

# THE PHARAOH AND THE GODS

## 1. Horus Wept

Year 150

Horus watched his sometimes lover priestess call forth his sometimes dead father. ~ *What's is it ~~this~~ all about? Why do we live? What is at the other end of life? Why do we bow before the powerful? Seek the approval of fools? What is it we seek and what will we do when we find it?* ~

The sun rose higher into the sky. The adulation of the people became louder with each passing moment. The High Priestess did her job well. She had summoned Osiris from the land of the dead to be reincarnated as Ra, the Living Sun. ~ *Dung! It's all bird dung and cow dung! Droppings from a high-flying bird onto the heads of fools standing in cow dung trying to find meaning in their meaningless lives. I am barely a man and already the dung overwhelms me. Mother, Father, show me the way. I am lost. Show me the way.* ~

He tore his red-rimmed eyes from High Priestess Hathor, her arms upraised summoning Ra, and looked at Prince Djoser who stood captivated by the ceremony. ~ *He is dead, Prince Djoser! You ~~must~~ know that by now. But do you know that he is dead by my hand? But you would not care. His death gives the powerful the little ceremony ~~you~~ you crave and the masses the big ceremony THEY crave. And it comes without cost to anyone except my father who bought it with his life and to me who bought it with blood-stained hands.* ~

He looked at the mindless, gathered multitude. ~ *Mother Hathor will soon be telling me of the glory my father brings to the land. Uncle Djoser will be telling me how pleased Osiris would be with how everything worked out. Uncle Set will be pleased that both Father and Mother are dead. Or he will be furious they are still held in higher regard than him. And Mother Nephthys -- how will you counsel me? To rejoice or to despair? And why should your words matter?* ~

Horus wept. ~ *Father, I killed you so that Djoser ~~can~~ could ~~successfully~~ create his unified, all-powerful kingdom ~~you both strove for~~. Did I kill you in vain? Will Uncle Djoser create the ~~powerful~~ kingdom he believes he ~~is~~ destined hungers for? A civilization to replace the one you lost along with Mother and Uncle Set and Aunt Nephthys and your mythological Queen Kiya. And if he does -- what difference? And if he doesn't -- what difference? ~~My mother and father~~ You remain dead except in the minds of fools. Uncle Djoser knows exactly that which he seeks. What is it ~~I~~ seek? And why do I seek it?* ~

## 2. What We Seek

High Priestess Hathor completed the sunrise ceremony ~~after~~ as the sun ~~had complete~~ completed its ~~by~~ rise ~~a~~ from the great river into the morning sky. She was ~~self~~ satisfied. ~ *I need a more dramatic ending ~~to the ceremony~~. The people must be filled with ecstasy when they depart. The ending was acceptable, but I must make it ~~more wonderful~~ even grander.* ~

Hathor dismissed her staff but called for a noon-time banquet to review the ~~mornings'~~ morning's activities. She wanted to give them time to reflect upon their glorious task and to consider how to improve upon it. A Nubian drummer informed her that Saqqar priests were gathering beneath the Mastaba to bow before her and seek entry into her service and, too, that Shaman Saqqar, himself, appeared to be on his way to the Mastaba. Hathor smiled with the self-satisfaction of total victory. ~ *Great Lord Master God Osiris, after you vowed you would not cast me down from the heights, I swore to you that I would be the best priestess ever. I hope I have pleased you. I did my best for both you and Isis. I did my very best.* ~

Archer Hetephe approached Hathor and upon reaching ~~Upon reaching~~ her, ~~Hetephe~~ curtsied. Both women knew that, since this morning's ceremony, their relationship had subtly changed. Hetephe was no longer the higher ranking, more powerful of the two.

Hathor nodded her head in recognition and said, "Archer Hetephe, you have brought greatness to your land. Prince Djoser, all Nubians, and all in the land of Kemet owe you a great debt. Thank you for the Nubians you convinced to join the service of Osiris and Isis. They made our ceremony a wonder to behold."

As the two women amicably discussed Hathor's successful conquest of Shaman Saqqar's hold over the control of the dead and their Mastaba's, the surrounding crowd parted to make way for the arrival of Prince Djoser and Queen Nima. Djoser held out both hands as a greeting to Hathor. Hathor did not accept his extended hands; she, instead simply stared at him. Nima, immediately understanding what was at play, made quick calculations. Deciding, Queen Nima curtsied to High Priestess Hathor. Without unlocking her stare with Djoser's, Hathor nodded in recognition of Nima's curtsy.

Eternity stood as Djoser stared back unblinking. ~ *So my little destitute trader girl has risen to the heights where a prince must show subservience to her? How did you do this little girl? That I -- Djoser, Prince of Kemet-- must bow before a common gutter girl? What would Friend Osiris have me do? ~*

Deciding, Djoser broke his stare and nodded in subservient recognition to High Priestess Hathor.

Hathor returned a radiant smile, took his extended hands, and nodded back in recognition; but she did not curtsy. ~ *I do not wish to dominate you, my Prince. But you must accept me as High Priestess to a god -- as the one who will call forth the rebirth of Osiris every sunrise. I became what you wished me to become. Now, I am what I am. You will accept me for what I am and bow before me. ~*

Djoser tried to reaffirm his position as the ranking person, even over his mother, by praising the staff that attended to Osiris and the Word of Isis. But all who listened understood that Djoser was helplessly repeating that which Hathor had brought to pass. He ended his praise with a somewhat challenging, "And should the prince fear the High Priestess? Will Hathor wish to rule over all the land of Kemet?"

Hathor gently laughed as she replied, "Kings, queens, and princes are responsible for the care of ~~their~~ living people and their land. I am responsible for the bodies of the dead waiting for their rebirth and for those living in the Land of the Dead. Lord Osiris entrusted me to be his High Priestess. I think not that powerful and high-born rulers have anything which I desire."

"Except for more Mastaba's, jewels, and wealth -- but only for the glory of the dead, of course!"

"But of course! I must prepare a place for your mother and father -- and even you, my prince. That which you give to the priests and priestesses is that which you will have in the land of the dead."

"Does Hathor have all that Hathor desires?"

"No. but I work toward it every day -- to increase the glory of Osiris and Isis -- to make their story a common experience that will further strengthen the bond between all peoples of your land -- of the upper kingdom and lower kingdoms. I shall strive every day to give the prince what HE wants -- two kingdoms bound together as one united kingdom. Do my words please you?"

"Ever the little trader girl. Promising me everything I want while preparing to take everything I have. Your boss would be proud!"

She stiffened and haughtily replied, "My LORD Osiris IS very proud!"

Again, Djoser laughed and replied, "I am sure he is! May I be dismissed, now?"

She nodded his dismissal and turned to chat with Queen Nima. Shaman Saqqar stood obediently to the side, waiting his turn with Hathor.

As Djoser walked away, he nodded for Hetephe to join him.

Hetephe joined Djoser as he was walking down the Mastaba to the ground level. "May I join you, my prince?"

"Please do, Archer Hetephe. I am in need of pleasant, refreshing, female companionship."

"You just want someone to 'Flick your Ibis,' Prince."

"No, Hete. I want the pleasure of your company; NOT your exquisite Ibis flicking talents. Not right now, anyway. Right now, I need to clear my mind and find out how you and Hathor made this happen and what I want now, and how to get it."

"Let's visit in the Mastaba of Chief Kemet -- or Ptah as Hathor calls him. His Mastaba will be peaceful. I always enjoy visiting him ~~there~~. It will be a good place to clear your mind and make plans for your final, total, and complete conquest and unification of the upper and lower kingdom. 'Exquisite Ibis flicking talents,' you say."

~ Meanwhile ~

Set and Nephthys did not join the other Memphis powerful on the Mastaba of Osiris. Instead, they went to Hostess House for Set's morning meal of garnished cabbage. Anubis joined them. To the usual weight of Set's presence, Nephthys carried the burden of last night's death of her friend, mentor, hero, and confessor -- Osiris --; once named 'Titan Dionysus of Everywhere' and with whom she had once lain."

As they sat in their post-meal ritual, Set looked up and became more animated. "Well, look who comes to join us -- my young nephew Horus!"

Nephthys immediately looked and saw Horus approaching. Her heart quickened with compassion, sympathy, and sorrow. ~ *Your father died, my son. Did he die well? I'm sorry. So very, very sorry. His mind had already died. It's for the best. But still, you loved him. As I did.* ~

Horus entered, looked around, saw Set, and walked over to their table. "May I join you?"

Set replied, "Yes, Nephew. Join us and tell us what happened."

Nephthys wanted to console Horus but remained silent.

Horus answered, "Father is dead, you know. He is now with Mother in the Land of the Dead. Does this please you?"

Set replied, "Yes. Yes, it does. Do you know when and how he died? Was it painful?"

Horus answered. "I killed him last night in time for Hathor to prepare for her morning ceremony. It was not too painful -- for him, anyway. I smothered him with his wine-red pillow. He jerked a few times. I'm sure he knew what ~~was being done~~ I was doing."

Set leaned forward with a touch of glee. "Did you hear that, Neph? Osiris was killed by his own son. How is that for ~~an act of~~ betrayal? Our day starts well!"

Nephthys looked at Horus. They spoke but only with their eyes.

Anubis addressed Horus, "I'm sorry, Cousin Horus. You killed him, yourself? That must have been difficult but I'm sure Uncle Osiris thanks you for your compassion. His mind wasn't always right, and he knew it, I think"

Horus replied, "Thank you, Cousin. That's the nicest words I've heard all day."

Anubis reached out to lightly punch Horus's shoulder; an act of sympathetic male-to-male bonding.

Horus was a year older than Anubis, but they looked much like brothers. Something Set never noticed.

Nephthys offered, "When we get time alone, I would like to talk to you about it, Horus."

Horus replied, "Yes. Let's. After the sun sets. Down by the river. I would like that, too."

Set interjected, "You people can roll around in self-pity when I'm not around. Right now, let's celebrate with beers for everyone!!" Set held up his hand for four beers.

Horus said, "It is more fitting that I drink wine, Uncle. And Mother Nephthys, too." Horus called to the server, "Make that two beers and two wines."

Anubis wanted wine instead of beer but thought twice and let the order stand.

Set laughed a cackling laugh, "As you will! He is dead. Wine won't bring him back! Or his dead bitch whore. Beer -- wine -- urine -- drink what you will!

Horus reprimanded Set, "Mother was not a bitch, Uncle Set. She was a queen!"

"Yes, whatever. A queen. Can ~~she at least be~~I at least call her a bitch queen, Nephew?"

"A queen, Uncle Set."

"Sure. A queen. A dead queen!"

The beer and wine arrived. Each toasted with their own private thoughts.

Horus: ~ *I will find you, Father. And you, Mother. Now I know what I want. This is what I want!* ~

Anubis: ~ *We are all flawed. Uncle Osiris was the best of us and he was somewhat insane. And now dead. I wonder if he is still insane.* ~

Nephthys: ~ *I want you to be a human being, Set. Not even necessarily a GOOD human being. I have tried. I have failed. What can I do? I want to find the way.* ~

Set: ~ *This is what I wanted and now I have it. Now, Horus, you little bastard child of Osiris and his bitch Isis, I can, at last, humiliate and destroy you.* ~

~ The Powerful ~

High Priestess Hathor and her contingent of Priests, Priestesses, and attendants hosted a mid-day meal for King Nebka, Queen Nima, and Chief Kerma. Shaman Saqqar was there as were Chief Kerna's two youngest sons, Rafah and T'jaru. Prince Djoser and a contented Archer ~~Hetp~~Hetephe arrived late. The talk was animated and delightful. Hathor *did* practice being imperial. Osiris had once told her that people seemed to like an attitude such as that in their superiors. Politically knowledgeable, even more so than King Nebka, Hathor continually steered the talk toward the contributions of the Nubians in their grand sunrise ceremony. "I would not have the power to call Lord Osiris back from the land of the dead without the considerable assistance of his Nubian drummers and Announcers. Indeed, it is they who are key to calling forth the Living Sun."

Hathor, Nima, and Djoser took note that even Chief Kerma appeared to believe that Osiris had actually been called from the Land of the Dead and that the sun was now a living being. It wasn't that Chief Kerma thought about it on a critical level, he was told that this is what was happening by people

who supposedly knew about these things. It must be so. More power to the Nubians who helped them do it.

Queen Nima thought, ~ *If a Chief accepts this illusion as fact, what then of the masses? And my husband, do you believe this nonsense?* ~

Hathor continued her politicizing. "I am told, Chief Kerma, that the people of Memphis are angry with the Nubians because Nubians do not deem to visit our fair city. I am also told that the Hostess House in South Memphis has tried to convince your virile Nubian males to join them for food, beer, and dancing girls but none will come. How can Prince Djoser convince your subjects to favor us with their presence?"

Kerma replied, "The people of the upper kingdom are content with their home in the upper kingdom. We have no need for Memphis or the lower kingdom."

Hetephe, knowing the ambitions of her Prince Djoser, piped in, "I am at the Hostess House every quarter moon impressing the locals with my skills at archery. No Nubian male can defeat me; especially if I can get a beer in them before the competition. Tell them that, Chief Kerma!"

Kerma laughed. "What do they get after they defeat you Nubian Hetephe?"

Hetephe did not miss a beat. "Why, they get ME, Chief. High-born and right there on a table in front of everybody."

Djoser tensed but kept silent.

Hetephe continued, "A good chance to show how manly and virile they are in front of the locals!"

Kerma grunted what may have been a laugh.

"But if I defeat them, then they must dance naked through the streets of South Memphis and any woman who happens to desire a male defeated by a woman can have him -- to the cheers of the other local women, I suspect. And Omari -- he may want in on the action, too. Let's put a little pressure on my brother archers. They DO love a good competition!"

Djoser thought, ~ *go straight to their ego, my little archer woman. But you made that offer so easily. An occasional liaison is one thing -- even with four ~~of them~~ at once -- but you made this offer so very easily.* ~

Hetephe continued, "I have made my special friend, Prince Djoser, uneasy. He doesn't know if he wants me to make this challenge or not. It will certainly achieve his desire to bring our two kingdoms closer together. All I know is that a girl has got to do what a girl has got to do, and this girl has got to challenge every archer in the upper kingdom to come on the night of the full moon and try to win the right to plow her on a table in front of everybody!"

Hathor cleared her throat to distract from Hetephe's vulgarity. But still, Hathor owed her a great debt. She said, "It is done, Chief Kerma. Bring one hundred Nubian men and women to Memphis on the full moon. Your men can do whatever it is men do at Hostess House and your women can tour ~~the~~ our trading shops. At sunrise, they can all mingle with the locals and witness the rebirth of Osiris as the living sun."

Chief Kerma grunted, "I will consider this thing."

Hathor, having tasted the elixir of total triumph, breathed deeply and imperially said, "It is not for you to consider, Chief Kerma. The High Priestess of Osiris commands it!"

Kerma stared into the eyes of unblinking, unsmiling, Hathor. A queen and a prince had already capitulated. It was a bitter moment, but Chief Kerma nodded acquiescence. He felt no dishonor in doing so.

Prince Djoser thought, *~ I am well on my way to what I want, and this is a big step in my getting it -- by the grace of two women. ~*

Prince Djoser praised the wisdom of Chief Kerma and asked, "Great Chief Kerma, may I have your permission to show your favorite son the glories and hidden places of Memphis?"

Kerma responded, "Yes, I would be pleased if Rafah learns all there is to know of Memphis."

*~ I am sure you would ~* Djoser thought, but said instead to Rafah, "Come with me, Favorite Son Rafah. Let's start with the glory of the Mastaba of Osiris and Isis. You will be impressed by all that you see.

~

That evening, Nephthys found Horus looking out over the river. She joined him and asked, "Did Hathor ask you to do it?"

"No. But she ensured that I understood that it was needed for her to obtain all power over the dead. Everything was in place for the coming sunrise. It was her best chance to succeed. Kerma was observing, and every day Father lived, the power of his story diminished, diminishing her chances of success. Everything was perfect for a coming sunrise ceremony for Hathor to call Osiris to be reborn as the Living Sun -- except Osiris still lived. Hathor could not call him from the Land of the Dead if he wasn't dead. Hathor wanted what was best for Osiris. Father wanted death to take him. He had lived too long."

Horus paused, "I understood these things. He was already near death. I helped him. He only twitched ~~only~~ twice."

She moved closer to him.

He put his arm around her shoulder and asked, "Mother, how did you live and sleep with Uncle Set and counsel Father and raise me and raise Anubis as Set's son? It must have been difficult for you all these years."

She remained silent as they both looked at the beautiful moon hanging in silence over the great river

Horus finally, quietly said, "I will find them all. I will understand why they lived -- why they died -- where they are -- the meaning of meaningless. I shall!"

### 3. To Conquer Sinai

The next Quarter-moon came. King Nebka sat in furious silence as General Khasek and Vizier Menka reported failure to secure peace with the Sinai warlords.

"Raids into Kemet are ongoing and growing more frequent."

"Men had been killed, children and women kidnapped and taken as slaves."

"Livestock and grains had been taken."

"No single warlord can be identified. There are many."

"They are now lying and covering for each other, daring us to take action."

"They have grown bolder and have no respect for the army of Kemet."

"Action must be taken."

"Discipline must be restored and forcefully exercised."

The General continued, "We found and confronted six different warlords. They were indifferent to our demands that all raids into Kemet must cease. One warlord laughed at us and told us not to anger him; that we did not appear to have enough soldiers to fight our way out of his camp."

Queen Nima, Prince Djoser, and Shaman Saqqar sat behind the king listening.

They finished their report and sat in silence as the king considered what he had heard.

Finally, King Nebka said, "Your laughing warlord is correct. Memphis has enough soldiers to protect Memphis, even if Chief Kerma's ambitions grow to the attacking point. But to invade the Sinai and impose my will upon them is not possible. The enemy covers too much territory, is too mobile, and there are too many warlords to conquer. I can only conscript men to reinforce our border Nomes. There is no way that Kemet can conquer all of the warlords in the Sinai. We can only defend our border settlements."

With mounting frustration, the King broke into a coughing spell.

The general, vizier, and shaman waited until their king had recovered then all clucked in agreement. They began discussing a plan to recruit the additional volunteers.

Prince Djoser asked General Khasek, "General, could not a hundred archers lay waste to the tribes of the warlords -- with no loss of life to the archers?"

Khasek answered, "Yes, prince. But I have less than a dozen good archers. Chief Kerma has untold archers but obtaining any from the chief would be impossible. He needs them ~~all~~ to reinforce his southern border with the Kush and he certainly doesn't want his archers available to King Nebka -- just in case ~~their~~ our relations sour. Training archers takes time and we have little skill in that area."

Djoser said, "I have a friend, Father. May I pursue this problem with Archer Hetephe?"

The king replied, "One archer, no matter how expert, will not solve our problem, Son. But you may talk to her about our problem if you like."

Djoser asked, "General, would not conquering all of Sinai greatly increase the military power of Kemet?"

Vizier Menka answered for Khasek, "Not only increase our military power but we would have common borders with Canaan, with the Levant, with Assyria, with all of the mature and growing powers in the east. We would become a significant trading power to all -- plus we would control the turquoise mines in the Sinai. Shall we conquer the United Cities of Greece while we are at it, Prince?"

Djoser laughed, "No. They are our allies. Our Kingdom is safe as long as we remain allies with Greece. Besides Greece is not raiding our country and taking our people."

King Nebka coughed and said, "Our problem with the Sinai warlords has no solution."

Djoser thought ~ *Osiris taught me how to solve unsolvable problems. Break it into smaller problems and solve the smaller problems. The insolvable problem will take care of itself.* ~

He said, "I understand, but it will amuse Hetephe to be consulted."

The three men harumphed Djoser out of their conversations and continued their discussions.

Djoser smiled at his mother and asked, "May we visit, Mother? At Grandfather's Mastaba, perhaps?"

The queen and the prince excused themselves and walked the long concourse to Chief Kemet's Mastaba. Priest Hotep welcomed his mother and younger brother to the resting place of the mummified remains of Chief Kemet. Djoser walked to his grandfather's remains and bowed his head

in silent reference. Finished, he turned to his mother and brother, and said, "Ahh. Perfect. The three of us together; a good time to speak of the unspeakable. Father's cough is not a good thing, Mother. How often does he do that?"

The queen did not want to discuss the king's illness, "He is still young. We do not need to talk of such things!"

Hotep replied, "The king does not wish to discuss his future Mastaba. He says there is ample time before he will need a Mastaba."

Djoser replied, "He is NOT young, Mother. He is old. His cough is not a good thing. We must make plans for his death."

Queen Nima replied, "This conversation is ended, ~~Son~~. I command you to cease such talk."

They talked on about how good Chief Nebka looked and however did Djoser think he might actually conquer the Sinai?!"

Djoser did not continue the subject of his father's eventual death, which for the sake of his kingdom had best be later than sooner. Djoser did, however, discuss the issue later in great detail with High Priestess Hathor.

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That night, after leaving Rafah in Anubis's expert care at Hostess House, Djoser met Hetephe on Osiris's Mastaba at the table which had once been claimed by Osiris, himself. The priests, priestesses, and attendants went about their duties working around the two. High Priestess Hathor, herself, had welcomed the two and given her permission to enjoy the evening on her – rather – on Osiris's Mastaba. Hathor commanded that wine be served to her two distinguished guests.

After Hathor had departed and the wine served, Hetephe grew mellow and romantic. "It is so beautiful up here. We can see the moon over the great river and everything. It's such a pleasant evening." Her ankle accidentally brushed against Djoser's leg.

Djoser said, "I am still young and immature, woman."

"Yes. That's true. But you have such a lovely Ibis. I forgive you for your immaturity."

He laughed, "My sweet, innocent Archer Hetephe, let us plot to take over the world."

"Oh, I would love to take over the world. What ~~do~~ must I do?"

"Archers. I need one hundred Nubian archers -- under your command -- to wage war against Sanai warlord bandits. How do we do this?"

"Well, my best friend, High Priestess Hathor, who is indebted to me, has commanded one hundred Nubian to come to Hostess House at the next full moon to try to win my affection -- my 'intimate' affection -- are you jealous -- I hope you're jealous -- but anyway -- just convince Chief Kerma to assign them to my command. There, you have it. What else?"

"Hmmm. I wonder why Chief Kerma would release them from his service?" Djoser paused and asked, "Who does Chief Kerma most fear? Who wants his Chiefdom?"

Hetephe answered, "Chief Kerma? Fear? Absolutely no one. And *everyone* wants his chiefdom. He had two of his older sons killed after they tried to dispose of him. The word in everyone's mouth is that the chief only trusts his two youngest sons because they are young and patient enough to let the chief die of natural causes before either tries to take over. He is grooming them both to be his successor.



He says that he will let the stronger be anointed Chief. T'jaru isn't really interested in being chief. He is more interested in invading and taking over Kush. Rafah is infatuated with Memphis and if he becomes chief, he wants to make Nubia more like Memphis."

"And how does my little archer girl know what goes on in the minds of Chief's sons?"

She giggled. "Oh, I have my ways!"

"Do you have a way to convince Chief Kerma to release a hundred archers to your command?"

She considered the question with seriousness before replying, "Not a hundred but maybe fifty to T'jaru's command. Chief Kerma believes that he controls T'jaru. Commanding fifty archers would be a good experience for T'jaru."

"A hundred would be better, but fifty is a start. I believe Mother has just developed an overwhelming urge to visit Grandfather Kerma. Would you like to take a trip with us to see King Kerma in Abdu?"

She pouted, "Will you be nice to me?"

"I may be young and immature, Archer, but I am not stupid. I value my life. Yes, I will be so nice to you that you will squeal with delight."

"Oh, I love squealing in delight. Let's go to Abdu! After you make me squeal a little!"

~Sunrise~

Djoser watched Hathor's sunrise ceremony. Hathor continued to make incremental improvements each morning. The crowds grew and become trained in their appropriate responses.

Djoser gave his mother and father time to finish *their* sunrise ceremony and then sought an audience with his mother. He joined her for her morning meal and presented his plan to her. He finished with, "I see the big parts of the picture, but I don't know how to fashion the pieces together to present it to Grandfather. I don't know how to make him want to do this thing."

Queen Nima responded, "Let me see if I understand what you want. You want my Father to command fifty of his best archers to Memphis, compete in this little contest of Hetephe's, then follow Hetephe as their commander to a new outpost you are going to build on Middlesea, and, from there, build a highway to Canaan, and, as the opportunity arises, go into the Sinai and kill a lot of warlords for my husband. Yes, Son. I understand how you would not know how to make my father want to do this thing. Tell me. Why *would* Father want to do this thing?"

Tentatively, Djoser ~~said~~ suggested, "Well, it would get one of Grandfather's ~~only~~ competitor's out of the Upper Kingdom for a long time. The fifty archers would gain invaluable battle experience and fifty battle-hardened archers would be a formidable force against the Kushites -- or Osiris forbid -- against the Lower Kingdom if Grandfather got adventuresome. And T'jaru would be tied up in the Sinai until Grandfather is ready to retire with twenty wives ~~and name T'jaru Chief of the Upper Kingdom~~. Everyone would be happy."

Nima said, "Oh, I see. This is my father's retirement plan. How nice. And what will my son do if he someday becomes King of Kemet and is faced with an aggressive Upper Kingdom led by fifty battle-hardened archers?"

~~"Oh, Mother. Don't be dull. Kemet is allied with the King of Greece -- the one with all the Warships. So, may I ask Hotep to start planning a trade route from a new T'jaru Outpost along the Middlesea to Canaan? Hotep is accomplished at road building, and he might enjoy planning a major project that his son can construct."~~

~~Nima replied, "Snefru is a talented man who would excel at such a project. Let's leave after sunrise ceremonies in the morning. I will need the rest of the day for your father to appreciate the richness of our plan and to approve it. You have my permission to talk to your brother about the roads although, his High Priestess may have some say in what he is allowed to do."~~

"Why, if I remember to ask nicely, The-Living-Word-of-Isis will command the archers into MY service."

They laughed, rose from the table, embraced, and set off to do a full day's work.

~ Next Morning ~

Djoser, Hetephe, and Queen Nima prepared for their departure to Abdju. King Nebka and his senior advisors arrived to hold council. The king asked Djoser, "So you believe you might be able to convince Chief Kerma to release fifty of his archers to my command?"

"Oh no, Father. The fifty archers will be under the command of Major Hetephe -- a Nubian acknowledged by all as the greatest archer in the world. But Major Hetephe will be under *my* command -- half Nubian and grandson of the chief. And I can't convince the chief of anything. That's why the queen -- my mother, your wife, and his daughter -- will do the convincing; accompanied by the prestigious Archer Hetephe. And as for reporting to me rather than to General Khasek, I hereby and forever pledge my allegiance to General Khasek's command but don't go touting that to Chief Kerma. Mother intends to insinuate that I will follow her commands, not yours or the general's."

General Khasek said, "If fifty Nubian archers decide to attack Memphis from the east, the bloodshed will be significant."

Djoser bristled, "General Khasek, Major Hetephe has proven her fealty to the concept of truly united kingdoms at every opportunity. Her services in bringing this dream to fruition are as great as yours. General, I will not have her loyalty to the kingdom questioned! Besides, you have trained your army well in their defenses against archers."

Khasek did not back down, "I question the loyalty of fifty Nubian archers led by an ambitious son of an ambitious chief!"

Hetephe broke in, "You are correct to be wary of my countrymen, General Khasek. But they will follow the guidance of Captain T'jaru who is under my command. As long as T'jaru remains loyal, there is no need for concern. It is my responsibility to be aware if his loyalty wavers at any time. I have been trained in observing changes in men plus I intend to handpick the women who will accompany the archers as support staff and gossip with them at every opportunity. I am confident you could terminate any pre-planned insurrection before it began. You may assign one of your trusted advisors to be *my* second-in-command if you feel it necessary.

Vizier Menka said, "My king, this is an ambitious, dangerous plan but the rewards of a successful implementation outweigh the inherent danger. To subjugate the Sinai warlords would be a victory of unimaginable importance. Let them proceed as they will. The general and I will remain unobtrusive, interested observers.

Shaman Saqqar said, "My High Priestess looks with favor on Priest Hotep planning a trade route along the Middlesea shoreline to Canaan. Her requirement is that the story of Isis and Osiris must be told along the way to those who have not yet heard the good news. Priest Hotep intends to name the first outpost 'T'jaru,' assuming Archer T'jaru becomes captain of the Kemet fighting force in the Sinai."

Queen Nima offered, "Naming the outpost 'I'jaru' is a wonderful idea. That will please Father a great deal. But let's refer to a 'Nubian fighting force,' not a 'Kemet fighting force.' Naming the United Kingdom 'Kemet' still rankles my father. He considers himself an equal to Chief Kemet, but the United Kingdom is named 'Kemet,' not 'Kerma.' A king's jealousy, I'm afraid."

Djoser thought, ~ *Mother, that is an interesting observation!* ~

The group talked for a while, then said farewells.

Major Hetephe led her group to the loading area where their chariots, wagons, and attendants waited. Hetephe would command the lead chariot, followed by Queen Nima and Prince Djoser. The entourage would wend through the streets of Memphis and South Memphis. Djoser had sent word to Set that his delegation wished to stop at the House of Nephthys for the Queen to pay her respects to him and Nephthys for the outstanding work they both do in South Memphis. ~ *A little spectacle for the people is always good -- plus it's always good to feed Set's ego -- plus Set will ensure his people line the streets to bow before the Queen and see the queen and the prince pay homage to Set.*

Hetephe solemnly waved to the staff of Hostess House as they passed by. ~ *I need these people on my side when I compete with the Nubian archers. What if one accidentally defeats me? Djoser will be angry with me. He is already angry with me for even making the challenge. Oh, well, anything for my country.* ~

The streets were lined with residents paying their respects to their Queen and thrilled with the recognition of the high-born waving back at them. Several Hostess House working women were jumping up and down on tables enthusiastically waving to the Queen.

The delegation proceeded to the House of Nephthys where the caravan stopped. Set and Nephthys were waiting on the front porch. The Queen was helped from her chariot and waited to greet her two loyal subjects. Djoser got down and stood with the four runners pulling her chariot. Hetephe joined him. Under her breath, she said, "Don't worry, my prince. I am the best there is. I cannot lose."

"Yes, archer woman. You *are* the best there is – at many things."

Set made a production of greeting the queen. Nephthys trailed three steps behind him and did not attempt to usurp the attention and adulation Set was receiving.

Djoser saw Anubis and Horus step from the house onto the front porch. He unobtrusively left the chariots to amble over and speak to the two young men. "Do you want to go on an adventure? We are going to Ogdoad City to visit Tehuti and then on to Abdu to see Chief Kerma. Get your things and join us. It will be great fun."

Horus morosely declined as Anubis excitedly exclaimed, "Yes, we would love to go. Cousin is wallowing in self-pity. This will be an opportunity for him to rejoin the living. I'll get our things." Anubis ran back into the house to pack, leaving Horus alone with Djoser.

Djoser said, "Your father would want you to go. Nephthys will be pleased if you go. I command you to go. You are going."

Horus laughed a bitter laugh, and, with sarcasm, replied, "I would be delighted to accept your gracious invitation -- command -- whatever."

"Good. Back wagon. Gossip with the attendants. That's where knowledge lives." Djoser turned to leave, hesitated, turned again to face Horus, and said, "Love is hard."

Horus quietly answered, "I know."

With greetings complete and everyone loaded, Major Hetephe began their long journey to Ogdoad City.

## 4. Nubian Archers

Year 150, first month

The runner delivered the Queen's message to Seshat in Ogdoad Town promptly. Seshat had a full day to prepare her husband and the town for an official visit from their queen. As sophisticated as the citizens were compared to most cities outside of Memphis, the opportunities for excitement and pageantry were few. They were now beside themselves with excitement. A visit from the Queen coming so soon after the good news of the resurrection of Osiris overloaded their senses. Even Lord Tehuti, himself, as worldly, well-traveled, and sophisticated as he was, felt the stir of excitement.

There was to be a welcoming pageant; drummers, dancers, flags, singers, children in costumes, and all manner of entertainment. After the Queen met her loyal subjects, Lord Tehuti and Seshat would host a feast. A wonderful time was planned.

The children on the lookout for the caravan saw it coming down the highway and ran to tell the waiting citizens of Ogdoad Town. Hetephe saw the children depart and said to Djoser, who was riding in her chariot, "They know we are approaching, let's prepare for our reception."

The caravan stopped for the occupants to relieve themselves, put on proper dress, and return to their proper chariots and wagons. Major Hetephe donned her full Nubian Archer dress complete with a full-sized bow and arrows. The Queen donned her royal robe and placed her crown upon her head. The prince, much to his disgust, donned his official princely robe. Horus and Anubis looked at one another and shrugged.

Major Hetephe turned ~~and~~, looked at her caravan, and ~~f~~-Finding everything to her liking, ~~she~~ commanded the chariot and wagon runners, "On to Ogdoad Town!" Although their entry into the city was festive, noisy, and exceedingly exciting, only two people fainted.

The receptions, speeches, entertainment, and introductions were flawless. The dignitaries finally retired to Lord Tehuti's house for their banquet.

Tehuti sat at the head of the long table with Queen Nima on the other end. The prince, Archer Hetephe, the queen's handmaidens, and the Ogdoad sat on either side. Each Ogdoad had been allowed to invite townspeople of their liking. The excited invitees sat quietly at a side table, overwhelmed with their great fortune to be invited. Horus and Anubis had each invited a young townswoman of their choosing to be their guest at the feast. The four had their own side table. Many citizens sat outside, with children in their laps, enraptured with the laughter and learned discussions coming from inside the home.

The queen praised Lord Tehuti and Ogdoad Town. Tehuti praised the King and Queen. Everyone at the head table praised everyone. The guests listened to all the praise in raptured silence. Anubis quietly interjected witty comments on the proceedings to his invited guest, an extremely attractive, full-bodied young woman. She hoped her smiles and laughter were appropriate for his comments, but she was far more concerned about not fainting, not wetting herself, and keeping her heart from exploding. Horus's companion, much more serious and detecting his sullen attitude toward the festivities, reached over, squeezed his hand, and ~~smiled a sad little smile for him, then withdrew her hand.~~

The feast ended and everyone retired to Tehuti's receiving room to mingle, chat, and drink. The queen's two handmaidens expertly stood on either side of the queen and discreetly controlled who

chatted with her and for how long. Djoser and Hetephe charmed everyone they spoke with. Anubis and Horus retired with their guests to talk quietly in a corner ~~with their guests.~~

Tehuti was excited as he told his guests, "I knew the gods would live forever! Osiris proves it beyond doubt! Him being called back from the dead every morning and all, to visit his admirers. I can hardly wait for my turn! Good old Dad, Zeus, is already up there in the sky. Everybody loves the sky, just like they love Dad. And Uncle Poseidon is living in the Ocean -- everybody loves the Ocean -- and Cousin Persephone painting the flowers and bringing forth the crops and everything! It's all wonderful!

Seshat said to Tehuti, "Dear, I believe Hathor invented that story about calling forth Osiris each morning. She needed power to subjugate Shaman Saqqara to her will. The story of Osiris and Isis, and of calling Osiris from the dead each morning, and him becoming the Living Sun were just convenient stories she thought the people might accept as truth and ~~for which she would~~ make her ~~be the~~ Gatekeeper to the Truth. She took a few kernels of truth and wove an elaborate hoax."

Tehuti shouted, "Don't be stupid woman! High Priestess Hathor says it's the truth and a High Priestess knows about these things! And what about all of her Priests and Priestesses already waiting on Chief Kemet to return from the land of the dead? My friend Osiris just beat him to it!"

Prince Djoser interrupted, "Hmmp, Lady Seshat. Let's leave the discussion of religious details for another time. We have many citizens listening to our every word, and we don't want to confuse the issues with competing theological concepts."

Seshat knew she was being reprimanded and glanced at her stern-faced queen for further instructions. ~ *They both want me to tell my people falsehoods. To let them believe this fantasy Hathor has created. How can this be? For leaders to let their people believe that fantasies are real.* ~

She responded, "Of course, my Prince."

Tehuti was elated the prince had backed him up, and continued, "Everybody knows that *something* has got to cause the sun to rise and the wind to blow and the tide to come in and the crops to grow! This explains everything! The gods cause everything outside *our* control. How can anyone *not* believe in the greatness and the power of the gods?"

Seshat frantically searched the eyes of her guests looking for anyone who appeared to know the truth. She found the gaze of Horus locked onto her. He nodded to her in recognition but held his finger to his lips to command her to remain silent.

Tehuti talked on. Repeating the stories again. Everyone listened and was comforted in knowing there were things greater than themselves. ~ *Tell the comforting story of Isis and Osiris, again, Great Lord Tehuti!* ~

Anubis and his guest retired to the riverbank to discuss things of great importance and for a closer inspection of the woman's body.

Horus invited his guest and Seshat to join him on the front porch to talk of cabbages and kings. Horus told them, "Kings must provide their people with the things their subjects need. Most people need gods more than they need food. People like Uncle Set, however, prefer a well-garnished cabbage. It is not for us to judge their needs."

Delightful conversations filled all of Ogdoad Town throughout the night and early into the morning.

The delegation rose late the next morning and visited with the powerful and leading citizens of Ogdoad Town. Prince Djoser played his people well, solidifying his concept of the upper and lower kingdoms being one unified people with common goals. -- "Osiris watches over *all* the people -- he does not care about where you live, now does he?"

Tehuti proclaimed he and Seshat would most certainly attend the next possible ceremony calling forth the rebirth of his old friend and fellow god. Archer Hetephe explained that the ceremonies immediately after a full moon were generally the most elaborate, exciting, and well-attended. She told Tehuti, "You should plan on attending the next one! Plus, there will be an archery competition the night before at Hostess House that you will enjoy!" ~ *Especially if some male accidentally defeats me!* ~

The caravan set off for Abdu after high-sun leaving behind an excited and even more faithful Ogdoad Town.

## 5. Chief Kerma and the Gods

Chief Kerma and his city were sophisticated even by Memphis standards. Their culture was more nature-oriented than their neighbors in the north but their management and organizational skills, concern for the well-being and education of their people, and ability to feed and protect the citizenry