”

Seth realized he detected some *sadness* in Horus’ tone. Why? What had he to be sad about? That he’d been caught? That Isis was focusing on someone else? But as Seth watched Horus, he realized that the picture in his head of Horus as this stoic but volatile figure didn’t align with this almost sad and lonely man before him. Seth had assumed Horus was desperate and too vicious for others, but that he made up for it with charm and his newfound privilege as a king, on top of the love all of the heavens and humans had for him. But what did you do if you couldn’t trust the people closest to you, made enemies of them all, and hurt them in your own confusion and pain?

If you’re me, you run Egypt into the ground, Seth thought.

“Let’s get back,” Horus said. “I imagine you want to ensure Anubis hasn’t stubbed his toes in your absence.”

Seth followed Horus obediently, not liking any of this at all.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 16: Between

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Isis met Seth and Horus outside her tent. She looked tall and intimidating, even off a throne, with her make-up, beautiful dress, and sharp eyes. She held her papyrus staff in her right hand, not in a battle-ready posture, but clearly ready to fight if need be. Her angry gaze settled on Seth. He wasn't quite sure what type of anger it was: it'd been too long since they'd been friendly with each other for his old understanding of her to remain. But he could at least tell she was angry. That wasn't hard. And he couldn't guess what in particular it was this time that had set her off. Was she thinking about what Horus had revealed? Was she annoyed that Anubis was a problem she had to take care of? Or was she going back to refusing to accept Osiris had done all that he had?

That would be typical, he thought as he came to a stop when Horus did. There were humans guards set at a distance from the tent, but they were too far to hear much. The came continued to move around them.

Isis turned her gaze to Horus and said, "You'll wait out here. Seth and I need to talk alone."

Horus frowned in annoyance. "You're giving me orders now?"

"Are you a tyrant to refuse to let your mother speak to her brother?" Isis demanded, refusing to back down. "He is your prisoner and will still be your prisoner after I've spoken with him briefly." She crossed her arms. "Or do you expect me to free him?"

Horus simply gazed at her for a moment, before sitting down by the tent entrance and gazing outward at the camp. "Very well."

Seth wondered what the guards or any passing humans would think of their king sitting in the dirt outside a tent, like a spoiled child sent to a corner. But he supposed that was Isis and Horus' problem, not his. Seth also assumed he wasn't going to get a choice in the matter, given he was a prisoner, and Isis just glared at him before walking back into the tent anyway.

I suppose it would be easier to just meet it up front. He wanted to see where Anubis was, but the best person to know would be Isis, so he simply followed Isis back into the tent. Magic shut the tent flap behind him, and he could feel it humming around him.

"He can't hear us now," Isis said before she turned back to him. Her anger was still there in her blue eyes, but there was some tempering to it. "Perhaps his intuition will tell him something about the conversation, given it's faster and sharper than it used to be, but he won't hear it." Her left hand rested on the table, and her index finger idly rubbed the tabletop.

She's nervous. Is it me? Seth crossed his arms. "Why are you telling me you're trying to hide things from your son? Or do you hope to torture me where he can't stop you?"

Isis smirked. "Are you afraid of that, Seth?" She was powerful and knew it, and he was at her mercy, and knew that.

Seth smiled right back. "Do your worst." It wasn't that he didn't believe Isis could make him suffer if she wished. After all, she already had. But he was worried about who was sitting outside the tent, angrily deafened to their conversation, or using his own magic to circumvent Isis' powers. Seth knew what it was like to be cast aside while your loved ones ran off without you. What that did to a person.

Horus isn't a person, Seth thought angrily. *He's a storm waiting to rip apart everything he hasn't yet taken. He's a spoiled child smashing toys apart in lieu of doing anything useful.*

"My son is obsessed with punishing you," Isis said, gazing at him thoughtfully. "He said he kept you when you should have gone to Ra's sun boat. Anubis confirmed that."

"Where is Anubis?" Seth asked, being daring. He wasn't sure why Isis really cared anyway. After hearing about Osiris, after the end of the trial… what did any of it really matter? Unless she believed it was all lies.

"He's with Khnum," Isis said. "They're getting along well, and as the evening deepens, Anubis will likely have access to more of his powers and they can experiment more."

"Do you know what his powers are?" Seth asked. He envied Khnum, getting to experience that with Anubis. But it was good Anubis was making more allies. People besides Horus and Isis to rely on, though he'd be dependent on Isis' good favor all the same.

Isis sighed. "Something to do with Duat, I think. I studied him while he and Khnum worked, and there is an aura of the place about him. Maat also felt drawn to him, and indicated it was something gods connected to Duat feel."

Seth disliked the idea of Anubis spending more time with Maat, but he had to admit it wasn't a bad idea if more gods felt inclined to be around him, rather than to flee from him due to his relationship to Seth. "A connection to Duat?" His eyes widened. "But that means he'll have to go to Osiris…" Seth swallowed, feeling cold. "Osiris could capture him or… Or do *something!*" After everything Osiris had done to Anubis in the past…

"We won't let him," Isis said, her voice sharp. In the moment, she looked like the same goddess who'd gone to war with him, Osiris, and Nephthys against Ra. "Maat will go with him if he has to go, and she'll make sure Osiris doesn't touch him. Khnum can also help him access some of his powers through the waters of the Nile, so he should be safe for a time."

Seth was still unsure, given Osiris' power, but the knowledge was somewhat comforting at least.

"What has Horus been doing to you during your imprisonment?" Isis asked.

Seth laughed, amazed she was back on that. “You don’t want to know.” The way she’d reacted to learning about what Osiris, well…

“Yes, I do,” Isis insisted, glaring at him. “I’m tired of the secrets and lies. I’m not running anymore.”

“He fucks me,” Seth said. "Until I'm bloody, raw, and unconscious."

Isis stiffened slightly, and perhaps paled, but she didn’t back away.

Seth snorted. “You testified about how he won the trial. Why are you surprised he’s doing it more?” He remembered Isis standing before the court and explaining alongside Horus how Horus had repelled an attempted assassination and assault from Seth, and proved his domination of Seth, thus showing Seth was unfit to rule. As further evidence, she brought forth Sebek as a witness, who took one look at Seth, and then testified over Maat’s scales. Centuries of friendship between Sebek and Seth were buried under Seth’s own actions against all the other gods during his reign, and Sebek’s own honesty. Worse was when Thoth had stepped forward to lend his own expertise on the matter, to indicate who had dominated whom.

Seth felt filthy the entire time, watching all the evidence of his night with Horus being dug out and shown before the court in all its putrid glory. It wasn’t exactly as bad as what Horus had threatened before they’d come to fight the Greeks: being Horus’ plaything was different to losing to him in battle, and too many tales had been spread of Seth being sent off to serve Ra as punishment. But it had been vicious all the same.

Seth was truthful when questioned, given there was no point in lying when his heart was on the scales, and he didn’t have Osiris’ gift for sophistry. All his boasting was pointless now. And then Maat’s spell had wrapped around him, binding him to the floor, and he’d watch them lead Horus to the throne. Isis looked triumphant in the moment. Seth didn’t remember all that much through his anger and frustration. He just hated everyone watching, and himself most of all, for not being strong enough to defeat them. Why hadn’t he tried harder against Horus?

Isis grimaced. “That was self-defense.”

Seth scoffed, unsurprised she was clinging to that. It seemed Anubis had as well, for a time. After all, Seth had been the one to instigate for the affair. It was one reason he was so surprised they all cared *now.* But perhaps the trial hadn't counted? “It just gave him a taste for more. He uses me as he wants. To offload his anger. I’m a convenient hole for him.” He imagined this was how Horus would have described it. Seth was surprised Horus hadn’t. Unless Isis for some reason wanted to hear it from Seth. Did she think he’d lie about it, perhaps to make her feel better? They both knew what happened when he did that.

“Do you enjoy it?” Isis asked.

Seth’s eyes widened, shocked she’d even asked such a thing. “What the fuck do you think?!” He turned away and glared at the wall. “Fucking… Of course not! He’s a little monster! If I could have killed him by now I would!” He blinked in realization and then laughed. “What,

you think because I'm such a monster myself that I must enjoy it? Like meets like?" He scoffed and shook his head. It all made sense that way: of course he'd be into it. Probably bend over for Horus to do his dirty work. "Incredible."

"After you attempted to assault Horus during the trial, I couldn't be sure."

Seth rolled his eyes. Did she think he'd commanded every rape that ever happened? The humans were the ones who went out of control. He simply didn't reign them in. "The trial was… foolishness. Not something I *wanted* as a long-term plan."

"You were setting an example for your followers," Isis said, sharply. "Rape is an excellent tool of domination, after all. A favorite of your followers."

"So who was Horus setting an example for?" Seth asked.

Isis grimaced. "You made a surprise attack on him, turning it into a match between you both, partially for survival. He won it fair and square." Her eyes widened. "Is Osiris where you got the idea from?"

Seth scoffed. "No, it was Sekhmet's idea." Her stupid plan that he'd thought he could make his own.

Isis' glare sharpened. "She has much to answer for."

She wasn't the one who did it, Seth thought. But he had his own bones to pick with the missing goddess.

"At the time you tried to attack Horus at night, you were in the middle of a match for the throne," Isis said. "What did you think would happen if you lost? How did you think anyone would view it?"

I didn't really think I'd lose, Seth wanted to say. He wasn't sure what he felt at the time. Desperate, frustrated. He'd seen Horus beat him and just wanted to tear something apart. He could sense Osiris coming for him, and just wanted things to be over. The waiting was the worst part. "Justify it to yourself however you want," Seth finally said. It was another way he knew it was pointless to argue in his own defense. Whatever Seth did was wrong. Whatever Horus or Osiris did was right. It was just the way of the world.

Isis looked away. "I admit asking if you enjoyed it was a bad question."

Seth raised his eyebrows at her, surprised.

"But you were simply so gleeful in telling me," Isis explained, looking a bit exasperated. Then she shook her head. "I just needed to be sure. You and I are not good at talking to each other and haven't been so in hundreds of years."

That's been obvious to me for ages, Seth thought snippily.

"But I want to know what has been going on between you and Horus, in more detail than Horus will give me." Her eyes shone. "I told you I'm tired of running. So tell me all the damn

filth you think I can't stomach."

Seth met her hard gaze for a moment before he said, "He's just like Osiris."

Isis stiffened.

Seth laughed. "You're happy, aren't you? That they're similar. It's what you most want to hear."

Isis was quiet for a while, staring ahead without seeing. Finally she shut her eyes, sighed, and said, "No, it's not what I want to hear. The god whom you and Horus have described… I don't want Horus to be like him at all. And I'm seeing more and more than he's more like Osiris in all the wrong ways than I had realized."

He's already building a rift between you both, Seth thought, considering Horus' comments about Isis during Seth's imprisonment. *Have you finally noticed that, too?*

"Horus and I are talking a little about all this," Isis said. Her expression grew sad. "He admitted some of it to me."

Seth had figured that out, but was grateful she was being honest, anyway, for all the good it did either of them.

"But he doesn't trust me," Isis continued, clearly pained by it. "That will be hard to mend. But we must, for our own sakes and for Egypt."

Seth didn't want to think about how he'd destroyed Anubis' lack of trust between them, and how much Isis' struggle with Horus made some sense. *Though at least Anubis never did all the shit Horus did,* Seth thought. *Betraying me was even more self-defense than the match that decided the trial.* Even now, though, Seth wanted to tell Isis things would be okay, that she'd figure it out. Old pieces of themselves from ages past, trying to claw their way to the surface. He thought he'd buried them beneath everything else, beneath Osiris and Horus and everything Isis had left him to. He didn't like this. He wasn't meant to comfort Isis anymore. Not after everything.

"So I need to hear your side," Isis said. "In full."

"Why are you confiding in your enemy and not Maat?" Seth asked, cautiously. Why was everyone suddenly so candid with him? Why was she putting herself in the hands of someone who didn't know how to handle anyone at all, and who only destroyed everything he held?

He remembered Anubis in his arms, crying himself to sleep, clinging to Seth like he had when he was younger. And awakening to godhood to defend Seth.

That was his own power, Seth thought. *He's always been stronger than me in the ways that matter.*

"Once we used to plan strategy together," Isis said, pulling him back from his self-flagellation.

Seth wanted to scoff again, but knew his childish tantrums were stupid. “A long time ago. And you spent years evading me.”

She smiled. “But you’re currently standing here under a spell from Maat, aren’t you? And it’s not like I couldn’t fight back against you if I wished.” She glanced at the tent entrance. “Besides, Horus is right outside, and he already beat you once.”

“If you want him to rape me again, you could just ask him,” Seth couldn’t help but say.

Isis’ expression became closed off.

Seth smiled. If she wanted to be the poor put-upon mother, she would have to deal with the actions of her son. Ones she’d used against him in the past. If she wanted to claim that Seth was setting an example for others, well… what example was the king of Egypt setting? And was Isis going to keep supporting it?

“I wouldn’t have him do that,” Isis said.

Seth wasn’t sure he believed her, but he was tired of this dancing around. “So what strategy do you want to talk?”

“Besides hearing more about what Horus has done, I still want you to tell me what happened that night with Osiris, in more detail that you said before,” Isis said. She gazed at him with a great intensity. “I want to know all that Osiris did. What you would have told me if you hadn’t panicked and overthought the situation, and without Horus breathing down your neck nearby after he’s been keeping you in a cage in Heliopolis.”

“Why?” Seth demanded, feeling his hackles go up a little at her description. There was a bit of fear still, but she already knew it all anyway. What more was there to hide?

“Because I’ve spent a good part of my life doing the same for others,” Isis replied. “Listening to the events from the victims of your policies and the victims of Ra’s and Osiris’ policies.”

Seth frowned, not sure where she was going with this.

She smiled. “Do you think rape was invented during your regime? It was worse, but it wasn’t brought into existence then.”

Seth knew that, but her phrasing… “Grouping Osiris into the bunch like that is… *different* for you.”

Isis breathed in deeply. “I want to know everything Osiris did. Before I hear some new piece of it in a courtroom.” She met his gaze. “If I’m to continue to hate you, I want it to be for the things you actually did, not the ones I imagine.”

“I’m not some human victim,” Seth said, coldly. “I know what I’ve experienced. I’m a god of war. I’ve been through worse.”

There was an odd expression on Isis’ face, but it changed to determination. “So give me context for what Osiris has done. Shocking me is useless. Tell me, in your own words, what

he put you through. If nothing else, it will help Maat and I prepare his trial."

"Shouldn't she be here if that's your goal?" Seth might have to repeat himself, and he didn't like that. But he also hadn't thought much about what he'd have to testify to. It would be humiliating. Far more so than even the end of his own trial. But he'd also been through worse, so… did it matter?

"Maybe later," Isis said. "For now you start with this. You tell me. And then I decide how we go forward."

"How compassionate," Seth said sardonically.

Isis smiled. "Should I pretend to comfort you and tell you that it's your choice? That a situation wherein you are still atoning for your actual crimes, you can *choose* how what is carried out will happen? You say you've gone through worse, to warn me off from trying to be at all gentle, yet you also expect me to *lie* in an attempt to make you feel better?"

Seth's expression stiffened. And what was that about gentleness? He just didn't want…

He didn't know what he wanted. Comfort he couldn't stand, certainly not from Isis. It felt too dangerous, like Osiris was lurking in the shadows. Or Horus, taunting him with more pain…

After a while, Isis' gaze softened a bit. "I'm not planning to send out missives with the details, Seth. But I need to know. You went mad after learning what Nephthys did. Do you expect me to be any different with Osiris?"

Seth's shoulders sagged and he lowered his head. "No." He'd already seen her go mad once over it. And now with the truth… he supposed he could understand.

"So talk to me," Isis said, quietly. "Tell me what happened that night. In full."

What choice did he have anyway? His only alternative was waiting until Isis lost her patience. And he could do better than she had, couldn't he? He wouldn't run away from it all. Not anymore. "…All right."

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 17: Listen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth sat with Isis at the table in the tent and talked about the night he confronted Osiris. He explained how Sekhmet had pulled him aside and told him a limited version of events involving Osiris and Nephthys, which had horrified and infuriated Seth. How Nephthys walked in on them, and Seth saw her eyes fill with tears before she confessed that it was all true. And how the bubbling fury had overwhelmed him.

Looking back on it, Seth felt like it was so pathetic. He *should* have waited. He should have gone to Isis or gone somewhere else to cool off and plan. But he was too embarrassed and angry. Too upset that he'd failed to not only see that Nephthys didn't truly love him, but also that he couldn't convince her to love him enough to be honest with him, either. And he was too ashamed of his own inability to be lovable, and wanted to instead take out his anger on Osiris, who was clearly to blame for it all. If not for Osiris, then…

He kept it relatively brief to Isis, though. All the way Seth was aware that Horus was outside, supposedly unable to hear them, and Anubis was somewhere learning how to use his abilities with Khnum. And Osiris was lurking, always lurking, waiting to strike out at them. Yes, Isis had a charm on Anubis to look after him, and his new god abilities made him stronger, but there was still a fear in Seth that it wasn't enough…

But he had to talk. So Seth talked about Osiris. About attacking him, and Osiris overcoming him. About their chat, and Osiris drugging him. How it was all so shocking to see the picture of the brother he'd cared for all these years crumbled to reveal the monster beneath, in handfuls of falling sand at a time.

"All the lies," Seth said, glaring at his hands. "How didn't we see it?" Every day Osiris and Nephthys had looked at them both, and neither Seth nor Isis knew. But why? Why, when they were the strategists, had they not seen it?

Isis looked grave. "Something I'll ask for the rest of time, perhaps."

Her words made Seth think about Horus, and all the half-truths he'd been telling people, to hide his own dark secret. He still wondered if Isis was seeing the parallels. If Horus was still seeing them, for all he knew from his intuition. The man hated Osiris and being compared to him. Perhaps even now he was sitting outside the temple in self-castigation, trying to justify how much better than his father was, how he was different. How what Osiris did didn't affect him. He was righteous vengeance.

"I know what it's like to wish to be more like a parent… and then to wish to not be. I think one reason I hate Anubis is because… he still wants to be like you. And I'm… jealous."

Seth recalled the laughter Horus had let out as he spilled all of Seth's secrets to Isis and Anubis. How it seemed to be mockery towards Seth. But there was something cutting in a way that didn't seem targeted at him.

I don't really know Horus at all, Seth realized. *Do I?* He knew a man who was his parents' vengeance, who was cool amidst refusal, and cruel in his punishment. Not this stumbling, desperate creature who lashed out, backed off, reassessed, and even offered actual comfort to a degree. They were strangers when Horus came to court, and despite all the time Seth had spent in Horus' company, all the ways Horus had imprinted himself on Seth physically and mentally, they seemed strangers even now. Who was Horus, really, and what did he want anymore?

Isis was frowning at him, clearly wondering what he was waiting for, so Seth muscled on with his tale. How he fought against Osiris and failed to fight back successfully. How Osiris revealed more of his insanity.

Isis looked more pained the more Seth spoke, but she didn't pull away. She didn't shut her eyes. She stayed. She listened. Her hand on the table clenched.

For some reason, this recalled old anger for Seth. *This was who you turned your back on, Osiris,* Seth thought. He clung to it, because talking about all this was so filthy. It was a distraction from how terrible it all was, to focus on Isis' pain instead. *This was the woman you abandoned and used up because you're a selfish, entitled asshole.* If Isis hadn't turned on him, he imagined they'd have wreaked havoc on any plans Osiris had. They could have comforted each other through it all. But… that wasn't what happened.

And here they were. Too late for much, perhaps, but not too late for everything. Not too late for Anubis.

Seth bared everything that happened that night, so that Isis would understand. He was afraid she wouldn't believe him. After all, he was Seth, God of War. Shouldn't it have been fine?

"I would rip him to pieces were he in front of me now," Isis said, her fingers gripping her right hand into a fist so hard she was bleeding.

The words shocked Seth. But then again, hearing explicitly about Osiris' betrayal was awful. When Seth spoke about standing over Duat, looking down at Osiris in his defeat, Isis even laughed.

"We did think up good strategies, you and I." She was smiling fondly, and there was a righteous fury in her eyes.

Seth wanted to laugh too. But in the ghost of his words were Horus, taunting Seth with his inability to plan. His lack of foresight. His brutishness. And how much Horus always had something in store, waiting to use. As much as Osiris lived on in his second son, Isis did as well, in her wisdom and thoughtfulness. Her gift for strategy. Did Horus see that now? Would he? Or had Osiris poisoned everything?

“So you ran to me,” Isis said, pulling him out of the dark and the wind. “Looking like you’d just committed some heinous act, and in a way you did.” She shook her head. “I was worried and scared. And you seemed to confirm all of my fears, especially with what you’d done.”

Seth looked away. In the end, did any of what he said matter? After all, he’d gone on to kill many of Isis’ followers.

Isis stared at her hands thoughtfully, her expression hard to parse. “Thank you for telling me all of that.”

Seth was surprised by her thanks. It was an awful tale. He wondered if he’d have to tell it again to Maat and a courtroom. He would, probably. He wasn’t looking forward to that. Not again. He wondered how much worse it would be to hear Osiris testifying about it, if they could get him to. Would he hide the truth again?

"It doesn't change everything," Isis said. "But... it helps, knowing what he did. Knowing that I did turn my back on you when you needed me. Us both being shocked doesn't excuse either of us." She gazed at him. "I'm sorry for that."

Seth's eyes widened. He wasn't sure what to say to that. He could feel her honesty.

“Is this why you say Horus is similar to his father?” Isis asked suddenly. “Is this what he does to you?”

Seth hadn’t fully explained everything about Horus yet. “In his own way it’s worse,” Seth said. “Because he’s so much more creative. Osiris just likes the sound of his own voice.”

Isis snorted. “You’re right about that.”

Seth blinked in surprise, still wondering at how she was ready to turn against Osiris, after everything.

Isis smiled ruefully and rolled a cup in her hands. “Over the years of our preparing to strike back, I got to know him in a different way. No matter what I believed, things were *off* about his retelling of that night, and my own recall. And he was far more impatient than he ever was during our preparation. Yes, death obviously gave him a reason to finally get up and *do* something, but he was just…” She sighed. “I didn’t remember him being so full of himself. But he was.”

Seth snorted. “Yeah, he still is.”

Isis sighed. “I don’t want Horus to emulate his father. Not like that.”

“You’ll be shocked to find I don’t want it, either,” Seth said, with a bit of sarcasm. Perhaps Horus was on that path. Perhaps he was afraid of it, too, and stepping away for his own good. Seth found himself hoping hard for that.

“Tell me what he’s done,” Isis said, watching him. “What Horus has done to you.”

Seth only looked at her for a while.

Isis gazed back with some ferocity. "If I survived listening to what horrors one man I loved did to you, I will survive hearing what my son has done."

Seth sighed and gave as brief a summary of it all as he could, expecting her to gloat. Expecting more, “Did you enjoy it?” comments or something. But her expression was impassive. It felt almost like cracking open a door, and not asking for help, but letting out poisoned air, and cleaning some bit of what was inside the room. It wasn’t cleansing, precisely, but a little like it.

When Seth was finished, Isis’ hands were in fists on the table. “I’ll negotiate with him. Get him to change his mind about your imprisonment. You’ll finally go to the sun boat, I imagine.”

Although Seth was glad she wasn’t celebrating to his face, he was confused by this reaction. “You think he’ll be satisfied?” Seth asked. He imagined a life without being worried about Horus.

“I’ve convinced worse,” Isis said.

Seth recalled Ra and agreed. But he imagined Horus without his favorite toy. He recalled Horus’ jealousy of Anubis. And Osiris’ jealousy of Nephthys. And how that had turned out. And Seth would be far away from Anubis to help him if something with Osiris happened.

“No,” Seth said, surprising Isis. “I’ll stay with him.”

“…You’re not serious.” She looked actually horrified at the idea.

Seth wanted to laugh. Seth couldn’t quite believe he’d said it either. But after everything that happened, he knew where his place was. He needed to be close to Anubis, and he’d never get that chance if he was on the sun boat. He needed to make sure Osiris kept his hands off Anubis. He needed to be sure that Horus and Anubis didn’t come to blows.

More than that, Anubis needed to be safe, and if Horus was just another version of Osiris, Anubis wouldn’t be. If Seth had to sell himself to ensure that didn’t happen, then so be it. He’d take Horus’ punishment willingly. But after everything that had happened, Seth had the inklings of wonder, too. “If he needs to learn how to be a god,” Seth said, “then I’m possibly the best shot he has.”

Isis gave him a confused look. “*You?* After everything you did as king? Even you know that’s a joke.”

“He’s already been learning from me during the war,” Seth said, refusing to be cowed. “And he’s… starting to listen to me more. Like you, he’s being more candid.” Horus was good at study and learning. He’d demonstrated change. His fighting skills improved just over the course of their battles here. He was quick in combat with Osiris. He was wise in times of stress. His intuition was powerful, and he knew how to use it. He was strategic. They didn’t need to repeat the tragedy of Osiris. And perhaps… perhaps if Seth listened this time, like Horus wanted him to, they wouldn’t have it. It wasn’t too late yet.

Isis only frowned at that.

“One issue we had with Osiris was that none of us talked to each other,” Seth explained. “Perhaps we should take advantage of this. Try listening to him.” And it meant Seth could keep an eye on him, and perhaps convince Horus to leave Anubis alone. And with Isis in the know, Seth might have more freedom to an extent. Even if he was trapped again in Horus’ office, it would be better than being trapped on the sun boat where he was even more useless.

“You want to go back to someone who treated you the way Horus has treated you,” Isis said. Her expression as confused. “I can understand some of your reasoning, and I appreciate that you want to give my son a chance, but after everything…”

“He’s sitting outside, isn’t he?” Seth said. He could sense Horus’ in the dirt there, waiting patiently. “He’ll listen.” Seth grimaced. “I didn’t give up on Anubis entirely, though I tried, and look what happened?” Anger, tears, and pain for them both. “You haven’t given up on Horus entirely. Isn’t it up to us to ensure they do better than we do?”

Isis shut her eyes, clearly pained as well. Then she opened her eyes and met Seth’s gaze. “Do you think you deserve this for what happened?”

“For my crimes?” Seth asked.

“For what happened with Osiris. It’s not your fault he did what he did.” There was something gentle in her tone, almost soothing. She seemed almost worried about him.

Seth shook his head. “I don’t… no.” Seth had no issues understanding that. “But if I’m to serve punishment for what I did to Egypt, then I will serve Egypt properly by ensuring we don’t have a worse king than either Osiris or myself.” He swallowed. “And it’ll make things up to you, at least in a small way. And make a better world for Anubis.”

Isis’ expression softened just a little at that. Then she glanced at the tent entrance, beyond which Horus sat. After a time she said, “Very well. If that is your choice.” She looked at Seth again, her expression hard. “Much will happen in the coming days. It will be… It will be good to face it together, I think.”

Seth wasn’t so sure about that, but he was happy at least that Isis wasn’t entirely his enemy. They’d still hurt each other too much. There was still too much between them. “We’ll deal with Osiris,” Seth said. “This time, for good.”

Isis grinned. “Yes, we will.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 18: Wants

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

After waiting for quite some time, wondering if he should do more to hear what Isis and Seth were chatting about, Horus stood up and dusted himself off from sitting in the dirt. He didn't plan to be caught resting on the ground by his new visitors. He didn't care what the humans thought, but these…

"Why are you out here?"

Horus persisted in gazing ahead as Anubis approaching him, with Khnum at his side. Anubis was trying to be intimidating with his new godhood, and this was reflected in his tone, as if ascension was the only difference between him and Horus, rather than years of training and fighting against impossible odds. He wasn't succeeding.

"I am meditating," Horus coldly replied. It wasn't entirely a lie: he could sense his mother's magic on the tent. She *really* didn't want Horus to hear whatever she and Seth were talking about, which was frustrating. *More secrets*, he thought. *Wonderful*. He'd been considering whether to try breaking through the spell or not, and what that might cost him, and how to handle things if he chose *not* to break the spell. More arguing with Isis and Seth seemed inescapable at this point. It was just his lot.

He definitely didn't care to speak to *Anubis* of all people, even if it was at least a *distraction* from wondering about what nonsense Seth and Isis were up to.

"Don't you have friends to be honest to?" Seth had asked. Because Horus didn't, really. He'd never stayed anywhere long enough to make good friends. Or at least ones who survived. And he still didn't know who to trust. Anubis might have seemed like a good friend, given their age, their parentage, and now the fact that they were known to be half-brothers. But those simple facts didn't change all that was between them.

I'd rather befriend an actual dog, Horus thought as he crossed his arms.

Anubis didn't leave, though. Clearly, he felt he had the right to be heard.

Horus finally deigned to look at Anubis, and he hoped his half-brother was intelligent enough to see how truly unimpressed Horus was with him. Horus wasn't Seth or Isis, fawning over the *poor* injured Anubis. He wasn't Nephthys, hiding in her cell. Horus was the king of Egypt, a powerful god in his own right, and the one who'd defeated Seth. Anubis was a mere stripling by comparison.

Anubis met Horus' look with a dark expression of his own. His power was more obvious now, even after the little training he'd had. He was tall, muscular, and had Khnum – a god of the Nile - standing beside him in support. Horus assumed all of that was adding to Anubis' overconfidence.

Khnum stood at Anubis' left elbow, dripping water onto the ground. He bowed his head to Horus. Torchlight made the gold of his ram's head mask glow.

Horus nodded slightly at him, glad that *someone* knew their place. Then he focused back on Anubis. "What do you want?"

"I wanted to speak to Isis about something, since she told me to return after Khnum and I were done." Anubis' tone was irritated. "But I found you here. Are you a guard now?"

"I am still king, last I checked," Horus said, his tone suitably dangerous. "If I choose to stand in front of Isis' tent, what of it? What do you want with her?" There was no way Anubis had mastered his abilities in less than a day.

"I wanted to discuss plans to face Osiris," Anubis said, undeterred. "My powers are connected to Duat, and I've already found some interesting uses for them. Things Isis should know." He looked towards the tent. "Is she busy?"

"Yes," Horus said. "She's discussing matters with Seth." He could only imagine how disastrous facing Osiris would be with someone as foolish as Anubis on their side. He *wanted* Anubis to go back to training, where Horus didn't have to see him.

Anubis frowned. "What matters?"

"That's their business," Horus said, moving so that he better blocked the entryway. Though he was tempted to let Anubis try the tent flap and get zapped by Isis' magic. "You can go somewhere else to wait."

Khnum set his left hand on Anubis' left arm, and lightly tugged him, as if to make him move. It was a strangely intimate gesture, and one Horus was surprised to see. He didn't know they were so close.

Anubis, however, didn't budge. "Our fight isn't done. You have things to answer for." His legs were set in something of a fighting stance, and he carried his gold and black heka staff in his right hand.

Horus wondered if he fought Anubis *now,* would that lure Isis and Seth out? And would it just annoy them both? And did Horus care if it did? He wasn't sure, but he grinned threateningly at Anubis all the same. "And you plan to bring me to justice?" There was, perhaps, much Horus had to answer for in regard to Seth, but far less than *Anubis* likely felt was owed. Anubis was fully in the mode of avenging his father for any slight, as he returned to being the loyal son. But he seemingly forgot all the things Seth *had* done. Of course, why would Anubis know? He had been in Heliopolis, living it up the whole while. Poor him, his father was a little mean to him, so he had to run off and sleep in his nice bed, unbothered by bandits and Seth's followers.

Horus had to forcefully calm himself from riling up the breezes around him, which were reacting to his anger. He knew his hatred of Anubis was partially undeserved and largely because Anubis was an easy target, but he didn't care. Perhaps it was because Seth forgave so easily: Anubis had betrayed him multiple times, yet still cradled him tenderly and comforted him in the tent. Seth even put aside his own freedom in favor of helping Anubis. It was useful for Horus to use as leverage to keep Seth under control, yes, but infuriating, too. Anubis was an ungrateful brat. How was he worth all that?

Osiris tried to murder me for even speaking out against him, Horus thought. *Let alone helping his enemies to defeat him.* He wasn't sure what made Anubis so special.

Anubis tilted his head, unafraid. Unnatural shadows pooled around his feet. "No one else is stepping up to do it."

Khnum pulled on Anubis' arm harder. "Anubis, this really isn't a good idea…"

"I'm not just some weakling you can bully anymore," Anubis said, still facing Horus. "My father is not alone anymore. You only beat him because you had my help. And you don't have that anymore."

Horus scoffed. "I don't need your help anymore, though. He's under Maat's spell, so he's weakened." Horus tilted his head. "Unless you know something I don't? Do you plan to break him out?" It would be treason and give Horus an excuse to smack Anubis down, so he almost hoped Anubis said yes.

Anubis only gazed back at him with a frown.

Despite his haughty words, Horus thought, *he's still caught in his own centuries-hardened indecision.* "Go," Horus ordered, a bit disgusted. "Listen to your teacher. Learn actually useful things rather than chomping at your betters like an untrained mutt."

Anubis' lips curled slightly, but after a bit more glaring, he finally let Khnum tug him away. When they disappeared into the distance, Horus breathed a sigh of relief. He needed to be away from his half-brother. Whenever they were together, Horus just wanted to rip him apart. Horus looked up at the darkening sky, knowing he was acting ridiculously, and should strive for better, even if Anubis was out of line. He wondered if he let himself go this way because his hatred for Anubis was more straightforward than Seth. Anubis had never been wrongly accused of any of the things Horus despised him for, after all.

I should feel sympathy for him, Horus thought as he glanced back at the camp. *We have both suffered under difficult fathers, and a slew of gods who think less of us for being born at all.* But where Horus had no choice but to grasp his destiny, Anubis had run *from* it. And for that, and everything else, Horus would disdain him.

Horus turned when he felt Isis' spell vanish. The tent flap parted, and Seth stood there, gazing up at him. He wore his black sha mask still, but the light within the tent illuminated the thick muscles of his chest and arms, the fine lines of his legs, and his solid but narrow hips threatening to poke out of his black shendyt. The plump pout of his lips, so often set in a

frown. Horus had run his tongue and fingers over every part of Seth many times now, and could draw them all, blind, if he had to.

Horus felt something animalistic in his chest. The familiar feeling he'd had ever since that night after the second match when Seth had crawled into his bed. A desire to conquer, to own entirely. Again and again. Even after everything, with all of Horus' mixed-up thoughts, he wanted to drag this god away to Horus' tent to fuck him to tears. Seth was too beautiful. And Horus had been honest to Isis about what he wanted: Seth for his own. And even now, in a sea of confusion, Seth was like some kind of rock he could hold fast to. The real amidst the unreal world of centuries-old lies and deceit.

Horus had wondered if this was something he'd inherited from Osiris. Some sickness of the mind. He should be respectful towards his uncle, especially after everything he knew Seth had gone through, or simply hate him, for all that Seth had actually done to Horus, Isis, and Egypt. But seeing Seth so close that Horus could touch him with barely any movement, seeing the way Seth gazed up at him and parted those plump lips, Horus had the sense it wasn't. Seth was just beautiful in everything he did: in war, command, or bed. And Horus wanted him.

But even if it wasn't something inherited from Osiris, Horus knew there would be no more than what they had as prisoner and jailor. Anubis had betrayed Seth, but Horus had made himself into Seth's nightmare. Seth rightfully despised him, and Horus was still in a way glad of it, because at least Seth felt what Horus had for so many years.

"Isis and I are done," Seth said, his voice neutral, rather than fearful or angry. More like the general he was with the troops. "You can come in." If he found any humor in his not simply bowing down to Horus' commands, he didn't show it. He was simply being practical, and facing Horus, unafraid. Seth's fearlessness, even when it was foolish, had always impressed Horus.

What would things have been like, Horus wondered, *if you and I had met at some other time, before everything went wrong?* It was a childish dream he tried to never spend much time on. And in the past, it had involved the idea of Seth not existing at all, or being hidden away somewhere else. If Isis and Osiris had been able to peacefully raise Horus in Heliopolis. If he'd had access to all the things he'd deserved, like Anubis had. But now, Horus had an idle fantasy about coming to his rooms to find his bed filled with a red-headed beauty, smiling up at him, asking how his day was.

That kind of foolish daydream is what makes Osiris and Anubis so stupid, Horus thought. *They're too caught up in their idea of better days and forget that life doesn't work that way.* He pushed the thought away and followed after Seth into the tent.

Isis was seated at the table, and she looked up at Horus with an unusually angry look. Horus stood his ground and wondered just what she and Seth had talked about. Had Seth shared more than even Horus had shared with Isis? He glanced at Seth, who simply sat in a chair near Isis. That was equally surprising, and it seemed to indicate that Seth and Isis were getting on better, perhaps even working together. Horus wondered if he should be concerned.

Whatever it is, I'll survive it, Horus thought. He'd survived worse.

“Seth has decided to remain as your prisoner,” Isis announced frostily. She was obviously unhappy about this, but Horus was more distracted by what she’d *said.*

I didn’t realize it was up for discussion, Horus thought. But assuming it was, Seth had… chosen to stay with Horus? He looked at Seth, who was watching Horus with a frown. “You’ve *decided* on this?”

“I was planning to have you to let him *actually* go work on the sun boat,” Isis said, clearly annoyed. Another comment that surprised Horus, given he hadn’t done so before. Isis presumed much, apparently, though at least she wasn’t planning to send Seth to Osiris. “But Seth *insisted.*”

Horus would have refused Isis’ attempts at persuasion anyway. Persistent as Isis was, he would have stayed strong. He needed Seth nearby, for the betterment of Egypt and… for what little Horus could have for himself. For the bit of calm and honesty he felt around the older god. But Horus was stunned that even with the option of Isis advocating on Seth’s behalf for alternate terms, Seth had chosen to stay with Horus, when before he’d chosen *death.* Was he simply realistic because he knew how adamant Horus was in keeping him?

“Why?” Horus asked, still staring at Seth. “Why would you choose to stay at my side?” He needed to know.

“You don’t want to become your father,” Seth said, his expression unreadable. “I can help you with that.”

Horus raised an eyebrow. “Oh? By doing what?” Isis and Seth hadn’t stopped Osiris from becoming Osiris, after all.

“By *listening* to you, for starters,” Seth said. “You aren’t someone who trusts many people, but you trust me. Osiris was similar: he didn’t trust anyone, save for me, a little, in the end.”

Horus had indeed been a bit too honest before, but he supposed there were rewards, too, given the gift this was: Seth choosing *him* when there were allegedly other options. He was uncomfortable at the additional comparison to Osiris, but well… he’d take what he could. Comparisons were unavoidable, after all. Seth had spat plenty out at Horus before, anyway.

“Plus, Isis and I can teach you strategy together,” Seth said, glancing at Isis as he spoke. “Your father turned his back on your mother. But together, Isis and I are a force to be reckoned with.”

Horus nodded. He’d learned a bit just watching Seth command troops, and he imagined it would be enlightening to learn more from the pair who’d helped defeat Ra. Still, he didn’t exactly believe that Seth was suddenly so charitable.

“And you’ll probably need more help to properly face Osiris,” Seth continued. “Even with Maat and Anubis, it’s possible he’ll put up another fight of some kind.”

Horus could simultaneously see the logic in this, and also realized why *precisely* Seth chose to be here. It made him furious, and he had to take a moment to calm himself before he

asked, “You want to stay here to look after Anubis, don’t you?”

Seth frowned. “Yes, I do. Is that so unusual?”

No, it wasn’t, and Horus knew that. Seth cared for Anubis and didn’t care for himself. Of course he’d try to tough it out and stay, no matter the torture. He’d done it before. “No. But you won’t be spending forever together, if that’s what you think will happen. You’re still being punished. Whatever we’ve learned about your situation, things aren’t simply going to return to how they were before you lost the trial.” It sounded childish, but if Isis and Seth suddenly felt Horus was a mere obstacle to be moved around, they were mistaken.

“I don’t,” Seth replied, clearly annoyed. “I’m very aware that my punishment is ongoing.”

“Horus,” Isis said, warningly, “Remember what we spoke of yesterday?”

Horus frowned. Healing. Doing better. Trying not to emulate Osiris. And Horus didn’t plan to.

“And perhaps… there’s time to make it right,” Isis had said.

Horus wasn’t so sure. He’d done too much that likely wasn’t reparable, no matter how much time he allowed Seth to do as he pleased – within limits – or how honest Horus was. He realized both the people before him saw him for what he was, and perhaps before he’d have reveled in it, but now… Now he was hesitant. He had more to lose than he’d thought.

“You have things to answer for,” Anubis had said.

But you won’t be the one to bring me to justice for them, Horus thought, gazing at Isis and Seth. Isis was still angry, but Seth seemed a bit resigned. His left arm rested on the table, and the torchlight highlighted each of his fingers. Would he still use those to attack Horus again one day, in righteous retribution? If Horus was so regretful and doubting every decision he’d made, was he so pitiable now that he might *let* Seth do that? If only to reclaim some justice for himself? Horus was, after all, simply an instrument of vengeance. If he wasn’t meant to be Osiris’, or even Isis’, and wasn’t sure of his own… would it be that strange for someone else to use him in a different way than he’d planned?

“I have not forgotten, Mother,” Horus finally said. He didn’t have time for so much confusion and self-doubt. He was king, and they’d only just dealt with one threat to Egypt. Now they had to prepare to deal with another, older one, who’d been rotting Egypt at its core for centuries by destroying his own siblings and everyone around them. Then he had to shore up Egypt’s defenses against future threats. “But we both have duties. And do you seriously think that my reminding Seth he is meant to be *punished* is any worse than sending him off to Ra’s sun boat?”

Isis frowned. She seemed to see she had little high ground of her own to stand on, at least. After a moment she said, “Fine. But he won’t be your toy, either. He is to work off his punishment by aiding and rebuilding Egypt. You don’t help Egypt by ripping into him as you have.” Before Horus could reply, Isis continued, “We will return to Heliopolis. There will be a trial for Osiris, during which Seth will likely testify.”

Seth's left hand twitched slightly, but he didn't say anything.

Horus didn't know what he'd do with Seth once they were alone again. Mostly his mind was just thinking about all that he'd learned, all that he'd thought about for the future. And everything he'd considered before crumbling to pieces.

"If we must…" Isis breathed in deeply. "If we must, we shall confront Osiris, and put an end to what he's been doing. Maat will have guidance on this. And after that… perhaps Seth can help literally rebuild what he tore down. A god would make some of those efforts go faster, and Seth's abilities with sand are optimal for part of it."

I'm so glad you've decided all of this already, Horus thought. *Did you need me to refill your wine while you continue?* "It's definitely something to consider for the future."

Isis frowned at him but didn't comment on his attitude over the matter. Perhaps she knew she was pushing him hard, as well.

"Anubis was looking for you," Horus said, deciding he was done being childish for the time being. "He wanted to talk about attacking Osiris."

Isis raised an eyebrow. "He should still be training. He's too new to his powers."

Horus shrugged, agreeing that Anubis was an untrained and overconfident fool. "He clearly believes differently."

Isis stood up. "I'll go talk to him. If…" She frowned and looked at Seth, and then sat back down. "No. I'll summon him back here. It's time we all talked properly about this. Maat can listen as well." She called forth spells for messengers to use.

She really is being more open now, Horus thought. *And all it took was my torturing her brother. Who knew?* He found a seat near Seth and sat down, assuming it would be a long night.

Seth didn't move at all, either pretending at or actually unbothered by Horus now. Perhaps his chat with Isis had given him confidence. Or perhaps the assurance that he'd get to stay near Anubis was bolstering him. Or perhaps he was thinking ahead to the trial or fighting Osiris, and had bigger things to worry about.

Horus studied Seth thoughtfully while Isis worked. *If nothing else, I can finally see the real you. And if that means you see the real me, too, well… I'll bear it.*

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 19: Return

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth knew he liked to sleep but he'd never felt so drained as when he, Isis, Maat, Horus, and Anubis finished their discussion for the trial concerning Osiris, and what they planned to do if Osiris refused to attend his trial and stayed holed up in Duat. Maat grilled them all for more information in preparation for the trial itself, and although Seth felt scoured after explaining things in what he felt like were too much detail, at least he wasn't alone. Although the feeling of everyone's eyes on him as he talked through a whittled down version of his encounter with Osiris on the night of usurpation burned. He hoped by the time they got to the actual trial, he would be entirely numb to saying it.

And who knows what Nephthys will contribute, Seth thought glumly as Maat listened to Isis' comments. He didn't want to think of Nephthys much, but his thoughts were ever more drawn to her today and what she might have to offer. He'd ignored her for so long because of his own embarrassment and pain. Would she cooperate?

He pursed his lips and imagined that Anubis might have to convince her.

Throughout the discussion, Horus and Anubis remained semi-civil, which was probably helped by the fact that he and Horus were separated from each other by Seth. Seth had tried not to *stare* too much at Anubis in his god form, still shocked at Anubis' transformation, since he looked tall, handsome, and impressive in a way that Seth hadn't imagined. Anubis for his part looked calm and collected, and listened thoughtfully to whoever was speaking, though he glared a bit whenever Horus spoke up.

Nephthys should be proud, Seth thought. He had no hope that Osiris would be, given Osiris' treatment of Anubis in the past. Seth hoped Anubis wasn't hurt overmuch by that. He was so rightfully angry about everything he'd learned. But he kept referring to Seth as his father, and that warmed Seth's heart.

When the sun rose, the consensus was: they needed Nephthys to learn more about what had happened with Osiris, and they needed to see how amenable Osiris was to coming of his own volition to the trial. On this matter, Maat was adamant.

"He needs to be given the opportunity to confess and submit," Maat said. She looked unhappy but continued, "As the ruler of Duat, he's not exactly in my jurisdiction, and so putting him on trial is tricky. If he submits voluntarily, this will all be easier, and there will be no forced travel to Duat." She gazed at Seth, who didn't hide his frown at this. "And you will be weaker there, even without my spell on you, so simply fighting him outright just isn't the answer yet. Trying to go for the trial first will hopefully avoid outright war."

“Arguing gets us nowhere,” Isis said, before Seth could say anything. “We’ll leave once the Greeks are gone, and things will progress from there.” She looked to the sunlight peeking in through the tent flaps. Then she rubbed her eyes, clearly weary. “Let’s all get some rest. The soldiers mostly have everything taken care of anyway.” She looked at Anubis. “Continue your training with Khnum after you rest. You will likely be crucial in whatever awaits us at Heliopolis and, perhaps, in Duat.”

Anubis smiled, and Seth tried not to be frustrated. He didn’t want to throw Anubis into the fire. Anubis always wanted to be *useful*, to be part of things. But this was so much at once…

Horus stood, looking tall and superior before them all. He’d listened to Seth’s discussion of events with an unreadable expression and little reaction, other than a vague kind of anger, and Seth couldn’t tell at what. “Very well. We’ll break for now.” He looked at Seth. “Come.” Then he headed to the tent flap.

Isis frowned, and Seth knew she was going to say something.

“He’s not your pet,” Anubis said, beating Isis to the punch and standing to face Horus with an angry expression on his face. “You will treat him with respect.”

I’m his prisoner, Seth thought, unsure what to say aloud. *He doesn’t* have *to treat me with any respect.* He wanted to laugh, because it felt like he was defending *Horus*. But he was just being honest.

Horus paused by the tent flap and turned to gaze back at the group, his expression neutral. Then he looked at Seth. “Your cot is in my tent. Where else are you going to rest, particularly considering Anubis destroyed his own tent?”

Anubis glowered.

I wasn’t aware the cot was mine, Seth thought bitterly. But he wanted Horus and Anubis away from each other, and he didn’t want more questions Isis or Maat about what they’d heard, let alone from Anubis, who’d heard more than Seth had told him earlier. And Seth needed to figure out what Horus was like now. A Horus who was nervous, nearly apologetic, who gave reassurances, who backed down? Would he turn into a monster in private again? Or be something else?

Seth smiled at Anubis and patted his right shoulder. “It’s all right. Get some sleep. Work with Khnum. I’ll check in with you later.” Seth knew he was pushing things, given his status as a prisoner, but he needed to say *something* to deal with the tension.

Anubis frowned, but then nodded. “All right, Father. I’m here if you need me.”

I’m still being punished, Seth thought, following after Horus and out of the tent. *It’s not like I can take breaks as I please.* The soldiers stood at attention in his presence, saying nothing as they passed. The morning sun was warm on his back. *Nothing has really changed.* Isis still agreed on that front, anyway, just not so much *how* Seth was being punished. And he got that. It was still hard to walk back to Horus’ tent, following the taller god, knowing Seth was getting farther from the people who could help him in a pinch, but Seth had gone to Osiris

alone. Seth had faced everything alone for hundreds of years. He had survived Horus thus far, and would do so in future.

Inside the tent, everything was quiet, and just like they'd left it before heading off to the battle with Osiris. Horus' desk was covered in scrolls he had to attend to. His cot was made. There was a torch for a little bit of extra light.

Seth wondered if Horus had gotten any proper rest since they'd left. He was a god, he didn't need it, but perhaps that was part of why he was acting so strange and disorganized.

"You're staying with me," Horus said, turning to face Seth, his expression neutral. "You could shelter under Mother's wings, but you chose not to." There was a question there.

"I already told you," Seth said, facing Horus squarely. "I don't want you to turn into someone like Osiris any more than you do." *Even if you already are like him in so many ways.*

"And you think finally listening to me will really make a difference?" Horus scoffed. "What a change of heart, given how much you hate doing that."

"It's different when you don't just see me as your fucktoy," Seth said. "And listening doesn't just mean I'll follow your commands. Telling me which hole to bare to you only makes you more like your father, not less."

Horus scowled.

"Are we still enemies, then?" Seth asked, truly curious. "I don't think you *want* me as your enemy anymore, do you? That's why you took the cock ring off. You don't see the point of it either." He didn't think that Horus had met whatever punishment quota he'd prepared for Seth, at least not to make up for all the years of pain Horus had apparently gone through. But Horus was already changing things in significant ways.

"I took the cock ring off because it wasn't necessary," Horus said, stepping a little closer to gaze down at Seth imperiously. "That doesn't mean we're not enemies."

"Are you going to put it back on then?" Seth challenged. "Or have you come up with something worse to try?" He'd survived wearing it, and Horus' other tortures. This was for Anubis, and to avoid having *two* of Osiris in the world. One was bad enough. Seth could withstand anything with those goals in mind.

For a while Horus stared at him, unmoving.

Seth wondered if Horus had even heard him. Was he wrapped up in his ridiculous sexual fantasies again?

Finally, Horus snorted and said, "No, I'm not going to put the cockring back on you. And I don't have anything worse planned." He turned and waved towards the cot. "Sleep or continue to stand there glaring at me. I don't care." He went to the never-ending pile of papers on his desk and sat in the chair.

Seth was surprised Horus backed off so easily, but it also gave him some hope that there was a point to this experiment. He walked over to the cot, wondering if he should trust this at all. Horus had done many terrible things while Seth was asleep. But would he risk it now, knowing Seth had Isis and Anubis on his side to some extent? Should Seth believe him?

Horus had his back to Seth, as he often had. He wasn't afraid in the slightest.

Seth didn't know how open Horus was to listening to *him* in turn, even after all the listening he'd done during the discussion. But he felt leaving things on that note was bad. So he said, "I meant it. I'd listen to you." He breathed in deeply. "If you really feel that I'm the only one standing with you in your loneliness… then I'll listen." It felt ridiculous. He was no one's confidante. He was a soldier or a general. If he wasn't cutting something down with a sword or planning military strategy… Well, he'd already failed to raise one son well. How could he ever think he'd help with Horus?

"Osiris tormented you," Horus said, glancing over his shoulder at Seth with an unreadable expression. "He's been your brother your entire long life. You served under him. Worked alongside him. If he were standing before you today, would you still offer to listen to him to try to change him?"

Seth winced, and felt disturbed by the mere thought. "No. Osiris has made his thoughts and position quite clear in that regard." If Osiris ever changed, Seth wasn't going to be in charge of it, and he only wanted the other god as far from him and Anubis as possible.

"So why bother with me?" Horus smiled slightly. "I've done worse than he has."

"No, that's not why I'm doing this," Seth said, though it grated on him to admit it, since Horus was partially correct. "The delusion Osiris operates under is that he understands my feelings better than I do, and that he can force me to care for him. You were under the delusion that I was your father's murderer, and you have used that to add to working through your righteous anger against me." Perhaps, at the end of the day, Seth was just making excuses, and the differences between father and son were trivial. But perhaps after talking with Isis more, seeing how far Anubis had come, and hearing bits of Horus he hadn't seen before had made part of Seth look at Horus and see the child of Isis and a cracked version of how Anubis might have lived, and a protective urge in him was rising in Seth for that. Perhaps Seth thought about how Horus might have lived if he'd been raised in Heliopolis.

Perhaps I'm just foolishly trying to change the past, he thought. He knew there was no going back. There was only going forward.

Horus tilted his head. "Righteous?"

"Perhaps I don't fully understand your love of the humans," Seth said. "They are mortal, their lives are fleeting, they are meant to serve us. But I can understand that my actions injured you personally. I can see a desire for revenge there. And revenge like that… I understand." Certainly he understood after dealing with Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, and Horus himself. He didn't begrudge Horus his fury, precisely, even as he hated Horus for everything Horus had done to Seth himself, and might do in future. But nothing was accomplished by staying enemies. By simply hating each other into eternity. It was only Horus' territoriality that kept

Seth out of Duat now. Plus, there were other considerations. “And you took the cockring off of your own volition. I didn’t force it off, and Isis, Maat, and Anubis didn’t force you, either. You left me with Anubis, to spend time with him, despite your comments that I wouldn’t be allowed such things.” True, part of that was to spy, but… There was *something* there. It wasn’t just Seth’s imagination.

“Maybe it was to torment you more,” Horus said, a dangerous lilt in his voice. But Seth could see through him now. Horus was trying to be evasive.

“I imagine it was in a way,” Seth acknowledged. “But you could have done that by leaving the ring on. You didn’t have to keep such a distance from me all this time. You didn’t have to give me time alone with Anubis. You didn’t have to talk to me like…” He frowned. “Like you did before.”

“If I’m not honest with you, I have no one else to be honest with.”

Horus sighed and faced away. “I was overly casual. It won’t happen again.”

“…I don’t mind if it does,” Seth said, and he was being truthful. So much had changed in the span of little more than a day. Isis and Anubis were talking to him. There was the thought of Osiris facing some justice for his crimes, even as Seth hated to think of them. And perhaps his punishment wouldn’t be as bleak as he’d imagined it. And much of that rested on Horus cooperating, which involved Seth learning what he needed most, besides a cockwarmer. “It was the most honest you’ve been in the entire time we’ve known each other.” *At least without causing me pain, I suppose.*

Beneath all Seth’s doubts about Horus simply making another trap of some kind, Seth had the sense that there had been something real in Horus’ openness. Horus was still a young king, and a young general, with all the issues that entailed. And everything he built was starting to crumble around him, seemingly faster than he’d realized when he’d built up his house of lies. He should have been celebrating his win against the Greeks… Instead, his mother was not on his side, his half-brother was coming into his prime, his father tried to murder him, and Seth was leaving his control. It was a dangerous mindset to be in. And pushing him further into that sense of instability was even more dangerous. But Horus wasn’t attacking anyone, even Seth. He just sat at his desk and gazed thoughtfully at his uncle. He was still ready to fight Anubis, but he’d shown restraint when others stepped in. He wasn’t unhinged in the way that Osiris was, unwilling to see any reason at all. There *was* hope. And if Seth could ensure that Egypt had a saner king, it meant that Anubis would be better off, and have a firmer bulwark against Osiris.

That was worth whatever danger Seth faced in the meanwhile.

“I was glad when you chose to stay with me,” Horus said.

Seth blinked, surprised.

“Not that you had a choice, I guess,” Horus continued. “You’re still my prisoner. But I was glad you decided that.”

Seth wasn’t sure how he felt about that. There was still that obsession of Horus’, deep down. Seth could exploit it, but only so far. Just because his body responded to Horus didn’t mean he *wanted* Horus. But knowing Horus was still emotionally attached to him, and not just thinking through his cock… That was useful.

“I don’t know that I can trust the part of me that finds comfort in you,” Horus said. “That part of me is like an animal, lusting after you. He doesn’t think properly. He doesn’t plan right.”

Well they say self-awareness is useful, Seth thought. “You don’t want to trust me, either,” Seth said. “That makes sense. We’ve been enemies for hundreds of years, and you blame me for everything that’s gone wrong in your life.”

“Regardless of what happened with Osiris and Mother’s assumptions, you are to blame for much of it,” Horus noted.

Seth simply gazed back. He wasn’t disputing that.

“But beyond that, I want to *own* you completely,” Horus said. “That’s not the same as trust.”

Seth felt a shiver at those words. It was so like Osiris. Yet Horus still sat at his desk, away from the cot. He could use his powers if he wanted, but he hadn’t.

“That part thinks that trust is the easy way to the goal of ownership,” Horus said. “That I can pretend to find my way into your bed again. That letting my guard down is an easy sacrifice for the sake of this greater purpose.” Horus shook his head. “I don’t know. It’s all a mess…” He sounded frustrated.

Seth studied Horus for a while, unsure what to say. He thought of Osiris, and his strange feelings, forcing them so hard on Seth. Horus, by comparison, knew what he wanted, and he’d spent some time forcing them on Seth, but now, with the knowledge that Seth *wasn’t* as guilty as he’d seemed, Horus seemed… afraid.

Seth stilled at the thought, realizing things were far more dangerous than he thought, in a way. A god who was afraid was a terrible thing. Seth had fought Ra and seen Osiris and Isis’ fears. Seth had *lived* as a fearful god for hundreds of years, worried Osiris might come back somehow, or that he wasn’t as strong as he believed. He knew what fearful gods were capable of. Or at least he knew *other* gods. Horus’ powers were partially untested. It was one reason what he’d suggested to Isis had been so important. They needed to get Horus stabilized, or they’d all suffer.

When Seth had been frustrated, he’d turned to drugs and alcohol, which were always a bad idea. He needed to start somewhere, though, so he did what he’d do in preparation for any war: he tried to get more information. “Before you caught me,” Seth said, quietly, “was there something you did that helped you relax?” He hoped Horus would understand Seth meant something other than “fantasize about fucking Seth.” If he was calmer, things would be easier, and Seth felt that just leaving him alone while Seth took a nap would be insufficient. They'd have to go back out at some point.

Horus thought for a while, which Seth was surprised about. He worried Horus would be too distracted in his confusion. “Sometimes I’d read the scrolls my mother found for me. Or do practice sparring.” He smiled. "When I was a demigod, it used to at least tire me out, or get me to focus a bit more."

Sparring practice was something Seth could work with. He’d done that with Anubis when Anubis was younger. “And what do you feel like doing now?”

“None of the soldiers here are strong enough for me to spar with,” Horus said.

“…I’ll spar with you.”

Horus raised an eyebrow at Seth. “You’re not serious.”

“If it will help you relax, then we’ll do it. It’s not like I can win, anyway.” And it was better than trying to fuck Horus’ problems away. Seth was a warrior. This came easily to him.

Horus stared at him, and in that look, Seth thought he saw… wonder? “All right.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 20: Chances

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth didn't know what to expect of sparring with Horus. He wondered if it would simply be a return to them fighting for supremacy during the trial, or another form of Seth trying to escape during his imprisonment. He'd seen Horus fight the Greeks and Osiris, and Seth knew Horus could be quite powerful in his own right.

Seth was still surprised to see a fuzzy mirror of Osiris. And not in a bad way. Where Osiris was wary and relied on his powers, Horus was swift and determined. He wasn't overconfident, and paid attention when Seth dodged or knocked him aside. No wind appeared to knock Seth over and grab his khopesh from his hand or yank his khat. Horus focused on using his sword and dodging around.

They were some distance from the camp, on a stretch of sand where no humans would bother them, and where the noise of their fight wouldn't wake any sleeping soldiers. What animals there were had fled from them. It was even farther from help for Seth, too, but it also meant no one was bothering them. Seth hoped Anubis was asleep or just focusing on his own training.

Seth thought he'd be too tired for this, perhaps even to the point of collapse, or be too anxious fighting Horus and thus make mistakes. But there was something strangely calming about the knowledge that Horus had agreed to this as a form of relaxation. That Horus hadn't just jumped into more torture or more difficult conversations. There was no taunting, either. No extra invasive touches. Just the sound of grunts, clanging metal, and bare feet racing across sand.

When Seth shoved Horus a short distance away, Horus stood up slowly and asked Seth, "Can you tell me what I'm doing wrong?"

Seth blinked and stood up properly, then walked over. Quietly, he started giving Horus pointers, and even demonstrated some of them.

Horus simply listened, and his eyes followed when Seth used his hands or gestures to indicate something specific. Then they'd take up arms again and fight once more.

It reminded Seth of training with Anubis, and a part of him ached at the memory.

Seth thought that perhaps someone else would think he was a fool for this: making his enemy stronger. It meant that if Seth wanted to try to escape again at some point, Horus would be even better at stopping him. But Horus was *already* good at stopping him. Making sure he wasn't as bad at fighting wouldn't change that.

Eventually, Horus called a halt, and they returned to Horus' tent, where Horus left Seth to sleep alone on the cot, while Horus returned to his writing. The air between them was less tense, and Seth thought he might be able to sleep.

As Seth lay on the cot, staring at the tent ceiling, truly weary, he heard a soft voice say, "Thank you."

Seth's lips quirked, and finally he said, "You're welcome."

In about a week, the Greeks fully cleaned up their camp, carrying their remaining injured onto their ships. There were no major issues. The Egyptian commanders kept the troops in order. Osiris didn't attack them again, that any of the gods could spot.

Seth and Horus sparred every day, sometimes in the camp where the soldiers could see, to boost morale. Judging by the cheering, Seth felt it was working. And Horus was improving incrementally, which was a good sign.

Anubis met with Seth every morning to check on him. And Seth would pull him aside when he glared too much at Horus. Anubis would report on his progress: he was doing well with his powers, and Khnum, ever at his side, was happy to report on that as well.

"He has excellent control," Khnum said to Seth one day, when the three of them were standing outside Horus' tent while Horus and Maat discussed something a short distance away. The Greek ships had already started leaving the shore, and the Egyptian gods were planning to depart in a few days, as well. "Phenomenal, for a god so new."

"I have a good teacher," Anubis said, smiling down at Khnum, who smiled back at him. Anubis reached out and rested his left hand on Khnum's right shoulder.

Seth glanced between them, glad to see they were getting along, but a bit confused at the closeness.

"Khnum," Isis said as she walked over. She wore a fine dress and much jewelry as usual, and had the leader of the healer tents at her side. "I need you."

"Excuse me," Khnum said to Seth. He smiled at Anubis before departing.

Anubis watched Khnum leave.

"You're very close with Khnum," Seth said as he studied Anubis' expression.

"He's very kind," Anubis said, still staring after where Isis and Khnum were walking away. He looked at Seth and smiled. "I like him."

"That's good," Seth said. "It's good to have allies." Perhaps, with time, he could be encouraged to work with Horus, especially given Khnum was Isis' servant.

Anubis nodded. "How did you first court Mother?"

"…What?!" Seth asked, almost forgetting to keep his voice down.

Horus looked at him with a frown.

"When you first courted Mother, how did you do it?" Anubis asked again, as if the issue was that Seth hadn't *heard* him. "I was curious."

"I… *Why* are curious about this?" Seth remembered those early days of his cautiously approaching Nephthys, unsure how to make his feelings clear. She was so beautiful, powerful, and wise. Everything he knew seemed so blunt and harsh by comparison. And the concept was ridiculous: a god of war trying to make love to a goddess of peace? It made no sense.

"I'm a god now," Anubis said matter-of-factly. "It makes sense for me to consider my own partnerships."

Seth supposed that was logical, but Anubis was leaping ahead on a lot, and perhaps trying to follow in his old habits of imitating Seth in particular. "You don't have to mimic us, though. You can make your own path." Seth grimaced. "In fact you really *shouldn't* mimic us, all things considered." What with Nephthys and Seth's disastrous marriage, and Isis and Osiris… Not that he felt Anubis would fall for the same tricks, but Anubis *had* been entranced by Osiris' kindness, in a way somewhat similar to how Seth had been entranced by Nephthys.

Seth wondered if Horus wasn't the only one who needed advice on what to change… Though at least Anubis had Khnum teaching him now, not Seth. But Seth wasn't sure *he* was happy about how close Anubis and Khnum were.

"I don't plan to mimic you," Anubis said, surprising Seth. "I mostly wanted to ensure I'm not screwing things up. And I know Khnum is already open to my advances anyway."

"…What?!" Seth wondered just *what* Khnum's lessons entailed. Would he have to find Khnum and demand more answers from *him?* Would Isis reverse her change of heart over it? *Should she be the one doing this? I'm really not the best person to give advice about this kind of thing.*… His thoughts went to Nephthys, wondering if, even after everything, this was meant to be her job… And how he actually preferred Anubis *not* asking for her help.

"I just wondered in case there was something else I should be doing," Anubis said, still seemingly unfazed by Seth's alarm.

"You want to… court *Khnum?!"* Seth kept his voice low. "But you haven't known each other that long!"

"We're gods," Anubis said with a slight shrug. "We have the rest of eternity to get to know each other better, don't we?"

"Then why are you rushing?" Seth demanded.

"Did you take your time when you were courting Mother?" Anubis asked.

Seth grimaced, thinking back to his desperation when he'd courted Nephthys. He'd hoped for more kind looks from her, for more moments where she just saw *him* and not humans or Osiris or Isis. Every moment his skin had been on fire, begging for her notice. It seemed so alien to him now, the idea that he might live or die without one more of her gentle smiles. In the hundreds of years since he'd discovered her true desires, he'd walled himself off from that part of himself. He let the embarrassment of his foolishness drown him. And even when he still felt that need for her approval, he'd cut himself off even further. She didn't want him, and never had, and he was an idiot to keep believing she might. Now all he felt was ambivalence.

No, Seth didn't want Anubis to follow in Seth's footsteps, even if Anubis was even more inexperienced. "Perhaps if I'd spent more time thinking things over… much would have been different," Seth cautioned Anubis. "Maybe… Maybe your mother would have been more honest with her own feelings." It was something he'd wondered for a while. He ignored Osiris' insinuation that it was *his* influence that had brought about Nephthys' affections. But even then, Seth wondered if *Seth* pushed Nephthys too hard? Was that why she'd agreed to be his wife and bear a child for him? Perhaps if he'd just stayed as Nephthys' friend, she could have talked to him about her feelings for Osiris, and they could have worked things out. Maybe even just have a stronger friendship, instead of what they had now: never speaking to each other except to argue, both imprisoned by guilt of their own design.

"But would that have changed Osiris?" Anubis asked, his expression more serious. "It seems like he just took advantage of Mother's feelings for him to get to you."

Seth smiled ruefully, thinking that perhaps he was worrying too much when Anubis was already so wise. "You're probably right." Even if Seth hadn't lost Nephthys, Osiris might have just bided his time for some other opportunity. But at least Seth wouldn't have had the pain of knowing he'd been twice a fool. He wouldn't have been mistaken that he could be loved.

"Khnum isn't like that," Anubis said, oblivious to the whirlwind within Seth's heart. "He's sweet and gentle. And when I peer into his soul…" Anubis smiled satisfactorily. "Well… I know he thinks of me, too."

"You peer into his soul?" Seth asked, confused.

"It's an ability I have," Anubis said. "It's not exactly telepathy. But it connects to the soul. We didn't want to test it on too many people at once when I learned about it and wasn't skilled at it, in case it backfired, so Khnum let me test it on him." Anubis' grin was back. "It's one reason I know I want to court him."

Seth was almost curious about what exactly Anubis saw in Khnum's soul, but given the smile on Anubis' face, he wondered if it would be best to just… not ask. Perhaps Anubis got confused sometimes on who to trust and why, but peering into another god's soul and seeing their desires… It was definitely one way to learn some truth about them. Somewhat similar to Maat's scales, but more direct, without allowing for someone like Osiris to wiggle his way out of things. "You really trust him so much already?"

"Yes," Anubis said, firmly.

“Are you sure it’s not just…?” Seth winced. “Proximity? Or… maybe part of the magic you’re using?” What if Anubis just felt connected deeply with *anyone* whose soul he connected with?”

Anubis shook his head. “I’ve tried it on a couple soldiers, since getting a handle of it with Khnum. I don’t feel the same when it’s them.” Anubis quirked his head. “I liked Khnum before I looked into his soul. Seeing into him just confirmed for me that when he says he feels similarly, he is being honest.”

Seth put up a hand to stop him. “Okay. I believe you. I just… I worry. I don’t want you to end up hurt, that’s all.” *I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I did. That Isis did.* “I want you to find happiness.” But if Anubis and Khnum were already talking with each other about it then… clearly they had things handled. And like Anubis said, they had eternity. If things ended then… things ended. Seth was certainly the wrong person to try to steer someone’s heart in such matters.

Anubis reached out and grasped Seth’s upper left arm. “I know.” He smiled down at Seth. “And I’m glad you care enough to tell me, too.”

“I don’t want to control your life,” Seth said. “I don’t… That’s never what I wanted.” He didn’t want Anubis to feel constrained by him. He liked the way they could be together like this, just two gods who cared for each other, and supported each other. Anubis seemed happier than Seth had seen him in years.

“You just didn’t want me to turn into a god of war,” Anubis said. There was some frustration in his voice. His old, childish wishes made manifest. He’d loved his father so much, and always wanted to follow in Seth’s footsteps.

Seth winced. “Yes. If I could stop that… It’s a hard thing to be.” He wanted Anubis to be someone who could be loved. Someone like Nephthys: beautiful, wise, and powerful, who was welcomed wherever she went. And Anubis at least, to some degree, had that, even if Horus hated him. Isis cared for him. Khnum cared for him. Maat trusted him. Anubis was confidant and content, and Osiris hadn’t come back for him. Perhaps things would be okay for him.

“I’m something different already,” Anubis said. “Than both you and Mother. And even than Osiris.” He clasped his left hand into a fist. “I’ll forge my own path. Though I appreciate all the guidance I can get.” He smiled at Seth. “Especially if it means we can talk.”

Seth wasn’t used to hope. But he felt some of it welling in his heart.

“And it means I can stand up to that asshole,” Anubis said, glaring at Horus.

Seth laughed. “Anubis, he’s your king.” Perhaps the path ahead would be easier than he thought, but not all easy.

“*You* killed Osiris,” Anubis said. “Being a king is immaterial.”

Seth felt a slight chill at that. “Horus is not Osiris. He’s not perfect. He has work to do. But I think he can improve.” Seth knew it. He’d seen it. It was slow, and it was still somewhat worrying. But it was possible.

“Are you on *his* side now?” Anubis asked with a frown. “He abused you.”

“I’m not on his side,” Seth said, feeling his cheeks warm. “And I know what he did. I’ll never forget any of it.” He breathed in deeply. “And I’m on *your* side. Which will not be helped by killing another king. Even assuming you’d be able to.” When Anubis didn’t look discouraged in the slightest, Seth continued, “You may be full of yourself with your power now, Anubis, and it’s true that you are very obviously powerful.” He could feel it, even standing here, before Anubis had touched him. “But Horus is smart and creative. He has Isis’ support, and Maat’s support. He has all the other gods on his side. You can’t backstab him in the way you did me.”

Anubis’ lips parted, and Seth knew he’d struck hard on that.

“He suspects you too much for being my son, working for Osiris, and your constant threats to him,” Seth said. “Not to mention he *knows* you have a past of betraying people.”

“Father, I…” Anubis was clearly struggling to find the right words to reply.

Seth smiled, knowing he’d gotten *something* through to Anubis, at least. Though he didn’t expect much beyond Anubis just… not attacking Horus. “I don’t expect you to apologize for what you did. I told you, you can kill me if you wish. I understand.”

Anubis bowed his head, clearly pained.

Seth felt something burn his chest at the movement. He raised his left hand up and lightly touched Anubis’ chin. “You’re my son. You’re doing amazing. You’re going to go so far. And I’m proud of you. If you can push past what I’ve done to you, then I can push past what you’ve done to me. Okay?”

After a moment, Anubis nodded.

Seth lowered his hand, and then smiled. “It’s a bit foolish to get advice from me on romance, anyway. It’s not like your mother ever really loved me that way. Likely all my stumbling around accomplished nothing. Why she agreed to marry me… I have no idea.” And would he find out at last once they returned to Heliopolis and questioned her? The thought was terrifying.

After a moment, Anubis said, “It’s not like there are many people I can ask for advice *from.* Isis was fooled by Osiris as much as you were. Khnum’s never been with anyone before. And Maat doesn’t talk about what Thoth did to court her.”

Seth supposed Anubis had a point there. Anubis was definitely serious about all this.

“And Horus…” Anubis scoffed. “Maybe he’s not Osiris. But he’s a monster all the same.”

Seth thought of all the faraway looks he'd seen on Horus' face. The disconnection between Horus and his family. The loss of people he'd trusted. The increased isolation as other gods became more wary of him. It seemed they all saw a new Osiris in him. Or a new Seth. Who Horus ultimately turned out to be, perhaps none of them knew, but they wouldn't let the mistakes of the past repeat themselves.

Seth recalled how much training with Horus felt like sparring with Anubis. He thought of how much Osiris had stolen from them all, given Seth would have trained Horus if he'd been raised in Heliopolis. How, even now, Horus sought pointers from him. Horus was keeping a distance, listening to advice, even if he kept careful boundaries between himself and others. And even know, he listened to Maat, giving Seth and Anubis their space.

"He's done monstrous things," Seth said, carefully. "But so have I." He remembered his cruelty to Anubis and Isis too much to know otherwise.

Anubis grimaced.

"And if I can be forgiven for anything," Seth said, "If I can change…" He looked up at Anubis, searching for answers he wasn't sure he'd find. "If you want me to believe that I have some kind of future? Then I have to believe he has one, too."

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 21: Cages

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth let his sand chariot dissolve at the entrance to Heliopolis, and Horus swooped down and landed beside him. They'd come ahead of Isis and Maat, given both Seth and Horus could move faster than the other gods. The trip itself had been uneventful, even if Seth constantly felt Horus' eyes on him. Even after sparring together so much lately, there was still a bit of strangeness between them.

But it's a bit easier, Seth thought as Horus stepped up to Seth while gazing ahead into Heliopolis. *He's calmer, anyway.*

Horus was just quieter generally, now. He focused on cleaning up the camp with Seth on hand if he needed advice, and still asked for help with his forms during their training, but they had little to say to each other otherwise. Horus didn't make new threats or touch him inappropriately, and Seth mostly spent his time in Horus' tent sleeping or staring at the tent ceiling, wishing for sleep.

It also meant that Seth was left alone with his thoughts more often than not, and not comfortable sharing them with Horus, despite their newfound *honesty*. Sparring with Horus let him get off steam, too, but the silence, particularly late at night, was starting to remind him of his years ruling Egypt, drowning in emptiness and isolation. He hadn't slept the night before they returned to Heliopolis, and he was on edge. He felt like this whole plan was a farce, and he was the weakest part in it. And they were going to Nephthys just to highlight all his flaws. The ones that meant she'd never looked at him properly, and only ever seen Osiris.

A large, round shadow formed on the ground near Seth's feet, under cover of the overhanging roof, and Anubis poked his black jackal head mask out of it, before rising entirely out of the ground, with Khnum beside him, wrapped in the embrace of Anubis' right arm.

Seth watched with a slightly unnerved fascination for Anubis' newly discovered form of travel. Anubis said it allowed him to travel along in shadows as he pleased. He'd stayed attached to the underside of Seth's chariot as they moved, which Horus hadn't liked.

Seth frowned and glanced at Horus, who was pointedly ignoring Anubis and Khnum. Horus had taken to muttering angrily about Anubis some nights until Seth knocked him over the head during practice enough times to make the younger god focus properly. But the enmity between them was still there. And he knew Anubis was under the chariot. Now Seth wondered, *Is that why he was annoyed while we traveled?* Seth despaired of his own abilities to ease tensions between the half-brothers, especially when Anubis was so set on not letting them go, either.

Seth wanted to laugh at himself. He wasn't a god of peace, and here he was, trying to get Anubis to at least stop being hostile to the god who dethroned his own father, with Anubis' help. *Nephthys would be proud*, Seth thought. *If she were proud of anything I've done, anyway.*

Anubis let Khnum go, and the river god stretched his arms a little. The gold of his ram headdress glowed in the sunshine. He turned to smile at Anubis. "That was already better! You're still improving!"

Anubis smiled warmly back. They were standing close, and it seemed like Anubis might pull Khnum into an embrace again at any time.

Seth suddenly felt like an unwanted outsider on their spectacle, and considered walking into Heliopolis on his own, though he didn't know how Horus would react to Seth taking such initiative outside the practice arena.

"It does raise the question of just *how* long you could carry someone with you," Khnum said as he stepped forward to place his hand familiarly on Anubis' left forearm.

Horus walked into the palace, thankfully allowing Seth to follow him, while Anubis and Khnum stayed behind him, chatting about practices they could try.

"We should question Nephthys immediately," Horus said, facing ahead. "While she doesn't have time to prepare. The servants sent word while we were away that she hasn't left her cell." His tone was annoyed.

He probably hates being an errand boy for Isis, Seth thought as he followed in Horus' wake. Seth couldn't exactly say he relished the thought either. He didn't *want* to hear whatever Nephthys' thoughts were on Osiris. He'd heard enough of them already. He could only imagine how much worse it was than all the things he'd imagined on top of what little she'd said on the matter. He remembered finding her after Isis ran from him: Nephthys was still crying on the floor where Seth had left her after speaking to Sekhmet. He'd told her Osiris was dead, and she simply stared at him until he left, disgusted with both of them, particularly himself.

Horus walked quickly, his strong shoulders bearing ahead. Seth was almost glad Horus was in the lead, because Seth imagined his own were shaking, though at least Anubis and Khnum seemed too wrapped up in each other to notice.

They shortly arrived at Nephthys' cell. Afternoon sunshine filtered in through the high window of Nephthys' cell, and Nephthys knelt in the center of the floor behind the bars. Her long blonde hair was in shadow, and her black dress was dirty.

Seth still thought she was beautiful, but he mostly felt a desire to step away, not go to her. To leave and never return. He couldn't be here for more of her tears and silence, or what she might say once someone got her talking.

Nephthys looked up at the group as they approached, and her eyes widened. "Horus? Seth? Khnum? And…?" She frowned at Anubis. "Who are you?"

Anubis stepped into the cell, with its door still open for Nephthys to leave as she wished, and knelt at her side, removing his headdress.

Seth's eyes widened slightly. He hadn't actually seen Anubis without his headdress before this, and so seeing Anubis' long, dark, curly hair, so similar to his grandmother's, was startling. Anubis' face was an adult's, obviously, and so different from the child one Seth was familiar with.

Anubis looked somber before he smiled at Nephthys. "It's me, Mother. Anubis."

Nephthys stared in confusion, then glanced at Seth.

Seth only gazed back at her. If she expected him to rescue her from anything that was about to happen, particularly when it would likely just involve talking, he had neither the ability nor precisely the will, and it was best she learned that quickly.

Nephthys looked back at Anubis, clearly still confused. "Anubis? You…?" Her eyes widened. "You ascended?!"

Anubis nodded.

Nephthys reached out hesitantly to lightly touch Anubis' chin, clearly still shocked. She was smaller than he was, now.

Seth imagined that if things had been different, this would have been a moment of joy for all of them: Nephthys, greeting Anubis after his ascension. But instead, Osiris… and Nephthys… had shattered it for them.

"But how?" Nephthys asked, clearly still shocked. "When?" Her thumb rubbed Anubis' cheek.

"I was defending Father," Anubis said.

Seth wanted to smile at that, but he felt stiff from having to remain here. Every moment drew closer to *something*, he just knew it, and the tension was killing him.

Horus snorted beside Seth, but otherwise said nothing.

Nephthys frowned. "Defending him? From what?"

Anubis was quiet for a time before saying, "People who meant him ill."

Nephthys' expression grew more confused.

Horus stepped forward, "Nephthys, we know that Osiris is Anubis' father."

Nephthys stiffened, and then looked up at him in alarm. When Horus simply stared back at her, she looked at Anubis, who also gazed back at her, impassively.

Horus stepped into the cell and looked down at her, his expression unreadable. “We need you to testify about what you discussed with Osiris concerning the power of creation.”

Nephthys’ eyes widened. “What are you saying? Why?”

“Osiris is a traitor to the Ennead,” Anubis said, bringing Nephthys’ gaze back to him. “He’s used me to try to get to Father, to continue abusing Father. And Osiris has been trying ever since the night he died. Before that, maybe.”

Nephthys put a hand over her mouth, and then looked at Seth in alarm.

Seth didn’t say anything. He was glad at least she wasn’t talking about not loving him or something. He assumed it would happen after the shock of *some* of Osiris’ crimes wore off.

“I didn’t know…” Nephthys said, quietly, still watching him. “I didn’t… Tell me it’s not true, Seth,” Nephthys said, gazing at him pleadingly. “He’s our brother, he… He wouldn’t…”

Seth simply gazed back at her. For a moment, it was like how they used to be, close and working together, talking about anything that came to mind. But then they were back in this cell, with all the pain and lies in pieces on the floor between them. *I’m your brother too. Look what came of that.* “It’s true.”

Nephthys clutched her chest and bowed over herself. She shook, and her eyes grew wet. “But he… He always…” There was a desperation and fear in her voice.

Seth clenched his hands into fists, frustrated at this. He wanted to run away and hit something. Or just get this over as fast as possible. But if he spoke more, he’d start yelling, but yelling at Nephthys wouldn’t solve anything, and he refused to do it, anyway. It would just make things worse. He didn’t want to see her in pain like this. He didn’t want her to be hurt, even if he wouldn’t intercede to try to stop her having to testify. Things needed to be brought to light, so that Osiris could be stopped. So that Anubis could be safe.

“This cell is dank,” Horus said as he stepped out of it. “We should reconvene in one of the meeting rooms.” He looked back at Nephthys. “It’s time you left here. Enough of this hiding in the shadows.”

Seth frowned. A part of him wanted to fight back, to tell Horus to leave Nephthys alone. But when had his interference done anyone any good? If he hadn’t interfered, perhaps Isis would never have fled. Perhaps Horus would have had the life he deserved.

“Mother, please,” Anubis said, putting his arms on her shoulders. His voice was quiet, but firm. “Get up. Let’s get you somewhere warmer.”

Seth watched Anubis coax Nephthys up. *Would Anubis have suffered any less if I hadn’t acted? Or would Osiris have planned worse for him?* When Horus began walking out of the room, Seth followed, letting Anubis focus on Nephthys. Servants bowed as they passed.

Back in the sunnier halls, Seth breathed a little easier. He felt more alive than like he was also trapped in the cloying dungeon Nephthys had kept herself for so long.

“Feeling better?” Horus asked.

Seth twitched and looked at Horus. The younger god was studying him thoughtfully as they walked side by side. Seth had been so wrapped up in himself he’d barely noticed how they fell into step with each other. Horus had been his constant companion too long, and Seth was letting his guard down too much.

“You looked like you were going to break a wall down,” Horus noted.

Seth frowned. Of course Horus was paying close attention to his prisoner, in case Seth broke loose again. “I’m in control.”

Horus didn’t say anything to that.

Just like that, the tension between them was back. The reminder of even more scars Osiris and Seth had left between them. Seth wondered if Horus would reprimand him somehow. Perhaps, being back in Heliopolis where Horus had committed most of his cruelties to Seth, would bring back his desires. Would Horus send him back to that closed office?

“We should spar after this,” Horus said, leading him to a meeting room with a long rectangular table, tall green plants, and a sky window letting sunshine stream over them. “It helps you cool off, too, I think.” His voice was neutral. And he wasn’t calling his powers or glaring, or even touching Seth at all.

But Seth still felt the vice of Maat’s spell. The trap of having to help his captor be less like Osiris, to save them all. A task Seth wasn’t sure he was doing well at in the slightest. Even Anubis seemed to be better at this, and he’d barely been a god for much time at all. “Whatever you say,” Seth said, perhaps a bit bitterly. If it didn’t mean Horus was tossing him on the ground to have Horus’ way with him, that was good. “You’re the king, after all.”

“I’m not your enemy here,” Horus said.

Seth blinked and laughed at him. “Really? Did you forget why you’re keeping me leashed?” Seth felt a burning in his chest, still. *I’m not a god of peace, after all.*

Horus gave him an unimpressed look. “I’m trying to make this go as smoothly as possible. Or do you think baiting me will get you somewhere?”

Seth’s hands tightened into fists, and he forced himself to turn away. *Great, I’m being talked down to by the antagonistic little shit. Isis would be proud.* Seth shut his eyes and tried to regulate his breathing. He refused to let his fear control him.

A bird cried outside the window. Humans called to each other. The world moved all around them. Osiris hadn’t stoppered it all yet, and Seth wasn’t trapped in a cell.

“I know,” Seth finally said. He breathed in. He was no better than Horus losing his temper like this. “I just…” He grimaced and put off whatever he was going to say as Anubis and Nephthys walked in.

Nephthys still looked uncertain, but she walked at Anubis' side, with Khnum behind them. She looked paler in the sunlight.

"Thank you for joining us, Nephthys," Horus said before he sat down at the head of the table. "Sit."

Anubis led Nephthys to a chair, and Seth took one on the opposite side of the table. It meant he had to look at Nephthys, but that they wouldn't be close.

As Anubis and Khnum settled in chairs, Horus watched Nephthys with a severe look. "Osiris will be tried before the Ennead for his various crimes. When Maat returns with Mother, they'll have more details on that." He rested his elbows on the table, laced his fingers together, and leaned forward slightly. "But in the meanwhile, to prepare, I need you to tell me what the true relationship between you and Osiris was."

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 22: Honesty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

It was strangely banal, listening to the way Nephthys explained that she'd never once approached Osiris at all until the day she asked him to help her have a child.

"I admired him for years," she explained, staring mainly at her hands. Her pale face looked weary, but she had a small, sad smile on her face. "But I never said anything."

A part of Seth was asking why she hadn't told *Seth* about this, but it wasn't his place to talk. It was Nephthys' place to explain. Seth had made *his* feelings clear on the matter for many years.

So Nephthys talked. Her recollection of her conversation with Osiris about having a baby was almost bland in its normalcy. Osiris seemed to treat it like a business transaction.

"I was so distracted by having this part of him, that I… I didn't think overmuch about what I was giving him in turn. I would have given anything for some piece of him to have with me." She looked at Anubis apologetically. "I'm sorry, Anubis, that I hid the truth from you for so long." She looked nervously up at Seth.

Seth simply gazed back at her. He had no questions to ask that he felt comfortable saying here, where Anubis, Khnum, and Horus were listening. *I wish you'd spoken to me about this before. If you wanted to be with him so much, we could have ended things before they even began, or ended it* then, *at the least.* Seth imagined he'd have been upset, but not like this. Perhaps, if Osiris had still gotten up to his plans, Nephthys wouldn't have been part of Seth's grievances. But now Nephthys was inextricably bound into it. He hated Osiris. But Nephthys was a painful wound that felt opened anew every time he looked at her.

Nephthys grimaced and turned back to Horus. "And that was all. We never again spoke about it. I think sometimes he looked at Anubis in a different way than a mere uncle, but he never treated Anubis any differently that I was aware of. He never interfered with Seth's parenting. He never suggested anything else. And I never brought it up again either, until the night Sekhmet told Seth about it. I haven't spoken with Osiris since before I came across Seth and Sekhmet that night."

Horus thought this over for a time before asking, "You were the one to suggest the baby?"

Nephthys winced. "Yes. I thought… Osiris was the god of life, so perhaps he wouldn't see it for what it was. Seth wanted a child, but we…" She winced and looked awkwardly at Seth.

“We had trouble conceiving because Osiris stole my seed,” Seth finished for her. Everyone knew he was Horus’ plaything, anyway. Recounting this was nothing at all for him. If he had to listen to Nephthys chip away at their past, he might as well chip away at the rest.

Nephthys’ eyes widened. “What?!”

Seth remembered how ridiculous it sounded when Osiris first explained it to him. But that was long ago at this point, so he shrugged. “I have no idea how long he was doing it. I never felt it.” *I’d have done something if I had. And clearly Isis never noticed in all the times she healed me over the years.* “But I assume that’s why you couldn’t bear a child with me. He didn’t want me to have a child with you.”

Nephthys frowned. “But… why?”

“Because he’s an obsessive monster who wants me for his own personal fucktoy,” Seth replied, making her flinch. *Good. This is the shitstain you’re so deeply in love with. I wish you both the best if you’re ever together again.* “He viewed me as his personal property. Having a child with you would mean someone else was using his property without his consent. You remember how proud he was. He would never have borne that.” The way Osiris felt *entitled* to Seth was one of the primary things Seth hated about him. It was disgusting. As if Seth was *owed* to him. All the years he’d invaded Seth’s own body without Seth’s knowledge, and lied to Seth’s face every day. And the creep felt like a *child* would convince Seth of his affections?

Nephthys put a hand over her face. “How? I never—! He was never like this! Prideful, yes, arrogant at times, yes, but it was in ways that made him a good ruler. He was never cruel to any of us. He loved all of us.”

“He never loved any of us,” Seth replied, his hands tightening on his arms. “He only saw us as his means for his own ends.” Isis, to secure his position. Nephthys, to get hold of the power of creation. And Seth, to stay nearby until Osiris could hatch his stupid plan. Even Anubis was caught up in the mess of it.

“I just don’t understand…” Nephthys insisted. She was crying now.

Seth remembered how he had been unwilling to accept it all. But he hadn’t been able to take his time to process it. He’d gone into survival mode. Because anything less meant madness.

“You made a human error, Nephthys,” Horus said, calling their attention to him. Horus’ expression was stern, and he gazed back at her with sharp eyes. “You worshipped Osiris. Worship is the farthest step from understanding.”

Nephthys stared back at Horus in horror.

Seth frowned at Horus.

Horus looked at Anubis, who glared back at him.

Seth rolled his eyes. *Can you let your grudge against Anubis rest for even a short while?* Though he had to admit there were some parallels between Anubis' trust in Osiris and Nephthys' affection. But it was all wrapped up in lies and Seth's failure to see what was wrong in advance.

"Osiris didn't suggest the baby," Khnum said, surprising them all. He was staring at Nephthys. "But he *did* suggest the power of creation in exchange?"

"Yes," Nephthys replied as she raised her head properly. She wiped away her tears. "He said it was necessary for everything with the pregnancy to go smoothly."

"That was a lie," Seth said with a frown. "He wanted to use it on me."

Nephthys frowned. "Use it on you? For what?"

"What did he say, specifically?" Horus asked, making her look at him. "When he said he wanted the power of creation, what did he say?"

Nephthys glanced at Seth before saying, "He said… 'I'll need the power of creation for this to work properly.' That's all."

"Did he ask you how to use it?" Horus asked.

Nephthys shook her head. "He just took it, went away, and came back with a container of his seed for me." Her cheeks warmed a little, but she continued staring at Horus, waiting for more questions.

"So it seems he worked alone," Horus mused.

"What do you mean?" Nephthys asked.

"Osiris drugged me," Seth said, before Horus could answer for him. He didn't need to hear Horus explain things again in his ridiculous fashion. "That night I confronted him. He drugged my wine."

Nephthys' eyes widened.

"He explained what he'd done with my seed, his deal with you, and then he assaulted me while trying to use the power of creation on me." Seth grimaced. "He wanted to have a child with me. That's what he needed the power of creation for."

"That's ridiculous," Nephthys said, quietly, but she kept staring at him.

"He was going to use Anubis' soul for it," Seth said.

Anubis' lips twitched.

"No!" Nephthys said, still horrified. She looked at Anubis in alarm.

Anubis gazed at the table, clearly lost in thought.

“It seems the proposition was entirely in his favor,” Horus said. “Seth and Nephthys would stop trying for children, and he had two ingredients for his plans.” There was an odd note in his voice.

“Admiring his planning for once?” Seth asked sharply.

“I acknowledge he wasn’t a fool all the time,” Horus said. “But the entire idea was foolish, so the fact that he was somewhat skilled at carrying it out is immaterial.”

Seth almost laughed at that.

“He wouldn’t have wanted to create suspicion,” Horus said, gazing at the air over the table. “So he lied where he needed and hid his plans as long as he could. I wonder what he was waiting for… A better opportunity?” Horus looked at Seth for a moment. “Did you two never fight?”

“Not like that night,” Seth replied. “After the war with Ra, he wasn’t interested in combat. He preferred to focus on his statesmanship. If we argued, one of us always walked away before it came to blows. But that day…” The day he’d discovered everything he knew was a lie. That two of the people he’d trusted most had spent years lying to him about something like this… “I lost control.”

“I should have told you,” Nephthys said quietly, staring at her hands on the table. “I’m sorry, Seth.”

Seth laughed, startling her and everyone else. He couldn’t help it, though. It was *hilarious.* “Told me what, Nephthys? Did you think I was upset just because you didn’t tell me yourself? Because I had to find out from *Sekhmet* of all people? Is that why you’ve been hiding in your cell?”

Nephthys flinched. “Seth, I—”

“Horus was right,” Seth said, putting his head in his hands. “This whole thing was foolish. Stupid. If you’d come to be about your wants before all of this happened, perhaps much could have been averted. Instead, you went behind my back to Osiris, rather than telling me directly what *any* of the problems were, either about my failure when it came to your conceiving or my failure to stir any affection for me in your heart.”

Nephthys gasped. “Seth!”

“Because if you *did* love me,” Seth said as his hands shook, “you would have told me, wouldn’t you? You would have been honest. Not later. You would have told me you cared for Osiris. Or wanted his help, at least. Instead you planned all of this. And at so many points you could have changed something, not just after it was complete and Anubis was born and you were already lying to me. But you chose not to.” He took a moment to breathe. His heart was racing.

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” Nephthys said quietly.

Seth laughed again. “Did you think this hurts *less?!* Did you think so little of me that I’d have been furious if you turned me down, or chose to end our relationship so you could pursue Osiris? I practically worshiped the ground beneath your feet, Nephthys. I would have wished you well!” He blinked, recalling Horus’ words from earlier.

“Worship is the farthest step from understanding.”

Seth grimaced. *That’s why I was so blind.* “It all truly *does* come to honesty, doesn’t it?” He looked up at her.

There were tears in her eyes again, but she was gazing back at him, waiting. Hoping for the punishment he’d never given her perhaps.

It was never my punishment to give, he thought. *You hurt Anubis. I was just collateral damage.* “You were never honest with me. You never trusted me. And you ruined at least three lives in the doing.”

Nephthys hugged herself.

“What was so monstrous about me back then?” he asked, quietly. *What did Osiris in all his madness do that was better?* “I trusted you.” *And you stabbed me in the back for it.*

“I’m so sorry, Seth,” Nephthys said, bowing her head. “I was a fool. It’s not your fault.”

I’m the god of war and I’m meant to protect us from enemies, Seth thought, gazing at her, feeling a gaping maw of emptiness surrounding him. *But I failed to see the ones at my back. How is it* not *my fault?*

“Perhaps we should take a break,” Khnum said, in his soft but gentle voice. “Things are getting heated. Nephthys has given her testimony. When Isis returns, she’ll want to go over it again.”

No wonder Anubis likes him, Seth thought dimly. *He’s the calm one.* He breathed in and out, trying to relax.

“…Yes,” Horus said. Seth was surprised to see Horus’ eyes on him. “We’ll take a break.” He looked at Khnum. “See that Nephthys is taken to her quarters, not her cell. And guards are placed on her.” He looked at Nephthys. “I don’t believe you’re working with Osiris, Aunt. But it’s just to be safe.”

Nephthys nodded, still gazing at the table. “I understand.”

Horus stood and walked over to Seth. “Come.”

Seth had been ready to leave for ages, but getting up from that chair felt like one of the hardest things he’d ever done. He numbly followed Horus out of the room and down a hall, wondering if they were returning to Horus’ office. *Will he tie me to a column again?* He almost welcomed the idea. Pain would take him out of himself, perhaps. And it would give him something to grapple against, rather than Nephthys and her tears and how much he hated every second of her pain.

His love for her had felt so magical. He hadn't thought he could feel that for anyone. But it had been like a special flower, just for him. And he thought she'd shared it with him. But instead, he was a fool in a walled off room, while everyone ran away.

He and Horus ended up walking down a familiar path to Seth's rooms. Seth frowned as Horus opened the door and let him inside. Seth's rooms were clean of any detritus from the last time he'd been here. He recalled he hadn't been happy, and the furniture had mostly been destroyed, and the floors strewn with blood and pottery. Now, the rooms looked as lavish as they'd been before he learned about Nephthys and Osiris. Before Isis ran.

"I had the servants clean this a while back," Horus said. "I thought the palace shouldn't be full of wreckage anymore."

Seth snorted. It made some sense. He wondered who would have lived here after him. Some special diplomat?

"You should rest," Horus said, indicating the bed. "It's been a long day."

"You almost sound worried for me," Seth said, confused. He assumed Horus would gloat or something. Not this.

"I know what you can get up to when you're angry," Horus said.

Seth snorted. "As if Maat's spell would let me." But he walked to the bed and sat down on it, idly rubbing his hands over the sheets. Would unaltered sleep drown anything out? Usually he needed at least alcohol.

"You really think you were a monster to Nephthys when you were married?" Horus asked, still standing near the doorway.

Seth scoffed: he didn't know what he thought anymore. "I must have been, for her to hide it from me. Why else would she have done this, if she wasn't afraid of me?" He smirked. "I was still a god of war, after all." He'd done his best to keep that away from her. To try and separate his work from his life with her. But had it mattered at all?

Horus was quiet for a while. Eventually he said, "Nephthys wasn't afraid of you."

Seth froze.

"She was afraid of herself," Horus continued. "Peace seeks balance, but this was a moment of imbalance. She was ashamed. And a coward, because she knew telling you would hurt you. But not afraid of your own actions."

Seth leaned forward, breathing in and out. "How do you know?"

"I know," Horus said. "I could hear it while she was talking."

Seth's eyes grew hot. "And why are you telling me?" *She didn't think I was a monster? It was just her own fear of… of herself?* He thought he'd bullied her without realizing it. That his powers had somehow intimidated her. That *that* was part of why she went to Osiris. Or

perhaps he so disgusted her or embarrassed her, or any number of reasons. He'd tried to be a good husband, but wondered if he'd failed at that, too. But Horus' intuition was accurate, or at least had been. Then… *Maybe it really wasn't my fault.*

"I am the vengeance of my parents," Horus explained. "For true wrongs. You've done monstrous things, Seth. How you treated her wasn't one of them." He looked away. "If you want to feel horrible about yourself, feel it for the things you've actually done."

Seth made a weak laugh. *Of course that's why. He doesn't want me to waste my time feeling sorry for myself for unimportant things.* Nephthys wasn't his fault. A failure, yes, but not one he'd spurred her towards. He didn't know what to make of it.

"I'll be back shortly. I need to fetch some papers, and I'll do work here while you rest. Do not leave this room." Horus stepped out, letting the door shut behind him.

Seth shut his eyes and bowed his head, letting his tears fall to the ground. He had no strength to get up and flee anywhere. He tried to master his breathing. But like so many things, he failed at that, and was thankful he was at least alone for it.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 23: Considerations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

Horus stepped into the room he'd kept Seth in before they'd left Heliopolis to fight the Greeks. It was empty, on Horus' orders, and quiet, but the torch in his hand easily lit the place. He stared at the small room as if seeing it for the first time. He'd closeted himself in here for months before they'd gone to war. He'd fucked Seth on just about every part of this place (save the ceiling, since that had proven more complex than pleasurable), humiliated Seth on the rest… But the room was clean because stains would have made the stench unbearable. It looked more like an abandoned storage room than anything else. The air was stale.

Horus walked to the column where Seth had been bound most often and could see an after-image of the silent god, blindfolded and covered in filth and bruises. Seth's breathing was so loud when he was pushed hard that Horus sometimes heard it in his sleep. There were cracks in the column from where Horus had struck it and Seth had strained at it. Horus reached out to touch one of the larger cracks near the top. The stone was cold.

He tried to imagine bringing Seth back here again, and wondered if he could even stomach it. The idea was somehow a bit repellant now. He'd seen an array of emotions from Seth since they'd left for Heliopolis: despair, desperation, a new form of resignation and rage, and even a bit of hope and happiness. Things he'd wanted while torturing Seth in here, but had never truly gotten in ways that mattered. Horus knew personally how much pain you could get from someone pushed past their limits. But it was only on the front lines that Horus had seen Seth being honest.

And now Horus had grown used to the slightly less tense cohabitation they had. One that didn't require rope bonds and beatings. Strange as it was, there was something calming about their sparring sessions. Something in Horus' frustrated mind sorted itself out when he could work out his frustrations that way. Seth was a tough opponent, even weakened by Maat's spell and holding back because the sparring wasn't a real fight. For all Seth hated Horus, he didn't have the same disdain on his face as Osiris did when he sparred with Horus in the past. Seth didn't narrow his eyes when Horus fell, as if it was disappointing. He didn't sigh when they had to repeat something, or when something had to be explained.

He's also good at explaining things, Horus thought as he pulled his hand away from the stone. Osiris had fought in a war before, but he was no teacher of it. His impatience had always been obvious, though Horus was thankfully quite quick to pick up sword-fighting, and the need for practice was lessened.

Seth, on the other hand, seemingly had endless amounts of patience when Horus didn't understand something. Seth asked if Horus wanted help and wasn't bothered when Horus

needed him to rephrase something to be more useful, and Seth seemed to even think about it a little when something didn't work. Seth *was* a good teacher, for all Horus hated to admit it. And it made Horus continue to think a bit too much about how things could have been if Horus had grown up with Seth as his teacher rather than Osiris.

This was a pointless detour, Horus thought as he gazed once more at the room. There wasn't really anything for him to gather here: he'd had all his necessary documents taken to the camp with them, and they were being brought back with Isis and Maat. He'd mostly wanted to give an excuse to leave Seth to his misery, since Horus didn't know how to handle it anymore. Before, he'd have reveled in Seth's distress, and a part of him still did. Seth knew what it was like to be abandoned by those he loved. He was almost more alone than ever, even with Anubis' support. Horus should have stayed to revel in Seth's pain, particularly given Horus' questioning had a hand in causing it.

And I didn't even need to fuck him into it, Horus thought. But he'd just felt the urge to get away. The events that brought about his own birth were tantalizing in their mystery, and suffocating, too. It was hard to witness his forebears being so weak and fickle, and all the terrible decisions they'd made, almost none of which they'd learned from, even after hundreds of years. And it was hard to look at someone else realizing they were unloved by someone they cherished, and find glee in it. Horus had never wished his own relationship with Osiris on anyone, and while Seth and Nephthys' relationship was different, it made Horus think too much on his own past. To shattered thoughts about Isis, as well. *What am I without them, without their vengeance? Am I even allowed to be myself?* Seth without his siblings had turned into a tyrant and destroyer, and now he was trying to help Horus not go down that path. But as Horus stood in this room with scars from Horus' actions, was it too late?

Horus walked to the desk and imagined life after the trial with Osiris. Perhaps they would even have to confront Osiris another way. But then what? Horus still intended to keep Seth at his side. He'd been honest to Isis in the camp, and he still felt the same now: he wanted Seth and would do whatever it took to keep him. While watching and listening to Nephthys, he'd had one thought in his head: *He'll never be yours again if he ever was, because he's mine.* And knowing while looking at her that Seth *hadn't* been hers, at least on her part, had made him gloat a bit, to the point that he'd been fighting to keep a neutral expression on his face. He thought he managed it, but it was a near thing. Horus had no doubt that Seth loved Nephthys. Seth wouldn't be so anguished over it otherwise. But Nephthys had no claim on Seth, and never would again, if Horus had anything to say about it.

Horus left the room after he felt he'd given Seth enough time alone. He could feel the desert god's power through Maat's spell even from his distance and resisted the urge to turn into a bird to fly back faster. For all Horus' confusion on what he thought of Seth, Horus needed Seth nearby. Being around Nephthys and seeing more of her strange relationship with Seth had only made Horus' hackles rise higher.

She wasted what was offered to her so freely. It was embarrassing and pathetic. Yet another god of his parents' generation who'd been foolish. Seth was a powerful and attractive god who was well-respected before Osiris' death. *If Seth had courted me, I'd…*

He paused in the hallway he was in, gazing ahead in confusion. Thankfully, no one was around to notice him acting odd. *Seth courting me? Ridiculous.* Horus was the son of Seth's enemies. Horus had played around in fantasies before, but this was something entirely different. *If Seth courted me, Mother would have killed him.* He shook his head. *And I suppose Father would have killed* me.

He walked back to Seth's room, thinking absently of maybes and what might have beens. A world where Horus and Seth weren't enemies in a cautious, temporary truce of sorts. Where they didn't have so much pain between them. Where Horus might have courted *Seth,* like he'd thought for a moment after their first night together. Where Horus didn't wonder if he should be punishing Seth more, somehow.

When Horus got back into Seth's room, Seth was laying on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. His headdress was on, and given he didn't glance towards or otherwise react to Horus' appearance, it seemed he was asleep.

Horus stopped by the doorway and gazed at Seth for a bit, watching the way the sunlight fell on the fine planes of Seth's body, and how Horus could trace the lines of Seth's feet with his eyes closed. *How often did Nephthys see this and take it for granted, simply because she loved Osiris of all people?* He couldn't imagine wanting to trade the sight of Seth's pleasantly muscular form, with its delicious curves and power, for *Osiris*. Horus had half a mind to move forward and remove Seth's headdress, to tug at Seth's soft hair, to gaze into those bright red eyes and feel the heat of the desert bursting at its bonds.

It made the idea of Nephthys loving Osiris when Seth was an option truly bizarre, even as Horus knew Isis loved Osiris, too. Growing up, Horus listened to his mother's stories of Isis and Osiris' romance, and thought fondly of life with them together, raising him. He'd hoped to meet a partner as loving himself, one day. And then as he'd gotten to know Osiris better, he had taken the words of one of the humans to heart: beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

"Do you always lurk in the doorway when you work?" Seth asked without moving. His hands rested on his stomach. "Usually you come bother me when you're like that." There was a resigned indifference to his tone. No tears, no pain. Just emptiness.

Horus snorted, unsurprised that Seth was only pretending at sleep. "You sound better." Leaving him alone seemingly had been the better option, though he wasn't sure how he felt wanting to make things easier for the god who'd tormented him for so much of Horus' life.

"I'm perfectly fine," Seth said, staying in bed.

Denial it is, then, Horus thought. He walked forward and stood by the bedside at an angle where he could better see Seth's face under the sha mask.

Seth cracked an eye open to glance at Horus, then shut it, leaving his mouth in a firm but neutral line. "You don't have anything with you. Did you get lost? Or lose all your work?" There was light mockery in his tone.

He's trying to bait me now. Perhaps he really is recovered. "I had servants take care of it," Horus said. He wondered at how Seth had been paying attention enough to notice that Horus

needed something when he left.

Seth didn't reply to that.

"Nephthys was lucky," Horus finally said, "to have you give yourself to her so freely." He couldn't help some of the bitterness in his tone. It was part of why he'd gloated. She'd spurned Seth, and now, when she wanted his forgiveness, she couldn't get it. *Fool.*

Seth snorted at that. "Ah yes, that would make you jealous, wouldn't it?"

"There's nothing to be jealous of," Horus replied. "She won't have you again."

Seth sighed. "No, I imagine she won't. Even if you weren't going to stop it from happening, neither of us wants it."

"You don't care for her anymore?" Horus was genuinely curious. Horus knew Seth had cared for her at least once, and Horus knew what it was like to be around the person you wanted.

Seth opened his eyes and grimaced. "I don't think I *don't* care for her at all, but… I don't want her in the same way I used to, yes. Regardless of whether or not I pushed her into it… What was between us, even if it was entirely imagined on my part, is gone. And she clearly never loved me in any meaningful way. Or even wanted me in a physical one."

Horus was half-pleased at that. Of course, Seth wasn't happy, but he was clearly trying to move on. Perhaps he only needed encouragement. Horus replied, "It's her loss."

Seth scoffed. "Ah yes, do tell me about all my good points you value so much that she's missing out on. I'm sure the man who hates me the most would know."

Baiting again. Horus frowned and put his knee on the bed to lean over Seth slightly.

Seth didn't move. He simply gazed up at Horus evenly. The air almost burned between them.

"I could detail all the ways I enjoy your body," Horus said, having to restrain himself from pulling Seth to himself. Even this was pushing it. "But that's not what you want, is it?" Horus tilted his head. "Do you want me to join in your self-pity?"

Seth scowled and pushed up, nearly stabbing Horus in the eye with the sha headdress. Seth grabbed Horus' left arm and yanked him forward, before pushing him down on the bed.

Horus could have pushed Seth off of him easily, but he simply lay back while Seth straddled him. It wasn't an uncomfortable feeling, with Seth's strong thighs around Horus' sides. Horus looked up to see Seth above him, smelling of desert heat. Horus wanted so badly to rub his hands all over Seth's skin, to coat him with Horus' scent. But he kept himself calm.

Seth glared. "No, you want something like *this,* don't you?"

Horus had to admit he hadn't expected Seth to do something like this, but he ran with it. "A trip down a different road of memories?" Horus asked. He placed his right hand on Seth's left thigh.

Seth was shaking. But he didn't move away.

"I asked what *you* wanted," Horus said. He dissolved his headdress so that Seth could see his expression fully. It left Horus barer, too, but he didn't care. There was a sharp tension in the air, and if they weren't going out to spar, then they needed to resolve it here and now. They needed all their wits about them for when Osiris came for the trial. "Unless you really want to try assaulting me again. Which won't end well."

Seth scowled. "You said Nephthys was missing out on being with me. It's almost like you *want* me to take you, to give to you what I gave to her."

Horus raised an eyebrow. "I'm not Nephthys. I want you in my own ways. And I can appreciate you in ways she clearly didn't."

"She never raped me, if that's what you're thinking of," Seth replied, clearly unimpressed with Horus' offer.

Horus snorted. "I imagine not. She never had cause to hate you the way I have."

Seth narrowed his eyes. "Yet you're not moving."

Horus smiled, liking the way Seth was focusing more and more on *Horus*, and not the useless ghosts of Seth's past. "I can move whenever I please. Besides, this lets me imagine you riding my cock to exhaustion, which isn't an unpleasant thought." Seth's ass was just touching the top of Horus' erection. There was no way he wasn't aware.

Seth's cheeks burned. He knew.

"You'd enjoy it, too," Horus said, keeping his voice lightly teasing. "I can make you forget whatever bliss you found with her."

"I've never found bliss in any of our encounters," Seth said, his anger returning. "No matter how my body reacts to you."

"You want to forget, though," Horus said. "I can tell. It's why you're pushing at me."

"I push at you because you're always in my space, refusing to back off," Seth retorted.

True, but you haven't fought back though we regularly try to hit each other with swords. "I'm not the one holding you in place," Horus said. He simply gazed up at Seth. "You haven't even moved your ass away from my dick. I don't mind, of course, but it seems like an easy way to get away from me."

Seth grimaced. But he still didn't move.

"I could make it good for you," Horus offered. "Is that what you want? Someone who appreciates you and doesn't run away into someone else's arms at the first chance? Because there's nowhere I'd rather be than here."

Seth's breath stuttered. His grip on Horus' arms tightened.

“There’s all sorts of ways to *spar* after all,” Horus noted. “If you need something to take your mind off things.” Horus didn’t know what he was doing. Perhaps he was pushing too much, or not enough. Was he being the cruel jailer? The enemy? Or did he just want even a little of what he sensed in Seth’s mind when the desert god looked at Nephthys? One last part of Seth that Horus couldn’t claim. Sex wouldn’t be the same, but if Seth *wanted* it then…

“…Fine,” Seth said, surprising Horus. Seth removed his headdress so that Horus could better see his burning cheeks and intent expression. “Distract me.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 24: Try

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth knew it was a mistake to agree to Horus' offer. But sitting atop the younger god, Seth felt strangely powerful, like it was *Seth's* choice in this, and not Horus'. Like somehow Horus wouldn't take advantage, like he always did, and like Horus had a right to, given Seth was still his prisoner. Though Maat's spell hadn't been clutching at him as of late, either because Seth was fully adjusted to it or… Seth wasn't sure.

Horus gazed up at Seth with those bright blue eyes that reminded Seth of a strong river. Eyes that could pull you in and drown you, with depths that were maybe best left unexplored. Seth had always liked rivers, and used to sleep by them, listening to the sound of birds and insects and humans working in the distance. He'd chat with Sebek, and listen to the gossip Sebek's priests picked up, to tell Isis, later. Horus' eyes were like a relic of Isis' power as a river goddess, reeling Seth into memory and doubt.

Seth could already feel Horus' half-hard cock beneath him, which pulled him back to the present. Seth almost scoffed: it was like Horus barely needed any encouragement. Perhaps if not for the history between them, Seth would feel flattered. But it just felt like whatever this was would devolve into Horus' usual tortuous sex affair. Seth knew Horus could be delicate if he wished: the way Horus moved with the sword was focused and pointed. But Horus in bed was brutal and demanding. He couldn't be anything else.

Dare Seth trust otherwise, with this more thoughtful Horus? *Or am I just assuming there's nothing better to do and I can't fall asleep because I've got Nephthys' words on my mind and Horus would at least keep me from running over them again and again?* He'd also gotten so used to watching Horus demonstrate his techniques during their sparring that he was almost wondering if there was something Horus hadn't shown before. Something not animalistic or ruining. Physically pleasurable, sure, Seth's body always reacted him, but enjoyable? *I don't know about that.*

Horus reached out with his right hand to Seth's left knee, but when his fingers touched skin, Seth flinched back a little. Horus lowered his hand, simply gazing up at Seth.

Seth snorted, knowing this was off to an excellent start. "Is this supposed to make me feel better? You just lay there and do nothing?"

"If that's what makes you comfortable," Horus replied, gazing back steadily. "Is it distracting enough?"

Seth glared at him. "You're not funny."

“What do you want me to do?” Horus raised an eyebrow. “Do you want me to be a monster to you, so I can be the *worse* monster, and bring you some comfort in your own lesser monstrousness?”

Seth swallowed, annoyed that Horus saw right through him. “No. I just…” He breathed in. “Maybe. I don’t know.” He looked down at Horus’ hands. He wasn’t afraid of them. He refused to be. “Just touch me. Do whatever.” His cheeks burned as he said it. *I can’t believe I’m telling him to. But I also just want it over, to move to the next terrible thing in my life.* He ignored the fact that *he* was the one to bring Horus down to the bed.

“You practically let me defeat you.”

Horus’ words from what seemed so long ago now sent chills through Seth. Was this just more self-destruction? And should he stop it? Or just… accept its inevitability? He didn’t think he could experience anything good anymore, anyway.

Horus waited a moment before reaching out again, gently caressing Seth’s knee.

Seth breathed in deeply, waiting for things to turn bad.

Horus’ left hand rose and did the same to Seth’s right knee. The touches were gentle and slow, nearly ticklish. Horus’ right hand moved back, then, slipping under Seth’s shendyt, to Seth’s thigh, touching the softer skin there.

Seth shivered, a little unnerved by Horus moving under the cloth, but Seth didn’t run away. He wouldn’t. He *could* if he wanted to. But he wouldn’t. If Horus thought he could make this *good*, he’d have to prove it. Seth hadn’t minded sex once, at least with Nephthys. He’d even liked it. But after the discovery of her betrayal, it just became empty pleasure, one he stopped taking part in. His body reacted, and that didn’t mean anything.

Horus’ left hand slipped under Seth’s shendyt as well, cupping Seth’s right thigh and lightly squeezing. “You’re really tense.”

Seth rolled his eyes. “And why do you think that is? You feeling me up is hardly new.” He knew what to expect already.

Horus didn’t reach for Seth’s dick. Instead, he gently massaged Seth’s thighs, back and forth, back and forth, in a way that was strangely lulling. “Remove your shendyt for me.”

Seth sighed, thinking, *Of course*, and took it off, leaving himself bared. It’s not like Horus hadn’t seen Seth’s nude form before. But Horus seemingly ignored Seth’s cock and focused on moving his fingers over Seth’s thighs, touching all the spots he could reach, even poking his fingers lightly behind Seth’s knees in an odd pinching way. It felt almost curious, like Horus was just exploring him.

“Turn around,” Horus finally said, almost startling Seth after lulling him into a near doze with the movements, “and bring your ass to my neck.”

Seth frowned, deeply confused by this. “What?”

“What, you don’t want to sit on my face?” Horus asked with a smile. “I feel like that’d make you happy.”

The image that popped into Seth’s head from that was ridiculous and made Seth want to cover his face in embarrassment. *Is that what he thinks I'm missing?* The idea was ridiculous. But he could see an almost *challenge* in Horus’ eyes, as if Seth wasn’t even capable of it, and Seth wouldn’t take that. “I… Fine!” *If you want me to sit on your face so badly, whatever!* He pushed up, noting that Horus’ fingers let him go. Then Seth turned and moved back until Horus’ nose brushed Seth’s butt. “There!”

Despite the way he sounded, he didn’t feel like he’d won anything. But he’d moved, anyway. Horus had commented enough about Seth’s ass, that Seth assumed he enjoyed the view.

Horus sighed, making Seth shiver as it hit his ass. Horus reached out grabbed Seth’s hips, pulling him backward, and slightly pulling his legs apart.

Seth’s face burned when Horus’ lips touch Seth’s hole. There wasn’t any biting, just gentle sucking that made Seth shiver all over. But Horus held him in place. When Horus’ tongue teased its way inside Seth’s body, Seth grabbed his left arm with his right, and breathed in deeply. He’d done this for Nephthys before, but it was a whole different story when *Horus* did it to *him.* Invasive and intimidating but… something else, too.

Horus’ tongue pushed its way in deeper, making Seth gasp. It felt like burning, but not unpleasant. And Horus just kept moving his tongue happily.

Despite the fact that all of Seth’s nerve endings felt like they were on fire, Seth knew if he moved in a particular way, he could probably crush Horus’ face. It’d be a weird way to try to kill the younger god, but it was doable. Seth didn’t particularly feel like trying it, but it was a weird way for him to feel in control, even as Horus pulled Seth closer to get that awful tongue deeper. And Seth realized he was automatically pressing back on it. The sounds Horus was making as he worked made Seth’s face burn even hotter, and he ducked his head, as if someone was watching them.

Eventually, Horus pulled away and said, “Turn around again.” His voice was breathy. “I want you to ride my cock.”

During Horus’ ministrations, Seth had gone into some strange shaky place of pleasure-shock, and was so used to taking Horus’ orders at this point that he simply nodded and moved forward. His ass felt sloppy, even now, and Horus hadn’t even fucked him properly yet. He turned himself around, and his eyes widened at the sight of Horus’ face.

Horus’ eyes were dazed, and he was sweating. Saliva dripped from his mouth. His blue eyes burned, and he grinned at Seth. “You taste good.”

Seth looked away and carefully moved himself. He knew Horus’ cock had been getting harder while Horus worked, and Seth easily bumped into it.

He was treated to the sight of Horus grunting.

Seth smirked at that, and rubbed his ass against Horus' cock, knowing it probably hurt a lot at this point.

Horus breathed in deeply, and glared at Seth, but didn't say anything, watching as Seth stroked his ass along Horus' shaft.

Seth grimaced as he realized what he was doing. What, was he enjoying this or something? *Well yes, but…* He shook his head and lifted himself up, carefully lowering himself down over Horus' cock. He grunted as it breached him, that cock so much bigger than Horus' tongue. He was used to it at this point, after all the times Horus had fucked him, but it was still an adjustment.

"Take it slowly," Horus said, his fingers rubbing Seth's knees. "Take as long as you need."

Seth breathed in shakily, wondering if this was some kind of trap. Echoes of Osiris' words rang in his ears, but Horus expression wasn't harsh, his words weren't cutting. It wasn't deepest night, there were no drugs circulating in Seth's system. Anubis was safe and probably fucking Khnum somewhere. Nephthys was morose but off in her room again, having admitted everything. And Horus was here, speaking in a weirdly gentle word and focused on *Seth's* pleasure, not his own, with eyes like a river.

Take as long as you need.

Osiris hadn't wanted that. He'd wanted Seth to get to the part where Seth pleasured *him*. And there had been an expediency to the whole arrangement, mostly due to Osiris' impatience. Horus, meanwhile, seemed content to just lay there.

So Seth went as slow as possible, gently adjusting to Horus' girth. Part of it was he wanted to test Horus' resolve. Another was that he wasn't honestly sure *what* he, himself, wanted more: fast or slow. Slow seemed easier, anyway, though Seth was actually losing his patience. Eventually, he let himself fall the rest of the way, spearing himself with a gasp on Horus' cock, and half falling forward over Horus' chest.

Horus reached out and lightly grasped Seth's arms, holding him in place. "Just breathe, Seth. Breathe."

Seth felt his heart racing. He'd pushed himself down onto Horus, and now the younger god was what… comforting him? But Horus didn't shove him back or mock him. He just let Seth rest there, like they had all the time in the world for anything. It was bizarre. Eventually, Seth pushed himself back up, wincing at the feel of Horus' cock in his ass. It was so *big* and just… *there*.

"Show me what pace you like," Horus said, his expression dark and heated.

Again it's on me. What about you? "I thought you were supposed to be distracting *me*," Seth said with a glare. "It feels like I'm doing all the work."

"Is this not distracting?" Horus asked, almost innocently.

Seth almost said, *From what?* But he knew then he'd been caught in a trap. Frustrated, he focused on lifting himself up slowly and moving down, testing how it felt with Horus' cock in his ass. He realized it'd be annoying to lose the thing and have to get it back inside himself, so the process required learning some careful movements that meant it didn't fall out, and more so that Seth could more easily move up and down on it.

Horus seemed perfectly content letting Seth go, or at least he was saving any criticisms for later. Seth supposed this all meant Horus had little to do, so what was there to complain about?

That annoyed Seth, and he began moving up and down harder, wanting to feel Horus struggling more.

Horus made a soft grunt, and his right leg twitched. But he kept himself largely still. His right hand moved to Seth's left knee on one drop, and Horus squeezed Seth's knee, but otherwise, he made no response.

Seth found an angle that made his insides light up whenever Seth dropped down and focused on repeating the motion.

"You're beautiful like this," Horus said, clearly pleased. "Spread over my lap like a painting. Working yourself up and down on my cock."

Seth's face burned. *There's the mockery.* Thought the tone was more neutral than usual. Horus just seemed generally pleased.

Horus rubbed Seth's knee again. "Do you like it when I rub your cock?"

Seth swallowed. *Is he asking so he knows how to toy with me?* But Horus didn't move. He just kept his hand on Seth's knee, leaving Seth's hard cock alone. Seth couldn't focus enough to deal with himself, and was mostly trying to reach his release moving up and down on Horus' dick, so Seth wasn't sure how to answer.

"I think you'll get where you want eventually," Horus said, his voice calm and strangely patient. "But if you want help, just ask." And then he just lay there.

It was *infuriating.* Seth glared. "Put your hands to use, then!"

Horus' eyes widened, but he reached out and gently wrapped his fingers around Seth's cock, as if Seth was some delicate flower.

Seth was so hard that he cried out at the touch, hunching half over and stopping his movements over Horus' cock.

Horus' fingers didn't move. They just carefully rested around Seth's dick, waiting.

Seth got control of his breathing back and sat back up, gazing down at Horus' left hand. Horus could do a lot of damage with that hand.

Horus moved his thumb, rubbing it around the cockhead, making Seth groan, even as he tried to get back into his rhythm. “That’s good, Seth. Just like that. Let yourself go.”

Seth was confused by the words and fell hard, hitting that spot inside himself in a way that sent sparks racing through him, combining with a gentle squeeze from Horus’ hand, and then Seth came hard.

Horus grunted and came inside Seth’s ass, filling Seth up with his seed.

Seth leaned forward, gasping. But he was strangely exhausted by his careful maneuvering earlier, trying to fight himself *and* Horus, so he couldn’t move much. He was used to the filling feeling, so he could ignore it. He let the pleasure of his orgasm fill him up, too.

In his distraction, he spotted Horus’ expression, and saw that Horus’ eyes were shut too, and he was breathing quickly. He wore a slight smile.

I did that to him, Seth thought. Somehow, it made something in his heart warm. Horus had never been afraid to show how much pleasure he got out of Seth.

Horus’ eyes peeked open a little, showing those deep blue eyes again. His smile widened.

Seth shook himself. *Nonsense.* He shut his eyes, and let his orgasm move through him.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 25: Fairy tales

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

Horus opened his eyes to see the ceiling of Seth's room covered in late morning sunshine. He'd been spacing out a bit after his orgasm, saw Seth fall asleep, and followed right after. He couldn't recall being that relaxed in a long while, and he couldn't even remember dreaming.

He looked to his right to see Seth laying on his arm. Seth had his eyes shut and was facing Horus, his expression calm. His long red hair was a bit of a mess, in an attractive way as usual, and his limbs were curled around him, but he hadn't moved off Horus.

Horus wasn't sure whether he should free his arm, pull Seth over, or just sit and do nothing. So he opted for the last, drinking in the sight of Seth voluntarily being so close. Horus wasn't sure what he felt staring at Seth looking so comfortable. Seth wasn't yelling or fighting him. Just relaxing. Like he didn't want to move. And *Horus* had done that.

Horus' chest was hot. He wondered, *Am I happy?* Happiness for him usually meant Seth suffering at his hands. It meant control, tears, desperation, and the realization that Horus' will was law. Yes, Seth was voluntarily doing what he was doing now, because of things Horus had done that somehow made him feel comfortable enough to be like this, but Horus wasn't sure if he could trust feeling accomplished. Could Horus do it again, or would he fall back into bad habits?

He found… that he wanted to do this again. He wanted to show just how good he could make Seth feel. It was a kind of victory, too: showing Seth that Horus was the better option. Far more so than *Nephthys*, and certainly than Osiris. If Horus was to stand in the shadows of others, than he would *burn* as bright as the sun. And his reward would be Seth against him, crying in ecstasy, not pain or hatred.

Horus wondered if Seth would allow this again, or was it only possible because of Seth's moment of weakness after facing Nephthys? Horus had felt so powerful when Seth just… *listened* and let Horus do his work. When they were working together, not against each other. He knew Seth was still wary, still angry, but it was *pleasurable.* They'd both enjoyed it, and not just physically. There'd been no trap waiting for either of them, even if now Horus wasn't sure about it all.

Is it meant to be like that? Horus wondered. Nephthys had spent her entire marriage to Seth lying to him after all, so it wasn't like Seth's previous relationship hadn't been without tension, at least on one side. And Osiris had lied to Isis for much of their relationship. Maybe an undercurrent of *something* wasn't abnormal, or at least being wary of it. After all, Seth had

lived for thousands of years, many of which Horus didn't know about. And Horus wanted to learn about them, too, with Isis' regrets, Osiris' rage, and Anubis' bitterness.

I want him at my side for more than just sex, Horus thought, gazing at Seth as the warmth continued to fill him. And the discovery humbled him. Isis had talked to Horus a number of times about finding a true partner, and the wonder of it. The last time, it was still some years before they came to Heliopolis, and they'd been sitting together in one of her temples, watching the humans work. Isis' eyes were on humans who were laughing together, clearly enjoying themselves. "You might not find someone, Horus, but… if you do, make sure it's someone who will stick by you. Someone who supports you in difficult times, and whom you can support in turn." She gave him a fierce look, her gaze burning into him, letting him know this was important. "And never betray them. Betrayers like that are the worst."

Horus frowned, but kept listening, unsure where she was going with this. She seemed to be thinking of something specific. Horus had never trifled with humans in such a fashion, and he'd never betrayed Isis.

Isis sighed and looked away. She looked strangely tired. "If you have problems with them… talk to them about it. Let them know." She breathed in deeply. "Honesty is an important part of those kinds of relationships." She looked at him worriedly. "And maybe… maybe they'll break your heart, too. But I hope it doesn't come to that."

"Mother, is something wrong with Father…?" After all, there was only one partner for Isis.

Isis shook her head, but she wouldn't meet his gaze. "I just know that, like the day my siblings and I stopped following our parents around, one day you will do the same. And I realize… I have no idea what that future of yours will look like." She sighed. "But I hope you get to have it, even with Seth's damn followers chasing us... And I hope it's a happy one." She smiled at him. "And that I'll be here if you need me, too."

Horus stared down at Seth and imagined Isis would only have more harsh words to say about *this* situation. She'd been shocked by Horus' comments about wanting Seth for his own, and his refusal to back down from it. But what if it was a more regular thing? If Horus and Seth started officially sharing quarters? If Horus had Seth at his side during official functions, and even took Seth's counsel? Was her newfound allyship with Seth still too fragile, under so many years of Seth's cruelties? Or could Horus trust her to stay by *his* side, still?

Seth stirred and his eyes slowly blinked open, looking blearily at Horus.

Horus gazed back, unsure of what to say. Partly it was because Seth was just… beautiful. And Horus didn't know how to express that in the moment. He could only stare, spellbound. It seemed like the desert stretched out beside him, reaching into the horizon. Burning and unforgiving, threatening to swallow everything whole.

Seth grimaced and rolled away, and he was almost no more than a man again, probably annoyed to discover he'd been cuddling Horus.

Horus almost laughed, but he knew it would only anger Seth. "Was it bad, then?" Horus asked, instead. He'd said he'd make it good, and he thought Seth enjoyed it, but if he was

wrong…

“No,” Seth said, quietly. “No, it was fine.”

Horus breathed in, glad. “Good.” He would have appreciated better praise, but he went with what he could get. “You seemed to sleep well.” If Seth had nightmares, they would have woken Horus.

Seth made a vaguely agreeing noise, but didn’t turn back to him.

“I enjoyed it,” Horus said. “It was nice. The way you felt. Seeing *you* enjoy it.” Horus knew that part of Seth’s insecurity lay in how he had potentially unknowingly treated Nephthys cruelly. This was not true, of course, but perhaps all Seth needed was reassurance that *Horus* had enjoyed it…

“You always enjoy it,” Seth said, dismissively.

Horus frowned. He knew that was true, but still. It was *different* this time. Horus’ eyes traced the line of Seth’s back, down to his ass, already free of the marks Horus had made crushing them together. Horus didn’t know if he’d left handprints on Seth’s hips before, because there was nothing there now, but it seemed like he would have, with the way he’d been holding the older god. Horus realized he wanted a way to show that Seth was *his*. Something that would get Nephthys to know her place. One day of pleasure wouldn’t change that, any more than their months together had changed it. *I want her out of your mind so you can focus solely on me.*

“Osiris never cared how I felt,” Seth said, quietly.

Horus’ eyes widened, surprised at the topic change.

“He just did whatever he wanted,” Seth continued. “I had to beg him to slow down, and he didn’t listen anyway.” His back was tense, likely because he was remembering.

Or does he fear my mockery? Horus wondered. “It’s always his way, with no care for anyone else.” Horus wondered if Osiris had ever truly listened to Isis. Osiris had certainly never listened to her much in the time before the battle with Seth. And he’d never listened to anyone else, let alone Horus. “He’s a bull-headed moron.”

Seth made a noise, and Horus was surprised to realize the older god was *laughing*. “Yes. He is.”

Horus smiled.

“When Isis ran from me,” Seth said, “I thought… I thought I was wrong. For just a moment, even after everything Osiris did… I thought I was wrong.” There was fear in his voice. Uncertainty. “Everyone loved him so much. I did, too, once. Maybe I just… Even after everything, somehow, I thought *I* was the one who was wrong.”

Horus grimaced, disliking that, but finding it strangely relatable. “The first time Osiris and I sparred, he broke my arm.”

Seth looked over his shoulder in surprise.

Horus met his gaze unflinchingly. “I went to my mother to cry. She healed it and said… it would make me a better warrior. That I had to work hard, so that I could face you, one day. Because you wouldn’t let me run away with just a broken arm.”

Seth grimaced. “Isis never treated Anubis that way.”

Of course she didn’t, Horus thought with irritation, *he’s Anubis and everyone loves him. He was never on the run, with his life at risk.* “Things were different. She loves me. I know that. She always has. But fleeing Heliopolis and losing Osiris changed her.” Horus sighed and turned his head back so that he could stare at the ceiling. “I never spoke to her about Osiris being harsh again. I’d go to her to heal my injuries, or just work through them. If Osiris was harsh, clearly he was just being an example of what I should strive for. And if I continued to find fault in him… I kept it to myself.”

“That’s unfair to you,” Seth said, sounding irritated. “Even Anubis criticized me sometimes when he was young. And he could always go to Nephthys. She was more sympathetic to him.”

I think even he felt stifled at times, Horus thought. But Horus also didn’t want to speak up about Anubis. “Sometimes I thought Isis’ most human aspect was that she seemed to worship Osiris. And given how little we had when we were on the run, with few enough friends or shelter, I didn’t want to take that last thing from her.”

Seth scoffed, clearly disagreeing. “It was probably for the best, I suppose. I doubt she’d have listened. Osiris was a good liar.”

Horus smiled. “It’s nice to talk about it now.” All those years of pent-up feelings, and he could say them freely, without judgment. “All those years I spent working to get revenge for him, and now that it’s done… I don’t care anymore. He and I are done.” Horus had thought he’d feel pain at it, but he’d dismissed thoughts of a good relationship with Osiris years ago. They were simply coworkers in a conspiracy. And now that Osiris showed even more of his true colors, Horus would have nothing to do with him, other than to crush him if he came after Seth again.

“You and Anubis deserved better fathers,” Seth commented.

Horus shrugged. “Was Geb so wonderful?”

“…He slept a lot,” Seth replied. “He and Nut were often busy with their duties or each other. And then there was the war. And then we had Egypt to look after. I don’t know that he got much time to be a father, honestly.”

“Is that how you excuse his faults?” Horus asked, turning to look at Seth’s back, so he saw Seth sigh. “That he was simply busy? He’s a god, he had forever to be busy with you, as well. Perhaps that’s where Osiris learned his own parenting.”

“Maybe Osiris learned something from him,” Seth said, “But no, I never thought about it much. Mother and Father went through so much just to have us be born that I suppose it never occurred to me to think about it that way. And we’re gods, so why did it matter?”

“But you tried to be a good father to Anubis,” Horus said. “You thought he deserved more for some reason.”

“…I wanted him to have an easier time than we did,” Seth said. “I wanted to be someone deserving of his affection.” He looked over his shoulder again, so Horus could see some of his red eye. “Just like you deserved a father worthy of yours.”

Horus felt his throat thicken at that. Seth of all people felt that Horus deserved better than he’d gotten as a child. He knew Seth was trying to stop Horus from turning into Osiris or something, but… this was different, somehow. It was true that Seth had been a prime reason Horus had suffered in his childhood, but still… *What would things have been like if I had grown up here, around him?*

“I can only imagine how terrible he was as a father and a teacher,” Seth said as he looked ahead again. “If he felt something should be done, he just *did* it, regardless of whether or not it was right. And Isis still trusted him for the most part.” He sighed. “A lot about your actions makes unfortunate sense.”

Horus grimaced. He supposed that was fair.

“But you care about my feelings, too,” Seth said, surprising Horus. “That’s something your father never did.”

Horus smiled. “I learned from Isis, too, I think.” Perhaps all his good traits, what few he had, were from her.”

“Yes. And perhaps not all the faults you found in your parents were with Osiris.” Seth sat up and looked down at Horus, who gazed up at him, confused. “And perhaps you fought against them both in your own way.”

Horus frowned. “I honored Isis.”

Seth moved over and pressed against Horus’ right side as he reached out and placed gentle fingers over Horus’ face, circling Horus’ eyes. His touch was soft and curious. “You have her gaze.”

Horus didn’t move. If Seth tried to attack him like this, Horus could stop him. And he was surprised at how bold Seth was being.

“If you’re their vengeance,” Seth said, gently petting the soft patch under Horus’ eyes, “perhaps you’re going to end both their failures. Not just in stopping me, but also failing you, and any gods who come after you. And maybe in the doing you’ll bring in a new age that’s your own.”

“With you at my side to show me where I’m going wrong?” Horus asked. Horus’ right hand want around Seth’s legs to rest against Seth’s side. He was needy, but he felt it was warranted. He had planned to undo the mess those before him left behind, but it was strange to hear the thoughtful hope in Seth’s words.

Seth snorted, but there was a soft smile on his face. Something almost like fondness. “Perhaps. It’s hard for me to be worse than Osiris at this point, at least when it comes to advice.”

“I’m already far more open with you than I ever was with him,” Horus said. “He never cared for my opinions. He barely even wanted to be around me and saw that as a chore.” He gazed up into Seth’s concerned gaze. “Don’t you? You wouldn’t be at my side if not for Maat’s spell.”

“…I do see this as a duty,” Seth said, his words honest and firm. “If I were given the option, I don’t know for certain that I’d be at your side.”

Horus refused to let himself be unhappy about that. He’d intended to trap Seth from the beginning, and now Seth *was* trapped. It made sense.

“But,” Seth said, making Horus perk up, “recall that I *chose* to stay. And being with you is not a chore. It’s a learning experience. A truly enlightening one.” He smiled. “I would have drowned in my own self-pity if not for you.”

Horus smiled, grateful Seth was being so charitable. “So I can be useful for something.”

“You can be useful for a lot of things,” Seth corrected him, surprising Horus. “You’re a capable god, and you can accomplish much when you don’t focus purely on revenge and your urges. And you have your own wisdom, too.”

Horus studied Seth’s red eyes, the fine lines of his face.

“It’s because of you that Anubis ascended,” Seth said. “It’s because of you that Isis has accepted the truth. It’s because of you that I’m not drowning in wine and incense. That Nephthys came out of her cell.” He breathed in deeply. “I care about what you have to say. Not just because it controls my life and the lives of so many others, but also because there is a power in your thoughts and opinions to change things for the better.” He leaned down. “And if I stay around you, maybe I’ll learn how to be like that, too.”

Horus’ eyes widened, even as Seth dropped down to place his lips against Horus’. The kiss was hesitant, but Seth stayed in place. Horus’ heart raced.

When Seth finally pulled back to break the kiss, his eyes were heated.

Horus studied Seth for a moment, before pushing him back onto the bed. Horus moved over him and leaned down to kiss him again. Horus’ left hand buried itself in Seth’s hair to cup the older god’s head. Their legs tangled together. Horus’ right hand clasped Seth’s left, pressing him into the bed.

Seth made a noise that Horus swallowed, but didn’t try to get away.

When Horus finally broke the kiss, he leaned down and pressed their foreheads together. “Then we’ll learn together.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 26: Ownership

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Things were quieter in Heliopolis for a few days, and Seth spent most of it sleeping, for what felt like the first time in ages. Horus was focused on catching up on administrative tasks in the palace now that he was back, and his secretaries were happy to keep him busy. He'd been able to accomplish much even while he was away, but now he could do more, and it kept him occupied once dealing with Nephthys was out of the way, and they awaited the return of Isis and Maat.

Seth often stayed on the bed while Horus worked at his desk, or exercised in the free space. It was still confinement, after a fashion, but he was able to sit on the window and look out at the city and wonder where he would even go if he *could* leave. Anubis was in the palace, as was Nephthys, and Osiris could be lurking anywhere.

It's better to stay here, Seth thought with a glance back at Horus, who was reading a papyrus scroll. *I can keep an eye on things.* Horus had made himself even more at home in the room, and Seth had simply come to accept it. It meant the place felt less like where Seth went to mope during his reign, and more like a shared space that Horus sometimes dominated, but familiar enough that Seth could take up his own part of it without suffocation. It was a tender balance, but a good one.

Anubis checked in every day, multiple times, letting Seth know he was fine, Osiris hadn't come to take Anubis over, and Anubis was still making progress learning to use his abilities. Khnum was ever at his side, usually a smiling presence who stuck to Anubis like a burr. Anubis would sometimes glare at Horus, but they mostly kept things civil.

"Mother is talking," Anubis said one day as Seth sat on the steps of Horus' throne while Horus talked with some of his secretaries. The official audience had been dismissed, leaving the hall empty, so Anubis was better able to talk without being overheard.

It was late afternoon, and sunlight poured into the area. Horus had started keeping Seth at his side during audiences, which initially alarmed the public, but at Horus' insistence on getting audiences done now that he was returned, people settled into the routine, and most just ignored Seth. Seth imagined most of them enjoyed the fact that Seth was almost always a step below Horus, or usually behind his throne. It made it seem more obvious who was in charge, and who had lost their trial.

Anubis had come in after the audience was dismissed, to catch Seth before Seth and Horus retired for the evening. Now Anubis' expression was worried. "Mother mostly apologizes or talks about raising me… but she's *talking*. More than she's done in years."

Seth nodded slowly. It made sense, now that Nephthys was out of her cell and Horus had been pushy about her speaking up. With all the years of Nephthys lying to Anubis about his parentage, it made sense that she'd be doing her usual routine of groveling for forgiveness.

"During your reign, I begged her to leave with me so many times," Anubis said, gazing into the distance. His jackal mask made him look more severe. "And she always said no, because she had to 'make up for your crimes' or something."

Seth sighed and realized at some point his opinion of Nephthys had drastically lost its golden luster. He would likely always love her, but… he was just *tired*. While he'd been punishing himself for his failure to stop Osiris from going as far as Osiris had, and for hurting Isis and maybe Nephthys, too, Nephthys had been punishing *herself*. She'd said to Seth in the past it was to make up for Seth's crimes, since he was her husband… but did it really matter to *Seth?* It just felt like another burden of his to bear, as if it was his fault she suffered in this particular way. But he'd broken their marriage the first time he saw her after dealing with Osiris. *I wasn't the one who told her to sit in a cell for hundreds of years,* he reminded himself. *And I wasn't the one who forced her to make that deal with Osiris. Or to lie to me.*

"You won't see her?" Anubis asked. There was a mix of hope and resignation in his voice. Anubis didn't bring it up in their conversations, but he was still clearly a son who missed easier times with his parents.

Seth felt like he was letting Anubis down, but still shook his head. "Nothing would be accomplished by that. I still have nothing to say to her." When he saw Anubis' expression grow sadder, Seth said, "I know you want us to get along, but… that just doesn't seem to be something that will happen." He sighed. "We've hurt each other too much. Confessing to what happened, fully, won't return things to the way they were."

"I know," Anubis said, still looking a bit glum. "I don't expect them to go back to how they were. Though I am glad she's talking." He smiled bitterly at that. "I would have liked to have known the truth sooner, though."

Seth grimaced, recalling his many regrets in that department.

"Though it's interesting to know that you at least joined together in a way to keep it secret," Anubis said, raising an eyebrow at Seth.

"…We didn't," Seth said with a frown. "I think we both assumed one of us would say something, but I guess neither of us did." He was honestly surprised with Nephthys' continued silence on the subject over the years. Part of the reason he'd drowned himself in liquor and incense was his fear that one day Nephthys would say something, and Anubis would be done with him. But it never happened. Then Seth tried to work up the courage to just *say it* himself. But that never happened, either. So they lived in an unofficial stalemate, both too cowardly to move forward with their lives, or to help their son caught in the middle. *If I'm disgusted with anyone,* he thought, *it's myself.* He lowered his head. "I'm sorry, Anubis. We should have told you."

Anubis sighed and said, "It's done. And I can't say I'm averse to the both of you at least talking to me properly again. Even under these circumstances."

We did stonewall him a bit, Seth thought. *Even beyond our own drama.* “You were always talking to her during my reign, though. What did you talk about?”

“Mostly I talked to myself,” Anubis said with a grimace of his own. “Or at least that’s how it felt. I knew she was listening, but she didn’t say much, other than to mind *you*, because you were my father, and to focus on my training.”

Still better than physical abuse, Seth thought grimly. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize she wasn’t talking to you, either.” He had hoped Anubis at least had some respite in his mother over the years, even if she’d lied. He hadn’t realized even that was gone. It made him feel more bitter about his *own* actions.

Anubis shrugged. “Enough with the apologies. What’s done is done.” Anubis gazed up at Horus, who was listening to a secretary say something. Anubis’ expression bent in distaste. “I’m surprised he brings you out here. I would imagine he’d hole you up in his rooms.”

“He likes it when he can keep an eye on me,” Seth said, though he knew it would only make Anubis more annoyed. “I think it keeps him calmer.”

Anubis scoffed. “What, is he a child with a special toy rather than an adult attempting to rule a kingdom?”

Khnum stepped forward and placed a gentle hand on Anubis’ left shoulder, making Anubis’ expression soften.

“Having your mother at my side used to calm me,” Seth said, his gaze resting only briefly on Khnum’s fingers before returning to Anubis’ face. “Gods enjoy the company of others to some extent. It’s relaxing. And if it keeps him focused, then I’m all for it.”

“You’re not his spouse,” Anubis said, still annoyed.

Seth scoffed. “Hardly. But we’re working together, and that’s what matters.” Horus *was* a lot calmer lately, now that Seth wasn’t actively fighting him as much. Horus didn’t go into rages. He certainly wasn’t whispering sweet nothings to Seth or treating Seth in the way Seth had treated Nephthys when things were good, but Seth didn’t expect that, and things were still *better*. *And not just him trying to convince me he’s the better partner,* Seth thought.

Anubis sighed in frustration.

Seth smiled and pressed his right hand to Anubis’ arm, “Just leave it be, Anubis. I’m handling it. But thank you for worrying about me.” When he let go, he added, “I’ll consider visiting Nephthys. If she’s comfortable with it.” He imagined she wouldn’t be, which would at least solve that issue. But he could make the attempt, anyway. He felt he was in a little better shape to.

Anubis smiled and said, “Okay.”

Horus finished talking with the secretaries and stood, walking down from the throne and up to Seth. He glanced at Anubis, who glared. Then Horus looked at Seth and said, “Come,”

before walking away.

Seth nodded to Anubis, who frowned, but nodded back. Then Seth followed Horus, only a half-step behind. He imagined Anubis would have more to say about this later, but it was Seth's duty.

I'll have a lot to talk with Isis about when she gets back, Seth thought glumly.

What Seth didn't expect was when, halfway to Seth's chambers, Horus pulled him into a storeroom and shut the door behind them. It was dark inside, but they could both see just fine with night vision. Horus pressed Seth up against a wall and pressed his nose to Seth's collarbone. His body hot as usual, and his grip on Seth's right arm was tight. His left arm pressed against the wall over Seth's shoulder. He left no room for Seth to escape. "I heard you talking with Anubis, and it made me itch the entire time." His voice was a mix of annoyance and lust.

Seth breathed in deeply and said, "I'm not going to stop talking to him. If you can't handle that, you're going to have to get over it."

Horus breathed against Seth's shoulder and pressed himself more against Seth's body. "I didn't care that you were talking to him. But I couldn't focus beyond the idea of you on my lap on the throne."

Seth wanted to roll his eyes at the old fantasy Horus had spoken of in the past. He was glad at least that Horus had never acted on it. But now he could feel how hard Horus was. *At least he pulled us into a storeroom so no one else could see,* Seth thought. *And at least it's not Anubis that's annoyed him.*

Horus opened his mouth and lightly pressed his teeth against Seth's skin, not biting, but keeping the threat there.

Seth reached out and cupped Horus' crotch, making the younger god hiss. But Seth wasn't going to be bullied. "Are you just going to threaten me? You getting horny at the turn of a phrase isn't my problem." Seth squeezed his hand lightly, making Horus wheeze a little. "Maybe what you lack is better focus."

Horus didn't bite down, but he moved his lips and pulled back to gaze into Seth's eyes. "Maybe you should read me my reports, then. I'll focus on them that way." There was challenge in his words. Nothing soft and gentle. Not quite a threat, either. Something in the middle.

Seth didn't think he wanted soft and gentle right now. The conversation with Anubis had frustrated him more than he thought, and the idea of seeing Nephthys was making his heart race. He needed something to get his mind away from it. "Maybe if you stop letting Anubis distract you, I'll think about it," Seth said, keeping his gaze sharp. He also refused to let Horus take Anubis away again like that. Yes, Seth had no real power in the situation, but he'd try as hard as he could to keep Anubis now.

“He couldn’t be further from my mind,” Horus said before he leaned forward and snuffled around Seth’s left ear.

Seth breathed in deeply. “Prove it.”

“…Get rid of your shendyt.”

Seth dissolved the garment even as Horus pressed Seth back into the wall and then lifted Seth’s legs, letting Seth’s knees rest over Horus’ shoulders. His left arm supported Seth’s back to keep him from banging his head into the wall. Horus licked his finger before pushing it into Seth’s ass, squirming around in a way that made Seth grunt.

“My mother should be here tomorrow,” Horus said as he thrust in and out of Seth with his finger a bit more.

Seth was surprised to find he was pressing himself against Horus’ hand, and his cock was responding to Horus’ ministrations. He realized he was getting used to this and was growing impatient. “Good. Now fuck me before I fall asleep.” He wondered if the order would piss Horus off.

Horus snorted before pulling out his finger and returning with his cock.

Seth was loose enough from the previous evening and their past experiences that he didn’t need much stretching, and he appreciated the slight burn as Horus pressed inside him. It meant Horus was focused fully on *him* and no one else. It meant Seth was grounded in the now. They were rutting in a dark storeroom, but this wasn’t the basement. They’d have to leave eventually. And Horus was desperate for him, but not in an angry way.

“What will you say to Isis?” Horus asked as he thrust back and forth to go deeper into Seth’s ass. His big cock pushing inside and forcing Seth to use his sand to compensate a little and make the path easier. “Will you tell her about this, just like you told her about the rest?”

“*You* told her first, remember?” Seth replied, grunting at each thrust. Horus was a bully even when he wasn’t trying. But his grip kept Seth from getting bruised under the assault. “Why? Do you *want* me to talk to Isis about your fucking cock?”

“I didn’t need my cock last night to make you cry,” Horus said, grinning in the dark as he increased the pace of his thrusts, even as Seth’s face burned. “You fell apart on my fingers, remember?”

Seth was glad it was dark, and moved his body a bit so he could wrap his arms around Horus’ neck and squeeze a little. “She’ll never want to hold your hand again, knowing it’s been inside me.” He wasn’t planning on telling Isis anything even remotely like this. Just, *He’s doing better generally, and treating me fine,* or something else to placate her, as well as his view of the meeting with Nephthys, and what Anubis had reported. *I can’t believe I’d ever imagine saying nothing bad of Horus’ treatment,* he thought, nearly laughing.

“That’s true,” Horus said, his breathing fast now as well. “I’ll switch hands next time, so both are off limits.” He leaned forward and kissed Seth’s neck, shoving himself inside Seth to the

root of his cock on every thrust. He yanked Seth down each time, making Seth cry out.

“I feel like she’ll wonder about stories from the servants,” Seth said, his eyes shut as Horus pushed him towards climax. “They might find it strange you’re fucking people in storerooms.” No one had seen them come in here, but someone might walk past and hear. In the past, Seth would have been fighting to get away, but his body wanted Horus’ cock more than it ever had, and was willing to risk it.

“They already talk about me sharing your room,” Horus said as he readjusted Seth’s hips for a better angle that brought tears of pleasure to Seth’s eyes. “There’s already rumors you’re my bedmate.”

Seth knew that was inevitable, based on what Anubis had told him. With everything that had happened, it had lost its threatening power. He was curious, though, “Do they assume their blessed savior would sink so low as to rape the former wicked tyrant?” He hadn’t heard anyone making up love stories in the way priests often exaggerated the actions of the gods, and he couldn’t imagine anyone trying. But many still wanted Seth to suffer.

Horus snorted. “I think it’s a mix of things. Some say you’ve seduced me, though my work has only worked to undo the damage of your reign, so I’m not sure what the point of your seduction is.”

The idea *was* hilarious, but it left Seth curious. “Do *you* think I’ve seduced you?” He wondered if Horus ever felt that Seth was manipulating him. It’s not like Seth had yet suggested anything with policy, but Seth had made it clear he was there to help Horus improve as a god and a ruler, and he kept his eyes and ears open, listening in to conversations and reading missives when he had the patience and wasn’t resting or sparring. Sex was an easy option for manipulating Horus, and Seth couldn’t deny he was increasingly willing to use it to keep Horus from going on the warpath, at least in regard to Anubis.

“You seduced me long ago, Seth,” Horus said, pulling out entirely and shoving himself back in *hard*, in a way that made Seth toss his head back and bite his lips to avoid screaming, even as his cock spilled over Horus’ chest. “But it’s no threat to me. So I don’t care.” He continued fucking into Seth through Seth’s orgasm, chasing his own release. “Mother knows something of it, and I don’t care about the rest.”

Seth was floating a bit, trying to stay in the feeling, but had enough wherewithal to ask, “And if someone said I was your whore now? What then?” The idea made Seth cold, but he couldn’t say it was a lie. Not when Seth chose to stay on top of everything else. Not when Seth had pulled Horus into *his* bed. But a part of him remembered Horus’ threats in the past too much ignore it. At the time they’d been terrifying. Now, there was too much at stake, and that seemed the least of their problems, not when Osiris could appear and try to kill them at any time.

Horus paused, and for a while, there was only the sound of their breathing. Finally, Horus said, “I’d have them beaten for disrespecting both myself and you. I am their king, and you are my war god. What I do with you outside your duties for Egypt’s defense is my business, and not for them to speculate to my face.”

Seth laughed at that, unsure what else to say. And he didn’t know how to feel at the strange warmth in his chest for the words, *my war god.* Nephthys used to say things like that, and it made him proud. But after the revelation of her lies, it had left him feeling hollow. But Seth knew Horus cared for no one else this way, and that his obsession with Seth led him to distraction.

Horus yanked Seth close when he came, his fingers tight on Seth’s back. They were so close that Seth could feel Horus’ lungs working, and the shaking of his body.

Maybe it’s warm because it’s real, Seth thought as he shut his eyes. *Maybe being kept isn’t so bad if I know that my keeper sees all of me. And wants it all.* Because he knew Horus did. *His war god, indeed.*

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 27: Clarity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth stood behind Horus' throne as Isis and Maat entered Heliopolis amid much fanfare in the late morning. Both goddesses were carried on a litter and smiled and waved while humans in the gathered crowd cheered for them. Khnum had arranged for a group of musicians and dancers to perform during the entrance, which seemed to please Isis when she looked at them. Briefly, her eyes flitted to Seth, and he gazed back at her, impassively. But she eventually looked away, and he simply stayed where he was.

Horus sat tall in his throne, smiling softly and surveying the spectacle.

Seth had commented to Horus before this that perhaps he shouldn't be there to greet Isis and Maat, since it might look weird to both the goddesses and the public.

Horus had replied, "The court has already seen you at my side. It would be strange if you weren't there now, like I'm afraid and hiding you from Mother. You're a war hero welcoming back Isis from the front. It's fine."

Seth breathed in deeply and settled himself, knowing he needed to just get through this. It'd be over soon enough. He glanced at Anubis and Khnum, who stood behind Horus' throne on Horus' right side, and were watching the entrance, as well.

Anubis' expression was calm and unreadable, and he had his arm wrapped around Khnum's back.

Seth looked away again. *As long as they're happy,* he thought. He imagined if Horus were standing, he'd probably be all over Seth, too.

"But I couldn't focus beyond the idea of you on my lap on the throne."

Seth's cheeks burned a little at the memory of Horus' comment. *Yes, it's better that he's sitting and I'm back here,* he thought.

Thoth was a step below Horus, bristling to go to Maat's side. He'd arrived the day before and explained to Horus that Maat had already spoken to him about what was going on. He glanced at Seth thoughtfully, and then away, clearly a little embarrassed.

Seth had been *less than enthused* over wondering just what Maat had said, but hadn't brought it up. *Thoth can imagine what he wants,* Seth thought now, staring ahead. *Even if I'd told him, ick, he'd probably imagine the worst. It's not like we've ever been close.*

Eventually all the gods got into the palace properly and left the humans to clean up. The gods walked together deeper into the palace, while servants bowed to them as they passed.

“We need to speak with Nephthys,” Isis said as she walked beside Horus, her expression cooler now that no one was watching her. She wore one of her fine dresses, heavy make-up, and sparkling jewelry, and her shoulders and gaze were determined. “Osiris has been too quiet after everything. We need to move things forward quickly.”

“We could schedule the trial within the next several days,” Maat noted from behind her. The goddess looked calm as he walked, with Thoth grinning happily at her side, but there was a firm look on Maat’s face. “A message will have to be sent to Duat. I’ve drawn up a list of his alleged crimes. If we give the other gods a little time to gather, we could wrap this up relatively quickly.”

“Assuming he doesn’t fight back,” Horus remarked coolly. “And he could refuse to appear.”

“Then we’ll just go to Duat to get him,” Maat commented. “His crimes have gone beyond the protection being in Duat gives him. And I have already sent messages to some of the gods there about this. We have allies.”

Seth thought that was one of the smarter things he’d heard in a while. He was slightly behind Horus on the opposite side of Isis, which put him uncomfortably close to Thoth, who was possibly clinging to Maat to offset it.

Horus led them to a meeting room with a large table and turned to Anubis. “Would you bring Nephthys here so we can talk? I’d rather not confront her in her rooms, or order guards to fetch her.”

Seth felt that was probably a lie, given Horus didn’t seem to think highly of Nephthys, but he appreciated that Horus was trying to be courteous to some degree. *He even phrased it almost like a request rather than an order,* Seth thought, *which should hopefully keep Anubis from being too furious.*

Anubis nodded and stepped out, with Khnum following.

Horus sat at the head of the table, with Seth at his left.

Isis sat on Horus’ right while frowning at Seth.

I don’t particularly want to be here either, Seth thought, while keeping his expression neutral and gazing blankly ahead. He was *not* looking forward to being around Nephthys again. *But at least doing it a bunch of times gives me practice for the actual trial.* But he had his doubts. He was used to trying something again and again, hoping for better results, given he’d spent hundreds of years drowning himself in alcohol, drugs, and slaughter, and ignoring his family while he hunted down Isis, as if that would solve every problem he had, when it never did. *But at least it means I’m used to failing to get better,* Seth thought, bitterly.

Maat set next to Isis, with Thoth on her right side, still smiling happily.

Isis looked at Horus, “Things seem to be going smoothly here. Nothing bad has come up in my absence?”

“I would have sent you a message about it if it had,” Horus said, a bit primly, as if Isis was criticizing him.

Then again, he’s probably still annoyed at her interfering in his efforts, Seth thought, watching them both. Horus hadn’t complained much about Isis lately. He’d focused on his work and being with Seth, which *seemed* to be an improvement. *But now that Isis is here, that could change…*

“How was your trip?” Thoth asked brightly, before the mood could grow more hostile.

“Uneventful,” Maat replied. “The Greeks are fully gone, and the army is in better order, which should help better prepare us for future threats.” She called a quill and parchment from the air and began writing on it. “But we’ll have to keep building up our defenses.” She didn’t look at Seth, but he could feel her pointed remark directed at him.

It’s not like I’m in charge of that, Seth thought. *War hero or not, that’s Horus’ decision.* He glanced at Horus, who had an unreadable expression.

Isis called a servant and had them bring her materials to write on as well. They came back right before Anubis stepped in with Nephthys on his arm. Isis dismissed the servant and gave Nephthys a dark look as she sat down near Anubis, and thankfully away from Seth.

“Thank you for coming, Nephthys,” Horus said, frostily. “Now that Isis and Maat are back, we need to properly prepare for the trial of Osiris.”

Nephthys looked paler than usual still, but nodded. She didn’t glance at Seth, which Seth appreciated. He gazed forward stonily.

Maat proceeded to ask Nephthys various questions about her relationship with Osiris, somewhat mimicking Horus’ questions, but with a greater focus on individual details. Maat wrote copious notes seemingly based on Nephthys’ responses.

Seth simply gazed ahead, glad that they didn’t really have to check anything with him. Nephthys’ recounting was little different than what he’d heard before, and anything new she offered wasn’t something he needed to verify. *Maat’s scales will do a better job than I would on that,* he thought. Unfortunately that made him think even more about the upcoming trial, and it took him an effort not to squirm in his chair.

After the questioning was completed, Isis said, “I’ll send out messages tonight. Maat, you’ll send for Osiris to appear?”

Maat nodded, organizing her notes.

Nephthys looked defeated, but stayed seated, with her eyes on the table.

“Then we will break for the day,” Isis said. “We’ll need our strength for this, and we’re running out of time to catch Osiris before he does something else, if he hasn’t already made

another move."

Anubis got up and pulled Nephthys to her feet before leading her out, with Khnum behind them.

Maat and Thoth rose and departed.

Horus stood up, and Seth rose to follow, but Isis put a hand up to Seth. "Seth, stay a moment. We need to talk." She looked at Horus, who frowned at her. "Go on, Horus. I'll speak with you afterward."

Horus glanced at Seth, who shrugged. Then Horus walked out of the room.

Seth sat down properly and met Isis' thoughtful gaze. He had some idea about what she might ask, but wasn't planning to get ahead of her.

"How has Horus been?" Isis asked. "Has he returned to his old habits?"

"He's been better even than he was before we left camp," Seth replied. "And no, he hasn't done what he used to. He's focused on work, mostly." There were still more visits to closets and a bit of time in Seth's bed, but Horus was diligent in his duties when he needed to be. Seth hadn't once been dragged to that windowless room, bound, or hit outside practice sparring, and Horus rarely managed to hit him there anyway.

"He keeps you at his side in public," Isis said with a raised eyebrow. "Whose idea was that?"

"His," Seth said with a grimace. "He said he wants to make it clear he's not hiding me somewhere." While Seth could understand the notion, he knew it still worried at least some of the humans. But people were generally happy with Horus' reforms, so hopefully that was offsetting things. Seth imagined Isis saying that Seth was interfering with Horus' work and should be sent away to the sun boat, but he didn't feel they were at that point.

"And you would rather not be seen there?" Isis asked.

Seth sighed, dreading what she was getting to and how he'd deal with it. "I'd rather be sleeping. But it means I can hear what he's up to, so it's not a big deal. He seems to be managing things well. You should be proud." Really, in better circumstances, he'd probably be talking up Horus' achievements. He was a good statesman and listened well to his subjects. Diplomacy had never been Seth's strong suit, but from what Seth observed, it was Horus', at least when people who weren't his family were involved.

Isis studied her notes, and her expression softened a bit. "I *am* proud. He has it in him to be a great king. Even better than his father." She snorted. "Although that's a low bar at this point."

Seth smirked, fully agreeing. Being around Horus also highlighted the gap between them, which was reassuring on numerous fronts.

"And mentally?" Isis asked. "How has he been?"

Seth shrugged. “I think he’s still a bit conflicted about things. About what Osiris did. What you did. What I did. What *he’s* done. But he hasn’t allowed it to distract him too much. He does his duties, he’s fair to the humans and gods alike. He’s stable, in a way Osiris never was.” *Particularly since I can see under the curtain in a way I almost never did with Osiris,* Seth thought. He felt more and more that he’d failed his duties in protecting Egypt by not looking harder into Osiris’ actions and plans.

“He said he’s staying with you in your rooms,” Isis said. “In one of his letters.”

Seth’s cheeks warmed. “Really?” He regretted giving Horus his privacy in letter writing now. *What has that horny idiot been saying?*

“Is he not?” Isis asked.

“…He is. He has been since we got back here.” There was no point in lying about it.

“And what are your thoughts on that?” Isis’ voice was neutral.

Seth sighed and replied, “Evolving, maybe. Before, I found it frustrating, like he was never giving me a break. But in the wake of everything else… it’s a needed distraction. If I focus on him, I’m not focusing on Nephthys or Osiris or the damn trial.” He glanced at where Nephthys had been sitting. “It’s been good in that sense.” He wasn’t foolish enough to be unaware he was just grasping at anything that would get him out of his head. But Horus was fine with it, so did it really matter?

“But not in others?” Isis probed.

“You don’t want me to talk in detail how we spend time in bed, Isis,” Seth said with his own raised eyebrow. And he’d already shared a lot about his own thoughts on the matter.

Isis’ cheeks warmed. “If he were forcing you there, I might.”

“He’s not forcing me there,” Seth said, looking back at her with a firm expression, but grateful that his headdress made him look more confident than he felt. “I pulled *him* into it.”

Isis’ eyes widened at this. “You…? Really?”

Seth grimaced. “It was… an odd moment. I don’t know that it was the *correct* decision. But things have been peaceful because of it, I think. Or at least… they seem that way.” He didn’t know how to voice all his thoughts on the topic, or feel particularly comfortable telling them to *Isis*. But if he’d spoken to her properly before about Osiris, or even Nephthys, maybe things would have been different, so he felt like he needed to be clearer now, especially when she was so insistent. And this was Isis’ *son* they were discussing. Seth felt it was unfair to keep silent, and Horus had already apparently brought it up anyway.

“Does he have you do anything else other than keeping him company?” Isis finally asked after a bit of silence.

“We still spar,” Seth said. “And we discuss reports and his decisions. I don’t encourage him any particular way.” He was still worried she’d think he was influencing Horus on that front,

but outside making sure Horus wasn't being a tyrant, Seth largely left things alone, and given Horus didn't exercise any such tendencies that Seth could see, that meant Seth mostly just observed things. "I think he just appreciated having someone to talk to in person in your absence. Now that you're back, I imagine he'll start talking to you more." Or at least he hoped, anyway. "He's always been talkative in that sense, though…" Even back when Seth had been bound, it seemed like Horus was *always* talking.

Isis smiled a little bitterly, which surprised Seth. "He wasn't, really. He was a rather quiet child, probably because he knew he had to be."

Seth's eyes widened. He couldn't imagine Horus keeping silent on just about anything, other than his relationship with Seth before it fully came out, mostly so he could keep carrying it out. Now… Horus was *quieter* on occasion, at least when Seth observed him with others. But he was still chatty.

"That he had to pick *you* to be the one to talk to…" Isis said with an exasperated sigh. She rubbed her eyes. "Well, at least he's talking. And he's working. He's also going through work at what seems a more rapid pace than before, which seems an improvement."

Seth nodded, unsure what else to do.

"If things change, you know you can reach out to me, right?" Isis asked, quietly, gazing at him sternly.

Seth smiled softly, feeling a little warm at the friendliness, and said, "Yes. Of course." He wasn't *entirely* sure, but she'd offered, so at least he'd heard it.

Isis nodded. "I don't exactly approve of his relationship with you. After everything you've both done… It doesn't sit well with me."

Seth nodded, since it made perfect sense. He wondered if she'd put her foot down and end it then, even after everything. They could still focus on getting Horus away from being like Osiris, and Seth could still wrangle his way into staying here. But it would add more complexity to things.

He almost laughed as he thought, *As if the situation between Horus and I isn't already complex enough.*

"But it's your decision," Isis continued, surprising him. "Horus is an adult, not a child. You're an adult, and you're hardly influencing him this way." She sighed. "We'll see how it goes."

Seth simply nodded, surprised he felt a bit relieved at her comments. He frowned at that. *What, was I actually worried she'd make me leave him?* He thought. *Why? Because it makes things simpler if she doesn't?* He didn't think he was *that* lazy, but maybe he'd underestimated himself. *Clearly Horus isn't the only one who needs practice,* he thought.

"Now I need to speak to him alone," Isis said as she stood up. She gazed at him thoughtfully. "You were pale during Nephthys' interrogation. How are you feeling?"

"…Better, I think," Seth replied, embarrassed his feelings had been broadcast at all for others to see. His time with Horus had helped buffer him against it, a little, and Isis' not precisely cold reception had even helped, too. He was a mix of things he'd likely have to think about. Or sleep off.

"Good," she said, before walking out of the room.

Seth returned to his room when Isis pulled Horus aside, and then slept. He was far too weary after everything. He woke to Horus carding fingers through his hair. Horus' headdress was gone and his blue eyes gazed thoughtfully into Seth's red ones.

"Mother said she spoke to you about us," Horus said. He was clearly curious, but leaving room for Seth to explain things.

"She did," Seth said, not moving while Horus continued his ministrations. It wasn't unpleasant. "We talked."

"She said you're still choosing to stay with me." There was a little bit of hope in those words, and Seth felt… conflicted about it being there.

"I am," Seth replied. It was still the best option, and it kept him from recalling the way Thoth and Maat had watched Nephthys intently while she talked about what she'd done with Osiris, or thinking about what they must think of Seth now. It kept him from thinking about what it was going to be like to stand up in court and say all that happened to him again, and to listen to it all again from Nephthys' and perhaps even Osiris' perspective. And just generally having to see Osiris again. The thought made him feel weak and pathetic, and he hated it.

Horus leaned down and pressed his lips to Seth's.

Seth shut his eyes through the kiss, glad to be here and not screaming his head off about what was coming. Glad to know Anubis was safe somewhere in the palace with Khnum. Now that Isis was here, she would ensure that Osiris didn't get to him.

Horus' hand moved down Seth's chest. His fingers pushed beneath Seth's shendyt, teasing the base of Seth's cock.

Seth moaned a little into Horus' mouth. It was impossible to ignore the man. Isis didn't necessarily approve of it, and Seth was glad in a way because it meant he wasn't insane to have some hesitation of his own. But hesitation wasn't enough to stop him leaning up into Horus' fingers, because it felt nice, and was it bad to feel nice if it drowned out everything else? He couldn't even feel Maat's spell binding his powers when Horus was on him like this.

And Isis wasn't furious at him again. She was letting Seth make his own choices, and letting Horus make his own choices. So they chose this, for better or worse. And…

Seth pushed Horus away and looked up into his blue eyes, wondering.

Horus frowned at him, but didn't push back.

“You can see… something like the future, right?”

Horus raised an eyebrow. “Not exactly. That’s more Mother’s thing.”

“But you can see *something*, right?”

“…Yes.”

“What do you see for us? With this?”

Horus blinked. “What do you mean?”

“Do you see it ending well?” Seth never imagined a happy ending for himself, and he didn’t think that, regardless of Horus’ promises, they would be getting a happily ever after. Seth felt he was doing good here, but what if he *was* leading Horus down the wrong path, too? What if his own weakness was going to pull Horus in the wrong way? Seth was happy to let Horus guide things, but Horus relied on Seth for things, too.

Horus’ eyes widened. Then his gaze grew more distant. He was very still, which was a bit awkward given their positioning. But Seth waited. Eventually, Horus’ gaze came back, and he said, “I didn’t see much. But I don’t think you want the answer.”

Seth frowned. “Why?” He wasn’t ready to scream about people lying to him because they thought it was better or had machinations. He trusted Horus enough to know it was probably for a good reason. But it still stung a bit, and he wasn’t going to deny that.

Horus studied Seth’s gaze. “Because it will be another chain on you, whatever the answer, won’t it?”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise.

Horus pulled his left hand up and rested it on Seth’s chest, his gaze thoughtful, and a little pained. “Osiris and I have both chained you, to keep you close to us. If I tell you we end up happily, you’ll… what? Stay with me? Because that’s what I said? But you’ll doubt me forever, thinking maybe I was lying in order to keep you close, no matter how much I tell you I’m being honest. If I tell you it doesn’t end well, then what? You’ll just get affirmation that being with someone who abused you is probably a bad idea, and you’ll go back to the self-hating cycle that brought you here in the first place.”

Seth sagged back on the bed, letting Horus go. *He’s right,* Seth thought. “That sounds a bit complicated…” He didn’t envy being able to see ahead like that, even if he sometimes thought it could be helpful.

Horus smiled. “Looking into the future in any form is.”

Seth snorted, having heard those words before. “You sound just like Isis.”

“Is that a bad thing?” Horus asked, still smiling softly.

Seth gazed at Horus thoughtfully. “No, that’s not a bad thing.” He thought about how they were clearly both aware of the tenuous nature of whatever this was between them. Isis was worried and rightfully so. Seth wondered when *he’d* decided to throw off the part of him that was afraid and furious. The part that would have ripped Horus to pieces given the chance. But being here now felt like coming up for air after nearly drowning during the first match of the trial. After dealing with Osiris on that horrible night, Seth had floundered for some purpose, some reason for himself, doubting everything he understood. Helping Horus improve was a challenge to his abilities and forced him back along familiar paths. He’d trained soldiers before, he’d won wars. Winning over Horus and making him the best king he could be was just another war of its own.

Seth really didn’t see as much of Osiris in Horus as he used to. It was still there in moments: the lust, the determination, the self-assurance, even sometimes in the ways they moved. Horus and Osiris were literally different *beings*, and so there were bound to be differences, regardless of how much physically was there, and how much Horus had learned from Osiris as a teacher. Seth also hadn’t known Horus as long as Osiris even if Seth had known Horus more intimately, but Seth knew enough of them both to know that Horus was walking his own path more and more as each day passed. Or perhaps Seth was more forgiving because Horus and Seth hadn’t had a deep bond to break like Osiris and Seth had, before Horus trampled all over Seth on the wings of Seth’s own actions against Horus.

Seth and Horus had both been cruel to each other, and then decided not to be. Horus was willing to meet him in the middle, both acknowledging what they’d put each other through. They weren’t ripping apart something old: they were building something new… but Seth wasn’t sure what, exactly. Seth saw Horus as a challenge, a curiosity, and a path to getting what he wanted and protecting those he cared about. But he had to be honest, too, like they both kept insisting. There was something so fragile in the soft look on Horus’ face, and Seth felt worried about how much power *Seth* held over that fragility. Whatever Horus saw, Seth didn’t know if it had given Horus confidence or simply more worry, but if Horus couldn’t be honest about it, it was up to *Seth* to be honest.

“I don’t love you,” Seth finally said, making Horus flinch. “I don’t know that I can. Maybe I even still hate you in a way. But I need you, in a way I can’t quite explain, either. Is that really going to be enough for you?” He breathed in deeply, watching Horus’ conflicted expression. “I know you want all of me.” Horus was like a sun, hot and life-giving, but burning anything in his path, too. And Seth felt the need to be scorched clean of everything repugnant he’d done in his life, but was Horus content to shine on so relatively little?

Horus sat up and gazed down at Seth for a while. The softness faded away, and his expression looked a bit worried. Finally he said, “I don’t expect you to love me. What we have here… It gets us through things. I promised you better than Nephthys, and I’m trying to provide that. Am I?”

“…Yes. Just by being honest.” Seth could feel the walls go up. He wasn’t sure if he’d made a mistake in this, but he had to be clear. *I spent hundreds of years with someone who didn’t love me. I won’t do that to someone else.* He wondered briefly if Horus would find someone else someday who’d make him happy. Someone who’d be a good consort. Something in his chest ached at the thought, and he wasn’t sure what to do about it.

Horus nodded. “Then we’ll work through the rest. Maybe we won’t last in the end. But we’re gods. We have time to figure it out.” He looked a bit depressed, still.

Seth’s heart burned a little at the look, almost like he felt bad for hurting Horus, which was odd in itself. He breathed in deeply and reached out to cup Horus’ cheek, making him face Seth. Seth smiled and said, “Yes, we do.” Then he pulled Horus in for a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 28: Opening

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus

Horus sat on his throne as the gods murmured amongst themselves while waiting for the trial of Osiris to begin. It was early morning, and the sun shone down on the familiar sight, giving Horus a sense of déjà vu. The place was packed with the curious gods, who struggled to keep their murmuring quiet. Horus had wondered if they'd all drag their feet because the new king had called them, but perhaps the enticement of Osiris himself being put on trial or the rumors of Seth being at Horus side were too alluring. They arrived quickly, all the same.

Ra was all smiles as usual, lazing on her throne in all her gold, jewels, and finery, and gazing expectantly at Maat, who was gazing ahead while they waited for Osiris to appear. Ra had arrived especially early, seemingly thinking to get hold of some gossip. Horus was closed-mouthed around her, as were the other gods in Heliopolis, though he greeted her politely, but he saw the way she stared at Seth standing behind him, quietly.

"So it really is true," Ra had said with a laugh, her golden eyes bright and hungry. It was mid-morning, and they were in Horus' court room. "You tamed him after all."

Horus kept his expression neutral, and no one else corrected her, including Isis, who stood on Horus' right side.

Seth frowned slightly when Horus glanced at him, but that was it. He probably knew nothing good would come of him arguing with Ra here. This wasn't like the opening of Seth's trial, after all, and Seth wasn't posturing. He was simply standing where he was meant to so that things could carry on as easily as possible.

After a while, Ra sighed and said, "It's a shame. I wanted to do that…"

Horus wanted to roll his eyes.

Hathor kept gazing at Horus rapturously from behind Ra, and now that the trial had begun, she was busy sneaking glances up at him from her throne on a lower level of the court, and he wasn't sure what to make of it. He had no interest in his great-great aunt, and given the flirtatious looks she was given, even more of a desire to stay away from her. He knew there was probably something to be gained from keeping an eye on Ra, but Isis had promised she was keeping an eye on the sun goddess, and Horus left it alone. He'd avoided both goddesses since they arrived at Heliopolis, outside official court duties.

Tefnut and Shu were wrapped up in each other as usual, but otherwise kept their distance, while Geb and Nut were guarded as usual. Nut currently gazed sadly down at the empty platform where Osiris would appear.

Before the trial, Nut had pulled Horus aside to speak to him. They hadn't talked in some time, and not really since Horus ascended. She'd overseen his early training before Osiris had taken over, and there was some connection between them given his power of flight, but that was all. Horus found himself oddly wary around his grandmother, especially after talking so much with Seth about her. He'd said she'd practically *abandoned* Seth, Nephthys, Isis, and Osiris, after all. And he recalled Seth's words about how to treat one's parents.

But she's not my *mother,* Horus thought. *Though I imagine Seth would see little difference in how I treat my grandmother, either.* He didn't imagine anything good would be gained from being rude to the goddess of the sky, particularly with his abilities, but he was also wary of her for the same reasons: he didn't like someone who could cause much harm to him at her own whim.

Nut had gazed at him with her usual sad eyes and asked, "How has Seth been?" It was early evening, two days before the trial, and Horus was heading back to Seth's rooms for the night.

Horus' eyes widened, as he was surprised Nut was asking *him* rather than just talking to Seth about it. But he assumed there was a reason she'd sought him out. Maybe she felt she couldn't talk to Seth herself? "He's still my prisoner, if that's what you mean. You saw him, alive and well." She'd been greeted by Horus' full court on her arrival, and Seth had been present as well, though he hadn't spoken to her. "You're not barred from speaking to him, if you wish."

Nut smiled sadly and said, "I tried, but he left before I got the chance. I think he's avoiding me."

Horus frowned, unsure what to make of that. He wondered if his words about Nut abandoning Seth had gotten through to the desert god, somehow. Horus recalled Seth's seemingly conflicted thoughts when talking about Nut. There was obviously a lot of baggage there. Or maybe it was tied up in Seth's thoughts on Geb and Geb's questionable parenting methods. Horus knew that even though Isis and Osiris were very much two separate beings with their own thoughts and agendas, his thoughts about them often melted into how they dealt with each other. He couldn't help at times wondering how Isis could love Osiris, especially after learning she suspected at least a little about what happened with Osiris, Nephthys, and Seth, let alone what Isis had seen of Osiris' treatment of Horus. How did you love someone who loved someone you had complicated feelings for?

Mother still loves me, Horus thought, *even though I love—* His eyes widened.

"Horus?" Nut asked, clearly noticing his alarm. The stars in her hair twinkled as she stepped towards him lightly.

"I think he's just worried about the trial, Grandmother," Horus said, putting on a smile and ignoring what he'd just thought. "The last time we met like this, *he* was on trial, and became my prisoner. Now he's at my side and preparing to oversee the trial of the man he was accused of murdering and stealing the throne from. There's just a lot weighing on him."

Nut's eyes widened. Horus realized the look in her eyes reminded him a bit of Anubis, which was annoying, and he wondered if that's why he was so on edge. It surely *wasn't* because

he'd just considered how his feelings on Seth had evolved far past his imaginings. "So he's really at your side now? It's not just for display?"

"He's part of my counsel," Horus said. "Despite his actions during his reign, he spent more time advising Mother and Osiris, and protecting Egypt, and has much wisdom to share." Seth honestly kept quiet more often than not when Horus talked politics, but it helped to have him there to listen. It wasn't like with Isis, who seemed far too guarded with Horus. And while he respected her being careful in a way, he felt like the wall between them was still high. He'd done horrible things, and he knew that, but every time he was around her, he felt like he was rubbing a festering wound. "We need him to protect Egypt, still."

Nut nodded. "You don't consider Osiris your father?"

Horus had been intentional with his wording, and he smiled now. "He *is* my father. He is also guilty of much. As the trial will show."

Nut looked fearful, but when he refused to speak more on it, they ended the conversation and parted ways.

Now Horus could feel Seth on the throne beside him, and Horus wanted to know if Seth would be upset about Horus' thoughts.

"I don't love you," Seth had said to him before.

That's only fair, Horus thought, gazing ahead and growing impatient as Osiris made them wait even longer. *Why would he love me? What binds us together is only lust and convenience.* It was how things had initially begun between them after Seth's punishment began, in a way. Horus wanted revenge, yes, but Seth was a convenient way to vent his general frustrations, as well: his frustrations with his new work, which felt overwhelming, his frustrations with Isis, who saw him less as an adult and more as a struggling child, his frustrations with his distant father, who seemed no closer now that Horus had the throne, and his frustrations with his own obsession over the god who'd destroyed Horus' life, at least as Horus had believed back then. He hadn't *wanted* to stay obsessed with Seth. He'd hoped it would fade with time. But in the meanwhile, Seth was present, and Horus could indulge.

I don't love him, Horus thought as he glanced at Seth, who was still gazing ahead in the throne nearby, oblivious. Seth had grown quieter as the day of the trial drew closer. He still responded to Horus' touches and comments, but he was withdrawing into himself more, and Horus wasn't sure whether to try drawing him out again, as Horus had done when he'd offered to show he was better than Nephthys. Horus hadn't run from the trial with Seth, but these days he had more and more frustrations about his own path in life. How his parents' vengeance – and all the mixed-up nonsense of it – had been a burden he'd felt over the years and never fully voiced.

He remembered once, when he was still quite young, sporting a bruise on his chest and forehead from a sparring match with Osiris, sitting alone and sharpening his sword, and thinking about running away. He couldn't, of course, and he hadn't, but he'd wondered about another life. What things might have been like for him. Where he could rest or otherwise do

whatever he wanted. Where he didn't have to worry about disappointed parents and maybe impossible futures.

He'd eventually gone back and talked with Isis about his studies, and things had returned to normal. Seth was pursuing them, and they had no choice but to face it.

Seth was also being pursued by Osiris now, but he was protected, by Horus, Isis, and even Anubis, allegedly. He had Maat's protection, as well, and Horus wanted to say that Seth didn't have to be here, but that wasn't true. In fact, it had been part of why Horus had told Maat to remove her spell on him.

"At least for the duration of the trial," Horus had said in the small room he'd gathered Seth, Isis, and Maat in the night before the trial. The spell Maat used to restrain Seth's powers was still on him, and its control was private.

Isis' lips had parted, likely to say *something*, but then she'd glanced at Seth and shut them again. She looked *angry*, though.

Maat looked astonished, but stared at Horus as she asked, "Are you certain that's what you want?"

Seth looked surprised, and his lips were slightly parted, but he didn't add any of his own comments. He was likely confused. Horus had been thinking about this for a few days afte rhe'd come up with the idea on his own, but he hadn't mentioned a word of this to Seth beforehand, so that Seth's reaction would be genuine. He didn't want Isis and Maat to think Seth had pressured Horus into it.

"We don't know what Osiris will do once he gets here," Horus said, gazing back at Maat calmly. "Given he's tried to kill Anubis, me, and Seth in the recent past, it's unclear if he could try again once he's here."

Maat frowned. "Osiris wouldn't dare with so many gods in the room."

"Never bet on what Osiris will or won't do," Horus replied, firmly. "No one in this room has done a good job at winning those bets, other than to know not to trust him." Horus had learned that lesson too many times.

Isis and Seth oddly wore mirror grimaces, but stayed quiet.

"Regardless," Horus continued as he met Maat's continued frown, "it's better to have more people ready to face him if he *does* attack. And I'd rather Seth have access to his abilities fully in such an instance." He glanced at Seth, who had pressed his lips together, but didn't otherwise react. Then Horus looked at Maat again, who looked conflicted. "On top of that, if your spell is on Seth during the trial, when he testifies, won't there be cries of interference in the proceedings on your part, like you manipulated him?"

That made Maat's eyes widen a little.

Osiris is still beloved by many, and you're the judge of the trial. Even though your spell doesn't change Seth's thoughts, there may be rumors that it does, given that it doesn't just bind him, but also weakens his powers." So much of a god's nature was tied to their abilities. It was one reason demotions could be something of a death sentence if enacted, and were so rarely done. Seth's strength was a main reason he'd been able to hold through Maat's spell for so long. If people knew that Maat's spell was cutting Seth off from his powers, they might think she was influencing him to do things, too. "They may think you *made* him testify somehow. That you have a grudge against Osiris for some reason."

"There may be rumors about the gods of Duat rallying behind Maat's desires to get Osiris to testify," Seth said, evenly. "But it would be foolish. Anyone with basic intelligence would realize there's no reason for Maat to *want* to punish Osiris. She doesn't want the throne of Duat, and she prefers keeping balance between the realms."

"She helped oust one king," Horus said, meeting Seth's calm gaze. Horus was surprised at Seth's pushback against this, and wondered if Seth didn't want the spell removed for some reason. It could only benefit him to have it off. "Perhaps she wants better control over the next one." He looked at Maat, who was still confused. "You're close with Anubis, and once the truth is out about his parentage, people will suspect you're trying to place *him* on the throne in Duat."

Seth frowned. "Anubis could never rule Duat." He sounded *slightly* petulant as he said it. "He'd never go for it."

Horus shrugged and replied, "You know something about gossip among the gods. They'll come up with anything." He didn't think Anubis would be a good ruler of anything, but Anubis didn't know many other gods. Given Anubis was Seth's son, he'd be seen as power-hungry, just like Seth allegedly was. If the father overthrew Osiris for one throne, why not the son doing so as well?

Seth grimaced and nodded. "They are stupid and easily led that way."

"Easily led to exaggeration and rumor, yes," Maat noted primly. "I suppose it helps to be safe… Though I would not favor Anubis to take over after Osiris, unless necessary. There are plenty of other gods in Duat who would better manage the role, not that I'm *looking* to replace him."

"I don't think you are," Horus said. *Though I wonder how you plan to punish him.* "But it's good to be cautious."

"There may be an outcry that you are bringing so many gods to gather when Seth is unbound," Isis said with a neutral expression of her own as Horus looked at her. "Forget trial mishaps. There will be cries that you've endangered other gods."

"Seth will not act up," Horus said. He saw the questioning look in Isis' gaze, and continued, "Besides, I beat him when he had no spell on him, and I'll be present as well. What is there to be afraid of?" He had full faith that Seth wouldn't start anything during the trial with his powers, at least against anyone other than Osiris, and even then, Horus felt he could step in if things got out of hand.

Maat and Isis were still skeptical, but eventually trusted in Horus, and Seth remained silent. Later that night, Seth had asked what Horus was planning, with a frown.

“I gave my reasons earlier,” Horus explained as he sat at his desk with Seth sitting on the bed. It was dark out, and both their headdresses were gone. It felt like Horus could breathe for the first time all day, after managing all the arriving gods. He was glad at least Nephthys was staying put and Anubis hadn’t bothered him much. “What was unclear?”

Seth’s gaze was hard. “You really think you could take me on again without Maat’s spell?”

“Yes,” Horus said. “Regardless of what we do when we spar, I am as strong as, if not stronger than, I was when we fought the first time.” He had full confidence in his abilities, and he knew that Seth still held back plenty, which could be exploited. Whatever Seth’s true feelings on Horus were, he wanted to protect Anubis’ future, and Isis might withdraw her protection from Anubis if Seth attacked Horus. Horus being whole meant that Anubis was left alone.

Seth had only gazed back at Horus impassively for a bit, before lowering his eyes and moving back to lay down on the bed.

Horus had frowned, confused by Seth’s behavior. “Did I do something wrong?” He truly had assumed Seth would be happy about all this, but instead, Seth just had just this strange impassivity.

“…I guess we’ll see,” Seth said, avoiding answering.

Horus hadn’t pressed then because it was the night before the trial. They needed to be on the same side rather than arguing, and Seth was going to be interrogated enough the following day. But he’d missed something, and it was bothering him. As he gazed at Seth now, he still wondered about it.

Before they entered the throne room, Maat had removed the spell, and Seth had raised one hand before himself, gazing at it thoughtfully, before lowering it, and simply standing, waiting for Horus to move.

“I’ll restore it after the trial is over,” Maat said, glancing at Horus.

“We’ll return to the subject then,” Horus said, making her raise an eyebrow. “It’s unclear how the trial will turn out at this point, and if we must face Osiris openly, we’ll need the god of war on our side, at full strength.”

Maat bowed her head, and they all moved to their places for the trial.

A brazier had been set for Osiris to communicate through, but it was still simply burning with normal flames. No connection to Duat had been made, though Maat was in contact with various gods in Duat who were keeping her apprised of the situation there. They’d debated holding some sort of trial in Duat itself, but that would be difficult for gods in the land of the living to accept. Instead, they’d been assured by Maat’s allies in Duat that he *would* appear somehow for the trial.

“Perhaps someone should go down and get him?” Ra asked with a smile as she glanced up at Horus.

Maat breathed in deeply and said nothing.

Horus gazed ahead calmly, assured that Osiris would appear. The chance to see Seth was too tantalizing for him, and with access to Anubis cut off, and Heliopolis protected, Osiris had few options.

Seth opened his mouth.

Someone walked into the court just then, drawing everyone’s attention. It was a mere human, an older one, dressed in the fine robes of a priest. He had brown skin and a thick, dark beard, and behind him walked other humans, also in rich robes, looking terrified. The human in front raised a hand, making them stay back as he walked forward.

“This is not a place for humans,” Maat called, her face severe. “Who let you in here?”

The human stopped, bowed his head to Maat, and then said, “I am here on behalf of Osiris.”

There were whispers around the court.

“That’s one of Seth’s high priests,” Isis said with a frown, quiet enough for only Horus and Seth to hear. “Why would he be here for Osiris?”

Seth frowned down at the human, too. “He’s one of my priests?”

“I recognize him,” Isis replied with distaste. She glanced at Seth in confusion. “You don’t recognize your own priest?”

Seth grimaced. “I don’t keep track of them… I’ve been busy…”

Isis sighed, clearly exasperated.

“You may step forward,” Maat said, her gaze severe. “What are you here for on behalf of Osiris?”

The priest got up on the stand and approached the brazier. He bowed his head again and said, “I am his speaker here, where he cannot be.”

Maat frowned, while mutters continued in the gallery. “What do you mean?”

“I can demonstrate,” the human said. He gazed up for a moment to Seth, and Horus saw a strange look of longing in the man’s gaze.

Horus frowned and thought, *Something is not right here.*

“It has been my honor to serve,” the human said. Then he raised his right hand, which had been clenched around something, and crushed whatever was trapped within. Green vines shot

from it, causing yells in the audience. But the vines only wrapped around the human like a vice. He trembled, but didn’t fall.

“What is this abomination?” Isis demanded, her hands tight on her throne.

After a moment, the vines melded together, and formed what appeared to be a second face over the human’s. A familiar one.

A hard gaze glared out at Maat, and the being who had once been a human priest said to Maat, “I, Osiris, am here, Maat. What is it you want of me?”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 29: Presentation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Seth was too appalled by what Osiris had done to pull his own powers out to attack the other god standing below on the stand. Staring at the remains of the human wrapped up in Osiris' strange green tentacle vines made Seth nearly ill. It was a bastardization of everything Seth knew. Humans were made to serve gods in many ways, but this was unthinkable. To use them as some kind of… fleshy mask? He wondered if Osiris' monstrous actions had any end.

"Osiris," Maat said, her voice trembling with anger, "what have you *done?"* Her hands were clenched at her sides, and she gazed ahead at him, clearly just barely holding herself back.

Osiris' expression was firm as he ever was, and he stood there like he did this every day with humans. "This human died some time ago and came under my dominion. What does it matter what I do with one of my subjects after that?"

Arrogant as ever, Seth thought with a scoff. He studied the remains of the human, much as the sight made his skin crawl. *Does he think Maat will let him off after displaying his arrogance so blatantly?* He wondered if Osiris really felt his reputation would save him. And given Seth's experience, Seth was afraid that Osiris was correct, regardless of how much he'd spoken to Maat. *But surely this is too far?* He thought. He could see that Maat was clearly struggling.

"Your rule is not there to experiment on human souls," Maat said, clearly furious. "You are meant to protect them! You should know better!"

Osiris smirked at her. "Apologies, Maat. I was born a god of life, not a god of death. Is it not in my nature to bring life to that which lacks it?"

Seth rolled his eyes, unimpressed. *Slippery asshole,* he thought.

"Your nature involves respecting the cycle of life and death," Ra said, leaning over her throne, her eyes sparking in the sunlight. She was frowning now, though, and Seth had the impression her powers were making her taller and even more buff than usual, which meant she was exerting more influence in the sight of this display. "You give the crops life, which the humans consume, and then they die, and give more crops life. This is the very nature of things." She narrowed her eyes at him. "Or do you think you can decide the nature of the world on your own?"

Osiris gazed back at her with an unreadable expression before finally asking, "Perhaps you would like to take my place Ra? Or you Maat? Or any other god here?" He raised his hand around, but there was only silence.

Cowards, Seth thought with a sigh. Though he knew he couldn't say anything, either. *Who would take the hand of something like* that, *let alone want to be trapped in Duat?*

"Perhaps it would be better if I had a warrior to keep me from my wretched ways," Osiris said, making Seth's heart race. Osiris' eyes met Seth's. There was a smile hidden there, and Seth wanted to cut it out with his khopesh. "As my son seems to benefit from the relationship, but rules well, perhaps Seth's talents should be put to use elsewhere, where there is apparent fault. He still has his punishment to work out, does he not?"

There was murmuring in the court and Seth glared at Osiris but kept himself back from attacking. He and Horus had discussed this a little, though Seth had kept his own counsel for much of it, reminding himself again and again that he had to be crafty this time. It was how he'd beaten Osiris originally, wasn't it? Attacking him in the army camp had nearly cost him Anubis. He tried to see it strategically, which was difficult when dealing with a mind as warped as Osiris', and realized that Osiris probably *wanted* to provoke him into causing some kind of incident. Anything to get Seth sent down to Duat, to be trapped there with Osiris forever. Seth also realized that Osiris was being incredibly obvious, too, though most wouldn't be aware: he *wanted* to stay in Duat, where Horus couldn't touch him, and where Seth couldn't get out.

Seth glanced at Horus, who was gazing down at Osiris with a frown.

…*He's jealous,* Seth realized. *He's jealous of Horus. For having* me. The idea was so ridiculous he almost laughed. But Osiris' wording and actions on the battlefield were clear.

"Silence," Maat said, breathing hard, bringing quiet back to the court. "This is not the *only* matter we must discuss today. The court of the Ennead is in session." She looked up at Horus, her expression sharp. She was calm again, and back in control.

Good, Seth thought. *We still have Maat on our side, so things will be fine.* He hoped, anyway.

Horus leaned forward, his gaze sharp. He looked every bit the powerful king, sitting there, almost calm and unaffected by things. His falcon headdress looked sharp, the blue bright and eye-catching, and his lips were stern. His shoulders were broad and strong. Anyone comparing the monster on the stand and Horus on his throne would easily lean towards standing under Horus' banner rather than Osiris, despite the fact that Osiris had ruled longer and was better known with more gods. Now, Osiris was a monster, and Horus was the shining beacon of kingship, looking like everything a god should be.

Seth wondered if Osiris was jealous of more than just who had Seth. Seth looked back at Osiris, unwilling to let the other god get away with anything if Seth looked away for long. He thought he detected a slight hint of fury in the man's gaze. It almost made Seth laugh.

"I, Horus, speak on behalf of the heavens," Horus said, his voice calm and commanding. "I have gathered us all together to bring justice for myself and others, because of the actions of Osiris." Murmurs filled the court again. "Osiris attacked the army of Egypt, using the body of the god Anubis, attempting to murder both myself and Seth. We drove him off. Osiris' actions that day nearly killed Anubis, Seth, and I, and given what I see before me, we are clearly still at risk for attack."

There were more murmurs, and Seth breathed in deeply. Anubis was calm nearby, and that was all he needed. But the risk *was* still there, especially with displays like this. *What else does he have in store?* Seth wondered. *What other tricks can he use to return?* He'd never seen a revived corpse like this, let alone a god using one to talk. It was ominous.

"Osiris' crimes stretch farther back than that," Horus continued. "Before even my birth. Statements have been given, and testimony will be presented to show that Osiris experimented on his fellow gods, attempting to kill both Anubis and Seth before Seth became king, which prompted the altercation between Seth and Osiris."

The murmurs were more alarmed now, and Seth kept himself calm. *I've prepared for this.* He'd pulled away from Horus more and more as this day approached, to protect himself a bit, trying to harden his heart to what was to come, but he was prepared. *I have to be,* he thought. *For Anubis.*

"At this trial," Horus continued, unperturbed by the gossip in the gallery, "it shall be shown that Osiris has violated the order of the world, attempted filicide and fratricide, and helped destroy Egypt from within."

Horus sat back, passing things back to Maat. But his gaze was still locked with Osiris'. Now it was cold and distant.

Seth noted that Osiris had kept his expression calm, almost bored. But there was anger there, too. He glanced at Seth, and Seth only gazed back, neutrally.

I will never be yours, Seth thought. If nothing else, he knew Horus would fight to keep him. He tried to find solace in that, but all he was reminded of was his own weakness. And standing before him was the man who explained just how weak Seth really was.

Seth clutched the armrests of his throne.

"Your response, Osiris?" Matt asked the other god, coolly.

Osiris snorted, and then smiled. "I have none. It's a bunch of foolishness, and this court shall see as much."

Cocky asshole, Seth thought. *He so firmly believes everyone will still bow to him.* Seth imagined Osiris didn't think anyone would testify against him. After all, in all the hundred years since Osiris' death, no one ever had, and Seth had famously lost a trial for it. Seth looked forward to wiping the smirk from Osiris' face forever.

Maat nodded and said, "Then step aside while we call other witnesses to testify."

Osiris frowned, but moved back, leaving space on the platform.

Anubis moved to Nephthys, who was back in the shadows, and walked with her into the court.

Seth had objected when he'd realized Anubis would have to be on the stand with or even near Osiris, and Horus had stepped in, saying it had to be done, to make the process clean. "The

other gods don't know what Anubis looks like, and we need to make it clear who Anubis is and where he stands on the matter."

Anubis had agreed with this, perhaps one of the few things the half-brothers *did* agree to, but Seth had still been frustrated about it. It put Anubis at too much risk.

Isis had promised she had spells all over the court. "He will not touch Anubis." Her glare was fierce. "You can be certain of it."

Seth was still grateful Maat's spell was gone. He would strike immediately if Osiris so much as twitched in Anubis' direction. He trusted in Isis' magic, but it never hurt to be *too* careful.

Now, Nephthys and Anubis stepped onto the platform, causing more murmurs. As Horus had said, not many gods had seen Anubis this way, so they were clearly confused who Anubis was, and many hadn't seen Nephthys in centuries. Nephthys looked nervous and had her blonde head bowed, but she stood up tall on Anubis' right. She wore a fresh dress and had her face cleaned, under the guidance of Isis' servants, and while she looked even paler than usual, she didn't look like a prisoner.

Anubis stood tall and strong, with his jackal headdress on, and his black and yellow heka staff in his left hand. He presented himself well, though he looked a bit like a powerful guard.

Seth was proud of him for doing this, even as he was worried.

Maat waved her hand, and her scales clanged as Nephthys' heart appeared on one of them, balanced opposite Maat's ostrich feather of truth, evenly.

Nephthys was still mostly calm, though clearly a little nervous.

"Nephthys," Maat said, her voice commanding. "Goddess of harmony and peace. Tell us about the nature of your relationship with Osiris."

Nephthys tightened her hands, which were clasped before her stomach, and then breathed in. She raised her head, gazed at Maat, and said, "Osiris is my brother. And I have loved him since we were born."

Seth knew that much. But what she meant by it was different than what he thought he'd known for much of their lives. He didn't mind that she'd cared for Osiris, even deeply. They all loved each other in their own way. *But if she'd told me sooner,* he thought. He pushed such thoughts away.

"When Osiris took our sister Isis as his wife, I thought that things were ended forever there, and so I did my best as the wife of my brother, Seth, whom I also cared for."

But not loved, Seth thought, bitterly as the scales didn't budge at all. *Not loved.*

She gazed up at Seth sadly, and he felt only a slight sharpness in his heart as he met her pale eyes. "I tried to be a good wife, but it was not enough for my heart. So when Seth and I had trouble conceiving, I went to Osiris for help, thinking at least that confiding in him would be good. He was the god of life, after all."

Seth knew there would be murmurs now. Seth's inability to help Nephthys conceive a child would spread. Nephthys was a goddess, so the problem couldn't be with her. It made him feel like a fool for not seeing it sooner. But he held fast. *Of course she never thought to ask me about this*, he thought.

"Osiris offered me his seed and said that it could grow strongly." She shut her eyes, pained. "And I… I was so desperate for some piece of him, that I accepted. And I conceived a son, Anubis, though I claimed he was Seth's son."

The scales remained balanced.

Anubis stood firm, having heard this before, but murmurs of alarm filled the court.

Ra's eyes glittered dangerously.

"Did Osiris ask for something in exchange?" Maat asked, interrupting the chatter.

Nephthys nodded, still looking unhappy, but determined. "He asked for the power of creation, which is natural to goddesses. I could not give it to him entirely, but a small bit of it, I could give."

"You didn't see the harm in it?" Maat asked.

Nephthys shook her head. "I didn't imagine he could do much with it. It hadn't helped me have a child before his help, after all." She smiled sadly. "And it was what he wanted, so I don't think I would have cared either way."

She was so blinded by her love for him, Seth thought, miserably. *I feel like she never was, for me.* He was sick of feeling sorry for himself. He'd grown sick of it centuries ago. She didn't want him, and that was the end of it. He didn't pine for her anymore, though he did feel somewhat lonely still. But he couldn't imagine anyone else in her place. *Except.…*

A vision of bright blue eyes filled his mind, and strong hands. Hungry looks and a warm chest. Strangely tender promises.

"I could make it good for you," Horus had offered, looking so confident and strong... "Is that what you want? Someone who appreciates you and doesn't run away into someone else's arms at the first chance? Because there's nowhere I'd rather be than here."

Seth was his sparring partner, his pseudo teacher… He'd stayed back to help Horus, and to help Anubis, when he could have negotiated for some other punishment. And Horus had helped keep him sane before the trial, which scared Seth, because it felt like Seth was hiding away from things, when he needed to be strong to face Osiris and the court, and whatever the ultimate punishment or lack thereof for Osiris was. Hadn't Horus broken Maat's spell because Seth was too weak?

Seth focused back on the trial, disliking where his mind was going.

"And Osiris never spoke to you about this again?" Maat asked Nephthys.

Nephthys nodded. “Not once. I was embarrassed to tell Seth, so I didn’t tell him, either. Or Anubis.” She bowed her head. “That is my shame.”

“You may leave the stand, Nephthys,” Maat finally said. Then she looked up at Seth.

Seth frowned, and waited until Nephthys left the area. He still avoided her like a coward, but he imagined she also had no desire to be around him, so it’s not like the avoidance was just on his side.

Horus reached out and clasped Seth’s right wrist, making Seth look at him in surprise. Horus’ expression was firm.

It’s almost like he wants to be supportive, Seth thought. *Though he’s probably just reminding me to keep calm or something.* Horus was just there to keep Seth stable and on target, after all. Seth letting his emotions run away with him was just the adrenaline of the situation.

Seth nodded at him, and then dissolved into sand and flew over the balcony, causing alarm in the room, before re-forming his body on the stand next to Anubis. Seth was glad he was at least close to Anubis now. And he was closer to strike Osiris – who was standing slightly lower and to Seth’s right – as needed. For some reason, it kept his mind clear, whereas seeing Osiris should have otherwise terrified him.

Maat reached out and swept her hand.

Seth felt an odd sensation in his chest as his heart went to the scales, but it was nothing major. Just strange. He’d experienced far worse over the centuries. He thought he should be awed that he was experiencing Maat’s scales, but he just felt tense.

“Seth,” Maat said as she gazed calmly at him, “God of war and the desert. Tell us what happened on the night of usurpation.”

Seth breathed in deeply, knowing this was the moment. “I came home from a battle. Sekhmet met with me. She told me that Osiris and Nephthys had been together behind my back, and that Anubis was not my son.”

There were more murmurs, and Seth pushed back the desire to crush them all. He’d already spent much of his reign doing that, and he knew they would eat up every word of this. But they didn’t *matter,* or so he told himself.

“I was furious,” Seth continued, recalling how he’d felt in the moment. “Nephthys walked in on us talking, and she was alarmed, but she confirmed what Sekhmet had said was true. I was even more enraged, so I stormed out to confront Osiris.”

The scales almost mocked him, with how balanced they were. He’d practiced saying this, to try and get as little emotion into it as he could. The scales were a delicate thing. But he’d been honest. Things were strangely simple when phrased this way, rather than in the form of Osiris’ half-truths and lies.

Anubis was still there, standing at his side. Seth hated saying all this next to him, but he was necessary as another witness.

“I attacked Osiris,” Seth continued, “and he told me to calm down, while using his powers to make me age.” Seth still recalled the feeling with horror. It was abominable. “He forced me to sit at a table with him and fed me drugged wine. I didn’t know it was drugged at the time.” It had felt so patronizing, the way Osiris had easily taken over things. Osiris wasn’t the god of war, *Seth* was, and yet Osiris had easily taken control. It was galling.

Isis and Horus were watching him from above, and both of them had focused expressions.

“We talked about what had happened,” Seth continued, feeling more annoyed as time passed. “Osiris explained that he’d given Nephthys his seed because she said we couldn’t conceive. That they’d never been together in the way I imagined. At some point while we talked, the drug in the wine began to interfere with my cognition, and I fell.” Seth breathed in heavily. He’d practiced this. He had. *I need to protect Anubis,* he thought. *That’s more important than anything else. More important than pride, certainly.* One of his worst moments, which few people knew about.

A bit of wind ruffled the hair under his shendyt, and he felt something like a warm hand on his shoulder, made of air. He realized it was Horus. Horus, who’d freed him from Maat’s spell to be stronger to face Osiris. Perhaps Horus had little faith in Seth’s abilities, but he meant for this to be successful.

Seth breathed in again, somehow finding some sort of strength and encouragement in that, because he had nothing else, before continuing, “He stated that he’d stolen my seed years before, so that Nephthys and I could not conceive. He then stated that he’d poisoned me. And then he tried to use the power of creation from Nephthys on me, so that I would conceive *his* child.”

Isis’ face twisted slightly as the scale didn’t move, and the murmurs were still ongoing. Like buzzing flies.

“He assaulted me,” Seth said, feeling like he was scraping through his own chest with a knife. “I fought and could not escape. Finally, he said that he was going to use Anubis’ soul as the fuel for this child he wanted.” He glanced at Anubis, reassuring himself that Anubis was there with him.

Anubis looked at him, and the corners of his mouth twitched a little in a gentle smile.

He’s alive, Seth thought, breathing in deeply. *He’s all right.* Seth looked back at Maat. “He then showed me the jars he’d collected Anubis’ soul in.”

Maat’s gaze sharpened at this. She wouldn’t have been happy with more evidence of Osiris’ experiments, even though she knew all this already. It was another thing to hear it in court, before the scales.

“I begged him not to hurt Anubis,” Seth said, remembering how pathetic and desperate he’d been. “And then I used my body to try to convince him to let Anubis go, since it was what

Osiris wanted." He'd have done anything then, anything at all. "Sekhmet intervened and knocked him out after I fell unconscious." He'd considered trying to keep her out of the story, but this had to be honest. And Sekhmet had been the one who'd tricked him into assaulting Horus. *Payback,* he thought. *It's not like it'll hurt her much, anyway. No one can bring Sekhmet to account for anything.*

Ra sat back in her chair, clearly still intrigued, but a little calmer. Seth wondered if she'd go find Sekhmet somewhere, since the goddess wasn't present now, unless she was hiding, as usual.

"I then cut Osiris' body into pieces, but that didn't work," Seth continued. "He was the god of life, he just reformed himself." He breathed in. "So I made use of his obsession with me, and eventually pretended I'd died and gone to Duat. He sacrificed his own immortality to follow me, swallowing the power of creation to do so, and killing himself without my laying a finger on him, to follow me into Duat."

Isis shut her eyes, pained.

The scale didn't budge. Seth tried to remind himself he'd gotten through the worst of it.

"How did you survive?" Maat asked into the strange silence.

"The drug Osiris fed me was full of life," Seth said. "I used it to keep my body separate, letting part of it die for me, while the rest of me stayed hidden and alive. I watched Osiris kill himself." It had hurt a little to sacrifice his body that way, but he'd gone through worse, particularly in that very night. Nearly losing Anubis had been far worse, and losing Nephthys had certainly been worse.

"What happened with Osiris at the army camp?" Maat asked.

Seth breathed evenly now, relieved to move on. "Osiris appeared before Horus and I while we were on the battlefield. I was confused and furious, so Osiris and I fought. He tried to kill both Horus and I, because Horus was interfering with Osiris' goal of taking and killing *me*. Horus noticed there was something wrong with Osiris, and discovered that he was possessing Anubis' body, and we subdued rather than killed him, freeing Anubis." He grimaced. "Anubis was heavily injured, in a way that would have killed a human. He wouldn't have survived without Isis' help." He still wanted to rip Osiris to shreds now, but they had to be careful with this.

Maat glanced at the scales, which were unmoved, and said, "You may be seated, Seth."

Seth nodded, glanced at Anubis, who was as calm as he'd ever been, and then dissolved into sand to go back to his throne. He felt like he might ooze onto the floor, but he stayed seated.

There was a whisper by his ear, "Well done."

Seth knew it was Horus' voice, but only stared ahead.

“Anubis,” Maat said after she’d placed his heart on the scale. “God of death. Tell us what happened on the night of usurpation.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 30: Spin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth

Anubis raised his head slightly to Maat, his shoulders straight and firm. There were murmurs in the court still, with the other gods wondering about how different Anubis looked now, being shocked that he finally ascended, and that the rumors about him were true. “That night I felt unwell and slept poorly. I had dreams that someone was chasing me, and at one point I felt like there was a great pain in my chest.” He touched the pale skin there.

Seth imagined Osiris sneaking into Anubis’ rooms for this, or using his vines to creep through the sleeping palace, and the idea made him nauseous. He wanted to rip the amalgamation of the god spectating to pieces.

“But I couldn’t wake up,” Anubis continued. “Eventually, the pain went away, and I *did* wake up. I later discovered that Osiris was dead, Isis was gone, Mother was isolating herself, and Father was king.”

“You didn’t see Osiris attack you?” Maat asked.

Anubis shook his head. “No. I went to sleep normally, alone.”

Seth imagined Osiris waiting for the right moment. How much had been planned in advance? Had Sekhmet only shown up because she knew Osiris had decided to target Anubis? What if Seth hadn’t visited Osiris that night? Would he have woken in the morning to Anubis dead? The though made him even angrier and he worked to control his breathing. They’d trusted Osiris, and left Anubis vulnerable. ***I*** *left Anubis vulnerable,* Seth thought.

“How did Osiris come to use your body to travel around the land of the living?” Maat asked.

Anubis bowed his head. “During Father’s reign, I despaired, and took my own life.”

Seth clenched his hands together. *He’d* pushed Anubis to this. By hiding the truth and pushing him away. Anubis didn’t look at him now, but Seth didn’t need Anubis to do anything to feel the shame.

“I traveled to Duat,” Anubis continued, “and spoke with Osiris. He listened and gave me solace, and I promised to work for him as best I could. When I returned to the land of the living, I was able to serve as his vessel as he pleased.”

The idea still made Seth’s skin crawl. He couldn’t imagine letting someone else into his own body like that. Even Horus, territorial as he was, even at his worst, hadn’t done such a thing. Seth was still himself: marked by Horus’ actions, and Maat’s spell, but his own person, all the

same. Maat's spell was a vice of sorts, but nothing more. He'd have destroyed himself before going through what Anubis did voluntarily.

"And this caused injury to your body?" Maat asked.

Anubis nodded. "In the beginning I thought it was just a noble sacrifice to help end my father's tyrannical rule, and to help my uncle… But it grew worse over time. The last time, I wondered if I would survive."

Seth had destroyed the armrests of his throne with his fingers, but he stayed seated. He'd still left Anubis so vulnerable, like a fool.

"Did Osiris ask permission when he used your body?" Maat asked.

"The first time, yes," Anubis said. "To introduce me to the concept. But later… he'd approach me without warning and take over before I could agree, and I'd later wake up somewhere new, not knowing how I got there, and sometimes having vague memories of what he did while controlling me. I grew afraid of him and what he was doing. But I went along with it. I'd agreed, after all."

Seth wanted to say, "You were a young demigod! He was a full god and your uncle! What choice did you have? It's not your fault!" But it was not his place. He was proud of Anubis, though, for standing up for himself, in front of the court. He wondered if Anubis was afraid. He didn't seem to be. Seth almost snorted as he thought, *He's faced Horus, I doubt he's scared of anything or anyone.*

Osiris, for his part, kept his expression neutral, simply gazing ahead, though he at least wasn't attacking anyone. Seth wondered if he had ever cared about hurting Anubis. Seth imagined Osiris hadn't even once felt anything for the younger god.

"Thank you," Maat said. "You may—"

"Wait," Anubis said, making her pause. "I wish to say something, before I leave." He glanced around the court with a glare, ignoring Osiris. "Seth is my father, regardless of biology. He raised me. He protected me. I am his son and shall always be so. And I am proud of that."

The scales didn't even twitch.

Seth's eyes heated, and his throat felt thick. *Anubis.*… He didn't have to say that. People would whisper about it, and say that Anubis was in league with Seth now. It could go very badly for him. He should focus on protecting himself.

But Seth was still happy Anubis had said it, and in front of everyone…

Anubis bowed his head to Maat. "That is all."

Maat nodded at him and said, "Very well. You may leave the stand." As he did so, she turned to Isis. "Isis, would you come to the stand?"

Isis breathed in and stood up before walking down. She didn't look at Seth or Horus as she went.

Seth knew that anything could happen here, but Isis had no reason to screw things up. She wanted justice for everything that had happened, too. In recent days, she'd spoken to him in private about her bitterness towards Osiris, even once saying, "If Maat doesn't make him suffer, *I* will."

You hurt her, Osiris, Seth thought, gazing down at the empty stand. *Now you'll pay for it.* He looked forward to it.

She ignored Osiris, too, passing by him without a single look.

Osiris' expression was still neutral as he gazed at her. It was almost like he didn't care at all about what was happening, beyond observing it.

On the stand, Isis stood firm, with her papyrus staff at her side. Her jewelry glittered, and her gaze was sharp. She stood alone, but proudly so.

There was a clunk sound and her heart appeared on Maat's scales. Maat gazed at Isis coolly and said, "Isis, tell us what happened on the night of usurpation."

Isis breathed in deeply, and began, "Before I ran into Seth after he'd killed Osiris, I was asleep in my chambers. I had a dream that Anubis was hurt, and so I awoke and went to see him, to see if he was all right. I didn't know if the dream was a vision or just a worry, since he and Seth sometimes got rough when they sparred." She shut her eyes briefly, as if recalling easier days. "I found Anubis in his bed with a bloody hole in his chest, his ka floating above his body, and he was dying."

There were alarmed mutters around the court, then. To hear Anubis talk was one thing, but to hear Isis admit as much was another.

Seth glanced at Anubis, who had returned to stand behind the thrones. Khnum was at his side, leaning against him. Anubis looked calm enough now. He'd heard all their stories enough times, there was nothing shocking. But it was strange to be talked about so much. Seth hoped Anubis never had to experience such a thing again. *I'll ensure it,* he thought. Even as he had to listen to a whole trial dedicated to his failures in the past, and he didn't want to think about going back under Maat's spell to restrict his abilities after the trial was over. But Osiris was still being secretive, so Seth had no idea what could happen. He'd be ready, all the same.

"I worried there were intruders," Isis continued, her eyes open and gazing firmly ahead at Maat. "So I tested the wards on the palace, since I used to maintain them. But none of them were broken, and I couldn't find sign of any intruders. Then I went to go find Nephthys, Seth, or Osiris, to find out what was going on. One of them *had* to know. And then I ran into Seth." She breathed in deeply before continuing, "I told him Anubis had been injured, and I'd healed him, and asked if Seth knew who'd attacked him, since Seth seemed prepared for a fight, and it was so late."

Seth recalled how full of rage and pain he'd been in then. He'd have fought anyone if they offered the slightest pushback. Unfortunately, he'd run into Isis first, and everything had gone wrong. He'd run through the event too much in his mind that thinking of it now just made him tired, but he told himself he'd get through this.

"Seth told me that Osiris had hurt Anubis," Isis said. "That Osiris and Nephthys had betrayed us. That Osiris had attacked *Seth.* And that Osiris and Nephthys had been together behind our backs." She bowed her head. "I was overwrought and confused. But I asked what had happened when Osiris attacked Seth, because clearly they weren't together at this point. Seth said that Osiris was dead, and when I asked how… his response seemed to indicate that Seth had killed him in self-defense."

There was more chatter around the court.

"I was horrified," Isis continued. "I couldn't believe such a thing was possible. That Osiris could attack Anubis or Seth, that Osiris and Nephthys could be together, or that Seth had *killed* Osiris. In my distress, I believed Seth was lying to me, and that *Seth* had been the one to attack Anubis, perhaps out of rage over what he believed with Nephthys and Osiris. When Seth explained that he'd learned about Osiris and Nephthys from Sekhmet, I even began to believe that Ra was manipulating all of this from the shadows, perhaps as revenge for being overthrown in the past."

Ra made a scoffing sound, but didn't move from her throne. Seth imagined she was getting a kick out of it all, and Sekhmet definitely liked inciting chaos, but he had kept far from both goddesses over the years. He didn't think their fingers were in too much of what had happened.

"I called him a monster and told him to stay away from me," Isis said, ignoring Ra. "I fled, and took Anubis from his room and went to Nephthys. I planned to warn her about Seth, and what happened with Osiris and Anubis, and was going to ask her to come with me to flee from Seth." She grimaced. "Nephthys confessed to giving Osiris the power of life in exchange for his seed. I was furious and attacked her. I left Anubis with his mother, and fled Heliopolis on my own." She breathed in deeply. "I wanted answers from Osiris, believing Nephthys and Seth couldn't be trusted, and *Osiris* of all people would be honest with me. So I revived him in the Nile and spoke with him. He insisted that Seth attacked him unprovoked, because Seth wanted the throne for himself. He said that Nephthys was desperate to have a child for Seth, but was unable to bear children, and so Osiris helped her bear Anubis. But Osiris said that he didn't expect Seth to get so upset about it." She looked up at Seth, her expression still grim, and continued, "And because I still loved him… I believed his version of events."

The scale remained balanced. More whispers filled the room, with comments like, "So Osiris really *was* a liar!"

Seth gazed back at Isis, knowing all this, and unsure if she gazed at him to be reassuring or what. She looked away eventually, which was a relief.

Maat asked, "And before you spoke with Seth that night, you had no knowledge of Osiris and Nephthys' deal about Osiris' seed and the power of creation?"

Isis shook her head, and her expression grew furious. “I had no such knowledge. If I had known…” She breathed in deeply. “I don’t know. Things would have been different.”

Seth wondered about that might have been world, where they knew about Nephthys’ actual desires, where they’d talked about what was happening with Osiris before everything went wrong. Seth didn’t think they could have saved Osiris, but…

He sighed and glanced at Horus, who was watching Isis below. *How much hurt wouldn’t have happened, all the same?* Seth thought. *Though, maybe we’d have hurt each other worse.* He knew it wasn’t worth wasting time imagining things, but he’d heard all this so much, his mind couldn’t help but wander a little.

After a moment, Maat said, “Thank you, Isis. You may be seated.”

Isis’ heart disappeared from the scales, and she breathed in deeply, before walking off the stand and back up to the thrones. She ignored Osiris again. Eventually, Isis sat back on her throne, gazing ahead. She still seemed firmly focused.

“Osiris,” Maat said, her tone harsher. “Step up to the stand.”

Osiris gazed up at Seth instead, ignoring Maat. The vines of his faced twitched a little.

Seth frowned down at the gruesome sight. *Now your filth is laid as bare as the monstrosity you walk in.* Everyone had heard it, from three witnesses speaking with their hearts on Maat’s scales.

When Osiris didn’t move, Maat said, “Osiris,” her tone full of warning.

Osiris looked up at her, seemingly unbothered. “I think I’m done with this charade.” Thick green vines exploded from the ground, rising towards Seth specifically, as screams filled the air. The vines met a wall of wind and sand, blocking them off from the area where Horus, Seth, and Isis sat.

Horus stood up with his right hand raised for the shield. He glared down at Osiris, his falcon headdress shining.

Isis stood at his side, her expression furious. Her magic sparked around herself.

Seth’s sand spikes had cut off vines that emerged from behind them, and he was currently channeling sand through the stone at their feet to block the vines Osiris was burrowing through the stone there. Seth had sensed the vines only moments before they moved, and moved his sand to cut them off, only just in time. *That asshole was using all this time just to grow those damn things*, he thought. He doubted Osiris ever planned to comply. He just wanted the chance to get close to Seth, without Isis’ wards barring him from entering.

Seth recalled that Osiris might have wanted to get at Anubis too, and so Seth glance at Anubis, who held his heka staff up before himself in a guard position, while Khnum stood at his side with water churning around their feet.

At least he’s fine, Seth thought in relief, before looking back at Osiris.

“Osiris!” Maat yelled, her voice echoing through the chamber as more gods screamed. “Stop this!”

Blazing heat struck out at the vines before the shield, and Seth turned his head away, but kept his senses in the sand, to keep an eye on things.

“We’re in the middle of your trial now, Osiris,” Ra said, her voice calm, but loud. “You have very little ground left to stand on at this point, don’t you? None, to be honest, given you’re not even here.” Her white smile shone through the dust and fading heat haze as her attack faded away. “If you can’t uphold your dignity as a god until this trial is seen through, perhaps Maat’s judgment will come early.” Her golden eyes shone. “Or be unnecessary.”

Chapter End Notes

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