Honesty and Recovery

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Honesty and Recovery

by FallLover

Summary

Horus talks to mirror!Nephthys in the dark passage in Hermopolis, only to be surprised by Seth overhearing part of it. When Seth demands answers, Horus finally explains about the mirror.

Set after Season 2, Episode 95.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own.

See the end of the work for more notes

“You didn’t tell Seth about me,” Nephthys said as she gazed back at Horus with a hard look. She looked just like he’d last seen her in Hathor’s mirror.

Horus was nervous about all this. *I’m not back in the mirror,* he thought, *am I?* The children had gone into the darkness, and Seth had as well. The whole experience was different than when he’d gone into Hathor’s mirror.

“Why didn’t you tell him?” Nephthys asked. She did not approach him. She just gazed at him in harsh judgment. “If you told him, surely he’d have helped me. But I’m still here.”

This must be an illusion, Horus thought. But he didn’t know how to break out of it, if it was. *The children said those with good hearts would be all right,* Horus recalled, *so does the darkness bring out the bad parts of a heart?*

“I trusted you,” Nephthys said. She looked sad, just like she might if she learned Horus had kept her existence secret.

Horus didn’t know if talking to the illusion would encourage it. But he had few other options. He could not turn back and leave Seth to this place. And he could not let go of the rope line, or else risk getting lost forever.

So he walked forward, wondering if the illusion would vanish as he neared. He thought it might be there to discourage him from going forward, as further protection for the children’s village. It was meant to intimidate invaders away, and it was possible the emotional manipulation was the only weapon it had.

Nephthys did not vanish. Horus walked right up to her and stopped, gazing down at her.

She glared back.

After a moment, Horus reached out with his right hand to see if she was insubstantial, and he managed to touch her left shoulder, which made him flinch back. She felt solid.

“Will you simply stay silent forever?” Nephthys demanded, frowning at him.

Horus wondered if he should try knocking her aside. She was surely only an illusion, so it wouldn’t harm her. *This space can’t be connected to Hathor’s mirror,* he thought. *Or else why wouldn’t the children have commented about her? Unless she didn’t know to talk to them about it. Why didn’t she ever mention this place? Or tell me to tell Seth to go to Hermopolis?*

But even as his doubts piled up, he also knew there was the chance she was *real,* and for all his issues with his aunt, he was still unsure about *this* version of Nephthys, and he did not wish either of them harm.

He had no other choice, since more movement might make him lose the rope line. And he couldn’t step around her, for fear of falling or vanishing.

“I’ve been trying to find the right time to talk to him,” Horus said. “It’s been… difficult.” Seth mocked Horus’ guilt about the night Horus assaulted him, but Horus still felt that guilt and disgust at his own actions. And the fear over whether they were his own or not. Whether he was no better than his father, or that interfering foreign god.

“You’re the son of Isis,” Nephthys insisted. “She was good at making allies and working in difficult situations.”

“You’re the goddess of peace and harmony,” Horus countered. “I am not.” Nut could say he was a link between humans and gods, but he often felt like trying to make gods work together was a more difficult matter. He certainly had trouble working with the gods he knew.

Nephthys sighed in exasperation. “Then take my advice this time: *tell* him. It will weigh on you if you don’t.”

“It already does weigh on me,” Horus said. “I want to help you, Nephthys, but telling Seth… it could destroy him.”

“Tell me what?” Nephthys asked in Seth’s voice. “And destroy me how?”

Horus blinked. He was standing in the darkness still, but Nephthys vanished before his eyes, leaving Seth standing before Horus, frowning up at him.

Horus looked around. He didn’t think he’d moved much, and he hadn’t seen or heard Seth before.

“What did you want to help Nephthys with?” Seth demanded, his voice filled with suspicion.

Horus looked down at Seth, suddenly afraid. His memories of the mirror were muddy, but he’d kept knowledge of it to himself. There was still the possibility this was another trick, that even the Seth before him was an illusion, morphed from the Nephthys illusion.

“Are you really Seth?” Horus asked, confused.

Seth frowned at him. “Of course I am! Who else would be?”

Horus knew that was true. But he didn’t know how the tunnel had tricked him into seeing Nephthys. “You didn’t see Nephthys here before?”

“You suddenly appeared in the darkness, talking about Nephthys and telling me something,” Seth said. “I never saw Nephthys anywhere. You saw Nephthys?”

Horus had a bad feeling about all this. He knew it *must* be the tunnel doing something, but what? *Was it really based on my heart?* He thought as he gazed down at Seth, unsure of what to say. Did he have to finally at least admit the truth to pass through this tunnel?

He was afraid of what would happen. But… illusion or not, that Nephthys had been right. They needed honesty. Seth had been open and vulnerable with Horus, which was what Horus wanted. He had to do the same.

Horus breathed in deeply and finally said, “During the trial, I received a hand mirror from Hathor. After the first match, I was looking at the mirror, when I saw you in it… and was drawn into the mirror, where I met someone who claimed to be the true Nephthys.”

Seth’s eyes widened in surprise.

“She had no knowledge of who I was,” Horus said. “which meant at least she had been trapped there before the trial. She said she observed you and a fake Nephthys being together, physically. She was *shocked* you were together.” At Seth’s increasing confusion, he said, “It seems like the fake Nephthys was the one who married you.”

Seth frowned at Horus, clearly suspicious. “A *fake* Nephthys? Inside Hathor’s mirror? What? That’s… ridiculous.”

“The Nephthys in the mirror wasn’t lying,” Horus insisted. “I could tell.” When he’d first learned of what was in the mirror, he’d been unsure how to approach Seth, who still viewed Horus as an upstart and an enemy. And when he’d learned more from Sekhmet about how Nephthys’ betrayal made Seth go mad, he knew he had no choice but to keep it to himself.

Seth seemed to gaze through Horus for a while. Finally he asked, “Who trapped her there? Hathor?”

Horus was glad at least Seth was still thinking, and not giving fully into his anger. Maybe this could be salvaged. “She couldn’t tell me. I know it was a woman. I would assume Hathor as well, but I’m not sure why she would do it. Nephthys seemed afraid of whoever it was.”

Seth scoffed and said, “Of course you can’t come up with that information.”

“Why would I lie?” Horus asked. “In this place?” Horus gestured out to the darkness. “I gain nothing by telling you about her. And… I really didn’t want to tell you about this because of how horrible it is.” He lowered his head slightly. “I take no pride in telling you this about someone I know is dear to you.” When Seth still didn’t seem unconvinced, Horus said, “We can go back to Heliopolis. I can show you the mirror. We can investigate it together. And…” He breathed in deeply before adding, “I’ll tell Isis. She… she should know how to deal with it.”

“But Isis would surely have noticed before now,” Seth insisted. “She was around Nephthys all the time.”

“It’s not the first thing Isis failed to notice about Nephthys,” Horus noted, quietly. “Even with her ability to see the future.”

Seth shut his eyes, pained. “That’s different. This is some kind of spell… To make a fake god entirely—”

“I don’t know if the Nephthys in our world is fully fake,” Horus noted, making Seth frown at him. “Or just… a part of herself cut off from her whole self.” He breathed in deeply. “I have reason to believe the mirror affects your reasoning, because once it affected my reason.

Maybe the mirror stole part of Nephthys' reason, perhaps even a part of her soul. And that's why the one you know acts the way she has."

Seth laughed. "So you're saying she had to be *unreasonable* to choose to marry me?"

Horus grimaced and replied, "No, Uncle, I just… I don't know. Maybe she's not real entirely. Maybe there's more going on."

Seth scoffed and said, "*That's* your better option?"

"I'm sorry, uncle."

Seth gazed ahead for a while, not seeing anything. Finally, quietly, he asked, "Was it really all fake?" He sounded weary and lost.

Horus hated the defeated look on him. "If we can find out who did this, and put an end to it, maybe…?" He grimaced. "It won't fix all that you've been through, but… it could help?" He knew he was grasping.

Seth scowled. "Hathor has been known to mess with romance in ridiculous ways. And she's close with Ra. Maybe it's some sort of revenge against us for defeating Ra… I don't know…" He shook his head and then glared up at Horus, the fury nearly sending Horus back a pace. "And you never mentioned this before now?!" He clutched the rope line in his right hand. "Why?"

Horus had to stop himself from running back. He knew he had to face this. "There's so much I'm still unsure about with the mirror. Sekhmet only confused it more..." He bowed his head. "When I assaulted you after the second match, I thought I was controlled by the mirror. I thought… some part of me was still trapped in there, too, or perhaps… perhaps the original me had been trapped there, and a fake me was out here, hurting you." He clenched his hands into fists. "Maybe it's why my intuition has been so strange. I don't know." He *thought* he was real. He thought the mirror simply stole his reason. But how would he know? His intuition had worked up until recently, and it was back working again, sort of. So what was happening with him?

"You think some damn mirror made you do that?" Seth growled, stepping forward until their chests nearly touched. "I don't care! You should have told me about Nephthys! I've wasted all this time and she's been captured somewhere!" He sounded pained.

Horus already knew Seth was brushing aside that night after the second match, but he'd at least finally explained. "What if it's not her?" Horus asked.

Sekhmet's words haunted him, *"Are you saying that the person sitting before me right now is "fake" as well?"*

Seth scowled at Horus. "And what if you're not you?"

Horus clutched the rope line.

“What if you just want me to stay away from the mirror because you’re afraid of your real self coming out and replacing the *fake* you?” Seth demanded, glaring up at him.

Horus almost took a step back in fear. “Sekhmet implied it was possibly the mirror that made me attack you, but she was twisted with her wording, so…”

Seth snorted. “So what? You hid this because you’re afraid to admit you just want me physically, no matter the circumstances?”

Horus’ eyes widened in shock. He thought he and Seth had come to some understanding, but the man before him was too wrapped up in his fury to remember. And Horus understood it: he’d kept this secret for too long. And he hated it. He hated all of it.

“You’re afraid that if we discover the mirror is nothing,” Seth said, glaring up at him still, “that you’re responsible for your own behavior?”

“Uncle, I—”

“Well *grow up!”* Seth said, his voice rising. “Take some advice from your mother: you did that! You! Yourself!”

Horus breathed in, shakily. “Uncle…” He was terrified. Of himself. Of Seth. Of what he could do. He’d tried to make up for it, to help Seth where he could. But he wasn’t sure he ever *could* make up for it.

Seth looked pained himself, but as he gazed up at Horus, his expression grew even more furious. “Don’t you look at me with those damn hurt eyes!” His left hand flew up – now with sharp claws – and grabbed Horus’ face, covering his nose and mouth.

Horus stayed still, trying to breath in evenly. The threatening claw on Seth’s pointer finger rested just beneath Horus’ right eye.

“I’ve trusted you,” Seth said, sounding shaky and pained. “And all this time, still, you’ve been *lying* to me! You, who demands so much from me in return!” The tip of his claw pressed into Horus’ skin, drawing blood.

“Uncle, please…” Horus said against Seth’s palm. “I only wanted… I didn’t want to *hurt* you.” He was afraid of the truth, too, but Seth had always been his priority.

“This is my *wife,*” Seth said. “My *sister.*” There were tears in his eyes. “If she’s been a fake this whole time or… some diminished version of herself… And I didn’t save her…” His voice sounded so small and hurt. “What if the reason she ever seemed to return my affections was because… because…” His breath stuttered.

Horus wanted to reach out, to hold Seth. But he knew it wouldn’t be welcome.

Seth shut his eyes for a while. Eventually, he lowered his hand.

Horus breathed in deeply.

“You saw it all and you didn’t even bother telling me,” Seth said as he opened his eyes to gaze at Horus. “Even if it’s somehow a lie… You could have said. At any time. I don’t care about the night you assaulted me. I care about Nephthys.”

“I know,” Horus said. He could see it in the way Seth moved now. He could see it in everything he’d learned about his uncle since.

“Was it jealousy?” Seth demanded with contempt in his voice. “Were you worried that if she came back or was made whole, I’d love her again and you would have had no chance?”

“Would you have listened if I’d told you back then?” Horus demanded in turn. “We were enemies. You were hostile to everyone, particularly me. You only laughed at or attacked me.” Horus knew he had less excuse later, but early on…

“And in the time since?” Seth demanded, glaring up at Horus while jumping to similar conclusions. “In the time you’ve been traveling with me? In the temple? Out here? Not even *once* in that entire time, did you think to tell me about this?!”

Horus swallowed, guiltily, and said, “I just… It never seemed right. I worried it would hurt more than help. After your reign, could you blame me?”

Seth gazed at him with an unimpressed look before shaking his head and turning around, switching hands on the rope, and walked forward.

“Uncle?” Horus asked, following quickly behind him.

“Let’s get out of here,” Seth said, his voice angry. “I don’t… want to see your face for a while. I hate being in here.”

Horus grimaced and kept following him.

“Why were you even talking about it *now?*” Seth demanded as they walked into the dark.

“I saw what might have been an illusion of her in here,” Horus said, glad at least Seth was still speaking to him. “She was dressed the same and acted similarly. She was mad at me for not telling you.”

Seth snorted in annoyance. “Well at least she and I agree on something.”

“Will you go back to Heliopolis, then?” Horus asked. “Mother is there now, of course, but so is Hathor.”

Seth scoffed. “Of course.” After a minute he said, “And I don’t know. I still have to deal with the curse, and I’m not welcome there. But if you weren’t able to figure out how to break it, I guess it’s useless sending you back… You really haven’t told Isis?”

“I haven’t,” Horus said.

Seth sighed in exasperation, clearly out of patience for this whole thing. “She’d be better able to solve something magic like this.”

“I didn’t know how to explain to her that her sister wasn’t real,” Horus said. And after that, he’d been too afraid of her fury at him for what he’d done.

“…Okay,” Seth said.

Horus breathed a little easier. “But I’ll tell her now.” He had to.

“We’ll figure it out once we deal with the current problem,” Seth replied. “Maybe you go back to Heliopolis and talk to Isis about this. And this time you actually *do* what you set out to do.”

“…Yes, Uncle,” Horus said, quietly.

Seth sighed, and for a while they were both quiet.

Horus found that he was at least glad that he’d finally said something. That it didn’t weigh on him anymore. He felt lighter.

“Sekhmet really knows about this?” Seth demanded.

“Yes,” Horus said. “She confirmed that to me.”

Seth growled, “And of course she kept it to herself. Manipulative asshole…”

“I thought she was behind it,” Horus said. “As a ploy to manipulate you and cover Egypt in blood. She admitted she knew about Osiris and Nephthys’ deception long before she revealed it to you. And she relished in the knowledge that… that it was all a trick. But it’s not clear to me if she meant she knew about Nephthys being a fake or if she just knew about Osiris’ game. She’s… mysterious. And it’s hard for me to read when she’s being honest, especially because she avoids giving straight answers to questions.”

Seth made a frustrated noise. “I wouldn’t put it past her, but it seems a bit much, even for her.” He sighed. “And pinning her down for answers has always been hard. When I find her next… she’ll be lucky to just lose an arm!”

Horus said nothing to that.

"If Nephthys has just been missing a part of herself... How couldn't she know?" Seth demanded. "She's the goddess of harmony. For the goddess of harmony to be... out of sync with her very self?"

"It's possible she doesn't realize," Horus said. "I... I didn't notice anything was wrong with me after I left the mirror."

"You're younger," Seth said. "And a demigod. Nephthys was a god before you were born."

"Yes," Horus acknowledged.

"But I appreciate you trying to explain that she might not have been lying to me about more than Osiris, Anubis, and my marriage."

Horus smiled slightly at that.

Eventually, Seth asked, in a more neutral tone, “You were really worried how I’d react to this?”

Horus swallowed his nervousness and said, “Yes. I… didn’t want to hurt you more. Not like everyone else has. But I was foolish. And no matter what, I would have hurt you somehow.”

Seth sighed and said, “You don’t shoulder all the blame. Sekhmet told me about Nephthys and Osiris. She could have told me about this, if she really knew as well. And she could at least survive my fury. You’re just a demigod.”

So are you, Horus thought. *With too much on your shoulders, that you keep having to bear.*

“Don’t misunderstand me,” Seth said, still angry. “I’m still furious with you. I still…” He breathed in deeply. “I thought I made peace with the fact that Nephthys didn’t love me, and perhaps never did. That she always loved Osiris. But a part of me…” He scoffed in anger. “A part of me wondered if… maybe once…” He was quiet for a while. Finally he said, “Maybe I’d done something to lose that love. And clearly… clearly that was never the case. I’d never even won it.” He laughed bitterly. “Well… it’s good to be proven right.”

“Uncle…” Horus said, sadly, unsure how to help.

“I was never meant for that sort of thing,” Seth said, continuing to walk. “I’m a god of war. I guard. I kill things when I need to. It’s not surprising.”

“Just because Nephthys possibly didn’t love you doesn’t mean you weren’t meant to be loved,” Horus insisted.

Seth paused, letting Horus walk up behind him. For a while, he just stood there, with Horus right behind him.

Horus wanted to see Seth’s face. He wanted to hold Seth close. Instead, not knowing what else to do, he said, “I love you.”

Seth didn’t reply.

Horus reached out and gently put a hand on Seth’s right shoulder. He felt Seth twitch slightly, but Seth didn’t shrug him off or step aside.

After a while, Seth breathed in deeply and said, “I know. That’s the whole mess of it, isn’t it?” He reached out and touched Horus’ hand briefly with his own. It was almost reassuring.

Horus smiled, thinking this was a good sign.

Seth sighed and said, “Let’s get going.”

But just then, a doorway appeared before them.

Seth frowned at it, but stepped through it, as they had nowhere else to go.

Horus followed.

On the other side was a sunny, semi-collapsed building, where the two children waited for them. The floor was covered in dirt and weeds. Birds and insects could be heard in the distance. There was even a slight wind.

Horus walked forward to Seth, who was looking around with a frown.

“You made it!” The child holding the cat said with a smile. “I knew you would!”

Horus wasn’t sure he believed in himself at this point. But he was glad Seth was at his side.

“Is that the mural?” Seth asked, gazing at something on a wall nearby.

Horus looked over as well, and saw something that was partially crumbled, but still mostly clear. It had more text on it, as well as a large figure wearing a long blue headdress, similar to Horus’.

The child with the cat nodded. “Yes, that’s it!”

Seth stepped over to the mural and looked at it. He brushed off some greenery to clear the writing around the image.

Horus followed, while taking in their surroundings: beyond the building, he could see a path leading down to an area with more buildings. He imagined that was the village.

“This isn’t you,” Seth said, pulling Horus back to the wall. “It’s a different god.” He pointed to part of the face they could see. “It’s another of these frog deities.”

Horus could definitely see how the face turned froglike.

“It’s Kek!” The child with the cat said as they stepped forward, pointing to the script.

Seth blinked in confusion and looked down at the child. “You can read this?” He gestured at the wall.

The child shrugged. “Sort of? The chief told us…” They looked back at the mural. “Kek’s domain is darkness. And he worked with Amun to create the tunnel to reveal what is hidden in bad hearts.” The child sounded like they were reciting something.

“Revealing what’s hidden,” Horus said, thoughtfully. “Then maybe that *is* why I saw Nephthys.”

Seth frowned and said, "If this explains how the tunnel works, that's probably why it's near the entrance. If there's something back on the other side, it might be crumbled or dissolved by now." Softer, he said, "I guess it really wasn't about your escapades in Heliopolis."

“You’re not Kek?” The child with the cat asked Horus, surprised. “With your headdress, I thought maybe you just changed your face… Are you family?”

Horus recalled the children *had* looked at him oddly during their flight.

Seth looked at the child and shook his head. “No. This isn't him, and he's not related to these gods.” His tone was a little gentler, though. He clearly didn’t blame the children for getting things wrong. "Though I can see the resemblance in his headdress."

“Oh,” the child said, sounding disappointed. “Well… it’s good you made it, then. Is your bearded friend coming, too?”

Horus and Seth glanced at the door of darkness.

“I’m not sure,” Horus said. “I didn’t exactly wait to see if he followed.” He wasn’t exactly upset if the man got lost forever in the dark, though.

“I’ll wait to see if he shows up,” the other child said. “I can guide him to the village. You can go ahead.”

The child with the cat stepped towards the path, smiling at them, clearly beckoning them along.

Seth looked at Horus, and his expression said they should go along with this.

It made Horus happy, because it meant Seth was still working with him. Horus had risked a lot in explaining things, but illusion or no, he’d finally been honest. And he hadn’t lost Seth. At least… not entirely.

“All right,” Seth said, looking at the child. “Let’s go see your village.” He stepped forward, but after a few stops he stopped and glanced back. “Are you coming?” His expression was a little annoyed.

“You want me to go with you?” Horus asked. Even after everything, he just… needed confirmation.

Seth sighed and held out his hand. “Yes.” His expression softened. “You’re the only person who sees me for who I am, after all. And maybe the only person who really loves me.”

Horus swallowed around a heavy weight in his chest, and stepped forward, taking the offered hand. He squeezed it.

“Let’s go,” Seth said with a sigh, walking forward while Horus held his hand. “Get one more mystery solved, maybe.”

Horus grinned as he kept up.

End Notes

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