Calmer Storm

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Calmer Storm

by FallLover

Summary

After the second match in the trial for the throne, Seth lets Maat question Horus about the “stone” boat, revealing his duplicity to everyone, and winning the trial for Seth.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own, and is being posted here as a back-up while Ao3 is down.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Maat reached up to the white ostrich feather in her hair as she stood before the assembled immortals in Heliopolis, and declared, “I shall confirm for myself.” She gazed at Horus steadily, clearly firm in her decision to learn the truth about the stone boat race.

There were mutterings throughout the area as onlookers wondered just what would come of this. Had Horus really cheated?

Seth felt antsy and wanted to continue talking, to drag the truth to light himself out of Horus’ very flesh if he had to. He hated being played for a fool, on multiple fronts. And it would serve Osiris right to watch his heir ground into the dirt.

But it would be even better if these arrogant morons proved their own duplicity. They came to Heliopolis all self-righteous in their entitlement to take what was his, to prove he was weak and unworthy.

They could clean up their own mess.

So he crossed his arms as Maat’s scales appeared once more.

Horus’ heart appeared on the scale.

The demigod, for all his arrogance during the second match, stared ahead calmly. He looked like a bloody mess after what Seth had already done to him.

Hathor dithered nearby, looking worried and unsure about what to do.

“Horus,” Maat said, gazing at him levelly before repeating her earlier question, “Is it true that you did not use a stone boat in the stone boat race?”

Seth smirked. There was no way for Horus to duck around it like Osiris had when he’d testified before. For once, Seth almost respected Maat.

Horus gazed at Maat for a while before pushing himself to stand. Red blood dripped to the floor as he moved, and Hathor rose with him, making worried noises.

Horus squared his shoulders, as if trying to look dignified somehow, despite his injuries.

Seth scoffed, but almost respected the demigod’s drive.

“Yes,” Horus said, before gasps filled the area from the observing immortals. “It’s true. I did not use a stone boat in the stone boat race. I used a wooden boat.”

Ra shook her head while smiling. Her golden jewelry glittered in the sunshine.

Isis clenched her hands from where she stood by Ra and glared.

“And I won largely with the help of my mother and father,” Horus continued, “not my own power.”

“Horus!” Isis half-hissed, clutching her flail. She looked ready to fight.

Seth grinned, wondering just how far Horus was willing to dig himself into a hole.

“Osiris gave my mother a seed to use,” Horus continued as he met Maat’s gaze, “to destroy Seth’s boat, while I distracted him.”

Seth recalled the black vines creeping over his own boat, with those hideous red flowers Osiris had tried to gift him hundreds of years ago. *The parasite is still trying to claw his way back to me,* Seth thought, angrily, recalling their confrontation after Osiris testified, when Seth had been again unable to fight back. *He still won’t let things go.*

He’d crush the other god however he could. Starting with his precious son.

“Did they give you the boat you used?” Maat asked, focusing on Horus.

“The wooden boat I used…” Horus began. He looked at Seth, making Seth frown. “Came from Anubis, the son of Seth and Nephthys.”

Seth’s grin twitched. *Anubis?*

The scales didn’t move. Horus was telling the truth.

Somehow, Seth was still surprised. He wasn’t sure why, after everything that happened, particularly Anubis helping Seth’s enemies enter Heliopolis largely unchallenged.

He looked around for the boy, to see Anubis hiding in the shadow of an entryway.

Anubis met Seth’s gaze. There was some fear in his eyes, but anger, too. He expected Seth to punish him again, and he wasn’t running away. He was only *just* barely shaking.

Seth frowned at him, then shook his head and looked away. He’d deal with Anubis later.

Seth wondered if Horus was trying to spin things to imply Seth ordered Anubis to make Horus cheat, losing the match for Horus. But Seth would have been better served had Anubis not acted at all: Seth *would* have won, fair and square, while it was unlikely for Horus to have ever left the initial shore.

Not that it would stop the gossip, Seth thought. But he’d survive that. It was practically tame in comparison to other things they said about him.

At worst, he thought, *I’ll have lost this round anyway.*

“It was not with his father’s blessing,” Horus continued, surprising Seth. “It was of his own volition, to ensure his father lost.”

There were more murmurs around the court: chatter that Seth couldn’t control his own son.

He led Isis’ group here before the trial began, Seth thought in some annoyance as he glanced around at the audience. *I already couldn’t control him. Or did you flighty morons forget already?* He’d punished Anubis for that.

But he also wasn’t surprised Anubis stood up to him again. Clearly, Seth’s little lesson after discovering Anubis’ first betrayal just made Anubis more determined in his goals to rip away Seth’s throne. Perhaps he even hoped to have Seth executed, should Seth lose the trial.

Seth didn’t know what he’d do with Anubis going so far to directly hinder him. But there was nothing he could do about it *now*. He wasn’t planning to drag Anubis out for another beating. That would hardly win Seth the trial.

“I see,” Maat said, looking between Horus, Seth, and Anubis. “This changes things, then. And Seth is correct, there must be discipline for this indiscretion.”

“How was Horus meant to win?” Isis demanded, making Maat turn to her. Isis still looked furious as she gestured to Horus. “He’s not even a god! You allowed him to use Nut’s blessing during the first match!”

“Nut’s blessing is part of Horus,” Maat said, coolly. “It is not a false boat pretending to be something else. Or unauthorized aid from an outside party to damage his opposition.”

Isis scoffed at that and glared at Seth, as if it was Seth’s fault that she and her allies had cheated. He supposed she probably blamed him for *making* her do these things.

“Perhaps it would be best to consider this match null and void,” Maat suggested, glancing between Horus and Seth. “Although Horus did not rightfully win, Seth did not make it to the finish line with a stone boat, either.”

“How is that discipline?!” Seth demanded, furious at the arrogance of the suggestion. “He might as well have won anyway!” They’d have the third match all the same.

They always just help each other, Seth thought, angrily. *They always let him sneak away into the shadows… It’s no different than the tricks he pulled in the first match…* But they hadn’t been successful in making Horus win, so he hadn’t fought that. This, though…

“It would be wrong to say the match is null and void,” Horus interjected, stepping towards Maat. “If not for my, and my parents’, deceptions, Seth would have won, handily. And we counted on Seth’s arrogance to win. And I still might have won, had Seth been the braggadocious monster people say he is, and lost his temper here.”

Seth had half a mind to beat the demigod up some more.

“But Seth chose the peaceful route in resolving this,” Horus continued, looking at Seth coolly. “I believe that deserves merit. Give him the win. The trial is over.”

“Horus!” Isis cried, angrily. “Think of everything we’ve done! He’ll kill us! He’ll destroy Egypt again!” Her eyes were wild and she clutched her flail.

“I believe that Seth can be reasoned with,” Horus said with a glance at Isis before turning again to Seth. “I believe Seth could have killed me any number of times now, and he hasn’t. Isn’t that true, Uncle?”

Seth raised an eyebrow at Horus, still not liking the demigod’s presumption. “I just wanted to give you a fair chance of winning.” He needed to prove before everyone that he deserved his position.

Horus nodded. “Then I hope you’ll use this trial as a learning experience and consider your future actions as God Supreme fairly, too, and treat your fellow gods and the people of Egypt with mercy. Because I will uphold my promise to serve you with sincerity, in part because I believe you can be righteous.”

Seth rolled his eyes. He had no idea what he was going to do with the demigod. Kill him? Imprison him?

Maybe Nephthys wants company she can stand, he thought, glumly.

“But should you fail that,” Horus continued, “I have lived my life scrounging for survival. And as Representative of the Heavens, I am not above trying this again.” There was a hardness in his expression that Seth was surprised by, when he was facing loss, servitude, and possibly death.

The pigeon still thinks he can stand up to me, how adorable. Seth gave him a sharp grin. “You’re ridiculous to demand anything from me. Let alone make *threats*.” He would rule as he *pleased*, not how this malcontent demanded. Osiris would have no sway in Seth’s reign.

“The gods stood up to you once,” Horus countered. “What’s to stop them from doing so again?”

“Their precious *Representative of the Heavens* wouldn’t be with them,” Seth said with a smirk. “You’re the only reason any of them have the courage to be here.” Probably because Horus was a useful sacrificial pawn: he was the child of Isis and Osiris, neither of whom had much power. He was also a demigod who could be abandoned on a whim, rather than any of the gods still shaking in their crowns whenever Seth walked near. Even Osiris risked nothing by losing him.

Osiris already nearly killed one son. What was a second?

Horus nodded. “Be that as it may. With the trial potentially concluded in this manner, I have other considerations to discuss with you, but I think they’re best spoken of in private.”

Seth frowned at this. “What? You really think I need to listen to anything you say, after you faked your way through an entire match?”

“You’ll want to hear what I have to say,” Horus said. “As your subject, it would serve you well to show you care about our troubles.” He smiled softly. “And you can just kill me if you want afterward, anyway.”

Seth scoffed at that, wondering if representatives of heaven were picked for their audacity.

Horus looked at Maat. “Maat, I wish you to oversee the talks.” He looked at Isis and Thoth. “Mother, Thoth, I also ask for your presence there.”

Maat sighed and said, “Very well. The trial is paused for the moment while we consider ending it due to recent events.”

Seth rolled his eyes, because of *course* she wasn’t conceding defeat yet. Of course this was still the golden boy’s show, because of course everyone worshipped the ground Osiris had tread on centuries later, including his better-known progeny.

It made Seth furious. He still didn’t have what he wanted: a full end to the trial. He wanted it done with. He wanted…

…He needed time to think about what to do with Anubis.

“Hathor,” Horus said, “Please wait here.”

“B-But your injuries!” Hathor said, glancing between Horus and Seth, just in case Seth lunged forward again.

“I’ll be fine,” Horus said with a gentle smile. “Thank you for your concern.” He walked past her to follow after Maat, despite his still-bleeding injuries.

Seth smirked at Hathor, who grimaced at him before returning to her throne.

Isis walked past Ra, glaring at Seth as she went.

Thoth stood up to follow after Maat, Isis, and Horus.

Seth supposed hearing out the damn bird wouldn’t take up *too* much time, and he really *could* just kill the damn pigeon at any time. So he angrily followed the group back inside the palace, leaving the bickering immortals behind. But he paused at the entryway to call back, “Anyone I didn’t *personally* invite here might consider being *elsewhere* when these talks are done.” He grinned, showing his sharp teeth, and heard alarmed cries before he turned and followed Maat again.

That would send them scattering. He didn’t want any of their noisy nonsense around his palace anymore.

He saw Maat shaking her head. As if he’d care about her opinion after witnessing her eating up Osiris’ lies and Isis and Horus’ manipulations.

Their small group walked into a quiet side chamber in the palace chosen by Maat. There was a sky portal, showing the sun and blue sky. Potted plants rested around the walls. Murals

showing Seth and his siblings working covered the walls. All the servants raced away from them.

“So?” Seth asked once they were all gathered. He glared at Horus. “What nonsense are you going to beg for?” He assumed Horus would plead to be spared or something. And Seth wasn’t sure on the matter: killing Horus would keep Seth’s position safer and perhaps salve some of his own anger, but he imagined Isis would interfere. She hadn’t stopped him from beating Horus up earlier, but the other gods had stepped in for her. *And* she’d had victory within her reach. With the trial essentially lost for her, things were more complicated.

He knew what she was like when she felt wronged.

“I wish to bargain for my mother’s safety,” Horus said.

Isis gripped her flail, clearly furious, but stayed silent when Maat glanced at her.

Seth scoffed before replying, “With what? You have nothing I want.”

“You need Isis for what I’m about to tell you,” Horus said, keeping his eyes on Seth. “I don’t know of any god who can replace her knowledge or abilities.” He looked at Thoth. “Not even Thoth.”

Thoth frowned at that, clearly a little put out, but still said, “Isis *is* the god of magic, if that’s what this is about?” He avoided Seth’s gaze.

Seth rolled his eyes. “Ah yes, another leader of my enemies. I *definitely* need her.” He could just imagine her trying to stab him in the back as he strolled about the palace. And he knew she still had other plans to work to get his throne and take her revenge. “For *what?”*

“A plot that involves your wife,” Horus said.

Seth stiffened, thinking of Nephthys sitting in her unlocked cell, not speaking the few times he went near her in the hundreds of years since she’d placed herself there. She hadn’t done anything in regard to him since he discovered what she’d done with Osiris, and then when she’d helped Isis out of the labyrinth.

Has she, like Anubis, finally decided to move, as well? He wondered. *Is that why I’d need Isis? To undo Nephthys’ magic?* It wasn’t like she was in any danger: everyone assumed she was a victim of Seth’s. But he had many enemies… He wondered if one of them might try to attack him through her.

Or if Horus was threatening her. And Seth wouldn’t let that stand.

Seth kept a cool face as he met Horus’ gaze and demanded, “What the fuck are you talking about?”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus didn't back down from Seth's anger. He simply gazed back at his uncle and said, "I was given a gift by Hathor after the start of the trial. A hand mirror seemingly with a blessing on it."

Isis frowned at that, though at least she wasn't attacking Seth yet.

Seth scowled at the apparent tangent, "And what, you gave it back to her?"

Horus lips parted briefly before he asked, "No. Why?"

"She was waving a hand mirror around after the first match when I passed her in the hall," Seth said as he crossed his arms. He still recalled how bizarre dealing with her fire magic was. *What does this have to do with anything? I already know about the junk mirror she's obsessed with.*

Horus stared at him for a while again before asking, "Was it bronze, with gold and red ornamentation? And a sun on the back?"

Seth frowned at him and asked, "Yeah. Why?" He remembered it being a gaudy piece of crap, if anything.

Horus looked away for a while, seemingly thinking, before looking back at Seth and saying, "I didn't give Hathor back the mirror, but I'm curious if there's more to this than even I thought. After the first match, I was in my room, and saw the mirror shine. When I drew close to investigate it, I saw *you* in the mirror, and was drawn inside, and met Nephthys."

Seth blinked in confusion at that. "What?" *He saw me?*

"I do not believe it is the Nephthys who is imprisoned in the cell in the palace," Horus said. "Though I haven't spoken to her about it… The person I met in the mirror, who claimed to be the *real* Nephthys, while the one in the cell in Heliopolis is a fake, also professed no knowledge of events after what sounded like the start of your marriage." He looked at Isis then. "She'd been in there a long time. If how she understands things is true, I imagine someone may have cast a spell on Nephthys in the past to do this."

The real Nephthys trapped in a mirror? Seth thought, horrified. *What nonsense…*

"It's an odd illusion," Thoth said, thoughtfully, "if that's what it is. And Seth being related to something Hathor gave you…?"

"I don't know that it was an illusion," Horus said. "And I don't know why Uncle Seth appeared there, though the timing is curious. But Nephthys was not what trapped me there,

nor did she keep me there, like I imagine an illusion would. She claimed to be trapped, herself, by the mirror, and wanted me to warn others about her."

Seth's hands curled into fists. "This is ridiculous. Nephthys has never been captured by *anyone!* Let alone some magic mirror! I can summon her here to talk to her, and prove it!" She'd never spoken to him of a curse! He'd have done something if he'd known!

Even if he couldn't do magic, he knew his wife!

He pressed his lips together.

Do I know her? Is this why she went to Osiris? Was she just an illusion the whole time?

It sounded too good – and too horrible – to be true.

"I will speak in front of Maat's scales again," Horus said, gazing back into Seth's eyes and giving Seth pause. "Everything I say is the truth as I know it, though I profess I don't fully understand it either. This kind of magic is beyond me."

Seth scoffed at that and crossed his arms.

"I will hand over the mirror," Horus said. "So Isis can uncover the mystery behind this, perhaps with Thoth's help, as I lack the ability to undo this, if it's even possible. But you must guarantee Isis' safety."

"And if it has nothing to do with Nephthys?" Seth demanded, finding the whole situation farcical. "If it's just some stupid illusion created by the flighty daughter of another enemy?"

"Then I suppose what you do is up to you," Horus said, neutrally. "But if you don't agree, you won't find the mirror again."

Sand swirled around Seth's ankles. "You'd threaten me with Nephthys?!"

"You believe it has nothing to do with her," Horus countered, standing his grand, even as sand approached his feet, and a pot holding a plant nearby exploded, sending ceramic shards all over. "I believe it does. And if nothing else, it's worth investigating." He glanced at Isis before looking back at Seth. "My mother is the reason I am here. I have never sought your defeat. I solely wish to see that she is safe."

"Horus!" Isis said, clearly growing angry.

But Horus only watched Seth, clearly committed.

Seth breathed in deeply before scoffing again, "You think, after what your damn mother pulled in that match, that I will *generously* agree to all of this?" Growing those horrible plants, destroying his boat, helping her son cheat…

Isis had turned her back on him before, but this was something else on top of all that. He knew she hated him, and it wasn't surprising. But it didn't bank his fury.

Horus bowed his head. “I know we wronged you, my mother included. But we were trying to restore my mother’s rights, and to protect Egypt, and you are a dangerous god, so much risk was necessary. That is also part of why I am willing to be ruthless again. Because the potential reward is worth it.”

Seth could almost respect that. He let the sand go, leaving the room calmer.

Thoth breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

“I would readily conclude the trial if this were accepted,” Maat said as she looked Seth’s way. “Egypt could use the two sides working on reconciliation, even in this slight a manner. And if the god of peace is truly cursed somehow, perhaps removing the curse, and restoring Nephthys, whatever version of her is real, may yet lead to greater healing.”

Seth nearly snarled at that, still smarting over how much leeway Horus’ side was getting. Even if he supposed there was maybe something in Nephthys being cursed affecting other things… There was far more to what was wrong with Egypt than just that.

Osiris was the rot at the core of everything, not Nephthys.

Seth wondered if Maat thought Nephthys could control *him* if she was freed of this hypothetical curse, perhaps make him play nice with the other gods who backed Osiris. It was almost laughable.

“A wise king would agree,” Maat noted. “You have little to lose, and perhaps much to gain. Unless you don’t care for your wife?”

Seth felt his chest heat up, painfully. His feelings for Nephthys were a mess at the best of times. In the hundreds of years since he’d learned what she’d done, they’d barely spoken more than a handful of words to each other. He thought she’d leave, perhaps join up with Isis after helping Isis escape the labyrinth, but she never had. She’d just stayed in her cell. And he stayed far away from her, in part because he imagined she didn’t want him around her. After all, she’d chosen Osiris. She’d lied to him for hundreds of years.

He couldn’t abandon her, though, even now. He wouldn’t. Even if Horus’ story sounded farfetched. Once, he’d have done anything to help Nephthys if she needed it. And he couldn’t turn his back on her if she’d really been harmed. If she’d been replaced somehow and the woman he’d cared for was suffering…

He couldn’t abide by that. But something else was bothering him…

Why wait until now to use this? Seth wondered, as he gazed at Horus, who waited quietly for Seth to make up his mind. *He could have brought it up before the second match started, to goad me into backing down… Unless he knows it’s a flimsy lie and a last resort…*

That made him even angrier.

“A hand mirror from Hathor…” Isis said, quietly and thoughtfully. “This sounds familiar…”

Seth looked at Isis, who was frowning at the ground. He also felt something vaguely twig his memory, though he thought it was just the night of the first match, when he'd had Hathor's hand mirror in his possession.

"Didn't you get a mirror like that from Osiris?" Isis asked as she looked at Seth. Her blue eyes were sharp and angry. "After he defeated Ra. It was included in your portion of the winnings."

Seth frowned and thought back. It was a long time ago… "I did. But I gave it to…"

"What's all this?"

"I don't know. You can have it."

"A bronze mirror? How pretty!"

His eyes widened in alarm as he recalled that day.

Horus was watching him, still, as if he somehow knew what Seth remembered, though there was no way he could.

Seth's hands clenched tighter into fists. *Did I give Nephthys something cursed? What did it do to her?*

Is this… my fault?

He *wanted* to storm out and demand answers from Hathor. He wanted—!

No. He breathed in heavily, recalling what hasty decisions had led him to in the past. He refused to be Osiris, rushing to his own doom.

Attacking Hathor wouldn't necessarily benefit Nephthys, if some part of her was stuck in a mirror somehow. And if it was just some trick, showing his hand so obviously would be foolish: most of the wars he fought were instigated by Ra, and she'd readily back her favored child if it came to it. He could be dragged into a new war for no reason, even if he did have a desire to hunt Ra and her progeny down.

He reminded himself that he couldn't use complex magic. His sand was one thing, but anything else was beyond him. He couldn't undo curses on objects, and when he'd held Hathor's hand mirror, which was seemingly near-identical to the one in his memory, he'd felt nothing in particular about it.

Even ignoring dealing with Hathor, he didn't know anyone else he could trust on this even if he had the mirror in his hands: Isis was the goddess of magic, and even Thoth, the god of knowledge, seemed perplexed by it. Going to war wouldn't solve the issue, and, if Nephthys were cursed, it would just prolong her suffering.

Seth was out of options. Cornered, even in victory.

He glared at Isis, who glared right back at him. He at least couldn't detect any deception from her, though that meant little: Isis was a good strategist, too.

"If Hathor," Isis said, "and perhaps Ra, are making a move against Horus, then, for my part, it bears investigating. And if something has happened to Nephthys, then…" She breathed in deeply. "I'll discover what this is, and try to break it."

"Fine," Seth said. He looked first at Horus and then Maat. "I guarantee Isis' protection while she's investigating the mirror to help Nephthys. Or whatever is stuck in there." If it was nothing, then he wouldn't really be wasting time, and it should keep Isis too busy to plan more attacks on him.

Horus breathed a sigh of relief.

"Then we will end the trial," Maat said. "Seth is the clear winner."

Isis scowled and looked away.

Seth felt a bit hollow. His enemies were stuck with him, after all. True, he'd been hunting Isis down, but now that she was here, that was moot. And without the trial as a distraction…

She'll be focused on this, he thought. *I can figure out what to do with her after this is sorted.*

"It could be dangerous to confront Hathor now," Horus warned as he gazed at Seth. "It's likely she knows what the mirror does."

"Could she manipulate it from a distance?" Isis asked. "She's never demonstrated that kind of power…"

"She used fire magic," Seth said, drawing everyone's attention again. "When I confronted her. She's clearly been keeping her abilities secret." Certainly she was if she knew curses strong enough to affect a god without anyone else knowing.

"So try not to antagonize her or Ra," Isis said. "After all, if it's the same mirror somehow, Osiris took the mirror from Ra. Who knows what it really does? Or what Ra's plans are."

Seth rolled his eyes. He knew, after all the years of being at war. He didn't need Isis to remind him. He looked at Horus. "Where is the mirror, then?"

Seth stared at the mirror in Isis' hands as they stood in Horus' room in the palace. Horus had brought their whole group there, and opened a chest where he'd dug out the mirror.

I could have found it, he thought as he gazed at the thing, so clear now in his memory from ages past. *There are precious few places for him to hide it, after all.* Perhaps Horus' threat was just an empty one, but he still didn't have the power to do anything with it without Isis' magical expertise. Even now, he didn't detect anything from it. If he'd rejected the agreement, and Isis fled or simply refused to help, he'd have an object he couldn't anything with, and no

one to consult for help, while hoping he'd taken the correct gambit that Horus' story was just lies.

He'd have never been able to live with himself. He'd have never known if the Nephthys he knew was even real. After everything they'd gone through, how would he have even been able to check? Maat was unlikely to help him, especially if the trial continued. Sure, he might have won, but Maat's help wasn't guaranteed even then.

“If Hathor has a second one of these,” Thoth said as he looked at the mirror, too, “And Seth confronted her around the same time Horus looked into it… maybe the mirror has a two-way communication function of some kind.”

When the other gods looked at him, Thoth smiled serenely. “It’s just a thought! I’ve seen some magic that works that way before, though it’s very complex… But Ra might be able to do it.”

Seth wondered if the birdbrain was trying to justify sticking around.

Thoth noticed Seth’s look and moved slightly behind Maat, putting her between them.

Seth snorted and looked back at the mirror.

“If so,” Isis said, “the question is how to get it from her without alerting her to what’s going. Or if my tampering with the mirror would alert her, and possibly endanger Nephthys.”

Assuming it’s really connected to Nephthys somehow, Seth thought. He still wasn’t sure about the idea of Nephthys being trapped and replaced.

“Before you mess with the mirror itself,” Maat said, “You could question the Nephthys we know. The one in the cell. To get her memories of the mirror, if they exist, or perhaps see if she has some inkling about it and has been hiding it. She’s never spoken about anything like this?” She looked at Seth, pointedly.

Seth shrugged. “She never mentioned something like that. She just liked the mirror, and we never spoke about it again. It was right before she became pregnant with Anubis, so we were distracted with other matters.” He frowned.

A cursed mirror as a gift from Osiris, coming into Seth and Nephthys’ possession right before Nephthys began pregnant with Osiris’ child? It had to be a coincidence…

Or was it? Was he too quick to believe it was too good to be true that this might be connected to the mess with Osiris?

“We have to be wary of her,” Horus said. “If she’s really fake, she might alert Hathor.”

“An illusion like that couldn’t have been maintained for so long,” Isis said, shaking her head. “She had to give birth, and I was there for the pregnancy. Even Ra would struggle to maintain such a powerful spell through that.” She gazed at the mirror. “We can be careful with the questioning, but whatever Horus saw in the mirror, there must be more to it. And the Nephthys we know is one of our few leads.”

“Then we’ll talk to her,” Seth said. He hated that his hand shook a little. “And see if she knows anything.”

He caught Isis looking at him with a frown, and wondered if she’d connected the dots, too, about the timing, and how Osiris might be involved in this. But he had no desire to say anything in front of Maat, Thoth, and Horus.

Maybe it’s irrelevant, he thought. It might not matter at all. He didn’t know if Nephthys would spill her secret about her relationship with Osiris to the others, but just worrying about it wouldn’t get them anywhere, either. If she was an illusion, he had no control over what she might do. And if she was cursed, what mattered more was fixing the curse, not his pride.

He wondered if Isis had told Horus, anyway, and how much, if so. It didn’t make a ton of sense for her to leave her son in the dark about things, though it made him wonder why Horus never used it during the trial, to show how weak Seth was. Even now, Horus just stood quietly, letting the older immortals handle things, as if he had nothing at all to contribute.

He's cunning in his own way, Seth thought, still smarting over the match. He’d won, but Horus was successful in manipulating him to a degree.

I won against Osiris in the end, too, he thought as he turned to the doorway to lead them to Nephthys’ cell.

But once outside, he discovered Anubis standing nearby, his arms at his sides, his hands curled into fists. There was a determined expression on his face as he gazed up at Seth.

“Father,” Anubis said. “We should talk.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth ordered the others to wait while Seth walked with Anubis to another private room where they could chat. The sun was lower in the sky and casting things into shadow, and Anubis' expression was even glummer than usual as he gazed up at his father. Anubis was still too thin and pale, but he was defiant. And Seth could respect that, at least. He wanted Anubis to fight for himself, and not give in to fear. It was probably part of why he'd helped Horus: to prove Seth hadn't cowed him. Or to fight back.

You brought an army into our home to punish and kill me, Seth thought as he gazed down at Anubis. *Isis threatened me with a knife. Horus stabbed me.*

It didn't matter that Isis and Horus – at least at the time – hadn't been real threats, but the gods coming in for the trial had been difficult to deal with. And as a result, Seth had to face Osiris again for the first time in hundreds of years.

You've been punished once, Seth thought, *why not run this time?*

Anubis could hate him. Even fight him. And he could choose a side that wasn't Seth's. But that didn't mean Seth was regretful, or that Seth would be somehow merciful *this* time.

"Please don't punish me in front of Mother," Anubis said, with a firm voice.

The corner of Seth's right eye twitched. He and Anubis had fought before, in practice, but that moment after Horus and Isis' forces arrived…

It was different.

"She didn't like it last time," Anubis continued. And there was an odd neutrality in his tone, as if he was trying to distance himself from matters. "And despite everything, it still hasn't convinced her to abandon you." He sounded angry, then. "I don't want to bring her more pain needlessly."

Yes, Seth thought as he gazed at Anubis, choosing to not punish Anubis for speaking before Seth gave him leave. *Perhaps her reaction is proof that there is some merit to Horus' ridiculous story.*

Seth knew Nephthys loved Anubis. Or at least she'd demonstrated it before. Nephthys was a loving goddess, and she'd have loved any child she had, or so he thought. But to do so little in light of Anubis' struggles? Her begging hadn't exactly made Seth stop, not after everything she'd done. Surely at some point she'd have enough and leave him, and stop punishing them both. Or try to intercede: there was magic she could have used, and chose not to.

If she'd been afraid of Seth turning on *her* instead, ignoring that Seth had never done so in the entire time they'd been together, why not find a way to escape? She'd helped Isis before. She was creative in her own way, and quite powerful as a god of peace. She and Anubis could have gotten out somehow. It's not like Seth had ever *found* Isis and Horus while they were on the run.

But if she's not really Nephthys, Seth thought, grimly, *or not fully herself due to a curse, maybe she doesn't realize how much her inaction is hurting Anubis. Maybe she doesn't know how to properly leave.*

Then again, Seth wasn't the only person Nephthys had lied to. Perhaps hurting Anubis was more part of her personality than he thought.

But there was still the chance that what they were planning could help not only Nephthys but also Anubis. And no matter how angry and hurt Seth was by Anubis' actions, he still wanted Anubis to ultimately find happiness, even if it meant watching Anubis and Nephthys leave forever.

Anubis straightened his shoulders, as if preparing for another beating. Most gods would expect such a thing. Or perhaps even expect Seth to kill him, given the rumors about Seth's proclivities.

I wouldn't murder my own son, Seth thought, angrily. *I'm not Osiris*.

"You're not going to fight back?" Seth finally demanded. "Even though you assume I'll beat you like I did last time?" If Seth were in Anubis' shoes, he'd probably attack first. Geb and Nut were distant parents, so it wasn't like he'd ever been in a similar situation, but he wasn't one to let his enemies just attack him without repercussion.

Anubis pressed his lips together, but stayed still, as if daring Seth onward.

"You've shown so much initiative, Anubis," Seth said, annoyed now. "It's unlike you to be a coward. Even if you use others as proxies." Seth smiled, then. "But you're a proper general's son, I suppose, spreading your pieces on a board to fight against me, rather than simply confronting me yourself, knowing it won't work. I can almost respect that."

Anubis' face twisted in distaste, as if Seth's respect were revolting.

"A general doesn't back down because his pieces failed," Seth said, frowning now at Anubis. "He comes up with another strategy. And another. And another. I imagine you have others lined up even now." He imagined that once Nephthys' interrogation was over, Anubis would skulk around until he could talk to Isis in private, perhaps planning their next move.

Seth needed to ensure Horus was somewhere Isis and Anubis couldn't use him. Horus was Seth's servant now, allegedly, but the demigod was tricky in his own right, and needed to be handled appropriately.

Anubis' eyes narrowed a bit, but it was hard to tell if that was because Seth guessed right or not.

Seth sighed and said, “Your little gambit won you little, other than embarrassing me. I still came out the victor.” The throne was properly his. Isis and Horus were in his power. The gods were afraid.

Nephthys would be cured. Things could perhaps, at least on some level, be as they were. Even if Nephthys left, and even took Anubis with her, things might be better.

It didn’t matter that it brought him little joy.

It reminded him too much of the night Osiris died. Seth’s foolish brother, who’d discounted Seth’s abilities, too. And lost.

And left Seth in turmoil.

Seth looked at Anubis and saw flashes of Osiris: from his face to his haughty arrogance, and hated everything about it. It didn’t matter that Osiris wasn’t around to instruct Anubis. He was there, in Anubis’ very blood. In how Anubis had sided with Isis.

Anubis and Osiris both wanted Seth dead, even if the reasons were different.

Seth grimaced and said, “Go to your room. I’ll decide on your punishment later.”

Anubis’ eyes widened in surprise. “What? But, Father—!”

“That was an order,” Seth said, making Anubis step back. “Or do you want your punishment to be worse?” Anubis already knew how bad it could be.

Anubis clenched his hands into fists, but said nothing, as if being isolated in his palace rooms was a *trial*.

It wasn’t like Seth was going to stick him in the dungeons with the human prisoners.

But when he thought about it, he sighed and said, “Fine. You want something punishing rather than stewing in your own frustration?”

Anubis looked up at him in surprise.

Seth simply gazed back, wondering if one day, Anubis would aim true in his attacks on Seth, and make things simpler for them both. “I have a job for you. It will be hard.”

Anubis’ expression grew firm again. “I can do whatever it is.” He likely thought it was some kind of trial to prove himself.

Seth snorted and said, “The human prisoners. They looked weak and underfed in the arena with Horus. Go see how things are going with them. That’s your job now.”

“…What?” Anubis seemed shocked now.

Seth smirked and replied, “You wanted to overthrow the *tyrant*, didn’t you? You wanted to free your mother. Well, here’s your chance to free *someone* if you so choose. But you’re

responsible for them. And you might find that taking care of humans so they don't just spontaneously die is harder than you think." He knew well enough how easily they perished, even with proper care, from his years in the army and working alongside Isis.

Anubis looked worried, then. It was a *lot* of responsibility. More than just welcoming guests or being sneaky. "But you never cared if they died…"

Seth laughed and said, "They're just humans, so why *should* I care?" Osiris was the one who existed for humans, not Seth.

"But…" Anubis began slowly, "You fought for so many years to protect them…"

"And for what?" Seth demanded. "They worship their precious Osiris. They worship Isis, who ran from helping Egypt after Osiris—!" He blinked and stared at Anubis, who was gazing back at him in surprise.

Seth scoffed and said, "Fine. If you think you know better what it is to be a king, then that's your new charge. Prove you're better than me."

Anubis grimaced, but didn't respond this time. He was accepting it.

Seth breathed in deeply and turned away to leave. He didn't care about any prisoners now that he finally had Isis. And it looked like he was going to have other headaches to keep him occupied for a time.

Everyone thinks they know me, Seth thought in frustration. But as he walked away, he rethought his decision to bring so many to question Nephthys. Anubis was proof that he couldn't just leave things be.

He needed to talk to Isis.

Seth and Isis went to Nephthys' cell alone, walking the quiet and darkening corridors of the main palace together in largely uncomfortable silence. The slaps of their footsteps echoed on the stone.

Seth had ordered only Isis would accompany him. He wanted to keep what Nephthys had to say to as few ears as possible. Of course, he didn't trust Isis, but after everything they'd gone through, he had connected the dots on what she knew of the night Osiris died…

And if she knew and hadn't spoken about it yet, when it would have benefitted her to speak out and denounce Seth, declaring him a cuckhold and a weakling, he doubted she'd speak out now, beyond what was relevant for dealing with the mirror. But it would be stressful enough to navigate interrogating Nephthys about the past without worrying what Thoth, Maat, and Horus would do with any information they learned.

Horus had objected to Seth's order, saying, "But I can detect if she's lying!"

"So can your mother," Seth replied, annoyed at the stupid pigeon. "Are you my servant or aren't you?"

Isis simply frowned at everything, clearly annoyed. But she didn't protest. She also perhaps knew why Seth wanted fewer witnesses to whatever Nephthys had to say.

"We are not allies," Isis said now as she and Seth walked forward. "I will kill you if I get the chance." Her expression was angry and determined, and she marched ahead firmly.

Seth laughed and said, "I'm aware, dear Isis. And maybe if Nephthys is made whole, she'll help you, like she did before." Helping Isis escape the labyrinth wasn't the same as helping Isis commit murder, but it was something.

It had hurt back then, but Seth had grown past it. It was hardly the worst betrayal Nephthys had committed.

Isis scoffed, but only said a brief, "Monster," under her breath before remaining quiet.

Seth stayed quiet, too. Despite everything, this was the first time they were really alone together since Isis fled Heliopolis hundreds of years before. Of course, Seth had guaranteed Isis' safety, so it wasn't like he was going to *attack* her, but…

"I know there's a reason you left Nephthys behind when you escaped the labyrinth," Seth said. "You wouldn't just leave her with me if you hated and feared me so much." He needed proof of his belief, even if he was quite certain.

Isis was silent, but her angry gaze was focused ahead.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Seth demanded as he stopped walking. They were far enough from everyone else now, and the servants avoided the area. "I came to you to ask for you to join me against them both, and you kept silent!" All the years he'd wondered, and now...

Isis stopped and stood still for a time before slowly turning to face him. Her eyes were narrowed in distaste. "You expected me to join up with you? After everything you did?"

Seth scoffed and said, "Osiris and Nephthys betrayed us both, what did you *expect* me to do?" He assumed she'd have felt as betrayed as him.

"I expected my *friend* to come to me for help!" Isis said, her blue eyes bright with fury now. "As we worked together in the past!"

Seth was surprised at that remark. "But I *did* come to you for help!" He'd begged for her support, offered her a place at his side!

"*After* you'd gone to challenge Osiris first!" Isis said, clutching at her flail. "After you'd *lain* with him!"

Seth's eyes widened in horror. "What?! You… You knew?! When did you…? *How* did you —?!"

Isis scoffed and said, "Of course I knew! I ran into Nephthys after you did. I heard from Sekhmet and Nephthys. And then I ran after you. And I saw it all."

Seth's heart raced, and he found it was a little hard to breathe. But as Isis continued to glare at him, he felt some anger too. "Then why…? Why curse us both?! Why run?! We could have taken revenge together!" If Isis knew and still *fled*…?

Isis scoffed and said, "*You* are the reason he went insane. Why in the world would I side with *you* for anything?"

Seth's heart hurt, it was racing so fast. "What are you talking about?! Osiris' madness is his own!"

"After everything you've done," Isis said, bitingly, "to me, to my followers, to my *son*, you *dare* lecture me about such things…"

"He betrayed you first!" Seth said, furious she wasn't seeing sense. "He went behind your back *twice* and you still *revived* him?! Even knowing what he did?!" It made no sense.

"You gave Osiris your body in order to achieve your goals," Isis said. "So why couldn't I?"

Seth stared at her in shock.

"Osiris and I are married anyway," Isis said. Her eyes seemed to glow in mad fury. "I have to use all the pieces I have to my advantage."

Like a general, Seth thought, even as he felt a bit of a chill.

"Revenge was my goal," Isis finished. "I did whatever it took."

Seth scowled and said, "Revenge, huh? You gave birth to Osiris' son just so you could take revenge on *me* for not coming to you sooner? For doing what I had to in order to save Anubis?" It felt like what little he recalled of their friendship was falling to ash before him.

"I was your family," Isis said, still looking angry. But there was hurt in her voice, too, which was surprising. "And your closest friend. Your trusted companion. But after everything we'd gone through, every hardship we faced, you abandoned that, all for your selfish need to be acknowledged as superior. To be declared king!"

"What?" Seth said. "That's not true!"

"You never told me the truth," Isis countered. "If I hadn't run into Nephthys that night, you would have continued lying to me."

"You can't know that," Seth said, feeling shaky. "I just wasn't myself then, that's all. If I'd had more time…" He'd felt like he was holding himself together by his fingernails. Everything had been hard that night. And his pain and rage had been so tied together then.

"You took everything from me," Isis said. "My husband. My throne. My followers. And now my son's birthright. And you expect me to sympathize with you somehow?!"

"…Do you still love Osiris?" Seth demanded. "Is that what this is? Is that why you cursed yourself, too? You couldn't forgive yourself for loving him?" *Is that why you hated me just as*

much?

Isis scoffed at that. “You beat your own son bloody rather than denouncing him or your wife, and have the audacity to accuse me of anything?”

“I’m not accusing—!” Seth breathed in deeply, caught by what she’d said. “When did you learn about Anubis being beaten?”

“Osiris brought him to me,” Isis said, dismissively. “At the start of the trial. He asked me to care for Anubis’ injuries.”

Seth scowled. “As if he’d care for Anubis… He was the one who tried to kill Anubis *first*!”

“Then perhaps it makes you even,” Isis said. “You’ve both nearly killed him.”

“I didn’t—!” Seth scoffed and looked away. They were getting nowhere.

“You’ve won this trial,” Isis said. “But that doesn’t mean I give up. Once this business with Nephthys is over…”

“Even if it was Osiris who did it?” Seth asked. “You know it’s too much of a coincidence.” He simply didn’t understand how she *still* sided with Osiris!

“My revenge is against you both,” Isis said. “And if the curse makes it so that I can’t have what I want, as this whole farce seems designed to push things, then I will use Horus to get what I want.”

“He already lost to me,” Seth said. “Even with your help. And Osiris’ help.”

“Yes,” Isis said, coolly. “For once, you thought before you did something. And you managed to succeed.”

Seth laughed and said, “Tell that to Osiris. *He’s* the one who chose to kill himself.”

Isis’ eyes widened in surprise. “What?”

Seth gazed back at her, glad to surprise her somehow. To shake her rigid arrogance. “I suppose you left before that, then?”

She glared at him and stepped forward. “Tell me!”

Seth scoffed and replied, “No.” As he turned aside, he felt a spell grab him and pull him into the air. He struggled, even though it was like fighting smoke. He had no real way to escape it.

“You *will* tell me!” Isis said. Her eyes glowed blue. “Tell me how he died!”

Seth coughed and gagged, and tried to get out. But it was no use. The spell held him tightly. It made him so dizzy and immobilized him enough that he couldn’t even strike out at her.

It reminded him of that wretched night, with Osiris and his damn plants…

“Speak up!” Isis demanded. “You were so cocky before! All the spell does is make you tell the truth! Just tell me how he died!”

Seth coughed loudly, feeling saliva dribble down his chin. He was getting nowhere. He couldn’t win against Isis in a magic duel.

“The wine Osiris gave me…” he finally began, “I couldn’t turn into sand. Which made me think… perhaps I could die easily as a human being. And… if I died, I could be free of Osiris.”

Isis frowned at him, clearly confused. Seth wondered if she, like others, had assumed Seth just dismembered Osiris and that was that.

She deserved to know what a fool she was in love with.

“So I killed myself,” Seth said. The spell didn’t hurt him as much as he spoke. “Again and again. But he kept healing me, refusing to let me go. No matter how many times. How many ways.” He coughed twice before he could continue, “and then I opened a path to Duat, and the souls of those killed in war dragged me down.” He remembered the touch of their hands on his skin. The way they’d ripped that piece of his body to shreds.

“You went to Duat?” Isis asked, confused.

“Just as the wine made me mortal,” Seth said, “it was also filled with life. I used it to keep a piece of myself outside of Duat, hidden, to observe and see what Osiris would do.” Seth grinned, recalling Osiris’ ridiculous fumbling. “He believed me dead, and consumed Nephthys’ power of creation to reject his immortality, and descend into Duat after me. And he could not resurrect himself, either.”

Isis simply stared at him.

After a while, the spell released itself, and Seth fell to the ground. He’d had worse injuries than his butt hitting stone, and was more bothered by the spell exiting his lungs. He coughed until his throat felt clear. His powers were still his own, his body felt normal. Unlike with Osiris, the spell wasn’t long-lasting.

“We should question Nephthys,” Isis said. “We’ve delayed long enough.” She sounded tired, somehow.

Seth scowled and pushed himself up. He couldn’t attack Isis at the moment, due to his agreement with Horus, but he was tempted.

Even if he supposed after everything he’d done, it was her right, as well, to treat him this way. He’d gone to her that night in the hopes they could help each other in their revenge, not solely for his own gain. Even if she didn’t care for it, in the end.

But at least her outburst had twigged his thoughts when he recalled that wretched night. “Osiris said that love is a delusion created by Hathor.”

Isis frowned at him, clearly confused by the comment. “What?”

“Isn’t that strange?” Seth said. “He believed his actions were the *proper* way to show love. But his wording… And now this mirror of Hathor’s that can possibly create illusions?” He shook his head and looked down the hall, towards the cell where Nephthys kept herself. “Of course he was full of ridiculous nonsense about everything, as always. Insisting Nephthys agreed to marry him because he was *stronger*… But I thought maybe… *Maybe*… he knew about that mirror.”

“Maybe the mirror did something he planned?” Isis wondered. “It *is* too coincidental, after everything he’s done.”

So she doesn’t trust him, Seth thought. He supposed using Osiris was her means to revenge, as well. *She truly hates me almost as much as if not more than him.*

Isis breathed in deeply. “Then let us go and see for ourselves.”

Seth was almost impressed with the way Isis was so confident he wouldn’t do anything in revenge for her casting a spell on him, and would stick to his agreement with Horus. Despite how she viewed him as a monster, as someone who couldn’t be trusted or relied on.

But he needed Isis to figure out what had happened with Nephthys, and attacking Isis wouldn’t bring him closer to that goal.

And if Osiris really had a hand in this, Seth thought, *I want to know.*

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth and Isis found Nephthys sitting in the dark of her cell, gazing listlessly ahead. Her skin and clothes were dirty, likely from sitting and crawling around, but she was largely otherwise neat-looking, for someone who hadn't done much in hundreds of years, thanks to the blessings of godhood.

Seth remembered how she used to be so clean and pristine. How she used to have big baths with Anubis for fun and delight in new clothes and jewelry. Now she looked faded. Listless.

He wondered if Hathor or Osiris or both had done this to her. And why?

Nephthys looked up in surprise at Seth and Isis' arrival. Her eyes went to Seth, and he could see the slight alarm there.

Seth knew it was deserved. But he hadn't touched her since he learned the truth, when he'd held her arm as she verified what he'd heard from Sekhmet. And he'd never touched her in a way that caused harm in the entire time they'd been together.

He remembered Anubis' plea that Seth not abuse Anubis before Nephthys, and wondered if Nephthys thought Seth was just waiting to turn on her, too.

He supposed that was deserved, too.

Isis stepped forward, facing her sister, and said, "We have questions for you, Nephthys." Her voice was commanding rather than sympathetic. If she believed Nephthys was a victim of some plot, she did not demonstrate it.

Seth had thought she'd wanted revenge for what Nephthys had done to them all those years ago. And perhaps this was part of that.

Nephthys looked between them both, with a bit of fearfulness in her eyes. Then she finally asked, "Isis, it's been a while… You're… working together?"

"For now," Isis said as she waved her hand dismissively, clearly not wanting to touch on whatever temporary truce she and Seth had come to, or talk about Horus' bargain. Or pretend she and Nephthys were friends. "The trial has become complicated."

Seth kept his expression neutral. He didn't know how much Isis was planning to explain, or lie about in order to get what they wanted. They had to be careful here, in case Nephthys really was a fake, or something else was going on. There were spells that could alert the caster, and perhaps even just talking to Nephthys might trigger it.

And based on Osiris showing up at the start of the trial, he thought, *if he is to blame for this, perhaps he could come here for that, as well.*

"You never gave me the full story of you and Osiris," Isis said, making Nephthys' eyes widen in surprise before they darted to Seth in alarm. "Tell me when you started falling in love with him." Her eyes narrowed. "When you started hiding it."

Nephthys swallowed and looked nervously between them, though neither Seth nor Isis were granting her any safe haven. And she could only move so far back in the relatively small cell, even with the increased darkness. "When it started? I don't…" She frowned. "I thought… I mean…" She shook her head, as if warding off a bug. "For as long as I can remember."

Seth pressed his lips together. *All the time we flirted and lay together, and you never said anything! Why?*

He thought he'd come to peace with it. That he'd put her behind him. But this just hurt.

"So you've always loved him?" Isis asked. Her tone hadn't changed. If she was shocked, she didn't demonstrate it.

"No, I mean… yes… I mean…" Nephthys put a hand on her head. "I'm… not sure…"

"You must have loved him deeply," Isis said. "To go to him for a child just after Seth proposed to you."

Seth kept his face calm, no matter how distressed Nephthys looked. No matter how much Seth hated all of this.

Nephthys clenched her fists together before herself. "I… Yes, I loved him. I mean… I wanted everyone to get what they wanted… Or…" She bowed her head. "I'm sorry… I don't know what to say. It's hard to think back to that time." She reached up to rub her forehead, almost like she was in pain.

Isis sighed. "I suppose I should be grateful. It's in part because of you that my son exists."

What does that mean? Seth thought.

Nephthys raised her head in surprise. "You have a son?"

"Ah," Isis said, almost casually, "right, you haven't met him. His name is Heru."

…*What?* Seth thought.

Nephthys smiled. "Ah, what a lovely name! I'm sure Anubis is happy to have a… um…" She glanced at Seth and then away, clearly nervous. "I'm happy for you."

Brother? Seth thought. *Not cousin?* He'd accepted it all already. His words had been to antagonize Isis into action, no more. Horus was Isis and Osiris' son, and that was the end of the matter. And Anubis was Nephthys and Osiris' son.

His left hand twitched.

Isis studied Nephthys for a while before turning and saying, “We’re done here,” to Seth, before walking off.

Seth didn’t glance at Nephthys as he left. He didn’t want to see her suffering more.

When they were far enough away, Seth called out, “What did you figure out?”

Isis paused and turned back to him. Her expression was frustrated. “She has no idea who Horus is. Whatever Horus saw, it’s largely disconnected to her. To maintain that kind of illusion is hard…”

Seth supposed that was true.

“And I could detect traces of what I think is a curse,” Isis said. “It’s subtle, but there if you know to look for it. And it makes sense, far more than Nephthys taking an interest in a god she had no such interest in before.”

“What makes sense?” Seth asked. His heart raced a little, and he hated that he was almost hopeful. Even if something in the mirror made Nephthys change her mind about things, he wasn’t sure he *wanted* her back. Not after everything.

Not after he’d left her alone to suffer.

“If the mirror can create illusions,” Isis said, “then perhaps it created the illusion of love in Nephthys’ mind.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise. “A mirror could do that? For such a long time?” An illusion in a fixed location was one thing, but Nephthys would have had to be fooled by the illusion for thousands of years.

“Anything is possible,” Isis said. “Especially if Ra and Osiris are involved.” She sighed. “And something like that warping the mind of the god of peace would lead to the kind of destabilization I saw in that cell.” She looked at him again. “I need to study the mirror and get a better picture of what we’re dealing with.”

“Fine,” Seth said. “You do that.” It’s not like he would be of any help to her, even if she wanted it. This kind of magic was beyond him. And if Isis saw some destabilization in Nephthys, it wasn't something Seth understood. She seemed no different than what he knew of her.

Clearly, he was useless in this.

Isis looked at him with a frown, then shrugged and turned away.

Seth had little else to occupy himself, and the other gods had made good on his threats and largely vacated the palace, leaving it mostly empty. It felt weird to walk around the place

being so quiet after the activity from the trial, but comforting in its own way, too. He knew few gods cared for him. And he felt the same towards them.

But with little else to do, he went to Horus' rooms, where the pigeon was sitting around, rather than escaping, for whatever reason.

Seth supposed maybe he really was loyal to keeping his mother alive. That was something.

Horus stood up when Seth approached, and eyed the older god with an unreadable expression. It was dark now, though there was a lit torch in the room for light.

Seth crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, eying Horus. "So, you're my servant now."

Horus bowed his head in acknowledgement. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and had the bearing of authority his parents carried. He didn't seem used to hard labor, but he was a demigod, so that wasn't abnormal. Seth had seen him working hard at those stones before the second match, and he'd fought well enough against Anubis in the arena.

There was a lot Seth could use him for. The issue was choosing. But thankfully, Anubis had recently given Seth an idea.

"I have a job for you," Seth said. He stood up. "Come along."

Horus obediently followed Seth out of the room, and they walked through the halls of the palace quietly. Servants avoided them, as usual, fearful of Seth.

"Did speaking with Nephthys go well?" Horus asked.

"I wasn't aware a servant could inquire into such things," Seth mused as he faced the path ahead.

"…I merely wish to know where things stand," Horus said. "Nephthys is my aunt."

Seth snorted, thinking that Horus had never even spoken to her that Seth was aware of, and said, "Ask Isis sometime. She's the one working on the mirror."

Horus stayed quiet then.

They ended up leaving the palace, which surprised Horus. Seth summoned a sand chariot to stand in and said, "Follow me." Then he whipped the reins and set off towards the deeper desert.

Horus spread his wings and raced after him.

The desert stretched before them, illuminated by moonlight. The wind was bitterly chill, but Seth didn't mind; he was used to the sharp changes in temperature, and he was a god, so it never bothered him. There were dark places, where moonlight didn't reach, but he could see just fine, and any animals left them alone.

They traveled for some time, with only the sound of the wind of their passing filling the air.

Seth wondered if Nut looked down on him, perhaps taking a moment to think about her designated savior losing to him. If she was ashamed. She'd done so much to support Horus and Isis, and now…? She hadn't even protested when leaving Heliopolis. Neither had Geb.

Seth scoffed and sped up his chariot, making the winged crocodiles race faster. The wind made his white khat whip the air behind him.

Seth pulled his chariot to a stop and dismissed it once they reached a dark cave poking out of the sand. The moonlight didn't reach deep inside, leaving it like an intimidating maw of a great beast, open and ready to devour any who entered.

Horus landed nearby and walked over, clearly wary.

Seth walked closer to the side of the entrance, where tools to light a torch were placed on a small stone column. Seth grabbed them and lit a torch, before heading into the cave.

Horus was at least smart enough to take his own torch, and followed. If he was going to attack Seth now, he didn't seem ready yet, though Seth planned to keep his wits about him.

It didn't matter that Horus had done so well during their fight in the match. It was clearly a fluke and luck, and purely the result of gaining so much aid from others. But Seth wouldn't be bested again.

The interior was pitch black, and the floors were made of pressed sand and even stone. The echoes of their footsteps filled the air. Soon enough, they were simply surrounded by darkness. The walls kept running ahead but led around seemingly random corners.

Despite the darkness around them, the air never became rank from the scent of the flames. Seth knew from past experience that it was something with the magic in the walls of the place.

"Uncle?" Horus asked. "Where are we?"

Seth scoffed and said, "What, your mother never told you about this place? How I trapped her here after she rejected my offer before she fled Heliopolis?"

"…The labyrinth?" Horus sounded surprised.

"That's correct," Seth said as he kept walking. He remembered first discovering this place, several hundred years ago, thinking it was so intriguing. Even Isis had been wary of it, but Seth had viewed it as a challenge. "It's going to be your new home."

Horus said nothing to this, and for his part, didn't stop or move back, either. He probably knew that if he did, Seth would abandon him. Perhaps Horus had a torch, but attempting to backtrack in this place would do little good. "Don't you have more convenient cells in Heliopolis?"

"I do," Seth said, "But considering how brief a stay your mother had, I feel it's appropriate you pick up the slack, especially since our ridiculous arrangement may give you the

impression you’re the one holding the chains in this relationship.”

“My mother is a god,” Horus said. “I am not. Wouldn’t it be more burdensome to keep me alive here?”

Seth scoffed and said, “Anubis will be in charge of that. And the place where Isis stayed is livable.”

“You’re sending Anubis in here?” Horus asked, clearly surprised. He didn’t sound that scared, either, just curious. “Is that your punishment for him? Looking after your defeated enemy?”

Seth rolled his eyes. He noted that the labyrinth was still largely devoid of animals: they didn’t like the stone the ancient gods had used to create this place. “Yes, it’s part of his punishment.”

“Even though he helped me before?” Horus asked. “Aren’t you worried he’ll help me again?”

“Last time he helped you,” Seth said, “you lost. I can't say I'm that worried.”

Horus didn’t have a reply to that.

Seth grinned and continued, “And this time, he won’t be able to help you. Beyond feeding you, anyway. And perhaps sharing whatever gossip he cares to from the palace.” He imagined Anubis would go begging to Isis any time now, to learn what she knew of Seth’s deal with Horus.

“What do you mean?” Horus asked, clearly confused.

Seth didn’t answer.

Eventually they arrived at the center of the labyrinth: an open area with a stone floor and a fountain running at the center, in the shape of a walled circle about knee-high. Seth moved to set his torch on one of the unlit torches around the sides of the fountain, lighting the area up. Whatever magic was in the torches spread across the circle and then to the walls, showing that there were four exits, including the one they came through. There were carvings on the wall in ancient script and art, but otherwise, the place was quite bare.

He remembered Isis studying the place, centuries ago. They'd managed to interpret some of the carvings, learning stories of the ancient gods who'd made the place.

“The light will last five days,” Seth said to Horus now. “Then it has to be renewed.” He looked at Horus, who still stood firm, holding his own torch.

He wasn’t running, and still hadn’t attacked Seth.

He’s of strong will at least, Seth thought, absently.

“Mother won’t work on the mirror if I die here,” Horus said.

Seth scoffed and said, “You won’t *die*. Anubis will actually bring you food, if nothing else. And the water here is purified, so you can drink it.” Isis had explained the magic to him centuries ago. It was one of the few still-functioning spells in the place, besides the main one that maintained the walls. "You'll help Anubis maintain the place." It would keep Horus busy, anyway, and out of Seth's hair.

“And if I escape?” Horus asked.

Seth laughed and said, “Then I’ll be impressed. I doubt you memorized the path to get here. And even if you did, the labyrinth rearranges itself throughout the day.”

Horus’ eyes widened in surprise. “What? How?”

“Its own magic,” Seth said with a shrug. “There’s a trick to it, of course. Maybe you’ll learn.”

“How are you planning to stop Anubis from showing me the way out?” Horus asked.

Seth made a show of reaching up to put a finger to his chin, as if he was thinking really hard. “Hmm… threats, maybe?”

Horus just watched him, clearly wanting an answer.

Seth chuckled. “You really did lose, in case you forgot. Perhaps you shouldn’t trust him so much.”

“Are you planning to have him poison me?” Horus asked. “Like how you had Osiris drink himself into unconsciousness?”

Seth’s lips twitched. “If you refuse to eat or he poisons you, that’s your call.” Seth shrugged as if it didn’t matter to him. “I doubt he’d poison you, though. You’re right in that he probably still plans to use you somehow. But he’s my son, so who knows?” He grinned at Horus. “And I am the evil god.”

Horus gazed at him for a moment, then glanced around, as if truly taking in his surroundings.

“I would also be wary of trying to break the walls,” Seth said, imagining that was Horus’ next thought. “There’s shielding on them that Isis studied for her own magic, but it’s stronger than what she can make. You’ll likely either injure yourself or bring the roof down on your head if you do anything. But that’s your call.” Isis couldn’t blame him if Horus brought about his own downfall.

Well, she blames me for everything anyway, Seth thought.

“I could serve you some other way,” Horus insisted, gazing at Seth once more. “You need only ask.”

Seth laughed and said, “Is the stalwart Horus finally afraid? How novel.”

Horus grimaced and replied, “This is a truly harsh punishment. But… as it’s what you did to my mother, I’m not surprised. Especially after our match.”

Seth scoffed and started walking towards the edge of the room, to another exit.

“You’re not taking a torch?” Horus asked, confused.

“I don’t need one,” Seth replied, dismissively. He’d learned the way the labyrinth worked years ago, after all. It had been a challenge for a while. And once, a place of hope. And still later, crushed dreams.

A reminder that hope was foolish. It was just a place for his enemies, now. That was all.

“Good luck,” he called back, mockingly. If Horus *did* make it out, at least it would be entertaining while he waited for Isis to solve the mirror. Then Seth dissolved his body into sand and flew off into the dark passage.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 5: Advice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I brought Horus food this morning,” Anubis said as he stood in the empty throne room in Heliopolis facing Seth and Isis. Anubis had his head down and his expression blank. He looked small and pale, but stood firmly as he gave his report.

Seth lounged in his throne, leaning his head on his left hand as he half-watched Isis, who stood near Seth’s throne, seething.

Isis had stormed in early, demanding to know why Seth had *imprisoned* Horus in the labyrinth of all places.

When Seth had retorted that Horus was his to do with as he wished in accordance with Horus’ own offer, Isis had started sparking with lightning.

Anubis had come in then to report back about his first visit to Horus, which had cooled Isis down only slightly. “He seemed fine,” Anubis finished, his expression neutral.

“He’s a *demigod*,” Isis said, glaring daggers at Seth. “He can’t survive there!”

“And yet you had him fight *me*,” Seth replied with a slight grin. “Am I somehow *easier* than the labyrinth?”

Isis scoffed and said, “A match is nothing in comparison to living in that prison day to day.”

“You weren’t even there long,” Seth said. “What do you know of it?” Nephthys had gotten her out of there pretty fast in the end.

Seth had never been sure he’d been happy about that. It just seemed another sign that Nephthys had never been on his side. But rather than confront him, Nephthys just hid in her cell, refusing to come out. And Seth at least didn’t have to deal with Isis’ fury.

“I know you made it your little warren,” Isis half-hissed at Seth. “And you’ve likely filled it with horrors for him!”

“And?” Seth demanded, smirking at her. “What are you going to do about it? Threaten me? Threaten Nephthys?” He was tired of being talked down to as if he was someone who could be tossed around on someone else’s whims.

Isis just glared back at him, still furious but with little recourse. She couldn’t kill him, though she could try.

And maybe Anubis will guide her to her precious son, Seth thought. He almost wished she’d *try*, as it would pass the time.

“He’ll be fine,” Seth eventually said, waving her off. “If you restore Nephthys, surely she at least will free Horus just like she did you, since she doesn’t seem all that willing to do it now.” True, the Nephthys he knew wasn’t aware of Horus’ imprisonment, but that didn’t change anything. “Or maybe you can go talk her into it.” He tilted his head thoughtfully, as if daring her.

Isis scoffed again and said, “I need Horus for my tests and the spell!”

“Then go with Anubis to see Horus,” Seth said. “I’m not going to stop you.”

Isis clenched her hands into fists and said, “You’re still just a monster,” before turning on her heel and stalking out of the room.

Anubis looked at Seth, clearly unsure.

“You’re dismissed,” Seth said, sharply. “Go plot if you wish.”

Anubis winced, and then left the room, following after Isis, maybe to actually plot away.

Seth breathed in deeply and leaned back on his throne, feeling tired. Not much had changed since he’d won the match. Heliopolis was quieter in some ways, at least, without all the gods making the place loud. But there were still problems like Isis and Horus to deal with. And Anubis and Nephthys.

Seth didn’t know what to deal with first: he couldn’t really help Isis with her experiments, or heal Nephthys himself. *So I just, what?* Seth wondered. *Twiddle my thumbs?*

“You dodging your problems instead of dealing with them is almost funny,” a familiar voice half-purred at him from behind the throne.

Seth frowned and made sand spikes shoot of the floor, causing Sekhmet to laugh as she leapt out of the way and landed before the throne in a half-crouch. Her golden headdress and costume glittered in the morning sunlight.

Seth glared at her and said, “What are you doing here, Sekhmet? The trial’s over. You missed it.” He was glad she hadn’t been involved in any of it, either. She had a habit of messing things up, and her help was always suspect.

“Is it?” Sekhmet asked as she stood and dusted herself off. “And here I thought the show had gone on. After all, you’ve been quite scrumptious after the second match.”

Seth scowled at her and said, “You always find ridiculous ways to word things.”

Sekhmet grinned sharp white teeth at him. “What would you rather I say? Something about the traitor son you’re sending to go help your enemies even more?”

“And what will he accomplish?” Seth asked, tired of this. “I already know what he did. If you expect to shock me, you’re mistaken.” Anubis was an ache he couldn't fix. But that didn't mean he was going to stew all the time over it. And he certainly wasn't going to moan about it to *Sekhmet.*

“Mostly I was just commiserating with you,” Sekhmet said as she stepped carefully forward, still smiling. “It must be so sad to be betrayed again by someone you love.”

Seth only glared at her before summoning more sand spikes, knocking her further away from the throne and making the ground shake a little. Sand crocodiles leapt from the floor and chased after her, making her laugh before she crushed and burned them.

“I’m not sure why you’re mad at *me*,” Sekhmet said with laughter in her voice. “*You’re* the one who’s afraid to confront Horus so much you hid him in a labyrinth.”

Seth glared at the goddess, making the sand animals move faster after her around the large chamber, half breaking walls in her wake. “I did no such thing. And I’m *not* afraid of him.” Horus lived because Isis wouldn’t help Nephthys otherwise. That’s all.

Sekhmet was finally cornered amidst some spikes, though she didn’t look that bothered as she backed up against a wall. “You know there’s another way to pay back Osiris, properly put Horus in his place, *and* get back at Isis than whatever it is you’re doing.”

Seth sighed loudly. “Oh? Do tell.” As *if* he was planning to take more advice from *Sekhmet*, of all people. *That turned out so great before.*

“You know how,” Sekhmet said as she smirked at him. “It’s like what Osiris did to you. And you’re stronger than Horus. He’d never recover from it.”

Seth felt cold at the insinuation. “I don’t need to do such a thing. He’s trapped alone in the dark.” The idea of doing that was… He just glared at her for the suggestion.

“Afraid?” Sekhmet asked. “After everything you’ve done, *this* is what you’re afraid of?”

Seth was getting pissed off at Sekhmet telling him he was afraid. He was a god of war!

More sand spikes stabbed towards where she was, but she leapt aside, cutting them in half.

“Or are you upset he didn’t manage to kill you in the end?” Sekhmet asked him with a grin as she slid along the floor, leaving cracks in the floor tiles.

Seth frowned at her, confused at the random line of thought. “What?”

“Oh Seth,” Sekhmet said as she moved forward around the slowed sand spikes. “I know you. I know despair like I know how to breathe. And you, you’ve despaired for a long time, hoping someone would put you out of your misery. And here comes this chosen of the heavens, seemingly ready to do it… and he fails.” She grinned. “That must have sucked, huh?”

Seth merely blinked at her. “You’re delusional. Leave.” The sand spikes grew in width as they rose from the ground. “You’re pissing me off.” He was going to start fighting *for real* soon, and then Sekhmet would regret things. He hadn’t spent hundreds of years ruling and even more leading armies for nothing.

Sekhmet pouted as she leapt away and said, “You’re no fun. Fine, I’ll go spend time with someone else.”

After she was gone, Seth breathed in deeply and leaned back in his chair. *Good riddance. What was that about, bothering me about how to punish Horus? It’s my decision what to do with him, not hers.* He’d managed to tick off Isis and Horus seemed genuinely afraid, while Nephthys was potentially on her way to being healed, despite everything. And Anubis was staying in line, to a degree.

Everything was *fine*.

“Ah, pardon…?”

Seth looked up to see Thoth hesitating by the doorway to the large room. The god of knowledge smiling in that way he did that made him look weak and helpless, but surprisingly, he had no Maat to hide behind.

“What do you want?” Seth asked, glaring at the bird. “Shouldn’t you be helping Isis?” Thoth hadn’t visited Seth once during his long reign, and to come here now, when the other god had been so fearful without his allies, was bizarre.

“She’s gone to talk with Horus,” Thoth said as he stepped closer, while eying some of the melting sand spikes warily. “I thought that… since she’s *busy*… maybe you could use my advice?”

Seth glared at him, thinking that was the *last* thing he wanted. “And your advice has been so *useful* to me?” He’d avoided conferring with Thoth over the years, initially out of wariness due to Thoth’s prophecy for Ra, and then out of lack of interest. Thoth avoided anything to do with war, and if he had any insight, he gave it to Isis, who relayed whatever was relevant to Seth.

Seth also always felt like Thoth was afraid of him, and Seth didn’t bother changing the perception. “You’ve done nothing but help my enemies and now you expect me to use you for my own ends?”

“You *did* win the trial,” Thoth said as he stepped even closer, though he stepped a short distance from the throne. “You *are* the rightful ruler of Egypt now, fair and square, and I, personally, care about Egypt’s stability.”

Seth found the pseudo-potential attempts at flattery odd before he noted, “You care so much about Egypt’s health that you cowered away in your temple while the kingdom suffered under my rule for hundreds of years?” The other gods had abandoned the humans just as much as Seth had.

At least Seth wasn’t alone in being left in the cold.

Thoth winced before he replied, “It’s… true that I am not the most skilled at martial prowess, so I tried to um… protect who I could when I could, rather than confront you directly. And I *did* help Isis and Horus in the end…”

“The *very* end,” Seth said. “And that came to nought.” Otherwise, Isis or Horus would be sitting on the throne.

Thoth smiled awkwardly and nodded with a quiet, “Yes…”

“So you’re useless and you help my enemies,” Seth said. “And your advice to me should be useful because…?” Seth asked, leaning on his hand again.

“Although my advice didn’t help Isis and Horus win,” Thoth said, “I do still know your other enemies weaknesses. And I know that Isis arranged to have a foreign army arrive on our shores to fight you in an emergency.”

Seth raised his head then. “What?” It was a ridiculous assertion, though he wouldn’t put it past Isis to reach out to people she wouldn’t ordinarily go to. Certainly she’d gone to *Ra* for help, so she was definitely desperate enough to contact foreigners for aid.

“It’s true,” Thoth said, looking calm. “They’re on their way even now, and should be here soon enough. A whole navy’s worth of foot soldiers, led by a powerful foreign god.”

Seth scowled at him. “More powerful than me?” He hadn’t dealt with any foreign gods in a long time. During Osiris’ reign, he’d kept them out of the country, though the army had fallen apart since then. Seth had still fought off a few over the years, and they generally knew to stay away, especially as the country fell more and more apart.

Thoth tilted his head and gazed up at the air, contemplatively. “I’m not very familiar with him, but I think it’s up for debate, especially given he’d be so far from home.”

Seth grimaced, though he wasn’t afraid of a new challenge. Certainly, it was something else to do rather than focus on Isis, Nephthys, Horus, or Anubis.

Seth still wasn’t sure it wasn’t a lie, perhaps some gambit of Thoth’s or Isis to take back the throne. “And I should let an ally of Osiris tell me more lies?”

Thoth winced and replied, “Osiris spoke before Maat’s scales, he wasn’t a liar!”

Seth barked a laugh then, making Thoth flinch. “That you idiots fall for his duplicity is hilarious…” *All that wisdom and they can’t see through Osiris’ pathetic machinations…* “Some *god of knowledge* you are.” *Ridiculous… Useless imbeciles…* Even when they were trying to “help” him they were bad at it.

“I know you don’t have a reason to trust my words,” Thoth said as he stepped closer, “But I can reassure you further.”

Seth scowled at him, unimpressed.

“Yes, we supported Osiris,” Thoth acknowledged, “after a fashion. He was the rightful ruler of Egypt, and you deposed him.” When Seth didn’t say anything, Thoth pushed on, “But that doesn’t mean we’re allies forever. Especially after everything Osiris has done…”

Seth narrowed his eyes. “What has he done?” He was under the impression people wanted to lick the ground beneath the dead god’s feet, especially judging by his reception at the trial.

“He destroyed a city I look after,” Thoth said, his expression going a bit solemn, “seeking out my knowledge. Especially when he didn’t hear what he wanted to hear.”

Seth scoffed and said, “Sounds just like him.” Though he couldn’t recall Osiris doing something specific like that. He supposed the other god *had* traveled around a bit during the war with Ra, and Isis had commented negatively on some of his tactics.

“I can even take you to the city if you want,” Thoth said, perking up that he hadn’t lost Seth entirely. “So you can see the destruction.” Thoth sighed sadly. “It could have been a place of knowledge, and he just wrecked it… So wasteful…”

“And yet you supported him,” Seth said. *Can any of you people just pick a side and stick on it?*

“He seemed to have changed a bit,” Thoth said, a bit nervously. “He was a better ruler than he was before that.”

A better ruler my ass, Seth thought. Sure, he acknowledged Osiris’ skills in making agriculture work, but he’d gone behind Isis and Seth’s back for everything else, attempted to murder his nephew, and his entire plan had collapsed due to Osiris’ own ineptitude, while the kingdom crumbled in his wake. Without Isis and Nephthys around to work, and Seth to maintain the borders, nothing Osiris did had any permanence. That didn’t speak highly of Osiris’ abilities.

He was almost weaker than the rest of us in that regard, Seth thought. *Pompous asshole.*

“And I viewed the way you took the throne as erm… unfair,” Thoth said, bringing Seth out of his reverie.

Seth burst out laughing then, startling Thoth.

Imagine what you’d say if you knew it was Osiris who handed the throne to me, Seth thought, bitterly. *Imagine if you knew what shit your precious savior’s father got up to.*

It was almost more annoying than anything else to keep up the charade, especially after learning Isis knew. All these people who thought they knew what he was, and they had no idea. And even if they got rid of him, well... Osiris was still there, ready to sabotage them whenever he felt like it. Without Seth to obsess over, he'd likely ruin the rest of them.

When his laughter finally died down, he said, “You’re the god of knowledge. Do you really only know what Osiris admitted to about the night he died?” He couldn’t believe Osiris had been able to come back in some way and never told anyone anything, even more lies.

Thoth looked wary then. “Well, I’ve heard rumors that elaborate on it…” He looked apologetic. “Lots of people like to exaggerate about what you did to him. But you don’t seem the type to dismember his body and place it in a coffin to float down a river…”

Seth grimaced in distaste. “Why would I place the pieces in a coffin? They’re just trash.”

Thoth blinked at that, and then smiled, awkwardly, clearly unsure how to react.

Seth leaned back on his throne. *So either he’s still a good liar or he really doesn’t know anything about that night.* Seth grimaced. *Useless trash.*

He wasn’t going to explain if he didn’t have to. Dealing with Isis, Anubis, Sekhmet and now Thoth was draining. And it was better if Thoth feared him too much to challenge him anyway.

But if the foreign army *was* coming, Seth could use whatever information he could get. He wouldn’t have ordinarily cared if they destroyed Egypt, but he disliked the idea of *someone else* doing it.

This is my kingdom, Seth thought, bitterly. *I decide how it falls.*

He smirked at Thoth. “Fine. Tell me what you know about Isis’ pet army. And anything else you think I might find useful. But lie to me, and you’ll regret it.”

Thoth swallowed nervously before stepping closer.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus was sitting against a wall in the torchlit chamber of the labyrinth when he heard someone approaching. He chose not to stand, as it was unlikely to be someone freeing him. Horus had already tried sending his birds into the labyrinth, and promptly lost contact with them. He had no hope he'd fare better. And he couldn't afford to constantly waste precious energy through more tests.

Anubis appeared from the darkness, looking as disinterested as Horus felt. He carried a basket with food in it, as well as more fuel for the torches. But only enough to last a short while. He glanced briefly at Horus before walking to the spot in the middle of the room where he always set everything.

Horus watched him, but said nothing either. A wrong word could ruin anything, make Anubis flee, and lose Horus a chance to get out of here.

After Anubis set his items down, he looked at Horus with a frown. "I don't think Isis will look kindly on learning you don't keep your promises."

Horus raised one eyebrow as he replied, "What promise? The one I made with you during the second match?" He gestured to the room. "I didn't precisely win the match with all your help, did I? Your father saw through the ruse."

"The promise wasn't for you to win," Anubis countered as he turned to Horus. "The promise was for me to lend you my boat. And I did. You owe me."

You even sound like him, Horus thought, grimly. It disgusted him. Anubis was a spoiled brat of a prince, trying to tear down Seth, and Horus hated the sight of him, especially now that he relied on the older demigod's goodwill for food. But ignoring him was no good.

Anubis waited, clearly patient, for now.

"My mother would think me a fool for giving up what little leverage would get me out of here," Horus replied. "Even if I think your argument is fair, she's already scolded me for not doing my duties properly. And currently, in her eyes, my duty would be to escape."

"Because you lied when you said you'd serve my father," Anubis said, mockingly.

"I didn't," Horus replied. "I mean to serve him here, if he wishes. But my mother did not make that promise. She believes I should want to escape." He did not like the labyrinth either and worried about what was happening to his mother and Seth while he was trapped here. But what choice did he have? He'd *tried* getting out. Seth hadn't returned and Anubis was largely unhelpful.

Anubis shook his head, clearly finding the line of reasoning irksome.

“How is it you can get around here so easily?” Horus asked. “Did Seth teach you?” He hadn’t asked before out of frustration to have to deal with Anubis, but he’d had a lot of time to consider things while stuck down here.

“Yes,” Anubis said as he glanced away, seeming uncomfortable. “A long time ago. He can’t destroy the place, nor can Isis. Rather than have it be used against us someday, my father showed Mother and I how to get around it on our own.”

“That’s how Nephthys knew how to rescue my mother?” Horus asked.

Anubis nodded. “Mother said that Father would take her here to learn the place. And only when she learned it completely and could take herself out on her own, did he propose.”

That seems like a lot of work, Horus thought. *It must have hurt him that she used it to save Isis.* “Why propose here?”

Anubis looked around the room thoughtfully. “Mother said that Father liked the challenge of the place, and sometimes the solitude. It was a place he could push himself safely, and not worry about his duties. And he wanted to share it with her.”

And it worked, Horus thought. “Why not use my freedom to barter for what you want?”

Anubis glared at him. “Because I couldn’t get you out of here even if I wanted to! There’s a special path you have to take if you’re with someone. Father never taught me it. He only taught me the solo path. He worried I’d bring someone else here and get lost or get *them* lost. But you have to know the paired path to use it. When he taught me, he used sand animals. They don’t count as people.” He looked around. “This place is good for hunting practice, and he wanted me to get used to going into it alone.”

Horus frowned. It *was* a good and easy way to ensure Anubis couldn’t help anyone. “How did he discover the paired path?”

Anubis shrugged and replied, “Father’s always been creative that way. Mother said he spent a lot of time here when he was bored, exploring. Centuries, even. If anyone knows their way around this place and all its odd ways, it would be him.”

Horus imagined as much. He recalled Isis’ letters with Seth, and how wise Seth seemed. In combat he demonstrated skill that wasn’t simply or easy, but something he clearly worked to maintain. It was admirable.

“You could have lied to me,” Horus eventually said. “Pretended you could get me out to get what you want.”

“You would wait until I got you out first,” Anubis replied. “And I wouldn’t be able to.” He seemed very frustrated as he said so.

Horus thought that was weirdly honest and observant for Anubis. He leaned back and said, “Fine. I’ll tell you what you want to know. But given you haven’t succeeded thus far, I doubt

it’ll work for you.”

Anubis glared at Horus and demanded, “Just tell me!”

So Horus did.

Isis glared as she walked through the halls of Heliopolis. The place was once home and now felt too familiar *and* too alien. It had been too long since she’d been here before the trial. And walking about with the stink of failure wrapped around her shoulders, and worry over Horus, made everything darker, even at midday.

She was making no progress in her research into the mirror, and had learned that Thoth had been helping Seth with some of his audiences, which was aggravating!

Insufferable, opportunistic bird brain! She thought as she moved closer to Nephthys’ cell. She wouldn’t have bothered with the traitor if she hadn’t been desperate! *If Seth seeks to gloat about this before me, he has another thing coming!*

Now she planned to study Nephthys more, to see if she could grasp *something* about the curse from the other goddess. In all the years they’d lived together since the alleged incident where whatever happened with the mirror happened, she’d never noticed *anything*, and she felt even more of a fool for it. It was like Ra was mocking her *again* at a distance, and Isis was glad the other goddess was far away and hadn’t come calling since the second match concluded.

That was beneath the specter of *Osiris* fooling her. If he was involved in this whole mess, that meant he possibly knew what he was doing by leaving Isis in charge of things. *But why did he trust I wouldn’t keep the mirror? It feels too risky…*

She was used to her brothers overlooking her, but from Osiris, with this of all things… it hurt in a way she didn’t like thinking about. An insult and a pain that kept her awake too many nights, after everything else he’d done to her.

Isis rounded the corner and found Nephthys, as usual, laying on the floor in her cell, not doing much. The golden-haired goddess sat up as Isis drew near, and gazed up at Isis with fearful eyes.

Isis narrowed her gaze at her sister. In times past, they’d been the closest friends. They’d worked together, ate together, went on trips around the city together… They’d confided in each other when they couldn’t speak to Seth or Osiris. Isis had supported her sister through childbirth and raising Anubis, and Nephthys had supported Isis through wars and rule. To know Nephthys had lied to her about so much, for centuries, had been harder than anything, until Isis had seen Seth and Osiris together.

That I hate them doesn’t change my feelings for her, Isis thought as she drew closer. “Nephthys.”

“Isis,” Nephthys replied, quietly. She was clearly fearful, but stayed where she was, rather than cowering away.

Isis studied Nephthys more, looking for anything new. The magic traces she’d seen before were still there, but no more helpful than they’d been. The mirror was ancient, and felt like Ra’s power, and Hathor. And there was little else Isis had to go on.

After a while, Nephthys asked, “Do you need me for something, Isis?”

“You can’t rescue my son, so no,” Isis said. If this Nephthys was somehow not right or real, Isis wasn’t going to let on about what was happening. But Isis didn’t think she was some sort of *construct* of a mirror… That didn’t make sense. *What purpose would Ra have for that?*

“Rescue…?” Nephthys asked, confused. “Did something happen to him?”

Isis snorted as she said, “Your *husband* trapped him in the labyrinth, like he trapped me.”

Nephthys’ eyes widened in shock, and then she lowered her head. “Oh no…”

“And now you’re stuck in here,” Isis said, annoyed. This was still the person who got her out of the labyrinth, after all. If Isis *really* wanted, she could probably break the cell. She wasn’t sure how Seth would react…

Nephthys flinched, and her lips parted, and then closed.

Isis sighed before saying, “Spit it out. What?”

“The door isn’t locked,” Nephthys said, quietly. “I… can leave, if I wish. Seth didn’t put me here, I… put myself in here.”

Isis blinked and then looked at the door. It was *closed*, certainly, but when she touched it, it pushed open, easily, under her hands.

Isis stared, grappling with this. “You could get out at *any* time?! But you *stay in there?!*”

Nephthys grimaced as she replied, “I *must*! I am responsible for what Seth has done!”

“You coward,” Isis hissed. “Even now, you haven’t changed!” But as she saw Nephthys cringe away from her, she thought, *I can get her to save Horus, can’t I?*

…But then what will Seth do? Will he just trap Horus somewhere else? And what if this curse of hers makes her do something to Horus?!

Isis bit her lip. *I can’t let her near him. If she’s my sister, then she’s still questionable. If she’s… something else, or controlled by something else, I can’t trust her with him!*

“I *am* a coward,” Nephthys said, quietly, into the dirt, clearly wretched. “I’m sorry, Isis. I—”

“Enough of your false regret,” Isis snapped back, making Nephthys flinch. “If you really cared, you would have fought your husband, or helped the humans, or even just defended

your precious son, if only because he's Osiris'!" Her eyes burned, but she refused to back down just yet. She didn't know the full measure of what was happening here, but it still hurt, regardless. Either this *was* her sister, and she'd hurt Isis, or it was something else! "But instead you do nothing, as usual." She scoffed.

Nephthys looked up at her, and there were tears in her eyes. But Isis had seen those before.

Isis turned and stalked off. *Useless. That Osiris would give* her *a son before me…*

Horus looked up from where he'd been studying a wall in the labyrinth to see Isis walking with a torch in her hand and a large sand sha at her side. The creature made little sound as it padded along, and came up to Isis' hip.

Isis ignored the creature and only had eyes for Horus. She studied him for a while before looking around the room with distaste. "Seth kept me here, as well. Of course he'd trap *you* here, too."

Horus nodded, not having anything else to say. He could see she was angry.

Isis drew closer to Horus, and the sha stayed by the entrance, where it sat, watching them, no doubt a sign from Seth that they wouldn't have a moment of privacy.

Isis reached out to brush her hands over Horus' cheeks and his shoulders, checking him over.

Horus was used to this. Isis had looked him over like this since he was born.

"At least he's not starving you," Isis said, clearly annoyed. Her eyes were worried as she gazed up at him.

"And you're well?" Horus asked. He could tell she looked just as he had when last he saw her: regal, healthy, and angry. If nothing else, Seth was keeping his word on that front.

"I get by," Isis said, still sounding unhappy about it. Then she pulled away and walked a few paces away, to put distance between them.

Horus watched her, wary. She'd been annoyed with him a great deal since the trial began, and he did not want to fight more with her, especially now. He didn't fear what Seth might glean from the encounter, but he was just not in the mood for more discord.

"Why did you give in?" Isis demanded as she turned back to him, angry again. "Why did you tell the court what happened?"

"Seth won, Mother," Horus replied, evenly. "Fair and square. The thing is done." They couldn't go back. And he still didn't like Anubis' comment about the gods choosing fights that put Seth at a disadvantage. That Seth had triumphed all the same spoke volumes.

Isis scoffed before saying, "You could have kept silent! You could have…" She frowned.

"Told half-truths to avoid things?" Horus offered. "That would be wrong."

“You sound like you’ve given up,” Isis said, angry. “You sound defeated. Almost cowardly. Like Nephthys.”

Horus stared back at her evenly. “Seth could have killed me any number of times in those two matches. He didn’t. Would you really call me a coward for stepping knowingly into that situation?” He’d offered himself up for *this*, too. That was not generally what a coward did.

Isis grimaced in frustration before turning away. “No. I’m… sorry. I spoke with your aunt. It made me upset.”

Horus wondered what that was like. He’d still never spoken to Nephthys. But Horus didn’t want his mother to leave on a bad note, and asked, “Do you know *why* Seth spared me when he didn’t have to?” Horus had been thinking it over a lot. Although the challenges were designed to hurt him, he showed he could overcome them.

“He knew he’d be declared a loser by default,” Isis said. “Perhaps he was scared of Maat’s retribution. Or Ra’s.”

Horus pondered that, thinking it wasn’t the case. Seth had attacked them *all*, even when Maat and Ra were around. Even when Seth’s own parents sat in the stands, he attacked. It made Horus wonder just what Seth thought of Nut and Geb. Nut had spoken only briefly and sadly about her son when Horus was with her, and he had thought it best not to push, no matter how curious he was. Geb, on the other hand, was quiet most of the time, and even harder to speak to.

But Seth would have hurt them both if he could, Horus thought. *Then again, they came into his palace with an army against him. It’s not that surprising.* He couldn’t imagine how he’d feel if his mother raised an army against *him*.

“I want to hear what happened to you in the mirror again,” Isis said, interrupting his thoughts. “In case I’ve missed something.” She gazed at him and said, “Tell me everything.”

Horus gave her all the detail he could. Including one part he hadn’t quite gotten around to in all the rush before.

“So you know she won’t get out?” Isis demanded, sounding annoyed. “Why bother with this whole farce, then? Just to get Seth to leave me alone?” She glanced at the sha, who didn’t move. If Seth was paying attention, the sha was not indicating it.

“It was from my intuition,” Horus said. “But my intuition also said that Seth would lose the match, which didn’t happen. So I’m worried… my intuition is wrong. Or I’m misreading it. And if so, perhaps it’s wrong about Nephthys and the mirror.” He looked away, a bit embarrassed. “Or I’m wrong about what it tells me.”

Isis gave him a worried look. “You can’t be in doubt at a time like this. You’re in danger here. I am, too. Everyone is, while Seth is on the throne. You need to remain focused!”

“Yes, Mother,” Horus said. He didn’t comment there was little else to do while he was here.

Isis sighed before walking up to kiss him on the cheek. “I’ll get you out of here, Horus. I *will* make things right.”

He believed she’d try, though he wasn’t sure of the success. He still put on a smile for her.

Isis seemed to think that was enough as she headed back out with the sha, who didn’t even glance at Horus before walking back with Isis.

I wonder how much Seth can really hear through that, Horus thought again as he watched them vanish. *Is it like my birds? Will he bring vengeance on me now for admitting that things might not go as we hope?*

But he barely had time to ponder before he heard more footsteps, and then turned to see Seth walking into the room, alone, with no torch.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth had initially been wary of letting Isis into the labyrinth. There was always the risk, even with his sand sha guiding her, that she could get lost, and she was Nephthys' only hope of getting uncursed. She was also smart and there was a chance she could memorize the path to lead Horus out, or perhaps give him instructions to get out. And Seth wasn't precisely *worried* about Horus getting out, since Seth could hunt him down in the desert, which would have its own entertainment value, but it was something to ponder.

Of course, Isis had pushed that she couldn't continue her work without seeing Horus, so Seth had obliged her, with conditions. The sand sha would not accompany Horus out, only Isis, so Isis would have to explain things if that was her plot. But unless Isis and Horus had some shared private language Seth couldn't detect through the sand sha, that didn't happen. Isis and Horus just talked about other things.

Some of which were rather alarming.

"You look very calm for a servant who should expect punishment from his master," Seth said as he glared at the demigod. Horus stood taller than Seth, but that didn't mean he was stronger, or that Seth feared him. Osiris was taller than Seth, too, and look what happened to him! And Seth had faced even larger and fiercer opponents in his time.

Horus only gazed back, his true expression difficult to read under his blue khat and falcon mask. He just seemed distant, if anything. His injuries from the match had already healed, likely form the medicine Isis insisted Anubis bring with him. And he still stood strong, despite all he'd been through thus far.

Seth scowled, disliking this, and how much it reminded him of dealing with Osiris. He wanted to rip Horus to pieces for manipulating the truth about his encounter in the mirror… But Horus seemed to believe the plan was still worth it, and not just to hold up the farce with Seth. And Isis had seemed to believe it, too.

"You've had ample opportunity to punish me," Horus replied, completely unconcerned. "But you have not done so."

Seth laughed, finding the haughtiness amusing. "And miss out on you *imagining* what I'd do? It's certainly done wonders with your mother." Isis had clearly imagined all kind of horrible things Seth would do to her and Horus. And Seth's followers had done a great deal to hers, giving her ample fodder for such beliefs. But since Isis had been in the palace for the trial, after that harsh introduction between them, the two had avoided each other.

And now Seth's hands were tied with what he could do, at least until what was wrong with Nephthys was dealt with.

Horus didn't reply to that, but Seth had the vague impression he was not happy.

Good, Seth thought. *That makes two of us.*

"Why did you stay quiet about Nephthys?" Seth demanded. "You had more information to offer. You should have told me."

"You could have asked instead of trapping me down here," Horus replied, clearly still unafraid.

Seth scoffed before saying, "Ra is your ally, but Sekhmet, her own daughter, told me to be worse to you." He hated admitting she might have been right about something. Horus' attitude needed *work*. He was a servant, not Seth's equal! Let him feel as lonely as he should! As abandoned as he truly was! All the other gods save Isis, Maat, and Thoth had fled Heliopolis, afraid of Seth's wrath. Horus was virtually alone now, out here.

"And yet you aren't doing as she says," Horus noted.

Seth glared, annoyed Horus was misunderstanding him, before saying, "I don't take orders from her." And he didn't need her recommendations. He'd run the fighting games with the humans. Gotten drunk and slaughtered as he pleased. He could throw Horus back in a pit, drag people *here* to fight him. Exhaust him from it all…

But what if he dies? Seth wondered. It should have been what he hoped, but it would make Isis unwilling to help with Nephthys. And it would make people whisper that Seth needed *humans* to kill Horus.

"You still came here," Horus said. "So you clearly listened to her."

The sand from the floor whipped up around Horus' ankles, chaining him to the ground and making him stumble forward, catching himself with his hands.

There was something almost comforting about watching the brat bent over, unable to hold himself properly. No more taunting. No bravery. Just weakness Seth could exploit.

"She wanted me to be like your *father*," Seth noted. "To take my revenge on you, to parallel what he *did*." The option was there, as ever. It would be easy, with Horus at his mercy… The demigod wasn't unattractive: it wouldn't even be all that terrible an experience, probably.

But the idea of stalking over and doing it all… Of taking Horus apart. Of demanding Horus serve him in such a way, when Seth's memories of such things were tied up in Anubis, and all the moments he'd had with Nephthys felt like lies…

Well, Horus could talk. Isis might notice somehow. And Seth didn't need that.

"What did my father do?" Horus asked, sounding confused.

Seth wondered just how much Isis had told Horus. And why neither of them had used it against him. Isis knew nearly everything, after all. And Horus had used half-truths before. If

he was pretending ignorance now, Seth was none the wiser. Unlike Isis, Seth didn't have an ability to tell if someone was lying.

He thought of asking about the army. To demand answers from Horus about it. But Horus could lie about that, too. In time, Isis would realize Seth knew, but if she returned here, Horus could tell her Seth had asked about it. And Isis would likely confront Seth about it or try to run, perhaps to ensure the army went elsewhere, if possible, in an attempt to outwit Seth, and Seth would have to go after her again.

But would she leave Horus behind? Seth wondered.

It was all an irritating mess, and giving him a headache. Destroying Egypt had been easier than this.

"Osiris was an arrogant fool," Seth said. "And it led to his ruin. I won't be so foolish." He didn't need information from Horus. It would be no more trustworthy than what he heard from Thoth. And if the fool thought he was going to be *rescued*, then he would soon see wrong. Or be left wondering, forever, why no rescue came.

Seth turned and left before Horus could say anything. Seth dissolved his body into sand and floated back out to the desert, where the fresh air was bracing.

After racing through the desert for a while on a sand chariot, Seth returned to his rooms in the palace, done with whatever gatherings Thoth had planned for the day. The bird had created a whole schedule for Seth, and it was wearying. Outside prepping the army, Seth had no patience for anything else. The humans managed most everything, and he left them to it.

I should have punished Horus, Seth thought, miserably. Though he was still worried. He *could* bar Isis from the labyrinth. Letting her go had earned him knowledge, but at what cost? If he stopped her now, she could refuse to work again. And if she kept visiting, that decreased his chances of punishing Horus properly in peace.

Seth felt like a hostage in his own palace. He hated it.

A jar in the corner of the room that was somehow in one piece nearby shattered as sand crushed it.

Seth thought of the match, when he'd almost let his anger cut the boat open. He could have just dealt with it that way and Thoth wouldn't have bothered him. He might not know about this *new* army until they were at his doors.

I can handle them, he thought. Though he knew he'd be better prepared now.

He breathed in deeply. *I cannot be like Osiris. I have to stop and think. Plan. Letting Horus survive for now is fine. I can wait. Killing him immediately won't help anyway.*

He *wouldn't* be like Osiris. Not like what Sekhmet wanted. And not like his frustrated mind kept pushing him to. That path led to failure.

He wondered if he should get drunk. It would help ease some of his frustration.

A familiar scent tickled his nose and Seth turned to the entryway and saw Anubis step forward, gazing up at him. “Father. I wish for an audience.”

Seth scowled at Anubis, who stood his ground. It seemed he’d kept that boldness about him.

“What now?” Seth finally demanded. He assumed Anubis would enjoy being far from him, yet *here he was*. Seth hadn’t heard any reports about the human slaves Anubis looked after, but he hadn’t had time to watch any fights, either. He was too busy recruiting humans and overseeing training, or checking over the city’s defenses, which were rather pathetic since Seth had let them rot and sent the defenders to other tasks, like hunting down Isis. Trade had also taken a great hit, and recovering it was a difficult task.

Anubis breathed in deeply, as if to prepare himself, before replying, “I wish to be involved in rebuilding the military. I can better serve you that way than in my current duties.”

Seth raised an eyebrow in curiosity. “Who will look after the imprisoned humans, then?” It was true that Anubis might be better suited to military matters. Seth had trained him in combat, after all. If nothing else, Anubis could train others in fighting techniques.

“I’ll free them,” Anubis said. “Let them return to their families.”

“To die?” Seth asked. “They were gifted to me. The humans likely won’t be kind to them.” Anubis cared about such weak creatures, after all. *Would you use and discard them like Osiris used people? Like he used your mother, to get to me?*

Anubis frowned. “They could work in the palace doing something else, maybe? As servants.”

“Servants who know they live or die by my word,” Seth said. “We could never trust them, stupid as humans may be.” He’d dealt with assassins before. Human ones were no trouble. He could crush them before they even got to him, and their weapons never harmed him. But it was a waste of time.

Anubis frowned, disliking the tangle he’d created, just like any child.

“And who would feed Horus?” Seth asked. Anubis had lived for centuries, but not as a strategist. Seth had been lax in his training since taking the throne, and certainly his own rule had not been a shining example of anything, by design.

Perhaps all he’s learned is how to screw things up, Seth wondered as he watched the demigod.

“Horus is a demigod,” Anubis said. “He can survive for a time without sustenance. I have.”

Seth wondered what that meant, but recalled he hadn’t paid as much attention to Anubis during his own reign. There were long stretches of time he hadn’t even seen Anubis, while he was traveling to hunt Isis or just get air away from the city that felt too full of Osiris’ memory. Or Isis or Nephthys.

He'd also tried to prepare himself for Anubis to leave and find his own path, but Anubis, stubborn as ever, had refused, and stuck by him. More dutiful than smart, unfortunately.

"I'll feed him when I can," Anubis continued.

Not willing to give him up entirely, then? Seth wondered. *What are you plotting next with him?*

"Do you think to take over the army for yourself?" Seth asked. "They will not respect an untested boy. Even if you are my son."

Anubis' frown darkened, as if the obvious wasn't true. Word had to have spread of Anubis' gambit. The humans would know he'd tried twice to unseat his father and failed. And if Seth's followers stocked the army, they would be wary, at best, of Anubis as a result.

"The last time you had any command over an army," Seth mused, "you dragged it to *my* doorstep. To get rid of me. What makes you think I'd trust you with another?"

Anubis breathed in deeply, and Seth knew he was angry. But Anubis didn't try to attack him. Instead, he cried, "If you distrust and hate me so much, why not let me risk my life against the forces Isis called to deal with you? Maybe I'll die that way!" He sounded like he almost wished it were so.

Seth's heart ached as he thought of Anubis facing armed humans or foreign gods and their unknown abilities. There was a time he'd have fought tooth and nail to keep Anubis from any pain. But Seth knew that *he* was the primary pain now in Anubis' life. Not good enough of a father or an enemy, seemingly. But still cruel and distant. Because much as Seth tried to put on a show, he was too much of a coward to tell the truth. To watch Anubis turn his back any more fully than he had and embrace the monster who'd taken Anubis' life before.

Because Seth still loved Anubis. "I don't want you *dead.*"

"When you beat me near to death, you didn't seem to have that issue!" Anubis retorted. His eyes almost burned.

"But you didn't die!" Seth replied, angry, too. What was he supposed to do? Ignore what Anubis had done? Let things slide? Let people think Seth couldn't control *one* demigod? Let alone two?

He could hear Osiris' mocking laughter.

Anubis looked furious. "I thought I was going to die! Not that you care. You *mocked* me for it."

Seth recalled his own anguish against Osiris, who didn't care about his pleas. And Osiris' mockery. Seth may try to avoid mimicking *all* of Osiris' behavior, but he didn't entirely do so.

Every path Seth dared to walk seemed so hard to see through. And he'd thought just going where his feet took him was easy, watching Egypt dissolve around him. Osiris' pride and joy

crushed. But it was hard, especially when it meant gazing, soberly, into Anubis' eyes, and seeing all the pain Seth had caused him.

Seth's fingers bit into his palms, and he turned away. "Fine. You can oversee training. Or whatever. Speak to Thoth, since you're so close already. Use it to overthrow me, if you can. I'm sure you'll try." Perhaps then he could rest, properly.

Anubis was silent for a time, but eventually Seth heard him turn away.

But, rather than leave, Anubis paused and said, "Mother still believes in you for some reason." He sounded frustrated.

Seth chuckled, hating everything. *Which version of her?* "If you're asking me why, I don't know." Did a part of her, somewhere, actually love him?

Seth didn't think so. Hoping just hurt.

Anubis made an annoyed sound before finally leaving.

Seth felt like a string was cut somewhere inside him. Like something was bursting. In the past, he and Anubis had been close, and gone hunting together. Trained together. Seth had taught him stories and went walking with him and Nephthys. Seen him grow tall and strong.

Seth had dreaded the day when Anubis might hate him, even as he felt it was inevitable. And that day had long since come. And no amount of believing it was right, that Anubis should pull away while he could, to escape, made it feel better.

His face grew hot and he put a hand to his eyes as tears fell down his cheeks. He breathed in sharply, keeping himself quiet. What good were tears, anyway?

Seth's focus and pain ensured he didn't see the small orange bird hidden behind a corner of the window of his room, watching.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Isis sat at the large desk in her room in Heliopolis, which was covered in scrolls, as one of her birds appeared and explained what he'd seen, letting her see some of the creature's memory, too.

Seth in tears? Isis wondered, watching the memory in the bird's mind. It was a surprising look on a god who was usually angry or mocking, and never cried.

A fragment of nightmare from the distant past came to mind, and she pushed it away.

So what? She thought. *Crocodile tears, if anything…* She'd seen her brother yowl when he was hit, but she'd rarely ever seen him weep, especially as they grew older.

He never really cried, she thought. *He always seemed so… remote. Distant from everything. Cold.*

She knew of many of the humans Seth and his followers had butchered over the centuries. She'd witnessed so much of it among her own followers, healed who she could, protected who she could… and it was never enough. Seth and his followers were insatiable. All to chase after Isis… Tears couldn't wash *that* away.

She remembered Osiris dissolving to reveal the form of a brutalized young Anubis. So what if Seth was Anubis' father, it was still so harsh…

"Seth could have killed me any number of times in those two matches," Horus said, his expression sharp as he gazed back at her from his cell. "He didn't. Would you really call me a coward for stepping knowingly into that situation?"

Horus' words still rattled her. He was so steady, despite his weaknesses. And Anubis himself had a similar amount of power, if not less, which made both of them weak against any god, let alone the God Supreme. But Anubis still stood up against Seth to bring the army into the city. And he faced the consequences, too. Seth would never let such a thing pass without punishment. All the gods knew Anubis was involved in bringing the army, they would have called Seth a weakling.

He could have died. For us.

Isis grimaced. *Children face consequences for their actions. If Seth hates that Anubis stands against him, he should know his path is wrong, and relinquish his position, allow himself to be imprisoned… But he refuses. Crocodile tears will not move me.*

“Still planning to kill him, Isis?” Sekhmet asked from behind Isis’ shoulder, making the goddess of magic look back and glare. Sekhmet stood against the wall and grinned at Isis with bright white teeth, and lips that were red as blood. “You should do it before he rebuilds the army to turn back your ally.”

Isis’ eyebrows rose in surprise. “How does he know?” When Sekhmet didn’t answer, Isis thought for a few moments before looking away snarling. “Thoth. He told Seth!” *He* has *changed loyalties, that worthless birdbrain!*

She knew not to rely on Thoth or his wife fully, not after what the four siblings had gone through throughout their lives. But the sting of another betrayal was still frustrating.

Sekhmet shrugged.

Isis ignored Sekhmet to look at Hathor’s mirror sitting on her desk, as it was far easier to deal with than a bird god who flocked to whoever could offer him the most comfort. The mirror resisted all her attempts to investigate it. She had pulled all her memories of when Osiris had collected it, but he’d made no specific mention to her of its use. It was just one of many artifacts he’d taken from Ra’s temple.

And Horus’ recall wasn’t helpful, either. Neither Horus nor whatever was in the mirror and claimed to be Nephthys had useful words for dealing with the spell on the thing.

The next step is contacting Hathor, Isis thought. But she knew she was in for a scolding of some kind from Ra. Or perhaps making more deals with Ra or Hathor. And Isis already had so little to give. And she still didn’t know if there was some other deeper game here from Ra *or* Hathor, especially considering what Horus had gone through. Asking Hathor was too risky.

“You won’t solve it by glaring at it,” Sekhmet said. “Though perhaps if you slept better, you’d know that.”

“And why do you suddenly care?” Isis demanded, tired of interruptions and distractions on yet another worthless day, when she still had the ghost of entering and escaping the labyrinth again on her mind. Demanding entrance from Seth had already taxed her patience. “If this is Ra’s idea of *help* now…”

“I’m not here because of Ra,” Sekhmet replied. “I’m *worried* about you, Isis. Your nightmares are making you erratic, aren’t they?”

Isis glared at her. Isis had experienced nightmares for a long time, though they’d grown worse since Horus lost the second match. It didn’t matter. She was a god, and didn’t need sleep like humans did. "What do you know of it?"

“You’re so miserable, it’s like a lodestone for me,” Sekhmet practically purred as she moved closer. “And you don’t understand that the pain of repeating that night over and over again comes from *you,* torturing yourself. And you’ll never move past it unless you *listen.*”

"Are *you* the one sending it?!" Isis demanded. It would make sense if Sekhmet of all people were doing this to her...

Sekhmet laughed. "Even I can't easily make another god have a nightmare. This is all *you*, Isis."

Isis shook her head, not fully believing her. *She's just here to waste my time.* "Whatever. That doesn't matter. I need to figure out the mirror. Get Horus out of the labyrinth…"

"You can barely see past Osiris reappearing before you," Sekhmet said.

Isis glared at her again. She'd met plenty who assumed she was just Osiris' tag-along, but Sekhmet saying it was *particularly* aggravating. *I controlled the Nile for him! Nephthys ensured peace! Seth and I won wars! We gave him his precious peace as much if not more than Osiris earned it!*

Isis was more than that. She was a goddess in her own right, a leader, a strategist, and the mother of Horus.

"You're not *that* good an actress," Sekhmet said with a laugh, as if she could hear Isis' thoughts. "You're lucky most of the other gods are all witless fools, anyway. Not that it matters." She leaned in. "You were *happy* to see him there."

Isis rolled her eyes. "I was surprised… I haven't seen him in person since I resurrected him." There were so many long nights over the centuries where she ached for him and hated aching for him. Where every attack by Seth's followers felt like a reminder of why she'd fled Heliopolis. A reminder that Osiris had abandoned her and left her to *this*. And she had to survive without him.

And yet still, her body kept remembering him. And her nightmares of that final night kept taunting her over it.

"And you missed him," Sekhmet crooned. "Even after everything he's done."

"*Osiris* didn't kill all my followers," Isis snarled. "Osiris didn't *imprison our son.* He…"

"Still betrayed you," Sekhmet said as she leaned over Isis' shoulder, smelling faintly of alcohol, which made Isis cringe. "Manipulated your sister, cornered Seth and slept with him behind your back, and experimented on humans…"

"What?" Isis demanded, turning to face Sekhmet, who was grinning at her. Even with the goddess' smell about her, Sekhmet's words pulled at Isis' curiosity. "What are you talking about? Experimented…?"

"You used every trick in the book you had not to *win* against Seth," Sekhmet said, "but to make him pay for the crime of being wanted more by the man you love."

"That's not true!" Isis said, feeling aggravated and embarrassed. "He's made me suffer!" Centuries of running and hiding. Relying on Nephthys to escape the labyrinth. Fearing that Horus would be taken from her, as she traveled, often alone…

"Which he?" Sekhmet asked with a smirk.

Isis glared at her, wishing the lion goddess had never come into the room. “Stop distracting me! That’s not—!”

“I only came to tell you the truth,” Sekhmet said, sweetly. “I want to see if you change your heart after seeing what I have to show you.”

Isis narrowed her eyes. “After you colluded with Seth on the night Osiris died?” She’d heard the stories: about how it was Sekhmet’s hand in suggesting how Osiris’ corpse ended up. She knew better than to trust Sekhmet on anything, even on what color the sky was.

Sekhmet chuckled. “I didn’t do anything but help save Seth from Osiris. And offer some suggestions here and there… Seth was the one who did the rest.”

Isis only glared, refusing to play Sekhmet’s game.

“If you want to know about Osiris,” Sekhmet said. “About the truth? Then I’ll show you. In your dreams. If you’ll trust them.”

Isis was ready to say no. It was a risk, to walk anywhere with someone like Sekhmet, who was a wildcard at the best of times. And with the foreign god’s army approaching, Isis had to be ready to direct them. To plan. To ensure Horus’ safety and Seth’s destruction.

But she also had no leads on the mirror. And she meant to get answers for it. If Osiris really had plotted with the mirror, and if he’d done even more than she and likely Seth knew, then Isis wanted to know! Sekhmet watched them all, and she, perhaps more than anyone, was likely to have answers no one else did.

What other options do I have, anyway? Isis thought, gloomily. *Ask Hathor for help?*

“Fine,” Isis said. “I’ll see what you have to say.”

Sekhmet grinned at her.

It took a while to get herself to sleep, difficult as rest had been lately, but finally Isis was off, wandering the darkness of her dreams, back to Heliopolis at night so long ago, as her mind always took her. But just as the cries from Seth and Osiris came to her, Sekhmet took her hand.

Isis didn’t want to be grateful to the exasperating lion goddess.

Sekhmet showed her visions of Osiris’ temple, where he conducted bizarre experiments to create children, which Isis realized were to use on *Seth*.

He never wanted to have a child with me, Isis thought as she gazed at Osiris’ angry face as he destroyed his work under the moonlight, crushing what looked like partially formed babies. *It was only when I revived him that he agreed to it. But for Seth—!*

She hadn’t known if she’d wanted a child, precisely. She’d liked the idea, and had enjoyed helping to raise Anubis, but she’d been busy, too. Raising one child was enough, surely. But

seeing this only reminded her of what Osiris had never even bothered to offer.

How many mortals died for these experiments? Isis wondered as she watched Osiris in his temple. *Even the floods never abused them this way. And all for what?*

Sekhmet pulled her onward, and Isis watched as Osiris confronted Ra, demanding answers, sounding not like the brave leader she imagined, but rather a child throwing tantrums. Isis had spent much time with human children on her travels, and often watched over them with Horus. Horus had always been so well behaved, despite the life he lived. He asked for so little. He barely even cried.

"So he manipulated things to start a war with Ra," Isis said. "It doesn't change what Seth has done."

The scene shifted and she was again standing outside that awful room, listening to Seth and Osiris talking. And her feet propelled her forward, no matter how little she wanted to approach. She saw Seth move into Osiris' arms and kiss him. She'd seen it so many times and yet it still sickened her like it was a fresh slap in the face.

When she turned her head away, she could hear the sound of pained cries, and realized they weren't her own. It was Seth crying, and begging. Pleading, like any number of victims he'd left in his devastating wake while he was king.

He chose this, Isis thought, refusing to face it. *For Anubis.* Yet she couldn't look. Not again.

"I've seen this before," Isis finally said. "You show me nothing new, Sekhmet."

The scene shifted on a cry from Seth, and Isis was watching what she realized was her old bedroom in Heliopolis. Isis – her past self – sat on her bed, weeping. And with the tools nearby and the smell in the air, Isis wondered—

Seth burst into the room, dressed in his regular clothes and wearing his headdress. "Isis! I need your help!"

Isis went cold as she watched Seth approach, and watched her own self bristle and firm up against Seth. This was the night Osiris had died. And Isis had just created her own curse.

"We should stand together as a united front against them," Seth insisted to her. And Isis recalled how angry she'd been. How hurt. How late this had been from him, when he should have come to her *first*. How Isis had nearly killed Anubis herself, but chosen not to.

He was so arrogant and self-centered, she thought. *Just like Osiris, thinking of me as a tool in his box rather than a sister. A friend.*

But now, at a distance, she could see the manic look in Seth's eyes under his mask. The way Seth, her strong brother, who was ordinarily terrifying on and off the battlefield, shook slightly. The quiver in his voice.

He's afraid, she thought, with surprise.

“We can lie,” Seth practically begged. “Say we slept together or something. To make them regret what they’ve done. To show we’re stronger.”

Isis lowered her gaze in embarrassment of the stupid idea, knowing that she would only speak rejection. That Isis would be trapped in the labyrinth and Nephthys would free her, and then Isis would revive Osiris before fleeing Heliopolis for hundreds of years.

“Isis, please,” Seth said, begging. “We have to do this!”

He sounded so desperate. And in that moment, Isis recalled the report from her bird servant. Seth with tears in his eyes. What he’d said to Anubis.

Reports said he’d drink himself stupid and go on rampages, she thought. *Is that all from my rejection for his foolish ideas?*

Isis had seen much pain on her run from Seth. Many victims of his and his followers. How even the survivors often fell into despair and destruction. They would drink themselves silly or drug themselves into comas, and sometimes death.

“But I did come to you for help!”

“I just wasn’t myself then, that’s all. If I’d had more time…”

“So what?” Isis demanded of this shadow of her brother. “You still hurt me! You still hurt my children! So many of them!” Her eyes stung. “Even if it was out of pain, you worked to destroy me…” She looked away. “I’m not responsible for what you did!”

The scene shifted again, and Isis saw herself and her siblings sitting on thrones for celebration. The war with Ra was over, the sun was high over the four siblings, and the humans danced and sang around them.

Isis breathed in deeply and sighed. *Sekhmet is failing whatever she wants with this.*

Her gaze went to Seth, who looked bored and annoyed. No more tears or desperation. No more tugs on her heart strings, despite how much she hated it.

He was just a god, that was all.

And then she looked at Osiris. Tall, regal, a true ruler. Her heart hurt, and she hated it.

“Were you involved in all this with Nephthys, too?” Isis demanded of Osiris’ memory, knowing he wouldn’t reply, just as Seth hadn’t. “All this, just for *Seth*? All the pain you wrought, for *that?”* She remembered how awful and hard the wars were. And she’d believed it was to protect them. To keep them all safe from Ra.

She watched Seth sulk away, and Osiris act the caring older brother, back when things had been fine, or so Isis had thought. *Already*, she knew, his heart was set on one goal. The one he watched walk away. Not on Isis sitting beside him. Adoring him.

The scene shifted and she watched Seth talking with the human servants about the loot he was being rewarded from Osiris' haul. He didn't seem happy, but he also seemed so… so normal. Not like the brash, arrogant god she knew.

He was *different back then,* she thought in frustration as she saw Nephthys approach and chat with Seth. Isis watched Nephthys laugh, clearly happy, as she teased Seth.

"What am I, a kid?!"

"Pfft," Nephthys said with a laugh as he held Seth's arm tightly, nearly pressing her child to his tall shoulder. "Aren't you? Or are you just a cutie?"

"Don't tease me," Seth said, his tall back to Isis, sulking as he used to. But he leaned into Nephthys rather than away. All his body language focused on her. His fingers teased closer to her side, and there was love in every word between them.

"How can someone so cute be so grumpy?" Nephthys pressed, leaning even more against him. She held him tight, as if he was the most precious thing in the world.

I haven't seen her happy in centuries, Isis thought, distantly, even as it stung to remember this, too. For all she looked back on these times for memories of the mirror, she'd avoided things like this. Even then, she didn't think seeing these two together like this could hurt so much, but it did.

Nephthys leaned in to kiss Seth's cheek, even as Seth wrapped his left arm around her back, not painfully, but to support her, and hold her close. His face blushed under his mask, and as they continued to talk, Seth pressed her to his chest, tucking her under his chin, as if to guard her from others.

"Cute…" he said. "Yeah, right… You're cuter."

"Agh!!" Nephthys howled, "That's so cheesy!"

It was all so simple and silly. *They act like children,* Isis thought with a roll of her eyes. But in a blin, she saw them pull each other close, gazing into each other's eyes, lost in their own world, before they finally kissed. They were wrapped so tightly it was hard to see where they each began and ended.

Isis grimaced. *I don't need to see this.* She already had the memory of Seth and Osiris burned into her mind.

"Pay attention, Isis," Sekhmet said, pulling Isis back from herself. "You're missing it." She snapped her fingers as she pointed.

A light shone from the side of the room where she'd pointed.

"Hm?" Nephthys asked as she pulled away from Seth's embrace, while still holding onto him. "What's all this?" Her eyes were on a pile of loot from Ra.

Isis frowned, watching as Nephthys picked up… *Hathor's hand mirror!*

This was that day! Isis thought, horrified. *I remember…* As she watched Nephthys study the mirror, Isis recalled considering it when assigning out the spoils, and discarding it herself, as it didn't reflect anything. She only had memories outside of this, so she never knew…

I was the one who sent it to them, she thought, miserably. She'd tried not to focus on it as she worked on the mirror. Whenever she did, it made her angry. Because it was foolish to blame herself, and still possible that the mirror had gotten to Nephthys, if it ever did, in some other way. And it was foolish to insist Osiris had somehow known Isis wouldn't keep the mirror. It had to be an accident that she wouldn't take it. That it would end up with Seth. That Nephthys would take an interest. There was too much risk involved!

He doesn't have the power of foresight, Isis thought bitterly as she watched Nephthys and Seth turn to bed, happily, still embracing, as if they wished to never part. And then they started losing their clothes.

"Ooh, this is fun," Sekhmet said, clearly delighted.

Isis' face burned. "I don't need to see this."

"But it's getting exciting!" Sekhmet said, her eyes on Seth and Nephthys' bodies.

"Move past this!" Isis demanded.

Thankfully the scene shifted again, and Isis saw Nephthys sit up as Seth slept. The look on her face as she gazed down Seth was so loving. His arms were still wrapped tightly around her, even in slumber.

She does love him, Isis thought. *She did, then. But… then why go to Osiris?* She'd seen that look on her parents' faces. On their grandparents' faces.

On her own face, in the past, as she gazed at Osiris.

That adoration was obvious, and meant you only saw one person. There was no way Nephthys, the Nephthys whom Isis had known, would stray.

The crying, begging Nephthys on that night when everything went wrong, because she loved Osiris…

And now Isis watched Nephthys go back to that damn mirror. The mirror that was always there, every time. A mirror that allegedly contained a version of Nephthys who claimed to be the wife of Seth.

And Isis saw the curse take hold, but the memory was just a memory. She couldn't tell what else it did.

"What does the mirror do?" Isis demanded as she looked at Sekhmet, who was only smirking. "Tell me!"

"You can guess, can't you?" Sekhmet replied with a sharp-toothed smile.

Isis recalled the flash of light that had drawn not only *her* attention, but also Nephthys'. "You! You did this! You ruined us all!" She could still see the adoration in Nephthys' face. In Seth's face. The love that had vanished so long ago. "They loved each other! And you… you —!" All that love had burned away.

"I see Osiris isn't being blamed for any of this," Sekhmet replied, coolly. "You should be honest. Osiris is the one who made this happen. I only made sure it didn't go as Osiris planned."

"But there's no way…" Isis half-pleaded. "The mirror was just one of many trophies… Osiris couldn't have known I wouldn't keep it. That Seth wouldn't want it… Why target Nephthys?"

"He *didn't* target her," Sekhmet said, sounding annoyed. "You know the only person he wanted to target. What he *wanted* to do to Seth with it."

Isis' blood ran cold as she considered Seth in Nephthys' place, insisting he'd hidden his love for Osiris for so many years, apologizing…

"He stole it from Ra…" Isis said, recalling Osiris facing Ra in her temple. And he'd *meant* for it to go to Seth. He'd known Isis for so long. He knew her tastes. Had likely known she wouldn't care for it, and so it would end up in Seth's portion.

That flash, Isis thought again. *That was Sekhmet making Nephthys take note of it. If Nephthys hadn't seen it, if* Seth *had been the one to keep it… What would have happened?* She looked at Nephthys in horror.

"Oh? I just… saw someone…" Nephthys' voice sounded distant.

"No…" Isis said, watching Nephthys turn away, from her, from Seth… from everything. The spell, whatever it was, had taken hold.

Sekhmet pulled her alone, making her watch Osiris manipulate Nephthys. How Nephthys sounded so unlike herself. How the sister Isis had once known would never have agreed to such things.

I thought as much of Osiris and Seth once, too, she thought. But no matter her bitterness, she'd seen Seth and Nephthys together. She'd known that kind of love.

This was all wrong.

"Her memories are trapped in the mirror now," Sekhmet said. "She only sees *him*, now."

"You could have just told me from the start," Isis said. "Why show me this?"

"Would you have believed me?" Sekhmet asked.

No, Isis thought as she watched the man a part of her still cursedly loved manipulate their sister. Manipulate their brother. Manipulate *Isis* with centuries of lies.

And he *smiled* as he did it.

Isis woke in her chambers, and saw it was late afternoon. After a moment, she could tell that a day had passed. She felt weary, and slowly pushed herself up, before turning to rest her feet on the floor.

She turned to gaze at the empty doorway. No one had seemingly come to call on her, or at least it wasn't apparent. She likely wasn't missed. Seth, Thoth, and Maat were busy. Nephthys and Horus were in their own cells, voluntary and involuntary. Anubis was wherever he willed.

Osiris was dead.

She could still recall Seth running in to see her, desperate. How her heart had grown still under her own curse. Over the centuries she'd wished for her siblings of old. The ones she'd loved. Whom she'd thought loved her.

Osiris had lied. Nephthys had been brainwashed.

And Seth? What had he lost without even knowing? She and Seth had both loved so deeply, and how had they been rewarded for it? How much of Seth had broken that night, over and over, just like Isis?

Isis knew what it was to know your son was at risk. And what ends she would go to, in order to stop that.

She reached out to the ghost of Seth's hand, offering her a place at his side. To stand together against those who'd wronged them. But there was nothing but air.

She pulled back her hand and hugged herself. *It changes nothing. He's done too much to me.* One pain shared was not everything, even if Osiris was at the root of everything. Even if Isis bore some of the blame, because Osiris had *used* her to ruin them.

Osiris is still out there, she thought. *In contact with Maat, other gods, Anubis… What will he do next?* She looked at her desk, where the mirror sat. *And how will I save my sister?*

She thought of the army approaching. How hard she'd pushed for it. How Egypt was unprepared for it. How Seth was possibly unprepared.

She clenched her hands into fists. *What revenge will either of us have, in the end?*

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Horus was already standing when Seth appeared out of the darkness of the labyrinth. As the torches ran low, Horus' intuition told him someone would appear, and it wouldn't be Anubis *or* Isis.

So when Seth appeared, Horus braced himself. Although he hadn't been personally tortured by Seth or Seth's servants -other than being bothered by Anubis – being stuck in the labyrinth was draining on its own. Horus missed the sunlight. He missed being able to go where he pleased. And not being able to keep track of time was slowly whittling away at his patience and calm, leaving him unmoored and more on edge than he'd been in years.

He'd never wondered before just how long his mother had stayed here, and asked her painfully little about the place. Now he regretted the decision, for all he didn't have Nephthys to get him out anyway.

How many days now? Horus wondered as Seth stood tall before him, gazing at Horus with an unreadable expression beneath that black mask. *But I can't ask him. He'll use it as a weapon.*

It was hard to be around Seth like this. Horus would have liked being a proper servant, in Heliopolis, able to be around Seth. But here, once more, they were at a painful distance. Perhaps forever. And being around Seth, even at a distance during the trial, had been so exciting… it was hard to give up now.

"You'll join Thoth in scouting for enemy soldiers," Seth said. "We're going to ensure your army doesn't get far."

"My army?" Horus asked, confused at the comment. "I don't have an army." Seth had sent everyone away when he'd told them to get lost after the second match. And that barely counted as an army, anyway. Supporters, perhaps, but not Horus' army. Unless Geb counted on that front.

Seth scoffed and replied, "You expect me to believe that?" He sounded oddly tired as he spoke, which was unusual.

Horus frowned and asked, "Why do you think I have an army?"

"Thoth said that Isis got one from far away," Seth replied. "To arrive during the trial and fight me." Seth smirked. "But that's not happening now."

Only years of keeping himself collected under Isis' worried gaze kept Horus calm as he thought of this. *Mother got an army? And she never told me?* He remembered when she left him in Nut's care and traveled, alone, a long way. And she'd never told him all of what she'd

done while she was gone, other than search for allies. *That must have been when she found something…*

“Do you think they’d shoot you down as a prize?” Seth asked with a smirk. “If they’re strong enough to fight *me*, you’re nothing to them. And I doubt foreigners care that much about who’s an ally right now.”

Horus supposed it was a possibility, though he imagined Isis had given her potential allies strict instructions. Still, he asked, “You’ll free me to die out there?” Seth seemed to have a personal stake in Horus perishing. If nothing else, Horus was the son of Seth’s main enemies, after all.

Seth shrugged and replied, “I’m only freeing you temporarily, and I imagine you’ll weasel out of dying in what’s to come.”

It was almost comforting that Seth seemed to have that faith in Horus’ abilities.

“After this is dealt with,” Seth continued, “I think I’ll send you back here to rot.” He still sounded non-committal, like he was still treating this like a game. And Horus knew that was obviously his right, but…

“This isn’t the first time you’ve spared me,” Horus said. “When you could do much worse.” It wasn’t like the labyrinth was easy. But for someone like Seth, it was *very* forgiving.

Seth simply gazed back at him.

“Why do you keep doing that?” Horus asked. “Sparing me? You should want me dead.” He knew Seth was conflicted over Anubis, while trying to retain his position, but he didn’t know Horus. He likely didn’t remember the time they’d met in Khemmis, as he believed he’ seen Anubis, not Horus. Seth attacked his siblings, his parents, his grandparents, great-grandmother, and peers… He’d destroy the whole of Egypt if he had the chance.

Horus was the son of Isis and Osiris. Seth should have wanted him dead, after everything Horus had been a part of. And yet… Seth didn’t kill him. Or torture him personally, imagined terror or not. This *couldn’t* be Seth’s answer to how to dela with Horus.

“Are you calling me weak?” Seth demanded, and Horus could feel the desert god’s anger growing. It had been distant before, almost like a nascent, early storm. But Seth was bristling now. The sand shivered at Horus’ feet, ready to turn into spikes or perhaps jackals to tear into Horus’ flesh.

There would be nowhere to go in this tiny room if Seth lashed out. Fleeing into the labyrinth was a slower death of a different kind, and they both knew it. But Seth hadn’t needed *this* to kill him, especially since Seth seemed to want to make the death personal and where Seth could witness it: but unlike the gladiatorial arena, Seth wouldn’t see Horus die in the labyrinth. And even just fighting here was too private. Seth, who clearly had his pride, would want Horus’ death to be public.

Horus considered, again, appealing to that moment of softness he'd seen in Khemmis. Recalling their shared past. But the god before him looked too furious for such things.

"I think you were trying to play fairly," Horus said, recalling when Seth had been calm enough to allow Maat to find answers. "Which is commendable. Or… there is something else going on." It was possible Seth took pleasure from this somehow, but Seth seemed too miserable in the moment to take pleasure here. He'd really only been happy while they were fighting on the boat.

Seth only snorted before he replied, "Then keep imagining whatever you want."

It felt like a dismissal, and Horus could have let it go: Seth needed him to investigate this army Isis had found, and Horus wanted answers on that front, too. After all, if the army was real, Isis had never told Horus. And what value would there be in Thoth sending Seth on a wild goose chase, unless it was some distant play to get Horus out of the labyrinth? An unlikely one, unless Thoth used his own ability to see the future to see if it would happen.

But what value do I have free? Horus thought. *Thoth knows I've pledged myself to Seth as the loser. And even if Thoth knows my feelings… why help me with them?*

Horus needed, and *wanted* more answers than he had, and more than he was currently given. He didn't want to come back here, not just out of fear, but also because this was one step closer to his goal: staying at Seth's side, for good. And perhaps for that, he should have let things rest.

But he'd been in the dark for too long.

"We don't need to be enemies," Horus insisted. "Our contest is over, and you've won. You gain little by killing me, and I have never desired your death, or even just your suffering!" When Seth didn't reply, Horus continued, "I fought for my mother, to restore her rights, but that's all. I know from what my mother's told me and what I've read, that both of you have gone through much… And I do not wish to see you keep fighting. If Mother obtained an army, it was not with my knowledge, and I *will* put a stop to it."

Seth frowned at him, then.

Horus stepped forward and knelt before Seth.

Seth stiffened, seemingly in surprise.

"You are siblings," Horus insisted, recalling all the carvings he'd seen of their exploits. The stories Isis had half-told before turning back to bitterness. The letters he'd found and carefully gone through, precious word by word. "You share the same blood. And once more, you work towards a shared goal: healing your sister. This contest can be ended once and for all, before more people are hurt and killed between you both." He clenched his hands at his side. "I cannot speak for my mother, but I meant what I said: that I would happily serve you with sincerity. For all eternity. If you'll only let me." Meeting Seth at the arena had been a shock: Seth had seemed at once so small and so much grander than Horus remembered. And

seeing his creativity and determination during the trial and the matches had been shocking, scary, and wonderous.

Horus wanted to know that god. Now, as they both were. And maybe Horus would be destroyed, but he wanted to try, all the same. A part of Horus was afraid, but also thrilled. He wanted more, whatever Seth would give him. Not to be trapped out here in the dark, so far away. And perhaps, given time, Horus could prove himself. Maybe even give Seth chances to show that he wasn't as terrible as he could be, like he had with the second match. That he could be the god Horus knew him to be. The brother and peer Isis loved. The guardian god Horus was awed by.

After a moment, Seth scoffed and said, "Isis would sooner kill than befriend me. And if you weren't a fool, you'd know she even has a right to it."

Horus had seen firsthand what his mother and her followers had gone through at Seth's hands and the hands of his followers. He knew that there were harms beyond the pale, beyond simple forgiveness. It was not Horus' place to force Isis into anything. He solely cared about her survival. And he did not want her to be miserable in her survival, either. But it was all he could do, for now.

But he recalled Seth's jibes at the opening of the trial, and wondered how a god like that could believe Isis had a *right* to try to kill him. *Again, he speaks of fairness. That is not the mad, evil god Mother has warned me of, time and again*.

A part of him had hope, hearing that.

"Get up," Seth finally ordered, clearly finished with the conversation, "we have an army to deal with."

"I believe negotiation is better at this point than all-out war," Thoth said to Seth as they stood in a meeting room in Heliopolis, with Maat standing nearby, watching. She'd also been roped into the talks, which only made Seth more irritable.

She was so thrilled *to hear from her precious Osiris,* Seth thought, with frustration. He could just remember the way all the gods were so *happy* to hear from that damned monster. Precious Osiris, who was so much *better* than the evil Seth.

If I can't be better, Seth thought, *then I'll be a worse monster.* But he didn't want Egypt to crumble to foreign invaders, all the same. Not just because it was his duty to guard against such things, but also because it felt like further insult to his power, and like letting someone else do the work.

If Seth wanted to crush Osiris' legacy, then he'd do it *himself*.

Seth sighed and said, "Fine. If Negotiations dissolve, I'll just slaughter them all."

"Ah, yes," Thoth said, nervously.

“Isis’ deal is moot,” Maat noted. “She’s no longer in a position to fulfill it, now that she’s…” She looked at Seth for a moment. “Here.”

Busy with Nephthys, Seth thought. *Not quite my prisoner. But not quite not, either.*

“We may need something else to bargain with,” Maat said.

“We have plenty of treasure,” Seth noted. “If you think that will sate them.” It wasn’t like he cared for trophies. That had always been Osiris and Isis’ thing. Seth was content with weapons, and he barely bothered with those anymore.

Maat nodded, but replied, “There may be other options before us.”

Seth turned when he smelled Horus approaching, and they all watched Horus appear at the door, looking concerned. The demigod had cleaned up since he’d left the labyrinth with Seth, and kept up – just barely – with Seth on the journey back to the palace. He’d then gone to speak to Isis.

“My mother is in a strange slumber,” Horus reported. “And I cannot wake her.”

Seth frowned and asked, “What?” *A strange slumber? What the fuck was she doing?* It was too odd a thing to lie about, but Seth was still wary.

Horus looked at him and said, “I ask permission to bring Nephthys to help. She’s helped Isis with similar things before.”

Seth supposed that was true to a degree, though he’d never been involved with such matters. He knew Isis definitely felt more comfortable talking about magic to her sister than Seth. And Nephthys had some healing ability.

Seth finally waved a hand dismissively. “If Nephthys wishes to help, she can. She’s always been free to go where she pleases. The door to the cell has never been locked.” If Horus thought to somehow use his newfound freedom to allow his allows to collude with each other, he was mistaken. Nephthys was *already* free to collude anew with Isis if she so wished. If she thought she *could*.

Horus’ eyebrows rose in surprise.

“Really?” Thoth asked. “But… I thought you imprisoned her?”

Seth rolled his eyes. “Of course, because *every* evil thing in this world is my fault, isn’t it?” Over the centuries, he’d tried to ignore Nephthys. To the best of his ability. It hadn’t worked well. Even now, knowing she might be something *else* didn’t help.

It was lonely.

“Because I make all decisions for everyone,” Seth continued. “And not a single one of you, not even my *wife* can make decisions without me. All of you are *so* incompetent on that front.” He snorted in disdain. Nephthys’ life was her own to ruin. He’d stepped out of it as much as possible. That she was still here after everything, well… it wasn’t his business.

Thoth looked away, clearly nervous as ever.

“Is it safe to allow her to work on your mother?” Seth asked Horus. “After all, she’s… whatever she is right now.” The creature had left Anubis alone, so he wasn’t worried about Anubis, but surely Horus would be concerned about Isis?

“I believe she will help,” Horus said. “I’ve seen that her being at my mother’s side will do good.”

Seth wasn’t sure to trust that, and for Nephthys’ sake – the true Nephthys, whatever happened to her – he almost went against it. He didn’t want anything bad happening to Isis before she was able to break the curse or whatever was wrong with Nephthys, after all. And what if the cursed or fake Nephthys got rid of Isis to ensure the curse remained as it was? Then Nephthys could be trapped forever!

So what is my solution? Seth wondered. *Ignore it until it goes away? What good did that ever do? Anubis never left my side. He only dragged everyone I despise back. Even Osiris.*

“We don’t need to be enemies.”

“Fine,” Seth said, wishing away Horus’ naïve voice. As if hoping for peace actually led anywhere. “Let’s fetch her then. We have work to do, after all.” The approaching army wouldn’t wait forever.

Seth, Thoth, and Maat joined Horus in collecting a confused Nephthys from her cell and taking her to Isis.

Isis was, indeed, resting on her bed, and nothing Thoth did could wake her, either.

Seth stood back, observing it all. It was strange to be in Isis' chambers again. He'd avoided them since he became king. So it had been centuries since he'd been here to any other space of hers. He used to be so curious, but after Osiris killed himself and Isis abandoned Seth, the spaces became too painful.

Seth hated his fear. *It's just a room.*

Nephthys stepped forward and looked Isis over, worried. After a while, Nephthys said to the gathered immortals, “I… am not as strong with such things as Isis, but she seems to be in some sort of coma.”

Thoth nodded, looking uncomfortable, before adding, “There’s nothing any of us can do.”

Seth glanced at Horus, wondering where this magical *help* Horus had promised would occur.

But Horus said nothing, merely watching Nephthys and Thoth gazing back at him.

Nephthys looked sad as she glanced between Isis, Horus, and Seth. And Seth hated the pitiable look on her face. He’d avoided her for so long and now he *kept seeing it*.

I wasn't the one who strayed! He thought, furious. *I did everything I could! I tried to be the best I could!*

He breathed in deeply, cooling himself. What was past was past. He didn't have time for this.

"Fine," Seth finally said. "Nephthys will stay here and see what she can do. And Isis at least will not interfere in our other plans." He didn't need her working mischief with the army, after all. He looked at Horus, who was watching him. "We have work to do." He glanced pointedly at Thoth and Maat and nodded, before heading out of the room, leaving Nephthys and Isis behind.

If the Nephthys here and now does something, he thought, *I guess I'm no worse off than I was. And at least I won't have to figure out what to do with Isis after all this is over.*

Horus, for whatever reason, didn't appear bothered by leaving the two goddesses alone. If this was some trick of his, he didn't speak of it.

And if Isis pulls something, Seth thought, *or if Nephthys does, like last time she helped Isis, I've still got Horus. So Isis gains nothing by escaping.* Even as things fell apart at times, he was still strong, and still held the reins of power in his hand.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sunshine burned Horus' back and wings as the demigod flew over the sand, stone, tall rock cliffs, and trees, searching for anyone who looked like one of their invaders. The wind carried flashes of places he couldn't see, even with his excellent eyesight. Occasionally, he caught the scent of dust, flowers, and water.

Earlier, Thoth said the ships of the invading army had beached and they'd set up camp already, sending out scouts to check the area. So Seth had told Horus to use his wings to patrol. Despite ramped up recruitment and a bit of training, the army wasn't ready to see any true action, but Seth had ordered the units that were ready *enough* to head out, in case they were needed, though he doubted it. Seth himself would go ahead, with Maat. Maat had said she could make her own way there, but Seth had said that she would not be arguing on his behalf, at least without *him* present.

And I am out here, Horus thought in frustration as he studied the terrain for anything that moved. *He really meant it when he said we'd be scouting.*

"They aren't far out, yet," Thoth called from nearby as he flapped his red, blue and yellow wings in his ibis form. "There's not much to find."

"You're certain?" Horus asked. Thoth had never told *Horus* about the army, after all. Perhaps Isis had told Thoth to keep silent, or she hadn't even known that Thoth knew, as Horus couldn't imagine her conferring with Thoth on such a thing. But Horus couldn't ask Isis, and he hadn't had the time to chat with Thoth before the they had to depart. There was little value in lying now, but if there was one thing Horus had learned from his mother about some of these ancient gods, it was to never trust them, at least not fully.

"You can't see it?" Thoth asked. "You should be able to." There was a challenge in his voice.

"I know they are watching," Horus replied, which was about all he got from his intuition. It didn't help that he kept being distracted by his wish that he was at Seth's side to… ensure what? Seth was Egypt's strongest fighter. He'd lived for thousands of years more than Horus.

But this whole situation set Horus on edge. "Why did you ask for me for this if you could look at it on your own?" Thoth was fast in his bird form, and they had yet to catch anyone.

"Finding them is not the same as dealing with them," Thoth replied. "I wanted to ensure that I had someone at my back if I needed it."

And to stand behind, Horus thought. *He is far more ancient even than Seth, and yet he's ready to let others die for him.* He'd heard many of his mother's tirades about the bird god over the centuries.

“Plus,” Thoth added, “it got you out of the labyrinth, didn’t it? You would have been worse off trapped down in the dark for much longer. Why are you upset?”

“If you’re trying to set Seth up this way, I don’t know how it will work,” Horus noted, not wanting to think about what he’d escaped. “My mother’s magic aided me as much as anything else during the trial.” Without her, much as he disliked the thought and wished to stand on his, he was weaker. “And I don’t know these warriors like she did. They will not listen to me to attack him.” There, his intuition failed him entirely, other than giving him the notion things would work out, somehow.

“They don’t need to listen to you,” Thoth said. “They already have orders. But you’ll need to be here if Seth falls to them.”

“So Maat lied when she said she’d try to keep them out of Egypt?” Horus asked. He didn’t know why Maat and Thoth would go themselves to witness such things, but maybe it was simply *to* witness. Maybe Thoth and Maat thought they could manipulate these invaders as they manipulated Ra, Isis, and Seth…

“No,” Thoth replied. “Maat *will* try to get them out of Egypt. A foreign army is the *last* thing we need right now, even with Seth still in power. But Seth is still volatile. He might not stand by what she says.”

That’s not true, Horus thought. Seth had acted erratically at times, when he was challenged by Horus and Isis, and at the trial, when the other gods were not primed to listen to him anyway, and of course after Osiris, whom he clearly hated, appeared. And then during each match, he was a fierce warrior. But the matches were martial contests, after all. How else was Seth meant to act? Just lay down and accept defeat? It was unlike him.

Seth surrendering would have made it easier for Horus and his allies, but even if Isis imagined it, Horus had never done so.

“He let Maat work after the match,” Horus said as the wind pushed on his wings, and he sent a small tornado to push what he thought was a mortal hiding behind a boulder. There was indeed someone there, dressed in foreign clothes and carrying a bow and arrows, and they ran back towards the shore. “He’s willing to work with people when it’s in his interest.” And it was in Seth’s interest to maintain his power. An invading army would only distract him.

“He’s also a warrior,” Thoth said, flying a short distance away to have a semblance of doing their duty. “And he enjoys sport. Do you think he’ll turn aside fighting with the army for fun?”

“You’re the one who’s been working with him,” Horus replied, sending gusts of wind to more apparent scouts. “You’re the one who’d know.” Horus didn’t like to think about the god who’d been turning humans against Horus in an arena for entertainment enjoying running amok amongst foreign invaders. Horus could easily see the appeal.

Thoth chuckled before saying, “You almost sound jealous.”

Horus frowned. With Thoth's powers, there was a chance Thoth knew some of what was in his heart, but Thoth had never said anything to Horus directly. And if Thoth had said it to Isis, Horus assumed she'd have challenged Horus about it.

Regardless of his own feelings, what mattered was that Seth not be driven into a corner, if only because that would make everything *worse*: Seth truly became erratic at such times. And Horus did not think highly of his chances if Seth fell and, while Isis was unconscious, an invading army could wreak havoc in Egypt.

"I'm joking of course," Thoth said. "This way is clear. We can head back to Seth's party."

Horus *didn't* breathe a sigh of relief. There was a warning in Thoth's words, and Horus knew he'd hear more of soon enough.

I am not afraid, Horus thought. *I put my all into the matches, and everyone could see it. And I am not ashamed of how I feel.*

Seth pulled his sand chariot to a halt, his eyes on the large triremes beached near the shoreline, behind an already set up camp. There were many people scurrying about, mostly in armor, and not all of them looked human. Creatures he didn't recognize, with blue, red, and green skin, sparked his interest.

It had been some time since he'd fought anything other than humans. Ignoring Horus, of course. And Seth refused to glance behind him to make sure the pigeon wasn't coming out of nowhere. Seth knew that the whole situation could be another scheme of Thoth's, to corner Seth against this strange army. But Seth also knew that with only a weak demigod at hand, Thoth would be placing himself in the hands of a foreigner, who would likely not have Egypt's interests at heart. And Ra wasn't around to take over once Seth fell. Nor Isis. And Horus didn't control the army. Anubis, who was traveling with the army now, might help give it to Horus, but so what? The army was still weak. Seth was the real power.

Without me, Seth thought as Maat got off the chariot behind him and stepped onto the ground, *and even with Horus and the army, they'd be vulnerable. And they have to know that. Or else they're fools.*

Seth stepped off behind Maat and saw a lone warrior leave the camp and march towards them.

"That is their leader," Maat said as she and Seth walked forward together. "Thoth described him to me."

"And you're ready to send him packing?" Seth asked. He carried his black was staff and walked confidently. The army before him didn't scare him in the slightest. He was almost grateful to Isis for sending him a proper enemy to deal with. And without Horus and Isis as a distraction, he could focus on it: he was quite ready to form sand constructs to rip the camp apart, as needed. His khopesh alone would wreak havoc on this place.

"Yes," Maat said, solemnly. "So long as you keep yourself in hand."

“Being a biddable servant is not going to impress them,” Seth said. They hadn’t talked much in the chariot, and Seth had preferred it that way. He was rather impressed Maat was willing to get in with him, after her fear during the trial. But Maat had noted it meant they’d arrive together, and she could keep an eye on him and what he had planned. “It’s going to make us look weak.”

“Very well,” Maat said. “Do as you must, then. But allow me a chance to try to deter him.”

Seth raised an eyebrow, curious at her willingness to bend. *I imagine she just wants this over with, with as little fuss as possible. First she loses her gambit against me, and now she risks foreigners flooding the place. It’s likely frustrating for her.* He supposed he should take delight in his enemies suffering, but all of his body was geared towards preparing for a fight.

As they neared, Seth could see more details of the foreign army leader: a tall, bronze-skinned man with long, brown, wavy hair, dark eyes, and a red cloak. He wore golden armor and a white skirt, and showed off his muscles as he moved. He walked casually, but was clearly a trained warrior, and a god, too, though Seth didn’t recognize which.

A small group of soldiers formed up at a distance behind him.

They’re ready for a fight now, Seth thought as he and Maat drew close. *But this man isn’t afraid of fighting.* He supposed foreign gods were arrogant. *Or he doesn’t think we’re a threat.* No letters had been sent in advance of their coming. Seth was just prepared to confront whoever they got to.

They came to a stop only a short distance from each other, where they were near enough to avoid not having to shout.

Seth disliked the look the man gave both of them. It was rather lascivious.

“Greetings!” the foreign god said with a smirk. “Are you the welcoming party?”

“We are here to tell you that your contract with Isis cannot be completed,” Maat said. “She’s not in a position to give you what you seek.”

The foreign god’s eyebrows rose. “Really? What happened to her?” He looked at Seth thoughtfully, as if Seth was hiding a whole goddess under his black shendyt.

“That’s not your concern,” Maat said.

“Now you’ve just made me more curious,” the foreign god said. When Maat didn’t reply, he asked, “We came here for war. Perhaps Isis is busy, but I do not know *you,*” he pointed to Maat, “and *you*,” he gestured to Seth, “seem to resemble my target.” He smirked.

Of course Isis would tell them who to look for, Seth thought, unperturbed. “So will you attack now?” He itched for a fight. And given Horus was not here and Thoth and Maat were purportedly *helping* him, well…

The foreign god gave him a thoughtful look, as if he was considering it, before replying, “She told me you were a wild animal and that I should attack before you did. Yet here you stand…

oddly calm."

Seth rolled his eyes. *Of course Isis would say that*. Seth had hounded her for centuries, and his followers had worked much havoc on Isis'. But it wasn't like Seth killed *everyone* he came across.

The foreign god shrugged. "Regardless, I will not renege on a deal."

"And if I kill you and annihilate all your ships?" Seth asked, making the foreign god study him. "Is that worth believing that Maat is lying?"

The foreign god's eyebrows rose again, and then he smirked. "It's an intriguing threat, if nothing else. And fighting you would still accomplish my mission."

Seth had faced many commanders over the centuries, many of whom were from foreign lands. This one was no different. They all felt that Seth and his forces were weak and would fall easily at the slightest pressure. And Seth always proved them wrong.

Wind whispered around him.

Seth didn't glance back when he smelled Horus and Thoth approaching. If they were planning to attack, this was the time…

The foreign god looked up and asked, "Reinforcements? So few, though."

"I felt no need to bring my whole army just to tell you to leave," Seth said. "Especially when I can handle you all myself." It was arrogant, but not wrong. This stranger didn't intimidate him in the slightest.

Horus and Thoth landed on the sand nearby, and walked slowly up to Maat and Seth.

"Uncle," Horus said as he drew nearer. "We got rid of their scouts."

Seth made a quiet noise that he'd heard, but didn't take his eyes off the foreign god.

"You're Isis' son," the foreign god said as he studied Horus. "She showed me images of you, so I'd know you."

To take his orders? Seth thought.

But Horus didn't reply.

The foreign god glanced at Seth and then back at Horus. "Where is your mother, Horus?"

"Not here," Horus said. "She cannot conclude your bargain. And as her son, I would end it, as the bargain was made on my behalf."

Seth kept his expression cool. He didn't know why Horus was acting this way, but Seth was willing to see it out. *Perhaps he's not entirely useless as a servant.*

The foreign god grinned. “Well, now, that’s interesting…” He glanced around. “Such a waste, though. This land is beautiful, and the immortals here are so fascinating.” He made a considering noise and said, “I’d like to explore, even if we don’t go forward with the invasion.”

Seth reached his power into the ground, ready to strike. He didn’t know this god’s powerset, so killing him as quickly as possible would likely be important…

“You want answers about your destiny,” Thoth said as he stepped forward beside Maat. “I can give them to you.” He smiled. “But in exchange, you and your army must depart. For good.”

The foreign god’s eyebrows rose. “You really want us gone, huh?”

“I’d rather not clean your wreckage from my shore if I had to,” Seth said. *Destiny? What destiny?*

The foreign god laughed before turning to Thoth. “Okay, color me impressed. What’s this about my destiny?”

Seth and Horus stood together and watched from a distance as Thoth, Maat, and the foreign god talked.

“You can hear them?” Seth asked. His sense of smell was strong, along with his hearing, but he couldn’t hear *everything* being said, just most of it.

Horus nodded. “They aren’t elaborating on a lot of detail, but clearly Thoth and Maat know much about him.”

Seth scoffed, and resisted the urge to walk over. “Thoth was able to sweettalk Ra about my parents. It’s no surprise.” He had little guarantee Thoth and Maat weren’t somehow convincing the stranger to set up a later invasion, though that was foolish: it would have been more sensible to just let *this* go forward as planned, if they wanted.

So he had to rely on what he heard and believe they were doing as they’d said: just trying to get rid of the army.

Horus looked at Seth, but Seth ignored him. For now, at least, the bird wasn’t attacking.

“Would you really be able to destroy them?” Horus asked.

“Of course,” Seth replied with a grin. “This is nothing. And they’re likely tired from the trip here, anyway. They’d be weak.” He could shove them into the sea to drown. Tear their boats down to use as weapons. Send an army of sand warriors in amongst them to cause havoc. There were any number of things he could do.

“Mother must have thought you’d be distracted by the trial,” Horus said as he looked over the camp. “That it would split your concentration… Or that she could use it against you, perhaps with me.”

“It’s likely,” Seth said. He finally looked at Horus, irritated once more that the demigod was taller than him, just like Osiris. “So you really persist in the idea that you had nothing to do with this?” The foreign god seemed to confirm it, as he’d indicated Isis had merely *told* him about Horus rather than introduced him, but still… Horus made it *sound* like he knew about it in advance, even if he hadn’t done the negotiations himself, or even just overseen them.

“I had nothing to do with this,” Horus insisted, meeting Seth’s gaze with his cool one. “I would have been against the idea if she’d told me. This… is not what this country needs.” He gestured to the ships. “Not now.”

And how would you change it? Seth thought. *You’re not the god your father is. You don’t even have Isis’ abilities.* “Even when you stand as my servant?” Seth asked aloud with a sneer. “You could command them now, if you wanted.” Horus had to know he was likely bound for the labyrinth again, once they returned to Heliopolis. Why not take the risk?

Osiris would, Seth thought.

“And when they learn that I lost to you?” Horus asked. “That your son has an important position in the army? They’d abandon me in a heartbeat.”

“At least you’re not a complete fool,” Seth commented. But as he turned to gaze at the three negotiating gods, he couldn’t help but wonder just what Isis had really planned for this army presumably succeeding. *She must have thought she could manage them… perhaps with Ra’s backing.* But he wondered at the idea that Ra would have ever agreed to such a thing. It seemed unlikely.

He thought of the first match, and how Isis had manipulated the water. *Would she have used drowning as a threat? Killed them all before they could reach their ships?* It was a risky business, at best. An act of desperation, if anything.

If we’d worked together, Seth thought, *she wouldn’t have been so desperate.*

Finally, the foreign god returned to his camp, and Maat and Thoth walked back over to Seth and Horus.

“He will depart,” Maat said. “And take his army with him.”

Seth watched the camp. “So easily?”

“He said he had what he wanted,” Thoth replied. He studied Seth before saying, “Though you could try chasing after him in the water, if you wish.”

Seth didn’t bother acknowledging the jab as he replied, “We’ll watch to make sure they leave. If they don’t, I’ll do as I said and destroy the whole camp.”

“Excellent!” Thoth said as he clapped his hands and smiled. “We appreciate you being so cooperative, Seth!”

“I didn’t win all the wars I fought through force,” Seth replied. Isis had negotiated plenty of them.

“I appreciate your willingness to negotiate, Uncle,” Horus said as he bowed his head. “It speaks well of you.”

Seth rolled his eyes. “It saves me time, that’s all.” After dealing with tricks from Horus and Isis, though he trusted his own abilities and his khopesh for this, he was wary of fighting foreign immortals here. They might endanger his ability to return to Nephthys and ensure whatever spell was on her was broken.

Horus smiled at him, which was weird. Seth would rather the demigod glared.

Seth turned away and summoned his chariot. *One problem solved, at least,* he thought.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Anubis stared at the wreckage of the caravan he and the unit he commanded had demolished: broken carts and the remains of dead slavers - their fallen weapons and torn clothes - littered the sand. The bodies were already dragged away for proper disposal. The soft cries of the freed captives occasionally came to his ears.

His unit had only run into this former slave caravan as they'd received orders to return to Heliopolis. And when Anubis had approached and observed them, he'd realized what they were.

Father would not want me to do anything, he'd thought as he stood in the sand, gazing grimly at the line of camels and human cargo. *But Isis.…*

Isis had spoken to Anubis of the horrors she'd seen in her travels, the few times they'd talked to coordinate her return to Heliopolis. And the women Anubis looked after in Heliopolis did, as well, when they learned he wouldn't hurt them, and would even help them. He'd known some of what he avoided by being the son of Nephthys and Seth. The grim reality was different.

"You should head back," Khnum said as he rose from a line of water nearby. "Your father will be angry as it is."

Anubis breathed in deeply, annoyed and somewhat grateful that Isis had instructed Khnum to look after him. Given the human soldiers were wary of him, Khnum at least gave him someone to talk to. Khnum had known Anubis for centuries, but he'd been around less often during Seth's reign. It was nice to have him back again.

But would he stay for me? Anubis thought, grimly. *Or just Isis?* It was frustrating to view their relationship through that lens. He didn't rely on Khnum for anything but companionship, but he wondered how fragile the connection was. And based on his arrangement with Horus, he didn't trust contracts with gods.

"Father's always angry," Anubis said as he turned to see the human soldiers going through the wreckage, and the freed but unsure captives huddled together with what supplies Anubis had gotten for them. "And he doesn't care what I do." With his own skills, he'd risen in the ranks. That he looked young at times didn't change the fact that he could grow taller and stand up to the oldest, strongest of humans. And he'd been studying tactics longer than the whole unit had lived. He still listened to the advice of the most senior members, but when he gave orders, they listened to the son of Seth.

"What *will* you do?" Khnum asked. He might have been there under Isis' orders, but he obeyed Anubis. For now, anyway.

“You’ve looked after your followers, haven’t you?” Anubis asked. “What would you advise?” Horus had taught him that he was less wise then he knew, and had little knowledge of the world. He needed to learn more, to grow stronger. To figure out what to do with his parents.

I don’t know if I can give up Father, Anubis thought. *But I can become strong without him. I already have.*

Khnum frowned, clearly thinking over the question. “You can save these people now, but what about when more slavers come?”

“Then I’ll fight them again,” Anubis said, imagining his rescues being enslaved again, or perhaps starving to death when left alone, without support. “If Father doesn’t need me in the army, I’ll be an army for these people.” His father had protected Egypt once, and was at least doing so a little with moving troops to hold off an invading army. If he wasn’t going to protect anyone else, then… Anubis would.

Khnum sighed sadly and then smiled. “Okay. I know a temple that might help.”

Isis stirred from sleep and blinked her eyes open, gazing into the afternoon light. She reached a hand up to her face, and rather than feeling tears or dryness, her face felt normal.

Her hands didn’t even feel tight from how hard she’d gripped the weapons she’d used in the nightmare, using them to smash, hit, harm…

She grimaced. *Of course I go back for more answers and Sekhmet had to show me* that…

Isis hadn’t been satisfied with her first exploration in her dreams, and after facing more frustration in her work, even with her knowledge of the mirror, went back to her dreams for clues, knowing Sekhmet was likely to be skulking around.

But all she’d found was the old nightmare. The night she’d learned the truth of all her siblings, and her world had collapsed around her. In her anger, dream Seth, who’d hurt her so much, who hadn’t gone to for her help *first*, had been an easy target, especially with Nephthys nowhere to be seen.

And it was in that moment of attacking him, trying to make him feel all that she’d felt over the centuries… that she knew that was part of it. It was easier to blame him than to attack herself for her own failings. Or Osiris.

She was the wisest of them, alongside Osiris. More than him, depending on the topic. She was the strategist when even Seth struggled. How had she failed so much to see what was right in front of her face? How had she loved so falsely? It made her skin crawl.

“Isis?” A quiet, scared voice asked her, making Isis look to her right side to see Nephthys kneeling beside her. Unlike Isis, Nephthys had tear tracks on her cheeks.

Isis frowned at her sister. “What are *you* doing here? Shouldn’t you be in that cell?” She recalled Nephthys didn’t have to *stay* there, and grimaced. “Oh, right.” She looked around.

“What finally dragged you out, then? I’m not imprisoned this time.” And Seth was nowhere to be seen, unlike in her dreams.

“Horus said you were in a coma,” Nephthys replied. “We couldn’t wake you. Are you all right?”

Isis frowned, but then pushed herself up to sit.

Nephthys was there, reaching out to help, but Isis pulled away.

“I’m fine,” Isis said, sharply. “I was looking for answers.” And Sekhmet would have gloated in her next words, “And I… may have found some of them.”

No matter what she felt about her own, at times, misguided efforts, Seth was still a threat to herself, Horus, and Egypt. And Isis was only here because of an agreement between Horus and Seth. Things were not safe. And she could not drop her guard around him.

Nephthys gazed at Isis with concern.

And then there’s her, Isis thought, miserably, as she moved to get off the bed. “Did Seth order you to come here?”

“No!” Nephthys said as she stood up, clearly nervous. “Horus told me I might be able to help, with Seth’s blessing, so I came.” She was trembling. “I can leave if you don’t want me around, but if you would like help…?”

You’re not you, Isis thought, miserably. *And Seth’s blessing? He just wants me to fix you.*

And there her anger came up against confusion. Because if Seth was as cruel as Isis had seen – if the love she’d seen in his eyes in those memories had faded – then he wouldn’t have cared about Nephthys.

But Isis saw the love in his eyes. And she knew it wasn’t from the mirror. And when Horus had suggested the idea of Isis solving the mirror issue, Seth hadn’t argued he didn’t care about Nephthys. Horus had known that Seth wouldn’t. In the moment, Isis had just felt it convenient, but perhaps Seth’s territoriality kicking in, wanting to ensure no one could curse his wife and get away with it or something. But now, when she had the space to think outside her fury, it really didn’t make sense.

Isis knew the real answer, as it was part of her curse: Seth wanted his family, more than anything else. And Nephthys, despite all she’d done, was part of that family. He’d sacrificed everything for his son. Just like Isis had for hers.

It doesn’t matter, she thought, miserably. *He’s too lost in vengeance to do anything decent.* Once Nephthys was restored, if possible, then what? Nothing would change.

It might encourage Nephthys to leave at last, Isis thought. She might even join Isis in vengeance against Osiris. The sister whom Isis remembered would never condone anything Seth had done. But how did that align with the woman who’d sat here in Heliopolis for

centuries? Unchanging, as her son was cast out by Seth? Hanging on to memories of better times and feeling self-recrimination for loving the wrong brother…

Isis' grip tightened. *Nephthys and I are not alike! I left, I raised Horus, I kept him safe…* But he wasn't safe, was he? He grew up in poverty, with what little she could scrounge up to feed him. They were hunted all his life. And she'd raised him to face Seth, his uncle. Whom Isis knew could hurt him, even kill him…

Even Anubis wasn't safe from him, Isis thought, recalling how weak Anubis had felt in her arms. After *Osiris* had left him there. Because even Anubis was still Osiris' toy, after all these centuries.

Isis breathed in deeply and looked at Nephthys, who was still watching her, warily. Then Isis went to her desk and picked up Hathor's mirror, before walking back to Nephthys.

"Osiris used you," Isis began. "He used all of us."

Nephthys' golden eyes widened in surprise. "What?"

"See this mirror?" Isis asked, holding it out. "Do you remember it?"

Nephthys frowned. "Wasn't this a gift… from Osiris? I gave it back to him… I think…" She frowned.

"The you who loves Seth is trapped in there," Isis said, remembering Osiris manipulating Nephthys, even as he *knew* what he was doing. How he'd twirled them all around his fingers for so long. Like *toys*. "Osiris took your memory of that love, and trapped it inside the mirror!" Her skin crawled with the knowledge that she'd been part of it. That Osiris had made *Isis* part of this awful plot. Even though she knew she wasn't to blame. She hadn't known.

Nephthys would not be almost groveling before her. Seth might not be who he was. So many might be alive. And Anubis… who knew what his life would be like?

And Horus? Isis wondered. *Would I have him?*

She did not want to think of the balance of things: if Horus was worth everything they'd all been through. She loved him so much. But that was not a question she wanted to ask herself.

"Osiris?" Nephthys asked, pulling Isis out of her reverie. Nephthys looked confused and seemed to not even see Isis. "He wouldn't… You must have it wrong." She gazed up at Isis, clearly lost. "Why would he do that? I'm his sister…"

"So am I!" Isis said, fury still inside her from her desperate dreams. She thought she'd soothed some of it by talking at the dream Seth, exorcising the hatred from her bones and directing it to its proper source, but knowing the truth didn't change reality. "And look what he did to me!" *Went behind my back, and lied about it, to my face…*

Nephthys cringed away from her. "I'm—"

“Osiris is insane,” Isis continued, refusing to allow either of them to back away from reality anymore. “He’s not the Osiris either of us once knew. He doesn’t consider us family.” She saw him looking to Seth fondly, over her. Using Anubis as blackmail. Crooning softly to Seth as Seth cried out in pain and sorrow. Gazing with cruelty at poor Nephthys…

“He fooled us all,” Isis said, bitterly. For centuries, she’d clung to her love of him, despite everything. Hating him in equal measure, but turning that hate on Seth, who’d pursued her long after Osiris was dead. Isis’ revenge on her husband had been to see the son he never wanted sitting on his throne, being a better god than Osiris had ever been. But she knew he didn’t care. All he wanted was Seth.

Nephthys was now gazing at the mirror in Isis’ hand, and she was visibly shaking. “Is a part of me… really trapped in that mirror? I don’t understand…”

Isis shut her eyes as she said, “This is Hathor’s mirror. It changes the memories of your love to those of someone else, so that you would love the new person instead, if you only see them in the mirror.” The siblings had never tangled with Hathor much in all the wars with Ra and Ra’s underlings. They’d been secure in their affection and belief in each other. And Isis was so sure of her love for Osiris that the goddess of love had felt insignificant by comparison.

I was a fool in many ways, Isis bitterly thought.

“Think about it,” Isis continued, when Nephthys still looked unsure. “I’m sure there’s something you’ve noticed. A gap in your memory or something that didn’t add up.” Nephthys was a goddess, and her magic wasn’t as strong as Isis by any stretch, but she was still powerful. “Your feelings and memories of love change when you look in the mirror. There should definitely be some part of your memory that seems off!”

“I…” Nephthys began. Then her hands went to her throat. “was waiting for Osiris… because I wanted to have Seth’s child…” Tears went down her face. “Did I really… love Seth? And not Osiris?” Her hands went to her mouth and she bowed her head. “Thank goodness…” She shook with her sobs.

Nephthys… Isis thought, sadly, thinking of all the woman she’d met over the centuries who’d seen the men they loved turn on them. *Hathor’s spell couldn’t change everything or fit it into place. A part of her knew. She always wanted to believe she loved Seth.*

Osiris had wanted to believe she’d moved on. But she hadn’t. Both she and Nephthys wanted more from their brothers. And they were not getting it.

The air in the room grew hot, and Isis realized Nephthys was using some kind of magic. It made her shake and kneel down, almost crushing into herself. Isis realized there were… *pieces* of her missing, almost. And whatever spell Isis was instinctively activating was trying to heal her...

“Nephthys!” Isis cried. *How could she help me like this? She can barely hold herself together!*

“Good job, Isis!” Sekhmet said as she appeared behind Isis, startling her. “You finally told Nephthys. That means you met all the conditions.”

“Conditions?” Isis demanded, furious. “What are you talking about?”

“Look carefully,” Sekhmet said as she held out the mirror.

Isis realized her hand was empty.

“This mirror is love,” a second mirror appeared in Sekhmet’s hand from flames that lightly warmed Isis’ face, “and despair. Those who’ve fallen into both love and despair can’t go against the mirror easily. But you… were able to save Nephthys regardless.”

Isis stiffened. “What are you saying?!” Love and despair hit too close to home… but Sekhmet was talking about the mirror, and Isis had never fallen into it. She’d been careful when using it to never do so.

“It means you ended the curse,” Sekhmet said. “But don’t worry. I’m here to help. After all, I can’t let things go how Osiris wants, and he wants to keep Nephthys lost and confused, because it keeps Seth unstable enough for him to control. But if she gets back her memories from the mirror, she’ll recover her strength, because the thing weakening the power of peace will disappear.” She chuckled. “And that’ll screw up Osiris’ plans to make things so horrible that he can come up and make mischief up here.”

“Isis?” Nephthys asked, gazing at Isis and Sekhmet in confusion. Her face was wet with tears.

“You have to do this,” Sekhmet said to Isis. “Only you can, goddess of miracles. Break the spell. Save her.” The mirrors rose into the air and rotated around Nephthys.

Isis was hesitant. All her research hadn’t gotten her far enough. The memories Sekhmet had shown her hadn’t been enough. But as she gazed into Nephthys’ terrified eyes, she saw all that they’d gone through, the four of them. Nephthys’ terror, and Seth’s desperation. And she saw the reflection of the mirror, into infinity. And Nephthys within the reflection.

I can target that, Isis thought, *and cut it out of our lives!* Isis raised her hands and reached forward, using her shields to cut through the net leaching from the mirrors to Nephthys. Wind whipped around the room.

Nephthys’ eyes glowed, and she gasped. And then she fell to the floor. Her spell and Isis’ shields collapsed.

“Nephthys!” Isis cried as she leaped forward. She pulled Nephthys into her arms.

She’s breathing, Isis thought with relief. Amazed she even could feel such a thought, after hating her sister for so long, and blaming her for much of what happened between them all.

“Good job,” Sekhmet said, with some glee. “You’ve succeeded. Osiris is furious.”

When Isis looked up, Sekhmet and the mirrors were gone. Her heart raced, and she wondered what to do next... If Nephthys was free of the curse, then the main thing that stood in the way of whatever Seth wanted to do to her was gone. And all that gave her pause was gone, as well.

Do I flee? Isis wondered. She couldn't really take control of the palace with Seth in residence. The servants feared Seth too much. And Maat might view it as going against the rules of the trial.

"And what good would hiding do now?" Isis wondered as she used her magic to raise Nephthys up into the air and lower her onto the bed. "So many of my followers are dead. Horus is trapped in the labyrinth..." She could maybe convince Nephthys to free him now...

I'd have to go begging to Ra again, Isis thought, bitterly. She could only imagine the older goddess laughing at her for her foolishness. Especially if Seth dealt with the foreign army.

I can find other allies, Isis thought as she looked over Nephthys. *I will not lay down and surrender.*

But then remembered Osiris asking her to look over Anubis, and her hands clenched on Nephthys' shoulders. *I have at least one last thing to clean up.*

Worse than that was the knowledge that if her goal was turning towards Osiris even more than before... there was only one person who'd defeated him before.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seth pulled his chariot to a stop at the entryway to Heliopolis, near Isis, who was standing tall and ready to greet him. She'd put one of her form robes and wigs, and glittered in the morning sunshine, and was unbothered by the dust that flew by.

"You're awake," Seth said as he dissolved the chariot and stepped down to the ground. They'd been gone a few days, and he felt ready and wary about seeing her there to greet him. *Though at least this time she's not jumping me from the shadows.* "Why come to greet me?"

Rather than reply, Isis looked up to see Horus landing at Seth's side.

"Mother," Horus said. He reached out to her and took her hands, squeezing them in his own. "You're well?"

Isis' expression grew troubled. "That's up for debate." Then she looked at Seth.

"Where is Nephthys?" Seth demanded, not liking how she avoided replying to him. *Does she think because I left her alone in the palace for a while that I've forgotten everything between us? That I've just given her the throne because I'm not there to sit in it?*

"She's sleeping," Isis said. "Recovering."

"Recovering?" Seth asked. "From what?"

"The mirror spell is broken," Isis said. "She is restored."

Seth's eyes widened in surprise. "What?!"

"I knew you'd do it," Horus said, quietly, and with a soft smile.

"Where is she?!" Seth demanded. The sand around him shook.

"In my room," Isis replied. "I'm watching over her until she awakens."

Seth turned into sand and flew past Isis and through the halls of Heliopolis, avoiding servants who backed away from him in fear. He didn't stop until he was in Isis' room, and he could re-form in his regular body, to gaze down at Nephthys, who slept on Isis' bed, on her back.

She looked normal, and her hands rested on her chest. He could tell she was breathing. Her golden hair was brushed and her clothes were neat. She even looked cleaner than when he'd left to face the foreign army.

Seth's heart raced. He couldn't tell that she was different any other way: he didn't have Isis' magic, and she didn't wake at his entrance. A part of him thought Isis might have been lying to corner him, but to what end?

Eventually, Isis, Horus, Thoth, and Maat entered the room, and Seth turned to Isis.

"Will she reawaken?" Seth demanded.

Isis sighed and said, "As I trying to explain, I believe so. Her body is processing thousands of years of memories and recombining them. Or at least that's what I assume is happening."

Seth studied Isis, who didn't seem stressed. He'd seen the mirror was absent from the room. "How did you do it?"

"Sekhmet helped me," Isis replied.

Seth grimaced, and wondered what Sekhmet's game was. "She knew about this?"

"Yes," Isis said as she stepped closer. But rather than move into Seth's personal space, she moved closer to Nephthys, looking over her. As if somehow Seth had done something in Isis' absence.

Seth's hands tightened into fists as he considered the lion goddess. "How long did she know?" *How many times has she faced me, knowing about this, and said nothing?*

Isis looked at him with a grave expression. "Since the beginning."

Sand circled Seth's feet as he said, "I'll *destroy* her…" All the taunts over the centuries. All the jibes. Pushing and pulling him this or that way, claiming it would help. Mocking him for not being enough… *And she had the gall to target Nephthys!*

"You can't do that," Isis said. "She's stronger than you are."

Seth glared at her.

"You know I'm right," Isis said.

"We never put it to the test," Seth replied, sharply. "She never fought in any of her mother's wars." It was true that Sekhmet was good at slipping out of difficult situations, but if he *really* tried to kill her… Well, they'd see what would happen.

Isis only said, "You're going to get sand on Nephthys."

Seth breathed in deeply, making the sand calm. "What did you learn? What did Sekhmet tell you?"

Isis looked at Thoth and Maat, then at Seth. "You want them to know?"

Seth glanced at the older gods, who just gazed back at him. Thoth had a thoughtful expression, and Maat was, as ever, unreadable.

“This is everything,” Isis said, warningly.

Seth was unnerved by her words. “Why are you asking me? Wouldn’t you benefit from whatever you have to say?”

“It ruins me, too,” Isis replied, ominously.

“Perhaps we could simply speak without Maat and Thoth present,” Horus suggested. “If it would make you both comfortable.” When they looked at him, he added, “if Uncle agrees afterward, we can tell Maat and Thoth.”

“That may be best,” Isis said.

“Then get out,” Seth ordered Maat and Thoth. “We’ll call if we need you.”

Maat shook her head and then stepped out of the room, followed by Thoth.

Horus put a wall of wind around the room, encompassing him, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys’ bed. “They cannot hear anything. Unless they have other powers. Thoth can see the future, after all. He might already know.”

“Tell me,” Seth said to Isis, ignoring whatever Horus was doing.

“Osiris started the war to confront Ra and steal the mirrors her,” Isis said. “They were a paired set.” She looked back at Nephthys. “He’s been obsessed with *you* for thousands of years.”

“…I know,” Seth said. “He said he was the reason Nephthys and I couldn’t have children. He made it so I couldn’t.”

“He started a *war* to ensure he could gain control of you,” Isis said, looking back at Seth in anger. “Not to protect us. To get control of you.”

Seth’s grimaced in distaste. “Do you think I encouraged him?! I assumed we only fought to protect each other!”

“No,” Isis said, breathing in deeply. “I don’t. It’s just… He took the mirror. And he had to get it to you without you knowing. So he included it in the loot that I distributed to everyone.” Her eyes slid away from his. “And I had no idea what it was, but I didn’t want it. So it ended up in your share.” She gazed at Nephthys again. “I didn’t know. I had no idea…” Her hands tightened into fists.

Seth could see her regret, and her own rage… and knew it was directed inward, not at Seth. *She blames herself…*

But Seth knew culpability lay elsewhere beyond Osiris.

Seth looked at Nephthys. “I was the one who let her have the mirror. You’re not solely to blame.”

Isis said nothing in reply, though her anger seemed to soften a little, if only slightly. Seth only noticed because, despite all the centuries, once, they'd been close, and he could tell such things. Or he might have been imagining it for some reason.

"What does the mirror do?" Seth demanded, not wanting the distraction. If Isis wanted comfort, she would not want it from *him*.

"If you look into it," Isis said, a bit cooler, "and you see someone who is not the one you love, then your memories of the one you love are replaced with the person you see in the mirror. Osiris meant to do this to make *you* fall in love with *him*."

Seth had to fight not to unleash his powers and fill the room with sand. That Osiris would go so far!

Then he blinked, thinking about what had *actually* happened. "But that means…"

"Nephthys looked into the mirror and saw him," Isis said. "Her memories of loving you were replaced with loving *him*."

It was revolting. *And he lied to me,* Seth thought, as he recalled Osiris' cursed words about how she'd fallen for Osiris because he was *stronger* or where true peace truly thrived… *He trapped her and called that thriving?!*

"I'm glad he's dead," Seth said, sharply.

"As am I," Isis said.

For a moment, they stared at each other in surprise.

Seth looked back at Nephthys, thinking of all the suffering she'd been through. And…

But that means… "She loved me after all?" Seth asked, shocked. "Truly?" All these centuries he'd assumed she never really had. That everything had been a lie. That Osiris had been *right*. He'd loved her so dearly, and thought she felt the same... only to realize it was all a sham.

And now to learn that wasn't true at all, either. That what they'd had, at least once, had been genuine.

"She did," Isis said, sadly. "But that love was locked away in the mirror. And she was made to believe she loved Osiris. That's why she went to him for a child."

Seth hadn't thought it could hurt him anymore. He'd tried walling off his heart. Burying himself in battle, drugs, and wine... But he almost felt like falling apart right there and then, forever.

A hand rested on Seth's back and Seth pulled away, glaring at Horus.

"Apologies," Horus said. "You looked like you needed support."

Seth stared at him in disbelief. *You're being told about evil things your father did and your first thought is to support* me?!

"Horus!" Isis said, clearly angry.

"We need to work together," Horus said, rather than apologizing to her. "Osiris has lied to you both and manipulated all of you. There needs to be accountability."

"We already knew that," Seth said, bitterly. "How does this change anything?" It made *him* hate the man more, of course, but that was meaningless to Isis and Horus. And Isis still detested Nephthys for her part in things, though she seemed to care about her sister once more. Perhaps she had accepted the effects of the brainwashing. "Unless you want vengeance for Nephthys, now?"

"He *used* me," Isis said, clearly furious. "He used all of us. For thousands of years. Isn't that enough?"

"It was *always* enough for me," Seth replied. "*You* turned me down." It had felt like the final thrust of the knife. He'd lost Nephthys, Osiris, his own son… And then Isis had turned her back on him, too. Everything he knew was a lie and everything he was, a sham. There was nothing else left, and he didn't understand where it all went wrong, or why.

Isis shut her eyes, breathing in heavily. "I was upset. I didn't know what to think. And I was hurt by *your betrayal*."

"I tried to solve it on my own!" Seth said. *She's still angry I didn't go to her before confronting Osiris?* "I didn't know how much you were involved!"

"We thought he and Nephthys had Anubis behind our backs!" Isis yelled back. "Why did you think I *wasn't* involved?!"

Seth turned away. "If you think I should forgive because of your upset, why can't you do so for *mine?"*

"After hundreds of years of hunting my son, my followers, and I, down, you would ask me that?!" Isis demanded.

"This solves nothing," Horus said, breaking them apart. "You cannot change the past, neither of you. The harm was done. All that matters is how you move forward."

"*You*," Seth spat out, ready to toss the demigod out of the room. Perhaps he'd been useful up until now, to a degree. Seth could almost see him as a sort of servant. But his interruptions were far too exasperating.

"Can't you see this is what he wants?" Horus asked, giving Seth pause. "He wants you both alone, against each other. It makes you easier to manipulate."

Seth remembered the drugged wine. The way Osiris had tangled him in those vines. The way he'd confronted Seth in the hallway after the trial… Always alone and controlling. Even the way he'd gotten the mirror to Seth had been that way. Rather than present it to Seth publicly,

he'd used an unknowing proxy. A foolish, risky move, like a lot of what Osiris did. And it almost worked.

Seth tamped his fury down.

"How was Sekhmet involved, Mother?" Horus asked.

"…She made it so Osiris wouldn't brainwash Seth," Isis Seth, coolly. "She didn't want his plan to succeed fully."

But Osiris still went along with it, Seth thought, miserably. "And the goddess of destruction watched peace crumble. How wonderful for *her*."

"And a boon for Osiris," Horus noted. "It ruined peace in this realm. Between you all. Only now that it's restored to some degree are you two even coming to some kind of an accord." He looked between Isis and Seth. "Shouldn't you take that for the chance it is? To bury past pain and move forward?"

"You want me to forget everything he's done?" Isis asked.

"No," Horus said. "Seth's actions were his own. Just as yours have been, Mother."

"You blame me?!" Isis demanded, furious. "I—!"

"I asked why he thought you would do this," Horus said to her. "Given the risk. I understand what happened in the past was difficult. But… Thoth offered some ideas when we were looking for scouts from the foreign army."

Seth narrowed his eyes. "About what?"

"He explained about Mother's duties," Horus said. "In the past, she flooded the Nile to cull the human population. More than once."

Seth just gazed back at him. "How does that change anything?"

"It was meant to balance things," Isis insisted. "Thoth knows that." But for some reason, she looked nervous.

"I know you told me that life, even human life, is sacred," Horus said. "That life is worth living and protecting, especially among humans. And Seth was a false king because he ignored that balance. But I wonder what the drowned humans would think of your actions set against his, Mother."

Seth watched them, curious. He could feel his cursed khopesh, ready at his command should he need it. It was an evil thing, and a final resort against Osiris. *Isis raised him interestingly, it seems…* Which made Seth wonder why Horus wanted to support *him*, even only to old end enmities.

Isis seethed for a moment, and then shook her head. "Regardless of this, Osiris *is* our enemy. And we should deal with him."

Seth nodded slowly. “And what do you plan to do? He’s down in Duat.”

“No,” Isis said. “He has the ability to come up here. You saw when he attended the trial.”

“He hasn’t returned since,” Seth noted. He’d been watching for anything, but thus far, nothing had happened. He’d wondered if Osiris had exhausted what ability he had. After all, Osiris hadn’t been able to resurrect himself before this.

“That’s because he has to use Anubis to do it,” Isis said.

“Anubis?” Seth asked, confused. “What does he have to do with this?”

“Osiris possesses him,” Isis replied. “I’m not sure how. But he’s never done this with anyone else. I imagine Anubis has done something to enable the connection. And so long as it is an option, neither we nor Anubis are safe. We have to sever it.”

Seth was alarmed. “He’s been…? That…” He breathed in, trying to stay calm. “Anubis is with the army. I don’t know if they’ve reported back…” They’d been gone a few days to deal with the invasion, and Seth planned to look over reports if he was in the mood when he was out of this. Thoth had offered to review them, but Seth still planned to do so himself, not trusting the bird god, fully.

“We need to bring him back,” Isis emphasized.

“Maat and Thoth should be told,” Horus said. “If there is to ever be an accounting for Osiris’ crimes, they should know. If they don’t already.”

“And if they did,” Isis said, “I want to know why they didn’t share it when I needed answers. Certainly Ra’s been our enemy enough I can see why they might keep some of it from us, but the rest…” She scoffed.

“You’re so ready to turn on your father?” Seth asked Horus, curious.

“I never knew him,” Horus said. “The trial was the first time I even spoke to him. My mother raised me.”

“Horus…” Isis began, warningly.

“And Father did not want children anyway,” Horus said. “If he had his way, I would not exist.”

Seth blinked at that, confused.

“Horus!” Isis said, angry, now.

“I want it to be clear that I will not stab Uncle in the back, Mother,” Horus replied, while holding Seth’s gaze. “I took part in this trial for my mother’s sake. Not Osiris’.”

“You lied to the gods?” Seth asked. He well remembered the words Osiris’ *lost sovereignty.*

“I was clear about the facts as I knew them,” Horus said. “You committed many crimes, and my mother and I have rights. I did not lie.”

Seth could almost respect the twisting paths of the story before him, though it again reminded him of Osiris, warping his words to skate by. Seth knew he’d have to be careful, still.

“Horus should not be returned to the labyrinth,” Isis said, recalling Seth’s attention. “If we want to stand against Osiris, we need all the allies we can find, especially since we don’t know the limits of his abilities. And Osiris will use whatever it takes to get you. And...” She sighed in exasperation. "There is also the matter of *Sekhmet* to contend with. Though she's helped me with all this, her reasoning is unclear, and we should be prepared for anything she does in the future that may benefit her rather than us."

Seth pressed his lips together, glancing between Isis and her son, who both watched him. He hated that he knew she was right. He still remembered the grip Osiris had on his wrist before Isis, and the way Osiris had pulled him forward in the hall…

“Fine,” Seth said. He could always change his mind on returning Horus to his cell later, though the demigod seemed to have his own uses. “But I am not so weak as to need protection.” *I already tricked Osiris into killing himself once, after all. And I'll figure out how to make Sekhmet pay...*

Chapter End Notes

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