Hope is the thing with feathers

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Hope is the thing with feathers

by FallLover

Summary

Horus tells Nephthys his theory about Hathor’s mirror, but when she disappears, Seth arrives and asks why Horus was looking for Nephthys. Horus finally explains everything he’s discovered and believes about Nephthys, the mirror, and Osiris.

Set after Season 2, Episode 98.

Notes

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

The title of the fanfic is from the poem of the same name by Emily Dickinson.

See the end of the work for more notes

“Osiris,” Horus said in frustration to Nephthys in the dark tunnel/mirror space in Hermopolis. “You must have looked in the mirror and seen Osiris.” *That’s why Maat’s scales said she was telling the truth during Seth’s trial… It would have led her to seek him out for conceiving Anubis, and everything else…* He frowned. *But then did Hathor set that up too? Or was it Ra?*

“Osiris?!” Nephthys asked, deeply confused. “But I love my brother, too!”

Horus shook his head. “The mirror possibly focuses obsessive affection, to a point it’s difficult to handle. I’m not sure. You may have loved Osiris as a sister, but did you love him as a lover?”

Nephthys’ pale cheeks darkened a little. “That’s—! I mean… No. He’s Isis’ husband.” She smiled awkwardly. “He’s a bit too formal for me, really. Seth… Seth was always playful and sweet.”

Horus smiled and said, “Yes, I can see that about him.”

Nephthys’ eyes widened. “You’re close to him?”

“…Yes,” Horus replied. “We’re very close.”

Nephthys smiled and said, “I’m glad. He often isolates himself, and could use more friends.”

Horus grimaced and said, “Well… maybe more than friends.”

“What do you mean?” Nephthys asked. And then she vanished.

Horus’ eyes widened and he looked around. The blue scarab was still glowing in the dark, showing him the ancient mural, but he couldn’t sense Nephthys at all. “Nephthys?”

“Nephthys?” Seth asked as he stepped forward out of the dark, the blue scarab light tinting his red hair a purple shade. He frowned at Horus. “Why are you asking about Nephthys?”

Horus gazed down at Seth in surprise. The older god looked unhurt and like his usual self. His hand rested on the rope line they’d been using to travel. Horus glanced back and saw the mural was gone. It was only darkness. He looked back at Seth, who was still frowning at him.

“What are you looking for?” Seth asked. He looked at the scarab thoughtfully. “That’s useful.”

Horus thought about saying nothing, as he had for some time, because he’d left his intuition unquestioned for so long, until he lost it, and was left directionless in the desert.

Talking to Seth helps, Horus thought, gazing down at Seth. *I need to just be honest.* “I saw Nephthys. Or… perhaps her memory.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise. “What? How?”

Horus sighed and explained, “Back in Heliopolis, during the trial, before our first match, Hathor gave me a bronze mirror as a token of her blessing. I believed it was something foretold by Thoth when my mother was seeking help in exile. Thoth said that Ra would give me the thing I needed most. But I also had a bad feeling about it I couldn’t place my finger on.”

Seth asked, “A mirror? What did it look like?”

“Bronze, long, about so big,” he gestured with his hand. “And it had art of Sekhmet on the back—”

Seth scoffed in annoyance. “I saw Hathor skulking around with that during the trial. But she gave it to *you?*”

Horus frowned. “You saw her carrying it? When?”

“After the first match,” Seth replied with a frown. “Did she steal it back from you?”

Horus shook his head. “I still had it then. Perhaps there are two of them? There are two figures holding mirrors on the back…”

Seth sighed and scratched his head with his left hand. “That can’t be good. It’s probably something she uses to cast spells somehow.” He growled softly. “Ra and her daughters…”

“Yes,” Horus said with a nod, thinking of his experiences with Sekhmet. “I think it’s possible it did something. But I’m still unsure.”

Seth frowned as he asked, “What do you think it did?”

Horus gazed at Seth, worried about what to say. How it might stir up Seth’s anger. But he couldn’t back down now. He was *not* a coward. And if this lost Seth forever, then… he would keep fighting anyway, like he had all this time. “After the first match, I looked into the mirror, and I saw *your* face.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise. “Really?”

Horus thought about what Seth had said about seeing Hathor walking around with it and asked, “Did you look into the mirror when you saw Hathor with it? Or did she show you it somehow?”

Seth sighed and said, “I stole it from her briefly. I suppose it’s *possible* it was facing me a bit. Why?”

“Perhaps my mirror reflected what was on the surface of the one you held,” Horus said. “And that’s why I saw you.”

“So they really were connected,” Seth said in annoyance. “Maybe as some sort of communication or something?”

“She never said that to me,” Horus said. “Just that it was a blessing.”

Seth frowned. “Then perhaps she meant to use it to spy on you without your knowledge.” He shuddered. “That’s disturbing.”

Horus hadn’t thought much of that, but it was the past at this point, and hardly the worst of his experiences with the mirror. He’d have to have a hard conversation with Hathor, at best, at some point. Or just stay far away from her. “Yes. But I think it was more than that. I… went inside the mirror.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise again. “What?”

Horus sighed and said, “It was strange. Kind of like this place,” he gestured out to the dark. “A dark void. And in that void… I met Nephthys. Or… a memory of her.”

Seth’s eyes widened in shock as he repeated, “What?”

“Did you ever see her handle a mirror like that?” Horus asked.

Seth frowned. “Why would I remember something like that? She had a lot of mirrors, I think, anyway…”

“One of her last memories before she became fully trapped was you two being together,” Horus said. “It’s likely the mirror was in a room you were in.” The mirror hadn’t left his hands when he returned to his room in Heliopolis. It likely had still been with Nephthys when whatever part of *her* returned, too.

Seth stared at him, and then his frown deepened, as his expression grew more thoughtful, like he was really trying to think back. After a while, he shook his head and said, “I really don’t recall.”

“Perhaps something associated with Osiris?” Horus tried, still worried about his theory. He had avoided telling Nephthys by luck, and so hadn’t alarmed her, but if he was right, Seth would need to know.

“Osiris?” Seth asked, confused. “Why would he…?” Seth blinked and gazed ahead for a moment, as if he’d finally recalled something.

“Uncle?” Horus asked.

“…A long time ago,” Seth said, still gazing into the distance, like he didn’t see anything at all. “There was… a mirror like Hathor’s… But it was so long ago I didn’t…” He sounded lost.

“What happened with it?” Horus asked, desperate. He almost hoped he’d been wrong again.

“…Osiris gave it to me,” Seth said. “As part of the spoils he won in the war against Ra. He shared the loot with all of his siblings. The mirror was in my portion. Nephthys noticed it, so I gave it to her, because I had no use for it, and it seemed to make her happy.”

Horus nodded sadly as he said, “I think the mirror can be used to heighten or even create affection, desire, or love in those who look into it, based on who they see.”

Seth frowned at that. “What?”

“I’m mostly guessing,” Horus explained. “My intuition is… It’s back, but I’ve learned that I rely on it too much, and that reliance has made me weak in the face of many challenges.”

Seth just stared at him, clearly not comprehending.

“I may be wrong,” Horus explained, “But I believe that Nephthys looked into the mirror all those years ago and saw Osiris. And… somehow, perhaps, part of her affection – her memories of her affection at least – for you was trapped in the mirror, either replacing it in her mind with affection or desire for Osiris, or allowing whatever feelings she had for Osiris to rapidly grow. And without those memories… she possibly had no recall she felt them in the first place.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise at that. “What do you mean?”

“I believe the mirror is part of the reason I attacked you as I did after the second match,” Horus went on. “I didn’t believe myself capable of what I did… but at the time, the desire I felt was uncontrollable. It’s part of why I believe the mirror spell is tied to affection or desire. But when I spoke to Nephthys in the mirror during the trial, she said she’d been *trapped* there, though she didn’t remember how. And the last thing she saw was you and herself in our world being together. She was unable to leave the mirror, trapped there all these years. And her self in Heliopolis… pursued Osiris. Like how I pursued you, when the mirror was in my room, and so were you.” He felt disgusted with himself. *If only I’d thought harder back then…*

Seth looked horrified. “What?” He looked down. “I… I gave her that… I…”

“It’s not your fault,” Horus said, reaching out to set his left hand on Seth’s shoulder, and squeezed, hoping to give reassurance. “If it was a gift from Osiris… I’m not even sure she was a target. But I think it was a targeted gift.”

Seth frowned at this and said, “A targeted gift? Why?”

Horus gazed sadly at Seth as he said, “I know my father pursues you. And has for some time. I know he wants to kill you to drag you to Duat with him.”

Seth looked away at that.

“If he found an artifact from Ra or Hathor,” Horus continued, “Something that could perhaps manipulate feelings, enhance desire, or *something…* Do you believe he would not use it to turn your affections to him?”

Seth’s eyes widened in alarm. “What?! That’s…” He simply gazed ahead blankly for a bit, and then his face bent in a pained laugh. “That’s exactly the ridiculous kind of shit he’d do! That… That—!”

“He probably thought you’d investigate it,” Horus said. “And that would be his moment. You’re a curious person, maybe he knew that.”

Seth sighed and said, “I suppose I’m lucky I was deeply uninterested at that time. But Nephthys…” He grimaced in pain and shook his head. “I let her get hurt…”

“If she wasn’t the intended target, she was just caught in the crossfire,” Horus said. “You couldn’t have known. My mother was there, too, and she clearly didn’t sense anything. You can’t use magic; how would you have known?”

Seth still didn’t look happy. “You called me a guardian god. How was I guardian *even then*, if I failed to protect her?”

“You did your best,” Horus said as he pulled Seth close for a hug. “I know you did.”

For a while, they just stood together, breathing in the dark. Horus could feel Seth’s heart race.

“What did this have to do with what you saw earlier?” Seth finally asked.

Horus breathed in deeply and pulled away, gazing down at Seth with as neutral an expression as he could manage. “I believe Thoth’s prophecy *was* correct, in a way, because this whole incident has shown me that I rely overmuch on my intuition, and that I need to learn to do better with and without it.”

Seth gave him a confused look. “Okay… And…?”

“I could not become a god until I grew stronger,” Horus said. “Until I became able to see things clearly and stopped relying purely on instinct. Until I learned how to find truth myself.” He bowed his head. “When I first met Nephthys in the mirror, my intuition told me she could not leave the mirror. That there was something off about her. And that there was nothing I could do about her situation. At the time, based on what the Nephthys in the mirror said and what little I gleaned from my intuition, I assumed *she* was the real Nephthys, and the one in our world was a fake to replace her, possibly as some plot by Sekhmet.”

“Sekhmet?” Seth asked.

“After you came to my bedroom after the second match,” Horus said, watching Seth’s reactions – but he made none, seemingly having put the incident behind him, at least for the time being, “and then left, Sekhmet spoke to me. She derived entertainment from watching you and your siblings fall apart. I assumed from the art on the mirror, and what I’d done to you and everything I’d learned, that she was the culprit.”

Seth’s lips twitched in something nearing a snarl. “It *would* be the sort of game she’d play…”

Horus nodded and continued, “But I’m not sure about her connection anymore. At the time, she implied I was wrong. I didn’t trust her, because of all I knew about her, and my assurance in my intuition, but the things she said led me to doubt myself… But so much happened, I didn’t have time to ponder it. Until now.” He gazed at Seth, feeling his heart race. “This place does something with the heart, focusing on the nature of your heart, perhaps weighing it, like Maat’s scales. Perhaps it knew, even when I didn’t, that this weighed on me. It also seems to be connected to the mirror space. It allowed me to meet with Nephthys in the mirror again, and to ponder things anew. To realize my mistakes.”

Seth hadn't walked away yet and wasn't attacking him, so Horus took that as a good sign. Seth's expression was still hard.

"I talked with her more," Horus said. "Asked questions I hadn't the first time. I learned more about who she was. Thought more about her comments on memory troubles, and my own experience with the mirror. I realized what she probably is, and what likely happened to trap her in the mirror." Horus sighed. "I could leave, because the person I saw in the mirror was someone I already loved. She couldn't, because her affection for you was trapped here."

"I don't understand," Seth finally said. "This is…"

"She loved you, Uncle," Horus said. "Once, at least, I think. And the mirror seemingly took it away."

Seth stared at Horus in alarm. "But that's—! She said before *Maat* that she—! That—!" His eyes grew moist. "Osiris said…"

"Osiris *lies*," Horus said. "He always lies to get you to do what he wants. To trick you. To trap you."

"I *know*," Seth said, bitterly. "You don't need to tell me that, I know he does, I just…" He breathed in deeply, and his expression grew furious. "That he did all this and had the guts to just… *lie* like that… knowing what he'd done…"

Horus' heart hurt for Seth, and everything he'd gone through. "I wish you didn't have to go through this. I'm sorry, Uncle." He wanted to hide Seth away somewhere safe, but knew it wasn't possible.

Seth wiped his arm over his eyes. He slowly got his breathing under control. Finally, he looked at Horus with a sharp gaze and asked, "And you? Why didn't *you* tell me before this?"

Horus bowed his head again. "At first we were enemies, so even if I wanted to tell you, I know you wouldn't have believed me."

"And then later?" Seth demanded. "You've had opportunity." He sounded rightfully angry.

"I still relied too much on my intuition," Horus said. When Seth only frowned at that, Horus continued, "It told me there was nothing to do. So I did nothing. I didn't question it enough. I was afraid to. Because… if the thing I always relied on, whenever I needed guidance… If I couldn't trust it, then… what should I trust?" He clenched his hand around the scarab. "It could have meant that everything I knew was a lie." He looked up at Seth, hoping what he said got through. "I'm sorry for my cowardice. I didn't want to hurt you or Nephthys."

Seth gazed at him long and hard.

Horus felt his heart race. His intuition wasn't aiding him in this moment, but he *knew* that talking to Seth was the *right* thing to do.

Seth reached up with his left hand and pushed it up to cover Horus' right cheek. It didn't grab or anything: it just cupped him there. His skin was warm.

Horus' heart was still beating fast, and he wondered if he'd really chosen right.

Seth's expression was a bit sad, but resigned, too. "You didn't know, and it's doubtful I'd have listened anyway. As soon as you learned what you think is the truth, you told me." He breathed in and said, "Thank you. For telling me." His eyes were wet again.

"Uncle…" Horus said.

"Do you think…?" Seth swallowed around his brittle voice. His fingers twitched. "Do you think Isis could do something? If we told her? I know she won't for me, but…"

"I don't know," Horus said. "But I'll advocate for her to try." He thought back to Nephthys disappearing, and felt there had to be more going on with that. He'd tell Isis about that, as well. "I promise."

"Thank you," Seth said. He chuckled. "I probably never would have known. I would have gone on forever, thinking…" He sighed.

Horus stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Seth again, pulling him close.

Seth leaned his head against Horus' chest. He was shaking. "I'm glad. To know. Even if… Even if it probably doesn't change anything… I'm glad to know."

Horus smiled sadly, thinking of all the futures that might have been. "I understand."

He was glad at least they were still together.

A white light shone behind Seth and Horus blinked at it.

"What's that?" Seth asked, turning with a frown and shielding his eyes.

"I think it's the way out," Horus said. "I think… this what the children meant about good hearts, perhaps. Keeping what I learned hidden, and you choosing to not attack me for it… Perhaps that opened the way for us."

Seth snorted and said, "Well. I suppose that's something anyway. Let's get out of here, then." He pulled back a little, and then gazed up at Horus, his expression unreadable.

Horus gazed down at him. The light seemed to almost make Sethoddly ethereal.

Seth leaned up and lightly kissed Horus on the lips, before pulling back and saying, "Thank you." Then he stepped away and headed for the light.

Horus stared at him, spellbound.

Seth paused and looked back at Horus when the other man didn't move. Seth raised an eyebrow at him. "You coming?" He held his hand out.

Horus swallowed and stepped forward quickly. "Yes! I'm coming!"

End Notes

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