Beholder

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by FallLover

Summary

28 years ago, Seth, god of the desert and war, left Osiris' court without explanation to reside in the desert again and focus on Egypt's defenses, cutting off virtually all contact with the other gods. Shortly afterward, Osiris was found dead, his killer unknown, leaving the throne to Isis. Isis later gave birth to Horus, and Horus wished to discover his father's killer, for the sake of himself and his kingdom. Now of age and learning his godhood, and with the time to spare, he sets forth to question his top suspect, or at least someone with potential answers: his absent uncle, Seth.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own, and is being published here as a back-up.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus looked over Egypt in the morning sunshine, thinking again how beautiful the capitol was as it spread to the horizon, the many buildings, temples, and farms nestling along the Nile. How vast it was. How he could spend so much more of his time getting to know it.

Wondering what it would have been like with his father showing him.

“Taking a break from all the reports?” Isis asked as she stepped out on the balcony with him. She was beautiful as ever, and had not yet begun the morning audiences, so she still had time to relax with him. She looked calm and bright, and dressed in her usual finery, wearing her typical long wig and copious jewelry.

“Just for the moment,” Horus replied, looking back over their kingdom, his headdress shrouding his eyes. “I was… thinking of Father.”

Isis was quiet for a moment, and he could picture the unreadable expression that usually came over her face when Osiris came up. He knew it pained her, so he didn’t try talking about it much.

“…What about your father?” she asked, quietly.

“I was thinking to try my hand at the investigation into his murder.”

“*Horus*…” she began to chide.

He turned to her, and now he could see her worry. She didn’t want him to be sad, despite the fact that this was one injury she could never heal, like a broken bone or a cut, and he imagined it grated her: the one kind of illness even her magic could fix.

Horus had never met his father, and Isis seldom spoke of him, except to be sad about him.

“I wish to give it a try,” Horus continued. “If someone could kill the God of Life, who knows what threat they pose to the kingdom?”

“It’s been nearly 30 years,” Isis insisted. “Surely they’d have done something by now if they wanted more than killing Osiris. And yet,” she gestured to the city before them, “Egypt prospers.”

“It doesn’t bother you that this person managed what should be impossible?” Horus asked.

She frowned. “You ask if it bothers me that they murdered my husband?”

“Ahh… forgive me, Mother, I meant no disrespect.”

She sighed and waved it away. “Yes, it bothered me. But when no threat presented itself, I worked harder on bolstering our defenses. Improving my own skills. And no new threat has presented itself. …Outside of perhaps an endless stream of petitions I often wonder how Osiris dealt with.”

Horus smiled, but his expression quickly sobered. “I still wish to uncover it. This was a threat to the Ennead. It must be dealt with.”

She looked at him with an exasperated expression. "Why *now?*"

"You are giving me more responsibility lately, but I still have some free time to myself. I must take advantage before I am too busy with other matters. Before... I had more time to think, but it felt less urgent. Now I realize... perhaps it is time to end the mystery once and for all."

She sighed, quietly. "Very well."

“I was thinking it over last night,” Horus continued, “and as I reviewed Maat and Nephthys’ reports of the investigation, I realized no one had asked Uncle Seth about where he was at the time Father was killed.”

“Why your uncle in particular?”

“After looking at all the witness statements, the other gods who typically resided here were questioned, but not him, and he was the only outlier. There’s not even really any motive for most anyone here to hurt Father. He was Pharaoh and Egypt prospered under his rule, and the other gods have many followers and temples. But as Father’s brother, with no other heir apparent, Seth had much to gain from Father’s death: the throne. Though regicide is unfathomable in Egypt, we hear tales every day of our neighbors warring over the right to rule. And given the way members of the Ennead often vie for authority, it seems possible that at least a god who fights for victory *might* vie for such authority himself. And given how universally loved Osiris was, it seems the only explanation for *why* someone would do it.”

Isis crossed her arms. “While I see your points, for starters, Seth never cared to rule. Note also that he didn’t return from the desert to claim the throne, even at the funeral. And he loved your father…” Her gaze grew distant for a moment, then she sighed. “And at the time of Osiris’ murder, Seth was off in the desert, like he had been for a month. Eyewitnesses saw him fighting against raiders that day.”

“I saw eyewitnesses were questioned, but you still never asked him directly? There are many ways to kill someone from a distance, particularly for someone trained especially in the art of combat.”

Isis rolled her eyes. “Seth isn’t wily like that. He likes a game just as much as anyone else, but of the four of us – my siblings and I – I was really the only one with a head for that sort of thing. Seth in particular prefers direct combat. And as for why I never asked him, at the time of the investigation I was mostly concerned with being *pregnant*.” She raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him. “I would suggest *you* try being pregnant with a god at some point, and see how much free time it gives you to go wandering around looking for clues.

Particularly while trying to make sure your dead husband's kingdom doesn't fall apart without someone sitting on the throne and no living heir."

"Ahh," Horus lowered his head, allowing his headdress to shadow more of his face. "Forgive me, again, Mother. I meant no disrespect." He sighed. "I do not wish to criticize the work you and the others performed. I simply want answers. Osiris was my father, after all. And as the pharaoh, how can I not worry about what fate might await me, given my predecessor's fate?"

She stepped forward and reached out to squeeze his right shoulder. "It's all right. I understand. And I will *always* be here to protect you. And you are so strong," she smiled fondly at him. "I have faith in your abilities."

He smiled back.

Finally, she sighed. "If you wish to speak to Seth, you have my blessing. But…" She swallowed. "Respect that he may not wish to talk to *you*. He never explained why he left, but I can't imagine there's no reason why he hasn't come *back*. And it's not that he's unable to." She looked away, her expression pained, and said, "Even at Osiris' funeral he kept his distance from everyone, and then left as soon as he was allowed. And he spoke to no one other than me, in greeting, on his arrival."

"You watched him that much?" Horus was genuinely curious. Had she suspected him, as well? Watching to see what he did?

"He and I used to be close," she replied with a sad smile. "He's my brother, after all. In some ways, we were even closer than Osiris and I, for at least Seth was not Pharaoh, and could speak with me about more casual matters more often, without matters of state taking up his time." She sighed. "But I fear that closeness is gone. And I often wish… I knew why."

"I hadn't decided whether to go find him myself or send for him," Horus said, "but perhaps if you wish to speak with him, it would be better to send for him… Or you could come with me to find him."

"I do not want to order him here to be interrogated," she replied, firmly, "especially if word gets out you're investigating Osiris' death again, and people start suspecting it was him just because we're asking questions. So you should go find him, but someone must remain to manage the kingdom while you are absent." She smiled. "Thankfully there are two of us on the throne. Go. Return as soon as you can. I can only handle so much without you."

"You mean you handle most everything," Horus said with a smile. "Leaving me the dregs to feel even slightly relevant."

She smirked. "Please. They're the *boring* dregs I don't feel like bothering with." She kissed his cheek and went back inside.

Horus turned back to the vista before him, and the wind whispered through his headdress, pulling at him. He called his falcon wings, stepped up onto the railing, and leapt.

Finding Seth took some time. He apparently moved his camp every few days to different parts of the desert, and sometimes didn't even stay with it, choosing to wander around in his chariot with his sand winged crocodiles. It took nearly a week just to find the most recent spot Seth had taken up camp, and Horus was lucky enough to find the god resting within, at least according to the scared human servant cleaning plates outside the large tent.

Horus dismissed his wings and walked up to the large, pale tent flap. He called within, "Uncle? It is Horus, your nephew. I wish to speak with you."

Silence greeted him.

Horus knew a god like Seth would be immediately alert, and wondered if this was meant as an insult to the God Supreme. But Horus reined in his temper. He was somewhat used to it – Isis wielded far more power in Egypt, still, and had for decades. The kingdom was still getting used to Horus being in charge with her. And his mother was more trained in the role than he.

Plus, he imagined getting criticized by his nephew wouldn't make Seth all that amenable to being honest and open to questions.

After a time, Horus called again, "Uncle?"

"Oh fuck off," a masculine voice replied from within. "You may be co-ruler with your mother, but that doesn't matter out here."

Horus blinked. "Uncle, I am not ordering you to do anything. I merely wish to talk with you."

More silence.

Eventually, Seth said, "Fine."

Horus pushed back the tent flap and stepped inside. Once he adjusted to the lowered lighting – it was growing dark outside, and there were only a couple thin torches in the tent – he blinked in surprise at the sight before him.

Seth sat on a simple cot, his black animal mask over a white khat with golden fringe covering most of his face but for his lower jaw. He wore a simple black shendyt around his hips. A thick golden usekh around his neck, a set of gold bracelets, armlets, and anklets, adorned his limbs, but he was otherwise lacking in paint or ornamentation. His pale skin resembled the desert at midday, and was warmed by the firelight. He was lithe, but not frail – Horus could see the musculature on him. An attractive enough god, Horus supposed.

Horus had never met Seth: Isis was still pregnant during Osiris' funeral, and like Isis said, Seth had never visited the palace since. Horus only had artwork on the walls and by priests and Seth's other worshipers to go by, and stories about how beastly he was in combat, or how wise he was in strategy. Horus remembered one wall in particular, depicting Seth and Isis playing board games together. It was alongside art of his parents together, and Horus' eyes often strayed to this other piece, wondering about the mysterious god playing games with the Goddess of Magic.

Horus had also seen drawings of Seth's sacred animal as it ranged. Horus had run into a few sha during his travels, curious about their bright red and dark black coats, but they were wary creatures, and fled from him, to seek out easier prey.

Seth was frowning at him, though Horus obviously couldn't quite tell his expression through the large headdress. The creature's red eyes were meant to be intimidating, but they just felt… distancing, like the false creature's long snout.

"Well?" Seth demanded, without bothering to get up.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Uncle," Horus said, nodding his head slightly rather than chastising the other god for not bowing to his pharaoh. Horus had not expected such impertinence, but then again, this god was the sibling of Horus' parents. Horus saw some of Isis in the man's demeanor.

"I'm sure," Seth replied, drily. He stood up and crossed his arms. Horus realized Seth was… actually shorter somehow than his own nephew. Horus was used to it with Isis, but given she always said even Horus was shorter than Osiris, it was strange to see Osiris' brother this… small.

He hadn't expected the God of the Desert to be small.

"I came to speak to you of my father's murder," Horus began.

He noticed that Seth's right pinky finger twitched, but the other god didn't say anything.

"We never discovered who the culprit was," Horus continued, wondering. *Did* Seth know something?

"And…?" Seth finally asked. "You think *I* did it?"

"Are you offering a confession?" Horus asked.

Seth twitched, and then laughed, "So the baby bird has talons after all." He uncrossed his arms and made to walk past Horus and out of the tent, but Horus reached out and grabbed his left wrist.

"Do not touch me!" Seth yelled as he twisted out of the grip and made to flip Horus over.

Horus was surprised at the sudden anger, but spun around… only to find he was grasping at sand quickly flying out of the tent. Horus ran out himself and saw Seth leap into a large chariot parked outside, even as he formed his giant winged sand crocodiles to lead it, and as Seth cried out, "Ha!", they quickly carried the god away.

Horus called his wings and flew after Seth. When he drew close, he called out, "Uncle! I simply wish to talk! I apologize for upsetting you!"

"Ha!" Seth yelled, but otherwise ignored him. From this angle, Horus had a better view of Seth's angry expression.

Horus grimaced, but kept pace. He tried a different tack, “Uncle, surely you wish to discover the identity of your brother’s killer?”

“So you no longer believe it’s me?” Seth demanded, still facing ahead.

“I have no proof of anything,” Horus called back, flying beside him, but not too close. “But I was not alive back then. You were.”

Seth didn’t say anything to that. After a time, though, he said, “You’re a decent enough fighter, it seems. Shall we test your skills?”

“What?” Horus asked, confused.

“Over that rise,” Seth pointed at a large dune they were rapidly approaching, “are enemies of Egypt. Will you fight at my side?”

“...Of course, Uncle.” It would be an honor to do that. Although Horus had gone hunting before, Horus had never fought Egypt’s enemies in such a way, and Seth’s abilities were legendary.

“Very well. Try not to die.” Seth called his black bow, and spurred his crocodiles onward.

Once they all crested the dune, Horus saw a small army of monstrous creatures spread before them. They wore bits of unfamiliar armor, and held spears, swords, bows, shields… And all of them turned to Seth and Horus.

Horus was shocked, as he hadn’t even sensed them! And they seemed *endless*.

Seth roared as his chariot charged into the mass.

Horus called for the wind and went after him.

Seth was a glory to behold in combat.

As the great-great-grandson and inheritor of Ra, grandson of Geb, and the son of Osiris, Horus was born a warrior and leader, skilled in many forms of combat, and he’d trained with some of the best warriors in Egypt, at Isis’ insistence. He was strong, fast, and smart.

Seth was a force of nature. Horus was the wind, but Seth was like an ocean on the land, charging through enemies like an unstoppable tide, shooting through whole clumps of them with his fearsome bow, and then easily cutting them down in droves with his black khopesh, and leaping to the next before you could even see him land the final blow, whether with his hands and their claws, his fast and powerful legs, his giant sand creatures, or the assortment of weapons he could call from nothing. He cut a swathe through those surrounding him, then leapt into the air and dove into another group of them. He’d use his sand to knock them down, or pick them up with giant sand hands and toss them leagues away.

Horus had seen many gods at work in different tasks over the years, and many trained fighters. There was wonder in someone who was good at what they did working at it.

But Seth, like this, was *beautiful*.

Horus kept pausing to watch him, feeling something stir deep inside himself at the sight.

And in moments between the deluge of enemies, roars, growls, screams, and the sound of metal on metal and flesh being rent in two, or the roar of fast-moving, heavy sand, Horus would see flashes of Seth grinning as he cut down another enemy, or hear a snatch of laughter, or another yell of triumph.

It seemed an age and only a moment before the two of them stood alone amongst a sea of corpses.

Seth seemed entirely unscathed, whereas Horus sported a few scrapes, mostly gained from being distracted by Seth.

Horus realized Seth was watching him. The god of the desert somehow appeared taller out here in the open, and his pale skin was even starker against the sea of dead enemies and the bloodied sand.

“You did fine enough,” Seth said eventually, dismissively. “But you’re too easily distracted.”

“It was only due to watching you, Uncle,” Horus replied, smiling. “Watching you fight is a joy I hope to witness again! And soon!”

Seth snorted, but there was the inkling of a smile at his lips. “Flatterer. Just like your mother. And just like…” He paused, then turned back to his chariot.

“Would you tell me of my father?” Horus asked, stepping forward.

Seth stood in his chariot, holding the reins but not sending his beasts forward.

“I did not know him,” Horus insisted. “If nothing else, I wish for that.” He wished it could get through. Horus did not know if the god before him had murdered Osiris, but being around him made the idea of his father seem more real, somehow. Of the four, Horus only knew Isis and Nephthys, neither of whom spoke much about Osiris other than his achievements as Pharaoh, yet here was the last of the siblings: the god of the desert, Osiris’ brother, who had stood at his side and made Egypt strong.

Horus only wished for a part of the last piece. And if Isis and Seth had been close once, surely Seth would understand.

Seth sighed. “Return tomorrow, and ask me your questions then.” Seth called, “Ha!” to his crocodiles and they took off.

“How did it go?” Isis asked after Horus returned to his room in the capitol. She’d been watching for his return, as she often did, sitting on a couch and playing her lute - a gift from Maat and Thoth - while she did. He could tell she’d been staring at the window sometime when he approached.

A part of him wondered if she was hoping he was Osiris. He knew his mother had taken others to her bed over the years, but not for long, despite encouragement from Nephthys and Hathor. Sometimes such things seemed to even make her sadder. And though she was charismatic and often chatting with this or that god or goddess, she was often more alone once her duties were over than not, with a forlorn expression on her face. He ached for her.

“Well, I think,” Horus said, walking to a bowl of water to clean off his hands. “Though Seth is somewhat… difficult to talk to.”

She smiled. “He could be like that, at times. If he didn’t want to talk to you, he’d just turn into sand and leave.”

“Yes… He did, at one point.”

“So you’ve given up?”

“No,” Horus said. “I return to him tomorrow, to ask him more questions.”

“Then you’ve learned something from him?” She asked, surprised.

“I’ve learned… he is interesting.”

An unreadable expression came over Isis’ face, then she shrugged and said, “I suppose he is.” She smiled. “Hathor asked after you while you were gone, you know. She is growing more persistent.”

“I know,” Horus replied. “And I have no answers for her, yet.”

“If you are not interested in her, you can simply let her know,” Isis said.

“I enjoy her company. I think… she would make a fine queen.” *But I am not certain I wish her to be* mine… He did not want to hurt her feelings, though.

Isis smiled, likely noting his hesitation. “I understand. In any case, I think I'll go rest.” She touched his cheek gently. “It is good to see you home again, Horus. Good night. And good luck.” She pulled her hand away, cradled her lute, and walked out of the room.

Horus looked out the window to the moon, lighting up their beautiful capitol. It was good to be home again, surrounded by all the lives they kept safe and secure.

He thought about Seth resting in his tent in the desert, alone but for a small following of servants to clean up after him, and what mindless animals he formed out of the sand around him. Even Isis, closeted as she could be out of grief and to protect her secrets, kept an entourage of servants and advisors, and was often consulting with other gods. Nephthys managed temples and an army of administrators. Hathor was always going from human gathering to gathering, usually parties. And Maat and Thoth had each other, and were seldom out of each other’s company. With what relatively little Horus knew of gods, he knew that they could be loners, at times, preferring the adulation of mortals than the competition of proximity with other immortals, but he knew they also craved company.

Yet Seth had attempted to push Horus, likely the only other god who had visited for some time, away. To get Horus and all he represented out of Seth’s life. So that Seth could return to his solitary cot in a tent in the middle of nowhere, with a few servants who were wary of any outsiders. A god like Seth, famous for his deeds in wartime, with his own grand temples, sibling to two of Egypt’s leaders, and uncle to the other, would be welcome anywhere.

What was it like to prefer that isolation instead? And why? Even Horus, given to solitary wanderings at times, and quiet hunts, liked Hathor’s company, or working alongside his mother and advisors.

He sighed and turned to bed. The morning. More questions. He would learn.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Horus touched down at Seth’s encampment, servants were cooking a meal of some kind. The smell of roasted meat filled the air. They looked at Horus in surprise, and then gestured him again to the tent.

Horus dismissed his wings and walked over, calling within, “Uncle?”

After a while, Seth replied, “…You really came back?”

“Yes, Uncle. You told me to.”

There was a muffled noise and Seth said, “Fine, get in here.”

After Horus pushed back the tent flap, he saw Seth sitting at a small throne facing the tent entrance. A small table was set up nearby, piled high with various fruits and other snacks. Seth plucked a fresh grape and brought it to his lips. A papyrus scroll rested on his knee.

As Horus watched, he recalled one point in the fight yesterday where he’d seen a flash of Seth’s upper face under the headdress. Bright red eyes, hungry for bloodshed, over a wide, sharp grin. He was paler than most people Horus knew, similar to Hathor and Thoth. But where both of those gods lavished themselves with scented oils and pretty clothes, Seth seemed almost uncaring about his appearance. According to Nephthys, when he’d lived at the palace, he collected boats, trophies, armor, and filled armories full of fancy weaponry… but this tent was rather bare, but for a few plants. The gold and the headdress were part of his being a god, but perhaps not fully meant to show off, and his shendyt was rather plain. He was unscathed because he was good at what he did, not because he feared blemishes - Horus could remember the way he hadn't bothered to wipe blood and detritus off himself during combat. Even the luxuries here were just… what was due his station. No servants fanned his face, or played music for his entertainment. He was alone in the near-silent tent, with naught but papyrus scrolls for company.

Horus doubted Seth was used to a certain level of deprivation. Even though it wasn’t lavish, he still had servants making meals for him, a finely made tent, a nice cot, and someone had to keep those torches going… But there was an odd… thinness to this place. And it felt deliberate. His chariot and weapons almost had more adornment to them than he did. He seemed to care more about how fine the details on his sand crocodiles were, than how much he personally drew the eye. The place made him seem... small.

Even during the daytime he lay in his tent, sleeping, with the flaps shut. Alone. A mortal would have done so to conserve energy and move only when it was cooler, but Seth didn’t have to worry about that. But it made sense when his life consisted mostly of… only leaving when he had to deal with enemies. Egypt wasn’t under assault at *all* times these days.

These were all things Horus thought of in moments. Horus had the gift of perception and insight, from his own godhood and decades of harnessing the keen senses he'd been borne with, where he listened and watched everything about him with a depth and patience mortal children lacked. Though the ideas seemed to come from nowhere, he'd learned they were more often true than not, and usually gave him an edge in interactions with others. Seth hadn't given him much to work with the previous day, but Horus' powers were always stronger in the daytime.

Horus barely knew the god seated before him, but maybe he was getting somewhere in figuring things out.

"You live away from everyone else who is not your handful of servants," Horus said, looking around, as if some minor god might pop out of the tent fabric or the floor at any moment. "Why?"

"Perhaps I like the quiet," Seth replied.

When Seth didn't elaborate, Horus commented, "That cannot be all."

"Well if the *King of the Gods* says so," Seth replied, mockingly, "then *clearly* there is some ulterior motive. Perhaps I am plotting with Nut to overthrow you, and only out here can we communicate undisturbed."

Horus smiled. "Grandmother dotes on Isis and I. If she wanted to overthrow us, I doubt she'd need you to do it."

"Oh to be caught out by my own nephew," Seth replied sarcastically as he considered the fruit bowl again.

"You enjoy taunting me," Horus suggested.

"One must pass the time somehow."

Something happened to make him leave the palace, Horus thought. And his uncle was not doing the best job of hiding that.

While Horus considered his next question, Seth asked, "Was that all?"

Horus noted Seth still didn't offer a seat for his guest, let alone his pharaoh. Isis would have yelled and called lightning to destroy the tent if she knew. But Horus returned to the main goal of this visit, as Seth seemed uninterested in other matters, "Would you tell me of my father?"

"No."

Horus blinked, surprised at the continued stonewalling. "But yesterday you said you'd answer me."

"I said come back and ask me your questions. I didn't say I'd answer them." Seth ate another grape. After he swallowed he added, "Besides, "no" *is* an answer." He smirked. "Your mother

taught me that one."

"So why tell me to come back if you had no intention of answering in a way that *matters?*" Horus asked. He'd been slow to anger once he obtained his godhood, but even *he* was being tested.

It seemed like everything Seth did was meant as an insult. And Horus was more and more the fool for letting them stand.

Seth studied him for a moment, then replied, "I wanted to see just how much like… *him* you are."

Horus blinked at that. "My father?"

"Of course."

"And… your assessment?"

Seth tilted his head. It reminded Horus a little of a cat considering prey. "You walk like him, a bit. And your smile… you have nearly the same smile, though yours is… softer. Osiris was almost always a bit haughty about it, like he knew more than you did – and he had the right of it – but you seem more… genuine, I suppose."

Horus wondered if that was a compliment, since Seth's disinterested tone didn't make it sound like one. Perhaps Seth was calling him stupid?

"Your build, of course, is quite similar," Seth continued, "though your jaw, I think, is from your mother. And your demeanor is…" He pondered a moment. "It is a mix of both of them, I think. Perhaps more Isis at the moment. But also *not* like her."

"How so?"

Seth snorted. "She's a trickster. I don't sense that from you."

Horus bristled. "My mother is not a trickster."

"Oh?" Seth smiled. It was a bit patronizing. "It's hardly an insult. But did she not tell you how she won your father's throne for him?"

"…No."

Seth snorted. "Odd. What, did you think Ra was *happy* to just hand over rule of Egypt to Osiris after attempting to ensure that our parents didn't produce the next pharaoh?"

Horus watched Seth, wondering at how willing he was to chat *now*. "I… hadn't considered it."

Seth considered him, then said, "Hmph, well… Ask her sometime. It's not my story to tell."

“Why wouldn’t she tell me?” Horus wondered aloud, mostly to himself. His mother wasn’t always honest with him about things, but he had no other response, and felt like he needed one.

Seth seemed a bit surprised. “Well… it’s not like the story is unknown. I’m sure someone else around the palace can tell you, if she won’t, for some reason. Nephthys knows, at least.”

"Thank you for telling me about it," Horus said. Even this little bit was more than he'd had before. His powers always struggled around his mother, but then again, he'd always trusted her to tell him what he needed to know. She would test his cunning at times, but she was open with her knowledge. She wanted him to be strong, and wisdom made him so.

Seth shrugged.

Horus tried to imagine Isis and Osiris planning something together, let alone how to unseat Ra, and struggled. He was only used to his mother planning things, and couldn't quite picture them in the same room, speaking of their future. “I wish I’d… known them together,” Horus said, feeling oddly sad. “Knowing my father on his own would be enough, but… I wish I could see them together. She loved him, deeply. And so many respect him.”

Seth leaned back and ate some more grapes and didn’t respond to that.

“Do you miss him?” Horus asked.

He noted Seth’s fingers twitched before he reached for another grape. “No. I do not.”

“Mother said you loved him.”

“…I did. Once.”

“What changed?”

Seth ate another grape, slowly.

After a while, when Horus realized Seth was not planning to respond to the question, he asked, “Did you kill him?”

Seth swallowed and then snorted. “No. But you have no reason to believe me, do you?”

“I do not. But I don’t think you’re much of a liar.”

Seth grinned. “You’re too trusting for a pharaoh. Your parents are better at sussing out lies. Well… your father was, anyway.”

“I am still young and learning,” Horus replied. The continued insult of not offering him a chair, so that he had to stand before the other god like a servant or a recalcitrant child, was definitely pointed. Or Seth’s unsubtle hint to leave. But it was all right, Horus could keep standing. And yes, he could demand recompense for Seth for all these insults, but he found Seth’s refusal to bow to him fascinating, still. The mystery of Seth’s relationship with Osiris stayed his hand as well. He would see the thing through, anyway. “Mother is a good teacher.”

“I imagine.” Seth waved a hand and a chair finally materialized out of the sand.

Horus looked at it, wondering if he should trust it. At any point, Seth could turn it into a weapon – and Horus was not able to turn into sand as his uncle was, or plants, like his father. And he didn’t have his mother’s gift with magic. Seth could even simply dissipate it, to make a fool out of him.

Dared Horus trust it? Dare he refuse and see what Seth was like when angered?

He walked over and sat, looking at Seth. “Thank you, Uncle.”

Seth scoffed. “A word to the wise, nephew: a half-truth can be far more dangerous than an outright lie.”

Horus considered that as servants walked in and carried in a larger table and a meal.

Horus had not planned to eat here, but he accepted Seth’s sudden apparent hospitality – perhaps Seth was grudgingly attempting to be a half-decent host at last – and they ate in relative calm. Seth asked about what Isis and Nephthys were up to, and Horus discussed recent petitions from some farmers and merchants.

The food was good, and Seth was a polite eating companion. And he did not do anything to Horus’ chair.

The servants came in to clean everything out.

“Why are you investigating this *now*?” Seth asked, looking at Horus with a hard gaze once the servants were gone. “It’s been nearly three decades. Surely if older gods than you haven’t figured it out, any clues are long gone.”

“I have a sharper gaze than many,” Horus replied. “I feel I might see something they did not.”

Seth snorted and leaned back in his chair. “I don’t know who killed your father. Though given his power… there is a relatively small pool of candidates. Though perhaps larger than I know. I am not so familiar with the rest of our pantheon as I might be.”

“You think it was a god?”

“I cannot imagine it could be anyone else. And not a demigod, either, unless they were very powerful. Osiris was a politician who spent most of his time in court, yes, but he was the god of life *itself*. He had only to *think* it to kill you.” The corner of Seth’s mouth twitched. “My first guess would be Ra, for she had motive and the power. But Isis would have stopped her, and if Ra *had* killed Osiris, she would not keep it secret. …Probably. She works in mysterious ways.”

Horus nodded.

“But I have been away from court for longer than Osiris has been dead. Perhaps people change. Perhaps people gain new abilities, new needs. Who can say?” Seth gazed towards the

tent flap, which was open, to allow in a breeze and a view of the desert outside. “Much can be hidden behind closed doors.”

“You know something,” Horus said, wondering what half-truths Seth was sharing even now.

“No,” Seth replied. “I do not. Osiris was my brother, and I’ve known him nearly all my life… yet I felt I knew him less at the end of his life than I did at its beginning. Let alone who might have wished him ill.”

“You disliked him.” It was obvious every time Seth spoke of him.

Seth’s mouth quirked ever so slightly. “It would not do to dislike the King of the Gods.”

“You dislike *me*.”

“It’s not the same. You’re strong, but you don’t hold the same power over life and death that Osiris did.” Seth waved a hand when Horus opened his mouth, “Oh, you have your own abilities that go even beyond his, that much is obvious. But it’s not the same.”

Horus frowned at him. “You can see what my powers are?” He was still learning them. Even Isis didn’t know them all.

Seth snorted. “Sort of. For starters, you stink like Ra does, in a way Osiris never did. Osiris smelled like plants and dirt. You… smell like burnt soil, ozone, and hot wind. Which is how Ra smells. I assume some of your abilities are sun-based.”

Horus’ eyes widened. Even Isis didn’t fully know about those. Horus avoided using them, given how dangerous they could be. “You are incredible, Uncle! Your skills continue to impress!”

Seth scoffed. “Stop being so shocked by small things! I am a warrior: I’m trained to gather as much information as I can about potential opponents.”

“You think we are enemies?”

“…I do not know *what* we are,” Seth replied. “But *you* are annoyingly relentless.” Seth stood, stretched, and walked out of the tent.

Horus got up and followed him.

As Seth got in his chariot, Horus asked, “Is it another army?”

“Yes. Though a smaller one.”

“Do you need help?” Horus asked.

“I didn’t need help *last* time,” Seth replied, sternly. “And I don’t need it *now*. But if you wish to come along and stretch your court-spoiled limbs, be my guest. There are plenty of enemies to go around, and my soldiers always enjoy spectacle.” Seth called out, “Ha!” to his sand crocodiles.

Horus summoned his wings.

This time, Seth led them to a large encampment of human Egyptian soldiers, who cheered when Seth appeared, and cheered even louder when they saw Horus in attendance.

Horus was a bit… nervous to be fighting with a human army. He'd gone hunting with mortals before, but he'd never led them into battle. That was Seth's arena.

Horus distracted himself by watching Seth quickly take command of the situation and lead the group forward, with the human generals quickly falling in line behind him. They didn't even seem that bothered by Seth's winged sand crocodiles. Horus assumed it was his usual way to charge into battle.

The battle itself was a bit underwhelming compared to the previous day, though Horus focused a bit more to protect the humans.

Today they fought a mix of unfamiliar creatures with wolf features and human mercenaries, which Horus assumed was the reason Seth was making use of the humans at all today. They stood some chance of survival against other humans.

Seth mostly stuck to regular weapons, though he abandoned his chariot at one point and took to flying, running, or sliding around the battlefield on his sand, leaping on unsuspecting enemies with a roar while his soldiers cheered him on. Later he regained his chariot, raised his bow, and simply shot at scores of enemies as his sand crocodiles charged onward, faster and with better accuracy than any mortal could strive for, with his huge black arrows knocking foes down en masse.

Horus used the wind to knock enemies together, then dove in and cut them down with his sword, or crushed skulls with his fists and legs. Enemies shot arrows at his wings, which were an easy, large target, but the wind kept most of them from striking true, and even when they did hit, Horus shook them off, his healing quickly restoring them to normal. He called the sunlight to blind the enemy archers, and dove amongst them to send them scattering in alarm.

The humans acquitted themselves well, clearly trained to stay out of Seth's way when he was after something, and they grouped together to face what few more-than-mortal enemies Seth and Horus left alive for them to kill. They made quick work of the mortal enemies, and were otherwise organized and efficient, from what Horus could see.

Horus wondered, as he saw spearmen facing a line of enemies, moving in a dance he realized resembled Seth's work of the previous day, how much Seth had taught all these humans. And what he was like when the more open god Horus had seen earlier was willing to spend so much time with others.

It seemed a lifetime and yet no time at all before the last of Horus' enemies fell, and he looked around as the humans began cheering. Horus found Seth, who was back on his chariot as the humans surrounded him, waving their weapons and calling his name.

Horus was surprised to hear some of the humans calling *his* name as well. He knew the humans respected him, and his temples were well cared for, but it was another thing to hear people he'd fought beside in combat cheering him.

He was additionally surprised to see Seth supervising the transportation of the wounded to the medical tents. Though Seth could not heal, he could see the injured were taken away properly. He even stayed back with the priests and other soldiers who looked after the dead, though the dead were small in number.

Seth said nothing to him as all this occurred, and Horus simply watched, not knowing what else to do.

Finally, Seth turned his chariot away and headed back into the deep desert, with soldiers still cheering for him as he left.

Horus flew at his side, unwilling to break the silence between them now, but wondering what his uncle was thinking of.

"You acquitted yourself well, today," Seth eventually said, his arms crossed as the crocodiles steered themselves, likely under his will. Horus wondered if the times he needed reins were when he needed to feel more physically in control of something, much like how Horus himself often just preferred walking when he could fly, to anchor himself somewhere.

"It was an honor," Horus replied. "And a privilege, to again watch you fight."

"If you pay too much attention to others fighting, you will start to lose your own battles," Seth replied.

"I am working on my battlefield awareness," Horus replied. "It is impossible to be unaware of the God of War as he plows through enemies, though, even when I am facing the opposite direction."

Seth snorted, but Horus did not feel any anger in it.

For a while they traveled in silence again, until they returned to Seth's tent and servants.

As Seth stepped off his chariot, he looked at Horus. "You're going to come back tomorrow, aren't you?"

"I would like to, if you will not answer my questions again."

"You still believe I killed Osiris."

"I believe you have answers to my questions concerning him, even if you don't realize it, and I value the advice you've given me about the situation."

Seth scoffed.

"And perhaps, Uncle, I am coming to enjoy your company." Horus smiled, and noticed the slight twitch at the corner of Seth's lips. It wasn't all playfulness: for a time, during their meal

and when Seth had been discussing which gods could do what, Seth seemed like a pleasant enough companion, and like someone Horus could enjoy being around.

And Horus had the personal impression he was already wearing the other god down. Isis said it was a fault of his, usually with fondness.

Seth shook his head. “You are like your father, now, you know.”

Horus felt a small thrill at that, but also wondered why Seth didn’t make it sound like it was a compliment.

After a moment, Seth sighed and said, “But you are *not* him, as well.” The slight twitch in his lips seemed a bit more like a contented smile at that.

Why do you seem happy that we’re not so similar, Uncle? Horus wanted to ask. But it was getting late, and he didn’t want to push his luck with whatever new space they’d found.

“Very well,” Seth continued. “Return again tomorrow, if you must.” He went back into the tent.

When Horus returned home, he recalled Seth’s advice, and sought out his mother. “How did you depose Ra?”

Isis blinked, then snorted. “Seth told you?”

“He told me you did it, but not how. He said it wasn’t his place to explain.” He hadn’t thought Seth was lying, but it was… odd to have confirmation that Isis had kept such a thing from him. He was Pharaoh, and only the fourth to hold that position.

Half-truths, indeed. Or simply... avoiding explaining things.

“He was right.” Isis sighed. Then she walked over to a nearby couch to sit down, patting the space next to her.

Horus walked over and sat at her side, watching her.

“Your father was not Pharaoh the minute he came of age,” Isis began. “Ra held on to power, despite the prophecy that Osiris was meant to become Pharaoh. Your father said that Ra would give it up in time, but we are *gods* – long-lived and covetous – and Ra has *never* given up anything that wasn’t forced from her. And… she was not always a stable ruler, particularly as she aged.”

Horus had only met Ra on a few occasions. She definitely seemed… more chaotic than other gods. But when you were the source of life on Earth and commanded the sun, perhaps that was warranted.

“And…” Isis continued, “I was perhaps *impatient* for your father to be in power.” She smiled. “Queen is a nice title.”

Horus huffed a laugh.

“So I tricked Ra into telling me her true name, which gave me power over her. Then I told her to give up her rule and leave the earth. And she did. And thus, your father finally became Pharaoh.”

“Incredible.” Horus watched his mother for a moment, seeing more than he’d seen before. “Why did you never tell me?”

Isis shrugged. “It is an old story, and I don’t think on it much. Ra doesn’t visit often, and your father is gone, so… it doesn’t even come to mind.”

Why did Seth emphasize it? Horus wondered. “Seth theorized that Ra could have killed Osiris, but that it was unlikely because you’d have stopped her. Now I understand why.” A true name gave you absolute power over someone. Horus was surprised Isis hadn’t abused it even more. Though when the one in your power was the God of the Sun…

Isis snorted. “Indeed.”

“He thinks it was a god, though. No one else would be strong enough.”

“He spoke much with you this time?” Isis looked at him thoughtfully.

“Yes,” Horus replied. “I think he is more welcoming… or perhaps simply realized that if he talked to me, I’d leave faster.”

She laughed. “Either way, I’m glad you are getting somewhere.”

“Did you have any theories on who it was? All these years and you’ve never said.” He’d asked many a time. And stopped because it pained her to remember Osiris’ murder.

“There are many gods in our pantheon,” Isis replied, “but few who would have been able to outdo my spells. But they had alibis or no reason to go after Osiris.” She sighed. “Which means there is possibly someone out there who is stronger than I, with a grudge, at least against Osiris, and I do not know who, or one of those stronger gods was just good at hiding their tracks.”

“This is as dangerous as I thought, then,” Horus said. “We could be attacked at any time…”

“In 28 years they’ve done nothing else,” Isis said. “I think their ire was directed purely at Osiris. So we are likely safe. But do not think I have not spent all this time working hard on my own powers. I am stronger than I was even then, and I was quite strong already. Nephthys has worked with me to help, and now that you are here and have your godhood, we are better prepared for whatever comes.” She reached out to lightly caress his right cheek and smiled.

Horus smiled back, still uncertain. It seemed he had confirmation of his worst fears… It was one reason he’d tried to figure this out in the first place - that the killer could still be out there, waiting to strike again - but he hadn’t thought it might be a god on Ra’s level. If it was Seth, there were steps he could have taken, based on Maat’s notes and consultations with Thoth. But if it wasn’t a member of their pantheon, all of whom would have had no apparent

reason to harm Osiris, what if it was some unknown foreign god? How could they even begin to figure out that person’s powers, let alone to defend against it?

Which led him back to Seth, who guarded Egypt’s borders. Who could and should have spotted such an invader before they made it past Egypt’s borders, and made an attempt to stop them. Though Horus chided himself. Seth did not kill all who arrived at Egypt’s shores. Only enemies. And if this enemy was stronger even than Isis, or made themselves unassuming as they crossed over… perhaps Seth hadn’t even known. Though it was hard to think of an enemy even his uncle couldn’t face, given all Horus had seen of him in combat.

He’d talk to Seth about it tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A week, then two quickly passed with Horus visiting Seth nearly every day. Often they fought enemies – more often smaller groups of mercenaries, vermin, or the occasional giant beast. Horus had the impression Seth was testing him, still.

Horus hoped Seth was happy with what he saw.

Sometimes they traveled to Seth's temples, so that Seth could oversee ceremonies to bless new soldiers. These new soldiers worshipped Seth just like his army had. And Seth smiled, contentedly.

Horus again wondered why Seth chose to be alone.

He watched Seth redirect lost travelers in the desert while still talking about other things. Horus noticed the other god seemed to have an instinctive understanding of the people and creatures who roamed the desert. When Horus asked him about it, Seth shrugged and merely said, "I listen. And smell. And you know, I have *eyes*. Isn't your thing having good eyes?"

Horus found him very good at explaining certain things. Some things moreso than others.

And a few times, Seth would come to a quiet place and leave his chariot behind and settle in the sand, and his sha would come from seemingly nowhere and settle around him, fawning for his attention.

Horus watched them in awe, not daring to interrupt.

Close up, the creatures were large and thin, some easily dwarfing their lord. But they leaned into his touches, begging for pets and scratches, and the occasional bit of dried meat Seth pulled from a satchel.

And if Seth was grinning the whole time, and even *laughing*, well… that was a bonus.

(Horus found he liked Seth's laughter.)

(He liked it a lot.)

Seth eventually beckoned Horus over, grudgingly, perhaps, and Horus wandered over, carefully, watching the animals.

"Don't you have pets?" Seth asked, genuinely curious.

"Dogs, yes, but…" Horus looked around at the animals watching him. "Those are Father's animals, not someone else's."

Seth snorted, and said, “They’re still animals. They like things others do.”

Horus reached out to pet one bright red one who was watching him, then hesitated.

Seth reached out and took his hand.

Horus tried not to stiffen in shock.

Seth’s hand was gentle, but firm. He placed Horus’ hand on the animal, moving it back and forth, then let go, seemingly not noticing anything. “Just like that. He won’t bite. Well… maybe he won’t.”

“*Maybe?*” Horus asked, watching the animal, who shut his eyes, seemingly enjoying the touch. His fur was incredibly soft.

“Just don’t hurt him,” Seth replied, smiling. “He’ll let you know if you screw up.” He turned to the other animals.

Horus realized as they traveled back to Seth’s encampment that, like Seth looking for Osiris in Horus, Horus was looking for Osiris in Seth. Isis, of course, he could see, but Osiris was also Seth’s brother. Surely there was just as much of him as Isis, or Nephthys. And Horus could see his aunt in Seth, too. A sort of calm in his smile, sometimes. Maybe part of his appreciation for moments of stillness and quiet.

But Horus would never know for sure what bit of Osiris was there. It was simply lost in whatever was Seth. And Horus was oddly glad for it. Because he was growingly aware that yes, he liked Seth as he was. Not the missing father Horus wanted.

Perhaps a friend, though.

Seth glanced up at Horus, flying above Seth’s right side. The corner of Seth’s mouth quirked in a slight smirk that Horus was growingly used to.

Horus smiled back.

“Horus?”

Horus looked up from the reports he’d been reviewing before heading out to meet Seth again, and saw Nephthys step into his rooms. She looked as elegant as ever, and he was surprised to see her visiting him. She was almost always busy with some ceremony these days, now that Horus didn’t need as much of her attention.

“I heard from Isis that you’ve been visiting Seth,” she said, smiling.

“Yes, but she didn’t want it to get out…”

She nodded. “Yes. People gossiped when he left, and Osiris was upset about the whole thing.” She looked a bit sad at that. “If people knew you were back to investigating Osiris’ murder, and were visiting Seth in connection, the whispers would start again.” She frowned.

“Though they are starting to hear that you’re interacting, from reports of the soldiers, and are curious about it.”

“Osiris was upset about Seth’s absence?” Horus asked, not worried about what people thought of him. He was visiting his uncle. What was the harm in that?

She nodded. “He was morose about it… I’d never seen him so moody, honestly. Even Isis was confused over it. But he didn’t go after Seth, for some reason, though he could have. We expected him to.” She shrugged. “And then, well…”

“Did they argue?” Horus asked. “Is that what made Seth leave?”

“If they did, no one heard it,” Nephthys replied. “And neither Seth nor Osiris spoke of it. They were getting along just fine before that. In fact, the day before Seth left, we were all on a hunt together, just like normal. Everyone seemed to be getting along fine…” Her expression was sad. “If something happened between them, it happened that night. And then the next morning, Seth left.”

Horus watched her. “Do you think Seth murdered Osiris?”

Nephthys blinked, then her eyes widened. “Seth? Oh, no, no no no, not in a million years! They were so close! Plus… Seth wouldn’t have been able to kill him. His powers don’t extend to that.”

“But he’s the god of war.”

“Egypt’s greatest soldier,” Nephthys said, with a fond smile. “But not its greatest *assassin*. Oh, he’s good at sneaking around if he wants to, and certainly hacking up Osiris would suit his brashness… but simply ripping Osiris to pieces wouldn’t kill him. Osiris was the god of *life*, you understand. And Seth doesn’t have the kind of magic to deal with that.”

“Hmm… so it’d have to be a god with powerful magic, as well as physical strength.”

She nodded.

“Your notes were somewhat vague, though,” Horus said. “Well… Maat admittedly wrote most of them…”

“I was mostly busy helping Isis,” Nephthys replied. “Immortal pregnancies are… not easy things. And the shock of Osiris’ murder and having to handle everything else with managing Egypt… it was hard on her. I knew we were looking for *someone*, obviously, but outside questioning those who lived here at the time, I had no ideas. I don’t really conduct murder investigations.” She sighed. “I’m afraid I wasn’t all that helpful to Maat when she needed me, though I did try.”

“I’m sure she appreciated the help.”

Nephthys smiled. “Well… I’m afraid I have no insights to offer you, but I was wondering… if I could tag along with you to visit Seth?”

Horus looked at her in surprise.

“I miss him,” she said, looking down. “I haven’t seen him in so long, or spoken to him. We used to be so close…”

“I mean no offense,” Horus said, “But I don’t know that he’ll want to see you.”

She looked up in surprise.

“He’s very… private right now. He barely wants to talk to me.” Though he’d opened up more, lately. He talked about hunting, the different factions who attempted to invade, and campaigns he’d been on in the past. Never Osiris, but sometimes he’d bring up stories of Isis, Nephthys, or the other gods, too.

She smiled sadly. “Well… I’d rather *he* tell me that. Then I can at least be satisfied that I’ve tried.”

Horus studied her for a while, then nodded.

They arrived at Seth’s encampment around midday, since they took one of Horus’ chariots, guided by powerful black horses only gods could properly control.

Nephthys seemed perfectly at ease at Horus’ side, watching the landscape as it passed, staying quiet.

Horus was used to his aunt: she’d doted on him when Isis was too busy with her other duties. So the silence passed easily.

He hoped Seth wouldn’t be angry. It wasn’t like Horus had *promised* not to bring anyone else.

The encampment was the same as ever, and Horus stopped his chariot a short distance away, ensured the horses would remain calm in the hands of the servants, and led Nephthys to the tent.

She carried a large hamper with her, which she’d said contained a gift for Seth.

Horus stopped as usual at the closed flap and called, “Uncle, it’s me again!”

“You’re late,” Seth called back. “Isn’t it a sky god’s prerogative to get up early?”

“I’ve Nephthys with me, today. It took us some time to get here.”

There was no response to that.

In fact, so much time passed that Horus worried Seth was ignoring him.

But eventually the flap pulled back and there was Seth, staring at them.

Horus had to back up a step in surprise.

The other god looked no different than normal, but Horus could sense the tension in him. The surprise. His gaze was focused on Nephthys.

“Seth,” she said after a time, smiling. “It’s been too long.”

“Nephthys, I…” Seth swallowed.

Horus realized he was *nervous*.

She raised her hamper. “I brought you a snack. Your favorites. Would you like to sit and talk a bit?”

“I… of course.” After a moment he snapped at the servants and held the flap back so they could all go back inside.

The tent flap was tied open, letting in more air and sunshine, and making the tent less muggy. Horus was interested in how there were no sand chairs today: in fact, there was already a second chair waiting in the tent, but a servant brought in a third.

Was he… waiting for me? Horus wondered, with a spot of warmth in his chest. They’d talked more in the tent lately, but Seth usually made the chairs. Or they were out in the desert, traveling somewhere.

Servants brought a table, drinks, and snacks, as well. Nephthys settled in one of the chairs – not Seth’s throne – and set her hamper down. She pulled off the cover, revealing a wide variety of vegetables. She smiled as she turned to Seth. “I picked these this morning.”

Seth looked down at it all and smiled. “Nephthys, you didn’t have to do all this…” He reached out for a piece of lettuce, and Nephthys gently caught his hand.

Seth froze.

She let him go and said, “Sorry, Seth, I…” She sighed and looked at Horus. “I’m sorry, but… Horus, would you wait outside, please? Seth and I need to talk alone.”

Horus looked at Seth, who was only staring at Nephthys.

Finally, Horus nodded. He got up and left the tent, letting the flap shut behind them.

When he’d been standing for a time and been unable to hear anything from within the tent, he walked over to where the servants were watching the horses. He took over and lightly patted the creatures, smiling fondly at them.

He glanced back at the tent and tried not to feel uneasy.

“You’re acting like I’m going to eat you,” Nephthys said, settling back as she watched Seth. “I’m not planning to.”

Aren't you? Seth wondered. He could smell her now, she was so close. The perfume in her headdress. The familiar smell of her sweat. The sound of her clothing as she moved. Everything about her was so familiar, as if they hadn't spent nearly 30 years apart. The blink of an eye for a god, but in ways it had felt like an eternity.

And also not long enough.

Seth snorted. "Good to know."

"I've never seen Horus so invested in something like this before," she continued. "He's come out here so much. And he's friendly but… he spreads that friendship equally, to everyone. This is… a change for him."

"He wants either a clear confession or stories of his father," Seth said, dismissively. He'd thought over why Horus was friendly and… realized that yes, he had started appreciating the other god's presence. It was definitely a change. He was so unlike any of the other gods Seth knew. But Seth had no illusions about Horus' motives.

He thought, anyway.

Too often, he'd seen Horus' relaxed smiles when he was enjoying himself.

It was… annoying.

"But I think… he's happy?" Nephthys insisted. "He's definitely a bit cheerier around the palace."

Seth leaned back in his chair, attempting to appear a calm he didn't feel. He didn't *like* talking about Horus this way, particularly with Nephthys. "He *does* seem weirdly happy when he's here. I didn't know if that was just his disposition or what."

"Perhaps being around *you* makes him happy."

Seth scoffed. But for some reason, he felt his cheeks warm.

Nephthys looked around. "You seem to be doing okay out here."

Seth shrugged. "I'm well enough."

"You could come home, if you miss it," she said.

Seth didn't reply to that.

Her expression sobered. "Why did you leave? Without even saying goodbye?"

Seth grimaced.

"You can tell me anything, Seth. I promise."

He looked at her, saying nothing for a long time, then looked away. "…Not this, Nephthys."

“Was it…?” She hesitated, then shut her eyes. “Was it something I did?”

He looked at her in alarm. “No! No, never!” He smiled a bit sadly when she looked at him. “You could never… No.”

She smiled sadly at him. “I’m pleased, but also a bit alarmed…”

“You needn’t be, really. It *wasn’t* you.”

“But it was someone?”

Seth stiffened again, then looked away.

Nephthys got up and moved her chair closer to his, then sat down again, so that she could reach out and lightly cup his right cheek, turning his head to gaze down at her.

“I’m here,” she said, softly. “Please. Tell me.”

After a time, he shook his head. “I *can’t,* Nephthys.” His voice was broken. “I *can’t.*” If she knew, if…

The world shattered whenever he thought too much on it.

After a time, she bowed her head. “…I understand.”

He laughed, sadly. “No. No you… Hopefully you never do.”

She breathed in deeply, then reached forward and pushed her forehead against his, slightly knocking his large headdress off.

He was surprised, but quickly shut his eyes and fell into the old familiar touch they sometimes used to calm each other. Well, mostly Nephthys did it to calm *Seth.*

And it was relaxing, really.

In the calm, he remembered that once… once upon a time this had been all he’d ever wanted.

And in the calm he also realized… *once.*

He kept his eyes shut, but when Nephthys moved forward to brush his lips with hers, he pulled back in surprise.

She stared back at him, startled, but didn’t pull away. He realized there was a hint of... hurt, in her face. It hadn't been accidental, then.

“Nephthys, you…?” His voice was so quiet. Once, he would have given anything for her to be like this… whatever this was, if it was what he thought it was.

“I…” She swallowed. “I apologize, I thought…”

“No, I… I wanted… But since when?” It was a scramble in his head for the right words.

“For a long time, Seth.”

“How…? When…?” There were a dozen times he’d hoped, but…

She smiled fondly. “I don’t know that I can recall it that specifically.”

He smiled. He remembered how his eyes used to stray to her at parties. How he found himself going to her side more than Isis over time, though Isis was better at strategy when he needed someone to chat with. Nephthys always calmed him. She was a bulwark against the need to always be out on the sand, fighting *something*. With her he could simply… *be*.

Nephthys smiled. “Seth, with Osiris gone, you realize you’re the most powerful god in Egypt?”

“…What?” And like that, it felt like someone had dumped a cart of pottery on his head.

She blinked up at him. “You don’t feel it?”

“…Horus is Pharaoh.” He was. He had powers Seth didn’t, and had inherited more directly somehow from Ra. And who knew what Isis was teaching him? *He* was the King of the Gods. Not Seth.

“Horus is still a child,” she said, dismissively. “He is powerful, yes. But he’s not *you*, Seth.”

“Why… why are you saying this?” He wanted it to be any other reason… anything but…

"Peace may only be bestowed upon those who are strong."

He felt his hand twitch.

“I just wanted you to have your moment in the sun. Out of Osiris’ shadow.” She smiled. “Imagine how amazing you would be in court. You could come home. Not that you were ever barred or people wanted you gone, but… so many would flock to you again. They’ve missed you when you were gone.” She reached forward and caressed his arm. “*I’ve* missed you. And we could be together. For real, this time.”

He stared at her, thinking it over. *Really* thinking it over.

It was tempting. *So* tempting. Everything he’d wanted. He could see Isis again. Laze about more and leave his duties to his armies again.

And he’d have Nephthys. Wasn’t that what he’d always wanted?

But. A patronizing smile played on the edge of his awareness. “Why are you saying this *after* Osiris is gone?” Seth asked, quietly.

“What do you mean?” She was frowning.

“I’m no less powerful than I was when he was alive,” Seth insisted. “How long have you cared for me like this, without saying anything?”

Her frown deepened, and she was clearly confused. “I… For an age, Seth.” She blushed. “I simply… was too nervous about it.

“We’re *gods*,” Seth insisted. “Why do nerves matter?” *You could have told me. You could have told me and I wouldn’t have even had to plan tell you. To tell…*

She swallowed. “I just… needed more time, that’s all." She looked at him again. "I *want* you, Seth. That's not a lie, if that's what you're worried about."

A part of him wanted to let it rest. Why did it matter when? And so what if she primarily cared about how strong he was? He knew she cared for him in other ways, Osiris be damned.

…If he’d known about this, though, would it have changed things?

Perhaps.

But it didn’t change anything now, did it? It couldn’t change the past. It couldn’t fully change the two of them, sitting here now, being who they were.

Nothing could change who Seth was, now.

And he wondered why she couldn’t just *see it* on him when she stared at him. Why she couldn’t just *tell*. He wasn’t *that* good at hiding such things, was he?

Or perhaps he was a better liar than Isis always gave him credit for.

“I don’t mean to… focus on it,” Seth said. He reached out and caressed her cheek, making her smile. “I… am honored.”

He could see the stiffness appear in her expression. She understood, then. At least, that things weren’t as they were before he’d left.

Neither of them could go back to that, really.

He knew he’d always care for her, and when she moved her hand to caress his shoulder, he let a piece of himself finally go. It felt… oddly freeing.

“I could leave,” Nephthys offered.

He grimaced. “No, it’s…” He smiled. “It’s all right.”

She smiled sadly back at him.

“I don't mind," he said, honestly. "I wanted you for… for so long,” Seth said, quietly. “And I never told you.”

Her eyes widened slightly. “Seth…”

He smiled. “I should have. I'm so sorry, Nephthys.”

She squeezed his shoulder. “It’s like you said. We’re *gods*. Those things… They don’t matter.”

Seth huffed a bitter laugh. “Yes… I suppose they don't.”

"This was foolish of me," she said, quietly, looking down at her lap. "I should have realized..."

"No," Seth said, pulling her chin up. "It wasn't foolish. You were *never* foolish."

Tears glistened in her eyes.

"And I want to be there for you again," he continued. "However... however I can."

"I don't want to... *take* from you," she said. "That's... I *won't*."

"I'm giving it," Seth said. "I swear. You're not."

When she still looked worried, he continued, "Nephthys... Wise, kind, wonderful Nephthys, you are as beautiful as always. The most beautiful goddess of the Ennead."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Seth..."

He smiled at her, trying not to make it bitter.

"I wish I could give you peace, again," she said, quietly.

"Has anyone ever given it to you?" he asked.

She laughed and wiped away her tears, before looking at him again. "You always did."

"So let me do it again."

Her gaze softened.

This time, when she leaned in to kiss him, he didn’t pull away.

“Horus?”

The younger god perked up when he heard Nephthys’ voice. He found her standing before him, though a few paces away, respectfully. Her hamper was missing – he assumed she left it inside the tent.

He realized he’d *fallen asleep*, and it was getting dark. How had so much time passed?

“I think I’ll head home,” she said. She looked back at the tent. “Seth… didn’t want me to stay.”

“Oh.” Horus stood up. “We’ll head back then.” He wondered what they’d… talked about.

“No, I…” She frowned. “Would you stay with him? I don’t think he should be alone, but… Obviously I can’t... be with him.” Her gaze was searching, and a bit sad.

Horus’ eyes widened. *What* had they talked about? “You think… he’d be okay with me there?” Sure, Seth was more open with Horus these days, but Nephthys was Seth’s *sister*… If he didn’t want to talk to her, why would he want to talk to *Horus?*

She smiled sadly. “I could tell he was even more tense when you left. And the way he looks when he speaks of you… Perhaps you remind him of Osiris. Or Isis. Or both. He loved both of them, and Isis and Seth used to be thick as thieves…”

Horus was surprised to be disappointed at that thought. He found he *wanted* to be someone his uncle was close to. But *not* just because he reminded the other god of his *parents*…

“Please, Horus?” she said with a smile. “At least for me? I can make my way home on my own.”

“…Of course, Aunt. Are you sure you can manage…?”

She chuckled. “Of course. Seth taught me how to pilot a chariot, after all.” She leaned in. “Well, if I’m being honest, *Father* taught me how to ride, but Seth *really* wanted to show off, so I let him.”

Horus smiled.

She patted him on the shoulder. “Go on. Just…” She frowned. “Be gentle, please. Seth is one of the dearest people in my life. I don’t… want him to be hurt…” She opened her mouth to say more, then shook her head, and waved him off.

Horus paused at the closed tent flap, and hesitated before calling within, “Uncle?”

He was met with silence.

“Uncle, Nephthys wanted me to check on you.”

“...Fuck’s sake, stop shouting and get in here!”

Horus stepped inside and blinked in the light. His eyes settled on Seth, lounging on his cot, watching the tent flap. His expression was unreadable underneath his headdress.

“So Nephthys is *that* worried, huh?” Seth demanded, his voice oddly muted. He sighed. “Well, you can see I’m fine. Is she still out there?”

“She went home.”

“…Good.”

Seth didn’t say anything for a while, and Horus didn’t know what to say either.

Horus went and pulled up one of the chairs, so he could sit nearby.

After a while, Seth asked, “You’ve been Pharaoh some time now. Has anyone caught your eye yet, to serve as your queen?”

Horus blinked. Of course Hathor came to mind, but… “No. Not… quite.”

Seth snorted. “Well… that’ll change soon, I imagine.”

“…Perhaps.”

“Your parents were married long before Osiris took the throne. Ra, of course, never wed anyone, but well… more of us are marrying, now. Nut and Geb. Your parents. Maat and Thoth. It’s odd, still, but more common. I suspect you’ll join them.”

Horus said nothing to that.

“Do yourself a favor,” Seth said, looking at him. “When you know… tell her. Before… before it’s too late.”

Horus blinked. “Too late for what?”

“Just…” Seth swallowed. “Anything can happen, you know? You fall into love. You… fall out of love…” He grimaced. “Maybe you never really *were* in love… But… you owe it to yourself to grab it while you can.” Seth smiled, sadly. “If you can, that is.”

“Uncle, did something happen between you and Nephthys…?”

“Oh, a few things,” Seth said, shrugging. “Private things. Nothing terrible, really, just…” He sighed. “People move on. Even gods.”

Horus realized that he could smell them both in here. Someone had put out incense, but the smell was still there, still strong. Horus... didn't know how he felt about that, but it was worrying that Seth seemed so bereft now.

Like Isis.

“Uncle, are you out here in the desert because you’re sad?” He meant it with kindness. He knew it was something to do with Osiris. And maybe Nephthys, too. "Because... of something that happened at the palace?"

Seth was quiet for a time. Then he looked at Horus. “I thought I’d hate you. For being his son.”

Horus said nothing to that.

“And sometimes I do,” Seth said. “But you seem… perfectly normal. There’s so much of Isis in you, too. But… so much of *you* as well.” He looked down. “Who knows what kind of god you’ll be someday? I certainly don’t know.” Then he smiled. “But I hope… you’re a better one than your father.”

Horus was distracted from the odd praise when he noticed the tears leaking down Seth's cheeks. "Uncle…"

Seth snorted. "Pathetic, right?"

"No, I… please, tell me what's wrong, if you can."

Seth laughed. It was a brittle sound. He put a hand to his forehead, over the headdress. "I thought Nephthys was giving me some of her peace, like she usually does. And maybe she did, and now that she's not here, it's fading, and just… *worse* for the absence, because I thought I'd gotten over it, I thought…" His fingers tightened on the headdress, painfully so.

"Uncle!" Horus stood up and walked over, and knelt before the other god.

Seth wasn't looking at him, but like this, Horus could see his pained expression, the way he was trying to hold back the tears.

Horus reached up, then paused when Seth flinched away.

Seth's breathing sped up, but he shut his eyes.

"I can leave, Uncle, if…"

"No, it's…" Seth swallowed. "It's…"

After a while, Horus realized Seth wasn't going to finish the sentence.

Horus reached up and carefully pulled the headdress off, dropping it on the cot. Then he tried not to freeze.

Even covered in tears and blotchy, his hair mussed from the headdress, Seth was beautiful. His long, brighter-than-fresh-blood-red hair brought forth the idea of the desert at its hottest, the sand a blaze disappearing into the horizon, heat haze, and the sheer endlessness of it. His red eyes were sharp, but delicate, too, with the fine kohl to enhance his features and help protect him from sun glare. His jaw was fine boned, yet strong. He was young, yet also obviously ancient, with the wisdom of countless battles. He was small, in contrast to Horus, yet fearsome, in the way he fought, the way he loved, the way he mourned.

Horus reached out automatically, cupping Seth's cheek.

Seth looked down at him, his gaze distant, sad, tears still falling. "Are you not afraid? I could easily kill you like this."

Horus blinked. It was true. It was a very compromising position. And unlike his father, healing from dismemberment might pose an issue.

But he didn't care.

"You *could*, Uncle," Horus said, carefully. "But do you *want* to?"

Seth’s expression seemed to sink even more with that. “I haven’t known what I’ve wanted for longer than you’ve been alive.” He shut his eyes and bowed his head, letting his long hair fall in a curtain around him.

Horus pressed forward, carefully, and lightly wrapped his arm around Seth’s side, letting the older god rest on his right shoulder.

The moment felt precious and fragile. Horus was nearly too afraid to breathe.

“…You should call me Seth.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Horus woke, he was still sitting on the floor of Seth's tent and leaning against Seth's cot. He looked up and over his shoulder to see Seth still laying on the cot, with his back to Horus, his long red hair behind him.

It was still early morning: Horus could feel the sun rising outside the tent. The servants hadn't come in to disturb them. He wondered if Seth had to call them.

Horus wanted to reach out and touch the pale skin of Seth's shoulder, but didn't dare. Even though Seth had been open last night before they'd both fallen asleep, that didn't change things between them, or how Seth felt generally about touch.

"You are staring at me."

Horus blinked. "You're awake Unc-Seth?"

"…Yes."

"Did I wake you?"

"No."

After Seth turned onto his back, he stared at the tent ceiling, his hands resting on his chest. Like this, his face was even more intimidating and beautiful.

Horus hoped to never stop looking at it.

"I don't know what it is you're looking for," Seth said quietly, seemingly paying him no mind. "Since I have no new information to offer. I don't know who killed your father. Or why. And I have no idea who would."

Horus blinked, pulling himself out of whatever trance he was lost in. "I believe you. I've been ruminating over my next steps. And considering your earlier advice."

"I wish I had better answers for you," Seth replied. "Honestly. But I simply don't."

Horus tilted his head. "Something happened that made you leave the palace and come out here. Would you talk to me about it?"

"I wouldn't even talk to *Nephthys* about it. So no, I'm not going to talk to *you* about it." The vitriol was strong, and Horus reeled back slightly from it.

Seth looked at him, grimaced, then looked back at the ceiling, and didn't say anything.

“I understand Un… Seth.”

The previous night they’d sat for a long time, with Seth in Horus’ arms, not talking. Horus was shocked when he realized at some point Seth had fallen asleep, so he gently placed the other god back on the cot and sat at his side, watching, hoping Seth slept peacefully. He hadn’t expected to fall asleep himself.

Now they might as well have been standing as far apart as they had the first day they met.

“It can be so quiet out here,” Seth said.

Horus watched him. Watched the distant look in his eyes, as if he could see beyond the tent. But what was he looking for?

“It’s good, of course,” Seth continued, “Honestly, it’s one of the best things about being out here. But… I find I miss the music of the city at times.”

Horus considered, then offered, “We could go—”

“No. I’ll not go back.”

“Of course not… Seth.” Horus grimaced at himself.

“…Let’s go hunting.”

“…Of course… Seth.”

Morning rituals were different out in the desert, but the servants didn’t struggle with having another god to care for. Horus found their attentions good, and was glad Seth had helpful underlings to look after him. Horus felt clean and refreshed as he stepped towards the chariot, and Seth looked a bit brighter as well, even with his headdress back on, hiding much of his face again.

Their first target was a large, dark purple boar, the size of several adult humans. Its tusks were each easily the size of a child. Seth had first found the huge tracks, and led them towards it as the sun rose, warming their backs.

Horus was glad to fall back into their easy camaraderie of days past.

Upon finding the creature running along the dunes, Seth grinned from atop his chariot, clearly enjoying the hunt. The sunlight made his skin nearly glow. “There it is!”

Horus flew above him, watching the great beast roar as Seth leapt from his chariot. Seth formed his wicked black bow and aimed at the beast mid-air.

The battle was brief. Horus was no help at all, simply watching as Seth finished the creature off, before leaping to his chariot to hunt even more. As Horus looked back, wondering what to do with the corpse – and worried for any humans that came across such a creature, as they

could be poisonous and even physically dangerous to the untrained – he saw Seth's sacred beasts appear from the dunes, slavering over the remains.

Horus followed after his uncle.

They spent their day that way. At times, Horus went in for the killing blow, taking down a giant worm whose screams released vampire bats, a rat the size of three camels, with three heads, and two chimeras of creatures he couldn't name. Seth was unstoppable, though, and just as fierce against such creatures as he'd been against armies. Horus had seen him hunt before, but not like this.

At one point, Horus stabbed a sand spear Seth had lent him into an enormous bull with several eyes and four mouths full of fangs. The creature had enough strength to pull Horus down with it, yanking Horus' arm slightly. Horus let go of the spear and stepped back, shaking his hand with a frown.

He heard Seth's laughter, and then turned to see the other god walking forward. "Did it take you by surprise, Horus?"

Horus blinked. Seth… had never called him by his name, before.

It sent an odd thrill through him.

The beast cried out, and Seth turned to it, leaping astride it to strike down with another spear, silencing it forever.

Horus watched as Seth hopped back down. Seth grimaced at him. "You have to ensure it's dead, or else your mother will come for *my* head after I send your body to her." He looked up at Horus slightly, though Horus couldn't fully read his expression. "Are you all right?" He reached out to Horus' face, but pulled back his hand before touching Horus' skin, and frowned.

Horus blinked. "I am fine, Seth. Thank you."

Seth nodded with a "hmph", and then walked back to the chariot.

Horus wondered what would have happened if Seth hadn't hesitated.

As they finally rode back to the camp, Horus said, "I've never seen so many of such creatures at once."

"Many of them were killed in ancient times," Seth said, gazing ahead, seemingly calmed by all the slaughter. "But some fled to the deeper parts of the desert and Egypt's borders. Feeding on foreign soldiers, and sometimes each other. Some even went to Duat, but came back, changed."

"They can do that?"

Seth shrugged. “Duat is not my domain, so I don’t know. I simply clean them up as I can, to protect the humans. Osiris…” Seth grimaced. “He was the master of life and death. He would sometimes bring them back, for sport, and sometimes we’d make a game of it. But sometimes it was just for me. He liked to watch…” His expression clouded over, seemingly angry.

“…Seth?”

“…It doesn’t matter.”

What did Father do to you? Horus wondered as they traveled along. *What did you perhaps do to each other?*

They didn’t speak for the rest of their journey.

Seth parked his chariot in the camp and got out, but then stopped before returning to the tent. There was more activity in the servant's area than usual, and there were clearly more humans around than before. Usually they made themselves absent when they weren’t preparing food or cleaning.

A small falcon that had been resting on a camel brought in by the new humans flew to Horus’ shoulder. “A surprise for you, Seth,” Horus said, stepping onto the sand nearby and watching Seth’s movements. “Some entertainment for dinner.” He was nervous about this, but hopeful. He’d sent the falcon off for this earlier in the day, before they’d left for the hunt, hoping it might cheer Seth a little.

“I didn’t ask you to tell more people where we are.” Seth’s expression was now annoyed at best.

“They were veiled on the way here. And they will be so when they return. They’ll have no memory of this place: something Mother taught me.” One of the lesser spells he was good with.

Seth grimaced, but allowed Horus to lead him back into the tent, which was opened up a bit, with a table set up for their meal.

They sat together as servants brought them food and drink. Horus noted Seth’s surprise when dancers came out into the open area before them, while the musicians sat on the side on a colored mat and prepped their instruments.

Both gods were quiet as they watched the performers. Horus had seen many of them perform before, which was why he’d been fine when his falcon had found them. The dancers were beautiful, and the musicians vibrant, and all were skilled.

The beginning was quick and exuberant. Something purely to warm the dancers up and get the audience’s attention. It allowed Seth and Horus to focus a bit on their meal, though they could both appreciate the dancers’ ability. The second dance was a kind of animal dance, mimicking creatures hunting for each other. Perhaps it was the long hunt of the day, but something about the dancer movements reminded Horus of the mythical beasts they’d hunted, and the lithe movements of Seth’s sacred animals.

It culminated in a beautiful pair dance, with two young men who wore thin veils as they danced around each other, bending and twisting and gyrating. The music for this was almost hypnotic, and Horus noted Seth bending forward slightly to watch.

Horus paid attention to the dancers of course, but his eyes also stayed on Seth. The way the torchlight played on his pale skin. The way he sometimes rocked his head to the rhythm of the dancers. The way his lips curved in a soft smile of contentment.

Seth had felt so small in Horus' arms the previous night. Sometimes it seemed as if the entire weight of the desert rested on Horus' shoulders. And then it seemed as if there was simply a lithe man, resting in his arms. Muscular, but feeling delicate enough to be blown away with a breeze. Whatever he'd said and done with Nephthys had disturbed something deep in him, and Horus wished only to ensure that never happened again.

And… the music and the dancers called to something in Horus' blood, making his heart speed up, his throat tighten, his very blood race. It was unavoidable now, particularly with the pair dancers moving as they did. He *wanted* Seth. In a way he hadn't wanted past lovers or Hathor.

At one point, Seth looked his way, and the soft smile there faded. For a while, they simply gazed at each other.

Horus reached out before he even realized it, aiming for Seth's headdress, but realized what he'd done, and quickly pulled back at the last second before making contact.

Seth simply watched him, his expression unreadable.

Eventually the dance ended, and Seth dismissed them before they could start another, and sent the servants away as well after they shut the tent up for the night.

The two gods sat there for a time, still watching each other. Seth in his throne, Horus in his chair. The table was gone, leaving so much space between them, yet so seemingly little. Horus could reach out to touch Seth if he wanted, but didn't currently dare, though he felt a kind of cord between them, tense enough to break at the wrong moment.

"What is it you want?" Seth asked, quietly.

"…I don't know," Horus replied, still watching him. He *did* know. But he didn't know how to voice it without embarrassing himself, or making Seth push him away.

And Horus knew that even if Seth didn't reciprocate, Horus couldn't bear for Seth to push him away fully. Better their camaraderie than nothingness.

Seth's expression hardened. "You could take what you wanted. You *are* Pharaoh." Horus noticed the way his left hand tightened slightly on the chair arm, and the stiffness of his posture. Seth clearly expected *something* to happen.

Horus felt something dark in his mind, in the questions about what had happened between Seth and Osiris. Seth's unsubtle hints about how damaged their relationship was. And Horus

was gaining a growing number of dark suggestions for what might have happened between them. But for now, he wanted to focus on Seth.

"…I don't want to," Horus replied. "I *won't*." He wanted to take Seth, as lovers did, but not like *that*.

Seth smiled, and Horus was happy to see some of the stiffness bleed away, but only some. "It's easy for a pharaoh to say that, and then change his mind on a whim."

Did someone do that? Horus wondered. *Did Father do that to you?* Did Horus dare ask? He expected only silence in reply.

"I swear to you," Horus finally said, his gaze hard, *willing* Seth to believe him, "I will not." He grimaced, angry at his own inelegance. "I wish… I wish to merely be… myself. With…" He looked at Seth, picturing him without his headdress on.

Seth's expression sagged a little. "You don't know what you're asking."

"What do you mean?"

Seth looked away. "Have you ever…? *Been* with someone?"

"Yes."

"…Good."

Horus waited.

"Have you ever *taken* what it was you wanted from someone? Without…? When they didn't want you to?"

"No." Horus hadn't taken many lovers over the years, but the few he had welcomed his touch and affections. He liked to think it *wasn't* because he was Pharaoh or a god or Isis and Osiris' son, but sometimes he had to accept he'd never truly know and move on with his life. He could spend his entire life second-guessing the intentions of others, but outside disguising himself, it wasn't like he was going to stop *being* Pharaoh at some point in the near future to be able to test the theory.

Seth smiled. "I wish I didn't feel the need to ask you to swear before Maat." He looked away again. "I wish… I trusted more easily, like you clearly want me to."

Horus felt a wash of sadness. Whatever happened in the past, Seth had lost something valuable: something in himself, that made him cut off all the people he loved, the world he knew. The things that made him happy beyond the desert.

Horus wanted to offer to help him rebuild, brick by brick, piece by piece. But he didn't know how to even begin.

"If you cannot believe me," Horus finally said, "then… we are at an impasse."

Seth watched him, his expression unreadable. “…I believe you.”

Something unfurled in Horus’ chest.

“You’re not *him*,” Seth said, quietly. “And I have to accept that.”

“Do you?”

Seth frowned at him.

“I am my father’s heir, after all. For all we never knew each other, I sit on his throne, take advice from his wife, and people say I am much like him in many ways. People who aren’t you.”

Seth smiled. “But you are not him reborn. In some ways being around you will probably always remind me of him. But you are yourself, as well. And… I admit I have grown to appreciate it.”

Horus smiled, inwardly preening.

“I think if I’d stayed, we would have gotten along.”

“I think so as well.” It was odd, to imagine Seth walking the halls of the palace, perhaps joining council sessions to discuss whatever was on the docket for the day. Maybe even holding court with Isis and Horus. Someone else for Isis to lean on, in the times Horus and Nephthys and Isis’ priestesses weren’t enough.

It would have been nice, perhaps, Horus thought. *It still could be.*

Seth sighed, bringing Horus back to the present. “And you’ve been nothing but honest in the time we’ve known each other. My paranoia is… well, it is well-earned, I suppose, but it is always there.”

Horus frowned. “…Something made you doubt yourself.”

Seth stiffened.

“…My father?”

Seth didn’t reply.

Horus could feel whatever it was they’d had slip farther away. “You are a warrior, trained for all kinds of combat, and your achievements speak for themselves, even if I hadn’t seen you work with my own eyes. I would trust your instincts… no matter what I wish. You’ve only been right in the past.”

Seth finally unfroze and shut his eyes. “I’ve been wrong, though. Deeply so.” When he reopened his eyes, he seemed to look beyond Horus for a moment. Beyond the tent. Then he shook his head. “It’s hard to… to *trust*, you understand… In *this* in particular.” He gestured between them both. “Whatever *this* is.”

“I wish I could… allay your fears,” Horus said. He wanted to take Seth in his arms and block the whole world away. Whatever had made Seth weep the other night. Whatever made that distance in his eyes. The anger in his expression almost every time he thought of Osiris. “I wish I could tell you everything will be all right, so long as you trust me. But I don’t think it would make a difference.” He could see how tied up in himself Seth was. Even a pharaoh couldn't untangle that.

Seth’s hands tightened into fists, and he stood and walked over to Horus. “Stand.”

Horus obeyed, looking down at him.

Seth grimaced, and for a moment, they simply stood there.

Horus felt like his skin was electrified with Seth so close to him. So close, yet…

“Why?” Seth finally asked, quietly. “Why do you want *me*?”

Horus blinked. “Who *wouldn’t* want you?”

Seth’s lips parted in surprise.

Horus reached out, but hesitated before touching the headdress. When Seth didn’t move, Horus pressed forward and drew it away, then dropped it on the chair behind him.

Seth’s eyes were wary. Horus could tell he was at least a little afraid. Horus could see the doubt, even now. It was obvious, now that he knew to look for it. The paranoia Seth had talked about. Horus wanted to assuage it. But without more details, all he could do was focus on continuous reassurance, and honesty.

“You haven’t seen yourself hunt, or fight,” Horus continued, wanting to run his hands through Seth’s hair, but hesitating to do so. Instead, he reached out and touched Seth’s shoulder.

Seth shivered, but didn’t pull back.

Horus gently dragged his hand down Seth’s left arm. “You haven’t seen the way you cut through enemies. The way you drive your chariot.” Horus chuckled. “Even the way you sit in a *chair*.”

Horus’ hand traveled to Seth’s left hand, and he delicately rubbed the knuckles there, looking down at them. “The way you can command any space. Your laughter. The smoothness of your voice. The jut of your chin. The taunt of your lips. I could write odes to your *legs*.”

He noticed the corner of Seth’s lips quirk slightly.

Horus continued, “The endless desert of your hair. Like I could walk in and be lost.” He reached out with his left hand and gently cupped Seth’s cheek, making the other god shut his eyes.

Seth still didn’t pull away.

“I could be blind, Seth,” Horus continued, quieter, leaning closer, “and still want *you*.”

He felt Seth’s breathing quicken.

Horus parted his lips again, but it was Seth who pushed forward to kiss him.

Horus pulled him close.

Seth wrapped his right arm around Horus’ midsection.

To Horus, Seth’s lips were thick and soft, and he tasted like the spiced beef of their dinner, the sweetness of the fruit they’d snacked on, and the cool of a desert night.

Horus could still feel him shaking slightly.

Horus finally broke the kiss, leaving both of them breathing heavily. He asked, “Seth? Are you all right?”

“Don’t stop,” Seth simply said, pushing back into another kiss.

Horus pulled him close, and walked backwards to the cot, pulling Seth down with him, somehow not crushing the delicate piece of furniture. He cradled Seth with his left arm and dragged his right hand down Seth’s side, brushing the waist of his shendyt.

Seth maneuvered so that he straddled Horus’ legs, then reached up and pushed Horus’ headdress off, which would have shocked Horus more if he hadn’t had his hand full of Seth’s ass. The headdress fell onto the cot behind them. Then Seth wrapped his arms around Horus’ neck and leaned hard into the kiss.

Horus’ hands moved back, cupping the globes of Seth’s ass tighter through the cloth of the shendyt.

Seth grunted into Horus’ mouth, his arms tightening.

Horus could feel Seth grow hard against him, and smiled, pulling the other god closer to meet his own erection.

Seth grunted again into Horus’ mouth, and then broke the kiss for a breath of air. “How do you even walk with that thing between your legs?”

Horus laughed. A bit of wind carried a small jar of oil to him.

Seth looked at it thoughtfully, then shrugged. “I can turn into sand, you know. And we’re *gods*.”

“I know,” Horus replied, smiling. “But I like this part. And making it easy for you.”

Seth snorted. He looked down at Horus, and Horus fully realized he wasn’t wearing his falcon headdress for the first time in front of Seth. He hadn’t even taken it off to sleep the previous night.

Seth could see his eyes, his hair, the full outline of his face. It felt… strangely open.

Seth smiled. “Perhaps this isn’t a compliment, but like this you look even less like your father.”

Horus smiled awkwardly, and noted that Seth’s cheeks actually warmed a little, too. “Are you calling me ugly, then?”

“Mmm… I think… no…” Seth lightly brushed his fingers over Horus’ right cheek, just under his eye. “The opposite, really.”

Horus coated the fingers of his right hand in the oil, then pulled Seth back in for a kiss with his left arm, while tucking his right hand under Seth’s shendyt to find his cheeks.

Seth groaned when Horus lightly touched his rim, simply stroking for a time.

When Horus finally pushed a finger in, Seth jumped ever so slightly, breaking the kiss.

Horus murmured against Seth’s ear, “Just think of me, Seth. Only me.”

“H-Horus,” Seth murmured, shakily, making Horus smile, “This is… ha…”

“Feels nice?” Horus cocked his head slightly.

“Feels… I don’t know…”

Horus slowly thrust back and forth.

Seth shuddered slightly. “Isn’t it… strange? For you?”

“Mm… I like being inside you.”

Seth guffawed, and his arms squeezed tighter around Horus’ neck. “It can’t be *that* thrilling.”

“Have you ever tried it?”

Seth laughed. “Only once. It… it didn’t go well.”

“Ah, I’m sorry.” Horus switched to two fingers, making Seth twitch. Seth’s breathing was more labored. “You’re very warm.”

“Ha,” Seth said, shakily. “Of course.”

“Have you ever done *this* before?” Horus emphasized with a particular strong thrust. “Let someone take care of you like this?”

Seth didn’t reply to that.

“…Seth?”

“Talk about something else.”

Horus' smile faded.

Seth was oddly still.

"Is there something you want me to do?" Horus asked, quietly. "Besides the talking?"

Seth laughed. "I don't… I don't know."

Horus cupped his cheek and pulled him in for another kiss, grinding his fingers in deep and swallowing Seth's moans.

"I'm amazed you're letting me do this," Horus said breaking the kiss again. "You're so beautiful."

Seth laughed, lowering his head. "Flatterer."

"I'm simply being honest." Horus scissored his fingers, enjoying the way Seth trembled around him. "It doesn't hurt?"

"Not really… Do you *want* it to hurt?"

"I admit seeing you take it for me when it's difficult is rather pleasant, but I don't want you to be in pain."

Seth swallowed. "Then… then it doesn't hurt. Not… not in a way that's hard to overcome."

Horus paused and looked at him thoughtfully. "Seth, if you wish me to stop, I can."

Seth laughed. "I almost want you to speed up, you giant oaf! At this rate, neither of us is getting off before sunrise!"

Horus snorted and pulled out, only to press back with three fingers, making Seth grunt. "As you wish."

"I didn't say I… *fuck*…" His arms twitched, and he leaned his forehead against Horus'. "You are… relentless."

"And you make very nice noises. And you're so responsive."

"Didn't Isis give you any other toys to torment growing up?" Seth's voice was shaky. "That didn't burn this silliness out of you?"

"Oh, she gave me plenty," Horus replied, his voice as calm as if they were discussing the weather. "Nothing like you, though."

Seth snorted.

For a while, Horus just thrust his fingers back and forth, feeling the warmth of Seth's body, the press of Seth's head on his, the way Seth's breath settled a little but not overmuch. When

Horus finally pulled out, he dismissed his shendyt, wet his cock with the oil under Seth's thoughtful gaze, and then pulled Seth forward for another kiss.

As they parted, Horus said, "This might not be all that comfortable."

Seth smirked, then dissolved his shendyt into sand that fell away. "That's what you want, right?"

Horus snorted with a fond smile, though his eyes rested on the expanse of skin Seth had revealed to him so casually. He pulled Seth forward, lifting him up so that he was above Horus' cock.

"Ha, I thought you wanted to make it easy for me?" Seth said, nervously.

"Do you wish it to be easier?" Horus asked, looking at him thoughtfully.

Seth snorted, but seemed content enough to wait for whatever Horus had planned.

Horus slowly lowered Seth down, feeling a tightening in his chest when his cockhead breached Seth's rim.

Seth gasped softly. "I think your cock might kill me."

Horus laughed. "I doubt that, Seth. I don't think there's much that could kill you."

Seth snorted. "There really isn't. I've tried."

Horus paused.

Seth blinked, then said, "Ahh, I… Forget I said that."

But Horus simply *looked* at him.

"…Look, Horus, you have your cock literally in my ass, we don't need to have this discussion right now, all right?"

"…Very well." Horus slowly let Seth down even farther, watching as Seth shut his eyes and shook.

"So fucking big… You are… *How*…?"

Horus smiled. "You're so wonderfully tight, Seth."

"You keep saying my name," Seth said, his voice shaky. He grunted as Horus picked him up more, then slowly pulled him back down again.

"I like your name," Horus said, honestly.

Seth flushed even more, his pale skin making the contrast sharper. "You are… so childish…"

Horus laughed. “I am unfortunately young and inexperienced. Please bear with my fumbling, Seth.”

“…Very well… Horus.”

Horus pulled Seth all the way down, making him yelp, then pulled him close for a kiss.

Seth broke the kiss, cursing him, “You—!” He was shaking. His hands grabbed Horus’ shoulders, the fingernails biting into the skin there.

“Are you all right?” Horus murmured, rubbing his trembling back. He wasn’t bothered by Seth’s nails, so he didn’t say anything.

“I don’t…” Seth swallowed. “I feel like there’s a pole in my ass.”

Horus laughed, but didn’t move, letting Seth adjust some more, his breathing calm. “Sorry, you got me excited.”

Seth frowned. “…Saying your name excites you?”

“Only when *you* say it.”

Seth snorted, then bowed his head, breathing hard. “All right. …Horus.”

Horus pulled him close, making Seth grunt softly. Then Horus used his strength to pull Seth up and down on his cock, thrusting with his hips as well, even with the awkward angle. The cot chafed at his thighs, but he didn’t care. All that mattered was the way Seth’s tight ass seemed to hunger for his cock, the way Seth’s nails left his skin, but the fingers simply tightened for a hand hold, and the speeding up of Seth’s breath.

When Seth moaned softly, Horus felt something in him snap. He used the wind to help keep Seth in place, dipped his fingers in the jar of oil, and then wrapped them around Seth’s hard cock, squeezing before he quickly rubbed up and down the shaft.

Seth groaned. “*Horus.*…”

“I want you to come on my cock, Seth,” Horus said, leaning their heads against each other. “Can you do that for me?”

“I can… I… can *try*…” Seth was nearly breathless.

Horus squeezed his hand a bit harder, making Seth moan brokenly. “*Horus.*…”

Horus was rapidly moving Seth up and down now, thrusting hard, chasing his own climax. “*Seth!*”

As Horus’ fingers popped over Seth’s leaking cockhead, Seth cried out, throwing his head back.

Seth’s inner walls tightened around Horus’ cock. Horus grunted and pressed deep as he followed Seth into his own climax, while he buried his head in Seth’s shoulder.

For a while they simply sat there, curled into each other, shaking a little, the very air around them heated.

Horus sagged back onto the cot, carrying Seth with him, so that they lay awkwardly tangled on it, Seth’s spend on Horus’ stomach, though Horus didn’t care.

Seth grunted, his eyes shut, and eventually said, “This is uncomfortable.”

Horus chuckled and rearranged them so that Seth was resting on his side, with his back to Horus, then pulled him close. Horus snuffled lightly at Seth’s hair.

Seth snorted. “You’re like a dog.”

“Mmm…”

"Or this hawk I used to keep for hunting. Frustrating creature was always in my hair." He grunted when Horus re-entered him, particularly when the other god's cock went nearly all the way in with one push. “*Horus*…”

“I’m not going to do anything, Seth,” Horus murmured, pulling him close so they were sandwiched together, Horus’ cock buried deep. “I just want to stay inside you.”

Seth sighed. “As you wish.” After a moment, he asked, “You *really* like my name?”

“Yes. ...Do you like it when I say your name?”

Seth swallowed. “Never mind.”

Horus leaned over and said, “Seth.”

Seth shivered and shut his eyes, “Sleep, you fool.”

Horus grinned and settled down, using his powers to snuff out the torches.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Seth woke, it was still dark out.

His ass hurt.

He could feel Horus, overly warm and large, at his back, still holding him tightly around the chest, his cock still buried deep in Seth.

It was odd, to be in a bed with someone again for sleep - and sex - after all this time. Nephthys hadn't stayed, and before that had been 30 years of nothing. The few one night stands he'd taken over the years were kicked out in the early morning. Or Seth left.

Was it a mistake, he wondered, the night before? Yes, he felt… *something* with Horus, and the way Horus wanted him in a way no one else had *appealed*, but…

Did he have to rethink and rethink every decision he ever made? Couldn't it just be how it used to be? Sex? It made him feel good, once, the rare times he sought it out.

He remembered the last time he'd felt sorry for himself about not having the courage to ask Nephthys to be with him, when he'd gone into the desert with his servants and thrown a big party after a hunt. He didn't remember much of the party, but he remembered being miserable during it and ordering more incense be burned. Two humans in particular had caught his eye: a pretty muscular thing with ridiculously good hands, and a woman who looked far too much like Nephthys and had Seth thinking thoughts he'd be ashamed of Nephthys hearing. He'd watched them together for a while, as the woman road the man – imagining himself in the man's place, making Nephthys moan like that, and thinking horrible thoughts about himself before pulling them over to his side. He woke up staring at the tent walls as dawn peeked in, surrounded by sleeping naked humans in various silly positions on the cushions and floor. The air smelling of splashed wine, sex, and fading incense.

He'd promised himself not to do that again. It was cruel to have Nephthys stand-ins just because he was a coward, and if she said no, then it was *worse*… And he hadn't just wanted her carnally, he'd wanted her at his *side*, smiling at him, talking with him, spending time with him, riding in a chariot at his side more regularly.

Maybe part of how he'd been with Horus side was guilt. Wanting to drown out the memory of Nephthys from the other night, how it had been everything he'd wanted once upon a time, and yet felt completely empty in reality.

Or wanting to drown out—

No, he didn’t think about Osiris. The more things he did between that and the present, the better.

Osiris had wanted control, obedience, isolation.

Nephthys… Seth had no idea what she wanted, and realized he never had.

Horus… seemed to just want *him*. In whatever capacity Seth would offer.

It made a part of him warm, his throat tighten.

Perhaps letting Horus fuck him had been an exchange for what Horus offered. Perhaps he wanted to taste what that devotion felt like, and compare it to Osiris and Nephthys.

Perhaps it had been a long set of days and he wanted the distraction, and the hunt and the music had been getting to him.

But really, Horus was insatiable. Seth shouldn’t feel bad for whatever reason he’d consented to what they did that night, since Horus had certainly made good work of him!

Seth huffed and wished for sleep. He could smell Horus. Mostly he smelled like the desert, the incense used during their meal, and faintly of bird musk. There was also the faint scent of the fabric for his headdress, and a vaguely ozone smell that all sky gods seemed to have.

He didn’t smell like earth or rot or plants.

Osiris is dead, he reminded himself, pulling Horus’s hands tighter, needing to feel someone solid who wasn’t Osiris, oddly grateful now for Horus' stupidly unforgettably huge cock buried deep in him. *Osiris is dead, and he cannot touch me.*

Seth hadn’t believed the initial message from Isis 30 years ago, letting him know of Osiris’ death, and that she was taking the throne in her unborn child’s place. Seth had felt *something*, of course, when Osiris had presumably died – like a shiver in the very air – but he didn’t *believe* it. How could the pharaoh, the God of Life, die? It didn’t make *sense*. Even Ra hadn’t *died*, though part of that had been Isis always keeping a tool in her pocket as needed. Ra was more useful in her ability to protect Egypt than be destroyed.

And hadn’t he *tried* to… to…

Seth abruptly felt caged in, trapped. Just like… He pulled away from Horus, forming into sand to get fully away, and went out into the desert. Away from the tent, away from anyone living. He called his chariot and drove across the dunes, with sunshine starting to turn the sand pink. The chill of night and early morning ever so slowly retreated as the sun’s warmth reached its hungry fingers out.

This endless place had been a refuge 30 years ago. He’d raced around it purely as sand for longer than he’d been used to, and only returned to his humanoid form to fight the odd beast or enemy. He’d called more sandstorms, scaring away travelers and enemies alike. Every second he’d expected Osiris to call him back, or come for him, but it hadn’t happened.

Just Isis' messengers – a nest of scorpions traveling together and carrying her letter above them - with news of her husband's death, alongside an entourage of servants. In her letter, Isis asked him why he hadn't left with any.

Seth was the *God of War*. If *he* couldn't kill *one* person, then *how*…?

"Your strength is not your own."

Seth hissed and leapt from his chariot, then dove down into the sand, submerging and racing across it in a small storm.

I know what my strength is, I know what—!

"Seth, with Osiris gone, you realize you're the most powerful god in Egypt?"

He clawed at the dunes and screamed dust into whirlwinds.

It was midday by the time he returned to his tent, feeling scattered and empty.

Horus stood outside, watching him approach. His headdress and shendyt were back on, but even with the headdress on, Seth could tell he was worried.

Seth walked past him and back into the tent, then lay on the cot, his headdress dissolving around his face.

He heard Horus walk back in and kneel beside the cot, but didn't look at him.

After a time, Horus asked, "Seth, are you all right?"

"No," Seth replied, simply, honestly.

"Is there something you need?"

"…It's done already. There's nothing anyone can do." *You can't exactly re-kill him. Or change the past.*

"It's not… because of last night, right?"

Seth considered that for a while, not sure how to answer it, but he realized Horus probably thought *he* did something to Seth, so Seth replied, "It wasn't anything *you* did." He smiled. "It's what happens when you sleep with damaged goods."

Horus stiffened. "You're not damaged goods, Seth."

Seth didn't reply to that.

Horus reached out towards Seth's scalp and asked, "May I…?"

Seth shut his eyes. He shortly felt Horus' thick fingers carding through his hair, oddly gentle. Seth knew he shouldn't find it so odd. Despite Horus' massive cock and interest in seeing Seth a *little* scrambled during sex, Horus could be quite gentle. But everything with Horus felt like a new discovery. A new mark on the ledger of what made him *not* Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, or anyone Seth had ever known in his thousands of years of existence.

"What will you tell Isis?" Seth asked, wondering vaguely what she'd do when she found out.

"About us?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish me to tell her?"

Seth sighed. "You're *Pharaoh*. What *I* want doesn't matter."

"If I'm Pharaoh and my will is law, then I say what you want *does* matter. And even if I *weren't* Pharaoh, I still think what you want matters."

Seth snorted. "If you weren't Pharaoh this would be a *very* different conversation."

"Oh?" Horus asked. Seth could hear the smile in his voice. "How would it be different?"

Seth opened his eyes and sat up, looking down at Horus, still kneeling by the cot, gazing up at him beneath the falcon headdress, that smile still on his face. He'd sat back so that Seth could put his feet on the floor.

"You say such silly things…" Seth said, watching him thoughtfully. "Despite appearances, I'm quite sure Isis drilled into your head how things are different between a god who is Pharaoh and gods who aren't.

Horus chuckled, and Seth felt the soft smile on his face pull him in somehow. "Of course she did. She also wonders sometimes at the strange questions I ask." He pushed forward so that he was between Seth's legs, and Seth didn't move to stop him. Horus lightly dragged his right hand down Seth's left calf, making the war god shiver. "I admit talking is not necessarily my strength." He lifted Seth's calf and peppered kisses along the skin there, going up to Seth's knee.

Seth swallowed, feeling his face warm. He gripped the edge of the cot.

"Perhaps I should treat you as the god you are, hmm?" Horus' headdress vanished in a wisp of wind as he pressed towards Seth's inner thigh with the kisses. He eventually pushed Seth's shendyt back. "One to be worshiped properly."

Seth felt his breathing speed up. He kind of wanted to touch Horus' hair, but didn't know if that was allowed, or what would happen if he tried. So he focused on the feeling of Horus' lips on his skin, the way Horus maneuvered the leg over his shoulder and then pushed Seth's shendyt farther back before taking a gentle hold of Seth's cock.

Seth swallowed, then dissolved his shendyt into sand, letting Horus move more freely.

In return, Horus placed more kisses along Seth's shaft, making Seth shiver even more.

Seth was already feeling uncomfortably hard from Horus' attentions, and was shaking slightly as the younger god put his lips around his cock's leaking head. Horus quickly swallowed him down and Seth tossed his head back with a moan, feeling the tightness, the warmth of Horus' throat.

Horus bobbed his head briefly before swallowing Seth fully again and resting his nose against Seth's skin. He grabbed Seth's left hand and placed it on his own head.

Seth swallowed. "You… You want me to?"

Horus nodded as much as he could, then slowly bobbed his head back and forth, making Seth grunt. Horus' left hand gently clasped Seth's right hip.

Seth's fingers tightened in the soft strands of Horus' short, dark brown hair, which was surprisingly soft, like bird down, and he mostly shut his eyes at the pleasure.

As Horus pulled off at one point just to lick the leaking tip of Seth's cock, Seth groaned, "H-Horus…" But Horus already pushed back, swallowing him down again.

Seth squeezed Horus' shoulder with his leg, pressing his ankle into Horus' back.

Horus simply hummed around Seth's cock, making Seth shudder more.

"I'm…" Seth swallowed. "I'm close, Horus…"

Horus simply hummed again, and kept bobbing his head.

Seth felt his heart race, his gut twist, and finally pulled Horus in, close.

Horus stayed in place, without objection. His fingers tightened ever so slightly on their grip of Seth's hip.

Seth gasped as he came, hard, down Horus' throat. His legs shook.

Horus swallowed and swallowed, moving his nose slightly against Seth's skin.

When Seth was fully spent, he sagged to his left slightly.

Horus carefully pulled off, and then helped rearrange Seth's legs on the bed, helping Seth to lay down properly.

"Ha, that was…" Seth shut his eyes. "That was nice." He felt Horus sit down on the cot beside him, a nice source of warmth as Seth realized he was starting to feel a little cold.

Horus carded his fingers through Seth's hair again.

After a while, Seth murmured, "Do you need…?"

"I'm fine, Seth." Horus leaned down and kissed Seth's brow. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

“Did you just…? Kiss me with the lips you had around my cock…?”

Horus laughed. “I did, Seth. I wiped them off, though, while you weren’t looking, before I kissed you.”

Seth groaned, but eventually smiled. “You’re impossible.”

“I like being *your* impossible.”

“Pfft. How does Isis deal with you?”

Horus hummed briefly before saying, “She is very patient.”

“Isis? *Patient*?” Seth scoffed. “With her *work*, yes, but *people?*”

“Perhaps the Isis you knew 30 years ago is the not the Isis I know.”

Seth’s smile faded and he opened his eyes. “…Yes. You could be right.”

Seth abruptly realized... he'd truly had no idea what Isis got up to, raising her own son. A few decades was a blink in the eyes of a god, but here was a whole new being, raised to take up the throne after his parents, to lead Egypt. And in that time, she'd led Egypt herself. And Seth hadn't been there for any of it. He had no idea what her day-to-day was like. Who she was anymore. The closeness they'd had in the past was gone, by his own hand.

For the first time in a while he realized that while he was figuring himself out in the desert, his sisters had been alone in the capital to deal with their brother’s death. Isis had only Nephthys for main support, and was pregnant. And he’d just… left her there. Left *them* there. Alone.

He'd run away, yes, he knew that, but he didn't fully think about *who else* he'd left behind, and what pieces they'd picked up in his absence.

“…Seth?”

Seth looked at Horus. The headdress was still gone. Like this, Horus looked so very young. Too young for what he had to bear, as the heir of Isis and Osiris, of Ra... Even Osiris had been older when he’d taken the throne. Isis had been older when she’d taken on Ra.

Seth couldn’t stomach the lies anymore. Or half-truths. Whatever it was. Fleeing from Isis' messengers, not responding to her when she found him in the rare times she tried... He was the God of War, raised to be wise in strategy and planning and subterfuge, but before this young pharaoh seemingly designed to lay him bare, he felt tired of it all. More than he had even in 30 years.

This was his nephew. Isis’ son. …Osiris’ son. Seth owed Horus more than what he’d given.

Osiris was dead. And Seth couldn’t talk to Nephthys. He couldn’t talk to Isis. But Horus…

"…You want to know what happened 30 years ago. Why I left." Seth felt a mix between so shaky he felt the cot rock, and a strange stillness, like he and Horus were the only two beings in the world. His voice was quiet, worried about breaking that stillness. But he looked to Horus, to gauge his response.

Horus stiffened, his eyes widening in alarm. But there was a curiosity there, too.

Seth sighed. "…Fine. I'll tell you."

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m going to mention… *someone*,” Seth said, still sitting with his back to Horus on the cot, facing a tent wall. He still felt unsettled but didn’t know how else to deal with this. “And you have to *promise me*, to swear it, that they won’t come to harm because of what I’m going to tell you.”

When Horus didn’t reply, Seth grimaced, “Or else I won’t tell you. It’s not my story to tell if you won’t.”

“Why do you think I would hurt this person?” Horus’ voice was calm, measured, and unreadable. And Seth didn’t look at him.

“Because…” Seth grimaced. “Because what they did is the kind of thing a pharaoh would have to punish.”

“Is it…?” Horus swallowed. Seth could feel the cot twitch. “Are they the person who killed Osiris?”

Seth frowned. “…No. No, I don’t think so. It’s… I don’t think they have the ability to do so. Circumstances for them doing this were unique, and…” Seth swallowed. “They’d have needed help, at best. And they have no reason to have killed him.” Well… he supposed there hypothetically might have been some motive, but she wouldn’t have acted on it. And helping him wasn’t the same as *killing Osiris.*

“This is someone we haven’t talked about, then?” Horus asked, his tone neutral. “Someone you didn’t bring up as a suspect?”

“…Maybe. Maybe not. Horus, I’m not going to tell you about who murdered your father or how, because I truly have no idea. This isn’t about that.”

“…Okay.”

Seth frowned and turned to look at him. “*Okay?*”

“Okay,” Horus repeated. “So long as this person was not involved in my father’s murder, they shall not come to harm at my hands or by my order because of what you’re about to tell me.”

Seth’s hand twitched, and he glared at Horus’ impassive expression. “That’s not what I was asking for and you know it.”

“If you believe this person wasn’t involved, then it should be enough.” Horus watched him, then continued, “Unless you believe they were involved and your story would implicate them.”

“I don’t believe they were involved in your father’s murder. I’m purely asking for this because… they did something for me, which I can never repay, and put themselves at great risk for doing it. And I won’t see them harmed for it.”

“Then my oath is fine.”

Everything seemed to narrow for Seth. It felt like something hard was pressing on his chest.

“I can’t, Osiris, please!”

“Yes, you can, Seth.” Osiris leaned in and whispered to him. “You will always have more to give me, so long as I command it.”

And he was filled with anger.

Seth glared. “Get out.”

Horus blinked. “What?”

“Get out. Go back to Heliopolis.”

“Seth—”

“Do you have ears?! I said get *out!*”

Horus stood up. “You’re angry.”

“Oh, you figured *that* out, did you? *Congratulations!*”

“Seth, I am…” Horus winced. “I am *trying*.”

“You don’t *trust* me!”

“Can you not understand my position?” Horus was glaring now.

And Seth was too angry himself to be afraid, even though Horus was Pharaoh, and Osiris’ son.

Well, he was maybe a *little* afraid.

But Seth did what he was always did and allowed the rage to buffer him.

“You’re being incredibly cagey,” Horus continued, “and demanding in a very specific way that makes me feel like you are hiding information that could be helpful to solving my father’s murder!”

“You don’t know how hard it is to talk about this!” Seth yelled back, standing up and walking away. “You have no fucking *clue!* And instead you’re making qualifications and loopholes like this is some fucking *game*… What, was the *fucking* just part of it? A seduction just to see if I had anything left in me because you ran out of options?”

Horus was quiet for a while, and Seth wasn't facing him again. Couldn't stand the sight of him anymore. He didn't care about his guilt or shame or whatever it was. He didn't know if he fully believe Horus could do that. But what *did* he know about Horus? Horus was Isis' son as much as Osiris. He was the child of them *both*.

And he'd been fooled before.

What if it was some stupid long game? Not even a long one, since Horus hadn't had to try all that hard.

Seth could feel his hands start to shake.

But after a time, Horus replied, "Seth, I wouldn't… I… I swear I would never do that to you."

Seth wanted to believe him. But he was too angry.

"Get out," Seth repeated, quieter. He knew Horus could hear. "Get the *fuck* out."

After a time, he sensed Horus finally walking out of the tent and leaving.

Seth stared at the wall. He felt phantom hands on his arms, his legs, a threatening chuckle in his ear.

"It's time to remind you of who you belong to."

Seth dissolved into sand and fled out of the tent, opposite the direction Horus had gone. He headed back into the deeper desert. He didn't want to remember what it felt like to have skin for a while.

The next few weeks were a blur. Seth didn't really remember who he was fighting or when, but he fought. He called some of the worst sandstorms he'd made in centuries to slaughter armies when he couldn't be bothered to manifest in physical form, and the rare times he did properly manifest, he tore enemies apart with his claws and bare hands as often with his khopesh or bow. He often came to sleeping amidst a pile of his sha, more often than he did on his cot in his tent. The creatures were more protective of him lately, and even fought at his side more and more. He considered inviting them into his tent sometimes, in the rare times he could think clearly, but they didn't much care for enclosures. They preferred the open desert. Seth could relate.

Deep down, Seth knew that something had broken again, and he knew *he* had broken it, again.

Sometimes he wondered if Horus would return to cart him back to Heliopolis, as Osiris never had. Horus had been more persistent, after all.

Seth should have been more trusting. Horus had been quite giving during the exchange. The oath hadn't been empty.

And Sekhmet *couldn't* have killed Osiris. She might like chaos and screwing with people, but killing the Pharaoh? Killing *Osiris?* It wasn't something she was capable of. And *why* would she? She'd have had more fun watching Osiris go after Seth than Osiris dead.

So why did it matter? Seth himself had constantly reminded Horus that Horus was Pharaoh and Seth was not, and that *changed* things between them. Should he be surprised that Horus was putting his foot down in the mildest of possible ways?

But the fear came back. The sense of hands on his skin. Being trapped. Being a *thing* someone could manipulate at their will.

Seth sensed another group of mercenaries on the horizon and buried any thoughts in the sand as he sprang into action.

After a while he just stayed in his tent, too exhausted to keep roaming. This had happened after the years when he'd pushed himself too far, and the storms had been a bit much this time, falling too close together and being a bit stronger than necessary.

So he slept, and thankfully didn't dream.

When he awoke, he heard one of his servants calling for him from outside the tent. He'd ordered them to leave him alone unless something dire happened, and these servants were pretty smart, since Isis had picked them, so it must be urgent.

He considered ignoring them, but he supposed it might help to know how long he'd been asleep, so he called out, "What?"

"My lord, Lord Horus wishes to speak with you. He asked that I speak to you first."

Seth was silent for a time. He considered simply ignoring Horus' presence.

…He realized it would be childish, though. Better to meet his fate than pretend he could avoid it forever.

He scoffed and said, "He can come in."

He flew over to his chair in sand form, reformed in a seated position, and then arranged himself as neutrally as possible, facing the tent flap, his headdress on, his expression cool and empty of emotion.

Horus stepped in, looking calm as ever, and no different than he had when they last met. He let the tent flap close behind him. "Thank you for seeing me, Seth."

Seth's left hand rested on the chair arm, and he felt his fingers clench over so slightly. It should have been easier to pretend he didn't care. That Horus meant nothing to him.

But even now his lips wanted to quirk into a damn smile. He felt… calmer. Like it was easier to breathe. Despite how they'd parted ways, despite how afraid he was that this would go as badly if not worse than last time, Nephthys had been right, and he'd grown to care for Horus.

And part of his pain these past weeks had been the sense of betrayal. Again. But he still clung to that care, that affection, like a lifeline, because he was weak and it was all he had.

Why couldn't he *not* care for once?

"What do you want?" Seth asked, quietly. He kept any pleading expressions off his face. He wasn't a dog, hoping his owner would give him a treat. Much as he felt like it. *Do not make me send you away again.*

Thinking about it, he was amazed Horus had listened to him. He didn't have to.

Of course that only made that part of him that cared for Horus pulse stronger, because perhaps Horus hadn't been lying. Perhaps Horus cared, too?

No. Seth was his subject. Horus was Pharaoh. That was all. Horus made that *infinitely* clear.

"I wanted to see how you're doing," Horus replied. "The sandstorms have been… a very noticeable occurrence this past month, though they seem to have stopped since last week, at least."

"I won't be making any more any time soon, unless the situation requires it, if that's what you're worried about."

"What qualifies as requiring it?"

The corner of Seth's mouth twitched. "If I believe the best way to defeat an army is to rip the flesh from their bones grain by grain, or to drown them on dry land with dust."

Horus was quiet for a while, then said, "I have thought and thought over our argument, and I still cannot see what was wrong."

Seth grimaced. Of *course*.

"And I don't say that because I believe I was not in the wrong… but because there is information missing for me to understand fully how I was wrong." Horus grimaced. "You are trying to protect someone. I understand that. If your belief in them is strong, then my oath should be enough. But something happened that made it not enough, something you cannot get past. And I do not know what it is."

Seth scoffed. "*I* am not the issue." He was, though. He always was. "I wanted a *simple* promise from you. And you refuse to make it."

"You want full protection from someone who may be a danger to me. To my family. *Our* family. To *Egypt*."

"They didn't kill Osiris!" Seth nearly stood, but kept himself in place, clenching his hands instead.

"Then what is there to fear?" Horus gazed back at him, unafraid.

“Why do you have to demand more than I’m willing to give?!” Seth yelled, standing up, his hands still balled into fists. “Why do you have to keep demanding and twisting and…!” He swallowed. “Why do you have to keep *taking* like it’s your—!” Sense came back to him, and he realized who he was staring at.

“It’s time to remind you of who you belong to.”

“…Seth?”

Seth sat on the chair again and stared at the floor. “It doesn’t matter. Forget it.” He realized he was shaking, and didn’t know how to stop.

“…I swear I will not harm this person based on what you tell me, or give orders that they be harmed. Is that fair?”

Seth looked up at him in surprise.

Horus’ expression was unreadable. “You have extended me trust, Seth. More trust than I realized. I will extend trust, as well.” He walked over and knelt by Seth’s chair, making Seth stiffen. “Now please, tell me.”

Seth looked down at him, feeling uncomfortable having him kneel there. His fool heart was doing odd things. He was still shaking, but it… wasn’t as bad, now, for whatever reason.

After a time, he said, “A pharaoh should not be so ready to grovel. Get up, get a servant to get you a real chair.” He sighed. “I will try to be brief, but I don’t know how long it will be.”

Horus smiled and obeyed, giving Seth more time to breathe.

After the chair was by Seth’s side and Seth had leaned back, staring at the very shut tent flap, he said, “You must not tell others this. I will not… It cannot go past the two of us. And… the person who helped me.”

“Of course,” Horus replied, his expression serious. “I swear I will not divulge anything you tell in in this story to someone else, unless I have your permission.”

Seth relaxed, and shut his eyes briefly. “It’s not a good story about your father, either. Are you prepared for that?” He peeked open one eye to glance at Horus.

Horus’ expression was still unreadable, but it leaned more towards the stern than not. “I am prepared.”

“It’s not a good story about me, either, in all honesty.”

“I understand.”

Seth laughed, and the sound was mocking, even to him, “No you don’t.” He placed a hand over his brow, as if he didn’t have to face the world just by hiding his eyes from it. “Once upon a time, I… I wanted Nephthys, for my own. To have her at my side, as your father had Isis. She was my friend, in the way that the four of us were friends, though she was closer

with Isis and Osiris than I." He grimaced. "But still. I was shy, afraid. She was so beautiful, so wise, so powerful… I felt like she could never want my hand. But Isis encouraged me."

He swallowed. "But I still hesitated. And it was then that… that Sekhmet found me. And suggested I visit Osiris, for more support." He wondered again, had she planned it all along? Had he been a fool to demand such an oath of Horus? Did she deserve such protection?

When he was quiet for a time, Horus asked, "Seth…?"

Seth shook his head. "So I visited my brother. It was late. He was in his chambers." He grimaced. "I was so nervous, thinking it was silly. I explained that I was going to court Nephthys…"

Osiris had stared at him, seemingly in surprise.

Seth laughed nervously. "I know, I know, it's a bit… sudden. But I think it's time I gave it a shot."

"Let's have a drink," Osiris finally said, stepping back to the table. "So we can talk."

"Of… of course, Osiris."

"You haven't broached the topic with Nephthys?" Osiris asked after handing Seth a cup of wine.

Seth drained his cup dry, needing the courage. "No. Well… not really. I think she's open to the idea."

"Oh?" Osiris was smiling, encouragingly, as he often did. Always Seth's support when he needed it. His brother, his friend. Seth was sometimes shy of him and his power, but Osiris was always there with reassurance when Seth needed it.

"Well… recently… I don't know." Seth laughed. "I mean she likes me well enough, you know? As siblings. But… I don't know if she wants more. *I want to ask her, but..." He laughed again. "I'm afraid of rejection, like a teenager with a crush…"*

Osiris seemed to consider that, then said, "Perhaps you shouldn't."

Seth blinked. "…What?"

"Perhaps you shouldn't," Osiris repeated, smiling. "You clearly already don't think it's a good idea, so you should follow that instinct."

"No, I… I want to!"

"So why come to me for advice?"

"I just… wanted the support, I suppose…"

"Or you need someone to tell you it's a terrible idea," Osiris said. "To which I agree."

Seth blinked at him. "…Why do you think it's terrible?"

Osiris sighed. "She's the goddess of peace, Seth. She'll only give herself to someone who's strong. Even you could figure that out."

Something chill entered Seth's chest. "…What does that *mean?"*

"It's the way of goddesses. They choose the powerful. But Nephthys in particular. Peace can only be bestowed upon the strong. And Seth…" Osiris smiled at him, kindly, "that's not you*."*

It felt like something had shifted around Seth, only he had no idea what it was, and thought maybe he was imagining the things coming out of Osiris' mouth. Maybe it was nerves or something. But the table beneath his hand felt real. There was a chill in the air.

Finally, he was able to get out, "…What?"

"I gave you your power, Seth," Osiris continued, his expression calm, as if they were discussing the weather, and not the chills down Seth's spine. "She'd sooner agree to sleep with me *than you."*

"What are you—!" Seth stood up, then wobbled as the world seemed to shift. He stumbled slightly, blinking at the way his hands seemed wavy before his eyes. "What…?" He looked at Osiris, who was watching him with a sad look on his face.

Another wave of dizziness hit Seth, making him crouch on the ground, and he realized, "The wine…" He looked up at Osiris, feeling a burst of alarm, "You… What did you put in the wine?!"

"I've noticed you watching and talking with her more and more lately," Osiris said, standing up and walking over. "I hoped it hadn't gone this far, but even Isis mentioned how obvious you were."

Seth flushed. He felt woozy. Osiris had… had drugged *him. Seth didn't know if it was deadly. But Osiris wouldn't, would he? And Osiris didn't really kill with poison – that was Isis. So why…?*

"I guess it's time to remind you who you belong to," Osiris said, suddenly nearby and cupping Seth's chin.

Seth shrugged him off, feeling sluggish. "What are you talking about…?"

Osiris crouched before him and smiled. "Seth, you're mine. Mine to grant power to, mine to de-power. Mine to watch, to play with. Mine to take." He leaned forward and pushed their mouths together.

Seth mumbled something and shoved him, but his arm strength was nearly gone. He stumbled back a bit and Osiris followed him, surrounding him. He tasted like sour wine.

Osiris broke the kiss, looking down at him. "You are nothing that I haven't given you, and you would do best to remember that. As if I'd ever share you with Nephthys*." His expression was*

sharp on her name.

“I am the God of War*,” Seth attempted to growl. But he slurred it and tilted his head, trying to clear it. His headdress fell off, already half pushed by the kiss.*

“Yes,” Osiris said, smiling. “My sweet little God of War. My desert, packed in one.” His vines grew from the floor and wrapped Seth up tightly, lifting him in the air.

Seth tried to fight, but whatever was in the wine kept him sluggish. He couldn’t escape the tight vines on his limbs. His body wasn’t turning into sand, and the spikes he called from the sand were weak and quickly dissolved. Things warped and shifted back into focus, and Osiris seemed far away and close all at once. His mind kept going back to the fact that Osiris had kissed *him, called him weak, and now…?!*

“How I’ve waited for this.” Osiris’ right hand skated over Seth’s chest in an oddly intimate manner, making Seth feel sickened. “She’ll never have you, Seth. Even if she wanted you, which she won’t. You’re mine*.”*

“Why are you doing this?” Seth demanded. He didn’t know Osiris thought so little of him. And yes, it encouraged his anxiety of Nephthys, but… But why was Osiris being like this, touching him, trapping him?!

“I already told you, Seth,” Osiris replied, smiling at him. “You’re mine*. And you clearly need a reminder.”*

“I’m not yours!”

Osiris chuckled, and Seth’s chest felt cold.

“…Seth?”

Seth blinked and realized he’d been gazing at the tent wall in silence again. He looked back at Horus, surprised.

Horus had a look of concern on his face. “What did my father do?”

Seth’s expression flattened, and he looked away again. “He… took me. Used my body. Like a toy. The drug he’d used was strong. My powers were nothing against a pharaoh. Against the God of Life.” He realized his hands were shaking. “I don’t know how much time passed. But I remember it all… Mostly the pain… And…” *The laughter. Osiris’ damned laughter.*

Seth swallowed. “At one point I must have passed out from it all. I awoke on the floor, next to an unconscious Osiris. …Sekhmet stood over us.” He smiled. “She told me to run. That she’d snuck in and knocked Osiris out, and that I should leave while I had the chance.”

“What are you…? Were you watching?” Every part of Seth hurt, but mostly his ass, his jaw. He smoothed it out with sand, dissolving the skin away and reforming it, but his powers were still slow to respond. Faster than it had been before, but still sluggish. His face was wet with dried tears. The rest of him was wet with… He tried not to think about it.

He could feel every place Osiris had touched him. Since it was apparently everywhere. *His cock was sore with overstimulation.*

Sekhmet scoffed. "…Perhaps."

Seth didn't know if he was angry or ashamed or just… empty. Even colder than before. He felt small and too spread out all at once.

Sekhmet grinned. "Does it matter? I couldn't help you while he was too aware. He must have been out of it near the end, too focused on you and maybe overwhelmed by his own euphoria. Didn't even notice me sneak in." She looked down at Osiris and grimaced. "You should go. You don't have long."

Seth frowned. "Are you going to confront him? Sekhmet, he's too strong!"

"What, worried for me, Seth?" She grinned at him. "When I practically gave you to him?"

Seth stilled, the pieces of it all coming together, and he wanted to run from her. He'd never been afraid of Sekhmet, but now… "You… you set this up?"

She shrugged. "You never even noticed all the times he looked at you. Particularly *when you looked at Nephthys. It was annoying. Now you know. So what will you do? Wait for him to wake up so he can go back to fucking you?"*

Seth grimaced, feeling himself shaking, not knowing what to do with her. He was in no shape to attack anyone, much as he wanted to.

But still, he wondered, if this was another of her games, he weirdly wanted to know… "Why save me?"

"Hmm…" she practically purred. "Perhaps I felt bad… about your soft ass."

Seth hissed and called his sand to him to restore his clothes, grateful it was coming back faster by the second. "Screw you, Sekhmet." He focused on his anger at her, to avoid everything else.

She laughed. "Maybe I was worried for my little grand-nephew." Her expression softened. "Maybe even I didn't think he'd go as far as he did." She grimaced slightly, and looked down at Osiris, her expression hard.

Seth blinked at her, surprised. He was still angry, still afraid, and now…?

She grinned back at him. "Get out of here, Seth. Who knows what he'll do when he wakes. Stay in the desert."

"…He'll find me there."

"Well, are *you a god of the desert or aren't you?"*

Seth stiffened. Osiris' words danced around him. Osiris had demonstrated time and again how weak Seth was. How useless. How his powers were only what Osiris allowed…

"…All things end, Seth," Sekhmet said, quietly, her smile oddly soft. "Even the sun sets. Go."

Seth didn't say anything after that.

After a time, Horus said, "And then you just stayed in the desert?"

"I don't remember much of what happened after I left Heliopolis," Seth said, finally, quietly. "The desert was like… a beacon. Safety. I buried myself in it. Became a storm. I thought that even Osiris couldn't grab a storm, surely?" Even as he was afraid Osiris could just yank his power away at any time. "Time passed, and eventually I could think again. I took a more normal shape again, and there was Isis' messenger, telling me Osiris was dead."

"Sekhmet never contacted you again?"

"…One of her lionesses wandered my way during one of the calms between my storms. I knew it was hers, it stank of her. It followed me for a time, doing nothing else, and I got the message. She lived. After that, the lioness returned to wherever they go."

"Sekhmet is alive and well, so far as I'm aware," Horus said. "She doesn't stick around me much. I think she finds me boring. She likes annoying Mother, though." He had a soft smile on his face.

Seth shrugged. "Sekhmet and I were never close. I don't… know what her game was." He still didn't know if she was worried about him, truly. But whatever her reasoning, she'd saved him. Risked her life for him in attacking the Pharaoh. Maybe it was all a ploy to mess with Osiris. Maybe Osiris had died in their battle, but it seemed strange to imagine such a thing took a month, and neither Isis nor Nephthys had spoken of it, and Horus didn't apparently know about it.

He was grateful to her, in his own way, and he chose to focus on the parts of that interaction that had been for his benefit. A repayment of whatever debt he might have owed.

Though perhaps she had repaid *her* debt to *him,* in sending him to Osiris in the first place. Rescuing him from her own machinations.

His feelings for her were complicated, and likely always would be. But in any case, she had acted to stop Osiris from further harming him, and Seth didn't want her to be hurt for attacking the Pharaoh, to Seth's knowledge, on Seth's behalf.

"All things end," Horus said to himself abruptly, dragging Seth out from his thoughts.

Seth realized he'd been lost in his own head for quite a while.

Horus looked up at Seth. "You realize that sounds rather *damning*. And you left her alone in a room with Osiris while he was unconscious."

“Sekhmet doesn’t have the kind of power to *kill* him,” Seth insisted, rolling his eyes. “Knock him out when he was distracted? Yes. But kill him? Particularly a month *after* the fact? No.”

“She knew his weakness, though.”

“That he was euphoric while ra—that…” Seth swallowed. He tried to collect himself, mostly failed, and just said instead, “You think she blackmailed him?”

“It’s possible.”

Seth scoffed. “Osiris wouldn’t care. I said I’d tell everyone at one point, what he’d done to me.” He shuddered at the idea, but it was said in the moment, and it felt like all he’d had, covered in tears, snot, semen, blood, and fear. “He was *overjoyed*. He wanted to *brand me* as his. Cover me in jewelry. Fuck me in court if he got the chance.” He shook his head. “I’m not sure what he expected Isis to do… Just be fine, I suppose? She wasn’t Pharaoh, after all.”

Horus frowned. “The Ennead would—”

Seth laughed. “Would what? Meet because Osiris had enslaved his brother?”

“Yes.”

Seth’s smile twitched. “No, it wouldn’t. The Ennead didn’t care when Isis tricked Ra. It wouldn’t care what Osiris did… whatever he planned.” He had no idea what had been the plan after their encounter. He assumed enslavement.

He tried not to think about it.

“Mother wouldn’t have allowed it,” Horus insisted.

Seth looked away, feeling cold again. “We’ll never know, will we?”

Horus thought for a moment. “Is there something else you’re not telling me?”

Seth grimaced. “Osiris wasn’t always the most interested in Isis’ work, and it just… it always seemed odd that… that…” He swallowed. “The drug he used. He could probably make whatever it was himself, since he could make any plant, but… that kind of thing was always more Isis’ thing than his.”

Horus’ eyes widened. “You think Mother gave him the poison. Or at least… told him about it? To weaken you? To… take control of you?”

“She’d have no reason to,” Seth said, repeating the mantras he’d told himself over the decades. He loved Isis. She was his closest friend. She would never have…

But he’d loved Osiris, too.

“She might have even done it without knowing what he planned to use it for,” Seth continued. “Or maybe he *did* pay attention to her work and made it himself for later. Or he

just knew what the plants did. Maybe *he* taught *her* about some of those things. I don't know."

After a while, Horus replied, "…I see why you didn't go back."

Seth laughed. "Because I am a coward." He was still so afraid. Still shaking. The tent felt too close.

"Because you were hurt badly there," Horus explained. "And there was no one you could trust... Except perhaps Nephthys?"

Seth grimaced. "For all I knew, she was Osiris' ally. Though… I doubted it, the way he spoke about her." Osiris seemed to *hate* her. Why? Because Seth had liked her?

All of it made no sense. Even after decades of thinking about it and hearing Osiris tell him how long Osiris had wanted Seth in his arms while fucking him, Seth still couldn't believe it all.

"What convinced you otherwise?" Horus asked. "Unless… you weren't?"

"I didn't… think too much about it, really. Until she came here. And then… I simply knew." Seth shook his head. "If she was or… *is*… his ally, then… Then it is beyond me. She was not interested in humiliating me, anyway, so there's that." She had seemed safe enough out here, though being around her in its own way made his skin crawl just a bit, because of Osiris, because of what she'd said, because of… Too much.

He still cared for her, and she for him, it seemed. In her own way.

Horus was quiet for a while, before saying, "I'm sorry I kept trying to convince you to go back. I can see why you wouldn't want to."

Seth laughed, but had no reply.

"That my father would do something so..." Horus frowned. "It is monstrous. It's not enough, but I'm sorry you went through all that."

Seth shrugged. It was all he knew to do. He didn't know what he was expecting. He felt the distance again. Like he could just dissolve into sand at any moment, to match how he felt.

After a time, Horus said, "I believe Isis and Nephthys do genuinely miss you. And others, I think. Perhaps… I could speak with them?"

Seth stiffened. "You must not tell them!" The idea made his shaking worse.

Horus raised his hands. "I won't! I swear it!"

Seth sagged, still feeling a trickle of fear. Now Horus *knew*. Yes, there was the oath, and what he'd said, but…

“I’m sorry,” Horus said. “I didn’t mean to alarm you. My oath is still binding. I will not tell them.”

Seth bowed his head. “…I know. I… I know.”

After a time, Horus added, quietly, “Mother misses you. I hear her sometimes, talking about you. Sadly. Mournfully, as if you’ve already died.”

Seth grimaced. He felt heartsick, in a way he couldn’t put into words.

“But I can see how hard it would be, to talk to her.”

Seth laughed. “About my weakness? About her husband’s cruelty? She believes he was a good man. Let her believe that. Let them *all* believe that.”

“Just to talk about normal things,” Horus explained. “Things as they were, before my father assaulted you.”

Something settled in Seth’s belly and he wanted… he wanted to crawl away. No one had said it aloud to him. Even Sekhmet hadn’t. It felt too real, once more.

Seth felt tired. “I need to lay down.”

“…Of course.”

Seth floated over to the cot and settled, dismissing his headdress.

“Do you wish me to stay?”

“Do *you* wish to stay?” Seth demanded, not looking at him. There would be pleading on his face, even after everything, and Seth couldn't bear that.

Weakness, he thought.

“I don’t want to leave you alone,” Horus said, walking over and kneeling by the edge of the cot.

Seth felt too distant from himself. He didn’t know why Horus chose to stay. Who could, after learning all that? It must have disgusted him.

Seth could be alone again, as he had been. Just him and the desert wind and his sha.

“I just… I don’t know what to say,” Horus added. “Thank you for trusting me with that.”

“You think Sekhmet did it, still,” Seth said, coming back to himself a bit.

Horus sighed. “It was *very* damning.”

Seth sighed. This was too tiring.

“Why *don’t* you think she did it?” Horus asked. “Maybe she enlisted aid of some kind… She’s crafty like that. She could get favors out of people to help her, once she realized she could knock him out once.”

“Why?” Seth replied, actually curious. “What reasoning? She doesn’t like Isis enough to put her on the throne, and she didn’t know you. She certainly has no interest in ruling herself.” Sekhmet was a flighty creature, given to pranks. She had her own duties, as they all did, but court functions bored her. And despite her willingness to fight, even war bored her. She’d never helped him in his battles. Not that he’d expected her, too. It was just another way they weren’t close.

“I don’t know, Seth,” Horus replied. “But I should speak with her.”

“…So long as you keep to your oath.” He realized he didn’t care anymore. This whole thing felt silly, pointless. Why had he been angry? Why had been upset?

“I know.” Horus frowned. “You are worried about her. Why?”

“No matter her reasons, she saved me. I will grant her this in return.”

“…Those with your regard are well-protected.”

Seth scoffed, then reconsidered the sentence, noting the oddness of Horus’ tone. He looked at Horus, who was watching him thoughtfully. He was frowning, slightly. No, he was *pouting.*

“Are you… jealous of her?” Seth was incredulous.

“Perhaps.”

Seth snorted. His shaking was mostly gone, and he felt that foolish warmth return to him. He realized Horus wasn’t angry or disgusted. Wasn’t demanding more than Seth could give. Their conversation had let him calm down a bit.

Even in this, Horus was trying. Seth wished he’d noticed sooner how much Horus was trying, for *him*.

And that… made his heart lurch.

“You are a fool,” Seth finally said. “…Get up here. My back is cold.”

Horus smiled and clambered up onto the cot, behind Seth, dismissing his headdress. It was only twilight, but Horus made no protest about sleeping so early.

For whatever reason, Horus at his back wasn’t suffocating anymore. And Horus didn’t wrap an arm around him, as if to give Seth more space, even as they were right next to each other.

It felt like a barrier, between everything Seth had talked about, the world, and everything he was afraid of. Horus’ skin was warmth against the cold that Seth felt surrounding him at all times, and all Seth wanted to do was curl up into it.

Weakness, Seth thought again.

His eyes were wet, and he shut them. Then he was weak. So be it.

He was still afraid, but too tired to push Horus away. And he was afraid that if Horus didn't hold him in place, he might dissolve into sand again for another few years.

After a time, Seth said, “You’re not mad at me.”

“Of course not.”

“You don’t find me repulsive.”

“How could I ever?”

Seth swallowed at the honesty in those words.

“May I… hold you?”

Seth made an affirmative noise, and Horus wrapped a warm arm around him. Horus squeezed him a little, and Seth was nervous, but he also wanted to dissolve into the touch. The reminder that Horus was here with him, now. *Horus*. Not Osiris, not Nephthys. Not nothingness. This man who had stayed by his side and simply wanted to be there. Who time and again had respected Seth’s boundaries – even though he could be pushy and demanding, but not in a way that hurt (too much) – and enjoyed being around him. Who called him beautiful and glorious and…

Seth *wanted,* and for once… the cost of that wanting was nothing. For once… things were okay.

“…You believe me,” Seth said, some time later, still incredulous. This was Horus’ father, after all. Surely there was a ploy or… or…

“I trust you.”

Seth shut his eyes. “Fool.”

Horus pulled him close. “I’m glad you told me, Seth. It must have been hard.”

Seth’s tears fell, but he didn’t reply. He simply curled back against Horus, and prayed for no dreams. Reality was too nightmarish and too beautiful for anything else.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus gravitated between an ecstatic joy that he was back at Seth's side after weeks of keeping his distance, knowing the sandstorms made Seth's thoughts on their fight *abundantly* clear… and a sharp rage at his father… and Sekhmet.

All these years, hearing stories of his father from Isis, Nephthys, Maat, Thoth, even Ra on the rare occasions she visited… None of them compared to what Seth had told him. Horus' image of a wise, generous ruler who'd been good to his wife, his family, his subjects… And now this. Encapsulated in a god of war who'd fled to the desert to escape him.

Horus tried to focus on Seth, breathing in the scent of his hair, lightly caressing the soft skin of his chest.

The weeks away had been more difficult than Horus thought. Isis had scolded him for sighing more than once as he gazed towards the desert, though she'd also asked him what had happened. He'd stayed closed mouthed beyond vaguely saying he was giving Seth some space.

"Is he pouting?" Isis had asked, smiling softly. "He used to do that when we were younger. He has the most *adorable* pouty face, it's so silly." She'd laughed. Then she patted Horus' arm and left to work on her medicines.

Horus had taken care of plenty of work while he was home, which had piled up in his absence, even with Isis at the helm. It had been distracting, anyway. But at night his bed felt empty, and his arms grasped for someone who wasn't there.

He almost laughed. They'd barely had two nights together and already he could barely sleep properly without Seth there.

But it felt like something had shifted between them. Something greater than just bodies. He could be easy with Seth in ways he wasn't, and even when Seth was challenging – which was much of the time – it was *fun.*

He wanted Seth at his side… wanted to be at *Seth's* side… and the distance created by an argument he didn't understand was baffling, particularly when he didn't know how to make amends.

He'd been hopeful when he headed back to the desert after the storms ended, ready to get down on his knees to apologize if needed, though he kept his cool. He hadn't expected anything like what he found. What he *heard*.

He'd seen Seth shaking. Knew there were details Seth was leaving out. Couldn't even begin to imagine how truly horrible Osiris had been to him, based on that quick summary near the end.

Now Horus simply wanted to keep Seth in his arms and fly him somewhere far away, where no one could hurt him again.

And he wanted to talk to Sekhmet. He wanted *answers*. Beyond that, depending on the answers were… well he didn't know what he'd do.

…But he couldn't even talk to her about it, not with his promise to Seth.

And it would mean going back to the capital anyway. Abandoning Seth when Seth might - *hopefully* - need him.

…It could wait. Horus ducked his head against Seth's, and settled for sleep, feeling somewhat relaxed back here again, with Seth safely tucked in his arms.

It was still dark out when Horus opened his eyes as Seth shifted his legs slightly in the darkness.

"Are you feeling any better?" Horus asked quietly.

"…What does *better* mean?" Seth asked after a time, his voice oddly blank.

"…I don't know," Horus replied.

"…Then maybe," Seth said, quietly.

Horus was hopeful there, but not much. "What do you need right now?"

"…Can he come back?"

Horus blinked. "What?"

"You're Pharaoh. Your mother is Isis. Can he come *back*?" It was obvious who *he* was.

"…Not to my knowledge," Horus replied. "He's certainly never made a reappearance himself… I used to ask Mother, if she'd tried to bring him back, and she said such things were beyond her ability. Even Ra couldn't bring him back."

"…If you could, *would* you bring him back?" Seth was frozen in Horus' arms now. "He's your *father*, after all. And you're *Pharaoh*."

"…No," Horus replied, wondering just what Seth thought he was capable of just because he sat on his father's throne. On Ra's throne. Though it was true a lot of people thought he was capable of the impossible, if only because Isis sat beside him. And he *was* powerful, in his own right, and even he didn't know what he was fully capable of just yet, but he had the sense that bringing people back from the dead wasn't in his repertoire. As a child even Isis

had pointed out that he'd been more similar to his grandmother than his father in terms of powers.

For once, Horus was grateful that was seemingly the case.

"I would not bring him back, even if I could." There was a bit of anger in Horus' voice that he couldn't fully hide. Not directed at Seth, though. "I don't know what I would do if I saw him, now. Nothing good, for what he did."

Seth swallowed heavily. "He wasn't *all* bad. He was a good ruler. A friend to many. Wise. Egypt prospered under him, and the people were happy. Your mother loves him."

"He hurt you, likely planned worse, and had questionable opinions of the Goddess of Peace based seemingly on jealousy. I question if such a god would have kept Egypt in good health for long. And what his place would be were he to return to court *now*. And I feel that Mother would have been *furious* if she knew, to say the least."

It was odd to think of it. So many years, he'd wanted his father in his life. He'd looked at all the holes in his existence where his father would have been, if he'd been alive. He'd imagined his parents together, eating meals with him, training him, spending time with him… He hadn't thought it could be a reality, and certainly had no new ideas on how to make it a reality… but if he had the chance now, with Seth in his arms and that terrible history in his mind…

"All things end," Horus said. "Sekhmet hit on something true there, whatever she meant with that phrase. Perhaps his time was done."

Seth was silent for a long time, but eventually he leaned back into Horus.

Time passed.

"…You really think Sekhmet did it."

"She is currently the only likely candidate," Horus said, quietly. "No one else had motive. Perhaps she feared retribution after you left. Perhaps they made a deal that night when he awoke and it went sour after a month, so she struck. Perhaps she was biding her time before doing the deed, gathering helpers. Who can say?"

"Who would help her?" Seth asked. "He was *Pharaoh*. More than that, he was *Osiris*… People loved him. Even some of the other gods seemingly worshiped him."

"If they knew what he—"

When Seth flinched at that, Horus changed tack, "They won't, not if you don't want them to, but if they knew… I think you'd have more allies than you think. And Sekhmet might have known who to go to."

"…You think she *told* people?" Seth's voice was thin, horrified.

"…Perhaps." Horus pulled Seth close when he started shaking again. "Or perhaps she was good at convincing them through other means. We don't know. I've never heard of this before, and if she had help, I find it hard to believe the story wouldn't spread, so it's hard to believe she *did* tell someone. You know how bad the gossip is at home."

After a time, Seth stopped shaking. "…Yes. I do." After a time, he continued, "She's not strong enough on her own. She's a trickster. A fighter, yes, but not strong enough to face Osiris on her own."

"She's the daughter of Ra. Osiris was Ra's great-grandson. Perhaps Sekhmet has powers we don't know of."

Seth sighed.

"I don't mean to question your judgment on the matter," Horus said, feeling the sun creep up outside the tent. "You know Sekhmet better than I do. But—"

"You still want to talk to her."

"…Yes. But it's not important right now."

After a time, Seth replied, "Fine. You can talk to her about it. All of it."

Horus twitched. "Are you sure?"

"….No. But you can do it anyway."

"…You're *very* sure?"

Seth huffed and dissolved into sand, making Horus fall forward slightly. Seth reappeared near the tent flap and pushed it back, gazing in the direction of the sunrise, his back to Horus.

Horus sat up, watching him, wondering what he was thinking.

"I'm just tired, Horus," Seth said, quietly. He sounded… defeated. "Perhaps not better after all."

Horus stood up and walked over to him, placing his hands on Seth's shoulders to gently rub them. Seth didn't pull away.

"I'm wrung out," Seth continued. "Like a cleaning rag." He laughed, bitterly. "I'm still… afraid… angry… and empty, too. I don't… The emptiness just seems to be taking over."

Horus wrapped his arms around Seth's chest and pulled him close.

Seth went with the movement, resting the back of his head against Horus' neck. After a time, he continued, "I thought telling you would change things. And it… I think it did, but I don't… I don't really feel different. Just… empty…"

"It was a lot to talk about," Horus said.

"…You think I was stupid to run away."

"What? No! Of course not."

"You said Isis and Nephthys miss me."

"Well, yes, but… You did what you had to. To keep yourself safe. To heal. I would never think you stupid for that."

Seth snorted. "I've been doing nothing but sleeping, really, but I'm still so tired…"

"You can take a break," Horus said. "It's okay."

When Seth didn't say anything, they just stood there together, watching the sunrise.

"I do miss more than the music, the dancing," Seth said, eventually. "The library. Processions of our followers. Boat races. Archery contests. Even drinking contests with Sekhmet…" He chuckled. "Talking with Isis about anything, really. Your mother's brilliant, you know."

"I know."

Seth sighed. "Good." Eventually, Seth asked, "What would you do, if I went back? To Heliopolis?"

Horus blinked. "You'd go back?"

"I'm not saying I will," Seth qualified. "Just… what would *you* do?"

"With what? Talking to Sekhmet?"

Seth sighed. "With… *this*. Us." He scoffed. "If there *is* an *us*."

Horus felt his heart race, and then smiled. "Well, my bed is a lot more comfortable than your cot."

Seth elbowed him. "Oaf."

Horus swallowed and laughed. "It is, though. Roomier, too. And I've got all these wonderful sheets I'm sure you'd enjoy sleeping on." *And jewelry and fine clothes I'd cover you in*, but he didn't say *that*.

"Oh?" Seth asked, tauntingly. Horus could hear the smile in his voice.

"You could wake up in my arms every morning… if you wanted."

"Is that something *you* want?"

Horus nuzzled his hair. "You need to ask?"

Seth laughed a little, but didn't reply.

“We could set up a throne for you alongside mine and Mother’s,” Horus continued, imagining it. “You could hold court with us, if you wanted. I’m sure Mother would appreciate the advice.”

“You’re Pharaoh, though. I didn’t do that for Osiris. It would be strange if I did that for you.”

“I am not my father,” Horus said, quietly but firmly, noting Seth’s twitch in response. “The desert is Egypt’s primary defense against our enemies, and you are of my mother’s generation, and wise in strategy. I’d appreciate your advice and thoughts on problems.” *And perhaps if Father had listened to you rather than just… lusting after you, things might have been different.* But that was a ridiculous thought. Likely it would have just given Osiris more ammunition for whatever goals he had. And it was a silly train of thought.

He smiled and squeezed Seth just a little. “And, selfishly, having you at my side during meetings would be… pleasant.”

“Ha,” Seth said. “Not serving you grapes? Or sitting at your feet?”

“If you wish,” Horus replied. The thought of Seth feeding him grapes was *doing* things to his brain (and his cock). “But I’d rather you at my side. An equal, like Mother.”

“Mmm… What if I run away again?” Seth asked, teasingly. “Back here. Away from you.”

“I’d give you space,” Horus replied. “Unless you wanted me to follow you. Then I would.”

“You wouldn’t order me to stay?”

“Never.” Horus smiled. “Plus, you’re the desert. Only *you* can control you. It’s a fool who thinks otherwise.”

Seth laughed. “You’re Pharaoh, though.”

“You’re *Seth*,” Horus replied, pulling him close, kissing his right ear.

“That’s not an explanation.”

Horus moved down to Seth’s neck, making the other god crane his neck slightly, to give Horus more room. “As you keep reminding me, I’m Pharaoh, I don’t need explanations.”

Seth laughed.

Horus pulled him back to the cot.

Seth had his eyes shut and just let Horus kiss where he wanted, and move Seth how he wanted, though Horus noted Seth was gently smiling.

Horus pushed Seth onto his back and kissed his way down Seth’s chest, making Seth murmur contentedly. Horus was privately fascinated by how Seth didn’t seem to sweat all that much. He wondered if was one reason Seth tasted differently than others.

He paused and looked up, seeing that Seth's eyes were still closed. "Seth, I... Is this really okay? You'll let me know if it's too much?"

"I will be far more vexed with you stopping than whatever it is you have planned," Seth replied, quietly.

"You underestimate what I want to do to you." He couldn't keep the hunger out of his voice.

Seth's soft smile turned into a grin, even as Seth shivered slightly under Horus' fingers. He cracked open one eye to gaze down at Horus, with a kind of daring look. "Your threats have been received, noted, and filed with the appropriate officials. Carry on." He shut his eyes. "I'll kick you off if I need to."

Horus chuckled and went back to kissing Seth's stomach, eliciting a pleased sound from Seth. Horus found his way down to Seth’s waist, he hiked up Seth’s black shendyt and peppered kisses around Seth’s pelvis, sometimes licking the soft skin there, especially when it elicited sleepy murmurs from Seth. Then he licked his way down Seth’s cock, and kissed the head, but otherwise left it alone.

“…Horus?” Seth murmured, clearly a bit out of it.

Horus moved to Seth’s sack, licking it all over, sucking it partially into his mouth and making the other god shudder. Horus peppered more kisses over Seth’s taint, making Seth jump a little as Horus prodded the soft skin with his tongue.

Eventually, Horus pushed Seth’s thighs back, lifting the other gods legs up a little, and spreading his cheeks. Then Horus ducked down again.

Seth cried out in surprise when Horus’ tongue found his rim.

Horus pressed in, tasting everything he could, feeling Seth’s legs tremble in his hands. When he stuck his tongue inside that wet heat, both Seth’s legs *twitched*.

“Horus…” Seth groaned. He was unable to do much more than moan as Horus worked him over.

Seth’s left foot lightly eventually nudged Horus’ back, and Horus pocked his head up briefly, looking up at Seth.

Seth’s eyes were glassy, his face red.

“Yes, Seth?” Horus said, smiling.

“Want… want you in me.” His cheeks reddened. “Your cock, I mean.”

Horus grinned and replied, “As you wish.” He sat up dismissed his own shendyt, then used his wind to grab the oil Seth thankfully kept in the tent still. He wet his cock quickly, feeling anxious to get inside, then settled between Seth’s legs, and slowly pushed his way into Seth’s ass.

Seth tossed his head back. “Mmmn… *Horus*…”

“*Seth.*…” Horus murmured, his eyes locked on the other god’s face as he slowly thrust back and forth, burying himself deeper and deeper. He wanted to take his time so he could feel every small bit of Seth he could.

Seth’s fingers dug into the cot. “Mmmm… You’re right. There probably are benefits-mm-to a bigger bed.”

Horus laughed and thrust in *hard*, making Seth grunt. “Are there?”

“I want you to fuck me on it,” Seth said, between contented moans. “I want to… to wake up in your arms… Until I smell like you. And you smell like me. All the time.”

Something tightened in Horus’ chest and he grabbed Seth’s cock, pumping it hard.

Seth cried out, coming hard in Horus’ hands. Horus followed soon after.

As Horus knelt, still bent over Seth, panting, Seth eventually murmured, “I don’t understand. How I can tell you *all* that… With Osiris… But you make me laugh and… and this and… forget… it all.”

Horus looked up at him, surprised.

Seth’s expression was a bit dazed, but there was still an odd brightness to them. “You make me forget that all exists. That it *happened*. …I want that.” Tears appeared in the corners of Seth’s eyes. “I want to *forget*.”

Horus pulled out and went up to Seth’s side, pulling him close. Seth’s forehead pushed against Horus’ right breast.

Seth’s tears continued to fall, and he shook. “I want to *forget*, Horus…”

“I’m so sorry, Seth.”

“I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

Horus rubbed his back. “It doesn’t matter. It’s over. It’s passed.” Horus could feel Seth’s tears on his stomach, and wished he knew a way to fix everything. What was the point of being Pharaoh if he was so powerless?

“Don’t go away again,” Seth said, quietly, burrowing his forehead in Horus’ collarbone. “Please.”

“I won’t,” Horus replied. “I swear it.” He’d do whatever it took. He didn’t know how it would work, but… He’d figure it out.

They lay there for a time, close, breathing heavily.

“You have to go back, though,” Seth finally said. “You have responsibilities.”

“You don’t have to worry about that.”

Seth pressed his face into Horus’ collarbone. After a time, he said, “I’ll go with you. When you go back.”

Horus blinked. “Seth, you… You don’t have to do that.”

Seth chuckled. “Can’t get rid of me that easily.” He pulled back so he could look up into Horus’ eyes. Horus could see that there was hesitation and fear in Seth’s eyes, but an odd determination, too. “I think I need to see that… that he’s really dead.” Seth smiled sadly. “All these years and I think I’ve just been hiding out here from a ghost.” He shook his head. “I thought you were him. I thought Nephthys carried him, somehow. Maybe I even thought Isis was hiding him somewhere, I don’t know. But I can’t… I don’t want to always be afraid he’s going to come out to get me anymore.”

Horus smiled sadly and rubbed his back. “You’re so brave, Seth.”

Seth laughed. “Hardly.”

Horus pulled him close again. “Truly. You’re inspiring.”

Seth huffed, but didn’t reply. He snuggled closer, and sighed. “Isis will be so mad about me about this.”

“Coming back?”

“Sleeping with *you*.”

Horus blinked slowly, then laughed.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus and Seth didn't head back to Heliopolis immediately. For starters, they slept a good long while. And in the morning Seth took off for a hunt, with Horus following.

Seth seemed a bit cheerier, and Horus was glad of it. Things felt more normal when they were fighting immortal monsters together and racing across the desert sands.

Seth even grinned at times, which made Horus feel like he could keep racing through the desert for days.

They returned to the camp early, though, and Seth ordered the servants to gather their things and head back as soon as they were ready to go. Seth then set his chariot back towards the city.

Horus flew above him, and for a time, they were quiet, simply keeping each other company. Horus would have offered to carry him back, but Seth seemed to want to go back under his own power, which Horus could respect.

(And Horus hadn't yet broached the idea of "let me carry you", though he sorely wanted to.)

Horus didn't know what he'd do first when they got back, other than ensure Seth was safely settled. They'd have to meet with Isis, and Horus wondered how overwhelming *that* would be, after decades apart.

Horus had sent one of his falcons off earlier to alert the palace that they were coming, but asked his mother to keep things relatively low key. He'd debated putting out a full ceremony for Seth versus not being overwhelming, and decided some ceremony was good, to ensure Seth knew that he was missed and respected, but not to an overwhelming degree.

Seth slowed when they could see the city borders, and Horus ducked down to be nearer to him.

"It feels so strange now," Seth said, facing ahead. The sun shone on the dark head of his headdress, the cloth floated slightly behind him as they moved, and his expression was stern. He looked almost like he was riding into war, and Horus supposed, in a way, he was. "Hiding out all these years. And now to just… come back."

"You needed it," Horus replied. "Time well spent is never time wasted."

"But was it *well* spent?" Seth asked, quietly. Then he called, "Ha!" to his sand crocodiles, and they sped up again.

At the city outskirts, Seth slowed to a stop and looked at Horus, who landed nearby. “It’d be odd if you just hovered over me, wouldn’t it? Unless you normally fly around?”

“Our people are used to it,” Horus said, “But it’s not… the most normal, I suppose.”

“And it’d be odd if you walked while I’m up here, wouldn’t it?"

“I suppose.”

Seth sighed. “Well… come on up, then.”

Horus blinked, but took the invitation when offered. He dismissed his wings and stepped up to the chariot so that he was behind Seth. The car was surprisingly roomy, but Horus assumed it was because Seth always seemed to fill whatever space he was in, particularly when he was driving. They were still close, with Horus standing basically at Seth’s back, but they weren’t crushed together.

Horus wanted to hold Seth’s hip instead of the car handle, but decided the better part of valor was not to antagonize Seth during their first drive, so Horus kept his hands on the handle instead.

Seth gave him a moment to settle, then called to his crocodiles, and they entered the city.

By this point, soldiers had long since spotted them and came out to greet them, saluting both gods, and escorting them through the city, keeping back curious onlookers. Seth kept the chariot at a slower pace.

They heard calls from the gathering crowds, for both gods.

“Your majesty!”

“Seth!”

Horus was used to processions and people calling for him, and stole glances at Seth, who appeared stoic and unreadable, slowing his chariot down even more so as to not cause more problems.

When they eventually reached the palace, music met their ears, and rows of finely dressed servants stood in rows to bow to them, while beautiful dancers and skilled musicians performed. Other servants threw petals in the air.

And at the center, at the top of a flight of steps and under fine awning, sat Isis on a grand throne, with Nephthys at her side, both dressed finely as ever, smiling and waiting.

Seth parked his chariot, and Horus hopped down, followed by Seth. Horus walked calmly ahead with Seth just a pace behind him.

They finally made it up the steps to the two goddesses. Horus stepped forward to clasp his mother’s hand, and nodded to Nephthys, then stepped back to stand by Seth’s side.

Horus could feel Seth's nerves, and daringly placed his hand on the other god's right shoulder, making him tense ever so slightly. Horus said, "Seth has come home, Mother."

For a moment, there was silence, then Isis put out her hand, and Seth - after briefly hesitating - stepped forward out of Horus' grip, taking it.

Both gods smiled at each other, and Isis squeezed Seth's hands as she said, "Welcome home, Seth."

"…It's good to be back, Isis."

He finally let her go, and turned to Nephthys, who stepped forward.

Horus saw Seth stiffen.

Horus looked at Nephthys, wondering if this was whatever history she and Seth had and how to deal with it while they were all standing there, or at least put it off until Seth had settled in properly… and realized something was strange about Nephthys' dress. He'd been distracted by everything else happening and hadn't focused too much on the goddesses as he and Seth approached other than seeing where they were, so it was only now he realized… Horus frowned and gave her another look, then stiffened.

She was pregnant.

He hadn't spoken to her in some time before he'd left, as he'd been busy with work and distracted by thoughts of Seth. But as he looked back in his memory, he thought… she *hadn't* been pregnant when he last saw her, had she?

Nephthys reached out her hands to Seth, and he quickly took them, but held them lightly.

"Welcome home, Seth," Nephthys said, still smiling.

Seth managed something of a smile, but Horus could easily tell Seth was alarmed. Thankfully his headdress hid a little of his expression.

They all finally made it deeper into the palace, away from the noise, where a banquet had been set for them, with some of the other gods who often visited: Maat, Thoth, Khnum, Bastet, Hathor, Tawaret, and Sobek, who managed to make Seth smile genuinely when they embraced, clasping arms like old friends.

It wasn't the small dinner Horus had hoped for, but when he traded a look with his mother, he could tell she'd done her best.

He was happy at least that Sekhmet wasn't there. He wanted to speak with her alone.

All the gods present were curious about Seth, asking where he'd been, and what he'd been up to.

Isis stepped in and said, with a smile, "Let my brother sit and have some food. My son and Seth have been on a long trip to get here." She took Seth's hand and led Seth to his place,

between Horus and Nephthys, and Horus was grateful for her.

There was singing and dancing while the gods ate and chatted. Horus sat at the center of the table, with Seth and Isis on either side, and conversation was plentiful. Khnum discussed ship movements and animal migrations along the Nile, which Sobek joined in on. Bastet talked about some of the local building projects, particularly new temples, and Thoth talked about the library he'd started work on some decades prior, which was getting to be rather sizeable.

When Sobek again asked Seth why he'd come back *now*, Seth replied, simply, "I just felt it was time." Then he drank most of what was in his cup, and no one asked again.

Seth seemed open enough otherwise with the other gods, even sometimes smiling and laughing a little. He drank and ate, and clapped for the performers.

Horus wanted to put a hand on his shoulder again, to reassure him, but Seth seemed able to handle himself. Only sometimes when someone spoke up about a new topic did his gaze go a little empty, and he gazed at the dancers like there was nothing else in the room, even the dancers. But he'd quickly snap out of it to answer neutral questions.

Horus was sipping his wine when he heard Seth quietly ask, "Nephthys, who…?"

Horus watched the dancers, but out of the corner of his eye saw Nephthys smile at Seth and say, "Who do you think? I don't exactly sleep around."

Seth colored. "But we aren't…"

Nephthys sighed. "I'm not asking for anything, Seth. Just indulge my selfishness. If I can't have you, then…" She sighed and wrapped her right arm protectively around her belly. "A new god will be good. Who knows what they'll be like?" She smiled at him. "And I know you love teaching. You'll be wonderful with a child."

"When you say you don't expect anything…"

She smiled. "Just take things as they come, Seth. That's all."

Horus focused fully on the dancers, knowing he'd breached their privacy enough. Thankfully, Isis called his attention to a conversation she was having with Hathor.

When Thoth pulled Seth aside for a game of senet, and Hathor was discussing a recital she'd planned the following week with Bastet, Isis leaned towards her son and asked, quietly, "You and Seth are quite close. Closer than I even realized."

Horus smiled vaguely and glanced at Thoth and Seth, sitting off to the side for their game while Maat and Sobek observed. "Yes, we are." He looked back at Isis. "He is important to me. And I intend to keep him at my side."

Isis' eyes widened, and she glanced at Seth in surprise, then back at Horus. "Then…" She frowned. "We'll discuss this later."

As she turned back to Hathor and Bastet, Horus looked at Seth, seeing him frown in concentration while Thoth joked with Maat about something.

He got up to join them.

It was late when they were allowed to leave, and Horus promised Isis he would work on what had been piling on his desk in the morning. She didn't say another word about Seth, or to Seth about what Horus had said, but stayed behind to supervise the party.

Horus followed Seth to Seth's old chambers, where Seth looked around thoughtfully.

Isis had brought Horus here once when he was younger, and simply held his hand with a sad expression on her face before leaving. He'd returned when he started his official investigation into his father's death, and found nothing in the search. He wasn't sure what he expected to find: bits of Osiris hidden away under some clothes? A plan written up somewhere? A weapon with dried immortal blood on it? But there was nothing.

Now he felt a bit embarrassed about invading Seth's privacy.

Horus noted the servants had clearly visited before their arrival: the bed looked freshly made, and there was no dust on the desk, and the weapons on a large wall rack gleamed in the torchlight. The large windows were much like Horus' room, and gave them a view of the city at night.

Seth stepped over to the bed, touching one of the painted foot posts lightly, and thoughtfully. "It's hard to believe this is real."

"It is," Horus said, keeping back, giving him space. "But I assure you, it is real."

Seth looked around at the room. "It is… definitely a change from a tent in the desert."

"I can leave you alone here if you wish," Horus said, wondering if Seth wanted to simply be alone to think things through.

"So ready to be rid of me?" Seth glanced at him with a smile, but Horus could see through it, to how empty it was.

Horus raised an eyebrow. "I kept my hand on your shoulder before the public. Even Mother noted how strange it was. I even told Mother about us."

Seth's lips parted in surprise.

"But I can do more, if you wish."

"You would, wouldn't you?" Seth stepped away from his bed and walked over to Horus, looking at him with an unreadable expression. Finally he added, "I was promised a very nice, big bed. I assume the Pharaoh has a bigger one than I do."

Horus smiled and took his hand, pulling him out of the room.

Seth was relatively impressed by Horus' rooms, admiring the plants, the small weapons rack, a shelf of small golden animals, a decorative benet, with its strings kept beautifully neat mostly by servants – "A gift from Hathor," Horus said when Seth asked – and wandered over to the desk to look at how overwhelmed with papers it was. "I guess you're going to be busy for a time."

"Mother's revenge, I think," Horus said, grinning as he walked over. "But she might have already taken care of much of this. She'll want me to read up on it."

Seth smiled, idly touching the desk edge.

Horus watched him for a moment, then asked, "Do you… want to talk about Nephthys?"

Seth sighed. "Not really."

"All right."

"It's mine," Seth said anyway, his expression somewhat sad. "I didn't… I don't even know what to think about it. I know we were together, but I didn't even know she *wanted* a child…"

Horus wasn't quite sure that's what she wanted, judging by the want he saw on Nephthys' face when she looked in Seth's direction, but he supposed that wasn't important right now.

"It's…" Seth sighed. "I don't know what to think about it."

"You're uncomfortable with it."

"Yes, but… I don't know. Not enough to make anything of it. If she wants a child, fine." He sighed again.

"What about it makes you uncomfortable in particular, you think?"

Seth sighed. "I… That she didn't talk to me earlier, I suppose. But… it's her choice to go through with it, so…"

"She still took a choice away from you," Horus said.

Seth laughed. "I mean… I didn't say no when we..." He shook his head. "I *offered*. And I probably would have agreed if she'd *asked*."

"But she didn't."

Seth shrugged. "It's just a mess." Then he sighed and said, "As long as she's happy, then… Then it's fine." He smiled sadly. "I used to think about it, you know? Having an heir. Wanting to have a child with Nephthys… And I got what I wanted in the end, didn't I? I should be happy." He scoffed, and then sighed again.

Horus wanted to press, but he could tell Seth was truly tired. “I’m sorry. I wanted this day to be better. Or… easier.”

“You’re hardly the problem here,” Seth said, smiling a little. After a while, Seth asked, “Does it bother you? That I’ll be here and… Nephthys will have a child that I might lay some claim to, if she lets me?”

“No,” Horus replied, feeling warm. “Particularly since you plan to be here, with me.” He moved his fingers over Seth’s on the desk, intertwining them. “Your happiness is what matters to me in this instance.”

“Then… we’ll see things as they come, I suppose.” Seth leaned into Horus, watching their fingers. “You’ll need an heir, too, at some point.”

“Yes,” Horus replied. “I try not to think about it.”

“Well… in due time, I suppose,” Seth said. He sighed and turned away to walk to the bed. “I am *exhausted*…”

They ended up just laying down together, their headdresses gone, Seth pushed up against Horus’ chest, Horus’ arms wrapped around him.

Seth had his eyes shut and simply breathed. After a time, he murmured, “I came back and the world didn’t end.”

“It did not,” Horus replied, smiling. He lightly smoothed back Seth’s hair.

“…There’s always tomorrow.”

Horus chuckled.

Horus woke up while it was still dark out, and his arms were empty.

He sat up, looking around at the empty bed, alarmed.

“I’m here,” Seth said, from beyond the curtains.

Horus frowned and got out of the bed, heading towards where he heard Seth’s voice.

The room was dark, but moonlight from the windows shone on Seth sitting in Horus’ desk chair, facing the bed, his expression unreadable. His headdress was back on.

“What’s wrong?” Horus asked, walking over and reaching a hand out to Seth’s left shoulder. “Couldn’t sleep?”

“…Yes,” Seth replied, quietly. He wasn’t looking at Horus. Simply gazing ahead. “And no. I slept… and then I woke, and I wanted…” He laughed. “I wanted to search the palace. Make sure… Make sure *he’s* not hiding here, somewhere.”

"…Ah."

Seth scoffed. "Yes, *ah*. And then I realized, if you suspect me of his murder—"

"I don't—"

"—then that would look kind of damning, eh? Me, wandering around at night checking all the rooms, especially in my sand form, though it'd be faster than walking."

Horus considered for a bit, then said, "I can understand why you want to do this. But even you would have better luck seeing in the daytime. Perhaps we can do this when it's light out?"

"I don't…" Seth paused and looked up at him, confused. "We?"

"Yes, we. I'll go with you. The palace has been rearranged a bit since you've lived here. I know where everything is. And if anyone gives you trouble, I imagine the *Pharaoh* can deal with it more diplomatically."

Seth scoffed, but smiled softly, too. Then he looked down again. "I know I should wait for morning, but I…"

"You'll feel uncomfortable unless it's done now."

"Lazy until when it would be convenient, eh?" Seth said, smiling again. "If only some of that laziness would come back for me."

"I… could distract you?" Horus rubbed soothing circles on Seth's shoulder.

Seth shook his head. "No. Thank you. But no. Not… not now."

"I understand." But as Horus pulled his hand away, Seth grabbed his wrist.

Still staring at the ground, Seth said, "But you could… you could still come with me? Now?"

"…Of course. Whatever you need."

Seth's grip on Horus' wrist relaxed, and he stood.

Going through the palace so late at night was odd for Horus, as he hadn't done such a thing in years. He naturally preferred daylight hours, though the night didn't truly bother him. He just tended to drop dead asleep when the sun went down, particularly when he was young.

"But for about a week when I was younger," Horus said quietly as he held a torch aloft while they walked through the halls, "I decided to see if I could navigate the palace on my own, in the dark. It mostly went well. But on the last night I went too far and got hopelessly lost. A servant found me crying in a hallway and brought me back to Isis, who scolded me for doing something so foolish."

Seth chuckled. “Always the adventurer.”

They stepped into another empty and dark hall lit only a little by moonlight, and walked around with the torch.

Horus noted Seth’s tension as they moved along, but limited himself to saying, “We’re not going to be able to check personal chambers.”

“I know. …Though I could always turn to sand and check them.”

“That would probably be a bad idea if anyone ever found out.”

Seth grimaced.

“And Mother doesn’t allow anyone into Father’s bedroom.”

“Hmm. Not even the Pharaoh?”

“I’ve actually been in the room a few times.” They stepped into an open-air courtyard with a small fountain and covered walkway. “There’s nothing special about it. Mother keeps the bed stripped, and it doesn't even have a mattress. She told me it’s to remind herself that he’s not coming back. Otherwise… The walls are pretty bare and even the clothes are gone. Mother said it all rotted shortly after he died. Apparently he kept a variety of plants there? And even the clothes rotted, somehow… so most everything is gone. It’s just a room, with some chairs, an empty desk, and a bedframe.” He shrugged. “And most of the time it’s locked with one of Mother’s spells.” They walked back into another internal corridor. “She took me there sometimes to tell me stories about Father, but when I grew older she stopped.”

“It… must be hard on her,” Seth said, quietly. “The memories.”

“Yes,” Horus said.

“Do you wish she’d kept taking you for visits?”

“…I don’t know.”

Seth looked at him.

Horus shrugged, not knowing how else to answer, and Seth thankfully left it alone.

They kept search for a time, with Horus seeing little indication from Seth that it was helping or making things worse, Seth stopped at the end of a corridor, and Horus paused to look back at him.

Seth’s expression was unreadable, and the torchlight made the shadows from his headdress even more prominent. For a time he didn’t say anything, until, “I know this is… somewhat pointless, but there’s one room we could try before we go back.”

Horus turned to him entirely. “Whatever you wish. We can keep going, too.”

“I think… just the last one is fine. Or it’ll at least let me sleep.”

“I didn’t know,” Horus said as he watched Seth stare at what was presently a large meeting room. “He had so many offices and rooms he favored that were converted to other things. I didn’t know it was this one… Sometimes we have meals here,” Horus said, “Particularly dinners, given the moonlight…”

The room was open to the sky. The curtains on the decorative columns had been replaced recently when Nephthys redid some of the palace to give it a “fresher” look, and there was a large table set up for meetings on the main floor, leaving the upper floor for performances.

Seth walked towards the stairs but stopped before reaching them. He slowly turned to a nearby column.

Horus stepped forward, worried. Wondering if he should pull Seth out of the room, but wanting to leave him to his thoughts, as well, out of respect.

Seth looked back around. Finally he said, “There used to be plants.”

Horus blinked and looked around. “Ah, yes… They always have trouble growing in here for some reason. After investigating and realizing it wasn’t the servants doing a poor job, Mother told them to just stop bothering. The decorations are enough. And you hardly notice when you’re drunk or sleepy from food or paying more attention to dancers.”

Seth didn’t reply to that. He looked back at the column.

“…Seth?” Horus asked after a time, walking towards him.

Seth abruptly brought his arm back and punched the stone, making a loud crashing sound and forming a large crack-filled crater.

Horus would have worried about the noise bothering people, but this room was far away from the living quarters, with other large rooms that were definitely empty this time of night. If this was where Osiris had caught Seth, then… no wonder no one had interrupted them.

Seth was still, his hand still buried in the crater. He eventually withdrew his hand and moved away, walking past Horus. “Let’s get out of here.”

“Seth?”

But Seth dissolved into sand and flew ahead.

Horus raced after him.

Horus found Seth in one of the armories, sitting on the floor and staring at a wall of swords. He didn’t look at Horus as Horus came in the room.

“Seth?” Horus asked.

“It’s stupid,” Seth said. “And cowardly.”

Horus stepped forward carefully and finally came to Seth’s side, without Seth doing anything. Horus put his torch out and sat down next to the other god. “It’s not cowardly.”

Seth breathed out deeply and sagged towards Horus’ left shoulder.

Horus put his arm out and around Seth’s back, hugging him close.

“He’s really gone, isn’t he?” Seth said, quietly.

“Yes,” Horus said, rubbing small circles on Seth’s arm. “I went looking for him, too, when I was younger.” He smiled sadly. “A boy who wanted to know who his father was. All I found was lifeless artwork and stories, and the way Mother looked whenever she spoke of him. He’s gone.”

Seth swallowed and sagged even farther, falling into Horus’ lap and dissolving his headdress.

Horus moved his hand up to gently brush Seth’s hair, not knowing what else to say.

“How can you care for me like this, when… all you want is your father back?”

Horus hummed briefly before saying, “I can want many things. My father was dead before I was born. You are someone important to me. Loving you doesn’t mean I can’t regret the relationship I never had with him. Nor does my regret absolve him of his actions against you. Against Egypt.”

“…You love me?”

Horus said nothing as Seth pushed himself up so they were facing each other.

In the moonlight from a window, Horus could see the dried mark of tears and Seth’s shock, his lips slightly parted.

Horus simply stared back at him and replied, “Yes.”

It seemed so easy to say now, so factual. The sun rose and fell every day, the moon shone, and Horus loved the God of War.

“Perhaps I knew when we were first together,” Horus said. “The way I wanted you. The way you first felt in my arms. Perhaps it was being apart after we’d argued, and knowing I’d made a mistake, and missing you. Perhaps it was having you at my side today, and how right it felt.” He smiled. “Perhaps it is too fast. Too slow. Too much of whatever it is. But it is there.”

Seth simply stared back, clearly astonished. “Horus, I…” He opened his mouth, then shut it again.

“I don’t need any answer or anything from you,” Horus said. “That you are by my side is enough.”

Seth blinked, then shook his head, smiling. “You’re impossible. *My* impossible…” He leaned forward and kissed Horus on the mouth, his soft lips tentative.

Horus leaned into the kiss, wrapping an arm around him to pull him closer, and dismissing his headdress.

Seth leaned into him, pushing him onto his back.

Later, as Horus held Seth’s hips while the other god knelt over him and rocked back and forth on Horus’ cock, moaning Horus’ name, and sometimes helped along by Horus’ gentle pushes and pulls, and the moonlight painted Seth’s face in a beautiful glow, the red of his hair spread like a heat haze, Horus thought, *I want this to last forever*.

When they’d both spent themselves, and Seth finally collapsed onto him, laying on the ground with him, with Seth’s right arm over Horus’ shoulder, and Seth’s mouth close to Horus’ right ear, Seth murmured, “I love you, too, you impossible fool…”

Horus smiled and pulled him closer.

Horus was pleased to slowly wake up and see Seth breathing easily in his sleep, curled up in Horus’ arms. Horus just watched him for a time, marveling in how he didn’t have to fly out to the desert to see the other god.

He waited until he knew Isis would eventually come to fetch him for the day’s work, find his rooms empty, and thus send a servant, and then got up.

Seth grumbled with his eyes still shut, “Too early.”

Horus chuckled. “You can stay in bed. It’s not like you have any duties yet.”

Seth grumbled some more and sat up, and Horus snorted at how much of a mess his hair looked, which was admittedly partly Horus’ fault for constantly messing with it the previous evening, though the rest was from sleeping on the floor.

Seth of course ignored him and shook it out, making sand fall around them, which made Horus raise an eyebrow in surprise. Then Seth pushed himself up and stretched, allowing Horus to watch the sunlight play on the fine muscles of his back.

Horus swallowed. “We could stay here for a bit, or… go back to my rooms… Mother would understand…” She wouldn’t, but he didn’t care as he watched Seth move.

Seth turned to look at him, confused, then whatever expression was on Horus’ face made him snort with laughter. “I’m flattered, but maybe later. I’d like to talk to Isis, anyway. …After a bath, maybe.”

Horus sighed loudly, and replied, “Very well.”

Seth smiled again, and then his expression became more shadowed. “And I’d like to speak to Nephthys again.”

Horus’ own expression hardened. “I understand.”

They quickly made their way back to Horus’ rooms to get ready for the day. Horus could see servants flashing them curious looks before scurrying off to deal with whatever tasks they had, though he did stop one of the ones preparing his morning bath to let his mother know he’d be late for morning court.

They managed to minimize any groping while cleaning themselves, mostly with Seth scolding Horus for his lack of self-control by dumping a pitcher of water on him, and finally got themselves cleaned up and orderly before departing again to hopefully find a not very angry Isis. They were near the throne room – with Horus in front and Seth slightly behind – when Horus saw Sekhmet leaning against a wall along their path.

Her clothes shone in the bits of sunlight peeking down the hall. She turned her head up to smile at him, gamely, with a sharp grin. “So. You brought him back. Well done.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth froze behind Horus at the sight of Sekhmet just *waiting* for them.

Horus came to a stop to look at her as well.

Sekhmet pushed off from the wall with a grin to stand before them.

It was hard for Seth to define the feeling coursing through him. Seeing her again, after all this time, in person instead of through one of her stand-ins, seemed to bring everything back in a way being back in Heliopolis hadn't. He wasn't afraid, not entirely, but…

Sekhmet gazed back at him for a minute, possibly seeing his hesitation, his fear. Smelling it, perhaps. They were both hunters, they knew that scent.

Seth was disgusted with himself. Horus' soft words were washed away in the sight of Sekhmet. She *knew*. And she'd been there for him, but… it all felt raw being back here again, before her. Like he was back in that night.

Then he saw what might have been a nearly imperceptible nod from her, and for some reason… it was calming. He had no idea why.

"Sekhmet," Horus said, quietly. He put an arm out before Seth, protectively.

Seth frowned. "Horus, it's—"

"You have a bodyguard now, Seth?" Sekhmet said with a grin. "Good."

Seth's frown deepened. "Do I need one?"

"It can be nice to have people on your side," she said, sidling closer, but not too close. "Isn't it?" She tilted her head playfully at Horus.

Horus didn't say anything.

"Just like you were on my side," Seth said, carefully, "that night."

"Was I?" Sekhmet said, not looking away from Horus.

Seth sighed. "Do you *want* him to attack you?"

"I'm surprised *you* don't," Sekhmet said, glancing at him. "You're looking well, Seth."

Seth grimaced. "I'm fine."

“I can see that,” Sekhmet said, looking back at Horus. “So, the Pharaoh is finally taking a consort then? Who’s going to let Hathor know?” Then she hummed and added, “Unless she’s just going to be your second consort? I wonder if she could handle that…”

“He’s not taking me as his consort,” Seth said.

Horus twitched, but Seth didn’t react to it.

“Oh?” Sekhmet asked, her grin widening. “Trouble in paradise?”

“What do you want, Sekhmet?” Horus asked instead.

“I can’t want to check in on my dear family?” she asked, her smile all teeth. “I wasn’t at dinner yesterday, so I missed the opportunity.”

“Were you involved in Osiris’ death?” Horus asked, making Seth’s eyes widen.

“Oh-ho-ho,” Sekhmet said, clapping her hands together. “All these years and finally the baby bird is flying out with his talons.”

“Answer the question.”

“And what if I was?” Sekhmet replied, tapping a finger against her chin. “Would you lock me up? Kill me right now in this hallway?”

Seth looked at Horus’ face: his expression was hard.

Horus continued, “Are you confessing to the murder?”

“I’m not confessing to anything,” Sekhmet said. “Just curious. Besides, how would I have killed him?”

“You could have had help,” Horus offered.

“A conspiracy, then?” Sekhmet asked with a grin. “Does the young Pharaoh think he’s living in a nest of vipers?”

“I might,” Horus replied, stonily, “And one of them might be before me.”

“I didn’t kill him,” Sekhmet said, still grinning. “Why do you think I did?”

Horus frowned.

“I told him,” Seth said, quietly, looking at Sekhmet calmly. “He knows. Everything about… that night. When you helped me escape.” He swallowed. “But not to implicate you. Just to… explain.”

“Seth believes you helped him more than you didn’t,” Horus added. “I have no reason to believe otherwise.”

“Hmm…” Sekhmet said, tapping her chin again. “So you think I have some kind of motive to kill Osiris, then? To… *avenge* Seth, perhaps?”

“A generous guess on my part,” Horus said, quietly. “And if you were, it would be understandable.”

“Generous?” Sekhmet grinned. “You think I have some darker motive for going after Osiris? Perhaps I wanted Isis’ throne for myself?”

“You’re barely ever in court,” Horus said. “Even when I was younger, you seldom appeared. You’d be bored with a throne.”

Sekhmet shrugged. “Then I suppose I have no motive.” She tilted her head thoughtfully. “And yet we have a dead God of Life, and no one else with a motive now that you’ve cleared Seth, and your sole remaining suspect is one goddess who lacks the power to kill Osiris.” She smiled. “Have you ever thought you’re going about it wrong? I’d have needed help, sure, but who would I have asked? Maybe you should start there.”

Seth rolled his eyes. “Isis, Maat, and the other investigators surely would have investigated such things. Besides, there are many powerful gods in the pantheon. Just throwing around wild accusations would get us nowhere.”

Sekhmet smiled at him. “Sometimes, Seth, you really do have very good instincts. You should listen to them.”

Seth scowled.

“…You know who did it,” Horus said, watching Sekhmet.

Sekhmet’s grin widened.

“And you want something for that information,” Horus continued. “What do you want?”

“I don’t need anything,” Sekhmet said, smiling benignly. “I am simply doing my duty and advising my Pharaoh, am I not?” She grinned again.

“You could have told my mother when the initial investigation went on, but you didn’t.”

Sekhmet shrugged. “Perhaps I wanted to! Perhaps…” she tilted her head, “I wasn’t allowed.”

“…And now you’re allowed?” Seth asked, frowning.

“A promise has come due,” Sekhmet said, turning to look at him, her expression serious for a moment. “And it hasn’t been kept.”

“What promise?” Seth demanded. “And from who?”

She simply smirked at him. After a time she replied, “Now, now, where would the fun be in just *telling* you?”

Seth glared at her, making her smirk widen.

“You have to be fair to me,” Sekhmet said. “I have faith in your abilities. Mostly. And I’ve given you a *lot* for nothing.”

“You get something out of it, even if it’s just rejoicing in other’s frustration,” Seth said.

Sekhmet laughed.

“You’ve also given us nothing to go on,” Horus insisted, glaring as well, now. “A name or names would be more helpful than knowing that my father didn’t simply lay himself out to die and had to be overpowered first.”

Sekhmet snorted at that and turned away, “Perhaps you should go to court, little pharaoh. Maybe you’ll find your answers there.” She practically skipped away.

Seth touched Horus’ elbow to keep him from storming after her – and to keep *himself* from doing the same. “Unless you want to get into a fight with her, you’re not going to get much more out of her.”

“She should not speak that way to her Pharaoh.”

“No. But if it helps, she spoke that way to your father *and* Ra.”

Horus snorted and turned to him, a touch of concern in his expression. “Are you all right?”

Seth looked into himself, wondering. “I feel… distant, I suppose. I’m not lost in things. Seeing her again… it was hard, but… I’m dealing with it, I think.”

“You don’t have to come to court today.”

Seth chuckled. “It would be an easy escape, wouldn’t it?” He shook his head. “No. I’ll go. See how it differs from Osiris’ court.” His expression stiffened. He reminded himself that Horus would be there. And no Osiris. Even the questionable presence of Isis and Nephthys was far better than that, and he *did* still want to talk to them. “Come on.” He tugged Horus’ elbow and stepped forward.

Thankfully, Horus followed him. But Horus also added, “There could be something waiting for us. She was overly ominous about today’s session.”

“Then it’s best to confront whatever it is head-on.”

Horus sighed, then came to a stop, making Seth stop with him, “I would, if you wanted.” Horus swallowed. “Make you my consort.”

Seth blinked, and then flushed. “I…”

“I meant it, when I said I'd do more," Horus continued. "Just… think about it.” He smiled, then moved forward again, this time with Seth trailing behind him, thinking things over. They stepped together into the open throne room.

“Horus! And Seth. You’re both late.”

They saw Isis turning in her throne to look back at them with a frown. “Come on. First audiences are soon.” She had that look that said there would be a *talk* about this later. Seth could remember her stern lectures of the past.

For all Horus’ words had almost made him forget his feelings about talking with Sekhmet, which also made him briefly set aside his lack of sureness that Isis hadn’t had some hand – even accidentally – in Osiris’ plot, a ludicrous idea made Seth snort.

Horus looked at him.

Seth grinned. “Perhaps he was late for a meeting. And that was the last straw.”

Horus scoffed. “Don’t even joke about that.” But there was a slight turn up of his lips as he walked to his throne beside his mother’s.

Seth sat in a smaller throne nearby and behind their thrones, and found himself near Nephthys.

She smiled at him.

Seth nodded to her. And found that, for all he wanted to speak to her, he didn't know what to say.

Thankfully, she made the leap for him. “We should talk again. I know you want to.”

“Do you know so much about me?” Seth asked, stonily. He felt petulant now, annoyed at her assumptions. Even if he was too coward to speak up first, he was tired of other gods assuming things about him, particularly Nephthys.

Perhaps he was smarting still from last night, and Nephthys seemingly assumed he wanted a child, as well.

He regretted not talking to Horus about it more. Taking a choice away from him, indeed.

Nephthys put a hand on her large belly. “I may have tried for you too late to matter, but I knew you for most of your life, Seth. You want to talk about this.”

Seth looked at her for a minute, then at her belly. “Is it… uncomfortable? Do you need anything?”

She blinked at him, then smiled. “Of course *that’s* what you’d worry about…”

Seth snorted. “What do you want me to say in open court, Nephthys?” To talk about how hurt he was? How he felt… betrayed? No matter what he’d say, it’d embarrass them *both*. He wanted to talk to her afterward, in relative privacy, for both their sakes.

She was frowning at him, though. Perhaps he’d already angered her. “Seth, I—"

“Look at this wondrous assemblage!”

Seth blinked and looked towards the place where petitioners entered, and saw, to his surprise, Ra, standing there in all her glory, walking forward and grinning widely. Tall, muscular, intimidating, and covered in gold, with a mocking gaze angled at Isis, she seemed entirely unchanged from the last time Seth had seen her.

But why is she here? Seth wondered, staring at her. She seldom ever came down from her sun boat. She kept her word to Isis, didn’t get along with Osiris, and Horus had said she wasn’t around much…

It was at that moment a flash of sunlight attracted his attention to Sekhmet standing some distance behind her by the entrance to the room, smiling in the direction of the thrones.

Seth looked at Isis, wondering if she’d known about this, and if she’d yell at Ra to leave. He was unsurprised to see she was frowning at Ra.

Something still felt off about all this. Sure, Seth knew he had a boatload of his own issues making him not think as clearly as he might have, but Ra… Ra was her own warning, particularly after Sekhmet.

It seemed obvious this was what Sekhmet had been warning about. If she just planned to watch to gain intel, she wouldn’t have been so obvious about it.

This was a statement. But… for what? Was Ra planning something? Seth looked at her thoughtfully. Ra was *always* planning *something*. And Isis would stop her if she dared anything over the line. And Ra couldn’t have moved against Osiris, because Isis would have —

“My mother is not a trickster.”

Horus had said that to him, what felt like ages ago. And Seth had replied…

“Oh? It’s hardly an insult. But did she not tell you how she won your father’s throne for him?”

It wasn’t possible. It couldn’t be, but…

Isis had headed the investigation. And who would suspect her with that, on top of being pregnant, being Osiris’ beloved wife, grieving… She’d put Osiris on his throne, why would she take him off of it?

Perhaps it was just Seth’s paranoia that somehow Isis had, even accidentally, participated in that night to help Osiris take Seth all those years ago. But all his instincts said the present situation was bad. And Horus was staring down a former pharaoh with the power of creation while sitting beside the goddess who’d deposed her, on the throne of a dead pharaoh.

Seth's hands tightened on the chair arms. He’d been wrong before, though. About Nephthys. About Osiris. Even about Horus. What if…? What if he was wrong now? It still didn’t make any sense… Horus loved his mother, and she seemed to care for him.

“Sometimes, Seth, you really do have very good instincts. You should listen to them.”

He was the God of War. If nothing else, he knew combat. And this felt like combat. *I have to get him out of here,* he decided. *If nothing else, we can talk about it and write it off as me being overly cautious. Better than dead.* Seth stood up and walked quickly to Horus’ side, putting a hand on his shoulder and leaning down to whisper, “You need to get out of here, *now*.”

Horus didn’t move, and simply watched Ra, thoughtfully. “…No.”

Seth noticed Isis looking at him, but otherwise ignored her.

“*Horus…*” Seth said, frowning. He glanced at Ra.

She smiled at him. “It’s been a while, Seth, since you last visited me. I hear you had a welcome-back banquet and everything and didn’t even invite me! How rude!”

Seth swallowed. “I meant no disrespect.”

She grinned.

“I sent out the invitations,” Isis said, coldly, still watching Ra. “*I* chose to not invite you.”

Seth glanced at her, confused at this. He still didn’t want to fully contemplate what he’d pieced together, and maybe he was wrong, but… Was Isis shielding him or just emphasizing her power over Ra?

“You wound me, Isis,” Ra said, putting a hand over her heart. “*Deeply*."

“Horus,” Seth murmured again, squeezing his shoulder.

“It is good to see you, Ra,” Horus said, coolly, still ignoring him. “Do you have something you wish to petition the court for?”

“Only the chance to see so much of my family gathered in one place!” Ra said with a grin. “I figure maybe it’s time I try this whole human thing and focus on family, whatever that means. After all, you’re all doing it, right?”

None of the other gods had a response to that. Seth knew he wasn’t the only one who didn’t believe her.

Seth glanced at Sekhmet, who hadn’t moved, and was still watching the thrones.

Then Ra tilted her head. “Well, and I just noticed Osiris alive – insomuch as he can be – down in Duat.”

Seth froze, forgetting everything else happening.

“It’s time to remind you of who you belong to.”

The world spun, and everything seemed very, very far away.

"…th! Seth!"

Seth blinked when he heard his name as if from a long distance, and looked over to see Horus clutching his elbow, staring at him in concern. "Seth!"

"I…" Seth said, quietly, confused. He looked around and realized they were still in the throne room. It was daylight. Osiris wasn't here. He wasn't…

So he must have spaced out again.

Seth swallowed. "How long was I…?"

"Only a few moments," Horus explained, still worried. "Are you all right?"

"…Yes," Seth said, blinking. "Just… it's nothing."

"He's not coming back here," Horus said, quietly. Seth could hear… was that *anger* in his voice? "He *can't*. I won't allow it."

"Osiris is trapped down in Duat now," Ra said, chuckling. "He's not coming back here any time soon."

Seth looked down at her, wondering what she'd seen in him when he… panicked, if she relished in it. Seth hadn't dealt with her when Isis and Osiris made their powerplay. He and Nephthys hadn't been consulted about it, and at the time, Seth hadn't seen an issue with it. But he'd always wondered, looking at her, knowing the ease with which Ra's moods could change to the chaotic, what she thought of the siblings of those who had deposed her.

"It's honestly kind of funny, considering…" Ra continued.

"Can you not even show some basic respect to this court?" Isis demanded with a glare. "This is a court session. You're a petitioner. There are *rules*…"

"That's rich, coming from *you*," Ra said, her golden eyes brighter than normal, and dangerous.

"You need to close court," Seth said to Horus, grasping for something. "This… This could get ugly if what they talk about goes around." It was already bad. Too many people were watching. He could hear the whispers.

He selfishly wondered how many were about him, and hoped none were.

Horus frowned, then turned back to the courtroom. "We will adjourn to discuss the news of my father with Ra."

There was a murmuring around the court, and Horus stood and held out his hand to his mother as well, which she took. He kept his other hand on Seth's elbow, which Seth *knew* would start even more rumors, and together they left the room.

Despite the noted favoritism, which would lead to who knew what among the gossips, Seth was grateful for the anchor of Horus' strong fingers.

In a smaller nearby anteroom, Horus let go of Isis and took Seth's arms in his. "Are you sure you're okay, Seth? You look even paler than normal."

"I'm really fine, Horus," Seth said. He actually didn't know *what* he was, but he was… bearing through it. Osiris wasn't here. Ra hadn't tucked him into a pocket somewhere. He was fine. He was the God of War. He could fight. And…

And Horus is at my side, Seth thought, looking up at the man, who was still worried.

Seth smiled. "Really, it's… It's fine for now, Horus. Thank you."

Horus nodded.

Seth squeezed his elbow and said, quietly, "We need to get away. And speak privately."

"After this."

"You're not safe here."

Horus frowned. "Mother can keep Ra at bay."

Seth swallowed and lowered his voice even more. "That's what I'm worried about."

Horus' eyes widened.

"What is the meaning of this?" Isis demanded, turning to Ra, who had followed them in, and was nearly swaggering around as if she owned the place. "You could have told us this in private! So we could prepare!"

"You might have stifled it that way," Ra said, still grinning. "Besides, how was I to know you didn't already know? I wondered why you hadn't told *me!*" She sighed dramatically. "This is why I don't do the human family thing like you all do. Even when I wanted another reunion with all my children, it seems as if they simply wish to hide themselves away from me."

"For good reason," Isis growled.

"Isis," Nephthys chided. She stood near Isis' shoulder, a worried look on her face as she looked between Isis and Ra.

Isis scoffed and crossed her arms.

"Perhaps Ra has a point, Mother," Horus said, quietly.

Isis blinked and looked at him with a frown. "What?"

"Tell me that you weren't involved in Father's death," Horus said. "That you didn't use Ra to do it."

Seth saw the moment Isis paled, and felt the truth of his guess become overwhelming. Thankfully Horus' intuition had picked up on Seth's badly hidden clues, but… to see it confirmed there in Isis' expression…

"Horus, I don't understand—" Isis finally began.

"How?" Horus asked, a slight shake in his voice. "Why…? Why *lie* to me all these years?"

A pained expression came over Isis' face. After a long while, she responded, quietly, "To protect you. To… It was not an easy thing."

And there it was, a sliver of the truth. Over 28 years and it was just…

Seth didn't know what to think.

"It was not wholly her doing," Nephthys said, stepping to Isis' side and meeting Horus' gaze. She looked at Seth, then back at Horus. "It was not just her and Ra."

Seth wondered if he'd stepped on a boat while he hadn't been paying attention, because the ground didn't feel very stable.

Horus had an arm wrapped around Seth, and it tightened. "How many of you…?"

"Sekhmet as well," Ra said, snorting. "She ensured everything went smoothly. But your mother made the plans, laid the spells, made the poisons… I simply… provided some of the power."

"You were supposed to ensure he wouldn't revive!" Isis practically snarled at her.

"As were your spells!" Ra said, keeping only a mildly affronted look on her face. But her eyes told a different story.

She's enjoying this, Seth realized. *But why? What does she have to gain from…?* He blinked and looked at Horus' glare, then back at Isis, who was distracting herself from Horus' anger with her anger at Ra.

"He can't come back from Duat," Isis said, firmly holding her papyrus scepter. "That much is true."

"…How long did you know he was down there?" Horus demanded.

She looked at him, stricken. "Not until Ra came here and said so. But even if he *is* back," and she shot a brief glare at Ra before turning back to Horus, "he cannot return from there. I ensured it."

"You are certain?" Horus demanded, glancing at Seth.

"Yes," Isis insisted, her gaze firm. "I used some of my most powerful spells. It… wiped me out. I feared…" She swallowed, looking at him sadly. "I feared it nearly cost me you, at the time."

Seth was trying to grapple with it all. “But why? Why attack him? Why go so far…?” He couldn’t imagine why *Nephthys* would do it, but Isis loved Osiris. Had done so much for him. And either this was a very good act or she still loved Horus, and didn’t plan to get rid of *him* to hold the throne for herself.

Isis looked at Seth and her expression became pained. And there was something else in her expression that…

Seth felt something cold in his chest.

“…You *knew*,” Seth said, quietly, feeling like the room was too small, like everyone was *staring* at him. Like they could *see* it. “How… how did you *know*?”

Isis shut her eyes. “That night… Sekhmet showed me.”

He’d always wondered if Sekhmet would, for a joke or her own games, but that didn’t make the reality of it any harder to bear. Everything seemed so distant, and then Seth’s gaze somehow went to Nephthys, who gazed back at him sadly, and… and then he couldn’t look at her as he realized…

Seth pulled away from Horus and went to a wall, touching his hands to the cold stone, trying to even out his breathing.

“I’m sorry, Seth,” Nephthys said, quietly. “It’s not enough, I know, it never will be, but…” She swallowed. “Isis wasn’t telling the whole truth. She kept it from Horus to protect him, but also to… to protect you. Telling Horus would involve telling him what happened, and Isis wanted to protect your privacy.”

Was that supposed to make him feel better?

He felt like everything was close, but also far away.

A strong hand reached for Seth’s shoulder, and Seth flinched away, snarling, “Don’t touch me!”

Seth felt… he felt like he was burning and freezing all at once. It was hard to even *breathe*. It was embarrassing, and all the other gods had to be looking at him like some sort of weakling, like…

And Horus wouldn’t leave him *be*.

“Seth… Seth if you have to go without me, please come back.” The words were quiet, pleading.

The pounding in Seth’s ears faded for a moment at that.

“I’ll be here, waiting for you.”

Seth looked at Horus, finding him easily when he thought everything should be foggy. Seth spotted the worry there, the fear… for Seth? Seth remembered the times in his tent, with

Horus' desperation to be close to him, to respect his space, his quiet, gentle words…

Seth tried to focus on that, and not Isis or the rest of their fucked up family. Not that Seth wasn't just as fucked up as the rest of them. Thought at least he hadn't killed his own brother…

…Just got fucked by him. And seemingly *everyone knew.*

Seth swallowed. He wanted to run. To summon a sandstorm and get lost in it.

"Peace can only be bestowed on the strong."

If Osiris was standing in front of him right now, Seth would put all he had into wringing the god's undead neck.

But would that really be *better*? With Isis and Nephthys and Ra and Horus and probably Sekhmet somewhere all staring at him? Showing them just how volatile he was? How out of control? With servants to see him running out – even in sand form – and gossiping, rather than the few he had in the desert who knew to keep their mouths shut and that the God of War just went out at odd times?

Did he truly care that it'd be *embarrassing?*

"Please come back."

Seth *looked* at Horus again. At the sad, but resigned expression on his face. The worry. The way Horus was giving him room, even when Horus clearly didn't want to.

"I'd give you space," Horus said. "Unless you wanted me to follow you. Then I would."

"You wouldn't order me to stay?"

"Never." Horus smiled. "Plus, you're the desert. Only you can control you. It's a fool who thinks otherwise."

In the moment Seth had finally connected vague dots, one thing had crystallized: Ra had helped Isis kill one pharaoh, who was one of the most powerful gods in their pantheon. If they could take down Osiris, they could easily take down his far weaker replacement. Even if Isis had no reason to do that, since she held equal power with him, and had… possibly done all this for Seth for some reason, Horus was now dealing with the fact that his mother had murdered his father, and hid it from him, and had help from at least three other goddesses, all of whom had hid the conspiracy, *for years*.

Horus was the only person besides Seth in this room who hadn't participated in Osiris' murder. And though Seth felt no pity for the dead or undead god, he felt a great deal for the young god before him, who simply hoped that Seth wouldn't flee into the night, at least not forever.

And if any of these goddesses had designs on Horus anyway… Since there was likely more to the story than what little had been revealed… Seth wasn't going to let that happen, so long

as he had the ability to do something about it.

Much as it seemed the goddesses all had it handled far better than he ever could, anyway.

Nonetheless, right now, Horus needed him. That… that would have to matter more than the gaping chasm he knew only one way to deal with.

If Horus wanted Seth at his side, then… Seth would be there. Like Horus had been at his.

Seth tried to get himself not to shake and told himself he could lose it all later. *Later.* At night, maybe. He'd go back to the desert or something. Maybe Horus would even come with him.

Later.

He stepped away from the wall, and took Horus' hand, squeezing it lightly. He didn't say anything.

When Horus looked at him, a slight smile on his face, Seth knew he didn't have to.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus tried not to clutch Seth's hand too tightly as he considered the rest of their family, all staring at them now.

Isis looked at their clasped hands with a slight frown and a lot of confusion.

Nephthys was barely hiding her shock amidst her worry.

Ra, stood as ever with a slight smile on her face, clearly interested in all the goings on, but offering nothing of what she was thinking, though Horus reasoned that Isis' court being in disarray was probably high theater for her.

Sekhmet's expression was unreadable. She stood again with her arms clasped in front of her chest, leaning by the door.

Horus had wondered when Ra walked into the throne room if she'd had something to do with Osiris' murder. Sekhmet's ominous wording had been too on point to think otherwise. True, Sekhmet could just be setting him up to go against the sun goddess, but Sekhmet knew Horus' mother was Isis. And Horus imagined Sekhmet *also* knew *how* Osiris had gotten his throne in the first place… So, unless Sekhmet wanted to hurt Ra, it seemed odd that she arranged the scenario just to set Horus against Ra, even for amusement.

Beyond that, he'd realized that if Ra had been involved in Osiris' murder, it was likely Isis was, as well. Horus didn't know why or how at the time, but it wouldn't have been possible for Ra to strike Osiris on her own, especially not with Isis in the palace.

He'd wanted answers from Ra, first, for why she was there, while he formulated how to raise the issue with Isis in private… and then to learn that Osiris was still *alive* was…

First he felt shock. Then there was anger, that Osiris was still there but… hadn't come back, no matter the reason. A small part of him wanted to fly immediately to Duat somehow. Figure out how to get there, no matter how hard it was. Yes, he wouldn't bring Osiris back to life, but for a moment he was a boy who'd felt the absence of his father all his life. And there was curiosity, too. What was Osiris like, really?

But Horus had ample evidence of what Osiris had been like standing next to him, frozen in terror because of the knowledge that Osiris yet lived.

And the anger at what Osiris had *done* mattered more than anything else.

He'd wanted to pull Seth aside and leave the room. Make sure the other god was safe somewhere before Horus tackled whatever was going on with Osiris. Leaving the throne

room had helped, but it wasn't quite enough.

Seth was still afraid, but Horus couldn't just abandon his duties, and was worried about telling Seth to go on his own. So, Seth staying at his side had emboldened him.

It was selfish, but Horus promised to make it up to Seth somehow.

"Is there anyone else who knows?" Horus asked of the goddesses now, not knowing how else to start the conversation.

"No," Isis said, watching him warily. "Just the four of us."

"Couldn't let anyone else know Isis planned the Pharaoh's murder," Ra said with a grin. "That'd be *bad*… So of course she picked someone she could blackmail… And Nephthys volunteered."

Horus studied Ra for a moment, then looked at Sekhmet, standing calmly by the door, her expression unreadable. "And you? Why did you help?"

Sekhmet snorted. "What Osiris did was so *horrible*." Her tone was overly dramatic. "I simply thought justice was due, and told Isis and Nephthys, since Osiris was Isis' husband and both gods are their brothers."

Seth's hand twitched in Horus' grip.

"Isn't that reason enough?" Sekhmet finished.

Horus considered that, then commented, "You still didn't have to help them kill him."

Sekhmet grinned. "Are you *mad* that I made sure Seth was avenged?"

"I find it hard to believe anything, let alone *everything* you did was for vengeance for someone else." Horus absently rubbed soothing circles on Seth's hand with his thumb, though he kept his gaze on Sekhmet. "You wanted leverage. Against Isis. And perhaps Nephthys, too."

Sekhmet scoffed. "For what, exactly?"

"It's always good to have gods owe you favors," Horus replied. "Or when you want help de-shackling your parent from a goddess you could impugn in front of the court."

"Sekhmet did this for *me*?" Ra said, in mock shock. "I'm tickled."

"You'll note I wasn't the one who admitted to the crime," Sekhmet said, watching Horus. "Nor did I go before the court to decry your mother."

"Because you swore an oath to Isis," Nephthys said, frowning. "No one would speak a word of this outside ourselves, where others could hear." She swallowed and looked away from Sekhmet.

“Until…?” Sekhmet said, smiling again at the other goddess. “You’re missing a clause there, Nephthys.”

Horus looked between them, confused.

Isis grimaced.

Sekhmet sighed. “There just *isn’t* enough honesty in this court, I swear…” She snorted, and looked at Horus. “I swore to stay silent, so long as Isis told you about it when you came of age. I even held back when she insisted you still weren’t ready to know. That you were still young and coming into your powers, and needed to focus on being accepted at court as Pharaoh. But I think you’ve made it clear that time has passed.” She looked pointedly at Seth and their clasped hands.

“Why does it matter to you if *I* know?” Horus asked, confused.

“You’re the Pharaoh,” she replied, matter-of-factly. “You rule alongside Isis. It’s wrong that you don’t know your co-ruler is an assassin. That she murdered your father.” She tilted her head. “Admittedly there are worse things to hide from people, probably, but it’s a bit of a heavy thing to hide from your son and someone on whose back the fate of Egypt rests.” She grinned. “Imagine if this was out in the streets: that Isis killed the beloved Osiris? It would be disaster for Egypt. And I care *deeply* about this country’s fate.”

“You—!” Isis snarled, raising her staff, before she glanced at Horus, and then shut her eyes.

“…Mother?” Horus asked, quietly. “Why…?” Why did she do it? Why did she hide it from him? There were too many whys to force into simple sentences.

Isis’ hands were shaking. “I…” She straightened slightly. “There was never a good time. I didn’t… I wanted you to believe your father was a good man. And…” She worried at her staff a bit with her fingers. “And you’re so *perceptive.* If I’d told you part of it, I’d have had to tell you *all* of it, or you’d have figured it out, and I…” She looked at Seth, sadness in her gaze. “And I didn’t want to betray Seth even further by revealing this to others. Enough people already knew.”

“You… hid it for me?” Seth asked quietly, clearly shocked.

Isis grimaced and looked away. “Mostly for myself. I was too much of a coward to tell Horus. I could have figured out a way, maybe…”

Nephthys reached out and touched her shoulder, comfortingly.

“I didn’t want you to know,” Isis said, meeting Horus’ gaze again. “So I didn’t tell you. I know I should have. Long ago.”

Horus tried to process that, and felt Seth squeeze his hand. He looked down at the other god, but could only see the frown on Seth’s face.

Horus lowered his voice, “I need to know the details. Do you… want to leave for that?”

Seth was quiet for a while, then said, “No. I want to know.”

Horus looked back at Isis. “How was it done?”

Isis was silent.

Ra snorted. “Isis made the plan. She and Nephthys cajoled Osiris with drink and a party. Got him alone. Then Sekhmet struck, knocking him unconscious. With a bit of my sizeable power combined with hers, Isis managed to cut his body into pieces and scatter them in the waters of Duat, cursing them to never return to the living world. Isis saw that Maat was in charge of most of the investigation, which meant Maat had no reason to distrust her, because what was there to hide when Sekhmet was seldom if ever seen around the palace, I was always in my sun boat, Isis was distraught with grief and occupied with her pregnancy, and while Nephthys helped Maat as she could, Nephthys was worried about her sister, and no one would *ever* suspect the Goddess of Peace was complicit to murder.” Ra grinned, with teeth. “It was quite ruthless, really, but efficient, too. I’m honestly proud.”

“Shut up,” Isis hissed.

“So,” Ra continued anyway, looking at Horus again. “Now you know. Will you report this to the Ennead? Have Maat judge your mother? Or… abuse your power as your father did, to hide her crime, keep her safe?”

Horus could feel Ra pressing forward, not just verbally, but in the way her oppressive aura pushed at everything around her, though he could still feel how she kept it back from him and Isis. She wanted Isis gone more than anything. With Isis out of the way, and Osiris already gone and seemingly unable to return for the time being, she had no one holding her back. Horus knew he was no match for her. She could come back into power again.

A part of him automatically prepared to fight tooth and nail on his mother’s behalf, but the other half was still reeling from everything, and unsure. He couldn’t imagine what she might face as punishment, but… He looked at her, to find her watching him with an empty expression. She was ready for whatever her punishment might be.

He felt betrayed by all this. But he couldn’t imagine what she was going through to decide to kill Osiris. And then to hide it for so long from her son. From the world.

He felt Seth’s hand tighten on his.

“…I must think this over,” Horus continued. He glanced at Isis, then back at Ra. “You said my father is alive in Duat. How do you know?”

Ra shrugged. “I felt him try to come back. He failed. The spell on him is too strong for him. But I can still feel him down there.”

“So he can’t come back?” Horus asked.

“Yes,” Ra said, smiling. “He can’t.”

“…Good. Then… we’ll deal with that later. Have you other business here, besides Osiris?”

Ra shook her head.

Horus nodded. “Very well.” He looked at the others. “Word will have spread throughout the palace by now. I’ll make an announcement to the court that we’re deliberating over what steps to take. …And whatever it is can wait a day. If Father somehow returns within that time, well… We’ll see what we’ll see.” He looked at Ra. “If you wish to stay here until I come to a decision, you are welcome, and have your own chambers. Otherwise, you are free to leave. I will send a messenger when I have decided how to handle things. Until that point, you are not to speak of the plot against my father.” He looked around at the others. “You have kept your conspiracy quiet this long. Continue to do so until I have made my decision. That is my order as Pharaoh.”

Isis grimaced.

Nephthys nodded.

Sekhmet smirked.

“Mother, Aunt,” Horus said, looking at them, “You are to go to your chambers. I’ll call upon you when I’ve made my decision.”

Nephthys touched Isis’ shoulder again as Isis’ frown deepened.

Horus looked at Sekhmet. “I don’t imagine there’s a way to keep you in one place you don’t want to be. But I’ll request you remain in the palace until I’ve reached a decision.”

She bowed her head with a slight smile.

“Excuse us, then,” Horus said, nodding to them all before pulling Seth out of the room.

Seth went obediently, saying nothing.

They stopped briefly near the throne room so that Horus could speak to an aide, setting up a general message should anyone ask for more information about Ra’s announcement.

Seth stood back silently while Horus talked.

Horus then took Seth back Horus’ rooms, shut the door behind them, and then turned to Seth, pulling the other god into his arms.

Seth slowly wrapped his own arms around Horus, and Horus could feel him shaking, hard.

They stood like that for a time, just holding each other.

“What do you need right now?” Horus asked, quietly.

“…I don’t really know.”

Horus grimaced, then asked, “Do you want to get out of here for a short while?”

Seth twitched. “…What?”

“We could take a short trip to the desert, perhaps?” Horus offered. “Or maybe just walk somewhere? Away from people?”

Seth pulled away and *stared* at him, truly confused. “Horus, you can’t just… *leave*. Not after all of *that*.”

“We’ll be back soon enough,” Horus replied. “And I can be reached in an emergency.”

Seth opened and then shut his mouth. He looked away, then back at Horus. “I… Yes. Yes I’d like to… to get out of here, for a little while.”

“Do you know where you’d like to go?”

“…The desert.”

Horus nodded. “I can carry you if you wish.”

Seth flushed at that. “What?”

“If you’d like. You don’t have to. We could get your chariot, or…?”

“You’d… carry me?”

Horus smiled and pulled him to the window, then hopped up and out over the ledge, summoning his wings to keep him aloft. He turned back with a smile to Seth, holding his arms out. “I’d be happy to carry you wherever you want.”

Seth blinked, looked back at the door, and then at Horus. His cheeks were still red. After a moment, he smiled and shook his head, then hopped onto the wall and took Horus’ hand. “How are you…? Planning to carry me?”

Horus grinned.

Seth had a hand over his face as they flew to a part of the deep desert.

Horus supported Seth’s back with his left arm, and had his right arm under Seth’s knees, keeping Seth close to his chest.

“We can choose another position if it’s a problem, Seth,” Horus offered, looking down at him, worried this was just making everything worse.

“No, no, it’s fine…” Seth said, for the fourth time. He scoffed and looked out over the desert below them. “It’s fine.”

Horus hoped it really was.

After a time, Seth said, “It’s different, seeing it up here, but not making a storm or one of my sand statues.”

“Bad different, good different, or okay different?” Horus asked.

“…’I don’t know’ different,” Seth replied, snorting. “Ah, here is fine.” Seth dissolved into sand and showered down towards the ground.

Horus dipped and followed him and watched as Seth reappeared as a small sand whirl moving back and forth on the sand. The sand whirl eventually slowed and gathered together on the ground, forming into Seth laying on his back, staring upward. Sand flowed over to cover him, and he shut his eyes.

Horus dismissed his wings and sat nearby, watching him. He was close, but gave Seth space, too.

After a while, Seth asked, “Are you bored?”

“I’m never bored when I’m with you,” Horus said. “Does being out here help?”

“…It helps,” Seth said, quietly. He laughed, still with his eyes shut. “I thought I’d have to… storm around somewhere. Literally. But just… being out here. Where it’s quiet. In the sunshine… It’s better.”

“Because there are no people.”

“Yes. At least over here. I’ve run into nomads and traders here and there, but I always avoided them.”

“I still heard tales about the God of War redirecting lost travelers… And I've seen you do it.”

Seth snorted. “Well… sometimes I didn’t avoid them. But only if they were lost.”

They were quiet again, and Horus shut his eyes, too, soaking in the warmth as he leaned his head back.

“I can’t believe he’s… still alive,” Seth finally said, quietly, making Horus tense. “I always thought it was possible, but…”

“…We don’t really know what state he’s in right now,” Horus said, quietly. “He can’t get out of Duat, and he can’t apparently communicate with any of us.”

“I suppose a part of me just hoped Ammit had somehow eaten his heart and been done with it.” Seth grimaced. “Sorry…”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“...He’s your *father*.”

“Considering what you went through, it’s understandable. Osiris hurt you deeply, and that left deep wounds, and bad scars. You certainly didn’t send him to Duat yourself, nor did you plan his murder. Wishing you’d never have to deal with him in one of the few ways we know that is possible… Well, you’re hardly the first person, or god, to wish someone who wronged them ill.”

Seth smiled. “You always have the answers.”

Horus smiled back. “I wish that were true.” He thought of his mother, and Nephthys. Of Sekhmet and her games. “But if my simple-minded thoughts can help, I’m glad.”

“You’re not simple-minded. …Most of the time.”

“Oh?”

“You have your bad moments. We all do.”

Horus laughed.

Then they were quiet again.

“…Do you want to talk about… what Sekhmet did?” Horus finally asked.

“…I don’t know that I can,” Seth replied, very quietly. He laughed, bitterly. “I wanted to run from that room and never look back. As if I could hide from it. As if they all haven’t known for decades…”

“I’m so sorry, Seth.”

Seth didn’t reply.

“…If you want to talk more about it, I’m here,” Horus said.

“…Thank you, Horus.”

“Can I come closer?”

“Yes.”

Horus inched closer and gently brushed a finger along Seth’s cheek. He felt Seth hum softly in contentment.

“I’m glad you were at my side,” Horus finally said. “Selfish as it was, it meant a lot, having you with me.”

“It wasn’t selfish,” Seth said, opening his eyes to look over at Horus. “You shouldn’t have to be alone against… against all that.”

“I am Pharaoh.”

Seth sighed. “We’re your elders. We should have… We should have made it easier for you. Dealt with our own problems, rather than leaving them to you to clear up.”

“Who’s to say you haven’t?” Horus replied, quietly. “I may not have to do anything about Osiris. It’s just deciding what to do with my mother, my aunt, Sekhmet, and maybe Ra that’s the trouble.” Horus smiled. “And that’s nothing, really.”

Seth huffed a laugh. “Ah yes. Very easy.”

“Well, they all listened to my orders, so that’s a start.”

Seth smiled. “I can’t believe so much happened in so little time. We just started *court*. It’s not even evening yet.”

“It felt like an eternity,” Horus replied. Too many revelations at once. “When I set out to figure out the mystery of Father’s death once and for all, I’d never conceived of something like this. It feels…” Horus sighed. “It’s just a lot. But I’ll surmount it. I have to.”

“I believe you will,” Seth said. “It’s just… how you work.”

Horus smiled.

“…Have you considered what you’ll do with… Isis?”

Horus wondered if he was going to ask about Osiris but changed his mind at the last second. Horus frowned. “I have some ideas. But I think… I’m not going to demand she be put on trial.”

“Ra could talk. Once they know, the other gods might demand it…”

“She could. But I find it interesting that neither she nor Sekhmet spoke of it until now. Perhaps they are free of the requirement to not speak about it and are spreading word of it elsewhere even as we speak, though Sekhmet seems to not want word of it among the general populace, just me… But I feel that if Ra started telling others of the plan, her part in it would be revealed, as well. And Ra herself might face consequences, even if it might be considered revenge for Osiris’ past with Ra.” Horus sighed. “It’s a mess. But I believe that trying Isis isn’t the answer.”

“Other gods will wonder if Isis can just use Ra whenever she wants to get rid of them,” Seth said, thoughtfully. “If Isis could use Ra against the Pharaoh, who knows who else Isis might use Ra against?”

“Yes,” Horus said. “That *is* the issue. I find it hard to believe that Mother would do this again, but I still find it hard to believe she killed Osiris. She’s not close to other gods in that way, not even Nephthys.”

“…You have to talk to Isis.”

“Yes. I do.” Horus sighed. “I want more explanations from her.”

“The bigger part of me would suggest you rest from all that, but… you should go sooner rather than later,” Seth said. “While it’s fresh.” He looked at Horus. “I’ll go with you.”

Horus was warmed by that, but added, “It might be ugly. I don’t think either of us will be very nice.”

Seth shrugged. “I already know you can be terrifying sometimes. It’s fine.”

Horus smiled, but then his expression became more worried. “…I know you’re still worried about Osiris.”

Seth swallowed, and turned his face back to the sky. “I trust Isis – and even Ra – when they say he can’t come back. Or I will for now anyway. I wouldn’t be able to hide from him if he *did* come back. He’s the God of Life. Where would I hide? So why worry over something I can’t change?”

Horus grimaced and nodded.

After a time, where even Horus was beginning to feel drowsy, Seth pushed himself up and sighed. “We should be getting back.”

Horus stood as well, stretched, and asked, “How about a race? Back to the desert edge? You on the sand, me in the air.”

Seth blinked and looked at him. “You’re not serious.”

“It might help? Both of us, I mean.”

“You need your strength to face Isis.”

Horus shrugged. “I’ll be flying back anyway.” He grinned. “Unless you’re not up to it.”

Seth scoffed and yanked him down for a kiss, narrowly avoiding stabbing Horus with the black sha headdress.

Horus blinked and then wrapped his arms around Seth’s back, shutting his eyes and savoring the feel of Seth’s lips against his, Seth’s skin under his hands, warmed by the sunlight.

When Seth broke the kiss, they stayed close, so that Horus could feel his hot breath.

“We should…” Seth said, quietly.

Horus smiled. “Yes. Or else we’re definitely not going back for a few days.”

Seth snorted, then shoved him away and raced off towards Heliopolis.

Horus blinked. “Hey!”

Seth’s laughter was carried back to him, and Horus grinned, summoned his wings, and shot into the air.

Horus squeezed Seth's hand before they entered Isis' rooms. The trip back to the city had been grounding, and quietened the storm of uncertainty in his head, even if Seth had *narrowly* won their race.

Seth had pulled Horus into a private unused room in the palace along the way to Isis' chambers and kissed Horus again, which led to Horus dropping to his knees, pushing Seth's shendyt back, and sucking Seth off. Seth bit his left arm to keep quiet, and held Horus' headdress tightly with his free hand, nearly yanking it off entirely and shaking against Horus' lips. Horus kept his hands wrapped around Seth's thighs and pushed him against the wall, savoring the way Seth quickly unraveled.

While Seth was coming down from his orgasm, Horus had stood up and peppered his neck with kisses.

Seth had murmured, "Just say the word and we can go back. Spend another few decades in the desert."

Horus paused and looked at him. Horus was surprised to see that the other god was crying. "Seth?"

Seth sighed, shutting his eyes. "It's nothing. I'm fine. I'll be fine."

Horus pulled him close for a tight embrace. "We don't have to go now." *He's not ready for this*. It wasn't a criticism. The day had just… been a lot, brief excursions away or no.

"…We don't have to, but better now than later." Seth lightly scratched his nails down Horus' chest. "Do what you have to do. I'll stay calm."

Horus pulled away and met his eyes. "If it gets to be too much, just tell me, and we can leave."

Seth grimaced, then nodded.

Now Isis sat at her desk, watching Horus and Seth with a hard expression. "So. You already came up with my punishment?" She looked at Seth, who didn't reply.

Horus sighed and crossed his arms. "I just want to talk, Mother. I need to know what you were unwilling to say when others were listening."

Isis watched Seth.

"You owe it to Seth, too," Horus explained. "This is *about* him. He deserves to know."

"You'll have to be more specific," Isis said, thoughtfully. "There are a lot of things I keep from other people."

"Go over the real reason you didn't tell me about Father's death," Horus said. "Even though you apparently swore to tell me."

“I thought I was clear as day,” Isis said with a huff. “But very well. I…” She looked down. “I didn’t want you to think ill of me.” She scoffed, and met his gaze again. “Can you imagine being a parent and telling your child your murdered their other parent? It’s not an easy place to be, Horus.” Her expression saddened, and for a moment Horus felt bad for hurting her… though he knew he wasn’t the one who’d created that pain. “Even I feel fear sometimes. I didn’t want you to hate me. Or be disgusted that we share blood, or… Or I don’t know. I was afraid. So I didn’t tell you.” She sighed. “I promised at some point I’d tell you, and while you were investigating, I nearly told you a dozen times. I kind of hoped that somehow you’d figure it out on your own, without me having to say anything… but I was quite careful.” She sighed again. “I just…” She looked at him, sadly. “I should have told you. I *know* I should have told you…”

Then she swallowed and rubbed her eyes. “I didn’t want to lose you.”

Horus processed that for a while, against all that she'd hidden, how it felt to be raised with so many lies... And he couldn't imagine the life he'd had if she'd told him even a sliver of the truth when he was young. Perhaps things would have been easier with Seth if she'd told him sooner, before he'd gone out to the desert.

But if I hadn't gone to the desert, would Seth and I...? He considered that, in the contrast with how much pain Seth had gone through because neither of them had known the full truth. Not all of it was on Isis' shoulders - after all, it was to ultimately hide Osiris' cruelties - and he... didn't know what to think of it all.

He'd always loved his mother. So little time had passed between realizing what she'd done, hearing her say it, and coming back to confront her about it. He knew she wasn't his adversary. Yes, she had kept this from him, emphasized his father's virtues while hiding the horror, and lied to his face that she didn't know who killed him, or...

“Why did you kill him?” he finally asked.

Isis stilled, then put her hand down, and looked up at her. Her expression was hard. “I loved your father. Truly. He was an excellent partner. A good friend. A powerful god who was one of the wisest people I ever knew. And he was my brother, and I’ve loved him for that as long as I can remember.” She grimaced, then looked at Seth, her expression sad. “But Seth is my brother, too. And we’ve always been close, excepting… recent events.”

“It wasn’t…” Seth swallowed. “I didn’t mean to push you away, Isis.” He scoffed. “Though obviously that’s… what I did. …I’m sorry.”

“I understand why you left,” she said, quietly. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“The poison he used to weaken me,” Seth asked. “Do you know it?”

“He could have used a few things,” Isis said. “He liked to experiment on his own when I wasn’t around. I’m afraid just knowing it affected you that way isn’t enough.” She winced. "But he didn't ask me for it, if that's what you're asking."

Seth jerkily nodded.

Isis looked back at Horus. “At any rate, Seth and I used to be even closer than I am with Nephthys. And Osiris… *hurt* him.”

Horus noted Seth shift on his feet, but otherwise not react much.

Isis looked back at Seth. “He hurt you so badly. What Sekhmet showed me, it..." She swallowed.

Seth was staring at the ground now.

"Obviously it doesn't compare to... to living it, but... I *saw*." She swallowed. "Awful is an understatement. And he... made you run away from all of us. From *me*.”

Seth’s right fist clenched into a fist.

She looked away. “When I doubted myself, what I had done, obviously I had… the memory of what Sekhmet showed me of that night, in all its... But I also still remember you at the funeral. The emptiness in your gaze. The way you didn’t really respond to people talking to you. And then you disappeared again…” She swallowed, and her fingers tightened on her knee. “Osiris *hurt* you. He—” She swallowed again. “I *couldn’t* let him get away with that.” She breathed in deeply for a moment, and then said, “My only regrets are that I didn’t stop it before it happened, and that I wasn’t more creative in the murder. To give him what he deserved.”

"You could have gone to the Ennead," Horus said. "Stood up for Seth. Demanded justice."

Isis grimaced. "They'd have to know what happened that night." She looked at Seth sadly.

He didn't meet her gaze.

Isis continued, "They'd likely have demanded Seth stand witness and talk about it all. In front of everyone."

Seth swallowed.

Isis shook her head sadly and continued, “I can’t change what happened. But… I can only say how deeply sorry I am, Seth. I wish I'd been there for you.”

Seth’s lips tightened.

"I should have just gone out to the desert myself, but I..." She sighed. "I wanted to give you your space, after Osiris disrespected it so badly."

Seth didn't reply to that either.

Horus watched Isis thoughtfully, wondering at all the centuries of relationship here that he'd missed out on, because he hadn't been alive for it. Mostly he was just sad, for all of them: for Isis and Seth, Isis and himself, Seth and all the people he'd been close to here. So much pain, stemming from the actions of one person.

He could see Isis' grief even clearer than ever. Grief over the loss of Osiris, yes, but mostly the realization that he wasn't the person she loved, that he hadn't trusted his partner and sister with his deepest desires, despite everything they'd gone through, and that after all they'd been through, she had felt like she *had* to do this, to avenge her brother. He couldn't imagine how hard planning it all was. She was furious, but there had to have been pain, too.

He finally said, “You still hate Father.”

“Yes,” Isis said, practically spitting it out. “I remember what Sekhmet showed me. And seeing Seth now…” She looked back at her brother, and her gaze hardened again. “I can see in some ways what Osiris took from you, from us all… And the idea of Osiris possibly returning makes me want to march down to Duat and kill him again.”

Seth snorted, but there was a light smile on his face.

Horus smiled. “Perhaps you and I will go down together. A family reunion.”

Seth shook his head. “Fool.” But he was still smiling.

Horus smiled at the sight, then looked at Isis, who was watching them both thoughtfully.

She met his gaze, then smiled. “You love Seth, don’t you, Horus?”

Horus noticed Seth’s right hand twitch.

“It’s obvious, seeing you two together,” Isis continued.

“Yes,” Horus replied, easily, “I do.”

Seth looked at Horus, then at Isis. “Isis, I…”

She waved him away. “I’m glad. In many ways you’re both rather similar. Loners. But not people who like being alone. You both wanted someone in your lives, to support you, and to support. You both like taking care of others, too, in your own ways. I’m glad you have each other.”

“We thought you’d be mad,” Horus said. “At least a little.”

“Because you didn’t ask me first, before you went courting him?” She snorted. “So long as Seth is fine with it, I’m fine with it.”

Horus looked at Seth, who swallowed and said, “I love him too, Isis.”

Isis smiled. “I’m glad, Seth.”

Horus looked back at Isis. “…Thank you, Mother.”

She shrugged. “So. Have you decided how I’ll be punished?”

“…I’m still ruminating on it.”

“Of course.”

“I’ll let you know when I’ve decided.”

She nodded, her expression stern and accepting.

After a moment, Horus walked forward and kissed her cheek. He felt her surprise, and saw the way she reached out for his arm, but pulled back at the last second. As he pulled away, she saw the sadness had returned, but she was smiling softly, too.

"Whatever you decide," she said, quietly. "I am proud that you are my son."

He smiled at her.

As the door to Isis’ rooms shut behind them again, and they stood out in the hallway, Horus sighed, and said, “What a mess. But… not as bad as I was expecting.”

“What were you expecting?” Seth asked.

“Shouting, more plots… Who knows?”

“Ah. Well… Yes, I guess it was simpler than that.”

Horus took his hand and squeezed it. “How are you doing?”

Seth blinked, and then laughed. “I just… didn’t expect to get Isis’ blessing, really. Certainly not *now*.”

Horus shrugged. “It’s like you said. We’re gods. We don’t have to worry about things a mortal would. And Mother respects my decisions. And yours, I think.”

“Mmm.”

Horus smiled. “I’m feeling hungry. Perhaps we could get some food?”

Seth smiled at that, then glanced down the hall. “Do you mind if we… take a detour before that?”

“Sure,” Horus said. “What is it?”

Seth grimaced and looked up at him. “I want to talk to Nephthys... Even more, now.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth stared at Nephthys' door and thought about walking away for the thousandth time. He hadn't had the guts to talk to Horus about it on the way here, and Horus had respected his wish for silence.

Horus had held his hand while they walked, though, and Seth had pretended he was squeezing back for Horus' sake and not his own.

He marveled at the fact that he considered not dropping Horus' hand before they went in, but felt it was for the best to be… whatever it is they were when they weren't just the two of them, at least when it came to Nephthys.

He knocked on the door, and heard Nephthys call, "Yes?"

"…It's Seth. I… would like to talk to you. Horus is with me."

After a moment of silence, Nephthys called back, "You can both come in."

Seth breathed in deeply, and then pushed the door open, stepping ahead of Horus.

The room was the same one she'd had when Seth had lived in the palace before, and looked just as beautiful. There were flowers, gifts from her followers and other gods, and the windows of her room opened to a beautiful view of the city beyond.

Currently the goddess reclined on a couch, looking at the newcomers with surprise. With her on the couch sat the cat goddess Bastet, with her black and gold cat mask, gold jewelry, and black, white and gold outfit, holding a small yellow kitten in her lap, whom she was gently scratching as she, too, watched Seth and Horus. On Nephthys' other side sat the goddess Tawaret, with her bright red hippopotamus mask and its dark blue train covering her head entirely, her sheath dress perfectly cupping her large stomach, over which her heavy breasts rested. Her large, paw-like hands rested on the staff she often walked with.

Seth paused at the sight of the other two goddesses. He wasn't sure how to…

"Bastet, Tawaret," Horus said, stepping forward, "We have important matters to discuss with Nephthys. Would you please grant us some privacy? I'm sure you can return after we're done."

"…Of course," Bastet said, standing and bowing slightly to him. "We were just checking up on Nephthys." She turned around and handed the kitten over to Nephthys, lightly scratching one of its ears in passing. Then she smiled at Nephthys and said, "Just send me a message when you want me to come by again."

“Of course,” Nephthys said, smiling. “Thank you so much.”

Tawaret stood up as well and lightly squeezed Nephthys’ shoulder. “Let me know if anything comes up. I’ll be here quick as can be.”

Nephthys smiled gratefully at her, “Thank you.”

Bastet and Tawaret then walked past Seth and Horus out of the room, shutting the door behind them.

Nephthys smiled at them. “So, have you decided on our punishment?”

“No,” Horus said, “Not yet.” Horus looked at Seth, who stepped forward. “Seth wished to speak with you.”

Seth swallowed, and realized they were crowding Nephthys. They’d kicked the other two goddesses out, and now it was just the two of them, standing before on the bench. They were —

Nephthys smiled. “Seth, I’m pregnant, not made of pottery. I can handle whatever it is you have to tell me.”

“How is… the pregnancy?”

She sighed and rubbed her stomach. “It’s going well. Bastet and Tawaret were checking in on me, like they usually do.”

“They’re helping you?”

Nephthys looked up at him in surprise, then glanced at Horus. “I’m not sure you want me to talk about this in front of Horus…” She bowed her head to Horus. “Pardon me, Horus, but it’s a private matter…”

“Whatever you have to say to me you can say in front of him,” Seth said, watching her, unsure of what it was she *could* say. “Unless… you’d be more comfortable without him here.”

Nephthys blinked, and then shrugged. “I’m all right sharing it. I… had some struggling conceiving when I obtained your seed, Seth. I needed help and reached out to Bastet and Tawaret. So they’ve been checking on me to make sure everything is fine. And it is.”

“You had… trouble?”

“Nothing bad,” she said, smiling. “It was just… more difficult than it should have been. But Bastet helped with the conception, and Tawaret has been indispensable with dealing with the day-to-day. Isis suggested it, after Tawaret helped her with *her* pregnancy.”

Seth digested that.

The kitten in Nephthys' lap wiggled away and hopped to the ground, padding over towards Seth and Horus.

Seth looked down at her by his feet. "You got a cat?"

Nephthys smiled. "One of the many litters Bastet looked after had kittens. She was showing me, and I considered taking her in. Though I don't know…"

The kitten pawed at Seth's ankle.

Seth slowly crouched down and picked the creature up, watching her look at him in curiosity before sniffing his fingers.

"Aww, I think she likes you!" Nephthys said, grinning.

Seth cradled the kitten in a way he'd seen humans do, and the creature settled a bit, looking around, still. "Does she have a name?"

"Not yet. If I took her in, I'd name her." After a minute, Nephthys continued, "Would you like to keep her?"

"What? Me?" Seth looked up at her in surprise, and was amazed to see a soft, fond expression on her face.

"You could consider it our homecoming gift, since I didn't get you one. The servants who help care for Bastet's cats can keep caring for this one if you move her to your rooms."

Seth lightly pet the soft creature, and noticed she started to purr. He smiled at her, surprised. He already missed his sha, and the kitten would be a nice addition to things.

"But you came to talk about something?" Nephthys prompted after a while.

Seth stiffened, and looked up at her, though he was careful with the kitten. He wasn't… quite sure how to begin, but he knew that waiting it out would be pointless. He glanced at Horus, who was looking at him, too.

Horus smiled.

Seth sighed and looked back at Nephthys. "When you came to me in the tent in the desert… You knew about… about Osiris. What he… did." He swallowed down bile.

Nephthys' smile faded, and sadness replaced it. "Yes. I knew."

"…Why didn't you tell me?" He didn't know what that conversation would have looked like, but it would have been... *more*. He imagined he'd feel less betrayed, at least a little, now.

She shut her eyes. "I wanted… I wanted *you* to tell me. It wasn't my secret to divulge."

"But you already—!" Seth swallowed and lightly pet the kitten, who had twitched as Seth's volume raised. Seth pet her a bit, and said, "You already *knew*…"

Nephthys grimaced, but gazed back at him. “I just… I didn’t want you to feel like I was taking more away from you. Like Osiris had. I felt like if you learned that I’d found out without offering to tell me yourself first it… would be *bad*.” She shook her head. “Admittedly it was a foolish idea. An overly idealistic one, as if… As if *any* scenario would be good, rather than maybe the best of bad ones.”

“I would have…” Seth grimaced. “I would have appreciated *honesty*.”

She looked at him sadly. “I know. I’m so sorry, Seth.”

“So those things you said to me about… about not wanting to be someone who *takes*… Was that about Osiris?”

She bowed her head.

Seth lightly pet the kitten, feeling his heart race, feeling like a thousand eyes were watching him. “And I was too stupid to realize.” He’d thought she’d simply been overly polite. After all, he was *consenting* to it. And he’d been happy that at least she’d *asked*.

“No, you weren’t stupid!” Nephthys said, pushing herself up and walking over. She reached out a hand, but pulled it back before making contact. Her expression was still sad. “I… was manipulative. I thought you’d be able to see through it easily, honestly. It’s one reason I lied to Isis about going to visit you. I knew she’d warn me against it. That I’d reveal what we did.”

“…I fail to see how that doesn’t make me—”

“I think you’ve gone through a lot,” she said, watching him thoughtfully. “You were… *are* in pain from what Osiris did. You had a lot on your mind.” She glanced at Horus, then back at Seth. “Especially with everything else going on…”

If they were in private, Seth imagined either himself or Horus making a terrible joke about Horus being a *big* “everything else”, but he wanted to focus on Nephthys. He’d been stuck in his head so long and… “I just wanted you to be happy,” Seth said, quietly. “I suppose… that’s all I was really thinking about.” He certainly hadn’t fathomed that she somehow *knew*, or that she’d wanted to have his *child*. Godly pregnancies could be incredible ordeals, and no matter how much she wanted to sleep with him for whatever reason, bearing his *child* was a whole other complication!

But he supposed that meant she hadn’t been lying when she said she wanted to be with him, which was some comfort. There was no other reason to bear his child, after all.

When he looked up at her, he saw there were tears in her eyes. She shook her head. “I’m sorry, Seth, I… I shouldn’t have done what I did. I wanted…” She swallowed. “I just wanted to be with you, and… I didn’t care that in doing so I was hurting you. Not as much as I should have cared, anyway.”

“Nephthys…”

She pulled away, waving him off, and laughed. “I was honest, when we talked over dinner.” She put a hand on her round belly. “If I couldn’t have you for myself, I wanted a piece of you, in some form. So… I took one.”

“…I wish you’d *asked*.”

She laughed. “Yes. I should have. Even knowing you’d say no, I should have asked. And knowing you’d have said no, I shouldn’t have tried. In the end I’m just another person who takes from you. And I'm so sorry, Seth.”

Seth blinked, then sighed. “I wouldn’t… *necessarily* have said no. It’s not really something I was thinking about.” Once upon a time, he’d imagined having children with Nephthys, particularly after Isis became pregnant. That rosy future he’d imagined once he’d finally courted her. But after Osiris… Well, like most things, the idea of it was gone. He couldn’t fathom the idea of having children, particularly given he didn’t even know how long *he’d* survive…

When Seth looked up at her, he saw she was surprised. A part of Seth wanted to comfort her, and the other part… well… “Yes, maybe next time you could just ask me? I know running out to the desert doesn’t exactly inspire trust in my ability to listen, but I always listened to you in the past, didn’t I?”

After a moment, she smiled fondly at him. “Yes. You always did. You were always a good listener.”

Seth lightly rubbed the kitten’s ears. “I can’t say I’m not… *hurt* by all this. It’s… frustrating to know that you did this.” He looked up at her, and saw the pain on her face. He didn’t want to go on, to hurt her more, but…

Horus’s hand touched his elbow, and Seth looked at him. Horus’ expression was calm, and a little stern.

Seth breathed in and looked at Nephthys again. “I don’t know that I can trust you very much right now.”

Nephthys shut her eyes. “I know.”

“I *want* to,” Seth said. He swallowed. “I still care for you. Truly. Even if it’s not the way you want.”

Nephthys smiled sadly at that.

“And I want to be in this child’s life, if you’ll let me,” Seth added, glancing at her belly. “I don’t know what that future will be like, but I’ll be there to help.”

“Of course,” Nephthys said, smiling a little brighter. “You’ll be welcome. I’m sure you’ll be a wonderful father, too.”

Seth wasn’t so sure about that, but it was a nice idea, anyway. And nice that Nephthys was voicing it as if she believed it, too. And maybe she did. But he didn’t quite trust her at the

moment, so…

“I want to say all’s forgiven,” Seth said, quietly. “It was consensual. I wanted to be with you in the way you wanted inasmuch as I could be. I have no complaints. Obviously what you did afterward with your own body is your business. But…”

“It’s not that easy,” Nephthys finished when he didn’t go on. She was smiling sadly. “I don’t expect it to be.” She rubbed her belly and continued, “I expect to spend some time earning back your trust, if I can. And… selfishly, I’m happy you at least don’t hate me, though you probably should.”

“I couldn’t hate you,” Seth said. “I…” He sighed. “I love you too much. *Have* loved you. For centuries.” He saw the softness of her gaze at those words, and felt a twinge of pain in his chest. “If I’d had the guts to tell you sooner, this whole debacle might not have happened at all.”

“Don’t blame yourself for that,” Nephthys said, worry coming back to her expression. “That’s *not* your fault…”

Seth smiled a little at that, not knowing how else to respond.

Horus touched his shoulder again, squeezing it lightly, and Seth smiled up at him, glad he was there.

He knew there was no point in imagining what ifs. It was just a way to blame himself. He’d spent thirty years castigating himself for it. He looked back at Nephthys, who was glancing between them, but smiling again, just a little.

“I’m glad you have each other,” she said, a bit quieter. “Perhaps you won’t believe me, but I am happy for you both.” She looked at Horus. “Horus… I don’t know how much you want it, but I hope you may also be involved in the child’s life? Much as I was in raising you with Isis.”

Horus looked at Seth. “If Seth is all right with it…”

Seth knew he was weak because he could suddenly imagine them all sitting in a room together, watching a toddler play with a cat, or toys, or running about in the yard. He imagined them laughing, relaxing… At peace.

Maybe not *all* what ifs were a waste of time. He hoped.

“I think that’s an excellent idea,” Seth said, quietly. “I’d be happy if Horus was there.”

“Then I’d be honored,” Horus replied, watching him for a moment, before turning to Nephthys.

She smiled.

Seth didn't know how they made it to Horus' rooms. He vaguely remembered speaking to a servant to take the kitten away to be fed, and then imagined Horus must have half-carried him to the bed, where Seth promptly collapsed, exhausted.

Horus got in with him and maneuvered them both around, until Seth was on his side and pulled against Horus' chest.

"I don't know that I have any more in me," Seth said, quietly. "I feel… wrung out."

"Today has been more than enough for most people," Horus said. "You were amazing, though."

Seth laughed. "I'm glad you were with me."

Horus rubbed his back.

Seth leaned into Horus' chest and asked, "And you? How are you doing now that you've had a little more time to process?"

"…I'll let you know in the morning, I think," Horus said. "I feel better after speaking to Mother, though. And it does me good to know that you can rest some more."

"…Really?"

"Yes. I've been worried about you ever since Sekhmet first confronted us in that hallway, and then everything else happened… But now we're here, we've spoken to my mother, we've spoken to Nephthys… And I find I can actually breathe easier, particularly knowing you're resting here and not off to some other confrontation."

"...Are you mad I spoke with Nephthys?"

"No. I think it was important. I'm glad you let me know you wanted to see her. It was an important conversation. Besides, it distracted me a bit from our conversation with Mother. In a good way."

"And you'll… let me know if that changes? In the morning?"

"Yes."

Seth smiled. "I'm just… I'm glad you're honest, Horus. It's one of the things I like the most about you."

Horus made a contented humming noise.

"I guess I didn't… consider how much it mattered until today," Seth said. "Not… fully, anyway." He blinked. "I guess Sekhmet was right again, in a way. It *is* better when there's more honesty among us. Even if I can't talk about… about that night, much at all." He swallowed. "I hate that it still bothers me. I still feel like the ground will pull me down into it if I think about it too much." Though the conversations with Isis and Nephthys *had* calmed him a little. Or at least distracted him in a helpful way.

“I wish it were easier,” Horus said, squeezing his shoulder. “And you’ve already talked to me about it. No one’s asking you to stand witness against my father, to tell everyone what he did.”

“What if you *have* to put Isis and Nephthys on trial or… Or something?”

“If it comes to it, I’ll figure out some other plan.” He pulled Seth close and kissed his hair. “I wouldn’t do that to you. Honesty is a double-edged sword at times. In this in particular.”

“It makes me think about how if I’d been honest with Nephthys earlier, perhaps this who thing would have been averted… but who’s to say Osiris wouldn’t have done something later?” Talking to Nephthys, thinking about how long she’d waited to visit him, he’d realized some things about Osiris that he’d danced around over the years, wondering just how long he’d harbored the feelings he’d acted on that night.

Osiris was one of the most patient gods Seth knew. Horus had some of that in him. They could wait out whatever they had to in order to achieve their goals.

“He was Pharaoh and one of the most powerful gods in our pantheon,” Seth added. “If he didn’t want Nephthys and I together, and he wanted… *me*… Even if Nephthys and I married, that wouldn’t have stopped him.”

“Honesty isn’t a shield against all the world’s horrors,” Horus said, quietly. “But it does help. I wish Mother had trusted me, but I understand why she didn’t. It must have been hard for her, afraid she’d lose me while trying to do right by you, in her own way.”

“Mmm…” Seth murmured. He shut his eyes. “So some of us should have been more honest. And some of us… did our best.” He swallowed. “I should have… come clean about what happened sooner.” He laughed. “I thought I was done with what ifs.”

“Perhaps a goal for tomorrow?” Horus offered. “And hopefully today will set a precedent for more honesty where it is most needed among the members of this court.” Horus leaned his head down near Seth’s. “And you shouldn’t blame yourself for staying quiet for so long. Who could you trust here? And I am Osiris’ son. How would you know to trust me, especially when we’re strangers, and you thought my mother might even have been involved in Osiris’ schemes?”

Seth worried at his lips, but snuggled in closer. “…I suppose you’re right.”

“I’m glad you trust me now,” Horus said. He ran a hand down Seth’s back again. “You don’t know what a gift it is, to be able to be this close to you.”

Seth snorted. “You sure you don’t just want to fuck me into the desk or something later?”

“I am *definitely* not averse to fucking you anywhere in this room,” Horus said, kissing his forehead. “But I also appreciate your trust in *general*, Seth.” He leaned in. “Now let’s sleep. I love you.”

Seth smiled. “I love you, too, Horus.” He shut his eyes. He thought it’d be harder to stop thinking about a potential trial, dealing with Osiris, even, perhaps, whatever child he and Nephthys would have someday in the relatively near future. But with Horus’ arms wrapped around him, the palace quiet as it settled into evening, and a better handle of where his family stood around him, he was able to more easily drop into sleep than he had in some time.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Horus opened his eyes, he saw… the yellow kitten sitting on Seth's chest, asleep.

Horus raised an eyebrow. He noted that Seth was also still asleep, curled against him. The kitten rose and fell on his pale skin as he breathed in his sleep.

Horus stared at the cat again. "How did you get in here?"

"One of the servants knocked on the door while you were sleeping," Seth said, quietly, making Horus jump. "You slept through it."

"You… you woke up already?" Horus was about as light a sleeper as Seth, if not more so. How had he slept through *that?*

Seth cracked open an eye and smiled at him. "Yes. I needed to stretch. Didn't leave the room, though." His smile softened. "I know yesterday took it out of you. You needed the sleep."

Horus accepted that and sighed, leaning his forehead against Seth's. "I know."

The kitten grumbled and scrambled off, jumping over Horus' legs and down the bed, then off it entirely.

"Fast creature," Horus said, absently.

"Yes, she—" Whatever Seth was going to say was smothered by Horus pulling him close for a morning kiss. Seth relaxed into it, and made a contented noise as Horus' hand wandered down his front, drifting under the waist of Seth's black shendyt. Seth made a soft sound into Horus' mouth, shivering slightly as Horus pumped his cock almost lazily. Seth's right arm wrapped around Horus' back so he could dig his nails into the skin there, clinging tightly as Horus worked him over.

Horus could feel the way Seth's legs twitched against his, and grinned against Seth's lips as he pumped his hand harder and faster.

Seth pulled out of the kiss and clung to Horus' neck, breathing hard and loudly. His right leg reach out to wrap around Horus' hip, making Horus shiver slightly.

Horus rolled them over so that Seth was under him, shoved Seth's shendyt up and dissolved his own. Before long he was pushing his cock into Seth's ass, quickly thrusting inside that tight, warm heat, feeling how Seth was still a little loose from two nights before – only that little time! – when they'd fucked in the armory.

Seth wrapped his legs around Horus' back, pulling him deep on every thrust, and tossed his head back. He clutched at the bedsheets with his long fingers.

Horus was breathing hard, too as he pressed in and out with each thrust, and continued pumping Seth's cock, his eyes on Seth coming apart.

"H-H-Horusss…"

Horus gasped and pressed deep as he came hard.

Seth gave a muffled shout and came in his hand.

Horus stayed buried deep, and only belatedly realized he was essentially crushing Seth's cock. He slowly let go, listening to the other god pant, his eyes still shut, and an oddly soft contented smile on his face.

Seth finally cracked one eye open slightly to look at him. "Good morning to you, too."

Horus laughed and leaned down to kiss him again. When he pulled away, he asked, quietly, "Was that all right?"

"Mmm…" Seth tilted his head slight to look at him. "Yeah. It was nice, honestly."

Horus sat up and said, "I'll get the servants to bring us something to eat."

Seth mumbled something in agreement.

"You're staring again," Seth murmured between swallowing bites of apple.

Horus blinked. He'd finished a bit of his own food, and had been sitting on his side of the bed, just watching Seth work at the bowl of fruit.

Horus smiled. "To be fair, you haven't seen yourself eat grapes." Horus seriously considered never allowing anyone else to, either. It was too much for someone to bear and stay sane.

Seth snorted, and slowly, even more seductively than before, picked up an apple slice and put it to his lips, sucking gently and completely unnecessarily on one tip of it, his eyes on Horus, before carefully sucking it into his lips.

Horus swallowed, loudly.

Seth snorted as he chewed. After he swallowed it down, he asked, "Besides how sexy I am, you're doing a worried stare. Why?"

Horus grimaced. "How are you feeling, generally?"

"I told you this morning was—"

"I meant with yesterday."

Seth sighed, but stared at the ceiling. “Right now it’s… It’s there, on the edge. Waiting, I think. I may… lose it at some point. Start crying or… or something. I’ll probably need to go to the desert again, to offload. But for now it’s… it’s the moment between the tides coming in, I suppose. I’m managing.”

“You can stay here while I discuss my plans with Mother and Ra.”

Seth stilled, then looked at him. “You’ve decided what to do about Osiris.”

“I have some ideas.” Horus sighed. “But… I worry we may have to tell the court about what Mother did.”

Seth pursed his lips.

“Although Sekhmet was worried about what the general populace might do with that knowledge… It may be unavoidable, and better if we do it now, than it come out louder, should the worst occur and Osiris come back. What Mother did on your behalf was well-intentioned. But she still murdered a pharaoh, and without bringing his crimes before a court.” He grimaced. “But even if I do that, and make it clear what happened, going easy on her would require explaining why she did what she did, as well, because the court would understand.”

Seth stiffened.

Horus reached out and brushed his shoulder. “I know. I don’t want to. And I don’t plan to. I’ve been thinking of alternatives.”

“…These alternatives involve lying?”

“Yes. The best we could have without fully lying would be to make up reasons for why we’re not doing our best to get my father out of Duat, and why no one else should try.”

“…I see.”

“I don’t want you to have to testify before the court, Seth,” Horus said. “If you want to, I will respect that decision. And if you want one of us to give a summary of it, we’ll endeavor to do so. But trust that I’m trying to avoid forcing you into it. There are alternatives.”

“…I do. Trust you.” Seth sighed. “It would still be easier if I just… if I just *said*…” His expression was stricken.

“In the short-term, maybe. But Seth, it’d be hurting you. We both know that.” Horus reached out and touched his shoulder. “You don’t owe the Ennead what happened to you. There are alternatives. Mother stated that Osiris is trapped in Duat. We can simply tell them we did our best, and that’s that. Much as I wish to confront him,” *to have a word or two about how he treated you,* “I doubt even that’s possible. No one will be surprised if we present that. It’s not like we have many gods of the afterlife as it is. Ammit…” Horus frowned. “She keeps to herself, mostly. But if Father *did* somehow talk to her… Convince her of something…”

“Ammit is close with Maat,” Seth said. “What little Ammit has spoken to the rest of us has mostly been through Maat for a number of centuries.” He frowned. “It’s possible Osiris would still speak with her. He’s good at… at charming people.”

Horus rubbed his shoulder. “Then… we need to get ahead of whatever Osiris has told Ammit.”

Seth was quiet for a while, then said, “Perhaps if Maat used her feather, I could…” He swallowed. “She’d believe that, convince Ammit. And… that would be that. We might even have a bulwark against Osiris, with Ammit on our side. If… if it was enough.”

“Maat is the Goddess of Justice,” Horus said. “She would side with us. With you. And she would do her best to speak to Ammit if we asked. Maybe even without asking.”

Seth nodded, a little jerkily.

Horus frowned. “But you’d have to tell the truth.”

Seth was quiet for a while, then smiled. “When we were younger, we used to… Well. It’s easy to avoid saying too much before Maat, if you limit your answers. I could say less if she asks, than if I simply speak, and talk to fill the silence.” His gaze went distant.

“What’s wrong?” Horus asked.

“…Your father was the best at it.”

Horus grimaced, and to change the topic he asked, “How did you figure out you could limit yourself when it came to the feather of truth? That seems… risky.”

Seth laughed. “Well… we watched a few of Maat’s trials with the feather, and once, Maat questioned Isis. Isis wanted to test it: her magic against Maat’s. And Isis always liked challenges. Then it became a sort of game. How honest can you be without being *too* honest?” His gaze softened. “Even your parents, Nephthys, and I were young once. Things were… simpler. In a way.”

Horus watched him and the soft fondness there. “Do you miss it? Those days?”

The fondness faded away. “Sometimes. And sometimes I remember feeling directionless, and it felt a lot like how I was in the desert, in a way. And then I remember it’s pointless to reminisce. We are none of us the same people we were back then.”

“But you were happy.”

Seth blinked and looked at him, then smiled, “I can be happy now. I *am*… happy. With you.” He shut his eyes. “I may not always be. I may be tired or morose or angry… I may go quiet for days or longer… But I can be happy. And knowing I was once happier because I had less to worry about doesn’t change that.”

Horus smiled, then said, “Whatever the case, we won’t be doing whatever we have to… discussing our plans for Osiris with the court, talking to Maat, and whatever else, today.”

Seth frowned. “But you need to act quickly. The court will gossip—”

Horus squeezed Seth’s shoulder. “They can wait.” He didn’t want to push Seth into this.

“You have duties to your people, Horus!” Seth’s expression was angry, which took Horus by surprise. “I know you took time to visit me in the desert, but that was when your mother was at court. With her in her rooms, and Nephthys, too, someone has to be out there…” He grimaced.

“…You’re really worried.”

“Of course I am!”

For a moment, Horus saw again the god who could command legions. Who protected his troops as they attacked. Who fought alone sometimes not just because he could, but also because it meant fewer human lives lost.

Seth bit his lip and set up.

Horus blinked, and sat up with him.

“…I’ll do it. Today,” Seth said.

“Seth…”

“We need to get it done. This’ll be hanging over our heads otherwise.”

“Seth, we can give it time… Yesterday alone was just… way too much for anyone. People would understand if we waited a day, minimum…”

“I’m not so weak that I need to wait!” Seth said, pushing himself out of the bed.

Horus stared after him, his eyes wide.

Seth had his back to the other god, his arms crossed. “We don’t need to hold this back because I’m…! I’m…”

Horus stood up and walked over to him.

“I don’t think waiting makes you weak,” Horus said, reaching out to lightly touch his shoulders. “You know I don’t.”

Seth grimaced, still not looking at him.

“You are not the one holding this back,” Horus said, rubbing his back. “It’s a bad situation. It’s my job, as a leader, to ensure it’s handled with the least cruelty to all the people I govern. And you’re one of those people, Seth.” Seth stiffened. “I know you don’t like it, because it… takes some of your autonomy away, but as Pharaoh I *am* responsible for you, and I take that seriously. Especially because I’ve seen how hard for you just to tell *me*.”

Seth blinked and looked at him, surprised.

Horus smiled sadly. “Call it softness because I love you, or… I don’t know. But I owe you a duty, too. I don’t want to put you through this. I don’t want to put *anyone* through this. But you’re at least in my power to protect a little.” Horus leaned his forehead against Seth’s and shut his eyes. “You’re one of the strongest gods I know, Seth. And I still want to do my best to save you from what I know will be painful, because it would hurt anyone. And because I know you and at least some of how it’s hurt you. Wanting to protect the people I govern isn’t about them being weak. It’s about… doing what I can to help those I care for.”

Seth swallowed. After a while he said, “…I know. I just…”

“I could tell you more often,” Horus offered. He opened his eyes a little, seeing the uncomfortable set of Seth’s mouth. “That you’re strong. It’s my father isn’t it? His words to you that night.”

Seth swallowed.

“He didn’t know you, Seth. He had a version of you in his head and that’s all he saw. What he thinks… has nothing to do with who you are.”

Seth shut his eyes as tears fell. Then he laughed. “Doesn’t it? Here I’m panicking over nothing, and thinking I can somehow go before a court and talk about… about...” He put his head in his hands. “Fuck, I can’t, I *can’t*…”

“You don’t have to.”

“Yes,” Seth said, sighing. “Yes I do.” He looked at Horus, his expression sad. “For a long time I imagined him coming to collect me in the desert, with the Ennead at his back. Imagined him telling them all what he’d done. Imagined them laughing, or shrugging, or… I don’t know. I imagined them accepting his story over mine. Even now, people adore him. His worshippers are strong. And if he… if he somehow came back and… and…” He swallowed. “It’d be the nightmare, but this time it’d be real. Because they’d believe him. He was the best with the feather, don’t you understand? Even if questioned that way, they’d believe.”

“You’d have Mother on your side,” Horus said, quietly, rubbing his back. “Nephthys. Perhaps Sekhmet and even Ra. And me.” Horus leaned his forehead against Seth’s, wishing it was enough to calm Seth’s panicked breathing. “Even Osiris isn’t enough against all of us.”

They were quiet for a while, until they heard a meow, and Seth pulled away to see the kitten wandering around his ankles. Seth leaned down to pick her up, petting her for a bit until she purred, and even nuzzling her head a bit.

Horus watched him, not knowing what to say.

“…I have so much because of you,” Seth said, watching the kitten thoughtfully. “My life is so much more than it was even a short while ago. I’m back here, among other gods, in the city… The world seems so much more alive. And I’m on speaking terms with my family again. And… thinking hopefully about the future, even with its difficulties.” He looked at

Horus, something warm in his gaze. “You give me strength, Horus. You give me so much.” He swallowed, and shut his eyes. “That’s… that’s how I know I can do this. Because… because you’re here. With me.”

Horus smiled and gently cupped his cheek. “Always.”

Seth opened his eyes and smiled, and then his gaze grew distant. He looked out over the city. “It’s going to change things. What we do here. Forever.”

Horus breathed in deeply, and stepped closer to him, wrapping an around his back, and looking out. “Yes. But… I feel better too, knowing you’ll be at my side for it.” He looked down at Seth, who looked up at him. “You give me strength, too.”

Seth blinked at him, then smiled.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus managed to convince Seth to wait a day in the end, which mostly involved taking a trip to the desert again, so they could have another race, and then having a picnic by the Nile. For a bit, Seth just watched the sky, the tall grasses prickly around him, the sound of bugs, birds, and the wind filling the air.

And then Horus was there, interlacing their fingers, and Seth shut his eyes and breathed in deep, wondering about tomorrows.

Seth went with Horus to talk to Maat briefly, not detailing everything, but explaining that they needed to share with the court how Osiris died, and what was going on with him, and they had need of her for it. That Isis, Nephthys, Sekhmet, and even Ra could be in hot water, but they hoped the testimony would support Horus' decision on the matter before the rest of the Ennead.

Maat frowned for a lot of their talk, but she otherwise seemed cordial and even pulled Seth aside afterward to say, "It's nice to see you back at court, Seth."

Seth did *not* know how to handle that. He and Maat had been cordial and even friendly enough over the centuries, but not close. Now he felt a little bad for how they were preparing to use her during court. But he reminded himself it was to protect Isis…

"And you," Horus said before they went in when Seth joked about his nervousness. "You matter here, too."

Seth smiled awkwardly at that, and kissed him on the cheek, then followed him into court.

Seth stood at Horus' side this time. Isis was also sitting on her throne, her expression unreadable. Nephthys sat in the same chair she'd been in the first day, quiet.

A larger gathering of gods was present this time, everyone mostly curious about what would be done about Osiris, if more information about what happened to him came to light, if he was going to be Pharaoh again, and a slew of people who just wanted their business from days ago to get done with because they'd been waiting a *while* to be heard.

Seth admittedly didn't pay all that much attention to what was happening, and found it a little hard to focus, because it felt like he was falling somehow if he did. He mostly just reminded himself everything was fine, Osiris was still in Duat, and talking around what had happened wouldn't be an issue. …Or at least as big an issue as he worried it would.

He got the gist of what Horus was saying, because they'd talked about it already: Horus had not yet reached out to his father, nor had he appointed anyone to do so, though they were

discussing options.

“As you all know,” Horus said, “we never had answers about how Osiris was killed, or by whom.”

Murmurs filled the court, bringing Seth back to the present a little. He hadn’t actually been *there* at the time, anyway, so it was easier to deal with. He’d been out in the desert, as a storm, or laying in the sand staring at the sky.

“Today we will hear testimony for what happened, why it happened, and why certain considerations have been given to how we are treating this situation.” He looked out at the court. “Then I will announce my judgment, and how we shall move forward.” Horus paused then, and looked at his mother.

Isis breathed in, looked out over the gathered gods, and said, clearly, and calmly, “I killed Osiris.”

There were gasps and whispers.

Isis breathed in, holding tight to the armrests on her throne. “Osiris did something unconscionable to someone I care for, and I feared he would face no retribution for it.” She shut her eyes. “But that… isn’t entirely true. He deserved punishment for it. And I wanted to be the one to do it.” She opened her eyes. “So I ensured I was.”

“I aided her,” Nephthys stepped forward and Isis and Seth looked at her in surprise. “Isis did not act alone. I… lack her powers, but I aided her in every other way I could.”

When no one else stepped forward – Ra and Sekhmet were silent – Maat stepped forward, her expression grim. “These are grave claims. Acting on your own in such a heinous away against Pharaoh… What did Osiris do? And to whom?”

“He—” Isis began.

“Osiris assaulted me,” Seth said. He was surprised that his voice didn’t shake. And that a seeming moment of silence was there amidst the whispers to allow the words to sound in the room. “He… Isis and Nephthys took revenge for Osiris… for what he did to me.”

After he stopped, there was a stunned silence.

Seth stared somewhere off to Maat’s left.

“That… is a grave claim as well,” Maat said, as calmly as she could, though she was clearly unnerved.

“I’m willing to testify,” Seth said, and was grateful for the combat training that kept him from shaking too much.

Seth only remembered glimpses of what happened next, and nothing much at all afterward. He remembered at one point standing before Maat’s scales, her tall white ostrich feather in one cup and his heart in the other, saying, vaguely, that he’d come to talk with Osiris about

Nephthys. That Osiris had drugged him, weakening him, and had then abused his weakened state to overpower him.

He kept it as detail-less as possible, sticking to the basics, not elaborating on how long Osiris had Seth under his power, the specific things he'd done, or anything he could leave out without the story not making sense. It was easier and harder than he'd imagined. After explaining how Sekhmet helped him get away and that he'd stayed in the desert until he got word of Osiris' funeral, he stopped talking.

Maat looked at the scales and said, "The fact that the scale is not tilting is proof you are telling the truth."

Seth didn't say anything to that. He had no reason to lie. He was glad he was staring ahead, at Maat, and beyond her, to Horus, who was watching him with a neutral expression on his face. It allowed Seth to ignore the others in the room.

"Isis," Maat said then, turning to her. "Would you now step forward, to give your testimony?"

It was soon over after that. Isis' detailing was quick and to the point, discussing in the simplest terms how she found out, and how the plan came together. The scales didn't tilt. There were still shocked whispers, but Seth was back at Horus' side, his fingers brushing Horus' arm occasionally on the armrest, his expression neutral.

"What Isis and her cohorts did was wrong," Horus declared after Maat put her scales away. "They should have brought the case before us, so that Osiris could be tried before the Ennead. But, given Osiris' actions against Seth, Isis *did* seek out appropriate punishment." He looked at Isis briefly, before turning back to the court. "She and Nephthys defended our family. They avenged our best soldier."

Seth swallowed at that, but only looked down at Horus in surprise.

"I have decided to pardon Isis and Nephthys," Horus continued, causing more murmurs from watching assemblage. "And not just because of that, or that, since Osiris' passing, they have been fair and just rulers. But also because Osiris would have been an unsafe ruler." Horus scowled. "No one here would be safe from the God of Life, should his temper bring him to worse acts." He allowed a pause for more agreeing whispers to sound, riling the crowd up. "Now, he is apparently trapped in Duat. What the parameters of that are, we do not fully understand, and in the coming days we shall endeavor to discover them. But we do not seek to bring him back. If he should stay there forever, then such is his lot." Horus allowed another pause, then said, "I, Horus, speak on behalf of the heavens. This is my final judgment."

Maat nodded to him, and the court murmured quietly in response, but no one said anything in refutation.

Seth didn't remember the walk to their rooms, but he seemed to blink and he was sitting on Horus' bed, staring down at the other god, who was looking up at him in concern.

Seth could remember how small and powerless he'd felt before Osiris. How he'd fully realized just how awful Osiris' might was. Osiris had been older, wiser, and could bend life itself to his whims. But Osiris hadn't lorded it over him, until that night.

Now Horus sat at his feet, after declaring that he was pardoning Isis and Nephthys before the court, that he spoke for the heavens… And Seth didn't feel powerful to see him kneeling there. He felt fragile. Was this something in Osiris' line? An enjoyment of playing with toys?

"Do you want to leave for a while?" Horus asked. He was holding Seth's hands and rubbing Seth's knuckles, in a gesture that was rather soothing. It pulled Seth back again, from that awful perception of Horus as a shadow of his father. Horus could never be that. He was too much himself, too kind and sweet and compassionate. He knelt now to not overwhelm Seth. To give him space to think. Even now, he didn't press while Seth thought it over, trying to come to *some* decision.

Seth just stared down at him, not sure how to articulate words outside the mess in his head, as he tried to forget what he'd just talked about. How many people knew. He tried to focus on Horus, on the contact of their hands.

Horus grimaced. "Let me carry you to the desert again?"

After a moment, Seth nodded.

Horus stood up and pulled Seth up with him, walking over to the balcony.

Seth next came to laying on his back on the sand, staring at the night sky in the desert. An adult black sha sat at his side, watching him thoughtfully.

Seth sat up, and the creature kept watching him, then turned to look past Seth.

Seth followed the gaze and saw Horus sitting nearby, his feathers wrapped around him for warmth.

Horus smiled at him and said, "Seth! You're back!"

Seth blinked, and thought back over what happened. He remembered Horus carrying him, kind of, and then setting down on the desert. Then Seth let a sand wave pick him up and carry him for a while, just randomly. He'd wanted to call a storm, but Horus had been following him, and he didn't want to injure Horus. So he'd made do with the sand waves.

Eventually he'd stopped, and the sand had safely deposited him on the ground. He didn't know how much time had passed. If it was the same day, or the next.

"You… stayed," Seth said, confused. "Why didn't you go back to the city?"

"I wanted to be here for you," Horus said, frowning slightly. "Did you want me to leave?"

"No, I…" Seth swallowed, then looked at the sha, who had vanished while he wasn't paying attention. "I just… I know how I get."

Horus stood up, letting his wings spread and walked closer. “May I…?”

Seth shrugged, and Horus knelt down, sitting at his side, and gathered his wings around them. Seth wasn’t ever cold in the desert, or too warm, but he found he appreciated the gesture.

Horus set his forehead against Seth’s, their headdresses bumping. It was awkward, but nice, in a strange way.

“How did the…?” Seth paused, swallowed, and continued, “What did people say?”

“No one said anything to me before we left,” Horus said. “I let Mother and Maat handle it. I’m sure they have everything in order.”

Seth swallowed. “Then it was worth it, I guess.”

“It was. I’m so sorry you had to go through with it, though.”

Seth swallowed. “It’s done, I guess. So that’s something.” They were quiet for a while, and Seth sagged back onto Horus a bit. He felt wrung out again. He still couldn’t believe he’d said all that, but at least… at least his panicky mind was a bit quieter.

Horus pulled his wings in tighter.

“I thought it’d be different, to tell everyone,” Seth said. “Like… I’d either *break* or grow or… I don’t know. I thought…” He swallowed. “I don’t know what I thought. I was so focused on no one ever knowing…” In a quieter voice he said, “I can’t believe I said it…”

“You did a great job,” Horus said.

Seth laughed. “I don’t know how. Or how I’m… I thought it might be like back then. When I happened. That I might wake up in a month to news of something, missing memories of the past few weeks.” Seth grimaced. “It could still be that way.”

“It just happened,” Horus said, quietly, hugging him tight, and stroking his arm a little. “I’m sure there’ll be plenty of time to see how you feel about it. But you’ll be able to rest for it. However long you need. Heliopolis could use your help, but it can wait. Your duties are to… relax, as much as is possible.”

Seth laughed. He could tell he was probably going to break down again or… something. But everything just felt very distant. He truly couldn’t figure out how he’d gotten up and talked about all those things in front of those people. How he hadn’t stuttered once. Didn’t shake. How he’d gazed back at Maat and Horus and just… *done* it.

He was afraid of going back. Of how people would look at him now. But he was afraid of *not* going back. Of what people would think of him for it.

“There is no winning,” Seth said, quietly.

“…No,” Horus said. “There’s surviving, at least. And pulling yourself together from it. Into something that works to get you through the day. And you don’t have to do it alone.” He

squeezed Seth's arm lightly. "I'm here. Whatever you need. I plan for us to do more than survive, you know. We'll get through this."

Seth smiled a little at that. Still thinking of the future. Of more of this. Of them.

"…You're just talking about fucking me on your desk, aren't you?"

Horus was quiet for a second, then burst out laughing.

Several months later

Horus stood up from his throne after the last petitioner for the day left. He stretched his arms and shoulders out.

"You did well today," Isis said.

Horus looked at her as she stood. She was watching him with a smile. He noticed she did that more often these days. Between court getting into something of a predictability after the debates about bringing back or dealing with Osiris had died down, the discovery that yes, Osiris *was* stuck down in Duat and could not return (which he was not happy about, based on reports from Ammit and Maat, but about which he could not presently do anything to change), Nephthys' pregnancy, and Seth settling back into court life, there was a sort of calm now. And Isis was handling it as she ever had, with determination and skill. She was a ruler to be reckoned with, and Horus imagined Osiris would have been jealous of her abilities in this.

"I had a good teacher," Horus said, smiling back. Things had gotten easier between them too, as more time passed. They talked more, hashed more out. Learned more about trust. Currently, things between them were tentatively good again.

Her smile widened.

Together they left the throne room, walking deeper into the palace.

"Isis!"

Nephthys stepped towards them along the hall, waving. "Horus! Is court over for the day?"

"Yes," Isis said.

Horus looked past his aunt to see a nursemaid carrying baby Anubis in her arms. He was wrapped in cloth and sleeping soundly.

Nephthys and the maid stopped before them in the hall, and Nephthys looked down at the baby fondly. "He sleeps better when we're walking. Probably doesn't help that I could never sit down while I was pregnant. Or maybe he'll be a god who travels a lot."

Horus considered the small baby with his dark hair and big eyes. He had spent a bit of time with Anubis after his birth, watching the nursemaids handle him, and occasionally Seth or Nephthys or Isis holding him. Horus had only held him once, and didn't want to repeat the experience, mostly out of worry. Despite assurances to the contrary, he was concerned he would drop the child. Or crush him. He was just so tiny, and felt even more fragile than Simba, Seth's kitten.

"Seth went back to your rooms, Horus," Nephthys said.

"Ah thank you." He nodded to her, kissed his mother on the cheek, and walked past them towards his rooms.

When he opened the door, he noticed his room was quiet, and as he stepped inside, he saw Seth laying on a long lounging sofa he'd requested a while back be moved from his room to Horus'. It was shaped like an animal, with thick golden legs, a tall footrest, and a short headrest. Seth often lay on it when he was relaxing, and now he seemed to be asleep on it, with his head down, his arms crossed over his chest, and not paying any apparent mind to Horus coming in. His large headdress put much of his face in shadow, but his lips were set in a calm expression.

Simba, their still small yellow kitten (though she was growing larger), sat on the war god's chest, curled up. She blinked an eye open at Horus, then shut it again, returning to her sleep. Over the time the cat had settled into their lives, she'd taken a clear preference for Seth, and Seth liked her too, even if he was careful to avoid outright saying it. She now sported a heavy golden and jewel-encrusted collar that Seth had secretly gifted her and refused to talk about whenever Horus pointed it out.

But it was cute to see Seth blushing, like it was abnormal for him to dote on the creature.

Horus walked over and leaned down to kiss Seth's cheek.

Seth grunted, and then murmured, "Done with work?"

Horus knelt and started moving down Seth's side in answer, peppering kisses down his neck.

Simba grumbled as Seth shifted a bit, and then jumped off him entirely to wander away.

"Missed you," Horus said, before going back to sucking on Seth's abdomen.

Seth snorted, and placed a hand on the top of Horus' head, over the headdress. Horus dismissed the garment, so that Seth could card his fingers through Horus' hair. "I was never that far away. Just sitting with Nephthys, Taweret, and Anubis."

"Did you have a nice time?" Horus asked, resting his head on Seth's stomach while Seth gently finger combed his hair.

"Yeah," Seth replied, his expression soft. "Anubis slept a lot of the time anyway. He only fussed near the end, so Nephthys took him on a walk. That calms him down." Seth seemed to

enjoy spending time with Anubis, which Horus was happy to see, like any activity Seth took part in these days. “Taweret and I played some Mehen at one point.”

“Who won?”

“We didn’t finish,” Seth said, which Horus knew probably meant Taweret was winning.

“You stayed at the palace today,” Horus said after a while, watching Seth. “You sure you didn’t feel cramped?”

Seth hummed, and then replied, “I was in the desert for most of last week, and yesterday I was training soldiers most of the day. I felt a day in was all right.” He smiled. “And it *was* nice. Plus, I get to see you earlier.”

Horus smiled. Seth didn’t always stay at the palace when Horus was there. Often he went on trips of his own, sometimes on assignments for managing Egypt, or dealing with his own godly duties, but also sometimes to take breaks from everything. After his testimony he’d been quieter for a time, and had avoided mingling with most of the other gods. Surprisingly, Maat and Thoth had spent more time at court, taking meals with them, and drawing Seth into conversation sometimes, in part because Thoth was good at senet, and liked playing with Seth when Isis wasn’t free, and Maat always had news from around the country to share with them both.

Isis and Nephthys sometimes joined them, and while Seth and Nephthys were clearly being very careful around each other, he and Isis were getting along much better, and Seth often went walking with her through the palace or the city to talk. Sometimes Seth just lounged in her rooms, quiet and listening while she played her lute. Horus knew primarily because he’d come to collect Seth in the evening, and find him asleep, with Isis watching him fondly.

There were nights that were harder than others. Seth wouldn’t be able to sleep, and would take to walking the palace, or leave in his chariot. And he sometimes had nightmares, which would leave him restless when he woke up from them. He’d cling to Horus, or just stare off into the distance, not seeming to see anything. Horus simply stayed nearby, as needed, watching.

Some nights they’d go walking through the palace at Seth’s insistence, to try and dispel the nervous energy from his inability to sleep or return to sleep, and Seth would talk a little about the stories on the walls. Other things that Isis or Nephthys hadn’t told Horus, perhaps without an intent to hide information, but simply because he hadn’t wandered in that particular direction with them before. There were stories of Seth and Isis in their younger days, Seth’s conquests, Isis’ great feats of magic… And Seth had a gentle and sometimes sarcastic voice as he told them, that Horus liked listening to.

They learned to live with each other, even more than they had. And they learned to respect each other’s space, too. Seth never stepped over the bounds of Horus’ authority, despite being far older and his uncle besides, and respected Horus’ desire to speak with other gods in private, and wasn’t a constant hawk at court. Seth had a position as advisor of sorts, and took it seriously, but was clearly happy leaving Horus and Isis in charge. Horus also respected that Seth didn’t just seek privacy when he was at his worst, but was fully capable of managing his

duties on his own: overseeing temple management, training, leading soldiers… Horus knew the testimony had hurt his confidence, but after going with Seth a couple times on his duties, Horus saw that the soldiers treated him no differently, though Horus wondered if part of that was that they'd seen him in action.

"We could go flying if you'd like," Horus said. Seth had gotten more comfortable with Horus carrying him while they flew, though he was still a little tense at the start of such trips. It was a lot of trust, especially on their longer trips around Egypt. But Horus liked it, because when he could soar through the air, with Seth clinging tightly to him, Horus felt unstoppable.

"Maybe not today," Seth said, brushing his fingers down Horus' cheek. "Unless you want to…?"

"I'm just happy to relax with you."

Seth hummed approvingly and said, "You should eat something. It's been a long day."

Horus turned his head and playfully bit Seth's hip.

Seth scoffed and lightly shoved Horus' shoulder. "I mean something that's not me! Actual food! Silly oaf." His tone was fond.

Horus grinned and pushed himself up, then held his hand out, palm up. "Let's go, then."

Seth put his hand in Horus', and stood up.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Several months later

Seth opened his eyes, staring up into the darkness of the bedroom he shared with Horus in Heliopolis. It was early morning and still dark outside, long before most of the palace was awake. But Seth had the odd feeling that something had woken him up. But as he listened, he didn't hear anything.

Seth looked over his left shoulder to see Horus still spooned up behind him, sleeping peacefully. His headdress was off and his eyes were shut. His dark hair was ruffled slightly, partly from sleep and partly from where Seth had grabbed it earlier when Horus had his head between Seth's thighs. Horus' had his left arm wrapped around Seth's side. The tan blanket rested over their hips.

Warm fondness rippled through Seth as he looked at Horus, but that odd thrum of alarm, and maybe danger, kept him from drowning in his affection.

Seth sat up, pushing Horus' arm off, and looked around. He couldn't sense anything in the room. The palace was quiet. Outside their window to the city there was nothing visibly *off*. No screams in the night, no smoke or alarming number of torches, no birds screaming alarm…

"Mmm… Seth?"

Seth blinked and looked down at Horus, who had his eyes partially open now and was gazing up at him. "What's wrong?"

"I… don't know. Something's… off."

Horus frowned and sat up, reaching out to rub Seth's left arm. "Do you want to go for a walk?"

"…Yes." They still walked the palace at night sometimes when Seth was restless. Sometimes they talked, sometimes they said nothing. Sometimes Seth would grow tired and Horus would carry him back to their rooms, and Seth relaxed into Horus' presence. It was… good. Seth had more days than not where he could just rest normally, or be worn out by celebrations or whatever he was busy doing during the day, or could be put to bed by a very horny Horus' hunger… but the walking was still helpful. And Seth always appreciated it when Horus suggested it. Seth still struggled to ask for things, though he was getting better with Horus' gentle encouragement.

They got out of bed and put clothes on, and Horus took Seth's left hand and led him to the bedroom door.

Seth looked at him thoughtfully. "You're leading today?" It was a bit unusual. Usually Horus followed Seth.

Horus hummed to himself, his expression unreadable beneath his blue falcon mask. "I feel… something is off, too. I'm not sure what it is."

Seth frowned as he followed Horus out the door. "Could someone be doing a spell?"

"…We should find Mother," Horus said, walking down the torch-lit hall. "If anyone's doing something, she'll know."

As they walked along, a light approached them in the distance, and Horus stopped them, frowning, to gaze ahead.

Shortly, Isis, with Nephthys running behind her, materialized.

Seth realized Nephthys' face was covered in tears.

Isis was in her nightclothes, with her wig and make-up off, and her expression was furious, and she barely stopped before them before she started talking, "Osiris kidnapped Anubis!"

Seth felt like the floor vanished beneath his feet.

"Osiris?" he heard Horus say seemingly from a distance. "Where? Is he still in the palace?"

"No," Isis said, her eyes blazing. "He's gone back to Duat. With Anubis."

"How did he get in?"

"He took the form of a servant," Isis replied, "using a human as a carrier for his power. Who knows how long he's been sneaking in? Nephthys and Tawaret were resting, so the servants were watching over Anubis. I was preparing medicine for a disease outbreak in one of the villages that requested aid recently. Osiris must have been biding his time." She scoffed. "The servant is dead – Nephthys saw half of him go through a portal to Duat with Anubis, and the rest didn't make it. But it turned into… strange green roots that dissolved. I mean to have the other servants questioned. I've had what remains of the servant collected for study and questioning."

"…How did he take Anubis to Duat?" Seth said, feeling disconnected from things, trying to pull himself back from focusing on Osiris, and everything Osiris had done, trying not to be overwhelmed by rage because it wouldn't be *useful* while Anubis was in Osiris' clutches. Trying not to imagine what Osiris would do with an infant. "He can't make portals to travel. And Anubis is alive. He can't go there."

Isis grimaced. "I don't know. It shouldn't be possible."

"Unless he…" Horus began.

Unless he killed Anubis, Seth thought as Nephthys sobbed.

“Anubis is alive,” Isis said, her expression firm. “I have protective charms on him and they’re at least telling me *that* much.”

“I do as well,” Horus said after a moment. “It’s likely what I was sensing earlier. Though it’s hard to track at this distance.”

Seth had one, too. A minor tracking and protection blessing, since Anubis liked crawling around so much. Seth reached out to the tracking blessing and couldn’t even detect it nearby, which wasn’t a surprise. He hadn’t made it for this long a distance, if Anubis was really in Duat. But he could *also* sense the blessing was still there. Anubis was alive, wherever he was.

“Why would he take Anubis?” Horus asked. “Did he say?”

“No,” Nephthys said, still crying and wringing her hands. “at least not that I could hear! He was already in the portal when I woke up. And there’s no note or anything…”

“We need to have all the staff questioned to see if there are more of Osiris’ agents,” Isis said. “I’ll have to do a sweep of the whole palace.” She frowned. “But that can wait until after we recover Anubis.”

“Maat might be willing to help,” Nephthys offered. She was shaking, and Seth had the distant thought of comforting her, but couldn’t make himself move.

“Contact her, then,” Isis said. She looked at Horus. “I’m going to Duat.”

“As am I,” Horus said.

Seth blinked, then said, “I am, too.”

They all looked at him, and Seth refused to flinch. “Maybe we don’t know why he took Anubis, but… I have to wonder if…” *It’s my fault. Somehow.* He swallowed. “It’s possible Osiris did this to get me to follow him.” *He was furious at the idea of Nephthys having me. If he wanted a bargaining trip and learned of Anubis' existence...*

Isis’ frown deepened. “It’s possible, Seth. But you don’t have to go. Not just because it would be just what he wants, but also because I know it would be hard for you.”

“I’m the *god of war*,” Seth said, forcing calm into his voice. “This is a kind of invasion. I’m the best option for this.”

“We can contact Ammit,” Horus said. “Maat will tell us what to do.”

“No matter what, this is likely playing into his hands,” Seth said, quietly. “Osiris is smart. He knows, if nothing else, if he takes Anubis, we’ll follow him. He’ll be prepared.” *Does he want a war? Does he think he's trong enough to stand against us? He knows none of the other gods up here are on his side. Or is he that confident now that he's been down there so long?* But he knew they couldn't wait to summon him up here. The longer Anubis was in his position, the more dangerous things were.

“As will we,” Isis said, clutching her papyrus scepter, her expression grim.

“He’ll be more powerful down there,” Horus said. “Maat had word from Ammit that he’s been taking over Duat. His death changed some of his powers. Or, perhaps, he’s showing off ones he never had a use for before.”

“He can show off whatever powers he likes,” Isis nearly snarled. “I out-maneuvered Ra. Seth has defeated armies. You’re the Pharaoh. He’ll not beat us all.”

They didn’t go immediately. They set guards on the palace, and had Maat begin questioning people after she arrived. Thoth had scrolls on the kinds of creatures they might encounter in Duat, as well as areas they should avoid.

“I haven’t been there much lately,” Thoth commented, looking over the scrolls thoughtfully, “since I’ve just been working on a lot of things, but I’ve been chatting with Ammit more. She doesn’t like Osiris any more than we do.”

“Have you spoken with Osiris?” Horus asked.

Seth was too distracted staring at the kinds of monsters Anubis might be staring at right now. He clung to the fact his blessing was still there, somewhere, but he didn’t want Anubis terrified of all these horrible things…

Thoth laughed. “Not really. He never has an interest in talking to me. Besides, I’m too busy for conversation most of the time. I record for Maat, and then we leave.”

“You could guide us there,” Horus said. “You know your way around.”

Thoth flinched, “I, well… er…”

“You don’t want to go without Maat,” Seth said, frowning. “Don’t you have a spine?”

Thoth scowled, though his face was pink. “I do! I just… I can’t fight *Osiris*… Plus, maybe *you’ll* be fine because you’ll rescue Anubis and never have to go back there! Maat and I *work* there! We’ll have to return and deal with an angry king of the dead!”

“We will both go,” Maat said, stepping forward after a group of servants who’d been cleared were led away. Isis was at her side, dressed finely and clearly ready for war. “Although making sure the palace is secure is important, a grave crime has occurred here. Osiris must answer for it. And he knows the penalty for attacking me.” She smirked. “If nothing else, Ammit would make his days a living nightmare, even more than Duat already is.” She looked at Isis, “Your only other option is to get help from Ra again, but using her sunboat may take more time than you have, and it will be harder to get to Rostau. Thoth and I can travel there far faster.”

Thoth frowned, his expression worried, but he shook less when Maat took his hand.

“And without the god of knowledge, he’ll have plenty of issues keeping a handle on things,” Maat finished, smiling at him. “He wouldn't dare bother you, even without the rest of us at

your back. Be brave."

He smiled nervously at her.

"Then it is decided," Isis said, looking to Horus. "Let us leave soon." She looked at Nephthys. "Stay here and handle things while we're gone. Tawaret and Bastet will support you."

The hippo and cat goddesses standing by Nephthys' side nodded, though Nephthys continued to look worried. Her face was still tear-stained.

"Be careful!" Nephthys finally urged, clasping her hands together.

"I must warn you," Maat said, looking at them all, "When we are in Duat, limit your power usage until it is absolutely needed. The laws of Duat are not the same as up here, and the world reacts negatively to the powers of gods who do not belong there. You will likely weaken yourself if you casually use your powers as you do up here."

Isis grimaced, but nodded.

Seth swallowed, wondering if it was all right, going down to confront Osiris when he wouldn't be at his strongest, again. With no Sekhmet at his back this time.

Horus clasped Seth's left hand, murmuring, "Seth? Are you all right?"

Seth nodded. "Yes, I'm fine." He would master himself. He'd been in countless difficult battles before, and he'd survived them all. He'd survived Osiris. He would do so again, and rescue Anubis, too.

Maat stepped towards a wall and removed her ostrich feather from her hair. She raised it before herself, pointing at the wall. The feather glowed gold, and she drew an oval along the wall's surface, which glowed gold, too. When the oval was complete, she stood back. The line of the oval glowed brighter, and morphed into a blue opening, almost like water. It was impossible to see what lay beyond it, but it wasn't a stone wall anymore.

She looked back at the others as she replaced her feather in her hair. "Come." She took Thoth's hand again and led him through. Isis followed behind her.

Horus squeezed Seth's hand.

Seth swallowed and stepped forward, his grip on Horus' fingers tight. He *would* rescue Anubis.

The other side of the portal was not water, but rather a small courtyard in a palace with golden walls. Maat led them out of the courtyard and down some golden stairs into an open area surrounded by lakes of fire. Above their heads was a dark sky filled with stars. In the distance, they could hear demonic screams.

When Seth looked back behind them, he could see the tall golden-walled mansion they left, with tall golden columns, all decorated in intricate artwork, and guarded by tall falcon-headed guards carrying enormous swords, who ignored the group of gods departing.

“This is Ra’s palace,” Maat explained as they walked down the steps. “We’re close to Rostau.” At the base of the steps she stopped and looked back at them. “You must stay close. Duat is dangerous for gods who are not meant to be here.” She drew her feather again and wrote script in the very air, which flew away from her as it was written. Then she put her feather back on. “I’ve alerted Ammit to our presence. If she joins us, we’ll have a stronger united front against Osiris.”

Seth had his khopesh ready in his free hand, prepared to face whatever came their way. He felt a sense of unease about the place, and not just because he knew Osiris lurked somewhere around the corner. He knew part of it was his preparedness for a fight. It let him react quickly. Another part was worry, and a bit of fear he pushed down. He refused to run.

Duat didn’t scare him, on its own. It was a place he was distantly familiar with, after the calls of those killed in war reached to him. It was only one god who resided her that filled him with fear. Or at least, that's what he assumed that extra sense of unease was.

“So we wait?” Isis said, looking around, clearly uncomfortable. She was even sweating a bit from the burning water in the distance. Seth felt the heat, too, but it was nothing compared to desert heat.

“Yes,” Maat said, rubbing Thoth’s shoulder. The other god looked nervous, but not seemingly of their environs.

Seth looked at Horus, who was looking around the place thoughtfully.

“A part of your kingdom you’ve never visited,” Seth said, wondering if *Horus* felt unmoored now. Horus had volunteered to come along so quickly, and Seth hadn’t even spared a thought for how he felt about it.

He could be facing his father for the first time, Seth thought.

“Duat is not my kingdom,” Horus said, quietly. “Not yet, anyway.”

Seth frowned at him. “What do you mean?”

Horus looked at him. “Can you not feel it, Seth? My father rules here, like Ammit said.”

Seth blinked, and looked around, spreading his awareness out. There was sand here, and it felt *different* than in the living world, but it still obeyed him. He could tell what Maat said about how he might push himself too hard using it, though. It had a kind of wariness to it, like it might suddenly reject him if he pushed too hard.

There underneath the sand, though, he could feel it. Trickling throughout, creating his sense of unease. The same power that had grabbed him all those years ago, kept him bound. He

used to be so familiar with it in a way: Osiris had used his powers greatly since they were young. But *this*…

He twitched when he felt Horus' hand on his right shoulder. Horus had wrapped his arm around Seth's back. "Seth? Are you all right?"

"He's… in *everything*," Seth said, his voice thin. "*How*…?"

"The underworld gods are scattered," Horus said, "Performing their individual duties. But none of them hold sway over the others, really. There was a power vacuum. Osiris was Pharaoh in the land of the living. He naturally fell into the role. Ammit, Thoth, and Maat say he's been making careful nudges for power almost since he came here."

"...You let on earlier that you and Maat had spoken about this before," Seth said, annoyed. "You didn't say anything before this."

Horus grimaced. "Maat and I have discussed this before, a little. I didn't want to worry you."

"I don't need to be coddled," Seth replied, frowning. "I like to know the situation I'm walking into."

"I know," Horus replied. He bowed his head. "I'm sorry."

Seth sighed. "...I trust your judgment. But trust mine, too. The best battle plans aren't made with faulty information."

Horus bowed his head. "I will. The truth is, I wanted to see if he'd make more of a power play. Even Ra hasn't said anything about this in her trips on her sunboat. But I think they have… alternate understandings of how things are. After all, even as pharaoh, Osiris can't affect Ammit's work. And he can't touch Ra. Thoth and Maat seldom visit this part of Duat, so their guesstimates of his power aren't as strong, and they get to leave, unlike most of the other gods here."

"His pushes have grown stronger in recent days," Maat said, having heard their conversation. "Ever since Ra reported on him, I've been keeping an eye on him, since before that I couldn't even sense him at all here. Rostau was an area he took as his own recently, to some extent, since he can't *fully* control anything here, particularly with local gods still controlling areas here and there. But he's subtle about it. Creeping along like a weed, not taking more dominance than he must. Now I barely feel any difference here, which is probably meant to make the locals feel a false sense of security as he reaches for more and more." She frowned. "He likely spent those years since his death gathering his power again, restoring his body, planning whatever it was he means to do."

Seth grimaced, wishing there was an army to fight or something. He hated this *waiting* for Osiris to do something. It only made him imagine just how terrible it could be and think too much again on things he'd rather forget.

Eventually, a large creature appeared in the distance coming towards them. Seth called his black bow instead, and Maat raised her hand.

Soon enough, the figure became clearer in the gloom: they were humanoid, whoever they were.

“It’s Ammit,” Maat said.

Ammit was tall, broad, and thickly muscular. In the light from the flame lakes, her green skin shone, and her long crocodile mask hid much of her expression. She wore a long, dark linen dress, with sides cut out like Sekhmet wore, to allow her more freedom of movement. Over it all she wore a long silk cloak. Her long dark hair had many golden bangles clipped in it, and fell heavily down her back. She was barefoot.

She came to a stop before them, considering them all, her painted green lips quirking at them thoughtfully. She looked to Maat. “So, you brought guests, Maat. You know you aren’t supposed to do that.” Her voice was deep and intimidating, and Seth had a sense of immense age from her. He’d only met her once before, when she ventured to the land of the living, but he’d seen carvings of her made by human priests, under Thoth’s guidance.

“A crime has been committed,” Maat said, her voice firm. “Osiris kidnapped a demigod from the land of the living, and has him here.”

“No god of the living resides here,” Ammit said, frowning. “I would have sensed it.”

“Anubis is a demigod,” Isis reminded her.

“Likewise,” Ammit insisted. “All who are here are dead humans, demons, or gods of the dead, and yourselves.”

Seth reached out for the blessing on Anubis, and felt it still there. It was stronger now, too. “He’s alive, though! He’s still alive!”

Ammit looked at him, her headdress’ red gaze somehow pulling him towards it, though Seth resisted it, holding his stance.

Ammit shrugged. “If you say so. Come, then. Let us confront Osiris about this horrible crime. But be wary, your presence here has attracted the curious.” She turned and walked back the way she came, through the lakes of fire.

Maat led them after her, and Seth walked alongside Horus, still holding his bow at the ready.

The trip through Duat was slow. Sometimes beasts would appear in the distance, with the heads of different animals and insects. Most scuttled away at the sight of them gathered together, but Seth could tell that more and more took to watching their group, perhaps gathering together to attack in greater numbers. He prepared himself should they do so.

Sometimes they passed ghost-like humans wandering the path, looking around, confused. Demons might come upon them, and the gods only watched as the humans were caught or somehow managed to escape themselves.

Horus once moved towards a human being beset by multiple demons, but Thoth pulled him back, saying, “You can’t, Your Majesty. It’s not our place to interfere. The journey to the afterlife is in their hands, not ours.”

Horus grimaced and kept walking.

Seth reached out and took his hand again, squeezing his fingers gently.

Horus glanced at him and smiled slightly.

“Will you be okay seeing him?” Seth asked as they walked along. He kept his eyes on the onlookers, but hoped to at least help assuage some of Horus’ worries, if he felt any. “Your father?”

“…I’ll be fine.”

“Horus?”

Horus squeezed Seth’s hand and smiled at him. “I’ll be fine," he repeated.

Seth frowned. “Just… let me know if… if something’s wrong.”

“Of course, Seth.”

They eventually passed a group of curious snake demons and moved into a dry, sandy desert. Seth felt more at home, but also more alarmed, as a rush of Osiris’ energy overtook them. He reflexively reached for the sand around them.

Who are you?

Seth blinked and stepped back, surprising Horus into stopping.

“Seth?” Horus asked, confused.

Are you the one Osiris talked about?

The sand started drawing menacingly *towards* Seth, who, for the first time in his life, felt intimidated by it.

Because he knew *he* wasn’t controlling it.

“Everyone keep back from the sand!” He called out, pulling Horus away.

“It’s Seker,” Maat said, stepping back with Thoth. “He usually stays on the watch for Ra.”

Seth used some of his power to push the sand back from them all, though it was extremely difficult. Seker was powerful here.

A tall god with a dark hawk headdress emerged from the sand nearby. He was lithe and muscular, and had dark tan skin, and wore a dark blue shendyt.

“We have no quarrel with you Seker!” Ammit called, standing before them all. “We wish to speak to Osiris.”

“They trespass, Ammit. The gods of the living do not belong here.”

“Horus is the Pharaoh!” Ammit replied, nearly snarling back at Seker. “And Ra herself has marked Seth as one worthy to guard her sunboat! They have as much right to travel here as any!”

Seker snorted. “…Very well. They may pass.”

Seker’s power faded from the sand near them, and Seth breathed easier. He looked at Ammit, who was gazing after where Seker had vanished. “You knew Ra asked me to guard her sunboat?”

Ammit snorted. “She’s chatty sometimes, and covets different gods for the duty. You’ve come up a few times.”

Seth didn’t know whether to be honored or not about that. He’d rejected the idea before, and didn’t think he’d take Ra up on it any time soon.

They walked carefully across the sand, with Seth keeping watch, in case Seker should follow.

“You’re lucky,” Ammit said. “If he wished, he could make the sand drag you all down.”

“Seker is reasonable,” Maat said. “He’s ignored Osiris so far.”

“Hmph,” Ammit snorted. “That’s mostly because Osiris has been focused on other things. I’ve heard he got Seker’s help to open portals to the world above. Seker’s able to craft such things.”

Seth stiffened. “He made it sound like Osiris told him about me.”

“Mmm,” Ammit said. “Yeah, it wouldn’t surprise me. Probably to gain his favor, make him jealous. But in recent days, Seker lost interest in whatever Osiris was offering and moved back to his normal work. The problem with the portals he makes is that Osiris can’t travel through them himself. He can only send a little bit of his influence through, and it doesn’t go far.” She laughed. “He’s always furious about it, and rages. Might be that’s what drove Seker away.”

“But he might be able to learn,” Seth said. “Before this we didn’t think he’d be able to leave.”

“He can’t leave,” Thoth said, his voice thoughtful. “He’s dead, and stuck here. Whatever Seker is helping him with, it would wound him, to lose his essence like that. This whole effort may even leave him weaker.”

“Good,” Isis said. “He’ll be easier to deal with.”

“If he were a normal god of the dead,” Thoth added, “Seker’s training would be useful. But he’s not. Seker, Ammit, Maat, and I… we’re not *dead*. We just duties here, and so we can

travel. He can’t. He can only struggle with his inabilities.”

“Do you know what else Osiris might be up to?” Maat asked Ammit. “Any other gods he’s spoken with?”

“He’s *always* up to something,” Ammit replied, “with that hideous tree of his…”

“Tree?” Seth asked.

Ammit snorted. “You’ll see. He built it out of himself. To restore himself after he was killed.”

Seth was confused. Sure, Osiris could grow plants out of his very skin, but there was something *off* in Ammit’s tone.

They soon reached Osiris’ palace: a tall, intricate structure nearly as intimidating as Ra’s, but made of white stone instead of gold. There were murals on the wall of Osiris as Pharaoh, and Seth found they made him a little ill, though he pushed it back.

“We got here quickly,” Horus noted.

“It helps to go with a god of knowledge,” Maat noted, making Thoth smile. “And to not tote the sun behind you. The dead won’t wait for the tide. Like I said, our ways are faster.”

There were hulking beetle-headed guards watching them, bearing tall, intimidating spears.

Maat and Ammit stepped up, making the guards bow, and the group pushed on. But the area beyond the doorway was a mostly open, paved, courtyard. It was a little dark, with the walls mostly hidden in shadow. At the center of the courtyard was a large tree, made of green limbs formed like… organs.

Near the tree was a small golden couch, where a pale-skinned toddler rested.

“Anubis!” Seth said with a gasp, restraining himself from leaping forward.

Horus took his shoulder, as if he knew Seth's urge to move. Before Seth could say anything, he let go, making sure Seth had room to move.

Seth glanced at him, and saw that Horus was gazing ahead, at the couch.

Before Horus was really internalizing the "not coddling" thing. Seth knew better than to leap ahead into what was obviously a trap of some kind.

He still hated this. Anubis was *right* there. Seth shut his eyes briefly and sent his senses throughout the room. He was disgusted by the density of Osiris’ energy here, clearly centered on the tree, which reached far up beyond their sight. The area was otherwise empty. There weren’t even other guards.

He didn’t like it at all.

The group drew closer to the couch and the tree, and Anubis reached his tiny arms out to them, crying out in glee.

“My desert, you came,” Osiris said.

Seth froze. Osiris’ body wasn’t visible anywhere, and his voice seemed to generally come from the direction of the tree.

Horus wrapped an arm around him.

“…Get your hands *off* of him," Osiris snarled.

Isis stepped forward as a giant green root lashed out. A bolt of lightning crashed down on the root, roasting it, and making it stop several feet away. Seth’s sand darted up a second after the lightning, blocking the root from advancing any further, and shaving the end off like a knife.

“Isis…” Osiris said.

“You trespassed, Osiris,” Isis said, glaring fiercely towards the tree. “You kidnapped our nephew. How *dare* you?”

Osiris chuckled. “I merely wished to see him. Is it not my right, as his uncle?”

“You have no right to anything,” Isis said, still glaring at the tree as she walked forward. “Not after what you’ve done.”

Seth tugged away from Horus to follow her. He didn’t want to leave her to deal with Osiris alone, since she didn’t bring the other goddesses with her who helped her last time. Though clearly she was handling things fine herself.

Horus quickly followed, with Maat, Thoth, and Ammit in tow.

More roots grew from the tree, but Seth was slightly more confident with the other gods around him, and he reached for more sand to bury them and cut them to shreds. Lightning struck some of them, essentially batting them away.

Anubis stayed untouched on the couch.

“This is hardly necessary,” Osiris said as the group neared the couch. “Seth, you could have simply come to visit.”

Isis scoffed and stepped forward, still ahead of the others, and quickly snatched Anubis up and into her free right arm. “You are transparent, Osiris.”

Up close, the tree was even more disturbing, and if Seth peered at it too much, he thought he could make out a face… But he looked away and focused on Isis and Anubis, and keeping a handle on the sand in the area in case Osiris made a move. Osiris’ power and Duat still pushed back at him.

“Will you even speak to me, Seth?” Osiris asked.

Seth swallowed.

“You don’t deserve to even *see* him,” Isis said, moving back to stand with the others and handing Anubis to Seth.

Anubis burbled at Seth – he wasn’t even in a blanket, just wearing his tiny white shendyt and smiling up at Seth with his gray eyes.

Seth formed a sand blanket around him and held him close.

Maat stepped forward. “Osiris, what you have done here breaks our laws. You will stand trial for it.”

“I didn’t harm the child,” Osiris replied snippily to her. “I just brought him down here.”

“You kidnapped him,” Maat said. “He was not yours to simply take as you wish. You made agents in Heliopolis and waited until night fell to take him, when you knew it would be easiest, as his caregivers were asleep. Not to mention that you killed a human to do it.”

“He was one of my followers,” Osiris replied. “He gave his life for my cause.”

Maat frowned. “Whatever the case, the kidnap stands. As you are already in Duat, there are limitations to what you can be punished with. But guards will be placed to watch you.”

Osiris laughed. “You think they’ll stop me?”

“If Seker is the one guarding you, perhaps,” Maat replied. She raised an eyebrow. “But do please admit to future crimes you plan to commit, so that we can plan accordingly.”

Osiris didn’t reply to that.

Maat turned to Isis, Seth, Horus, and Ammit. “Since we have Anubis, we should leave.” She glanced back at Osiris. “He must be contained, though.”

“I will stay,” Ammit said, settling down near the couch and looking content. “You do not need me on the return journey. I will call to Seker and explain things to him.”

Maat nodded. “We’ll send word for the trial.”

“Of course.”

Maat looked at Osiris and said, “How did you bring Anubis down here? He’s alive, he can’t travel here.”

Osiris scoffed. “Perhaps you shouldn’t underestimate my abilities.”

Maat rolled her eyes. “You’re not that powerful, Osiris. Only gods of the dead can freely travel between the worlds, unless you’re Ra or under her protection. And you weren’t born to it, so you lack that ability.” She blinked, and then her eyes widened. She looked back at Anubis. “…Anubis is a god of the dead?”

Osiris didn’t reply to that.

Seth’s arms stiffened, and Anubis made a quiet noise. Seth wasn’t necessarily against the idea of his son being a god of the dead. It was a good position, and gods of the dead were respected. But…

He’ll have to come back here, Seth said, feeling his panic stir. *He’ll be around Osiris again!*

Osiris laughed. “There is no escape.”

Horus spoke up for the first time, to *Seth*, “He won’t come back here until he’s a fully-fledged god, and Osiris will be no threat to him.”

“Really?” Seth asked quietly, grasping on to the bit of hope.

Horus smiled at him. The familiar smile Seth was so used to when he needed solid ground to stand on, like when he woke from a nightmare or doubted himself. “Yes, Seth.” Horus couldn't see the future, but he had an insight into things that Seth had grown to trust.

It helped cool some of Seth's panic.

Osiris scoffed.

Maat shook her head and led them back out of the room.

Horus kept to Seth’s side, with one arm over his back.

“You think you can just *leave* like that?” Osiris demanded.

There was a rumbling and Seth called his sand to surround them as he turned back to face whatever Osiris brought forth.

But in a moment, wind cut through the giant green roots and black brambles Osiris sent out towards them. Ammit also leapt on them, biting down and clawing on anything she could reach. Lightning crashed down, burning more of it and making Osiris cry out.

What remained barely even touched the sand barrier Seth created before collapsing on the floor. Seth used the sand to shred it.

“What is going on here?” Seker demanded, stepping into the palace from another entryway, with large lions at his side.

Maat met his gaze and said, “Seker, we have a request for you.”

“Do not listen to her!” Osiris roared, making the ground shake.

Seker snorted. “Control yourself, Osiris. This is undignified, even for you.”

Horus snorted on a laugh.

Ammit sat down on a bunch of brambles, which were crushed beneath her heavy weight. She grinned at Seker. “Come listen to our tale, Seker. I’m sure you’ll have fun with it.”

Nephthys nearly snatched Anubis from Seth’s hands when they returned to Heliopolis. Tawaret was at her side, looking wary of the portal Seth’s group emerged from.

“Is he all right?” Nephthys said, crying again and checking Anubis over for injuries. “Did Osiris curse him?”

“No,” Isis said with a sigh as she stepped forward. “At least nothing that I can detect. I’ll run more tests on him, though, just to be safe.” She grimaced. “And there are some other things I need to check.”

“What things?” Nephthys asked, alarmed.

Isis grimaced. “He’s going to be a god of the dead.”

“…What?”

“It’s how Osiris was able to take him to Duat without killing him.”

“…*What?*”

“It does bear some thought,” Maat said. “And it’s possible Osiris’ original plan wasn’t kidnap. But once he got hold of Anubis, as the god of life, he realized. And… changed plans.”

“He really planned to kill Anubis?” Nephthys said, hugging Anubis slightly tighter.

Maat grimaced. “Anything is possible. There’s to be a trial, and we’ll… ask him there. For now, rest easy knowing that Anubis is unharmed and back with you.”

Nephthys hugged Anubis to her, nuzzling his face. “I’m so sorry I let him take you. I’m so sorry…” She was crying again.

Seth felt so drained even though he’d barely done anything. He *was* at least glad Anubis was back.

In a way he wondered if this was the price he paid for being too relaxed. For falling into routine with the return to his regular duties, being at Horus' side, spending time with his sisters... Osiris would be there, reminding Seth, *I will always be here and you cannot escape me.*

His hands clenched into fists. *I am not yours! I never was!*

“You should all rest,” Maat said, looking between them all. “Duat is draining for those unused to it. Without rest you might collapse.”

Seth looked at Anubis in Nephthys' arms worriedly. "What if Osiris comes back? He could strike while he knows we're weak." He knew Horus had said Anubis was safe, but…

"Bastet has been patrolling," Nephthys said. "And Khnum is here as well, on guard. Tawaret and I set up wards."

"And I'll set up more," Isis said, bowing her head slightly to Nephthys. "He won't get in this time."

Horus reached out to squeeze Seth's right shoulder. Horus hadn't let go of his arm the entire time they'd left Osiris' palace, nor had he really said anything other than to check on Seth.

And Seth only appreciated it. He needed the support. He'd been ready to attack anything that tried to snatch Anubis out of his arms.

"Rest, Seth," Isis said. "You can patrol yourself in the morning." She smiled at him. "You did well."

Seth bowed his head. "Thank you, Isis. For everything." He nodded to Maat. "And thank you. For your help."

"We'll discuss how to proceed soon," Maat said. "Thoth and I can handle the administrative side."

"Thank you, Maat," Isis said.

Horus added, quietly to Seth, "Would you like to stay with Nephthys and Anubis tonight?"

Seth blinked, and then met Nephthys' eyes. He'd held Anubis tightly through their return journey in Duat, and Anubis had eventually fallen asleep. Now he was still sleeping in his mother's arms.

Seth had never stayed overnight with Nephthys. On rare occasions, Anubis had stayed with Seth and Horus, or Seth had been with him alone. But Seth never stayed with *Nephthys* to watch Anubis. And Seth couldn't imagine asking to take Anubis with him and Horus.

He could see Nephthys thinking it over, though.

"…No," he said, finally. "It's fine. I'll… Nephthys, just… get a hold of me, if…"

"Of course," Nephthys said, her cheeks reddening a bit. "Of course. Thank you. For helping to get him back."

I didn't do anything, Seth wanted to scream as he nodded and turned around to leave the room.

Eventually, Horus took his hand and guided him back to their room. It was night again, and Seth realized they'd been gone for much of a day. It had felt longer somehow in Duat.

It hit him how oddly easy it all had been. If they hadn't had Maat and Thoth on their side, if Isis hadn't been there… He felt he could fight against Seker, but it would be difficult to deal with a god whose powers he didn't know, who was on a home advantage, as Seth grew weaker far faster than usual.

They'd been lucky, and Seth didn't like fighting with luck. It was unreliable.

Seth walked over to the bed and sat down. Horus sat nearby and reached out to rub his back.

"Do you think what Maat said is true?" Seth asked, quietly, trying to move past his own self-flagellation. "About Anubis being… a god of the dead?"

"…It feels right," Horus replied, quietly. "So I think so."

Seth grimaced. "I just… He *can't* go back there." He ran a hand over his face. "I know you said he won't until he's grown and can handle himself, but…" He began to shake. "I just imagine him there with Osiris, with…" His voice trailed off. Would Osiris hurt him the way he'd attacked Seth? Out of revenge or…

Seth would rip him to pieces if Osiris dared, even if he dissolved in the doing. But it wouldn't spare Anubis the pain of it.

Horus pulled him close. "You'll train him, Seth. We both will. All of us will. He'll be powerful. And you can protect him."

Seth laughed sharply. "Like I protected him today?"

"That you went after him says much on its own," Horus replied. "You were ready to support Isis and the other gods. You stood up to Osiris."

Seth swallowed. "I was afraid. I was… I was terrified. You know I was."

"And you know as a god of war that bravery isn't about not being afraid. It's about overcoming your fear to still do what you need to."

Seth swallowed and looked down.

"What you did today was not nothing. It was far from nothing. I'm so honored to have been at your side for it."

Seth didn't have a reply to that.

"What do you need right now, Seth?" Horus asked, continuing to rub Seth's back.

"…How are *you* doing?"

Horus blinked. "What?"

Seth's expression hardened. "You met your father for the first time. And didn't really say anything to him." Seth dissolved his headdress into sand and looked at Horus, his expression

a bit worried. “How are you doing?”

Horus hummed. “Osiris is a stranger to me. Yes, I know he fathered me with Isis, but Mother is the only true parent I have. I used to wonder so much about him… and even missed him. Wished he could be there with me. I hoped one day I’d become strong enough to go see him in Duat. But…” He grimaced. “It wasn’t to be. And since I learned about who he was, really? What he did to you and Mother?” He shook his head. “He is a stranger to me. That is all.”

Seth reached out and took his left hand, squeezing it. “It’s okay to… to hurt. Over it. Over what you didn’t have.”

Horus smiled at him. “Thank you. I don’t think… I am, really, but I appreciate it.” But there was something in his gaze that was a bit unsettled. Like perhaps even he couldn’t name what he was feeling.

“Is there something *I* can do?” Perhaps he couldn’t save future Anubis from his fate. He could train Anubis to be the best fighter there was, and even with Isis’ help it would be years in the doing. But Horus was here, and Seth… wanted to be there for him, too, as Horus had been, in both realms now.

Horus smiled and raised their clasped hands to kiss Seth’s fingers. “Stay with me. Let me love you.”

Seth snorted and said, "Of course," with a smile.

Horus dissolved his own headdress and leaned forward to capture Seth’s lips, pushing him down onto the bed. The moon shone on them: the way Horus kissed every bit of Seth’s skin he could reach, the way Seth clung to Horus, sometimes pushing his nails in to draw blood, which only made Horus hungrier for him, the way they clung to each other in the night. It was difficult to see where one started and the other began, as they pushed back the grasping fear of Duat and Osiris.

In the morning, they would plan. But for tonight, there was just this. And Osiris hadn't taken it from them. And as the days passed, even this one, Seth believed more and more that he wouldn't. And on days he didn't, Horus would be there, too, to remind him. Like today.

“You’re mine tonight,” Horus whispered into Seth’s neck much later, buried deep in Seth, with Seth’s legs holding him there. There was a hunger in those words. A want. And assurance, too. It made Seth's cheeks heat. "*Mine.*" His left hand grasped Seth's thigh, his right supported the back of Seth's neck.

“Yours,” Seth confirmed, his arms wrapped around Horus’ chest to keep him close, feeling the life in him, the strength that kept them both going, through everything. The god he'd chosen to be beside, who chose him in return. Who stood by him when Seth couldn't stand by himself. “Not just tonight." He placed a kiss on Horus' shoulder and groaned as Horus lightly shifted his hips. "Always.”

Chapter End Notes

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