





## **THE WIDOW, THE COFFIN AND THE REALLY WICKED GAME**

It started with a seemingly innocent party game and ended with a widow's search for her husband's body.

A brother's jealousy set off the gruesome chain of events that made headlines last month. Brothers Osiris and Seth belonged to Egypt's most prominent family, the Arums, but family friends say Seth always hated the fact that Osiris was more successful and well-liked.

The police believe Seth began plotting to get rid of his brother several months ago. Detectives say he paid a visit to Osiris' tailor to get his brother's exact measurements.

He then went to a carpenter and had a wooden chest made to those measurements and decorated with the most beautiful jewels.

Next, he threw a big party for Osiris. The other guests were all in on the plot — though one of them later confessed everything to the police.

After an evening of good food, drink and music, Seth started a "party game."

He said: "I will give this gorgeous chest to the person who fits mostly perfectly inside."

So one by one, they climbed in. Some were too tall or short, others too fat or thin. "Let me try," said Osiris. He hopped in and stretched himself out.

"I fit exactly. I win!" he shouted joyfully. But as soon as the words left his lips, Seth leapt forward and slammed the lid down.

As Osiris struggled inside, Seth and the other guests held the lid down and sealed it shut. They then threw the chest into the River Nile.

Although nothing was said to Osiris' wife Isis, as the days passed and she did not see him, a sick feeling in her stomach told her he was dead.

Knowing Seth's true feelings towards her husband, she was determined to find him. "If he is dead, I need to find his body to give it a proper burial, or his spirit will never be free," she told a friend.

After asking around, she found some children who said they had seen a wooden chest floating down the river.

Following their directions, she found the spot where they said it had become stuck in the river bank. There, it had begun sprouting leaves and branches, eventually growing into a large tree.

A man had chopped it down to make a pillar for his house. When he heard what Isis was looking for, he let her knock it down. And that's how she finally found Osiris, locked away in his wooden tomb.

But the heartbroken widow had little time to grieve. She hid the body, fearing Seth would find it.

Unfortunately, he did. Wanting to deprive his brother of a proper burial, he tore the body into 14 pieces and scattered them in different places along the crocodile-filled Nile.

So poor Isis was forced to search for her husband again. Luckily, the crocodiles decided to spare the body, and she managed to find all the parts except one.

This time, she made sure she hid it in such a way that her brother-in-law would not find it. But because she will not reveal the location of the body, the police are unable to prosecute Seth.

When questioned, Isis continues to insist that Osiris is still alive. "He's just gone on a trip — he'll be back one day."

## **BACKGROUND**

The tale of Osiris and Isis is an ancient Egyptian myth — a traditional story that explains something about the world or a people's early history.

The Egyptians believed in and followed such stories for thousands of years before religions like Christianity and Islam came about. These stories shaped their values and their view of the world.

For instance, the goddess Isis was worshipped as the ideal wife and mother. Children helped her find the chest, so she decreed that they would speak words of wisdom and, occasionally, be able to tell the future. And because Isis looked for Osiris' body while on a boat made of papyrus (a type of plant), Egyptians believed anyone sailing in such a boat would be safe from the Nile's crocodiles, because the creatures would think the boat carried Isis.

Osiris was the god of death, depicted in Egyptian art as a mummified man and as ruler of the underworld.

But because the myth said he would come back to life one day, many Egyptians believed in life after death. By praying to Osiris, they hoped they themselves would be reborn after death.

## **FAB VOCAB**

### **SEEMINGLY INNOCENT**

Something that appears to be harmless but is not

### **JEALOUSY**

Envy; being unhappy that another person has something, or wanting it for yourself

### **GRUESOME**

Horrible and unpleasant

### **PROMINENT**

Famous or well known

### **PLOT**

A secret plan

### **TOMB**

A place or room where someone is buried

### **GRIEVE**

To feel great sorrow after a death or loss

### **SPARE**

To let someone off

### **PROSECUTE**

To bring to trial in a court of law

## **IF YOU ENJOYED THIS, READ**

*Egyptian Tales And Legends: Ancient, Christian, Muslim*

By E.A. Wallis Budge

*Isis And Osiris (Looking At Egyptian Myths And Legends)*

By Geraldine Harris

*Who Built The Pyramids? (Starting Point History Series)*

By Jane Chisholm And Stuart Reid