

Osiris and Isis, a Play

by

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Translated from Norwegian by Ted Warren

Scene 1

(The Pharaoh's throne hall. Some of the court are gathered, among them Seth and his three accomplices, Tashenatit, Nut-hetepeth and Hu-nefer. A herald enters.)

Herald: A message of joy I bring to all the people. Osiris is now returning. He sent me in advance to spread the word that festivities will be held upon his arrival. He brings great riches from foreign lands. All the people of foreign lands have given him presents in thankfulness for the good deeds he spread to the people of the world from his country of black earth along the Nile.

Seth: Our hearts rejoice at this message. We shall see our enlightened brother again. We have longed for him, as he was abroad. Upon the day that Osiris no longer lives in the Kingdom of Egypt our land will be dark, cold and divided. Go now to prepare the festivities.

(Everyone leaves the throne hall except Seth and his three conspirators.)

Seth: Remember, now we must stand together. Our great day has arrived, when we shall revenge our suffering during many years of subjugation. Evil's great gods, give us the strength and power to topple the false God of Light, Osiris. Brother, now you shall die. Tashenatit, is the coffin built with the correct measurements?

Tashenatit: Yes, my lord, with the exact measurements. In secret we have measured King Osiris as you commanded. And the coffin is now the correct size for the King, to the breadth of a strand of hair.

Seth: Good, our sly plans shall be fulfilled. But has the right moment now arrived? Nut-hetepeth, where does the sun wander at this time?

Nut-hetepeth: It is the seventeenth day of the month of Athyr. Among Scorpion's bright stars the sun now shines.

Seth: And where is the moon?

Nut-hetepeth: It will stand in full splendor when Osiris returns home. His twenty-eighth year of rule is now completed. The full moon shines from the eye of the Bull, Aldebaren, near the Milky Way's most powerful stars.

Seth: And Mars? Where does the mighty Mars shine?

Nut-hetepeth: It has disappeared, my lord, and may not be seen by the naked eye. Yet we have followed its route carefully and know where Mars, the red and powerful, is headed. It has disappeared in its own house, in the sign of Scorpion behind the luster of the sun.

Seth: The right moment has arrived. Just like Mars I sneak behind the king's back, and now, Osiris, you shall die. In the sign of death we lay him in the coffin that fits his measurements perfectly, while the moon shines from the other side. And you, Hu-nefer, have you finished melting the lead?

Hu-nefer: Yes, lord, we have melted the lead, so much that it covers the whole coffin. We have it ready outside. As soon as Osiris lies down in the coffin and we have fixed the lid tight, the red-hot lead shall flow over it and fasten all openings so he will be choked in his own breathe within.

Seth: And now move aside. The moment is near.

(The Herald enters. Osiris approaches and enters with Isis and his court. Music. Seth and his conspirators bow down with their foreheads on the floor.)

Osiris: Be greeted, arise my dear brother. You shall not lie in the dust before me. You shall stand by my side, my brother. I know you have governed the Kingdom of Egypt well while I was in foreign lands. Tomorrow you will hear more about what I have accomplished abroad. Now we shall enjoy our reunion. *(As Osiris speaks the three conspirators carry in the coffin.)* But what is this? A wonderful coffin! What a masterpiece! Such valuable wood. Where have you found the precious jewels that cover the lid? Who shall own this treasure?

Seth: It has been decided that the coffin shall be owned by the man who fits in it perfectly.

Osiris: But who is that? You speak in riddles my brother. You, wise sign-bearer Kerasher, maybe it is you. Try, see if you fit in the coffin.
(Kerasher climbs into the coffin.)

Kerasher: I certainly do not fit. This valuable coffin shall be owned
(hesitatingly) by someone more honorable than I.

Seth: *(Quickly and sharply)* No, not him. He is too short.

Kerasher: *(As he climbs carefully out of the coffin)* I knew it. I never succeed in life's trials.

Osiris: But you, my brave cup-bearer, Panetchem, maybe you have better luck. You try.

Panetchem: My lucky moment has come. I recognize it, no I am certain. I dreamt it last night. I should become the richest in the whole kingdom.

Seth: You are a little too tall, my good Panetchem. A happy dream is not good enough. Here only the right measurements count.

Panetchem: *(As he steps out of the coffin)* What a disgrace and disappointment.

Seth: *(Turning suddenly, ingratiatingly, to Osiris)* Perhaps you fit my brother, Osiris. Look, will you try? Lie down in the coffin. If it fits you, it is yours.

Osiris: I do not know the measurements of the coffin. Nor do I have the desire for the coffin's treasures. But I will try if it can please my brother. *(Osiris proudly lowers himself into the coffin.)*

All: Look, it fits.

Seth: Yes, truly, it fits to the breadth of a hair. Osiris has the correct measurements. The coffin is owned by Osiris. *(with a crude voice)* And Osiris is now owned by the coffin! *(Immediately the lid is closed tightly with an explosion. The stage darkens completely. Seth's scornful laughter is heard in the darkness. Covered by darkness the conspirators carry out the coffin and all together cries of anguish are heard. Afterwards, subdued light. Everyone stands like stone statues.)*

Isis: Seth, what have you caused? Your own brother. You are killing him in the coffin. Let go of him! O woe! *(Isis walks a couple of steps to the left where Seth and the conspirators have disappeared. She stops and becomes rigid.)*

All: Osiris is dying. We are lost.

Isis: *(As she unsuccessfully tries to continue to walk)* O woe! What a catastrophe! Bottomless darkness sinks over the people of the earth. An ice-cold wind will penetrate every human heart. *(Mourning music as the curtain falls.)*

Scene 2

(In Byblos at the court of King Malkandros. The background is a huge oak tree that has grown up and now encases the Osiris coffin within its limbs. Malkandros and Queen Astarte enter from the left.)

Malkandros: Astarte, you my queen, what happiness for our country that the gods have given us a son, even though it must occur on this day of sorrow, the same day that Osiris was killed by his own brother, the dark and evil Seth.

Astarte: And no one knows where the corpse has been buried.

Malkandros: No, no one knows for sure. But I have heard that some children saw the dark men with Seth accompany the coffin down to the beach. They shoved it into the waves. Now it is cradled on the wide spaces of the oceans of the world.

Astarte: Tell me, King Malkandros, can it be driven onto land?

Malkandros: Never, I believe. Osiris is dead. In our state of mourning, our child must grow up. *(Malkandros and Astarte exit. Isis enters from the right, unveiled, walking with slow steps.)*

Isis: I have wandered from land to land and searched for Osiris. Not one good day have I had. I must find him. Maybe he can be awakened to life again. *(She notices the oak tree.)* What is that? This beautiful tree is no ordinary tree. The form hides something secret. My brother, Osiris. I feel you. You are near! Has the coffin drifted to land where the tree has grown up and hides you in its boughs? The dead hidden in life? O, what a wonder!

Astarte: *(Enters from the left):* Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want in the castle?

Isis: I come from far away and ask to serve. I am a widow in mourning. Do you need someone to nurse your baby?

Astarte: Yes, truly you arrive at the right time. I feel you are a good person. You may take care of my child. He is asleep in here. *(Astarte exits to the left, while Isis remains and turns towards the oak tree. After a short moment Astarte returns with her child and gives it to Isis.)*

Astarte: Here is our only child. He is born in sad times but you, my dear nurse, shall turn the dark portents to joyful rays of sun for this child.

Isis: *(With the child)* You, my dear child, see me dressed as a nurse. I will give you my forces, for I am Isis, she who was, she who is, and she who shall become. You shall take part in the gods' eternal forces. But first I must cleanse you in the gods' purifying fire, so all of the earth's clods are torn away to enable your being's starry luster to shine forth. *(The stage becomes darker).* The dark of night is falling upon us. See my star, Sirius, burning bright. I will go to work. *(Isis stands before the oak tree with the child in her arms, looking at the audience.)*

Isis: Come divine fire, come blazing flames. *(red lights)* Appear divine purifying force. Come consuming willpower. *(stronger red lights)* Come flaming beings that give eternal force. *(Red flames [eurythmy] come in from all sides towards the middle, where they flame against each other. As they enflame, Isis lifts up the child between the flames. The flames run out and Isis holds the child close to her. The flaming beings come back again towards the middle and Isis lifts up the child again between them. The flames move out again. The whole action repeats a third time. Music and song can accompany. Suddenly Queen Astarte enters from the left.)*

Astarte: *(Screams)* What are you doing? Stop! Let go of my child! You wicked witch. Do you want to damage my son? *(The flaming beings run out. It is pitch dark on the stage. From behind the stage cries of woe)* O woe! *(Half light on the stage. Isis puts the child down at Astarte's feet and goes to stand by the oak tree.)*

Isis: Look, there is the child. Take him back now, Astarte. You have stopped me in the holy act. I wanted to give him eternal life through the gods' purifying forces. Know that I am Isis, the sister of Osiris. *(Astarte falls on the floor.)* In me you see the wisdom of the universal starry heavens, for I am she who was, who is, and who will become. No mortal being has lifted my veil.

Astarte: *(Lying on the floor with only her head barely lifted)* O woe! Great Isis, have mercy. I did not know what I did. I did not recognize you behind your veil. I did not understand your holy act. Fear lamed me. Be graceful. Take the child back to you and finish the holy act.

Isis: No, I may not. You have prevented the gods in their actions.

Astarte: But tell me what we can do? What do you suggest? We will give you whatever you want.

Isis: Then give me of that mysterious tree that grows so powerfully here. Keep the tree but give me what is hidden in its boughs.

Scene 3

(By the Nile. High reeds and palms. On the front of the stage stands the open coffin. Isis kneels bowing over one side of it. Instrumental music and song, improvisation from the background, as three figures do eurythmy to words of the choir.)

Choir: *(Backstage, not visible)*
 O' woe, Osiris, the light of the world is put out,
 See his dead body in the coffin.
 How will we find the strong source of life?
 How will we find the lost light?
(Music and song)

Isis: *(As Isis speaks the three figures do more subtle eurythmy movements and Isis lifts her head and arms.)* Osiris, hear my call. Osiris, come out of the dark house of death.
 Osiris, hear the wings of my spirit.
 Lift yourself out of the darkness.
(Music and song)

Choir: *(From the background)* Our hearts carry bitter sorrow.

Isis: Osiris, the morning sunshine is here. Wake up.
(Music and song)

Seth: *(Sticks out his head and half his body from the side)* Now we must stop the forces of life. Soon Isis will awaken the dead Osiris. I will fool her away with a call. *(Seth disappears and is heard from off stage with a fake voice of a child.)* Come. Help me. I am drowning, help. I am sinking, help.

Isis: *(Stands up)* Who is shouting? Where? I am coming soon to help. *(Isis and the three mourning-dressed figures exit quickly. Seth and three conspirators run in with axes – they wildly cut up the body in the coffin.)*

Seth: *(While he is cutting)* The great Isis shall never awaken life of the dead. We cut the body into fourteen pieces. Take the parts away quickly for Isis is coming back. Hide them in the reeds over there. You, take out the head. You, take out the legs. I will take the chest. The rest you take. *(almost totally dark, as Seth and his conspirators run out with parts of Osiris)*

Isis: *(Returns with the three mourning-dressed figures, more light appears)* I sense danger. What has happened? Osiris is gone. The coffin is empty. O woe! *(Isis bows over the empty coffin. Music and song from backstage. The three mourning-dressed figures make movements, as Isis lies as in a faint.)*

(Stands up) Now I must search for him and find him. I sense it is Seth, his evil brother. Yet Seth shall not win. Osiris, show me where you are to be found.

(Isis leaves with her hands raised before her as in a trance. Music and song. The three mourning-dressed figures follow.)

Scene 4

(Another place by the Nile. Pyramids, palms, reeds. In front and to the right, a large stone.)

Isis: *(Entering slowly, carrying the Horus child in her arms, sits by the stone)* I have searched for many long days. Some parts of the dead Osiris I have found. The evil Seth has cut him into pieces. I found his head first. O bitter fate, cut to pieces, thrown into an unworthy place! I let his face be formed, sculptured with great artistic work, And it was buried where the head was found. The people believe Osiris is resting in his grave, where they lay his portrait.

And I have eight more pieces: a foot, a hand and the chest –
what a torment. And I have buried eight portraits of his
godly body at each place where the parts were found.
And eight new graves show the people that they shall
search in the kingdom of death. But I must search
further until I have found all of the pieces.
O you, my child, my little Horus child, I gave birth to you
during the long, sorrowful wandering. Your father was
dead as you first saw the light of day.
But you shall grow magnificently in his light.

*(Isis lifts up the child. At the same time the curtain opens to the side, and Osiris stands
in strong light, music and song.)*

Osiris: Yes, Horus. You, my child, shall live forever.
You will grow up as the splendor of the morning sun.
I shall protect you and give you strength
From the land beyond the dark gates of death.

Scene 5

*(The grown Horus sits on the throne, the falcon on his headress. To the left, Lower
Egypt's priest, Oadsjit-hm-ntr, with the snake symbol; to the right, Upper Egypt's
priest Nechbet-hm-ntr, with the falcon symbol. Eventually a number of Court
Members.)*

Horus: I have finally united the whole Kingdom of Egypt,
united wisely the lower with the upper,
and saved the people of Egypt from division and strife.
What does Oadsjit-hm-ntr bring to the Pharaoh?

Oadsjit-hm-ntr: We bring the earth's hidden treasures of wisdom
From lands below the Nile delta,
From the Snake God to the new Sun.

Horus: And what gifts are from Nechbet-hm-ntr?

Nechbet-hm-ntr: We bring the heaven's wisdom of the stars
From the land's upper part, the sources of the Nile,
From the Falcon God to the new Sun.

Horus: And like my father, Osiris, I unite the lower
with the upper, snake and falcon with the godlike
power of the Sun and the heart of gold.
But I am helpless, unless you my honored father, Osiris,
Will give me your help from the kingdom of the heavens.

(Osiris appears in the background on a platform above the throne. Eventually music.)

Osiris: My son, what do you plan to do?
Will you let Seth wander freely in the Kingdom?
Will you not fight the murderer of Osiris?

Horus: You challenge me to act, Osiris!
The dark Seth shall be driven out of the Kingdom.
I shall conquer him so he can do no harm
With his deceitful cunning.

Osiris: Blessed be Horus, you, my son.
I send you my light of wisdom and all my strength.

Scene 6

(At the Nile. High reeds and palms. Eventually blue curtain. Seth together with the three darkly dressed conspirators, equipped with spears and a large net.)

Seth: We are gathered to fight against Heka-Horus,
The false ruler who has stolen the throne.
He maintains that he is the son of King Osiris,
But it is a lie, he is a sly mutineer.
There he comes.
(Just then the three darkly dressed figures move to the left.)
Stay together here, defend our rights.

Horus: *(Appears from the right together with three light-filled figures, equipped with flaming swords.)*
To battle for light over darkness! *(Eurythmic movements: light-filled beings force back the dark beings. The dark beings attack, retreat and come from new sides. This is repeated several times. Possible music with drums in the background. Finally the dark beings are driven to one side of the stage, where they collect in their own net and sink to the floor in a clump with Seth in the middle.)*

Horus: You are trapped in your own net.
Now you lie enwrapped.
You pathetic brother murderer, prince of darkness.

Seth: *(Struggles to come free. Whispers)*
I am still alive. You have not killed me.
Be proud for a while, but remember:
the higher you stand, the deeper you fall!

Horus: Take the prisoner to the Abydos Palace.
You shall be dragged in front of those you have hurt,
In front of Isis, the widow, queen mother, goddess,
She sentences you to eternal imprisonment.

Seth: *(Quietly to himself, as he is dragged away)*
I can safely count on Isis' weak heart.

Scene 7

(The Throne at Abydos. Horus sits on the throne. Isis with a golden crown on her head sits on her own throne to the left, Dsjoti (Thot-Hermes) with the ibis-symbol and a papyrus roll to the right. Forward to the left Lower Egypt priest Oadsjit-hm-ntr, with the snake symbol, in front of him and right, the Upper Egypt priest, Nechbet-hm-ntr, with the falcon symbol. Horus Falcon is above the throne in the middle. Possibly also on stage: sign-carrier Kerasher and cup-bearer Panetchem and some of the Pharaoh's warriors.)

Horus: The wretched murderer has been captured.
He sits powerlessly in prison.
Bring Seth in and lie him down below the throne.
(Seth is pulled in by one or more prison guards.)

Seth: Mercy. Have mercy. Save my life. I beg you!

Horus: You whimper for mercy. Were you merciful?
You who cunningly took your brother's life.
You shamefully cut his body into pieces with an axe.
Now you await your sentence. It will be absolutely
merciless.
(Turns to Nechbet-hm-ntr)
Wise Nechbet-hm-ntr, what is your sentence?

Nechbet-hm-ntr: The prisoner was trapped in his own net.
There he shall remain, in the darkness he loves so much.
In the mountain's deepest cave he belongs.

Horus: And you my honorable priest, Oadsjit-hm-ntr,
Who advises the Pharaoh, what do you say?

Oadsjit-hm-ntr: His tongue lies. His abandonment is the poison of a snake.
It is best to fill his cave with that which he loves.
He shall live with snakes and may his spirit be filled with the
same poison he spreads to others.

Horus: I have never heard more severe words.
This merciless sentence he brought upon himself
The priests have formulated into words.
Therefore I remain silent.
I leave the final sentence to my mother.
You Isis, the star-filled wisdom of the universe,
how do you judge this pathetic murderer
who killed King Osiris, your brother?

Seth: *(Tries violently to wrestle off the guards, but remains caught in his net. He manages to come a little closer to Isis and stretches towards her.)*
 Isis, dear sister, remember our blood relationship,
 our common blood, from the same motherly womb.
 I was born too early and in the wrong position,
 but I am just as much your brother.
 You would not do your brother harm?
 O mercy, dear sister, remember our blood.

(All turn towards Isis, silence for a moment. Then Isis stands and moves slowly from her throne towards Seth, waves the guard away, and frees Seth from the net. Seth stands in astonishment.)

Isis: I do not have the heart to judge you.
 You were wrong, destruction and evil became your lot.
 But we are of the same womb, that is true.
 You were born too early and in the wrong position,
 but you are just as much my own brother.
 You stem from Geb, as much as I do,
 and Nut, the magnificent heavenly mother –
 I cannot do anything against our mother.
 I cannot do anything against my brother.
 Go free, I cannot sentence you to anything else.

Seth: I am free! I am free! I must move quickly,
 before justice captures me.
(Seth runs off to the right, as everyone else remains stunned.)

Horus: *(Stands from the throne and walks a few steps towards Isis.)*
 What have you done, my mother, unknowingly?
 Have you lost all of your heavenly wisdom?
 Now I tear off the golden crown from you.
 Your head shall never again carry a crown that witnesses
 the light of heavenly wisdom.
(Isis bows forward silently. Horus tears off her crown. Horus also bows forward holding her golden crown in his hand. For a moment they all stand like statues, then pandemonium breaks and they all speak except Isis, Horus and Dsjoti. Everyone speaks at the same time, chaotically, and divide into three clusters, more or less.)

1st Group: What did he do against Isis, against his mother?

2nd Group: What shall we do? I have no idea!

3rd Group: Darkness rules again. O Osiris, return!
(They all continue to talk amongst each other.)

Dsjoti:

(Steps forward to mid stage. Everyone else steps aside and becomes silent.)

Now I can no longer remain silent.

The gods named me Dsjoti, and my task is to always retain the words of wisdom

so they may be used in the right moments.

And that which no longer lives here

must be retained as a picture,

a picture revealing to us that the most powerful

that once was now works secretly,

behind the mysterious, dark veil.

(He takes out a crown that is formed as a cow head with horns and walks towards Isis).

Isis, I give you another crown,

a sign, a head of a cow with a horn.

You remain Isis, but in mourning.

For long periods of time you will live secretly hidden behind a veil.

Thus mankind will sense that you are that which was and is and shall become.

A child shall be born of a pure woman.

In him shall live the Wisdom-filled Words of Light.

And, Isis, then you shall be redeemed.