



Isis and the Seven Scorpions



An opera libretto
by
Dean Burry



Isis and the Seven Scorpions

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Isis and the Seven Scorpions was inspired by the Greek writer Plutarch's account of Egyptian religion entitled *Concerning Isis and Osiris*. Other excerpts of Ancient Egyptian text have been drawn from various sources including preserved scrolls and tomb and stele inscriptions.

There are several opportunities for audience participation and the Spell of Isis (I take away your sting) can be taught to the audience by the pianist or one of the cast members before the performance begins and Smith can ask them to help her cast the spell (Scene Six). Audience members may be asked to participate in the challenge of the golden chest (Scene Two) and Set will ask the audience to cheer the Osiris' arrival (Scene Two). The opera may be performed without these elements, but they certainly would help to engage a young audience.

Isis and the Seven Scorpions has been commissioned by The Canadian Opera Company in Toronto, Canada.

Characters

Professor Hornsby/ Set/ Rami (a fisherman)	<i>tenor</i>
Sally Smith/ Isis	<i>soprano</i>
David Sands/ Osiris/ The Scorpions	<i>baritone</i>
Molly Brown/ Nephthys/ Tahemet (a Rich woman)	<i>mezzo-soprano</i>

Setting

Present day, The Lost Temple of Isis in the Egyptian desert and Ancient Egypt.

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Scene One

(A vicious sandstorm in the middle of the Egyptian desert. A group of archeology students and their professor enter, searching for the Lost Temple of Isis. They are bent over with their hands held up to protect their faces. They are exhausted.)

ALL: So far.
 So far from home.
 So far from civilization.
 So far from our destination -
 the Lost Temple of Isis.
 We're searching for the Lost Temple of Isis.
 Where is the Lost Temple of Isis?
 Well, it's lost!
 And so are we.

 So far.
 So far through the blinding storm.
 So far through the sands of time.
 So far from our expectations –
 The Lost Temple of Isis.
 We're searching for the Lost Temple of Isis.
 We will find the Lost Temple of Isis
 but so far,
 not so good.

Smith: Professor Hornsby, we're lost.

Hornsby: No.

Sands: The sand is blinding my eyes and filling my throat.

Hornsby: Never.

Brown: We've been walking in circles for days.
 Are we lost?

Hornsby: *(Looking at map and peering around.)* No.

Smith: Are we lost?

Sands: Are we lost?

Hornsby: No.

Students: Are we lost?

Hornsby: Never.

Students: Are we lost? Are we lost?

Hornsby: No! Never!

Students: Are we lost? Are we lost? Are we lost?

Hornsby: Most certainly.

Students: *(sighing loudly)* Ugh!

Hornsby: Now class, I do not want to hear that negativity. Academic pursuit requires perseverance. The university has paid for this Egyptian field trip. It is an honour for you to participate and absorb the vast knowledge of yours truly...Professor Morton Webster Hornsby.

Students: Professor Morton...Webster...CORNSBY!

Hornsby: Tut, tut...HORNS-by.

Students: CORNS-by!

Hornsby: What was that?

Students: *(angelic)* Professor Morton Webster...*(quietly)* Cornsby.

Hornsby: *(angry)* What?!

Student: The greatest teacher of ancient history.

Smith: Knows everything about ancient people.

Sands & Brown: He's so old he knew them all himself!

Smith: He knows how to make a mummy!

Sands & Brown: That's because he smells like one.

Smith: He could fail you in your finals...

Sands & Brown: Uh, yeah.

Students: Professor Morton Webster Hornsby,
we're here to follow you.

Hornsby: I believe...

Students: Yes, Professor.

Hornsby: ...it is time...

Students: Yes, Professor.

Hornsby: To take a nap.

Students: No, Professor! No!

Smith: It's getting dark.

Sands: It's getting cold.

Brown: The desert isn't safe.

Students: Please, Professor, we should go!

Hornsby: Students should learn to listen to their teacher.

(Hornsby sits down and prepares to take a nap. The students turn away in frustration. After a moment, a stagehand dressed in black enters with a scorpion puppet. The scorpion menaces the audience, finally coming upon the sitting professor. The scorpion stings and scurries away. Professor Hornsby stands screaming and then falls to the ground.)

Smith: He's been stung!

Sands: He's been stung!

Brown: He's been stung!

Students: By a scorpion!
We have to find some shelter.
We have to find a cure.
We have to find some help or he will die.

Teachers should learn to listen to their students!

So far.
So far from our home.

(They pick up Hornsby and push onward. The sandstorm continues.)

Sands: Over here! A cave –
shelter from the storm.

(They carry Hornsby into a cave and sit him down. They pull curtains or flats away from the backdrop to reveal a wall covered in hieroglyphics and a magnificent golden chest. The students are awe-struck.)

Students: Gold that flashes like the sun.
Silver that shimmers like the moon.
Sapphires as deep as the ocean.
Rubies as fiery as a flame.
The Lost Temple of Isis...
Goddess of Magical Healing,
has been found.

Smith: This is it – what we've been searching for.

Sands: This is great!
We're gonna get an A!

Brown: Maybe we'll even be famous.

(Hornsby groans in pain.)

Brown: Professor Hornsby...
The scorpion's poison is working fast.
What are we going to do?
Trapped in an ancient temple,
in the middle of an ancient desert.
Isis, goddess of Magical Healing isn't going to help us now.

(Smith recalls something.)

Smith: Wait a minute.
Maybe she can.

(Sands and Brown laugh.)

Sands & Brown: Isis come here to help us?

You must be crazy.

Sands: Sally, you study too much.

Brown: Your brains have turned to strawberry jelly!

(They laugh.)

Smith: No, wait. Don't laugh.
I remember reading... *(They roll their eyes.)*
reading about a magical spell:
The Spell of Isis-
A spell to cure the sting of a scorpion.

(Hornsby groans.)

Sands & Brown: Well, do it. Do it!

Smith: I can't. I don't know it.
But I'm sure it's written here in the hieroglyphics. *(She motions.)*
Hidden in the story of Isis and the Seven Scorpions.

Sands: Well, do what you can to find it.

Brown: We'll keep the professor safe and look around.

(Sands and Brown begin to lead Hornsby off-stage, behind the backdrop.)

Sands & Brown: We're sorry we laughed.
You were always the smart one.
We have faith in you.
Have faith in yourself,
and Sally,
good luck.

(The two students exit with Hornsby. Smith looks quite intimidated and alone.)

Smith: So far from the answer.
So far from a cure.
Reading ancient hieroglyphics is one thing in a classroom
and another in a crumbling temple.
I feel so alone,
Where do I start?
Where do I start?

(Frustrated, she sits down on the edge of the golden chest. She notices a sistrum, an ancient Egyptian religious shaker, picks it up and rattles it. She suddenly takes a deep breath as though magic is entering her body. She is amazed that she can suddenly read the hieroglyphics perfectly and she follows with her finger as she reads.)

Smith: In the early days of Egypt, the Land of the Nile, there lived a great king – a pharaoh named Osiris. *(shakes sistrum)*
Osiris had a queen, a beautiful enchantress named Isis. *(sistrum)*
Osiris and Isis were wonderful rulers but the world was young, and incomplete. Osiris looked throughout the land and saw that his people were living in ignorance and hunger...frightened by the darkness. *(sistrum)*
So King Osiris traveled throughout the land, and as he went, he taught his people the things that they needed to know to survive:
The skills of farming and weaving,
The arts of music and poetry,
The sciences of astronomy and engineering.
All the things that they needed to survive.
And while he was away, Isis ruled over the Land of the Nile in his place. Egypt became a land of contentment. *(sistrum)*

(Hornsby enters, now playing Set.)

But not everyone loved King Osiris.
His wicked brother, the schemer known as Set, was jealous and wanted to lord over all of Egypt himself. He was willing to do anything to claim the throne. *(sistrum)*
Set thought and planned and schemed to find a way to destroy his brother, Osiris.

(Set gesticulates wildly, drawing plans out in the air and moving between extreme joy and utter frustration.)

He even asked his own wife, Nephthys, *(Brown enters as Nephthys)* to help him but Isis was her sister and although she would have loved to be queen, she did not want to harm them.
Set would have to trick her. *(sistrum)*
Finally, Set devised an evil plan - A plan that could not fail. On the day that Osiris returned from his journey, they would hold a banquet, a glorious feast. *(sistrum)*
And all of Egypt would see.. *(sistrum)*

Smith & Set: That Set, Lord of Chaos, Master of Storms, God of Darkness...

(Smith rattles the sistrum under Set's next line.)

Set: ...is their true king!

(Smith exits.)

Scene Two

Set: Just do as we planned and everything will be fine.

Nephthys: Set, I do not think we should proceed.
Isis is my sister
and Osiris a wonderful king.

Set: *(biting his tongue)* A wonderful king, indeed.

Nephthys: We should be happy to be in their kingdom.
Egypt is the greatest land under the sun.

Set: *(aside)* And soon it will be greater under the darkness.
(to Nephthys) Nephthys, my wife,
I have no desire to be king.
I have abandoned those ambitions to make you happy.
I am happy.
You have made me a better man.
My plan is not to hurt Osiris,
only to play a game in his honour.

Nephthys: A game to honour Osiris?
That sounds fun.

Set: Fun, yes, of course.
We will play a game at the banquet
And Isis will think you are so much fun.

Nephthys: Isis will think I am so much fun?

Set: And all of Egypt will sing our praises.
“Thanks to Set and Nephthys,
Who threw the greatest party
That history ever recorded
To honour the queen and king.
Lovely Isis
And Osiris.”
Are you with me?

Nephthys: Yes, husband.

Set: Then let us have some fun.

(Set moves to DC and addresses the audience directly. This section should be somewhat improvised and the audience should be made to feel that they are now a part of the story.)

Set: Welcome! Welcome People of Egypt to the grand feast of Osiris! Our king has safely returned from his travels, and while there are some who would rather have seen him eaten by crocodiles, or trampled by sweaty camels, *(Set begins to get carried away at the thought of Osiris' demise)* or chewed by vultures or sat on by hippopotami or mauled by a lion or torn by hyenas or *(completely giddy)* pulled apart piece by piece by tiny little fishies with great big teeth *(makes chewing motions)* gnah, gnah, gnah!

(regains composure) Well, of course, there is no one like that here.

(nervous laugh)

So, anyhoo, we need to make the king feel welcomed and I need your help. When I yell "All Hail Osiris!" you answer "All Hail the King!". Can you do that? Let's try it. "All Hail Osiris!"

(The audience responds. If they are too soft, Set may respond "All right, I don't like that sniveling brother of mine either, but you can do better than that," or if the audience is loud he can say "Yes well, excellent, it seems that you do love the king. (evilly) I will have to remember each and every one of you.")

(When Set is finished, bells ring backstage.)

Nephthys: Set, Queen Isis is coming.

(Smith, now as Isis, rushes onstage.)

Isis: Nephthys, my dear sister,
It is good to see you-
And Set, thank you for preparing such a glorious feast.

(Set bows his head. The off-stage bells ring again.)

Isis: The king is at the gates.
All of Egypt rejoices.
Osiris has returned!

Set, Nephthys
& Isis:

All Hail Osiris,
King of eternity,
King of the Gods,
The stars in the celestial heights obey you,
and the great doors of the sky open themselves before you.
Your praises are written in the southern skies,
and thanks are given for you in the northern skies.
The imperishable stars are under your supervision,
and the stars which never set
are your thrones.¹

(Sands, now playing Osiris, enters regally with a crook and flail crossed on his chest and wearing the crown of Egypt. At the end of the hymn to Osiris, Isis rushes forward, hugs him and takes the crook and flail.)

Set: All Hail Osiris! *(The audience responds.)*

Isis: Welcome home, dear Osiris.

Osiris: I hear your voice, O turtle dove –
The dawn is all aglow –
Weary I am with love, with love,
Oh, whither shall I go?

Not so, O beautiful bird above,
Is joy to me denied...
For I have found my dear, my love,
And now I am by her side.

We will wander forth, hand in hand
Through flow'ry ways we go.
I am the fairest in the land,
For she hath called me so.²

Set: *(aside)* I think I am going to be sick.

Osiris: *(hearing Set and laughing)* Do not worry, dear brother,
I am happy to see you as well.

¹ “Hymn to Osiris”, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*

² Tomb inscription

Set: Glad to see you have returned safely, Osiris.
It would have been terrible to have lost you.
Egypt would have been thrown into chaos.

Osiris, Isis &
Nephthys: Do not talk of doom and sadness.
Times are good and all are safe.
Your king and brother has returned.
Things are as they should be.
Try and have some fun.

Nephthys: How about a game?

Set: A game?
A game?
Yes, a game!

Nephthys & Set: King Osiris,
in honour of your return
we have prepared an entertaining game.

Isis & Osiris: Wonderful!

Nephthys & Set: The greatest craftsmen of all Egypt
have made this glorious chest.

(Set and Nephthys move back to present the chest forward. Osiris and Isis are obviously impressed.)

ALL: Gold that flashes like the sun.
Silver that shimmers like the moon.
Sapphires as deep as the ocean.
Rubies as fiery as a flame.

Osiris & Isis: Truly magnificent.

Set & Nephthys: Whosoever fits perfectly in this royal chest
will become its owner.

Osiris: Set, you honour me greatly.
It is truly a prize fit for a king.
What fun!

Isis: What fun!

Nephthys: What fun!

(Osiris, Isis and Nephthys go back to admire the chest, turning their backs to Set. Set excitedly walks to the side and addresses the audience.)

Set: What fun!
 In dark of night
 my spies silently stole
 into the sleeping chambers of the king.

 In dark of night
 as he lay quite innocent and unaware
 they measured him from head-to-toe.

 Then this golden chest was crafted
 strong enough to hold a god,
 sized to hold our dear Osiris perfectly.
 To some it is but a box.
 To others it is a coffin.
 Yes, dear brother, it is truly a gift
 fit for a king.

(Set returns to the others.)

ALL: Why should we wait?
 Let us begin.
 Who will win the chest fit for a king?

 Strike the cymbals,
 the tambourines trill.
 Who will win the chest fit for a king?

 One by one,
 we all will try.
 For all but one the dream will die.
 So take your chance and dare to lie
 in the chest
 fit for a king.

(Isis gets a set of cymbals and a tambourine. She gives the cymbals to Osiris and plays the tambourine herself. Set picks up the sistrum and acts as a carnival barker, first leading Nephthys to try the chest. There is a rise in anticipation immediately before she gets in, followed by jokingly disappointed moans and laughs as Set cries "Oh, too bad, your legs are too short!" This section can be improvised by Set. Isis gives the tambourine to Nephthys and takes her turn at the chest. Following Isis, a few audience members (teachers or students) could be invited to try the chest. These could be arranged before-hand or drawn spontaneously from the crowd. Osiris, Isis and Nephthys

are having a wonderful time and Set has become positively ecstatic that his plan is coming together. A festive atmosphere is in the air and the performers can be somewhat free: Osiris, Isis and Nephthys could do a simple dance. Finally, it is Osiris' turn to try the chest.)

Set: At last it is time
 for Osiris to try.
 Will no one win the prize?

 Everyone cheer our glorious king.
 All Hail Osiris!

(The audience responds. Osiris, completely unaware of any treachery, gives Isis the cymbals and bounds over to Set at the chest. He shakes Set by their forearms and pulls him in for a hug.)

Osiris: Dear brother, this has been the party of a lifetime!

Set: I am pleased that you think so.
 Now, brother,
 step into your destiny.

(Osiris hands Set his crown and a swath of his loose clothing and steps into the chest. Isis and Nephthys creep closer in anticipation. Set moves behind the chest, holding the hinged lid. Osiris begins to become somewhat suspicious as he lies down.)

Set: He fits! He fits!
 Osiris fits the chest perfectly!

Isis & Nephthys: What a joy and what delight!
 Osiris wins the chest.

Set: All Hail Osiris!

(audience responds)

Set: All Hail Osiris!

(audience responds)

Set: All Hail Set!

(He slams the lid shut with a bang and climbs on top of the chest, triumphant. The audience may respond "All Hail the King!" or they may be confused – just the way Set, god of chaos would want it. Set can laugh for a moment or yell "Silence!" if the audience needs to be focused. Isis and Nephthys are horrified. At some point during the

next scene, the performer playing Osiris will escape through a false back in the chest and a slit in the backdrop to the backstage area.)

Set: Egypt has a new king.
The Lord of Storms has risen like a hurricane.
The Master of Darkness has descended on the land.
The Nile shall roar my name.
The desert shall forever whisper my praises.
For darkness has conquered the light.

Isis & Nephthys: Set, you fiend,
you must turn back.

Nephthys: Isis, dear sister,
I had no idea!

Isis: You have both betrayed your country and king.
Beloved Osiris, I will save you.

Set: *(coming down from the chest)* Nephthys, rejoice,
you are the Queen!

(Nephthys runs off crying.)

And as for you,
false Queen Isis,
You shall be banished to the desert
and locked away in a prison
to be forever my slave!
You will never trouble me again!

(Isis tries to run away but Set grabs her and forces her to kneel before him. He throws the swath of Osiris' clothing at her as she kneels in profile to the audience, similar to an actual hieroglyphic.)

Set: Say farewell to your home.
Say farewell to your husband.
The chest shall be thrown in the River Nile.
Osiris is no more!

(Isis lowers her head to the floor, freezing in a pose of anguish and Set, sneering, arrogantly marches off.)

Scene Three

(When it is silent, Hornsby moans loudly from behind the backdrop. Sands rushes on, now dressed again as an archeology student. She holds the sistrum.)

Brown: David? David? We've got to help Sally.
Professor Hornsby is getting worse.
The story must continue in another room.

(Sands rushes on the opposite side also dressed like a student.)

Sands: *(pointing)* Over here! Over here!
More hieroglyphics.

(Brown rushes over.)

Brown: Well what do they say?

Sands: Let me see...eyeball, eyeball, squiggly line, birdie, birdie, guy
doing this *(He does the classic Egyptian pose with his arms.)*...

Brown: *(interrupting)* No, you goof-ball.
You have to translate.

Sands: But I failed hieroglyphics 101.

Brown: *(giving him the sistrum)* Here, Sally used this.

(He holds the sistrum by the wrong end, pointing it like a magic wand.)

Sands: Translaticus! *(He clumsily drops it.)*

Brown: *(Picking it up and shaking her head.)* You idiot! Who do you
think you are...Harry Potter?!
Hold it this way. *(She fixes it in his hand.)*

Sands: Oh, sorry.

(He ritualistically raises the sistrum and shakes it. The music shimmers with magic as revelation dawns across his face.)

Sands: I see it!
I can read it!

Brown: Well do it and hurry up. *(Hornsby moans again.)*
The professor is getting worse.

(Brown exits.)

Sands: So mighty Osiris was killed and Isis was imprisoned in the
 unforgiving desert,
 a slave for all eternity,
 making and mending the clothes of wicked King Set.
 (sistrum)
 Every day she wept.
 She wept for her lost love.
 She wept for her lost freedom.
 She wept for she was all alone.

*(He shakes the sistrum as he exits. Isis raises her head and begins working on the
clothing, still in profile.)*

Scene Four

Isis: So far.
 So far from the joys that I knew.
 So far from a warm embrace.
 Must I forever toil alone?
 Must I forever live in sorrow?

 I will show you the land in lamentation and distress.
 That which has never happened before has happened.
 People will take up weapons of warfare,
 The land will live in uproar.
 People will fashion arrows of copper
 and beg for bread with blood.
 And laugh out loud at distress.
 People will not weep because of death,
 People will not lose sleep because of death.
 Everyone will live only for themselves.³

 Set is king.
 Osiris is dead.
 Isis is alone.

*(Nephthys cautiously enters secretly carrying the sistrum in the folds of her robe.
She is humbled and approaches Isis with a guilty heart.)*

Nephthys: My sister.

Isis: *(standing in a rage)* O traitorous snake.

³ *Prophecy of Neferti*

How dare you come before me.
I wish it were you that had been thrown in the river.

Nephtys: *(kneeling before Isis who has turned away)* My sister,
my life is yours
and my heart weeps for us all.
The trap was not my wish.
Set has betrayed me.
I beg for your forgiveness
for mighty Osiris will always be my king.
I would give my life to hold his memory.

Isis: *(softening)* My sister,
I know in my heart you are not to blame
To accuse you adds to your burden.
We have all been cast into darkness.

(She lifts Nephtys up.)

I beg for your forgiveness.

Nephtys: My sister,
I will work with you.

Isis: My sister,
I will work with you.

Nephtys: To bring again the light of day.

Isis: To bring again the light of day.

Both: And make a better future for us all.

Osiris, you will rise again
and lead us in the Great Beyond

Isis: O good king, come into your house!
Long, long have I not seen you!
My heart mourns you,
my eyes seek you,
I search for you to see you!

Nephtys: O good King, come into your house!
Your enemies can no longer harm you!
The Two Sisters beside you guard your name,

We are with you, your bodyguards,
For all eternity!

Isis & Nephthys: You rise for us like the sun every day,
You shine for us like the stars,
Gods and people live by your light.

As you rise for us you light the Land of the Nile,
The world is filled with your love
Gods and people look to you,
No evil befalls them where the light of Osiris shines.⁴

My sister,
I will be with you.
My strength and heart will hold you up.
And though the darkness threatens
and shadows come closing in,
my sister,
you will always be my sister,
and I shall never be alone.

(They embrace.)

Isis: Nephthys, you must leave.
If Set finds you here he will be furious.

Nephthys: Isis, I am no longer afraid.
I have come to help you escape.

Isis: But we are in the middle of the desert.
The wilds are filled with the servants of evil.

(Nephthys gives Isis the sistrum.)

Nephthys: Take this,
and escape is at hand,
your protectors await.
My heart goes with you
until we meet again in the light.
I have faith in you.
Have faith in yourself.

(Nephthys exits.)

⁴ adapted from The “Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys”, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*

Isis: How will the sistrum help me?

(She rattles the sistrum and waits. After a moment, a clamouring is heard backstage. Sands has now become The Seven Scorpions. The Scorpions is a clown character and speaks in different voices with body animation helping to delineate the different individuals. The costume simply consists of a robe with scorpions at the hands, elbows and shoulders and a seventh, Tefen, on a skullcap. These scorpions could be puppets, or stylized images printed on the material. The performer “acts” through these puppets.)

Scorpions: *(off-stage)* Ho! Move over...
Outta the way...
Watch that stinger!

(Isis looks perplexed. She rattles the sistrum again.)

Scorpions: *(still off-stage)* I said look out...
You're on my tail...
Order, I want order!

(She rattles the sistrum one more time. The Scorpions stumble on, twisting and turning, finally ending up before Isis. She drops the sistrum.)

Scorpions: Outta the way...
Coming through...
Every...
body...
STOP!

Isis: Who are you?

Scorpions: Great Queen Isis,
We are the Eight Scorpions...
That's wrong...
No, it's not...
Yes, it is...
Look! One, two three four, five, six, sev...
Great Queen Isis,
We are The SEVEN Scorpions!

We are protectors of the righteous,
and are named...
Petet, Tjetet,
Matet, Mesetet, Mesetetef,
Befen
and I am Tefen, the head of this group.

What do you call a group of scorpions anyway?
A herd?
No...
A flock?
Are you crazy?
A chorus?
What the...

Isis: A group of scorpions is called a clutch.

Scorpions: You're joking!
Who asked you!?
Shhh, that's the Queen!
Forgive us mighty Isis.

Isis: Why are you here?

Scorpions: Why are we here!?
Why are we here!?
Why ARE we here?
Oh, forgive us, goddess of light.
We are here to save you,
to lead you through the desert,
to lead you to your freedom.
Your destiny lies far away.
So far away.

Isis: So far away.
So far away.
Then lead and I will follow,
make not a sound for evil has ears.
Let my destiny be written:

I am Isis.
I came forth from the prisons of Set.
I came forth in the dark of night,
and seven scorpions were with me.

Isis & Scorpions: Tefen and Befen behind.
Mesetet and Mestetef are near.
Petet, Tjetet and Matet show the way.
Together we will journey.
Together we are safe.⁵

⁵ *The Sorrows of Isis*, Metternich stele

(Isis and the Seven Scorpions begin their journey, walking through or around the audience. Isis walks regally, while the scorpions move protectively around her. They continue walking as Brown, the student, enters.)

Brown: He's almost dead.
 He's almost gone!

(She picks up the sistrum.)

Isis, please show us the way.
(reading) The scorpions lead Isis safely through the desert,
through the swamps of Parsui to a city by the ocean. *(sistrum)*
Isis was tired and hungry.
She needed to find shelter, or she would die.

(She shakes the sistrum as she exits.)

Scene Five

(Isis and the Scorpions arrive back at the front of the stage. She is exhausted and starving. The Scorpions help her as she stumbles along.)

Isis & Scorpions: So far.
 So far from home,
 but yet, so far from persecution.

Scorpions: The city lies before us,
 the desert lies behind.
 Salvation lies before us,
 the sorrow lies behind.

Isis: The sorrow lingers on.
 but you have led me through
 the sands of time.
 You have brought honour upon yourselves
 and will sit by Osiris in the Great Beyond.
 I thank you.

Scorpions: All right then, let's get outta here...
 That's rude...
 Speak for yourself...
 I'm sleepy...
 I'm bored...
 I gotta go...

Just hold it...
Silence! All of you.
We have vowed to protect the Queen,
and we are not yet finished.
We will stay with her till morning...
Aw, no...
Come on...
(*sternly*) We will stay with her till morning.
(*grumbling*)
(*politely*) Isis, our Queen, we will stay with you
until you are kissed by the morning light.

Isis: Again, I thank you,
but come, let us find shelter,
for while the desert may hold comfort for a scorpion,
a woman needs more.

(They begin to slowly walk as Brown enters as Tahemet, a noblewoman, holding her baby. The Scorpions and Isis approach her. Hornsby enters opposite as Rami with a fishing net that he is repairing. He watches the exchange.)

Isis: Please, kind woman,
can you spare a room for the night,
and a crust of bread?
We have traveled far...

Tahemet: (*aghast*) Horrid creature!
Rubbish blown in from the desert!
A beggar and thief, I am certain.
Permit you into my beautiful home
to sleep next to my beautiful baby?!
I should have you arrested
and locked away forever.
You should learn the difference between rich and poor.

(The Scorpions step forward. Tahemet jumps back, horrified.)

Scorpions: Let me at her...
Me first...
No, me...
Put up your claws...
Do you know who this is?
This is your Queen.
The Queen of all Egypt!

Tahemet: Queen?!

She looks more like a slave.
Now leave my sight
and take those hideous insects with you!

(She storms off. Isis, dejected, turns and walks back to C. The Scorpions stand, insulted.)

Scorpions: Hideous insects!?
Well, I never...
Really, insects.
Hello...eight legs!
Ever hear of arachnids?
What the heck is an arachnid?
That's us, you pinhead!
You're joking?
Really?
Shhh...

(They notice Isis beginning to sob and rush over.)

Scorpions: Isis, do not cry.
We are with you.

(Rami comes to Isis.)

Rami: You may stay with me,
if you wish.
It matters not if you are a beggar or queen.
I am but a simple fisherman,
no luxurious mansion,
no more than a drafty hut.
But everyone deserves shelter,
everyone deserves peace.

(Isis, exhausted, nods and offers a smile of thanks. Rami takes her arm and leads her off-stage. The Scorpions begin to follow, then stop suddenly, rush back to where Tahemet exited and return to C.)

Scorpions: That woman must be punished.
To dare to refuse a goddess.
We are not pleased.

So come my brothers and we will do
what scorpions can do best.
Lend you poison,

offer your sting,
to Tefen all your venom bring.
We will make the woman pay.

(Through a stylistic dance, the scorpions all give their venom to Tefen. The robe can be removed and the performer can use just the head puppet.)

Scorpions: Petet, Tjetet bring your flame.
 Matet, Mesetet do the same.
 Mesetetef add your blight.
 Befen come to join the night.
 I give to you my sting.
 I give to you my sting.

(The Scorpions, now just Tefen, creep off-stage where Tahemet exited. He carries the Scorpion robe with him. Moments later Tahemet screams.)

Tahemet: My baby! *(She rushes on with her baby in her arms.)*
 My baby has been stung by a scorpion!

(She rushes frantically back and forth in front of the audience begging for help. The Scorpions swagger back on with a smug grin.)

Tahemet: Help! O, please help!
 What did I do?
 Why will no one help me?
 (angry) Do you not know how important I am?
 I am Tahemet!
 I am wealthy beyond measure!

(Isis rushes on, watching at first, from behind. She is confused until she sees the scorpions smiling.)

Tahemet: *(Beginning to cry)* I command someone to help me!

(Isis moves the Scorpions.)

Isis: Scorpions, did you do this?

Scorpions: *(smug)* Scorpion sting...
 poisoned baby...
 yeah, sounds like us.
 Good one, eh?

Isis: The innocent child is not to be blamed
 for the actions of a thoughtless mother.

Scorpions: But even in her distress she demands help...
Says how important she is...
We wanted revenge.

Isis: Be always more ready to forgive,
than to return an injury;
those who watch for an opportunity for revenge,
will corrupt their own lives,
and draw trouble down
upon their own heads.⁶

(The scorpions exit, embarrassed. Isis moves over to the crying woman.)

Isis: Let me see your child.

Tahemet: Not you.

Isis: If you want your baby to live,
you abandon the myth of your importance.
You must learn that there is no difference
between rich and poor.
You must believe me.

Tahemet: *(Giving Isis her baby.)* I believe.

Isis: Then follow me.
Believe in me.

(Isis holds the child before her.)

Isis: I am Isis, goddess of healing.
I am Isis, powerful of magic.
I am Isis.

(As Isis recites the spell, Tahemet repeats her.)

Poison of Tefen,
appear on the earth,
do not advance.
Come forth.
Poison of Befen,
appear on the earth,
do not advance.

⁶ Ancient Egyptian proverb

Come forth.

I take away your sting.

Poison of Mesetet,
halt!

Poison of Mesetetef,
release!

Poison of Petet and Tjetet and Matet
retreat!

Come forth!

Come forth!⁷

I am Isis.

I take away your sting.

I take away your sting!

(She hands the baby to Tahemet.)

Tahemet: My baby is safe.
You are indeed Isis,
you are the light of life.

(Tahemet happily rushes off-stage.)

Tahemet: *(As she exits.)* She has done it!
Rejoice, the poison is gone.
She has done it!

Isis: I am Isis.
I am life.

Brown: *(off-stage)* That's it, the cure. The cure!

(Hornsby groans loudly.)

Isis: I am Isis.
I am love.

Sands: She's done it! She's done it!
Sally found the spell.

⁷ *The Sorrows of Isis*, adapted from the Metternich stele

(In full view, Smith ceremoniously removes the items of her costume that identify her as Isis, until she is standing once again as Sally Smith.)

Smith: I am Isis.
I am life.

Scene Six

(Brown and Sands enter supporting the Professor. He is mumbling to himself and almost dead. Brown has the sistrum.)

Brown: Sally, snap out of it.
There's no time!

Sands: Professor Hornsby is going to die.
We have to do the spell.

(They lay the Professor on the floor and stand in a semi-circle around him. He lies still and silent. Smith takes the sistrum and rattles it. The spell begins.)

Students: Poison of Tefen,
appear on the earth,
do not advance.
Come forth.
Poison of Befen,
appear on the earth,
do not advance.
Come forth.

I take away your sting.

Poison of Mesetet,
halt!
Poison of Mesetetef,
release!
Poison of Petet and Tjetet and Matet
retreat!
Come forth!
Come forth!

I take away your sting.

Smith: It's not working,
we need more strength.
We need more faith.

(Smith runs forward and addresses the audience. This section will only occur if the audience has been taught the song beforehand. Otherwise, the music continues with “All”.)

You all need to help us or the Professor will die. Sing, all of you, please sing!

All: I take away your sting!
I take away your sting!
I take away your sting!

(Hornsby starts to stir.)

Students: *(ad lib)* Louder! Louder!

(Hornsby eventually stands straight up looking as though he has had a wonderful night’s rest.)

Hornsby: Ah! I have had the most wonderful of dreams.

Brown: That’s it!

Sands: He’s saved!

Smith: It worked,
the spell actually worked.

Students: The ancient knowledge has saved the day.
The stories of long ago
have brought light into the here and now.
Isis has smiled upon us today.

Hornsby: *(Completely unaware as to what has happened.)*
What on earth are you three going on about?

Students: Professor Hornsby,
it’s time to go home.

(Hornsby nods and they begin to close up the tomb. Smith picks up Isis’ clothes, headdress and sistrum, reflects on what has happened and places them lovingly on the golden chest. Brown and Sands fold the edges of the backdrop in, “sealing” the temple and with one last glance, they all head off for home.)

ALL: So far.
So far from home.

So far from where we began.
So far from our aspirations -
we have found an ancient knowledge.
A wonderful, magical knowledge.
A knowledge of loving and living.
And Isis lives in us.

So far.
So far, but the storm has ended..
So far though the sands can't stop us.
So far from our desperation –
The Mystical Song of Isis.
We're blessed by the music of Isis.
The loving words of Isis bring us home.
The journey is long,
the night will come,
but so will another morning.
The journey is long,
but so far,
so good.

(They exit, patting each other on the back, arm-in-arm and filled with inspiration.)

The End