



OH

MUMMY
MIA!

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1. Family Matters

Aster Survati had always assumed that the adults in charge of anything – a school, a business, a country – had been chosen because of their wisdom. Or their skills. Or their good judgement.

But as his second visit to the Omnitheon – the council that represented all the immortal world – entered its third hour, he was starting to realize that such roles might be based on something totally different.

‘YOU, ODIN, ARE THE BIGGEST MELON-HEADED, BUM-FACED BABOON’S ARMPIT FART I HAVE EVER HAD THE

MISFORTUNE TO STEP IN!!!'

Maybe, just maybe, they were given to whoever was the loudest.

Aster looked over to see what his cousin was making of the chaos unfolding in the circular council chamber, which was lined with delegates from mythologies throughout time and territory. But Vesper Hooper was fast asleep. Again. Granted, none of them had had much rest. They'd discovered just a few hours ago that Seth, the Egyptian God of Chaos, had kidnapped Ra, the Sun God, down in the Egyptian Underworld of the Duat – and with Ra, he had taken the sun hostage. But Aster figured this level of disaster would be enough to keep anyone awake. He gave his slack-jawed cousin a nudge, bringing her back to consciousness with a snore.

'I'm telling you, it was onside!' she mumbled as she woke with a start.

'Sorry to interrupt your power nap,' he said. 'Thought that the fate of the world might interest you a bit?'

'Whatever,' grumbled Vesper, shutting her eyes again. 'Leave me alone – wake me up when it's over.' Aster rolled his eyes. It was unlike Vesper to be this tired. Although totally like her to be this grumpy.

‘Now come on, Ebisu, old boy, there’s no call for that,’ Zeus insisted, trying to keep the Norse and Japanese Gods apart. ‘Let’s all behave like grown-ups, eh? No need to resort to childish names . . .’

‘Oh, stick a sock in it, thunderpants!’ Odin shot back. ‘The last good idea you had was hiring a cheaper divorce lawyer!’

‘Now look here, you impudent cove!’ Zeus roared in his face. ‘All I’m trying to do is come up with a sensible course of action to avert disaster! Ra and the sun are stuck down in the bally Duat – and unless we save them, all life on Earth will be over in a matter of hours! So let’s stay focused on the task in hand!’

Odin paused for a moment.

‘You’re right,’ he said more calmly. ‘My apologies. The emotion of the moment got the better of me.’

‘Not a problem,’ said Zeus through a clenched jaw. ‘It’s no wonder you’re getting upset. After all, you, sir, HAVE THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY OF SOUP!!!’

‘HOW DARE YOU!’ Odin shot back. ‘Why I ought to stick a thunderbolt where the sun doesn’t shine, you absolute—’

‘Wonderful,’ sighed Aster’s Uncle Elliot. ‘This is

getting us nowhere. Slowly.’

‘Ah, it takes me back,’ Aster’s mum Virgo sighed happily. ‘Did I ever tell you that I was—’

‘—once a Constellation of the Zodiac Council and Guardian of the Stationery Cupboard,’ Aster trotted out. ‘Responsible for the smooth running of the immortal community and plentiful paper clip provision . . . Yeah, Mum. You might have mentioned it. But only a few million times.’

Virgo shifted grumpily in her seat.

‘Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit,’ she muttered. ‘And it seems there’s more than one melon-headed, bum-faced baboon’s armpit fart present today . . .’

As Vesper started to nod off again next to him, Aster ignored his mother – and the insults being freely hurled around the council chamber – to return to his father’s notebook. He turned the pages of the leather-bound tome tentatively – this precious gift was the sum of Dr Krishna Survati’s archaeological research. Aster’s dad had travelled the globe researching ancient cultures and languages and his notebook was always Aster’s first port of call for comfort, to feel some connection with his father. But since he’d found himself saving the world from vengeful immortals, his dad’s notes had also proved an invaluable font of

knowledge to prepare him for his adventures.

Aster gently flicked through the pages until he found what he was looking for, a page illustrated with an Egyptian figure on something that looked like a big canoe, carrying a giant beach ball. He read his father's accompanying note:

According to the Ancient Egyptians, every night the Sun God, Ra, travelled with the sun through the Egyptian Underworld, the Duat. It was a perilous journey – the Duat was full of daemons and snakes and fire. But every night Ra emerged victorious in time for the dawn. Many cultures have myths explaining the day and night, but I've always particularly loved this explanation for the rising of the sun – an excellent reminder to us all that no matter what challenges we face, we have the chance to start again anew every day . . .

Except for *this* morning. Aster tried to keep the growing sense of dread at bay – his fingers were gently glowing, as they always did when he was worried. He looked at his watch. It was nearly nine a.m., the sun should have been up hours ago. But instead, the whole world was shrouded in darkness. By kidnapping Ra, Seth had kidnapped the sun. Aster didn't understand the science – but he understood the net result. All life on Earth relied on the sun's light and warmth. And without it . . .

His late father's neat script twisted beneath his fingers. Aster loved this book. It was the closest he would ever come to hearing his father's voice. He wished, even more than usual, that his dad were here. He could really use his advice.

Aster's attention was suddenly snapped back to the chamber, where Zeus was trying to restore some kind of order.

'Now listen here, everyone!' he boomed. 'I have called upon my old friend the Oracle of Delphi to try to calm the horses a bit.'

Aster sat up. He'd heard of the Delphic oracles – the Ancient Greeks used them to determine their future – they were very important and highly valued members of Greek society.

So Aster was a little bit surprised to see a little old lady slurping on a bucket of takeaway chicken.

'Pythia,' Zeus addressed the woman as she gnawed on a chicken drumstick. 'Help us out. Once we've dealt with young Seth, we don't need to worry about the rest of them, correct? The Diabolon is safe at least?'

'Maybe,' said Pythia dismissively, licking her fingers clean. Zeus exhaled impatiently.

'Pythia, old girl – you are the Oracle of Delphi, blessed with the gift of foresight!' he exclaimed. 'We're going to need greater reassurance than

“maybe”!

‘All right, keep your wig on,’ said the Oracle, rummaging in her dressing gown pocket and removing a piece of paper, which she handed to him. ‘This is what I predicted the day we put Thanatos back in the Diabolon, remember? When you wanted to know if he’d ever get out? He was very rude about it at the time, never heard such language . . .’

Zeus pored over the page.

‘One pepperoni passion, one Hawaiian feast, three garlic bruschetta, one chocohazel blitz . . .’

‘Oops,’ said Pythia, snatching the paper back. ‘That was my breakfast. Try this one.’

She handed over a new prophecy, making Zeus peer intently. Aster moved over to read behind his shoulder as the King of the Gods muttered the words out loud:

When dawning sun comes out at night

Turning stones from dark to night

When friends swear oaths with traitor’s breath

So endless life meets sudden death

Then hell will gape its evil jaws

And no man’s child can stop its cause

‘Ah, yes, I remember,’ Zeus said to Pythia. ‘Still no bally idea what it means, though.’

‘I dunno,’ the Oracle replied dismissively. ‘I just deliver the messages. Which is more than Perpetual Pizzas managed with my breakfast this morning.’

This was all the Omnitheon needed to break out in another unruly row, the representatives from Ancient Mesopotamia and Fiji beginning to arm-wrestle while being pelted with snowballs by the Norsemen.

‘This is ridiculous!’ huffed Isis, the winged Egyptian Goddess who had been getting increasingly frustrated behind the Egyptian desk, while her son Horus played on his phone next to her. With a determined sigh, Isis hitched up her robes and clambered on top of her desk with a shout. ‘Now listen here, all of you – I have something to say. SO ZIP IT!’

Aster didn’t know if it was her natural authority, or just the fact that Isis was a mum. But the entire chamber of ancient deities fell silent, like naughty children who had been sent to their rooms.

‘Right!’ Isis roared. ‘We have a disaster unfolding and we have to make it right! I have known Seth for thousands of years and I know he will not stop until he gets what he wants.’

‘And what is that?’ a Korean delegate called

out. 'Have we even received his demands?'

'We don't need his demands, Dangun!' Isis cried. 'We know what he wants! It's what he always wants! To cause as much chaos as possible! He lives for the drama! He wants to make my Horus's life miserable! The things he put my beautiful baby, my pride, my joy, through! Isn't that right, precious?'

She turned to Horus, the middle-aged man-baby she so proudly called her son. He pulled something out of his belly button. And ate it.

'Just leave me alone,' he grumbled, returning to his phone. 'You're so embarrassing.'

Isis stared at her son. Aster waited for her to tell him off for his staggering ingratitude.

'See how he suffers so nobly,' she said in quiet admiration. 'Such an inspiration to us all.'

Horus let out another noise in response. Aster wasn't sure if it was in agreement or disagreement. But even from this distance, it smelt really, really bad.

'The plain facts are these,' Zeus continued. 'Poor old Ra has been taken prisoner down in the Duat – and with him, the sun. If we don't rescue them both before long, the whole mortal – and immortal – worlds will be right up poopy creek without a paddle.'

‘So what do you suggest?’ Ebisu called out. ‘Gods can’t travel to any underworld, those are our rules!’

‘And in any case, only the dead can travel to the Duat,’ Isis pointed out.

‘Marvellous!’ Odin boomed. ‘Who knows some dead people?’

‘Does “dead boring” count?’ Dangun mused. ‘Because we must all have some mortal politicians we can send?’

An enthusiastic murmur of agreement echoed around the chamber.

‘I don’t think that’s quite the spirit, chaps,’ declared Zeus tactfully. ‘I’ve sent my boy Hermes to the four corners of the Earth to rally the troops just in case. But then there’s another cup to this tea set. We need to quell panic on Earth. The mortals can behave most peculiarly when they feel under threat. I’ve seen things I can never unsee when they thought they were running out of toilet paper . . . Are we in touch with mortal world leaders?’

‘We are,’ Ebisu confirmed. ‘They are deploying a wide variety of tactics to keep everyone distracted, from fake news about a solar eclipse on social media, to pointing out that a celebrity may have worn the same outfit on more than one occasion.’

‘Is it working?’

‘Largely, yes. The eclipse story is buying us some time. The teenage and university population haven’t woken up yet and so much of the mortal population is on their phones, they have yet to notice that the sun hasn’t appeared. So we should be fine for a while. We have deployed multiple cat memes and videos of actors impersonating each other. That should give us several hours.’

‘Excellent work,’ said the King of the Gods. ‘Now we just need to form a rescue party . . .’

‘This is all too awful!’ Isis exclaimed, throwing her winged arms up in the air. ‘I can’t believe we’re here again! His persecution has been endless! And Seth is family! He’s my husband’s brother! My son’s uncle!’

‘Oh, wait – I remember this story!’ Aster piped up. ‘Didn’t Seth seal Osiris in a coffin lined with lead and send him down the Nile?’

‘Indeed,’ sighed Isis. ‘That was a tricky Christmas. When Seth turned against my Osiris, he tore his brother’s heart in two.’

‘I hear you, old girl,’ said Zeus sympathetically. ‘Family disagreements can be so very upsetting.’

Isis looked quizzically at the King of the Gods.

‘No – Seth actually ripped his heart into pieces. Along with the rest of him – he scattered

bits and pieces of my husband all over the world! And I was the one who had to put him back together again! I used to think it was rough finding Osiris's dirty pants on the bedroom floor. Try looking for his pancreas in Swindon!

'And the feud with Horus,' said Aster, remembering more. 'Didn't they, like, fight as hippopotamuses for three months? And race in boats made out of mountains? And didn't Horus . . . actually cut off your head for helping Seth one time?'

'Oh yes, he did,' sighed Isis, fondly squeezing her son's cheek. 'Such a tinker. Happy memories . . . But I'll tell you again, Seth will stop at nothing until he's caused the maximum amount of chaos. He's a terrible loser. Believe me. I've seen him play Monopoly.'

'So . . . all we need to do is find a dead person willing to fight a relentless evil immortal without any help down in an underworld none of us can travel to,' huffed Odin. 'Where are we going to find one of those?!'

'I've no idea – but we're getting nowhere here,' sighed Zeus. 'Everyone – if you need us, we'll be back at Home Farm. Keep on nattering and if anyone hits the jackpot, let me know. Let's go back to the homestead, pop on the kettle and see

if we can't sort it all out over a cuppa.'

'A wise move,' whispered Virgo approvingly. 'This council is highly sub-optimal. It's like the time Taurus was asked to arrange Pisces' birthday party and rather tactlessly booked it at a fish and chip restaurant.'

'Oh, spare us another tale from the good old days, grandma,' groaned Elliot. 'I'm with Zeus. If the best plan they have here is "find a dead person", let's go home and figure this out on our own. Come on, Ves. Er ... Ves?'

A drooling snore answered his enquiry. Aster nudged her again.

'Don't touch my yoghurt!' she mumbled this time as her brain tried to catch up with her body. 'Wait – what's happening? Where are we going?'

'Home,' smiled Zeus, helping Vesper to her unsteady feet. 'Let's get this show on the road.'

'Best idea I've heard,' muttered Elliot, putting his arm around Vesper. 'Let's go.'

Aster noticed the King of the Gods puffing up a little at Elliot's support. While they were far from friends, the frosty relations between Zeus and his uncle had thawed over the past few weeks – although he was still in the dark as to what had caused the big chill in the first place.

'It's not my story to tell,' his mum had said

when he'd asked her. 'But they'll sort themselves out. There's far too much love mixed with far too much history. Those two are joined together like Scylla's shoelaces, mark my words.'

Aster hadn't been convinced then and he certainly wasn't now. But it was good to have fewer arguments. Between his mum and his uncle – not to mention himself and Vesper – there were quite enough of those already.

'Er . . . before you leave!' Odin shouted after them. 'We do have one other urgent order of business. It has come to our attention from our security operatives that we might have another fugitive from the Diabolon.'

'What?!' Zeus replied. 'Don't talk tosh, you old fool! Young Vesper and Aster have already taken care of Kizin – good show, by the way – and we know all about Seth—'

'Vesper,' Odin asked gravely. 'When you were in the Diabolon, how many of the stone symbols did you press?'

Aster watched his sleepy cousin wake up very quickly.

'Oh yeah, we never covered that last time,' she said. 'It was . . . er, it was three.'

'Three?!' Odin replied to a general uproar. 'Why did you not say?'

‘Why didn’t you ask?’ Vesper replied defensively. ‘And, besides, I’ve been kinda busy, you know, saving the world and everything!’

Aster noticed his cousin sway a little as she shouted at the Omnitheon. She must be really tired – shouting usually fuelled her battery rather than depleted it. Aster often wondered if his cousin was powered entirely by rage and sarcasm. And chicken nuggets.

‘Vesper, dear girl – are you sure?’ Zeus asked gently.

‘Totes,’ said Vesper, rubbing her eyes. ‘There was the snake, the jaguar and . . . yeah, that’s right. The apple.’

Another gasp went up around the Omnitheon.

‘Then it is as we feared,’ Odin said grimly. ‘She’s on the loose. Morgan Le Fay is at large.’

‘Who?’ Vesper asked her cousin as the Omnitheon erupted in panicked chat.

‘Famous enchantress of Arthurian legend,’ Aster explained. ‘That’s King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, if you didn’t know.’

‘Of course I did,’ Vesper snapped, although Aster was far from convinced she was telling the truth.

‘She is Arthur’s sister,’ Aster continued. ‘And depending on which stories you listen to, either a

powerful enchantress or an evil sorceress. Or possibly, both.’

‘Hey ho, well, one thing at a time,’ said Zeus hurriedly, trying to usher Vesper out of the door. ‘Let’s get the sun back, then we can crack on with the next thing on the list . . .’

‘Really?’ Odin said incredulously. ‘I’m surprised you’re not more concerned. Logic dictates that she’ll be coming straight for the girl.’

‘Me?’ Vesper asked.

‘Of course you,’ Odin replied in confusion.

‘Oh, come, come now,’ said Zeus, still trying to get them all out of the chamber. ‘Kettle won’t boil itself.’

‘Yes, let’s just go home,’ Elliot urged too. ‘This doesn’t concern us right now.’

Aster knew when someone was trying to hide something. Vesper knew it too. And she wasn’t budging.

‘Why?’ she asked Odin simply, holding Elliot and Zeus’s attempts to move her along at bay. ‘Why would she be coming straight for me?’

‘Well, isn’t it obvious?’ Odin blustered as Zeus gestured frantically for him to stop speaking. ‘Why wouldn’t she come to you? After all, child – she’s your mother.’

Aster felt his heart do a cartwheel as he took in

this new information. So he could only imagine what Vesper's was doing.

But as his cousin looked at her father with eyes that could carve granite, Aster was certain of one thing.

The family arguments were far from over.

In fact, they were only just beginning.